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CHURCH CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE TRANSYLVANIAN REFORMED CHURCH  
DISTRICT BETWEEN 1887 AND 1895, WITH PARTICULAR  
ATTENTION TO THE BUILDINGS OF IGNÁC ALPÁR

– Summary of the doctoral thesis –

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At the end of the 19th century, a significant number of church constructions took place in the Transilvanian Reformed Church District – construction, renovation and expansion of churches, schools, parishes and teachers' residences – which, according to the 1895 inventory, exceeded 600 in the area of the entire church district between 1885 and 1895. The constructions can be linked to the name of Domokos Szász (1838–1899), who was elected bishop in 1885.

Our thesis examines church constructions in the Transilvanian Reformed Church District between 1887 and 1895, paying special attention to the work of the Budapest architect Ignác Alpár (1855–1928). We sought answers to questions such as what measures the Governing Council of the church district in relation to the constructions, who coordinated the constructions, where did the financial support for the works come from? What place do the newly built churches occupy among the constructions created in the area of the church district? Who were the architects? Did the personality of the architect count, was the look, style or functionality of the church the primary consideration?

After a brief presentation of the research topic (*Introduction* – Definition of the topic and Historiography of the topic), in the next subsection (*Resources*) we describe the types of sources (archival sources, forms, daily, weekly, church and architectural press) that we relied on during our research. The primary source for the Reformed churches built between 1887 and 1895 is the explanatory booklet prepared for the 1895 topographical relief map, in which the constructions between 1885 and 1895 are listed. This is supplemented by the 1890 construction map. The sources of our research were almost exclusively archival funds kept in the collection of the *Archives of Transylvanian Reformed Church District*. First of all, the case files and meeting minutes of the *Archives of the Governing Council* spanning the period 1887–1895, but we also examined the case files related to the constructions of the previous and following years. At the same time, we also took into account the material of the *Plan collection*, these are the most spectacular sources of our research. To a lesser extent, we also used the documents

of the *Bishop's Archive* and the materials of the *parish archive* concerning constructions. The latter are partly in the above-mentioned archive, partly owned by the parishes.

In the chapter *The constructions in the Transylvanian Reformed Church District between 1885 and 1898*, we briefly describe the biography of the Transylvanian Reformed bishop Domokos Szász. After that, we talk more about the constructions associated with the name of the bishop and the two maps that were the starting point of our research. In 1895, Szász had a topographical relief map made by Tódor Pokorny, a cartographer from Budapest, on which he presented constructions planned and executed in the first 10 years of his bishopric, between 1885 and 1895. The map has not survived, but the accompanying explanatory booklet has. In this, it was listed by each church diocese, what types of constructions were carried out in the given parish, when and how much money was spent on them. The map and the booklet handed to him were presented at the opening ceremony of the theology building (1895), and were later exhibited at an exhibition organized on the occasion of Hungary's one thousandth anniversary (Ezredéves Országos Kiállítás) in 1896. The 1890 map, also commissioned by the bishop, may have served as a precursor to this map, on which the constructions of the church district between 1885 and 1890 were illustrated. The map was made for presentation purposes to the Universal Convention of the Hungarian Reformed Church, from which the Transylvanian District requested additional financial support for the construction. This map was made by Ferenc Propper, an art teacher from Cluj, on which 316 constructions of 19 church dioceses are marked, the types of constructions are distinguished by different icons. The red-roofed church represents the construction of a new church, the black-roofed one restoration, the red-colored half-gabled house represents the school, while the red-colored gabled-roofed house represents the construction of the parish. In addition, the main points of reference (rivers, important streams, cities) are shown on it, and the circual parishes organized in diaspora.

In 1898, Bishop Domokos Szász quantified more than 70 newly built churches – including houses of worship – that were created during his bishopric. This number is confirmed by the data of the two maps, which indicate a total of 78 newly built churches. In contrast, however, only 30 churches and 8 prayer houses were built until 1898. The others were either

completed in the year of Domokos Szász's death, or were realized much later, but their number is negligible. Most of the new churches designated by Szász actually underwent a large-scale transformation and expansion, either a new nave, a new tower, or a new apse and a large side nave was built for the existing building. During the expansion, small churches that did not meet the size and needs of the congregation and were in poor condition were not only enlarged, but also their external and internal appearance was renewed in the style of the period. This is certainly why it was classified as a newly built church. It is likely that this is also the case in parishes and elementary schools. However, these buildings – especially the schools – have survived to a lesser extent, and from the perspective of the past 120-130 years, due to the lack of buildings and sources, it is no longer possible to make such a comparison.

