

FLIGHT
OVER
TRANSYLVANIA

FORTIFIED
SAXON
CHURCHES



Meşendorf / Meschendorf

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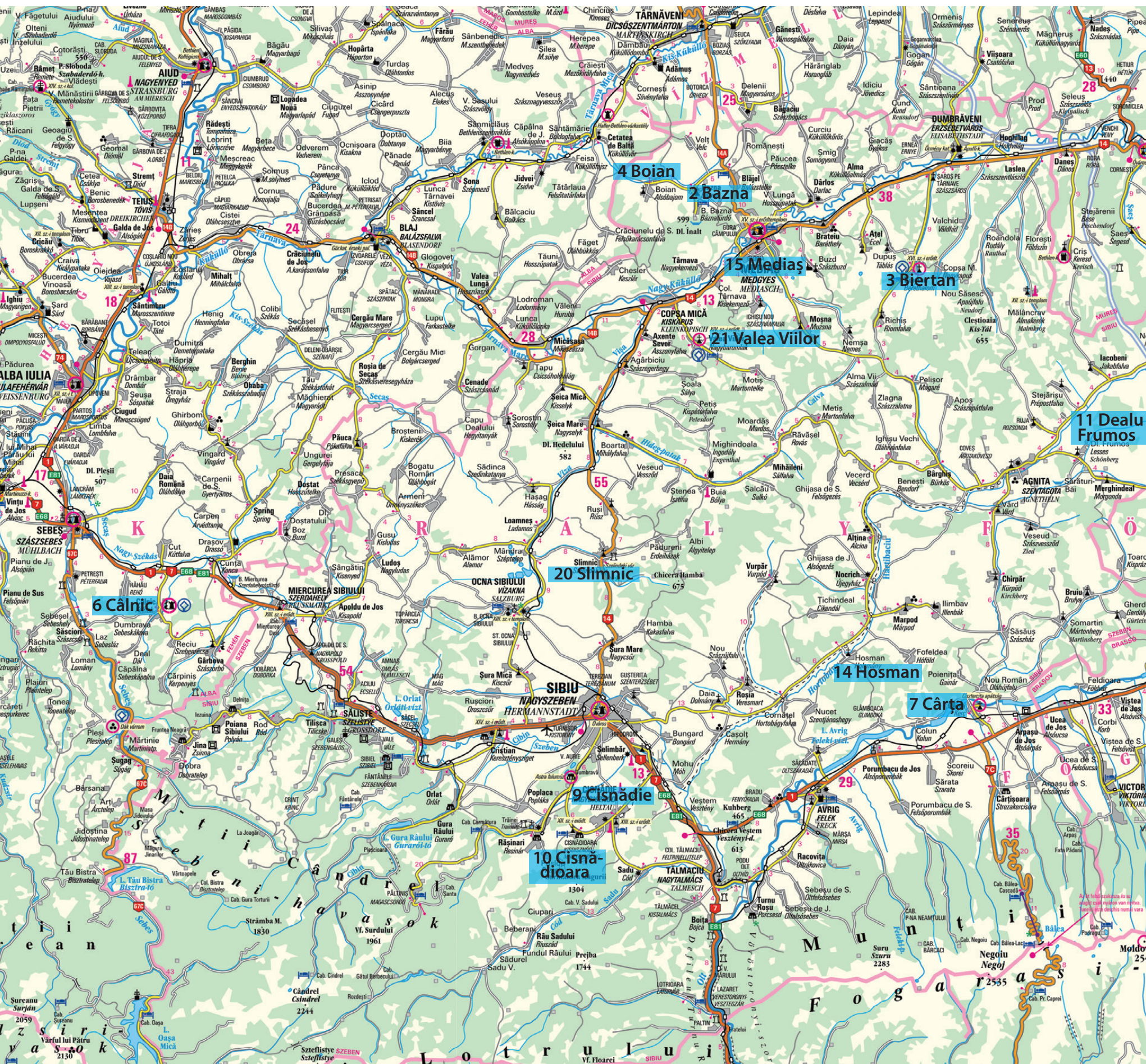
