
CHURCH-BUILDING AS PROOF OF SOCIAL PRESTIGE

THE ‘CHURCH OF THE GREEKS’ IN ALBA IULIA

Daniel Dumitran*

‘1 Decembrie 1918’ University, 5 Gabriel Bethlen Str., 510009, Alba Iulia, Romania

(Received 10 October 2013, revised 25 November 2013)

Abstract

In the pre-modern and modern eras churches represented rural and urban landmarks, generating cores of community cohesion and also bearing a symbolic language with characteristics hard to decipher nowadays. Especially in urban environments, the simple parish churches became peripheral or ‘decentred’, preserving with difficulty the artistic values and legacies that had once defined the cultural identity of the community. In the first instance, the methods of social history can investigate how communities formed and development and how they approached neighbouring communities. There were frequent cases when competition between communities either to keep or to increase the number of the faithful, or merely for prestige, led to the development and later the embellishment of parish churches. Patronage thus exercised met the expectations of prominent members of the community and offered them a cultural identity.

Using this method, this study examines the case of the ‘Greeks’ church’ in Alba Iulia, erected after Josef II’s Edict of Tolerance. Levantine merchants established in the suburb of Lipoveni from the mid-eighteenth century were instrumental in building the church, though there was also support from some more influential members of the Commercial Companies of the Principality (especially from Sibiu).

Keywords: church, Orthodox community, Greeks, cultural identity, Simion Silaghi

1. Introduction

In the pre-modern and modern eras churches were landmarks of rural and urban topography, generators of community cohesion and bearers of a symbolic language whose characteristics are harder to decipher today. Especially in urban environments, simple parish edifices become ‘decentred’ and have barely preserved their artistic value and legacy, which once defined the spiritual identity of the community. Marcel Gauchet speaks of the re-composition of the socio-human universe outside and against its initial religious logic, referring to the religious phenomenon; this can also be understood in relation to changing urban territory [1]. Churches, as places of the manifestation of the sacred, had to

* E-mail: danieldumitran@yahoo.com

adapt to this secularization of the urban landscape. The rediscovery of the significance of their position in urban topography, a result of the struggle to win 'city rights', followed by the sacralization of the attached territory and the proclamation of community prestige [2], thus represents a step of fundamental importance for the evaluation of cultural legacy.

Thorough research in Church history at the religious and local level, looking at administrative structures and the communities integrated to them, is currently the exception rather than the rule for the pre-modern period in Transylvania, especially if we take into account the churches' role as agents of integration for the new ethnic and confessional groups established in the Principality during the eighteenth century [3]. The liberty or otherwise of public exercise of religion could sometimes favour or cumber this integration in urban environments; thus individual or collective strategies of co-habitation became necessary, with greater chances of success when the newcomers contributed in some important way socially or economically. The phenomenon went along with the progressive demographic and territorial development of cities, illustrated through the tendency to integrate the outskirts and, at the social and judicial level, with the claim to the 'right of concivility' (of citizenship) [4].

The cultural routes of Baroque influence, overlapping with the Byzantine legacy, reflect the fundamental intermediary role of artists from the Ukraine and those trained there and of Serbs from Hungary, who received Baroque elements and adapted them to the Orthodox churches' needs [5]. The more peripheral position of the Principality of Transylvania considered here and the more modest scale of artistic achievement by Orthodox communities with less material wealth do not make such comparative research relevant [6-8].

Starting from these premises, my case study here is the Transylvanian town of Alba Iulia, whose development during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries followed the course described here, which in its general lines was common to the small towns on the periphery of pre-modern Europe [9].

