

Historical photography in the photographic art of the Fischer brothers. The architectural heritage of Sibiu County reflected in the Fischer glass plate collection, Brukenthal National Museum

Abstract

In approaching the subject of my doctoral thesis on *Historical photography in the photographic art of the Fischer brothers*. The architectural heritage of Sibiu County reflected in the Fischer glass plate collection, Brukenthal National Museum, a series of issues related to the analysis and evaluation of the architectural heritage in Sibiu County were analyzed, with an emphasis on its representation in photographs taken by brothers Emil and Josef Fischer.

Following the research undertaken during my doctoral studies, the structure of the thesis was divided into six chapters. Although they deal with different topics, the first two chapters are complementary.

Chapter I is dedicated to the *History of Photography in Sibiu between 1854 and 1897*. The large number of photographic studios operating in the center of Sibiu was due to the high level of economic and cultural prosperity of the population and the technical progress in the development of photographic processes. A large number of photographs have been preserved from these studios, bearing witness to historical, social, and cultural events that took place in the city. At the same time, photographs from the second half of the 19th century immortalized parts of the urban and rural settlements of Sibiu County, and today we can identify, with the help of these images, buildings that have been demolished or architecturally modified in the multi-ethnic space of Transylvania. After a more careful study of public and private photography collections and archives, our image of the old Sibiu workshops from 1854 to 1897 will be more complex and clearer.

The **second chapter** presents the activity of the Fischer photography studio. The two Fischer brothers, Emil and Josef, were the most famous photographers in Sibiu at the time, producing an impressive number of photographs with a passion that was hard to match. Through their work, the Fischer photography studio earned a reputation as the best in town. Their portfolio of images included studio portraits, city architecture, mountain views, and people dressed in traditional costumes, most of which were published as postcards for sale to tourists.

The images created by Emil and Josef Fischer have now become part of our collective visual memory. The style, artistic qualities, and expressiveness of these photographs make the two artists-photographers witnesses to the interwar world of Transylvania. Their images urge us to discover what remains today of the world they saw. And thanks to Fischer's architectural photographs, preserved in the collections

of cultural institutions in Sibiu, the history of the architectural heritage can be better understood and explained to those who are passionate about the past of the place captured in the images. The research of the collection of glass plates kept at the Brukenthal National Museum, the Altemberger House History Museum, is intended to be a restitution to the people of Sibiu, but not only, of stories waiting to be told.

The second part of the doctoral thesis comprises chapters three, four, and five, which complement each other. The main theme is that of architectural heritage photography, seen as a first investigation into an area that Romanian photography history has only touched upon to a small extent.

Chapter III is dedicated to *Religious architecture in Sibiu County in historical images preserved on Fischer glass plates*. This chapter presents places of worship belonging to Christian denominations: Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Reformed, Greek Catholic, Orthodox, and Armenian Catholic. This highlights the specific characteristics of each church, regardless of rite, the multitude of Christian elements, and the cultural heritage of the period when these monuments were photographed by the Fischer brothers. We did not want to present a historical overview or the multi-ethnic character of Sibiu County, nor did we want to describe the monuments or architectural ensembles, murals, furniture, or altars inside the churches. The aim was only to analyze the historical images preserved on the Fischer glass plates, which show major architectural changes compared to the present situation.

Images illustrating Evangelical, Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed, and Armenian Catholic churches, cemeteries (Evangelical, Orthodox, heroes' cemeteries, funeral chapels), and roadside shrines were analyzed.

The chapter dedicated to **military architecture**, structured in four subchapters, presents the changes in monuments of this type of built heritage observed following the analysis of photographic images. We have observed significant changes compared to the current situation in terms of the defense systems of cities with fortified enclosures serving as shelters against invasions, both for the inhabitants of the city and for the population of the surrounding areas, in some of the palaces and castles in Sibiu County and in the defensive fortresses. The subchapter dedicated to *fortified churches* is more extensive, as their defense systems have evolved over time through the construction of enclosure walls (double or triple), the reinforcement of churches with towers on the nave or choir, with bastions of different shapes, the demolition of side naves (for better defense of the flanks), by building parapets for firearms, embrasures, and guard roads, and by installing portcullis on the gate towers or on the entrance door to the church.

Chapter V, *Civil architecture in Sibiu County in historical images preserved on Fischer glass plates*, traces the impact of changes in rural and urban spaces on the architecture of residential, municipal, and administrative buildings. The analysis was differentiated between urban and rural architecture, limiting ourselves to researching family dwellings and public buildings.

Chapter VI, *Repertory of representations of architectural heritage in Sibiu County illustrated in the Fischer glass plate collection, Brukenthal National Museum*,

complements the previous chapters by listing the glass plates signed by Emil and Josef Fischer on the theme of architectural heritage in Sibiu County. The importance of the collection kept at the Brukenthal National Museum stems from the fact that the photographic material preserved in the image archive can now be used to supplement documentation on architectural ensembles or important monuments undergoing restoration, and to observe the changes that have taken place in some existing buildings or in rural and urban areas in general.

The paper concludes with a series of **conclusions** resulting from the research, a **bibliography**, and, in addition, an **appendix** containing a selection of images captured on glass plates by Emil and Josef Fischer, preserved in the collection of the Brukenthal National Museum.

The doctoral thesis *Historical Photography in the Art of the Fischer Brothers. The Architectural Heritage of Sibiu County Reflected in the Fischer Glass Plate Collection, Brukenthal National Museum* presents the state of the heritage by highlighting issues facing culturally important religious, military, and civil architectural monuments in a period of constant change, through historical photographs taken in one of Sibiu's most important photographic studios, the Fischer Studio.

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Keywords: photo workshop, Emil Fischer, Josef Fischer, architectural heritage, religious architecture, military architecture, civil architecture, Sibiu