

THE CHURCH OF ȘINTEREAG: MONOGRAPHIC SKETCH

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Abstract: The village of Șintereag is part of the commune of the same name, located in Bistrița Năsăud county, in the North central part of Transylvania. From the archaeological point of view, the locality of Șintereag is known by the Neolithic settlement discovered in the point “Pe Cremene”, located on a high terrace of the river Șieu, today, behind the school, but also for the discoveries from the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the post-Roman and Medieval ages. Also the main point of attraction that is the basis of our research, is the Gothic-style church, an architectural monument, built in the 14th century with later additions.

The village of Șintereag is part of the commune with same name, being located in Bistrița Năsăud county, the Northern central part of Transylvania (fig. 1), the village being a place where the conviviality between the ethnic groups is peaceful.

The history of the locality is fairly well represented thanks to documents and certain writings. The name has changed over time until it reached its present form, so in 1327 the name was Sumkers, in 1553 Somkerek and in 1830 Somkerék, the present name being Szintyerág - Șintereag¹. The name of the village is closely related to its location, it was once surrounded by a thick forest of antlers, hence the name Somkerek. Today, you can still see the lost traces of the antler forest, (kerek=wheel) on the hilltops. Similar to this locality, the names of other villages like Alma (alma = apples), Szil (szilvas = plums), Meggykerek (rosehip forest) etc. were formed.

From the archaeological point of view, the locality of Șintereag is known by the Neolithic settlement discovered in the point “Pe Cremene”, located on a high terrace of the river Șieu, today, behind the school², but also for the discoveries from the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the post-Roman and Medieval

¹ Kádár 1901, 93. Ghinea-Ghinea 2000, 522.

² COD LMI BN-I-S-B-01415

ages³. Also the main point of attraction that is the basis of our research, is the Gothic-style church⁴, an architectural monument, built in the 14th century with later additions⁵.

In the Middle Ages the village of Șintereag was part of Solnocul Dinăuntru county, located on the lower course of the Șieu river, east of Beclean. Although it appears in documents only in 1325, since in this year a transfer of ownership takes place, we can assume its existence since the 13th century. During the two centuries (XIII-XIV) the village was a noble property, first of the Vireag family, then of the de Gimbaș family.⁶ In 1327 the ownership of Șintereag changes from the territorial administrative point of view. From now we have important information, according to which, in 1333 Gombasi Domokos built a stone church here in honor of the Virgin Mary⁷.

Another important figure was Master Andrei, who had two sons: Dominic who no male offspring and Petru who probably before 1343. In this context, due to the lack of direct descendants, they gave their estates to the church in Alba Iulia, i.e. half of the Ciumbrud and Gâmbaș estates, as well as the Romanian village of Păgida in Alba county, together with the right of patronage over the churches there. In exchange for these estates, Bishop Andrei gave them the episcopal estates of Herina, Nețeni and Domnești in Dăbâca county, with the right to them for the rest of their lives. After his father's death, Magistrate Dominic gave up his control over the Herina episcopal estate in exchange for an annual annuity. Dominic was married to Margareta, daughter of Geleth of the Becsegergély family. In 1325, Margaret's brothers gave Dominic the Șintereag estate in Solnocul Interior county, where he built a stone church. Another important moment is when Dominic established his residence at his estate of Corușu ("Dominicum de Gumbas nobilem de Koroug"), where he disputed with Stephen Nadási the episcopal tithes from the Mérai nobles of the Corușu domain. Dominic loaned to the committean Nicolae Radnai, son of Benus, the sum of 300 florins, in exchange for which he obtained as a guarantee the Măgheruș estate in the county of Dăbâca. Probably around 1360, Dominic had a conflict with the bishop of Transylvania, because he demanded the transcription of all the contracts concluded with bishop Andrei. Dominic's financial situation worsened, as he had to pledge his part of the Turdaș estate to his Csesztvei relatives in order to pay a financial obligation to his wife's relatives. Before his death, in the spring of 1363, Master Dominic bequeathed to his ex-wife's relatives most of his assets: the Șintereag estate and his goods from all his debtors, especially from the bishop of Transylvania. To his grandsons, Petru Herepei and Ștefan Tátéi ("nepotibus

³ [HTTP://RAN.CIMEC.RO/SEL.ASP](http://RAN.CIMEC.RO/SEL.ASP) 11.12.2018

⁴ COD LMI BN-II-M-A-01714

⁵ Popa 1981, 51-52.