2. Case-study: city of Alba Iulia

In the eighteenth century Alba Iulia can be considered one of the small towns of the Principality of Transylvania, in spite of its statute as free royal city (*civitas*) [10]: according to a chart of contributions from 1816, it was the only royal city in the fourth class (along other noble cities and 'taxation places'), with the smallest fees of 6 florins for merchants and craftsmen [11]. Furthermore Jozsef Benko included it at the end of the eighteenth century among the market towns (*oppida/mezővárosok*) [12], undoubtedly due to its development over the course of the century, especially the urban changes needed to raise the Vauban bastions (1715-1738). The town's size and status emerge clearly enough from a description of the city on the occasion of the fiscal conscription of 1750, which mentioned the inferior condition of the majority of its craftsmen and merchants and the subsistence-farming level of agriculture [13]. However, the city did not lack dynamism, as can be deduced from the fiscal conscriptions of 1713 and

1733: in the latter year, for example, the majority of registered merchants were paying more, sometimes much more, than 6 florins [14].

The 1733 conscription, like other conscriptions recently analysed [15], represent a valuable source for the early topography of Alba Iulia. It records the inhabitants of the “*oppidum Hungaricum*”, “*oppidum Germanicum*” and the “*oppidum Valachicum*” separately. The new territorial configuration of the city thus represented more than just a project, it was already a reality, presented as such on the oldest known maps, that of 1736 by the military architect Johann Konrad von Weiss and that of 1738 by Lindemann. Although the emphasis in the first map is on the fortifications, the similarity is obvious: in the southern part the *Teutsche Stadt*, its edge marked by the present Romanian church, in the north the *Ungrische Stadt*, divided by the channel of the Mureş to the South-East from the *Hajusch Stadt* and by the Ampoi River to the North-East from *Lippovain* (the last two visible only on the 1738 map). An almost identical configuration appears on the 1741 map by a certain Johannes Michael Eisele [16, 17].

The new city’s topography is already more complex in the 1752 and 1771 maps (Figure 1a and 1b) [16]: this last shows *Teutsche Stadt*, *Város*, the suburbs named for the raftsmen who lived there (*Hajuschen* or *Schiffleute*) and the *Lipoveny Vorstadt*. The map of the city on the Josephine topographical map of the Principality of Transylvania, coordinated by Colonel Dominik de Fabris, reflects the same configuration, although it designates the whole territory of the new city under the single name of *Város* [18]. This name properly signified the privileged town as such and would in time include the suburbs. At the end of the nineteenth century the extent of the city’s territorial development, which cannot be followed in detail here, is illustrated by the 1900 map (Figure 1c) [17, p. 114]: the area of the former free city is here designated with the name of *Innerstadt*, surrounded to the North and South by the districts of *Ampoly*, *Lipovan*, *Hajos* and *Major* (*Mayerhof*).

The same maps show the churches built during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the exception of the Lutheran churches (which appear only on the 1900 plan): the Franciscan church in the ‘German town’, probably re-built between 1751 and 1760/70 since it already existed in 1738 (‘Franciscaner’ (1738), ‘Franziskaner Kirche’ (1752), ‘Neu erbaute Patrum Franciscanorum Kirche’ (1771)), and the Reformed church, between 1756/57 and 1760/61, in the centre of the ‘Hungarian town’ [12, p. 191; 19] More peripheral were the two Uniate churches, built in the first half of the century: the Holy Trinity church, at the southern edge of the Maieri suburb which essentially corresponded to the ‘German town’ (‘Wallach<ische> Kirch<e>’ (1738, 1752, 1771)), and the church of the Assumption, in the North-West of the Lipoveni suburb (the church is marked, but not nominated, in the 1752 and 1771 plans). After 1781 two Orthodox churches were built, the church of the Annunciation or ‘Church of the Greeks’ in Lipoveni (at the entrance to the district, close to the North-Western edge of the Hungarian town), and Holy Trinity in Maieri (further in than the old church).

