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UDC 94(498.4-21)“17”  
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.33.317451

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**Bibliographic Description of the Article:** Anghel, C. (2024). Urban transformations in 18th century Transylvania: the case of two provincial towns, Sebeş and Alba Iulia. *Skhidnoievropeiskyi Istorychnyi Visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 33, 8–26. doi: 10.24919/2519-058X.33.317451

**URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS IN 18th CENTURY TRANSYLVANIA:  
THE CASE OF TWO PROVINCIAL TOWNS, SEBEŞ AND ALBA IULIA**

**Abstract.** *The towns in Transylvania appeared in the first decades of the fourteenth century and went through a spectacular evolution in the Middle Ages. However, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries their development gradually decreased. In the early modern age, shortly after the inclusion of the Principality of Transylvania in the Habsburg Empire (ca. 1690), the newly acquired province had only three free royal towns and 65 boroughs. Not only the number of urban settlements was low, but these had rather small size, and their economy lagged behind that of other cities of the empire. Of these, many small towns were in difficulty, having been partly depopulated and having accumulated considerable public debt. Thus, after Transylvania was incorporated into the Habsburg Empire, its cities continued their development. Most of them underwent changes in their morphology during this period, reaching a new stage in their territorial enlargement. While the inner fabric of the urban structure of most of the old cities was not affected, apart from some localities where it was only slightly changed, the peripheral areas suffered numerous transformations. The suburbs expanded dynamically. The density of buildings increased concomitantly with a considerable territorial enlargement. Some localities, such as Alba Iulia, underwent massive restructuring of the inhabited areas as new neighbourhoods and suburbs planned according to modern urban rules appeared. In this article, a detailed analysis of the urban development of two Transylvanian cities: Sebeş, free royal town during the Middle Ages, capital of the homonymous Saxon Seat, and important trade and commercial center and Alba Iulia, an episcopal seat during the medieval period and after 1542 capital of the Principality of Transylvania. After 1690, Alba Iulia developed as an important military center of the Habsburg army. At Sebeş, new suburbs were constructed beyond the medieval city walls because of internal development, with the contribution of the local authorities, at least in one case. At the same time Alba Iulia underwent a radical transformation triggered by the construction of a new fortification with bastions encircling the former medieval fortress. The urban settlement existing in the vicinity of the medieval fortress was relocated to new emplacements.*

**Key words:** *Free royal town; oppidum; The Principality of Transylvania; The Habsburg Empire; intra muros town; suburbs.*

## МІСЬКІ ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЇ В ТРАНСІЛЬВАНІЇ XVIII ст: ПРИКЛАД ДВОХ ПРОВІНЦІЙНИХ МІСТ, СЕБЕША ТА АЛЬБА-ЮЛІЇ

**Анотація.** Міста в Трансільванії з'явилися у перші десятиліття XIV ст. і пройшли через вражаючу еволюцію в середні віки. Проте протягом XVI – XVII ст. їх розвиток поступово зменшується. На початку Нового часу, незабаром після включення Князівства Трансільванія до імперії Габсбургів (бл. 1690 р.), новопридбана провінція мала лише три вільні королівські міста та 65 містечок. Міських поселень було мало, вони відзначалися невеликими розмірами, а їхня економіка відставала від інших міст імперії. Багато малих міст перебували в скрутному становищі, оскільки частково втратили населення та нагромадили значні борги перед державою. Після входження Трансільванії до імперії Габсбургів її міста продовжили розвиватися. Більшість із них за цей період зазнали морфологічних змін, вийшовши на новий етап укрупнення території. Водночас внутрішня тканина міської структури більшості старих міст не була порушена, за винятком кількох поселень місцевостей, які змінилися незначно. Проте периферійні території зазнали численних трансформацій, зокрема динамічно розширювалися передмістя. Одночасно зі значним територіальним розширенням зростає щільність забудови. Деякі населені пункти, такі як Альба-Юлія, зазнали масштабної реструктуризації, оскільки з'явилися нові райони та передмістя, сплановані відповідно до сучасних міських правил. У цій статті детально проаналізовано міський розвиток двох трансільванських міст: Себеша, вільного королівського міста в середньовіччі, столиці однойменного Саксонського села, важливого торгового й комерційного центру, а також Альба-Юлії – єпископської резиденції в середньовічний період і столиці Князівства Трансільванія після 1542 р. Після 1690 р. Альба-Юлія стала важливим військовим центром армії Габсбургів. У Себеші нові передмістя за сприяння місцевої влади були побудовані поза стінами середньовічного міста через внутрішній розвиток. Тоді ж Альба-Юлія зазнала радикальної трансформації, викликаній будівництвом нового укріплення з бастіонами, що оточували колишню середньовічну фортецю. Міське поселення, що існувало в околицях середньовічної фортеці, було перенесене на нові терени.

