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The principal aim of the thesis was to provide a quantitative and qualitative survey and evaluation of the medieval churches from within the Sepsí deanery of the medieval Fehérvár archdeanery and the Kézdi archdeanery. The material was chiefly assessed, organized and examined using methods particular to archaeology, art history and the topography of historical monuments. The corpus so compiled evinces the diversity and variance of the material, highlighting the medieval heritage of the Székelyföld region that has been largely neglected so far and lacks a comprehensive treatment.

In conducting basic research, our fundamental premises and problems were such that, from a methodological perspective, our approach came to be closely akin to that of research revolving around ecclesiastical topography as it is commonly carried out in Hungary. Data was gathered drawing upon attestations in specialized literature and more popular treatments, materials held at public collections or found in the church buildings still, as well as the largely unpublished archaeological reports of the recent years. Based on their floor plans as revealed by archaeological excavations, we examined the volumetry and proportions of medieval church buildings as well as, to an extent, the techniques of construction used. Through the in-depth analysis of extant heritage assets, including objects in public collections, and that of various details that could be readily assayed using the methods of art history, we focused on establishing the chronology of the material, identifying overarching trends and waves of remodellings, as well as ascertaining how the discrete elements of the corpus are interrelated. With all this in mind, we divided the thesis into six main structural units (not counting the introductory remarks and reflections) presenting the methodology applied; the geographical and chronological delimitations of the subject; research history and the sources (whether written or pictorial) used; the churches themselves, discussed in detail as approached from a variety of angles; the conclusions such a synthesis allows us to draw; and offering a supplementary catalogue of data, complete with figures.

Within the history of research into medieval materials in the Székelyföld region, the thesis fits the same pattern as the works of László Dávid on the medieval heritage of Udvarhely Seat and of István Botár on settlement history in Csík Basin, offering a presentation of a smaller region that is intended to be comprehensive within certain thematic constraints. It is important to stress that no previous, similar work has concentrated specifically upon the medieval ecclesiastical buildings of Háromszék (extant or otherwise). The so far unpublished archaeological findings of recent years were, up to this point, not processed and, accordingly, viewed in relation to data available in prior publications. Extant carved architectural elements were likewise neither comprehensively analysed, nor properly

classified. Medieval murals received significant and, in ways, satisfactory attention, and the literature on them is ample; however, church buildings as their supporting medium are barely touched upon in such works, and these do not examine information gleaned from studying these murals in the context of other forms of ornamentation present in medieval church buildings, or indeed the chronology of these edifices either. In syntheses and earlier monographic treatments, there is a marked tendency to lay stress on either fortifications and other enclosures deemed to have served a defensive purpose, or general construction history. The outlines of Kinga Tüdös, János Gyöngyössi, Terézia Kerny and József Sarudi Sebestyén on fortified churches, the research of Dóra Danielisz into the use of space in Reformed churches or the latest work (a significant contribution to the field, despite its limited scope) of Boglárka Tóth and János Fehér discussing Sepsí Seat churches with a focus on the historical use of timber in structural elements as well as roof construction all exemplify this trend.

An analytic study of the individual churches and, tangentially, the network of parishes using a broad set of criteria forms the backbone of the thesis, relying on published or unpublished material to a degree that varies by the aspect treated on (church organisation and society; morphology; patronage; and cemeteries). Chronologically, the thesis concerns itself with the period spanning from when the first church buildings were erected and the church established itself locally to the conclusion of the major Gothic remodellings of these buildings; in absolute terms, setting aside a few exceptions, these extremes translate to the middle of the 13th and 16th centuries, respectively. Stylistically, this interval covers Romanesque and Gothic heritage; we did not endeavour to touch upon material from the Renaissance beginning to emerge in the 16th century. While collecting and organising data, we had to, first and foremost, define what characteristics qualify a potential entry to be a valid inclusion in the corpus. To that end, we elaborated a system of six criteria. We considered sufficient evidence medieval mentions of a parish, church or parishioner; archaeological findings demonstrating the existence of a medieval structure or phase; carvings or vaulting fragments known from the building; extant medieval murals; attestations in specialized literature or, at the least, a consensus among specialists that the church maintained some manner of a presence at a given site. Our main resources for the last of these were the network of parishes in 1540 as reconstructed by Géza Hegyi, and data contained in Zsigmond Loránd Bördi's new archaeological repertory of Kovászna (Covasna) County.