⁶ Kádár 1901, 93.

⁷ DIR-C, II, 368-369; 1333: Teleki, I, 46-47.

suis"), he left them each a sum of money and pieces of armament (two plates and a chariot with four horses). Many years after Dominic's death, two of his female relatives, residents of Totoiu, tried to obtain from the episcopate of Transylvania the estates taken over by the bishop: Păgida, Gâmbaş, Ciumbrud and Coruşu. The king forbade them to claim anything else, and his position is explained by the intervention of the bishop of Transylvania. It should be noted that he does not name the two descendants with the noble title, but only residents of Totoiu. Their mother, noble Gombasi, married a non-noble, a peasant from Totoiu⁸.

Historical data from monographs and from the work "Drumeţii în Ardeal" confirm that the church was built around 1327-1333. About the year 1327 we cannot say that it can be accepted as the year of the beginning of the construction of the church because the historical data do not confirm this fact. But we can certainly take 1333 as the year in which the church was already built. The information taken from the work "Drumeţii în Ardeal" cannot be certain because it is almost impossible that in such a short time (six years), such a big church could have been built⁹.

The writings refer to the fact that Gombasi Domokos Domokos built a stone church, but we cannot know with certainty whether it is this church or another edifice built on another structure. Thus, it is very likely that the construction of the church started around 1200 (probably the wooden one) and the year mentioned in the historical data, namely 1333, is the year of the completion of the construction (the stone one). It is also recalled that in the years 1332-1337 the parish priest of the church of Şintereag was priest Tilman. So already in 1332 the Reformed church of Şintereag had a parish priest. Thus, we are certain that the construction of the church began in the 1300s, and it is a fact that the church was already built in 1333. In 1363 Gombasi Domokos bought Şintereagu from Gilet's sons for money, leaving them the church he built in Şintereag, a vineyard and 10% of the mill. After Gombasi's death, Şintereag returned to the ancestral rulers, who in 1392 divided Şintereag into 3 parts. Thus, the first part belongs to Istvan son of Viragosberky Beche, the second part belongs to Janos son of Nemegyei Mihaly and the third part is divided into other parts, namely between Laszlo son of Somkerekgy Gilet, Janos son of Miklos and Antal, and between Marton son of Andras. The last branch of nobles was given the right of permanent estate, and the island of Şintereag was also divided into 3 parts¹⁰.

At the beginning of the 14th century, the noble family that owned Sintereag had four branches: Léli (after 1258), Bethlen (after 1282), Almarkéki Apafi (after 1298) and Somkeréki (after 1298), which continued throughout the 14th century within the Somkeréki family started by Gelet (attested between

⁸ Diaconescu 2013, 169-170

⁹ Géza 1943, 8; Felszegi 2013, 17.

¹⁰ Kádár 1901, 93.

1298-1304), through his descendants the Nemegyei (after 1325) and Virágosberki (after 1325) families, and then the Erdélyi Somkeréki (after 1391) following the disappearance of the direct Somkeréki branch (after 1391/92-1410), through the death of Ladislaus' grandchildren (attested between 1325-1364). The Virágosberki and Nemegyei families will disappear also, respectively, after 1392 and after 1415, so that the Erdélyi Somkeréki will remain the only heir of the Somkerék family, until its disappearance and the taking over of the inheritance by the Bánfi family, then Teleki in the 17th century (fig. 2.)¹¹.

In 1407 Somkereki Laszlo Somkereki Laszlo donated some relics and religious objects of great value to the church. It was probably around this time that the vaulting of the church was completed. In the years 1603-1603, Basta's brigands damaged the church and pillaged the village. We do not know to what extent the church was damaged, but there are reports suggesting that the church had to be rebuilt, but this did not happen¹². Continuing the chronological timeline, the following dates tell us that in 1661 during the Turkish-Tatar invasion, both the community and the church were destroyed. Then, in 1675, the voivode Apaffi Mihály I built the church and the school¹³.

