

# ROMANIA

## Transylvanian Saxon Architectural Heritage: Two Towers of Fortified Churches Collapsed

Some of the problems concerning the specific care for the preservation of the Transylvanian Saxons' architectural heritage have been mentioned in *Heritage at Risk 2008–2010* (pp. 145–147), where the project “Fortresses, Rediscovered Treasures” was presented. Developed in 2008 for 18 Saxon church fortifications by the “Coordination Bureau for Fortified Churches”, which was created in 2007 within the Superior Consistory of the Lutheran Church A.C. in Sibiu, it was implemented between 2011–2013 with funds from the European Union. The results are rather positive, as some selected examples presented in *Heritage at Risk 2011–2013* (pp. 122–126) prove. In the meantime, a second project for further twelve objects is being implemented.

The aim of the Coordination Bureau was to develop an emergency intervention programme to safeguard the fortified churches, focussing mainly on basic maintenance and repair works, as they had been performed for centuries by the Saxon communities before their massive emigration from Romania in 1990–91. Therefore, all the projects focus on preventing decay expansion, stopping degradations caused by water infiltration, but also ensuring an adequate use for their status as historic buildings, including them in the tourist circuit and, last but not least, fundraising. Bearing in mind that in Transylvania today about 150 (of formerly 300) church fortifications have survived, it will be a huge (and long-term) but necessary work to examine their actual state of conservation and develop priorities for future interventions.

First of all, it is essential to examine the structural condition of the buildings, since the Transylvanian Basin, surrounded by the Carpathian Mountains (of volcanic origin), has always been a very active seismic area – and it would take a long time to doc-



Fig. 1: The church in Roades before the collapse of the tower (photo C. Machat, 1998)



Fig. 2: The church tower of Roades after the collapse (photo A. Schnell, 2016)

ument the damages to the built heritage caused by earthquakes over the centuries. As usual unexpectedly the tower of the fortified church in *Rodeş/Radeln* collapsed partially on 14 February 2016, followed on 19 February 2016 by the tower of the church in *Rotbav/Rothbach*, which collapsed completely, destroying also a part of the western nave.

As a consequence, the newly established “Stiftung Kirchen-burgen” (Fortified Churches Foundation), which replaced the Coordination Bureau in 2015, appointed a structural engineer to examine the damages and develop a consolidation project for the tower in Rodeş. In Rodeş, only the northwest corner of the tower partially collapsed down to the first level, revealing the two wall layers: the inner one from the 14th century, reinforced in 1494 with a second one and raised to five floors with a wooden defence gallery. As no other damages happened and the ensemble of the church fortification (with surrounding circular walls and three towers) is in good condition, the first consolidation interventions of 2017 with new wooden gallery on the upper level (like the defence gallery from 1494) can be accepted as a first step towards reconstruction.

The situation in Rotbav is different. There the church fortification is positioned directly at the main road between Central Transylvania (North-West) and the *Țara Bârsei/Burzenland* (South-East). The church tower can be considered a landmark on this road, fortified in the 15th century with a defence gallery and machicolation, rebuilt after a fire in 1740 and shaped like the famous towers of the Black Church in *Braşov/Kronstadt* and the church in *Feldioara/Marienburg*. Being exposed all the time to all the trepidations produced by the growing heavy traffic and by the earthquake of 1977, which damaged large parts of Bucharest, the tower was seriously affected so that it had to be consolidated by a reinforced concrete structure. After the collapse, the western part of the church was closed in 2017 by a provisional wall, but first attempts for a possible reconstruction have already been made. The argumentation for this is based on the function of the church tower as a landmark. One can only hope that there will be no funding available for such a project as long as the numerous other church fortifications have not yet been preserved and consolidated. It will be interesting and important to see the results of a special project for the examination of the structural condition of 20 church fortifications developed by the Foundation and the Viadrina Europe University in Görlitz. It was funded by the German Federal Government and implemented in 2018–19.

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Fig. 3: The church in Rotbav before the collapse of the tower (photo C. Machat, 1998)



Fig. 4: The church in Rotbav after the collapse of the tower (© www.honigberger.com, Christian Chelu)