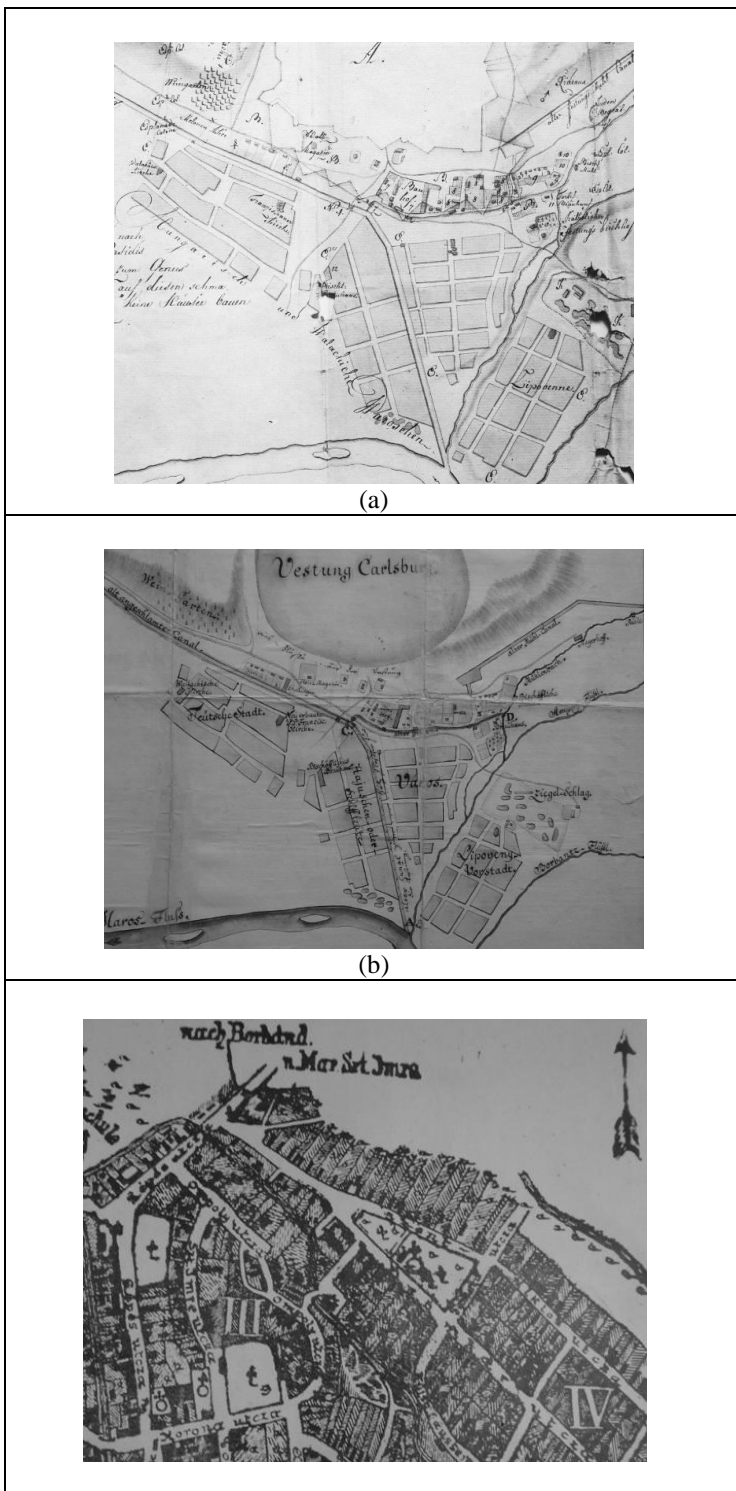


Figure 1. Alba Iulia: (a) in the map from 1752, (b) in the map from 1771, (c) in the plan from 1900.

Some time later, in the 1820s, the Evangelical church was built at the South-Western extremity of the 'Hungarian city'. Begun in the same decade and finished in 1840, the *Mareh Yezekiel* synagogue, the first wall synagogue in Transylvania [20] to the North-West of the 'Hungarian town' completes our list of places of worship in the former capital of the Principality. The city was growing and the first integrated suburb, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was Lipoveni, inhabited by Greeks and Romanians, who built the aforementioned churches.