Based on these, we considered the medieval network of parishes to have been composed of 127 units (mother churches, filial churches, outlying chapels). It is important to note that whilst in the case of most filial churches we can safely assume the settlement they

were based in had an early, probably medieval ecclesiastical building (on the basis of topography or data pertaining to settlement history), a small number of others (such as Csomortán/Lutoasa, Kézdiálmás/Mereni Kutapatak/Valea Seacă and Venéce/Lemia de Sus) were incorporated into the organisation of the church, but had no such buildings of their own. The likely number of sites is 127, 15 of which must have been outlying chapels, rather than full churches. Of the remaining 112, 65 buildings could be demonstrated to have existed by way of providing material proof (archaeologically confirmed floor plan, extant carving or vaulting fragment, extant mural). Of the other 47, 12 are attested in medieval documents, whereas for 35, there is little more than a consensus in secondary literature. We can contrast this with the 1332–1334 list of papal tithes, which only features the parishioners of 47 parishes. Written sources from the same period attest 55 parishioners in total; from the following 200 years, 36 parishioners of 26 parishes appear in such sources. Medieval documents mention a parish or church, specifically, in the case of 12 settlements.

The chapter analyzing the morphology of medieval churches in detail is the longest of this section, due to the sheer amount of the material processed. It is predominantly preoccupied with presenting and discussing the known details of the 65 sites with available physical evidence of a (previously existing) medieval structure, with positioning, construction materials, the shapes and proportions of medieval floor plans, the carved architectural elements, vaulting, triumphal arches, bells, furnishings, murals and inscriptions all receiving subchapters of their own. In terms of positioning, although data on settlement history at our disposal are hardly comprehensive, it would appear that there was a preference for higher ground on or near the edge of settlements. So far as construction materials are concerned, the known sites exhibit little variation: evidence indicating the former presence of wooden churches has, so far, only been identified by Zsigmond Loránd Bordi at Dobó and in Dálnok (Dalnic), which leaves stone as the staple. Bricks began to see use in the 16th century, but only in a rather limited capacity, in constructing vaults (as voussoirs of the web and in the terracotta ribs) and, perhaps, cornices.

Floor plans typically show a bipartite division aligned along an east-west longitudinal axis, with an apse closed on the east and an elevated, rectangular nave to its west. We are currently aware of two potential towers annexed to the structures' westerly end anywhere in the region. Archaeological research gives us data on the shape of the floor plan in the case of 37 churches. More often (if only marginally so), in 42 cases, we know how the apse terminated in at least one medieval phase. From the entire medieval period, we know 57 terminations, among which we find semicircular ones (23), square ones without (7) or with

buttresses at the corners (1 with certainly coeval buttresses and 2 where the buttresses might be more recent additions) and polygonal (24) alike. To illustrate how much our understanding of medieval floor plans improved in the last 30 years, we need only to note that Géza Entz could list no more than three apses with a square termination from the entire Székelyföld region.

From among the semicircular apses, some have a fairly regular length/width ratio (1:1–1,1), while others have a more elongated shape (1:1,3); the relatively high number of the latter received attention in earlier literature as well. We currently hold that the majority of such apses date from the second half of the 13th century or, possibly, from the early 14th. That being said, the first, likewise apparently semicircular, construction phase of the Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe) apse might plausibly date from as early as around 1200, considering the discovery of a coin minted under Béla III in a grave of the cemetery surrounding the church. We follow Béla Zsolt Szakács (and his writings concerning the Bereg area in Hungary, and the Szamos/Someş valley) in making a distinction between apses with a square termination supported by buttresses and similar apses lacking such features (many of which are trapezoidal, tapering towards the east). The former type, an example of which would be the apse of the second construction phase in the Sepsiszentgyörgy church, is unlikely to date from much earlier than the midpoint of the 14th century. Some instances are more recent yet, probably from the 15th century (this seems to be chiefly characteristic of the filial churches, such as those in Karatna/Caratna and Kisborosnyó/Boroşneu Mic). The square apse from the Gothic phase of the Dálnok church, in the meantime, is an even later construction that could not have been built long before the 1520s at the earliest.

The oldest Gothic chancels were discovered at Dobó by Zsigmond Loránd Bordi, and in Nagyajta (Aita Mare); these were, in all probability, fully finished in the 14th century already. A major overall wave of Gothic remodellings did not sweep through the region until considerably later: inscriptions with dates from the chancels themselves indicate construction works of this sort already underway in the first third of the 16th century. The dendrochronological measurements of Boglárka Tóth positively confirm that much in two cases, at Kilyén (Chilieni) and Bodok (Bodoc). Such remodellings, nonetheless, could have been longer processes, lasting for decades, and in Kilyén in particular, that of the apse would appear to have concluded the endeavour. In certain cases, as would be Lemhény's (Lemnia), it is evident that the chancel was partially rebuilt, perhaps sometime during the late medieval period, largely reusing the original foundation, but realigned along a slightly altered central axis. The fragmentary archaeological data resulting from the research of Zsolt Molnár

Kovács and Tamás Emődi conducted at Kézdiszentlélek (Sânzieni) hint at the same. The (unpublished) findings of Zsigmond Loránd Bordi's Sepsibesenyő (Pădureni) excavation, and in especial his discovery of the apse with a polygonal termination (that was still extant in the 19th century) having had no foundation of its own, but, rather, having been built atop those of a prior, elongated semicircular one evidence further cost efficient solutions during the Gothic remodellings.