**Ключові слова:** Вільне королівське місто; *oppidum*; Князівство Трансільванія; Імперія Габсбургів; *intra muros* місто; передмістя.

**The Problem Statement.** This article focuses on the evolutions of the cities located within the Carpathian Arch during the eighteenth century in the context of changes undergone by the Transylvanian society because of its incorporation into the Habsburg Empire. The analysis considers both the general evolution of the urban phenomenon in this period, as well as the transformation of the urban structure. While the inner fabric of the *intra muros* areas of most of the old cities did not undergo noticeable changes (or when such changes did occur, that structure was only partially affected, as was the case at Alba Iulia, after 1713 and Sibiu, from 1726 to 1733), the peripheral areas experienced tremendous transformations. The existing suburbs or those constructed during this period knew expanded significantly, in some cases even spectacularly. In fact, these transformations represent stages of the redefinition of the morphology of these localities up to nowadays. Two of the Transylvanian cities are analysed in detail, Sebeş and Alba Iulia. The analysis examines the urban transformations, and the reconfigurations suffered during this period as well as the causes which produced them. The two cities evolved differently in time, due to their geographical and historical conditions and to their functions. Sebeş earned relatively early the status of free royal city, became an important crafts and trade center and capital of the homonymous Saxon seat, part of the Saxon organization. Alba Iulia was successively an episcopal city, from mid-sixteenth century capital of the princes of Transylvania, and from ca. 1690 an important military center of the Habsburg army. Despite these different evolutions, during the eighteenth century the two localities were comparable in size and population, both faced demographic and economic challenges which affected their later development.

### ***The Emergence of the Transylvanian Medieval Towns***

Despite the fact that there had been an urban tradition of over a century and a half during the Roman era<sup>1</sup>, the urban phenomenon saw the light of day rather late in medieval Transylvania; it was only in the early fourteenth century that we could speak of the legal existence of towns. The causes of this delay are numerous; among them, we need to mention the most important: late migration, the lengthy process of conquering and integrating Transylvania into the Hungarian kingdom and the Mongolian invasion of 1241 – 1242<sup>2</sup>. The emergence of medieval towns in Transylvania is largely similar to that across the Hungarian kingdom<sup>3</sup>; there are, however, some particularities specific to a peripheral area as well as a delay of a few decades compared to Hungary.

Even though in the late thirteenth century some settlements were mentioned in the royal and regional documents as having the statute of a city (*civitas*) – Alba Iulia (1282), Rodna (1292) and Turda (1296) (Niedermaier, 1993, p. 23) – the existence of the actual towns during that period in time should be met with some reservations. While it might have been normal to refer to the first settlement, Alba Iulia<sup>4</sup>, as being a town since all the bishop residencies in the Hungarian kingdom were traditionally referred to as *civitas* (Engel, 2006, p. 278), in the case of the other two – both mining centres – the fact that they were given town-specific privileges speaks more about the importance of mining in the Hungarian kingdom during that period.