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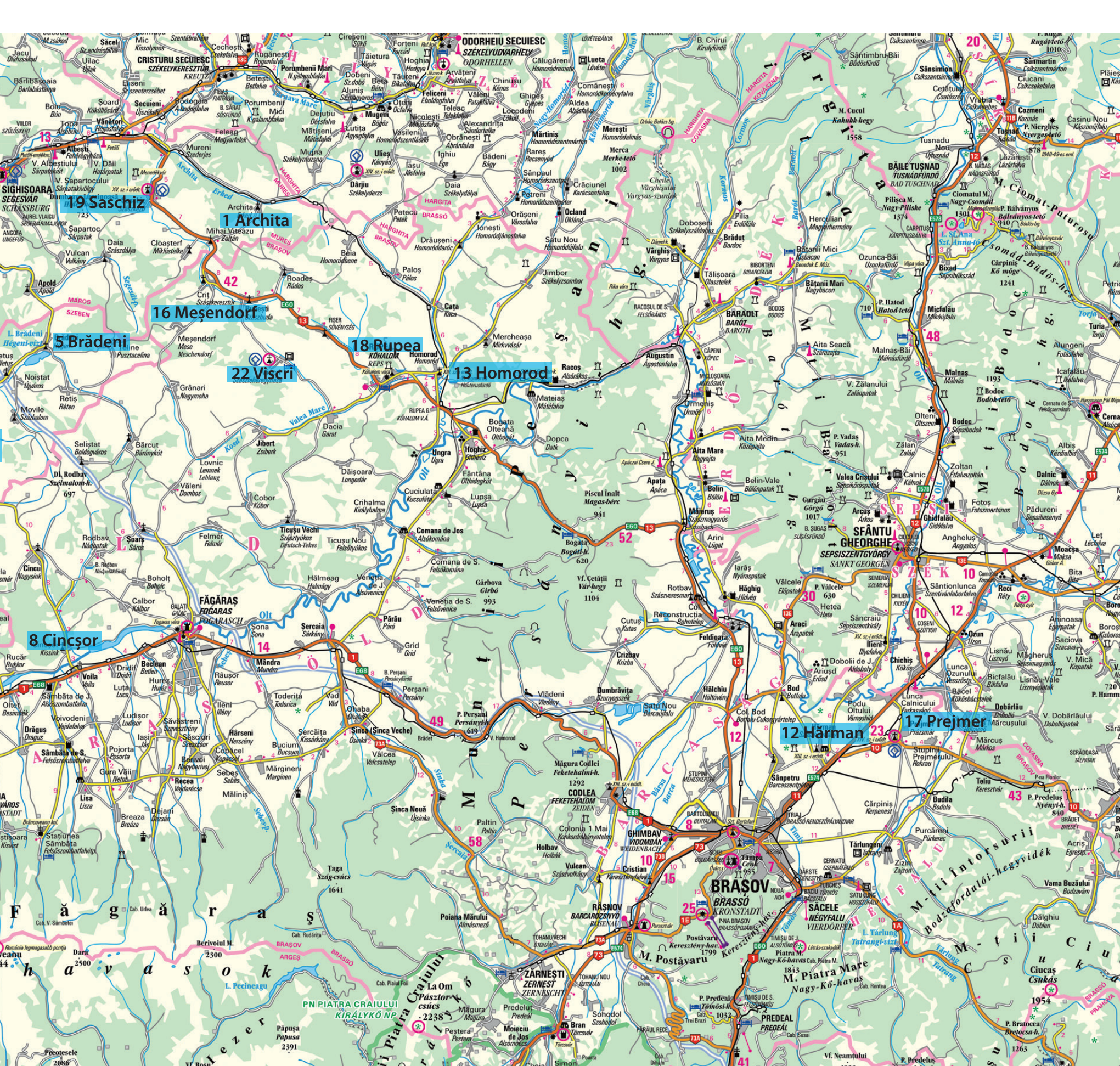
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Table of contents

