



ULBS

Universitatea "Lucian Blaga" din Sibiu

Interdisciplinary Doctoral School

Field of doctoral study: **History**

DOCTORAL THESIS - Summary

**TRANSYLVANIAN PARSONAGES OF
THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH A.C.
IN ROMANIA**

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Keywords: parsonage, clergy house, parish house, priests, tithe, Evangelical Church of Augustan Confession in Romania, Transilvania, Episcopal see, Biertan, Episcopal palace Sibiu, heritage, state of conservation, rural, urban, adaptive reuse, prototype, typologie, site, lot, spatial configuration, plan, roof, volume, dating, style.

1.INTRODUCTION

The Literature about the history of the Transylvanian Saxons is extensive and comprehensive. However, it has been little written about the buildings of the Evangelical Church A.C. in Romania and mostly about the churches and their fortification. Other types of constructions owned by this institution are scarcely documented, thus almost unknown in the specialized literature, although highly valuable from the functional, cultural and esthetic perspective. This is especially true about the parsonages that hold a remarkable value: within the European context and Transylvanian specificity, they were one of the most important factor in the evolution and diversification of the housing stock over the centuries.

The beginnings of the parsonages in the era of the wooden houses are lost in the darkness of time. The first evidences, first in written documents, then traces on the ground, are being produced long before the reformation, when the first masonry buildings appeared. The changes that affect the houses reflect not only the social conditions, followed by the reformation, but also the relations between the clergy and community and the economic situation in the region.

There is a great number of Transylvanian villages that had connections with the German minority. However, we consider above 250 of them relevant. In this paper we insist on 200 selected parsonages. Most of them, located in the counties of Sibiu, Braşov, Alba, Mureş and Bistriţa-Năsăud were described in detail in their monument's sheet.

Both the geographical distribution of the parsonages and the inherent difficulties of such a study have led to the need to limit the research. Attempts have been made at all times to capture the most objective and complete state of the buildings. But the changes that will take place over time, as well as the emergence of new considerations, will require the revising and the completing of the made observations.

2. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

The few existing data are to be found in lists and inventories, bills and invoices. With few exceptions the identified bibliographical sources treat indirectly the studied topic and rather make references to it. More information can be found in the church writings, as the commemorative books and reports of the general visitations of churches. Particularly useful were the measurements plans and architectural drawings found in the archives of the church and research institutes.

PhD. Helmut Klima, priest, dean and historian, carried out the first comprehensive research in the 1980s that looked at the localities as a whole. The data on parsonages are of historical nature and represent a selection of information from various sources and bibliographies, as well as site observations about the condition of buildings, considerations about their age, and about special details. An exhaustive inventory of localities and their buildings, with support from the German state, took place in 1992-1998. Only a small part of the results were published, thus few references to parsonages. The subject was also dealt with in works of history of architecture, art and urbanism. It was possible to gather some data on the subject from the archaeological repertoires.

This analytical work used work on the field and collection of data as research method. A photographic documentation of the studied buildings was carried out and, as much as possible, also sketches of the layout. Observations from the field were introduced in the inventory files.

3. DATA FROM HISTORY

This chapter briefly presents the organization of the German colonists, "*Hospites teutonici ultrasilvani*", from the administrative and ecclesiastical point of view, as well as the main legal and administrative acts that established the rights and obligations of the parish communities. Thus, the territorial administration of the localities within the studied territory (free villages on royal land / "*fundus regius*" and serf villages on noble's land) and their ecclesiastical subordination (organization in chapters and subordination to bishops or archbishops) was clarified.

Based on these criteria, the status of the clergy resulted in two categories: those in the free villages, called *plebanus* and those in the serf places, called *sacerdotes*. In both cases the main income is the tithe, but its value differs greatly based on the economical power of the community. Also the percentage received by the clergy varies. On the noble land one fourth of

the tithe goes to the bishop, another one to the church chapter, the third to the archbishop and the priest receives the fourth part. On the royal land, based on the subordination of the parish community, the priest receives two, three or even the whole tithe, if he agrees with the archbishop to pay a tax. Thus, the value of the tithe increases or decreases and the parsonages, through their size and sumptuousness reflect this variation.

Another historical perspective on the church buildings is their benefactor and administrator. The parish communities are responsible for building the clergy houses. Their maintenance, administration and value addition falls within the church fathers' ("*Kirchenväter*") responsibilities, in agreement with the priest.