In the early fourteenth century, some settlements, this time from a different category, crafts centres, start to differentiate themselves from the rural settlements around them and be known as towns (*civitas*) (Niedermaier, 1993, p. 24) in the official documents from the first years of that century's first decade. With a few exceptions, these were concentrated in the south of Transylvania which had been colonized by the Saxons, that is the territory between Orăştie and Drăuşeni which had remained in the possession of the king known as *fundus regius*<sup>5</sup> where guests (*hospites*) were allowed to settle. The following were mentioned as having the statute of a town: Cluj (1316), Orăştie (1324), Sibiu (1326) (Niedermaier, 2012, pp. 221–223), Bistriţa (1330) (Băldescu, 2012, p. 172), Sebeş (1341) (Anghel, 2011, p. 24), Braşov (1344), Mediaş (1359) and Sighişoara (1367) (Niedermaier, 2016, pp. 450, 469). Thus, they built a network of towns situated at an average distance of 60 km from one another, i.e. the distance one could cover on horse in one day (Niedermaier, 1993, pp. 21–23), and with one important urban centre at every border entry/exit point (Rădvan, 2011, p. 79).

### ***The Towns of Transylvania in the Middle Ages***

Starting with the mid-fourteenth century, the towns of Transylvania saw a spectacular, unprecedented economic evolution, a development which generated prosperity and triggered significant demographic growth and important urban achievements, such as the construction of the great parochial gothic churches and the beginning of works to fortify the inhabited areas. The causes of this phenomenon are manifold. Firstly, there was the attitude of the kings of the Anjou dynasty who ruled between 1308 and 1382 and wanted prosperous towns for pragmatic

<sup>1</sup> Of the 11 towns of the Roman province Dacia (*Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, Napoca*, the two *Apulum* towns, *Potaissa, Ampelum, Porolissum, Romula, Drobeta, Dierna, Tibiscum*), seven were situated in present-day intra-Carpathian Transylvania (the former from the list above), of the other four, there were two in Banat and two in Oltenia. For the history and towns of Roman Dacia please refer to Ardevan, 1998 and Ardevan, Zerbini, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> For information about late migrations, the conquest of Transylvania by the Hungarians and about the Mongol invasion of 1241 – 1242, please refer to Spinei, 1996 and Spinei, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> For details about the emergence and evolution of towns in the Hungarian kingdom in the medieval period, please refer to Engel, 2006, p. 269–289 and Rădvan, 2011, pp. 48–83.

<sup>4</sup> Alba Iulia was and still is the seat of the Latin Episcopate of Transylvania created in 1009 as tradition says. The documents, however, mention it for the first time much later, in the year 1111 when a bishop named Simon is also mentioned. For details about the history of the Episcopate please refer to Dincă, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> This territory, which the German ethnics called *Königsboden* and the Romanians *Pământul Crăiesc* (*The Land of the Lords*) is the area where the Saxons set up their settlements and where they lived until its disappearance following the 1876 reforms. The noblemen would rule over and live in the territory of the seven counties while the Szekelys were settled to the east of Transylvania for military reasons (on the Szekely land or Székelyföld). See Gündisch, 2001, p. 34.

reasons, so that they could bring income to the treasury, have strong stone-made ramparts and provide well-armed soldiers (Băldescu, 2012, pp. 43–44). The towns were provided with numerous economic privileges, such as the right to organize weekly or annual fairs, exemptions from customs fees or storage rights, but there were also legal privileges including administrative and legal autonomy; all these factors contributed considerably to their economic development. This was topped by the effects of the medieval agrarian crisis, which caused the prices of crafted goods to go up, both as the prices for agricultural products bottomed out (Niedermaier, 1992, pp. 151–152), and with the benefits brought to the foreign trade carried out by the Transylvanian towns by the setting up of the medieval extra-Carpathian Romanian states: Wallachia (1330) and Moldova (1359) (Niedermaier, 2012, p. 224).

The highest degree of urbanization was reached by the *free royal towns* which were in fact endowed by the Hungarian kings with the most privileges (Rüsz-Fogarasi, 2003, p. 85); in medieval times, this category included all the afore-mentioned towns. In the hierarchy of Transylvanian towns the lowest position was occupied by boroughs (*oppidum*), which had a lower degree of urbanization and were somewhere between a town and a village population-wise (Rădvan, 2011, p. 54). They had certain privileges such as that of organizing a fair, but their administrative and legal autonomy were limited compared to towns.

Most settlements which became towns (*civitas*) were located in the *fundus regius* and the explanation for this is simple: their inhabitants were descendants of the Saxon colonists who had arrived in Transylvania starting in the twelfth century and who, besides being free people, also had a well-defined relationship with the royalty dating back to 1224 when a decree was issued on the matter, known as the *Andreanum*<sup>6</sup>. They did not depend on any feudal master be it a nobleman or an ecclesiastic entity, but were subordinated directly to the king himself.