3. A fluctuating community: the Greeks of Alba Iulia

Still existing in the first years of the eighteenth century – a list from 1702 gives the names of 23 merchants, headed by a *judex* – the important community of merchants from Alba Iulia dissolved in the next years. Those registered by the 1733 conscription established themselves in the city later and were no longer part of an organized community or members of a company. Among these, the most interesting seem to have been *Görög Antoni* from Melinik and the enigmatic *Drágós Iván*, characterized as '*potentior omnibus*', who were selling 'Turkish' and Western goods and also appear in other sources; another two merchants who dealt in wares we know of (linen, canvas, silk fabric, sulphur, pepper, ropes, etc.) came from Pitești (the Romanian *Duka Thanászi*) and from Cernavodă (the Serb *Rácz Cosztándin*). Otherwise, the names recorded are associated with a declared ethnicity and origin, and other information recorded relates to their wealth, their judicial and civil situation and former membership or otherwise in a commercial company [14].

At least in some cases, the confessional options of these Greeks were not exclusivist until the mid-century. Two examples are the two founders of the Uniate church in Lipoveni: the merchant Ivan Dragoș, who donated a lamp inscribed with his initials in Greek and the year 1736, and the post master, Ioan Dragoș de Thurna, ennobled in 1742 and a fervent protector of religious union, who donated another lamp with a Latin inscription, containing his name, office and heraldry, dated 8th December 1766. Unpublished documentary sources show the latter as donor, in his will of 1773, of the vaults (stores) of each of the two churches of Lipoveni, Uniate and non-Uniate; another source confirms that as early as 1737 he took possession of one of these vaults in lieu of an unpaid debt [Alba County National Archives Service, fund *Primăria Alba Iulia*, nr. 12/1808, f. 9r/10r; nr. 2/1809, f. 1r]. Thus all the evidence seems to suggest that the latter was the former's heir, and the historian Augustin Bunea argues that both were involved in the building and later the restoration of the church. They also represent examples of prominent parishioners who affirmed their prestige in the community through the act of foundation [14, 21, 22].

Unlike the two Dragoș, the new members of the Levantine community, established in town after the mid-century, committed themselves as supporters of the non-Uniates. These were firstly the Karantoni family, native to Melinik, among whom *Manu Karandon*, once *haragiar* (collector) of the Company of

Sibiu, donated a lamp and censer to the non-Uniate chapel in 1768. Another two lamps donated by a woman, *Kriska Karandon*, date from 1794, when the new edifice of the ‘Greeks’ church’ already existed. Members of the Company of Sibiu were also involved with the church, the Company exercising a sort of patronage through the merchants in its ranks who had established themselves in Alba Iulia. It is quite possible that one of the great merchants of Sibiu may have donated money, as remembered by the parish inhabitants: two of them, Constantin Hagi Pop and Constantin Manicatis Safranos, had close relations with the local merchants. In the quasi-urban community about to form, the latter held a distinguished place, appearing in some documents in the forefront of the founders of the church, calling themselves ‘townsmen’ and different from the ‘lipoveni’ [23-25].

4. Church of the ‘Greeks’

Included on the list of historical monuments of Alba County, along with the architectonic complex of the whole street, the Orthodox or ‘Greek’ church of the Annunciation today stands on Avram Iancu street (*Korona utca* before 1918, according to the 1900 map of town).