From the evolution perspective, the parsonages are followed since the beginning, back in the early days of the wooden houses that appeared soon after first settlements of the colonists. Located near the church, sometimes within its precincts, the houses of the clergy were the first buildings made of masonry, after the church itself, beginning with the 13th century.

4. FUNCTIONALITY OF PARSONAGES

The architectural program of the parsonages had a special status within a settlement, due to its primary users, the clergy, who enjoyed high rank and privileges. The Saxon priest was not only the spiritual pastor, but also the one who dealt more than anyone with the cultural development of the people.

The homes of the priests have fulfilled from the very beginning the same functions that contemporary dwellings have: the function of feeding, rest and work. In addition to the physiological, sheltering requirements, these buildings had to meet major psychological requirements, with the priest being the highest authority, both spiritually and administratively. These requirements are expressed by aesthetic value, the architectural form, the need for intimacy, but also for openness towards the members of the parish, integration into the family and community life.

The representativeness of the parish house as dwelling for the most prominent member of the community translates into functional organization. The building must meet the private requirements - the family life of the priest - and the public ones - work and study (priest's office), administrative space (parish chancellery) and reception (for guests).

The Episcopal see in Biertan is a special case and represents an expression of the organization of the Saxon church after the reform. The Episcopal Chancellery is the administrative center of the Evangelical Church of Augustan Confessional. In 1867 the bishopric returned to Sibiu, as the situation of church administration had changed greatly. Increasingly bureaucratic, it required a larger chancellery, a more complex apparatus, thus needed to relocate into the city, into the building known today as the Episcopal Palace.

In addition to the two exceptional cases mentioned above, a special functional typology has been identified: the house of the preacher-teacher. The precarious economic situation of small villages, especially of the serf ones, led to the need to cumulate the job of a preacher with the one of a teacher as well as to combine the residential functions with the educational ones. Thus it resulted a building that housed both the cleric's dwelling and the school.

With the dramatic decrease in the number of parishioners, the number of members of the clergy has decreased as well, and the situation of buildings has changed. Left without their primary users, many of the parochial houses were sold, rented, abandoned or reused.

5. THE PROTOTYPE

The simplest typology of parish houses is the resumption and development of the peasant dwelling and is related to the material possibilities of the localities, which in turn depend on their administrative and legal situation.

The vast majority of parochial houses in the countryside are built in the spirit of the traditional houses, but much larger. Aligned with the long or the short side to the street, with verandas or porches to protect the access, and courtyards with typical secondary buildings, the parsonages stand out in the very organized villages also do to their special location and the irregular shape of the plots. The buildings of the 19th century, as well as those of the beginning of the 20th century display an urbanization trend. Some are modeled as small-scale representations of the castles and residences of the nobility. The organization of the yard it also follows the model of the peasant household, but everything is oversized. There are large barns (tithing barns) to accommodate the share of the priest from the harvest. The initial core of the parsonages consisted, as in the peasant dwellings, of one or two rooms. The size of the houses grew following the development of localities and the increase of their economic power, and the parsonages evolved rapidly towards more developed buildings.

The urban clergy houses represent a parallel in the evolution of the town dwelling. New buildings are subsequently added to the parsonage, as a response to the increased complexity of urban religious life, including sheltering and feeding the numerous clerical population. With one exception, Sighișoara, the urban parsonages were not built in a single phase, but grew organically, influenced by the size and orientation of the site, the events that impacted the city and the needs of the religious life.

A special character is the relatively early occurrence of the multi-level houses. Unlike the rural priests, those in the cities have more simplified households. But the entrance is treated with care and marked by monumental stone frames and decorations. The evolution of the urban house can be traced back to its oldest form by looking at the parsonage in Sibiu, where the original core of the old dwelling from the Gothic time is still preserved in the cellar. Alternatively the evolution of patrician house can be traced in the parish house in Bistrita.

With regard to the houses of monastic origins, we have more hypotheses (except for Cârța, where archaeological excavations were made), and less conclusive evidence. More studies are required in order to draw clear conclusions.

6. THE SITE

The parochial houses were built as part of the ecclesiastical ensembles. These constituted from the beginning the core of the urban development of settlements. On larger plots than the usual dwellings, with various forms, located in privileged positions, in the proximity of the churches, the sites of parish houses are defined by relief, water courses, roads and elements of urban composition, such as markets and meadows.