On the other hand, the settlements from the counties<sup>7</sup>, under the ruling of various noblemen or ecclesiastic entities, rarely rose above the level of mere boroughs (*oppidum*) (Rüsz-Fogarasi, 2003, p. 85); there were, nevertheless, a few exceptions: Cluj, Turda and Dej. In the medieval period, this category included: Alba Iulia (Gálfi, 2021a, p. 79), Gilău, Zalău (all owned by the Transylvanian Diocese) (Rüsz-Fogarasi, 2003, p. 174), Aiud (for a period in the possession of the Alba Iulia clergy), Viñu de Jos, Teaca, Gilău, Reghin, Hunedoara, Deva and many others, most of them in the property of various noble families. The modest development of these settlements may be explained through the relation of dependence upon feudal masters who were not fond of the idea of the settlements receiving privileges, as this could have compromised their authority over them (Rüsz-Fogarasi, 2003, p. 167).

In the territory occupied by the Szekelys<sup>8</sup>, urban life emerged a bit later (Rüsz-Fogarasi, 2003, pp. 41–42); it was only in the fifteenth century that settlements such as Târgu Mureş, Târgu Secuiesc (1427), Sfântu Gheorghe (1461) and Odorheiu Secuiesc (1485) (Hermann, 2020, pp. 49–51) were documented as boroughs (*oppidum*). These settlements continued their development in the following sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and among them Târgu Mureş became a *free royal town* (Man, 2006, p. 35) in 1616 against the backdrop of sustained economic growth.

This is the framework in which the Transylvanian towns continued their development in the fifteenth century, too; during this time, the most important ones – Sibiu, Braşov, Cluj, Bistriţa, Sighişoara, Mediaş and Sebeş – erected ramparts and completed their morphology and their mainly gothic silhouettes, largely preserved until the present day.

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<sup>6</sup> For details about the rights and duties of Transylvanian Saxons, please refer to Rüsz-Fogarasi, 2003, pp. 38–40 and Engel, 2006, p. 140.

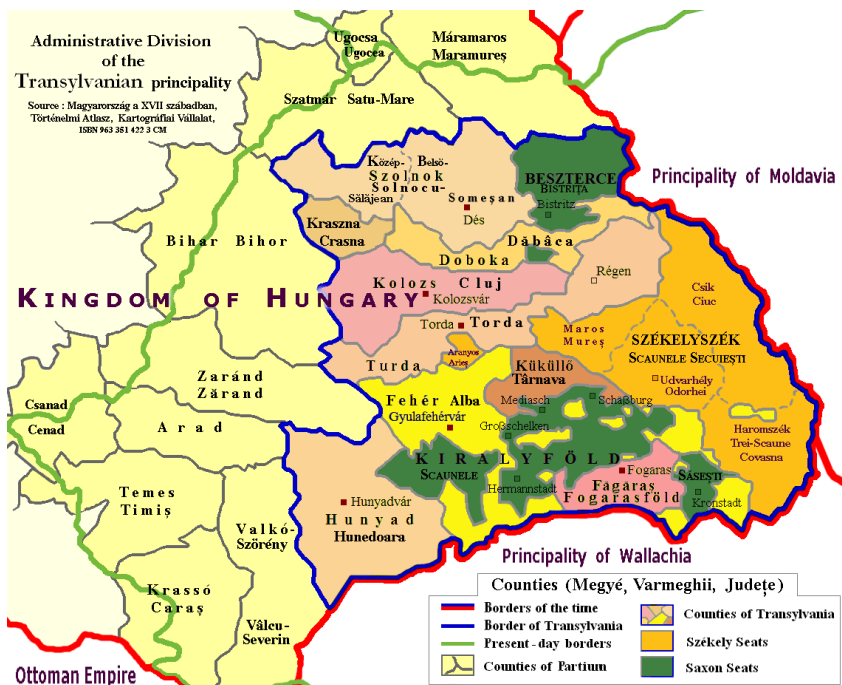
<sup>7</sup> In the Middle Ages, there were seven counties in intra-Carpathian Transylvania: Alba, Cluj, Turda, Solnocul Interior, Dăbâca, Hunedoara and Târnave. See Rüsz-Fogarasi, 2003, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> The Szekelys were settled in eastern Transylvania and mainly had military duties and the obligation to defend the eastern border. The territory occupied by them in the Middle Ages included seven seats: Odorhei, Mureş, Ciuc, Sepsî, Orbai, Kézdi and Arieş. See Hermann, 2020, p. 38.