We can glean data pertaining to the medieval naves of 34 churches either from the features of the superstructure or sources regarding later remodellings of the churches. The corners of early church buildings were commonly erected using sometimes quite elegantly dressed ashlar, as one can observe in the case of Bibarcfalva (Biborțeni), Nagyajta and Szacsva (Saciova). Uniquely, the Dálnok church has a nave with a polygonal termination on its west with an inscription establishing 1526 as an *ante quem* date of construction (the date itself refers to the vaulting that topped the structure which must have been finished shortly after the walls). Our calculations regarding the dimensions of the churches bear mentioning, at least tangentially, at this point. Early naves fell, roughly speaking, within the parameters proposed by Elek Benkő (40–70 m²), with a length-to-width ratio of 1,4–1,6 on average. Late Gothic naves were longer, with ratios upwards of 2,1 and with substantially larger floor areas, possibly in excess of 190 m² on occasion. Early churches tend to have naves that are up to 2,6 times longer than the coeval chancels of the same site, but the mean ratio is within the 1,5–2 interval across all periods. The most common orientations are a nearly perfect east–west one or, alternatively, a configuration with a northeast-southwest slant.

The two main structural units (nave and chancel) came to be complemented on the north side of the church by a sacristy from the 14th and an ossuary from the 15th century onwards. The sacristy usually adjoined the chancel; there are, however, a few instances of it opening from the nave, in the first church of Kézdiabícs (Albiș), at Kőkös (Chichiș), Gidófalva (Ghidfalău) and Sepsiszentkirály (Sâncraiu). The only extant medieval sacristy (with a more recently rebuilt vaulting) we are aware of is Nyújtód's (Lunga), but the eastern wall of the Lemhény church's current sacristy partially preserves a length of wall from its medieval antecedent. Ossuaries were invariably built against the northern wall of the nave and they often shared their eastern wall with the sacristy. No medieval ossuary survives, and consequently, all we have access to are the foundations at most. The only door known to have connected the interior of a church with that of the ossuary was found in the nave of the Dobó church. Cemeteries surrounding the church buildings doubtless had physical boundaries; of the medieval shape and size of these, nonetheless, we know little if anything, as

archaeological research has, so far, not been able to identify such structures. The existing enclosures are either impossible to date or else are from the 17th or even the 18th century. The one exception is the wall around the Gidófalva church which has an early 16th century date incised into it.

So far as interior design and ornamentation are concerned, carved artefacts (door and window frames, ambries, baptismal fonts, cornices and corbels) are known from 47 churches; most of these are still present at the site, albeit many of them only in secondary contexts. A smaller portion of them, including the fragments of the Középajta (Aita Medie) jamb and the tracery of the Feltorja (Turia de Sus) church (previously deemed to have been from Kézdiszentlélek) are held in the Székely National Museum. The greater part of the material is comprised of door and window frames, or the pieces thereof (60 door frames and 15 window frames from 36 churches). We can distinguish between door frames or portals featuring semicircular arches, toruses, ogives and shouldered arches. Carved elements of the church buildings were barely discussed in literature previously (the exceptions being few in number), and hardly ever in detail; if they were touched upon at all, that amounted to little more than a mere mention or an illustrative photograph. Monographic treatments would occasionally make an exception for baptismal fonts and ambries, but even in this respect, we managed to broaden the array of heritage assets known. A number of door frames primarily from the Erdővidék subregion (from Bölön/Belin, Dobó, Hídvég/Hăghig, Nagyajta/Aita Mare, Olasztelek/Tălișoara and possibly Erdőfüle/Filia) seem to form a discrete group (as János Fehér also observes). These objects, likely from the late 13th and early 14th centuries, exhibit qualities that mix Romanesque tradition with Gothic forms. A precise dating from them would be valuable in especial due to how at two sites with such door frames early apses with a polygonal termination were also found, but it is difficult to tell if the construction of the apses and the manufacture of the frames was indeed contemporaneous. Another door frame of particular interest is the Zalán (Zălan) one dating from the 1280s or 1290s and showing signs of formal influence from Kerc (Cârța).

