

THE CHURCH INSIDE THE CASTLE. **CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY COURT CHAPELS FROM BLAJ AND BUIA**

Letiția Nistor*

Keywords: court chapels, medieval church, tower, confessional identity, post-Reformation Transylvania.

Abstract: The present article aims at reflecting upon the use and architecture of two particular court chapels from the beginning of seventeenth century, with architectural expression kindred to medieval churches – the chapels belonging to the princely residence in Blaj and the Perneszi residence in Buia. Moreover, the Perneszi court chapel illustrates the rare situation of a medieval church incorporated into the court ensemble, whereas the princely court double chapel from Blaj, accommodated inside a wedge-shaped tower, presents clear references to medieval churches (decoration, layout) with kingly prerogative (*emporia* connected with the first floor private and official chambers). The contribution also entailed an introduction into a poorly investigated subject concerning post-Reformation Transylvania, namely the architecture of private court chapels, the way in which the devotional space was integrated within the complex structure of a noble or princely court in terms of functionality, exterior appearance, and relation to the ceremonial spaces of the residence (the hall, the private and official chambers). Last but not least, the study reflects the various ways in which the confessional identity found an expression in the architectural conception of private court chapels.

Rezumat: Articolul prezintă două capele de curte conturate în prima jumătate a secolului al XVII-lea, cu o arhitectură particulară, proprie bisericilor medievale – capela reședinței princiare din Blaj și capela reședinței nobiliare Perneszi din Buia. Mai mult, capela reședinței Perneszi reprezintă un caz excepțional, rar evidențiat, a unei biserici medievale încorporate în ansamblul curții nobiliare. Capela reședinței princiare din Blaj se evidențiază prin amplasarea sa în interiorul unui turn pană (de tipul bastioanelor italienești vechi), cu referințe clare la bisericile medievale în ceea ce privește decorul și planimetria, dar și la prerogativele princiare (o tribună legată de spațiile private și oficiale de la primul etaj). Studiul introduce de asemenea un subiect mai puțin discutat în istoriografia de artă din perioadă următoare Reformei în Transilvania și anume arhitectura capelilor de curte, modul în care spațiul de rugăciune era integrat în diagrama funcțională și spațială a curților nobiliare sau princiare, expresia volumetrică exterioară sau absența ei și nu în ultimul rând, modul în care identitatea confesională s-a reflectat în concepția arhitecturală a capelilor.

The architectural expression of a chapel¹ may vary starting from an alcove, a chamber, up to a larger space especially dedicated for communal devotion, implying the service of a priest. As faith and devotion were part of the daily life ceremony,² a chapel was a mandatory space in all noble residences. Chapels from Transylvanian early modern noble courts varied in form, dimensions, or spatial disposition. Most frequently they were located in rather secluded areas of the residences (regarding the accessibility), away from the main circulation routes, in the proximity of halls or private chambers, above the entrance gate, or in the corner towers. One important category is the independent structure, a church of various sizes, built as a distinctive building or even reusing medieval churches, serving also as a funeral chapel for the family's members, and probably functioning simultaneously as a parish church.³ Apart from the larger chapel, as a place of communal devotion, noble residences may also simultaneously accommodate small, private spaces for devotion and prayer located in a room or even an alcove, an oratory.⁴ As this type of space is harder to identify on site, criteria such as the presence of alcoves, moulded stone frames, vaulting, written and graphical sources indicate the possible use of the space as a private chapel.

* independent researcher, e-mail: letitiacosnean@gmail.com

¹ Rusu 2005, pp. 202-204; Rusu 2004, pp. 99-101; Popa 2002, p. 41. Chapel refers to a liturgical space functioning in various architectural contexts: fortifications, fortresses, monasteries, cathedrals, parish churches, and noble residences.

² Fügedi 1986, p. 116. Starting with the fourteenth century, private chapels became customary within royal, aristocratic or noble courts, and together with the hall represented the ceremonial core of the residences, symbol of prestige, authority and honour, and a way of exhibiting social and political status.

³ Rusu 1997, pp. 56-62. Rural parish churches were often founded by nobles on their estates and later some could become private chapels attached to a noble residence. See examples of noble estates in Buia, Odorhei, Filiași, Albești, Mălâncrav, Dumbrăveni, Cetatea de Baltă.

⁴ Rusu 2005, p. 203.