### *The Transylvanian Towns in the Principality Era*

In the sixteenth century, once Hungary had been defeated by the Turks in 1526 at Mohács, Transylvania entered a new stage in its evolution as a state as it became an autonomous principality under Ottoman sovereignty<sup>9</sup>. In 1556, the princes established their residence in Alba Iulia, in the palace which had up until then housed the Roman Catholic bishops of Transylvania<sup>10</sup>; thus, the town on the river Mureş became the capital of the principality.

The hierarchy of the Transylvanian settlements remained unchanged; *free royal cities* remained the most important urban centres of the country. Of these, the settlements of Sebeş and Orăştie lost their town statute and became boroughs while their place was taken by Alba Iulia, the new capital of the principality and also by Târgu Mureş in 1616 when the latter became the first town of the Szekely settlements. Braşov, Cluj and Sibiu continued the accelerated development which they had started in the previous centuries and stood out among the other urban centres, thus becoming the strongest, most important and most populous towns of Transylvania<sup>11</sup>.



**Fig. 1. Transylvania's administrative structure and main towns in the seventeenth century**

(source: <https://ro.m.wikipedia.org/>)

<sup>9</sup> For a history of the Principality of Transylvania please refer to Șerban, 1991, pp. 21–30.

<sup>10</sup> Against a backdrop of unrest from after 1526 which led to the weakening of the central authority, but also following the appointment of some uninspiring bishops, the religious Reform was swiftly adopted by the Saxons and the Transylvanian noblemen (most of them Hungarians). In just a few decades, Transylvania became a mainly protestant principality and in 1556 the Roman-Catholic Diocese of Transylvania was closed and its assets seized. See Pop, 2003, pp. 459–468.

<sup>11</sup> In the late sixteenth century, Braşov had approximately 11,000 inhabitants and Cluj and Sibiu around 8,000 each. See Niedermaier, 2012, p. 242.

From an urban development perspective, the towns did not suffer notable transformation between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The era of major construction work had ended with the completion of the parochial churches and urban fortifications. Renaissance architecture in particular influenced new and radically renovated buildings, mainly the houses of patricians of the larger towns of Transylvania: Sibiu, Braşov, Cluj and Bistriţa. On the other hand, the peripheries of settlements saw the emergence and later on the growth of the gardens of well-off Saxons, known as *Meyerein*<sup>12</sup>, which looked more like parks at that point in time (Niedermaier, 2016, p. 549). Their emergence may be linked to the increased prices of agricultural products, a sign that the medieval agrarian crisis had been overcome (Pop, 2021, p. 129). Another phenomenon specific to this period is the setting up of new suburbs in the proximity of fortified cities which would extend to become neighbourhoods of the former in the following centuries.

In spite of these evolutions, the development of Transylvanian towns during the principality remained below their real potential. The causes for this were numerous but included a great many natural calamities and epidemic phenomena over those two centuries on the one hand, and, on the other, violent events such as the Turkish-Tartar invasions of 1658 and 1661 – 1662 which affected many towns and especially the country capital, Alba Iulia. Other causes related to the specificity of the social structure of Transylvania and also to the relative isolation of the autonomous principality caused by its Ottoman sovereignty. The consequence of it all was a visible delay in the development of Transylvanian towns and society overall; this also persisted into the modern era, until the radical reforms carried out after 1867.