Preface	8
1 Archita Arkeden	9
2 Bazna Baaßen	14
3 Biertan Birthälm	18
4 Boian Bonnesdorf	24
5 Brădeni Henndorf	28
6 Călnic Kelling	32
7 Cârța Kerz	38
8 Cincșor Kleinschenk	42
9 Cisnădie Heltau	46
10 Cisnădioara Michelsberg	50
11 Dealu Frumos Schönberg	54
12 Hărman Honigberg	58
13 Homorod Hamruden	62
14 Hosman Holzmengen	66
15 Mediaș Mediasch	70
16 Meșendorf Meschendorf	78
17 Prejmer Tartlau	84
18 Rupea Reps	90
19 Saschiz Keisd	94
20 Slimnic Stolzenburg	100
21 Valea Viilor Wurmloch	105
22 Viscri Deutsch-Weißkirch	109





Preface

One-of-a-kind, yes, they are, our fortified churches!" The Transylvanian Saxons are not at all modest when talking about their sacred structures, not the remaining Saxons, the emigrated ones nor the returned ones. Naturally, there are churches in other places which were reconstructed for purposes of retreat or defense: in Germany (notably in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), but also in Luxembourg, Austria and a few in Switzerland.

There are many fortified churches in Transylvania, whereas many of them will not survive much longer. The frequency and tenor of reports in the Romanian media lead to the conclusion that the affection towards the Transylvanian Saxons' inheritance is increasing even though the minority has not always been popular.

Nurturing an interest in the fortified churches for any length of time, one can't help but develop downright affection for these structures. This sentimental statement may be permitted, because it is simply the truth. Among other causes, one may be especially cited, namely that the Transylvanian fortified churches were not raised by their subjects on behest of some nobles. In fact, citizens and more so, peasants, guarding against the increasing threat from outside decided to make their churches defensible at around 1500 A.D.

Somewhat simplified, the process may have been such: Having laboured on the fields all day, the peasants met at their church in the evenings to continue their day's work.

This is easily said, however, the family's daily

combined effort was barely enough to ensure sufficient supplies for the winter. Each man-hour's work put into the church could have meant hunger for the workers and their families.

Nowadays, a counter movement is gradually emerging, too slow to combat the churches' fast decay. Yet, there is hope, as several actors are getting increasingly involved: diverse government and non-government organisations, mostly from Germany, The European Union, the Evangelical Church A.B. in Romania and the Romanian state. Is the effort worth it? Most probably there will be an influx of a lot of funding and some will wonder whether there aren't other causes in Romania that may be more deserving. Why, of all things, should the masonry of an disappearing German minority be built up again? On the part of many scientists and architects involved for many years in the maintenance of Transylvania's fortified churches, one can expect a definite Yes.

The list of the UNESCO World Heritage includes seven fortified churches: Biertan, Câlnic, Valea Viilor, Saschiz, Viscri, Prejmer and Dârjiu (Székely fortified church).

The sources vary as to numbers, but consulting the Online Encyclopedia, Transylvania has about 150 fortified churches, more or less intact. This is down from an estimated 300 in the past. Half of them either decayed or collapsed. In many places they were removed after new weapons rendered the walls redundant. The stones and bricks were used for other buildings.

Archita Archeden

Around the year 1500, the church of Archita was converted into a fortified church. By dismantling the two aisles a hall church was created. The arcade arches were bricked up (still vis-

ible on the north side to this day), two battlements were built on the buttresses and arches.

Rings of pitch and loop holes arched around the nave, choir and sacristy. As

a result, the outer walls gained enormously in height.

A noteworthy aspect is the altar of 1752 of the famous Sighișoara altar builder Georgius Philippi in the style of







the late Baroque, massive and ornate. Since 1824, the western gallery features the organ with a manual by the famous organ builder Samuel Joseph Mätz. By the late 1400s, the construc-

tion of a two-fold curtain wall of about seven metres height further increased the protective capacity of the church. Originally there were nine towers, of which seven remain today. The 1802

renovation saw the inner ring's battlement removed and the loop holes closed.

The keys are with Mrs. Garofița Tutu. Tel.: +40 762 976 400.