By contrast, in terms of age, the Gothic heritage consists of objects produced sometime within an approximate interval spanning from the second half of the 15th century to the end of the 16th century's third decade. Certain Renaissance influences begin to clearly show in the 1520s, but even in the case of door frames with a straight lintel, the articulations remain intersected, which, formally speaking, is more of a Late Gothic feature. Frames with intersected articulation that are still ogival indicate a closer connection between the Dálnok and Esztelnek (Estelnic) churches – this much was established by earlier research. Currently,

we believe that the three gates with pointed arches and the one with straight lintels at Dálnok and Esztelnek are both coeval and part of the same architectural tradition; further, the similar make of the cornices and comparable, characteristically Late Gothic proportions of the two buildings imply that the atelier (or ateliers) working on the two churches, presumably in the 1520s (and perhaps during the previous decade already), was (or were) the same. Dating the carvings with a like certainty is more difficult, as the typical designs were in use over a prolonged period and their representations are often rather schematic, as one can observe on frames with both pointed and shouldered arches.

As regards other objects, of liturgical import, we briefly dwelt upon baptismal fonts, ambries and church bells. Beyond the 21 known to Edit Tari, we identified two further baptismal fonts (Kézdímartonos/Mărtănuș, Zágón/Zagon) as well as a possible third (Nagybacon/Bățanii Mari) from the region and we made an attempt at revising the chronology of the entire set. We managed to improve upon Kinga German's list of 7+2 sacrament niches and other ambries of liturgical significance, adding six sacrament niches and five ambries serving different purposes to it. In presenting the 14 bells of the region, we mostly followed Elek Benkő's pertinent work, but we touched upon two objects (from Esztelnek and Nagybacon) he omitted for chronological reasons even in this respect. Our catalogue of liturgical implements other than these is likely incomplete. We are not aware of extant altars or altar pieces from the region, save for two foundations unearthed by Zsigmond Bordi. Alongside the Late Gothic chalices and patens still in the possession of local congregations, we deem the corpus of a processional cross (13–14th century?) discovered at Sepsiszentkirály (Sâncraiu) and treated on by Tihamér Gyárfás in the early 20th century, likely lost or destroyed since; and an elaborate *monile* from Ozsdola (Ojdula) remarked on by Ferenc Lestyán, a photograph of which was likewise published by Gyárfás early in the 20th century worth mentioning as well.

Murals varying in size survive in 16 churches; literature (Mihály János, Zsombor Jékely, Dana Jenei, Dénes Radocsay) dates these to the latter two thirds of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th (or occasionally to merely the 15th, without further specification). Historical records and (less frequently) accounts regarding renovations (or destructions) from the second half of the 20th century reveal that the number used to be higher. Most murals are found on the walls of the nave, whereas some adorn exterior surfaces. Only the Kőröspatak (Valea Crișului) and (partly) the Árapatak (Araci) chancels have extant paintwork on their walls. Murals being a well researched subject, we could only contribute minor observations

to the sum of pre-existing knowledge; assembling a detailed overview did, nevertheless, yield a valuable insight into general aspects of church chronology.

Generally speaking, while the periods corresponding to major waves of church buildings being erected or remodelled largely coincide with those the carvings date from (the latter half of the 13th and the beginning or early third of the 14th century; and then, after a longer pause, the end of the 15th and the first third of the 16th century) , it is to be noted that most murals would appear to have been created in the exact intervals of time when no other, particularly substantial works were underway. Even as we only know murals we can date from less than a third of the total number of churches, this might reveal a tendency. Firstly, this would imply that the murals were neither ordered nor produced immediately upon the completion of the buildings themselves. Moreover, it is significant from a chronological perspective insofar as it supports the conclusion that the rather inaccessible hiatus between Romanesque phases and the Gothic remodellings might have in fact been spent painting the murals and carrying out construction works at a smaller scale, building sacristies or (somewhat later) ossuaries, perhaps also replacing the odd carved door frame in the interim (even though we have no concrete evidence of such replacements).

Not unlike any work of basic research, the present thesis is more successful at elucidating certain aspects of its subject matter, and less so when it comes to other aspects. On the one hand, in view of the current state of research, we are ready to consider our material corpus fully comprehensive. Additional scientific study could no doubt refine the chronology even further, but even so, we made certain advances to that end ourselves as well. While future renovations and archaeological research are bound to uncover new details that we were not aware of, the thesis provides a useful framework for interpreting and seeing these in their relevant context, even if the new details will make adjusting the original conclusions necessary in some ways. On the other hand, given the scope of the thesis, we did not endeavour, for the time being, to discuss the region's medieval art in the context of contemporaneous heritage from Transylvania in general and the rest of the Székelyföld in particular. We are nonetheless hopeful that continued research will soon lay the groundwork for clearing this debt.