#### ***The Transylvanian Towns in the Eighteenth Century***

Transylvania joined the Habsburg Empire in the late seventeenth century as a consequence of the political and military evolutions of the time, generated by the defeat of the Turks under the ramparts of Vienna in 1683 and by the military successes that followed which led to the reconfiguration of the foreign policy and the area of interest of the House of Habsburg. Under these circumstances, Transylvania became important for the empire, which therefore made diplomatic efforts, doubled by military pressure to control it. To hasten its conquest, a struggle which seemed to have reached a stalemate in 1690, the court in Vienna accepted that Transylvania should preserve the same rules as it had during the principality and that the privileged estates or political nations (the nobility, the Saxons and the Szeklers) should maintain their political and economic privileges. Based on these principles and following negotiations between the two parties in Vienna, a document known as the *Diploma Leopoldinum* was drawn-up, then ratified on 4 December 1691; on the basis of this, Transylvania was to be governed as a province of the Empire<sup>13</sup>.

According to this document, the Diet continued its activity and the old legal codes remained valid, along with the municipal statutes on the basis of which the region's towns had been managed since as early as 1583 (Pop, 2021, p. 39). The title of Prince of Transylvania was taken over by the Emperor; nevertheless, instead of ruling directly, he used governors as intermediaries who had limited prerogatives and were appointed by him from amongst the important Saxon families residing in Sibiu.

The Transylvanian urban network remained poorly developed, characterized by just a few small towns, well behind the urban centres of the other provinces of the empire due to the

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<sup>12</sup> Or *măierişti*; the name is derived from the German *Meyerein*, as these gardens were known. These gardens expanded over time, becoming farms in the 18th century.

<sup>13</sup> For details about how Transylvania became part of the Habsburg Empire, please refer to Magyari, 2003, pp. 369–374.

fact that their economy was rather medieval, still dominated by craftsmen's guilds. The same hierarchy of urban settlements remained: *free royal towns* and boroughs. While in the early eighteenth century there were only three towns in the first category, all situated in *fundus regius*, by 1786 their number had risen to 11: Alba Iulia, Sibiu, Braşov, Cluj, Bistriţa, Sighişoara, Sebeş, Târgu Mureş, Orăştie (Răduţiu & Edroiu, 2002, p. 85), Gherla (Szongott, 2014, p. 197) and Dumbrăveni (Andron, 2000, p. 50), the last two founded by Armenian colonists who had converted to Catholicism<sup>14</sup>. These were followed by 65 boroughs (Andea, 2002, p. 378) of which three were noble (*oppida nobilium*) and had the same statute as the towns, except lacking representation in the Diet<sup>15</sup>. The most populous town was Braşov with 17,792 inhabitants followed by Sibiu with 14,066 (Răduţiu & Edroiu, 2002, pp. 85–86) and Cluj with 13,928 (Agachi, 2006, p. 40). We should add that these figures also include the inhabitants from the suburbs beside those living in the actual town, *intra muros* (Răduţiu & Edroiu, 2002, pp. 85–86).

Reforms initiated during the eighteenth century had no great impact on the Transylvanian towns. Neither did the *Concivitas Edict* of 1781 which granted people of ethnicities other than German the right to purchase properties in the *fundus regius* (Abrudan, 2017, p. 88), as Saxon towns preserved the same ethnic structure, in general. Nonetheless, the suburbs grew in size and their population made up of Romanians registered a significant increase compared to in the previous centuries.

In fact, the suburb dynamic may be seen as a notable change in terms of the urbanism of the time. The *Meyereien* on the outskirts of towns also grew and turned into genuine agricultural farms, inhabited by the peasants working on them. Most of the towns did not undergo changes in the urban structure of the inner area (*intra muros*) during this period, in spite of a relative renewal of the built space. When such changes occurred, they affected only partially the morphology of the inner space, as was the case in Alba Iulia after 1713 and Sibiu, between 1726 and 1733. Where new buildings were erected or old ones were radically transformed, architectural, structural or decorative elements specific to the Baroque style are visible. One notable such example is the town of Cluj, where a large number of Transylvanian noble families settled (87 of them in 1770) (Agachi, 2006, p. 39); besides the palaces, these families have left us with another approximately 80 mansions and residencies (Porumb, Vlăsceanu, 2018, p. 87).