A number of criteria is used to analyze the site:

- Position of the parsonage in relation to church: most of clergy houses are located near the church, sometimes within their fortification walls, especially in the cities. Around 25% are located across the street from the church. 15% are located further away.
- Slope of the site: Sloped and flat lands have almost the same share in this study. The slope terrain allowed a new way of organizing the yards, with the houses withdrawing towards high ground and secondary buildings in front of them, towards the street.
- Shape of the lot: the stripes of land are formed from yards and gardens. The usual lot is rectangular, while the parish yard embraces a variety of shapes,

influenced by the topographic conditions and the availability of land in the proximity of churches.

- Position on the lot, in relation to street, yard, secondary buildings: the houses are usually not in the common alignment along the streets, or use a different orientation on the plot, which, together with the generous size, help them stand out. Behind the house, or in front of it are to be found the secondary buildings.
- Changed sites: the common situation for a site change is relocating the house on the same plot, in a different position, or changing the site altogether.

7. SPATIAL CONFIGURATION

The general shape is being determined by planimetry, number of levels and the volume and roof. The most common shape of a layout is rectangular, with one, two, maximum three spans on the narrow side and two, three, rarely five spans on the long side. Around 25% of the parsonages have an L-shaped plan, some translating towards T-shaped plan. By adding extra rooms on the sides, a rectangular plan becomes a U-shaped one. Some houses are built that way from the beginning.

They are complemented by more complex forms of layout, reflecting multiple stages of construction over different centuries, or resulting from the new functional requirements, but also due to the wider presence of specialized designers.

In general, the houses have two floors: the cellar (underground, half above ground, or above ground) and ground floor. Mostly in the urban areas there are variations of this type, such as house with cellar, ground floor and first floor, only ground and first floor, or cellar, semibasement and high ground floor.

The parsonages display a traditional appearance, with compact volume defined by massive gable or hipped roofs. Some display jerkinhead or gambrel roofs as well. The main roofs can intersect the smaller ones of the porch.

The vast majority of the studied buildings display an exterior structure, as verandas, porches or terraces that protect the entrance. Some of them are built-in, part of the house's volume.

The structure is made of masonry walls (stones, bricks or mix), wooden floors or masonry vaults. The wooden roof structure, still preserving in parts the wooden nails, date from the last centuries. The roofing is almost exclusively ceramic tiles, with dormers of different shape.

The windows of the clergy houses have two or three opening side hung casements, with or without transom windows. They are double, normal opening (exterior window toward outside, interior windows toward inside) or inside-opening. Towards the end of the 19th century the windows begin to be mounted in the middle of the wall's thickness, not aligned with their face, as before. Before the 18th century the doors are small and have the fittings applied on their surface. Later the strap hinges were replaced by butt and other types of hinges.

The oldest heating and cooking systems preserved until today are the open fireplaces, with a hearth covered by a chimney supported by the adjacent walls and a massive beam. Beginning with the 15th century the masonry heater surrounded with ceramic tiles gets into use. Before electricity, the lighting of a house was secured by candles or lamps hosted by niches in the walls. These niches had various forms and some of them, as old as gothic times, are still to be found in the cellars of the parsonages.

8. APPROXIMATE DATING

Dating the existing buildings and especially their parts can be challenging, due to the lack of clear identification elements and the use of similar building technique in different epochs.

We can safely assume the building of the first masonry parsonage in the 13th century, in Sibiu. In the 14th century the clergy house in Braşov was probably already built in stone. The 15th century marks an important stage in the evolution of the housing in Sighişoara, Sibiu and Bistriţa, when the housing stock diversifies as typology and building materials.

Major changes occurred in the 16th century, when masonry houses, sometimes with an extra upper floor, are built more frequently. Fewer are the buildings that can be clearly dated in the 17th century. In general, the information about this time period is collateral, from reports about houses built in the next century on older underground structures.

The diversity in constructions characterizes the 18th century. About 30 clergy houses are newly built on older locations and using existing underground structures or on new locations. Over 20 old houses are extended and modified in this time. And about 70% of the parsonages built or modified in this century still preserve that appearance today.

The transformations of the 19th century affected around 100 parish houses. Among these, the largest group – about 70 - are new buildings, some of them erected on older

substructures. Over 20 are adaptations and extensions of older houses. The century brings a new development that has a big impact on the ecclesiastical buildings: the establishment of the association *Gustav Adolf Verein* that offered financial support for their maintenance and even rebuilding. In this time there is a frequent nominalization of the professionals from the construction field, a sign of the sector's consolidation and regulation.