On August 6, 1744, thanks to Maria Banffy's letter of donation, the inhabitants of the territory of Sintereag had to pay taxes from all that they produced for the building of the church here, leaving the Saturday toll of the two mills also to be sent as a contribution for the monument. All this was going to happen until the church is completely built including the tower. Then the place of worship was to be furnished with chairs and furniture. Its construction in Gothic style was done later. At the entrance on a plaque the following benefactors who contributed to its renovation and improvement are mentioned in the following lines (fig. 3):

*“Nehai Migos Groff Losontzi Banfi Maria Asszony o Excellenciaja Somkereken ruinaban levo Isten Haza renovalisara es ekeszetesere legalt koltseggel es magaeval renovaltatott mindeneket MMLgos Groff Camerarius es Cotenellus Maros-Nemeti Iffjabb Gyulai Ferentz Ur u Nga kedves elete parja Mlgos Groff Szepesi Susanna Asszony o Ngaval egyutt Anno Domini 1767”*¹⁴. (Maria Banffy took care of the renovation and endowment of the church in ruins, the renovation being completed in 1761. She commissioned the priest Boloni Samuel to take care of such a church. Also in this period, the ceiling of the church is painted, the interior is improved with painted furniture, with the pulpit, as well as the painted gallery on the western side. The spire of the tower was built in 1716, the tower and the church being covered with shingles.)¹⁵.

¹¹ Hasan 2015, 131.

¹² Kádár 1901, 104.

¹³ This being the defining point for the adoption of the Gothic style.

¹⁴ Kádár 1901, 106.

¹⁵ Kádár 1901, 101.

From a historical point of view, no more data is known about the monument, but we can remember the fact that on October 23, 1553, King Ferdinand convened a National Assembly in the reformed church in Şintereag. We can also remember that on June 24, 1848, Captain Bem (poti sa zici ce capitan era?) visited the church, and in 1898, the existence of a male choir made up of 48 members is mentioned¹⁶.

The current parish priest of the village, interested in the lack of a chronologization of the parish priests of the village of Şintereag, tried to present a list of them after much research, wishing that future generations will complete his work. So I will expose the list of these church leaders and by this work I complete a small part of the history of Şintereag and at the same time I respect the wish of priest Felszegi Imre. This list can be found inside the church next to the tablet which states that in 1761 Maria Bamffy was in charge of the renovation of the building.

TIME FRAME	PRIESTHOOD
1332-1337	Tilman plebanos
1485	Mihaly plebanos
1675	Gyarmati Istvan
uncertain date	Banyai Istvan
1712-1716	Banyai Andras
1716-1718	Zilahi Marton
1719-1782	Boloni Samuel
1795-1824	Szilagyi Mihaly
1824-1877	Kovatsi Mihaly
1878-1879	Dombi Lajos
1881-1912	Csejdi Istvan

¹⁶ Kádár 1901, 108.

1912	Elek Istvan
1912-1922	Gergely Kovacs Istvan
1923-1933	Beregszaszi Gyorgy
1934-1935	Valadi Gyorgy
1935-1943	Gyenge Gyorgy esperes
1943-1944	Farkas Ferencz
1945-1949	Kovacz Istvan
1949-1969	Jaray Marton
1969-1975	Varga Laszlo
1976-1978	Herman Mostert Janos
1979-1984	Jakab Jozsef
1985-1990	Molnar Arpad Levente
1991-1994	Vincze Minya Istvan
1995-2001	Takacs Lajos
2001- up to the present date	Felszegi Imre

Although the edifice has undergone several changes over time, elements of Gothic architecture are still preserved. We can observe the massiveness of the building preserved from the previous style where we can see the buttresses, belonging to the Romanesque architecture, but also to the Gothic one, whose distinctive sign are the ogives (Fig. 4). The ogival windows are ornamented with moldings belonging to the mature Gothic style, where we can observe the stone frieze lacework (Fig. 5). This type of ogival windows can also be found in the architectural context of other buildings, such as the Evangelical Church in Sibiu

¹⁷, the Evangelical Church in Dîrloș¹⁸, the Church in Ațel¹⁹, etc. The tall pedimented west facade is undecorated and has only the main ogival entrance with stone surround and a round window made from fragmentary stone moldings. The corners of the tower, decorated with bosses, are supported on the ground floor by three robust buttresses. At the top level, the tower has on three sides, on the North, South and East, large ogival windows decorated with rich moldings. Under the pyramidal roof, with its very slender octagonal top, stands a perimeter gallery with a wooden parapet (Fig. 6).

The North wall of the nave has no window openings, but is rhythmized by four buttresses in two sections rising three-quarters of the height of the facade. The corners of the choir are reinforced with identical buttresses, the one on the north side being missing. The South wall of the choir is pierced by two ogival windows, and in the next segment of the choir enclosure there is one such window. Its mullions are damaged or missing altogether. The South side of the nave, due to the tower, has only two buttresses, and in the transoms are placed ogival windows with fragmentary mullions. On this facade there is a portico with segmental arches and a South side entrance with a Gothic doorway with a lintel on consoles (Fig. 7).

