

The Building of Bell-Towers Added to Romanian Churches

A Pattern of Intercommunity Cooperation in the Religious Life of the Romanians and the Saxons from Sibiu County, in the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Century

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This paper aims to emphasize a specific aspect in the evolution of the architecture of churches built by Romanian Orthodox or Greek-Catholic communities in the Sibiu region, in the second half of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century. More exactly, it is the widespread presence, in the ecclesiastical architecture of that county, and also in other Romanian Transylvanian settings, of the western tower, added to the church, which housed the bells and sometimes even clocks. In most cases, the raising of these towers was entrusted to Saxon masons from Sibiu, whose names have been preserved in inscriptions on the walls of edifices, or by their registering in contracts signed by the Romanians who ordered the execution. The involvement of those worthy craftsmen represented an important factor in maintaining the dialogue and cultural exchanges between the two communities that lived together in the Sibiu County region.

Keywords: *church architecture, bell-towers, western tower*

Impressed by a visit to Sibiu, during a trip undertaken in the early years of the sixteenth century, in the lands to the north of the Carpathian arc, and further to Hungary and Austria, Neagoe Basarab, who in the meantime had become ruler of Wallachia, subsequently ordered, probably in 1517, to Johann and Celestin, two famous goldsmith masters from the fortress on the Cibin River, several pieces of silverware, including a censer, which reproduced the shape of a church tower he had seen in Sibiu. It was the big bell tower of “Saint Mary” Catholic Church, which had just been raised in 1499¹, of which Neagoe said: “we visited the entire Hungary and nowhere had we seen a more beautiful tower”². We can imagine the overwhelming feeling, in the face of the massiveness and height of the Gothic tower, experienced by the traveler familiar with the rather low, Byzantine architecture of Wallachian places of worship. The pious ruler, later canonized by the Orthodox Church - which

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¹ Vasile Drăguț, *Arta gotică în România*, București 1979, p. 41.

² Grigore G. Tocilescu, *Biserica episcopală a Mănăstirii Curtea de Argeș restaurată în zilele M. S. Regelui Carol I. Sfințită din nou în ziua de 12 octombrie 1886*, p. 40.