

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

DOCTORAL THESIS

**ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE GREEK-
CATHOLIC BISHOPRIC OF ORADEA (1848–1860)**

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ABSTRACT

As a result of three years of research during the doctoral programme, the thesis entitled *Ecclesiastical Architecture in the Greek-Catholic Bishopric of Oradea (1848–1860)* is approached from an art historical perspective, completed with major additions from the field of ecclesiastical history.

To the greatest extent, the work has been done on the basis of information gathered from unpublished archival documents. Chapters three and four, as well as some subchapters of the first two chapters, have been entirely drawn up based on this research. Of the huge amount of material that I have browsed through, some of the collections of the National Archives of Budapest and the Bihor County Department of the Romanian National Archives have proved to be most helpful. The information contained in the documents was disparate, and at the same time offered no concrete data.

In what regards the methodology, on account of the nature of the sources, I have undertaken an analysis of the documents. Some needed a detailed study, as each piece of information contained in them seemed important, while in the case of others the main ideas transmitted proved to be sufficient. The thematic grouping was followed by a chronological approach. The documents were grouped according to the structural demands of the work. A different kind of analysis was needed for the original documentation offered by architectural representations. The few planimetric representations and elevations of the churches have enhanced our argumentation regarding case studies. Some details, such as the internal spatial separation, was only visible on a planimetric level. As regards elevation, the comparative analysis of the plan and the initial exterior design, as well as the proportion of these on the actual building were most helpful in the elaboration of the case studies. Besides planimetrics and elevation, I have also used another type of graphic representation,

namely the field studies made by engineers for representing the placement of the church. From these drawings, I have only analyzed this aspect (the placement of the church). This procedure has been helpful in reconstructing the stages preceding the construction of an ecclesiastical building. Another source used was imaging. The images used mainly represent the external architecture of the churches. By the stylistic analysis of decorative elements I have tried to identify a certain style prevalent in the age, and see whether it was also applied for Greek Catholic churches; I have tried to find out whether there was any specificity in the case of these churches, or whether it was possible to find any similitude with patterns that circulated in the territory under the Hungarian crown.

The structure of the work follows a trajectory from general to particular. The outline of the general surface from an artistic point of view started towards the end of the 18th century. The first chapter treats the architectural strategies of Imperial politics in the dominated territories, especially the Hungarian ones. At first the responsibility and control over buildings in the Empire was exercised by the Imperial Department for Constructions (*General Baudirektion*) from Vienna, then towards the end of the 18th century its structure was ramified, and new offices were established in different provinces. The network of departments responsible for buildings in the Empire permanently extended, and in 1849 such an office was also organized at Oradea. The Imperial and Royal Department for Constructions in Oradea started its activity in 1850, and it was one of five departments for constructions on the territory of the Hungarian crown. It had in subordination the construction districts (*Baubezirk*) with offices in Oradea, Debrecen and Arad. From a jurisdictional point of view the territories subordinated to the Office were: the territory south of Crişul Repede river in Bihor County and Békés County for Oradea; Sătmar County, Szabolcs County, the territory north of Crişul Repede river in Bihor County, and the so-called *hajdú* towns for Debrecen; and the territories of Arad, Csongrád and Csanád Counties for Arad. The first list of engineers who worked in these offices reveals a complex structure formed of chief engineers, engineers of class I and II, assistant engineers of class I and II and practicing students. The responsibility of the employees was to supervise the condition of state buildings and detect the possible degradations or deficiencies, make the plans and budgets of new constructions, organize auctions for constructions, and respect the directives. The control of the plans was the duty of regional offices; however, the

acceptance of the projects, the securing of the budget and the payments were the duty of financial bodies. Consequently, starting with 1850, the department for constructions coordinated the building of the new Greek Catholic churches in the Bishopric of Oradea.