In the second chapter (*Measures of the Governing Council regarding constructions*), we summarized the provisions and measures of the church district regarding constructions that were in force during the discussed period or that were created during this time. From the sources, it seems that from the 1880s, permission from the Governing Council had to be requested for all construction. The bishops were notified about this in a circular order several times, and even published it in the diocese's official church newspaper (1885, 1889). It was mandatory to attach the building plan, the budget, the official price list for construction in the nearest larger settlement to the permit, and, in the case of a church, the number of worshipers, and in the case of a school, the number of students. It was necessary to show the congregation's population because the size of the church to be built was determined based on this, ideally this meant 1 m<sup>2</sup>/person, but in most cases only 0.5 to 1 m<sup>2</sup>/person was used due to cost effectiveness. It was the same for elementary schools, they decided the size of the school and the number of classrooms based on the number of students. The latter was prescribed in 1873 by the Ministry of Religion and Public Education.

However, one of the most significant provisions of the Governing Council was the employment of the technical referents. The first technical expert and lecturer was János Székely, a retired chief engineer from Cluj, who held this position on the Governing Councils until his death in 1894. Székely's task included the technical expert examination and opinion of planned church buildings (church, school, parish, cantor's residence, teacher's residence and

outbuildings, apartment building, business premises, mill, etc.) and constructions (church equipment, mill dam, sluice dam, etc.).

The technical opinion was prepared by the technical referent based on the building plan and budget, but other reports were also needed. He examined the size, shape, weight, proportions, and appearance of the planned building and, if necessary, made suggestions for its transformation, and in some cases also prepared a new plan, such as in 1885. The budget included the work required for the construction of the building (foundation, masonry, carpentry, tiling, tinsmith, locksmith work), the use of construction materials and their costs, indicating the cost of the construction materials, the labor fee and the plan preparation fee. Based on this, the technical expert examined whether the building is structurally strong enough, checked the data, paying particular attention to which item of the construction price can be cut.

In addition to reviewing the plan and the budget, the technical speaker presented construction-related matters at the *Governing Council* meetings, but this task became less and less important from the 1890s. Instead, the supervision and control of the constructions became part of the activities of the architectural referent (theology, Metz apartment building, etc.).

In the chapter '*The financing of constructions*', we looked for the answer to the financial resources of the churches built between 1887 and 1895. Roughly until the 1870s, because the congregations collected their money for construction for a long time. In addition to their own assets, the parishes collected the necessary capital from various donations, donations collected during fund gathering tours (local, regional, national). The luckiest parishes could build a church with noble support.

From 1869, the state awarded 14,000 Austro-Hungarian forint in aid to the Transilvanian Reformed District, from which an amount of around 3,000 forint was initially allocated to construction projects. The Governing Council decided on the award of aid. The applicant parishes received an average of 100-200 forint for church construction, 50-150 forint for church renovation, 50-100 forint for church equipment, 50-150 forint for the repairing and construction of parishes, and 50-100 forint for school construction. It happened, especially in

the case of church construction, that state aid was voted for two or three years in a row, typically ranging from 100 to 150 forints per year. In 1887, the resources were reallocated, so 7,000 forint per year could be spent on construction on average. From then on, it was not distributed to the applicant congregations as 100 forint, but transferred to the Central Construction Fund.

The other source of income to cover the church constructions was aid from the National Reformed Public Fund of the General Convention of the Hungarian Reformed Church established in 1883. From here, similar amounts were awarded for construction as for state aid. The General Convention decided on the award of aid. After 1887, parishes typically applied for and received support for loan repayment.

Although these aids somewhat eased the burden of construction expenses, they did not provide real help.

The Transilvanian Reformed Church District faced new challenges with the organization of the circular parish. The necessary financial resource for the constructions had to be provided, because most of the community centers had neither a church, nor a parish, nor a school. In addition, many poor parishes did not have the financial means to build a church or to renovate their church buildings. Therefore, at the suggestion of Bishop Domokos Szász, the Governing Council established the Central Construction Fund by reallocating various church district financial funds, with capital surpluses generated by the sale and purchase of paper annuity bonds, and with the assets of depopulated parishes. Parishes could apply for loans from the construction fund under favorable conditions, which they had to repay in 32 years. An important condition was that members of the congregation had to contribute to the construction, and the building only became the property of the parish after the required loan was repaid. 19 new churches and houses of worship, 6 parishes, 5 teachers' residences and 44 new elementary schools were built from the Central Construction Fund, in addition to these, 11 churches, 2 parishes, 3 teacher residences and 12 elementary schools were renovated and expanded.