Today the nave is covered by a cylindrical vault with openings supported by late Gothic console and pillars attached to the wall. The original vault was similarly supported by consoles and narrow pillars with a polygonal plinth, attached to the wall, from which the ridges started, some of which have survived to this day under the west gallery and in the median area of the nave. Both the ogival door under the gallery and the semicircular window open into the tower. They indicate that the church originally had a gallery built of wood or stone. Between the nave and the choir is the ogival triumphal arch. The choir is covered with simple cross vaults, set on late Gothic consoles of various shapes. In the north wall of the choir can be identified a door opening with a straight doorway, which gave access to the former sacristy. Following the reform, the sacristy lost its function and was demolished (Fig. 8).

The wooden ceiling under the west gallery is supported by two wooden pillars and is ornamented with stars, while the parapet of the staircase bears vegetal ornament with decorative border of painted dotted fir-tree motifs. The five panels in the central area of the parapet are decorated in the style of the Umling family of painters, depicting vegetal compositions of pomegranate, acorn, tulip, and other flowers, which are set in Italian vases or simple cups set in Renaissance niches with parapet. (Fig. 9)

The middle panels have a greenish-brown painted background and the four side panels are painted in pointilist technique. On the plank beneath the

¹⁷ Lupescu 2020, 204; Marcu-Istrate 2020, 181.

¹⁸ Jenei 2020, 7.

¹⁹ Luca et alii 2003, 43-45.

parapet boards, on a white background, there are vegetal ornaments with vrejuri and the following inscription: „*Pred. V. k. L. Vers Őrizd meg mind a két lábaidat mikoron mégy az Istennek házához hogy hajlandó légy a halgatásra inkább, hogy nem mint a bolondoknak modgyok szerint valo áldozatra, mert ezek nem tudgyák, hogy Gonoszt tselekesznek Anno 1760 Umling Lőrintz Által.*” V. k. L. Vers. (V. k. L. Vers Take heed to thy feet when thou goest into the temple of the Lord: if thou draw near to hearken, it is better, than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they know only to do evil. Anno 1760 by Lőrintz Umling) (Fig. 10).

The stone pulpit, leaning against the north side of the triumphal arch, bears a wreath of fretworked wood, painted with floral ornaments, on the top of the volutes is represented the sacrifice of Christ through the symbol of the pelican that feeds its sons with its own blood. Around the crown are arched wooden elements of various sizes, painted with flowers, and the cornice's entablature bears the biblical quotation: "*Isa 58. P. L. V. Kiáltts tellyes Torokból meg ne szűnnyél, mint a Trombita emeld fel a te szodat és mond meg az én népemnek az ő binőket és Jákob Házának az ő hamis ...*" (Isaiah 58, Shout with all your might and do not stop, let your voice sound like a trumpet, proclaim to My people their sins and to the house of Jacob...) (Fig. 11).

The Lord's Table is round and made of wood with X-shaped legs. The outside is decorated with tulips. Arriving in Europe only in the 16th century, these flowers native to Persia and Turkey spread rapidly. A beautiful Turkish legend explains their significance: after a young prince learns that the young woman he fell in love with has died, he kills himself, and from his blood the tulips are born, representing pure love. Returning to the table, it bears the following inscription: „*Ímé az én ebédemet el készítettem az én tulkaim és hizlalt állatim megölettettek és mindenek készek. Math. R. XII. V. 4.*” (Behold, I have prepared my feast; my bullocks and fattened ones have been slaughtered and everything is ready. Matthew 22, 4) (Fig. 12).

The parapets of the choir stalls and the first benches have rectangular-shaped boards with tessellated corners or rectangles extended with triangles, which are decorated with free ornamental motifs of tendrils and flowers. The backs of the choir stalls are painted with architectural motifs with pilasters on whose "capitals" are birds. The cantor's chair in the east gallery is decorated with a wreath of flowers with the following inscription in the middle: „*Propriis Sumptibus Fieri Curavit Steph Szigethi Scholae Rector Ano 1761*” (At the own expense of teacher István Szigeti in 1761) (Fig. 13). The organ cabinet is also the work of Lőrintz Umling senior, its surface is painted in imitation of marble, and at the top it ends in a winged angel's head (Fig. 14). The interior of the church is fitted with painted wooden furniture, enriching its value (Fig. 15). Remaining traces from the Romanesque style can be observed inside the monument, for example at the base of the pillar supporting the stairs that lead to the bell tower, a column base specific to style with ornaments can be seen (Fig. 16).