The second chapter particularizes the situation of the Bishopric, presenting its evolution from its foundation to the year 1849. The chapter presents the historical context and organization of the bishopric, in order to offer a general framework for the construction of the churches, the topic of the following chapters. Speaking of the period of the 1848 revolution, one subchapter treats the consequences of these events on the organization of the bishopric. It is a well known fact that during the revolution some of the Greek Catholic churches were occupied by force by Orthodox believers. Some of these were returned, but the rest remained in the possession of the Orthodox Church also after 1849. As an introduction to the last two chapters, the situation of the churches is inserted in this chapter. A clear statistics of these buildings was started in the time of Bishop Vasile Erdelyi, when there was a requirement for regular reports regarding the situation of each parish. Until that time, the information on churches is quite scattered. These data appear in certain conscriptions, in formulas which mention the condition of the churches, but also via the protocols of the canonic visitations of bishops and archdeacons. We find out thus that in the period between 1777 and 1849 churches were predominantly made of wood, and the majority needed reparations because of their degraded condition. Quite poorly equipped with liturgical objects and internal decorations, these churches illustrated the general situation of the bishopric during this period.

The chronological continuation of this problem for the years 1848–1860 is contained in the beginning of chapter three. The difference from the previous subchapter which has the same subject lies on the level of the diversity of sources which yield information on the condition of the churches. In November 1852, Bishop Erdelyi asked the priests in a circular letter to report the condition of ecclesiastical buildings twice a year. This demand betrays the high priests' concern with the condition of churches and parish houses. Moreover, the Bishop circulated a standard form for the completion of the reports, in order to avoid formal diversity. As a result of the circular letter of the year 1852, we have today a series of reports of parish priests of the entire diocese which describe the church and school buildings of each parish. We use two types of documents: church inventories

and reports on other buildings in the possession of the Church. The analysis of documents displayed a worrisome state of the churches the majority of which was still built of wood in this period too, and was in a bad preservation state due to weather conditions. Cases like ruined churches, or churches closed because of high degree of decay, or churches abandoned because of their distance from the village, etc. draw the outlines of a world which, in the second half of the 19th century, despite the rules imposed by the Habsburgs, had no resources necessary for modernization.

Based on the correspondence between Bishop Vasile Erdelyi and the Oradea Department of Constructions, we have tried to reconstruct the role that the Bishop had in the process of church building. The evidence solidly argued for a portrait of the high priest outlined as a person actively involved in all stages of the building of a church, from fundraising to payment, and even his active participation in the process by urging certain works which were delayed. Vasile Erdelyi, as proved by his letters, wanted to be informed at all times about the stages and states that a church building under construction went through. As a development of the above mentioned problem, I have completed the horizon of the work with another problem, that of the reconstruction of the stages that a Greek Catholic church went through during its construction. Of utmost importance in this process are the implication of an entire administrative system, and the careful observance of each stage. The problem of the right of patronage is vital for understanding the process of construction and the obligations of the financer. The official foundations or persons who had this right had to pay for the construction of church buildings. If this duty was refused, it ultimately resulted in forced execution instrumented by a court of law.

The last chapter of the work consists of case studies as arguments for exemplifying the problems listed in the part on the stages of building a parish church. The introduction of this chapter contains a review of the churches built and repaired in the period between 1848 and 1860, but without any claim of having included all the churches. Since the number of such cases was quite low, the method of approach was analytical, completed with further data obtained from archival sources. There are four case studies: two in which the churches were built from the foundations, in the parishes of Dijir and Tarcea, and two in which the churches needed either works of repair or internal spatial structuring, like the church in Abrămuț, or the church of Leta Mare, where some works were done for the construction of

the vaulting system. In all four cases the information is abundant, from details of payments for each craft separately, to the data regarding the engineer who made the plans and the master builder.

As a result of this approach, we have revealed, by the documents referring to the construction of parish churches, that the Austrian system of administration imposed a rigorous control over the eastern counties of the Hungarian territory. The establishment of new offices responsible for constructions brought about the uniformity of applied typologies especially for churches, and also the strict observance of standard stages in the construction of these buildings, transmitted through regulations. The architecture of parish churches was standardized, both planimetrically and aesthetically. The standardized ground plan conveyed almost nothing about the specific rites of the Greek Catholic confession but rather reminded of Catholic ecclesiastical buildings. This pattern, imposed unconsciously by both sides, came to define an identity that it does not characterize. It was an assumed risk, born out of the need to have, still, places for worship. These patterns do not define the architectural identity of the Greek Catholics, but, once accepted, they came to outline a particularity present in almost all churches built in the period between 1848 and 1860.