One particular case is that of new settlements and even of some of the new neighbourhoods of older towns which adopted new solutions in their design in line with the urban development principles of the time, that is the use of a chessboard-patterned plan drawn-up on a board to define their morphology. This did not only apply to the settlements created by the Swabians of Banat during the eighteenth century, but also to others inside the Carpathian range such as: Blaj, Gherla and the new centre of the town of Alba Iulia.

Another manifestation of the baroque style is represented by the ramparts built in the proximity or even on the location of some Transylvanian towns during the eighteenth century. The first such construction is the citadel in Cluj, erected between 1716 and 1735 on a plateau near the town to shelter an Austrian garrison (Rusu, 2015, p. 35). But the most important and strongest Transylvanian fortification was that erected between 1715 and 1738 in Alba Iulia in the place of an older one, which would profoundly alter the urban structure of the former capital of the principality<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> For the Armenian colonization of Transylvania, please refer to Pop, 2002, pp. 24–29.

<sup>15</sup> In Hungary during the same period there were almost six times more towns than in Transylvania. See Dumitran, 2014, pp. 121–123.

<sup>16</sup> For details about the bastion fortification in Alba Iulia, please refer to Goronea, 2007.

### ***The Towns of Sebeş and Alba Iulia in the Eighteenth Century***

Of all Transylvania's urban centres, two neighbouring towns will be subject to a detailed analysis and have their urban evolution monitored throughout the eighteenth century: Sebeş<sup>17</sup> and Alba Iulia<sup>18</sup>. The first was part of the *fundus regius* and had been for a long time a *free royal town* and residence of the Saxon seat of Sebeş and the second was located in the county territory and had initially been a modest borough. This was where the bishops of Transylvania resided together with the count of Alba before it became a capital of the Principality and acquired numerous privileges. In the eighteenth century, after its re-instatement in 1713, the town became a residence of the Roman-Catholic Diocese of Transylvania. What's more, Alba Iulia also became a significant military centre following the building of the strong Vauban-style bastion fortification.

As might be expected, the two towns evolved differently over the years, each depending on the legal status it had in the various periods. Founded by Saxon colonists, Sebeş had been an important crafts and trading centre in the Middle Ages and had acquired the statute of a town quite early (1341), thus becoming a *free royal town*. Subsequent political and economic evolutions, however, did not allow it to keep up with the important urban centres of Transylvania: Braşov, Sibiu and Cluj, nor even with Bistriţa, Sighişoara and Mediaş; from as early as the fifteenth century the settlement lost the statute of a town repeatedly. It did recover it in the late eighteenth century, when demographic evolutions seemed to indicate a revival of the town's economy.

Alba Iulia, by comparison, a settlement created in the proximity of ancient *Apulum*, protected by the former *castrum* of the 13th Legion Gemina<sup>19</sup>, rebuilt as a fortification during medieval times, hosted one of the most influential institutions of the state, the Diocese of Transylvania, which was also its owner until it was closed in 1556 (Marton, Jakabffy, 2007, p. 36). From that moment and until the late seventeenth century, Alba Iulia was the capital of Transylvania; most princes endowed the town with privileges to stimulate its development. Their efforts, however, were not successful. Alba Iulia was not a crafts centre or a trading one. Besides, the town was situated on a trading route of secondary importance and in addition to that, the fact that it was one of three rather important towns – Sebeş, Alba Iulia and Orăştie – that were very close to one another led to the partial overlapping of their markets, which in its turn contributed to a stifling of their economic development (Niedermaier, 1993, p. 25).

The first decades of the eighteenth century were a difficult period both for Sebeş and for Alba Iulia, marked by demographic losses and other forms of deprivation with roots in the previous centuries. During the seventeenth century the regression of the town of Sebeş which had started in the previous centuries continued, strengthened by its conquest and destruction in 1661 by the Turkish-Tartar armies (Amlacher, 1886, pp. 5–7). The economic decline was also exacerbated by a significant demographic crisis. In the early eighteenth century there was a considerable increase in population, but it was due to the Romanians who lived in the suburbs (Streitfeld, 1981, pp. 121–135). In 1703, the town had 1,933 inhabitants, of which 956 were Romanians, 902 Germans, 40 Hungarians, 15 Armenians, 15 Serbs and 5

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<sup>17</sup> The Saxon name of the settlement was Mühlbach, the Romanian name was Sebeş and the Hungarian name Szászsebes.