This complex slowly emerged in the last quarter of the eighteenth century (as already shown by the town’s representation on the Josephine topographical map of the Principality made between 1769 and 1773) and in the early nineteenth century, as the town swallowed up the Lipoveni suburb. An early nineteenth-century source describes the location of the house purchased in 1792 (when the church was not yet built) as the lodging of Nicolae Raț, parish priest and archpriest: “The house in the Greeks lane in the corner of the Mureș river, adjoining the Teacher lane from the market, near to the property of the deceased Georgie Ferrari, bought with the money of the holy church [...]” [Alba County Service of the National Archives, fund *Primăria Alba Iulia*, nr. 6/1803, f. 1v.]. The quieter position off the street and the existence of the main entrance to the church in the southern side of the tower can be explained as attempts to evade the restrictions imposed on ‘tolerated’ religions that were not allowed to build places of worship with tower and entrance from the street [26]. Even if this provision has only informational value for Transylvania, where the Orthodox *de facto* benefitted from of the right of public worship, we may observe that the restrictions were not entirely absent.

This is a serious argument in the favour of the idea that the building was planned from the start with a unitary character and with bell tower, as suggested the image on one of the deacon's doors, in which the archdeacon Ștefan presents a model of the church. The detail is surprising, in the conditions of transmitting the message of a votive painting: its significance could be revealed by the name *Ștefanu*, inscribed in Greek characters on one of the lamps kept in the church (Figure 2).

The survey of the building completed in 2008, confirms the hypothesis of the unitary character of the structure. It features a hall-type church, formed of a semi-circular apse to the East, the nave divided into three bays with different

dimensions and various vaulting systems, and the bell tower attached to the Western frontage. Inside, a pavilion with wooden railing supported by columns was built into the Western part of the nave, at the middle of the twentieth century (Figure 3) [27].

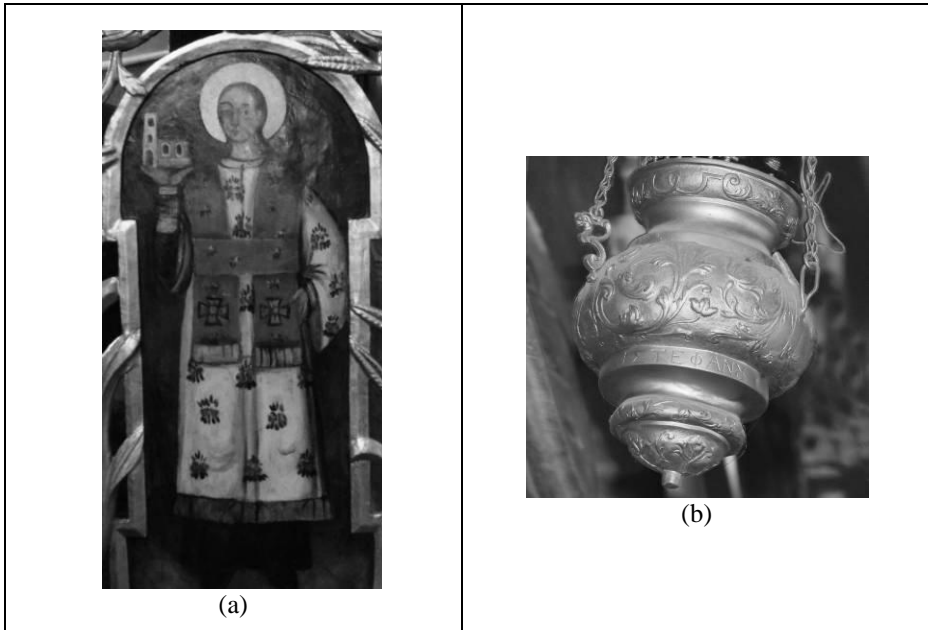


Figure 2. Church of the ‘Greeks’: (a) the representation of archdeacon Ștefan on one of the deacon’s doors, (b) the lamp with the name *Ștefanu*.