However, the repayment of the loan was also a big burden for many parishes, so Domokos Szász requested regular aid for the repayment installments from the National Reformed Public Fund. In order to obtain this, the bishop prepared the construction map of 1890. Thus, in addition to the usual aid, the convention provided an additional 2,300 forint targeted regularized aid to the Transylvanian Reformed Church District.

After the loan granted in 1888 was all paid by 1891, the Central Construction Fund was abolished in 1894. However, construction did not stop there. In 1891, the Governing Council established the Transylvanian Reformed Public Fund, from which short-term and long-term loans could also be requested for construction projects.

At the end of the chapter, we presented the forms, types and amounts of financing for the construction of 20 Reformed churches (Apalina, Abrud, Braşov, Târnăveni, Feiurdeni, Gheorghieni, Chiochiş, Teliu, Aşchileu Mic, Dileu Nou, Topliţa, Luduş, Săcele, Simeria, Iernuţeni, Nou Român, Săvădisla, Colţeşti, Sighişoara, Reghin) built between 1887 and 1895 in a table.

The last chapter of the thesis is entitled *Churches, architects, planners*, and we examined the builders of the 20 churches built in the period we are discussing. We managed to capture the work of three architects, Ignác Alpár, Ferenc Szalay and the architectural duo of the Horváth Brothers. Of the 20 churches built at that time, we do not know the architects of only two, the churches in Nou Român and Teliu.

There can be no doubt that among the architects the most important was Ignác Alpár, whose eight church plans – in Sighişoara (1888), Abrud (1890), Simeria (1889–1890), Târnăveni (1889–1891), Reghin (1891), Apalina (1890), Braşov (1891) and Chiochiş (1892) – were realized. In 1888, the Governing Council entered into a contract with the architect, who was commissioned by Bishop Domokos Szász to prepare the models of church buildings. Alpár created model plans for a church, a joint building complex of a church and parsonage, a parish, a school and teacher's residence, and a building complex of a parish and a school. By using the model plans, the church district not only expected the stylistic unity of the churches, but also wanted to simplify the complications associated with planning, and at the same time

wanted to save on the planning fee. However, the plans were used in very few cases. It seems that the 1889 building of the Simeria parish is the only one for which Alpár's model plan was used.

Among the churches designed and completed between 1887 and 1895, the buildings designed by Alpár are the most valuable. Unfortunately, only the church in Sighișoara is a monument. Alpár's churches and model church plans had a significant impact on the Reformed church architecture in Transilvania, both during the discussed period and afterwards. Even in 1909, their influence was felt during the expansion of the church in Luduș.

After Alpár, the Horváth brothers, Gyula and Lajos did the most planning during our period. Four of their planned churches were built: the one in Săvădisla (H. Lajos, 1888), the one in Feiurdeni (H. Gyula, 1888), the one in Gheorgheni (H. Lajos, 1887) and the one in Toplița (H. Gyula, 1895). The initial phase of their work is characterized by simple, small, featureless churches. Thanks to the buildings and model plans of Ignác Alpár, the style of the two architects was changed, but they continued to design in the previous styles to.

Ferenc Szalay was not a talented designer, but he had a reputation as an excellent architect. We know for sure that he not only built but also designed some of his works. Each of the churches he designed is a complete or partial copy of another architect's plans. Szalay designed two churches between 1887 and 1895, the churches in Săcele (1892–1894) and the churches in Colțești (1892).

In the case of four churches, the names of unknown local builders emerged: Gerzson Szabó at Iernuțeni (1894), Ferenc Mónus at Dileu Nou (1894), Lajos Hirsfeld from Cluj-Napoca at Așchileu Mic (1892) and József Sófalvi at Luduș (1888–1889). All four designers were also contractors of the buildings.

We concluded our thesis with four case studies, discussing in detail the construction history of the Reformed churches in Sighișoara, Simeria, Chiochiș and Luduș, and in some cases we also prepared an arthistorical description of the present church. We supplemented our thesis with six appendices, an appendix listing Ignác Alpár's letters and a voluminous picture appendix.

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