Having exposed a brief history of the village, we tried to develop an evolution of the monument in parallel with the historical evolution of the village, since its appearance in documents until today, showing the importance of the place of worship in a community. The description of the monument was made with the help of pictures from the personal archive and the Bistrita-Năsăud County Museum by comparison with a series of monuments that are part of the same architectural style in the Transylvanian space.

Putting in parallel the characteristics of the Gothic style with the styles that complete the monument, with small traces still remaining from the Romanesque, then with an evolution that improves the interior of the church with baroque renovations, here referring to the interior furniture dated 1761 following a donation, the roofs, etc., we can observe the historical process of development, which occurs gradually over the centuries. The worship place had a special role in the collective mentality of the community, being important both religiously and culturally. Unfortunately, today the church-going community is not so large and risks to dissolve with time. The importance of the monument is obvious, because we can see how over the centuries the community has developed and been influenced by the church.

This work has an informative/scientific purpose, but it is also an alarm signal about the fact that in the following repair of the shingles on the roof, many irregularities were found in the way the monumental rehabilitation was done. Although the church is a historical monument (Code: LMI:BN-II-m-A-01714) its condition is deteriorating. In doing this study we found some irregularities in the roof restoration process that took place and the already changed parts are in a deplorable state, the monument being exposed to the weather and inevitable destruction (Fig. 18).

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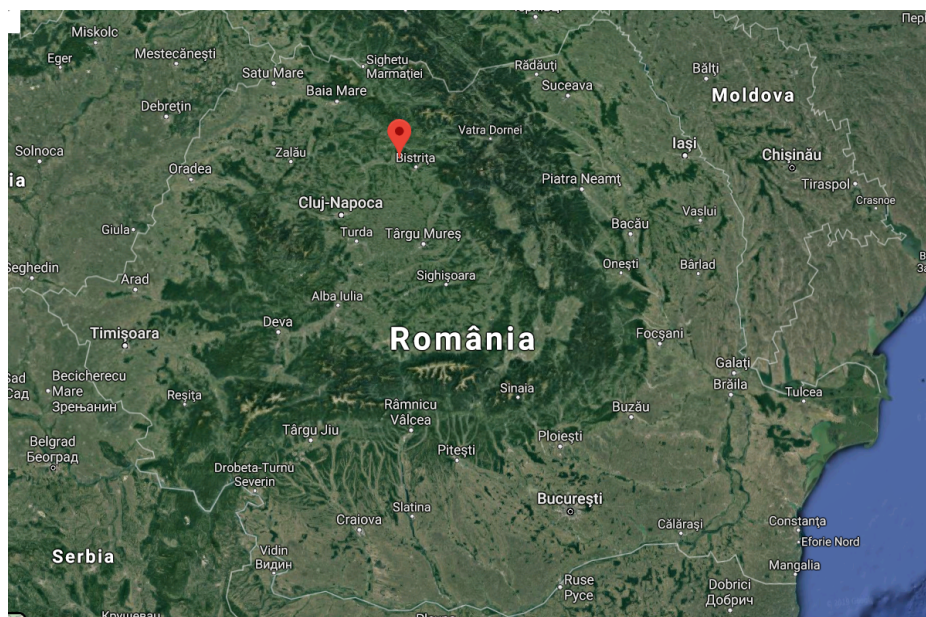


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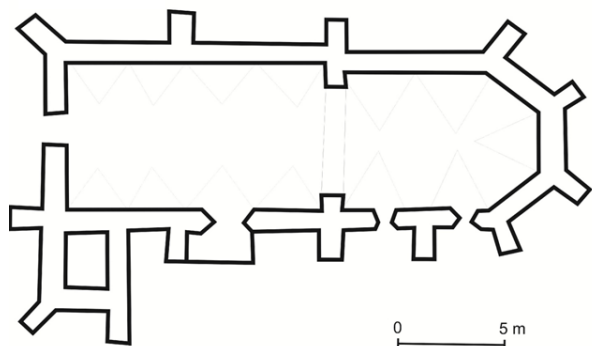


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