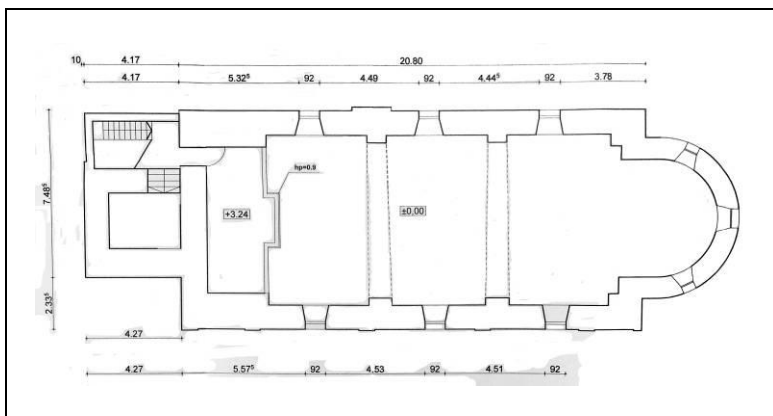


Figure 3. The survey of the church of the ‘Greeks’ from 2008.

In a much greater measure than the unassuming provincial Baroque architecture of the church, its endowment with a sumptuous iconostasis, dated to the first decades of the nineteenth century and attributed to the workshop of Simion Silaghi from Abrud [28], offers interesting suggestions for the circulation of artistic models. Similar though earlier works can be found in

churches in Hungary, at Békés, Békéscsaba and Szentes (with an iconostasis datable to the 1780s), related to the work of Stefan Tenetchi [6, p. 86-88, 160]. We may observe here that these were in the vicinity of the commercial route connecting Alba Iulia, along the Mureş Valley, to Szeged and along the Tisa valley to Kecskemét, towns with activate and important Greek communities. The scenes from the reverse of the iconostasis in the church at Alba Iulia (which remained sketches only) are accompanied by inscriptions in Greek, also used to designate characters in the altar's apse.

5. Conclusions

This brief review of the building of the church of the Annunciation in Alba Iulia proves the validity of the hypothesis from which the present research began. We are dealing, undeniably, with a strategy of affirmation of community identity through the act of foundation. The donors were from the ranks of the few Greek (or Macedo-Vlach) families whose role was preserved in the collective memory until the end of the nineteenth century, when the lawyer Rubin Paţia wrote two descriptions of the city which remain in manuscript [Held in the archive of the Union National Museum, under the inventory name 4487 and 4860]. These are all the more important since any material traces of these donors (inscriptions or funerary monuments) no longer exist or have yet to be identified.

In the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Orthodox parish of Lipoveni continued to be in rivalry with the Uniate parish for winning over believers, but was also looking to assert its prestige in relation with the other confessional communities and, especially, with the city government. Nor should we overlook the church's tendency to build on its advantages from the favourable position in the urban topography, as reflected in its efforts to continue selling goods. Starting from these general lines, the full history of the parish and the people who formed it has yet to be written.

References

- [1] M. Gauchet, *Dezvrăjirea lumii. O istorie politică a religiei*, Nemira, Bucureşti, 2006, 5.
- [2] D. Do Paço, *Coexister dans la diversité religieuse des villes de l'Europe moderne, XV^e-XVIII^e siècle*, in *Des religions dans la ville. Ressorts et stratégies de coexistence dans l'Europe des XV^e-XVIII^e siècles*, D. Do Paço, M. Monge & L. Tatarenko (eds.), Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2010, 18-20.
- [3] R. Bendel and N. Spannenberger (Hg.), *Introduction*, in *Kirchen als Integrationsfaktor für die Migranten im Südosten der Habsburgermonarchie im 18. Jh.*, R. Bendel & N. Spannenberger (eds.), LIT Verlag, Berlin, 2010, 6-7.
- [4] D. Dumitran, *Transylvanian Review*, **21(Suppl. 1)** (2012) 291-315.
- [5] B. Bešlin, *The baroque Form of „sweet Orthodoxy”. The Church and the transformation of serbian society after the Great Migration of 1690*, in *Kirchen als Integrationsfaktor*, R. Bendel & N. Spannenberger (eds.), LIT Verlag, Berlin, 2010, 77-78.

