

# THE PRINCELY PALACE OF ALBA IULIA – THE BEGINNINGS OF RESEARCH

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**Abstract:** This paper provides a first insight into the architecture and research of the monument known today as the Princely Palace of Alba Iulia. Moreover, it maps the most important wall findings by areas and rooms, in introduction to a series of detailed studies on building elements, decorations, and other subjects. Several preliminary conclusions and working hypotheses have been formulated during the investigations. One of the major findings was that all the changes made by the armies during the 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries have dramatically altered the coherence of the buildings and decorations from the age of the Principality. This has also implicitly affected the previous heritage, rich in Roman, medieval and Renaissance remains.

**Rezumat:** Lucrarea oferă o primă imagine asupra arhitecturii și cercetărilor realizate în anii 2014-2016 la monumentul cunoscut acum drept Palatul Principilor din Alba Iulia. De asemenea, topografiază cele mai importante descoperiri parietale, pe zone și încăperi, ca preambul al unei serii de publicații detaliate pe componente de construcții, decorații și alte teme. În timpul cercetărilor s-au formulat multe concluzii preliminare și ipoteze de lucru pentru viitor. Una dintre ele a fost că intervențiile din timpul armatelor care și-au avut sediul aici în secolele XVIII-XX au afectat dramatic coerența construcțiilor și decorațiile din vremea Principatului, implicit și moștenirea anterioară foarte bogată în vestigii romane, medievale și renascentiste.

The building complex known today as the Princely Palace covers the southern half of the Alba Iulia castle, south – south-east of the Roman Catholic cathedral, and consists of two-level buildings forming two approximately rectangle-shaped, unequally sized courtyards (Fig. 1). These buildings make up around two thirds of what was once the residence of the Princes of Transylvania, built mainly on previous constructions of the Bishopric of Transylvania, the provostry and some houses of the Catholic clergy. At its peak in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, during the rule of Princes Gabriel Bethlen (1613-1629) and George Rákóczi I (1630-1648), the palace had three interconnected courtyards, also connected to the north to the cathedral, and to the south to the outer side of the castle. This extensive shape is partly reflected on G. M. Visconti's plans from 1711 and 1714 (Fig. 2). At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Habsburg administration changed the function of the palace. The western courtyard and the cathedral were returned to the Catholics after the bishopric was re-founded (giving birth to what is now the Roman Catholic Episcopal Palace), and the eastern courtyards were passed over to the Arsenal (*Zeughaus*) and the Artillery Barracks.<sup>1</sup> The two eastern courtyards



Fig. 1. Aerial view of the princely palace (Photo by: Dan Stefan, 2015).

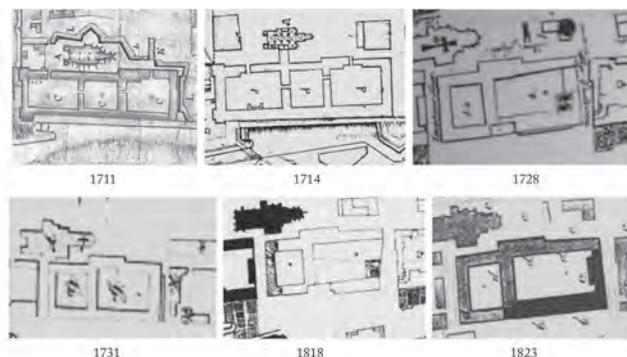


Fig. 2. The Princely Palace on plans of the castle from 1711-1823.

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<sup>1</sup> Kovács 2003, pp. 75-83; Rusu 2010, pp. 92-95; Kovács 2011, pp. 327-332; Kovács 2014, pp. 635-643.