At the beginning of the 20th century, before the WWI, more than 20 communities were busy erecting new parish houses. Of the 30 parochial houses of the century, only two are built after the WWII. Other features include: partition changes, upgrades, functional changes affecting both the parish houses and especially the organization of their yards (the occupation of the parsonages by the headquarters of the state-owned agricultural organizations).

9. STYLE

The stylistic analysis of parish houses presents some difficulties that arise from the features of this architecture program. The main function is residential, but it has a complex representativeness role. Thus this type of building has been permanently subject to change on several levels over the centuries. The representative function has led to the adaptation of the architecture of the houses according to the new European styles.

The oldest elements of the identified styles belong to the late Romanesque (Șura Mare, Sibiu). The Gothic architecture appeared in close connection with the evolution of medieval towns. The parsonages could preserve from that time the initial core of the old dwelling, but also structural elements as masonry, vaults, buttresses or non structural elements as frames of doors or windows, niches, frescoes.

The traces of Renaissance are scarce in the parish house's program. The Baroque, however, is well represented, especially by emphasizing the entrance area, the access staircase and the main hall. In the baroque time new rooms are being built or the existing ones are enlarged, thus dwellings become more spacious. The preferred ceiling for rooms is the sail vault or the penetrated barrel vault. The Baroque ornamentation of the facades emphasizes their representative character.

Classicist elements appear in combination with Baroque components, or at the end of his period, being found especially in the adornment of the facades.

Beautiful examples of neo-classical urban villas or traditional buildings with neo-classical facades date from the end of the 19th century. Few parsonages are built in the style of Neo-Renaissance or Neo-Gothic, displaying the appearance of small castles.

The Eclectic style defines especially the buildings erected following blueprints, but not exclusively. Some parsonages have no association to architectural styles, due to mismodernizations that disregarded the character of the house and followed the local "fashion". Thus it has become increasingly difficult to identify the old parish houses on the field.

REPERTORY

The repertory is the most important part of this analytical work and it gathers 200 parochial houses. It presents itself as an inventory of all the features, grouped on different categories of data, supplemented, where appropriate, by photographs, plans and other drawings. The information is structured in two parts.

The first, on the right side of the unfolded sheet, contains the identification data. First of all, the new and the old names of the place where the parsonage is located - in three languages - as well as the new and old territorial-administrative and ecclesiastical units. An aerial photography and five sections that contain information on the specifics of the terrain and the location of the house show a clear image of the site, followed by historical data, information about the secondary buildings, and finally the bibliography, completed by pictures or a plan.

The second part presents separately the different parts of the building and information as shape of the plan, dating, style, number of rooms and their disposition, as well as levels and number of spans. It continues with the description of the different elements (roof, gable, veranda, windows, doors, cellars, ceilings). As a general rule, additional pictures are being added.

STATE OF CONSERVATION

As a conclusion it results the state of conservation based on the structure of the building and special details.

Probably the most important change in the history of the clergy is the distancing of parishioners from their priest. This trend is accentuated by the twentieth-century troubles that lead to profound social changes and massive migrations of the Transylvanian Saxons. The depopulation of the localities, especially of the villages, meant for the priests the dramatic decrease of the evangelical communities and sometimes even their disappearance. This changed the paradigm of the clergy, and a significant part of the parsonages lost its original

function. Without inhabitants and without a community to maintain and repair them, many buildings begun to suffer from physical weariness, aggravated by the lack of current maintenance measures.

Today we have at least 13 missing or endangered houses. Around 20 parsonages included in this research are affected by major degradation, which jeopardizes their structural integrity. Approximately 60 houses in the studied are in an average conservation status, which means they do not have structural degradation, but they show deficiencies of the non-structural elements.

The vast majority of these homes are leased as dwellings and around 10 by NGOs. Still in use of the evangelical community there are about 15 parsonages, in an average conservation status. All others are uninhabited or sold.

There have been and will continue to be changes of the function, which imply difficulties and the need to adapt the buildings to current and future requirements. These changes pose specific problems, adding to the precarious conservation status due to physical wear and tear over time. In view of this, urgent interventions are needed to preserve this important part of our national heritage.