- [6] N. Márta, *Ortodox ikonosztázionok Magyarországon*, FÁBIÁN BT., Debrecen, 1994.
- [7] N. Márta, *A magyarországi görög diaszpóra egyházművészeti emlékei I. Ikonok, ikonosztázionok*, Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 1998.
- [8] N. Márta, *A Bizánci ikontól a nyugati barokkig. Tanulmányok a magyarországi görög diaszpóra egyházművészetéről*, Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 2008.
- [9] P. Clark, *Introduction*, in *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, P. Clark (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, 1-21.
- [10] V. Bácskai, *Small towns in Eastern Central Europe*, in *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, P. Clark (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, 78-79.
- [11] A. Răduțiu and L. Gyémánt, *Repertoriul izvoarelor statistice privind Transilvania 1690-1847*, Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1996, XIX.
- [12] B. József, *Transsilvania specialis. Erdély földje és népe*, Szabó György (ed.), vol. I, Kriterion Könyvkiadó, Bukarest-Kolozsvár, 1999, 172.
- [13] L. Gyémánt, R. Câmpeanu, A. Dörner and F. Mureșan, *Conscriptia fiscală a Transilvaniei din anul 1750*, vol. 1, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2009, 2468-2471.
- [14] D. Dumitran, *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica*, **15(2)** (2011) 302-303.
- [15] I. Madouvalos, "Conscriptiones Graecorum" in *Eighteenth-Century Central Europe. Crossing Borders: The Sociocultural Identification of Migrants from the Balkans to Hungarian Territories*, in *Encounters in Europe's Southeast. The Habsburg Empire and the Orthodox World in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, H. Heppner & E. Posch (eds.), Dieter Winkler, Bochum, 2012, 121-133.
- [16] G. Anghel, *Historia Urbana*, **4(1-2)** (1996) 70.
- [17] G. Fleșer, *Alba Iulia. O istorie urbană ilustrată*, Haco International, Ghimbav, 2008, 111-113.
- [18] Magyar Országos Levéltár, *Az első katonai felmérés Erdély és a Temesi Bánság*, DVD, Budapest, 2005, Section 170.
- [19] G.K. Botond, *Az eltűnt Gyulafehérvári Református Egyházmegye és egyházi közösségei/Inquisitoria Dioceseos Alba-Carolinensis Reformatae relatoria (1754)*, Kriterion Könyvkiadó - Tortoma Könyvkiadó, Kolozsvár-Barót, 2012, 123-127.
- [20] A.-M. Caloianu, *Istoria comunității evreiești din Alba Iulia (sec. XVII-1948)*, Hasefer, București, 2006, 210-211.
- [21] A. Bunea, *Episcopii Petru Pavel Aron și Dionisiu Novacovici sau istoria românilor transilvăneni de la 1751 până la 1764*, Blaj, 1902, 219
- [22] J. Siebmacher, *Grosse und allgemeine Wappenbuch*. Vierter Band, Theil XII. *Der Adel von Siebenbürgen*, Verlag von Bauer und Raspe, Nürnberg, 1898, 150 and Taf. 88.
- [23] A. Dumitran and E.-D. Cucui, *Simon Bălgrădeanul*, Altip, Alba Iulia, 2009, 19-20.
- [24] R. Moașa Nazare, *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie 'A. D. Xenopol'*, **39-40** (2002-2003) 189.
- [25] N. Iorga, *Scrisori și inscripții ardeleni și maramureșene*, vol. I, Atelierele grafice Socec & Comp., București, 1906, 124, and vol. II, 248.
- [26] P.F. Barton, „Das” *Toleranzpatent von 1781. Edition der wichtigsten Fassungen*, in *Im Zeichen der Toleranz*, P.F. Barton (ed.), Institut für protestantische Kirchengeschichte, Wien, 1981, 166-170.
- [27] G. Fleșer, *Biserici românești de zid din județul Alba*, Altip, Alba Iulia, 2001, 30-32.
- [28] A. Dumitran, *Patrimonium Apulense*, **12** (2009) 112.