<sup>18</sup> Although Alba Iulia, the name of the town, was established in the sixteenth century, each ethnic group of Transylvania continued to call it *the White citadel* in their own language: Bălgrad – in Romanian, Gyulaférvár – in Hungarian and Weissenburg – in German. See Anghel, 2021a, pp. 14–17.

<sup>19</sup> For information about the two *Apulum* towns and the Legion XIII Gemina *castrum*, please see Moga, 1999, pp. 175–180.



Jews. Although the population did go up a bit in the following decades, reaching around 2,000 inhabitants according to some estimates between 1720 and 1740, it later dropped again because of a plague epidemic of 1738 – 1739 which caused 227 deaths (Dörner, 2002, p. 195). The town came to a situation where it had few contributors and could not pay the debts it had accumulated. In 1748 the town debt amounted to 82,178.68 florins (Möckel, 1929, p. 17), though two years later, in 1750, it had dropped to 48,985.23 florins<sup>20</sup>.

In Alba Iulia things were even worse; the former capital of the principality felt the ripple effects of the destruction caused by the Turkish-Tartar armies in 1658 and 1661 – 1662, which had caused major destruction to the city and led to its partial depopulation. Countless properties were deserted as the locals chose to leave for other towns. Even the ruling princes came to prefer living in Făgăraș, which was defended by stronger ramparts. The settlement did not recover completely in the following decades either, as shown by the data comprised in the 1676 conscription according to which almost a quarter of the town properties were deserted. Of the 505 buildings and lands that existed in the outer town at that point in time, situated on 18 streets, 123 were deserted. It is likely that the situation did not change significantly in the early eighteenth century either, when the new Austrian authorities decided to build the Vauban-type bastion fortification in Alba Iulia in the place of the former fortress. It was to cover a surface five times larger, and in order to build it, they had to tear down the walls of the fortress and town constructions outside the walls; the works started in 1713 (Anghel, 1994, p. 292).

#### *The Urban Evolution of Sebeș in the Eighteenth Century*

Situated on the lower course of the river of the same name, the town had been founded by German colonists in the second half of the twelfth century. It was first documented in 1245 under the name of Malembach in the context of the efforts made by the Roman-Catholic church to mitigate the social effects caused by the Mongolian invasion of 1241 – 1242. A century later, as the socio-political circumstances improved, the settlement had been declared a town (1341) and had become one of the *free royal towns*. The economic strength it had acquired was a consequence of the efforts of the local craftsmen and merchants; during that time, Sebeș had become one of the most important towns in Transylvania<sup>21</sup>.

The town had developed around the central parochial church, whose construction had started in the early years of the thirteenth century<sup>22</sup>. The religious building, a fortified Roman basilica had been flanked by markets to the east and west; the first and biggest of these markets had played an important role in the economic and urban evolution of the settlement. In the second half of the fourteenth century, the apse of the church had been replaced by a hall-like gothic choir with the intention of rebuilding the entire church (Klein, 1976, pp. 23–59). Shortly after the choir was erected, a new large-scale urban project had been launched as the entire town was to be surrounded by a walled enclosure. Works had started around the year 1387 and had lasted for a few decades, though the exact moment when the fortification was completed remains unknown (Salontai, 2022, pp. 115–133). In the fifteenth century, once the two major construction projects had been completed, incorporating the parochial church and the enclosure, which both left their imprint on the morphology and architecture

<sup>20</sup> The debt had been contracted since the year 1700 as the town had borrowed various amounts to use for the town's needs and the schools; such amounts were to be returned in instalments with an interest rate of 6%. For some of these amounts the creditors were supposed to provide agricultural works or pay in kind with must. Please see Gyémánt et al., 2016, pp. 393–394.

<sup>21</sup> For details about the genesis of medieval Sebeș and its subsequent evolution, please refer to Anghel, 2000 – 2001, pp. 59–65.

<sup>22</sup> Regarding the territorial expansion of the locality, during the 12th to 15th Centuries, see Iacob, 2004, pp. V–VI.

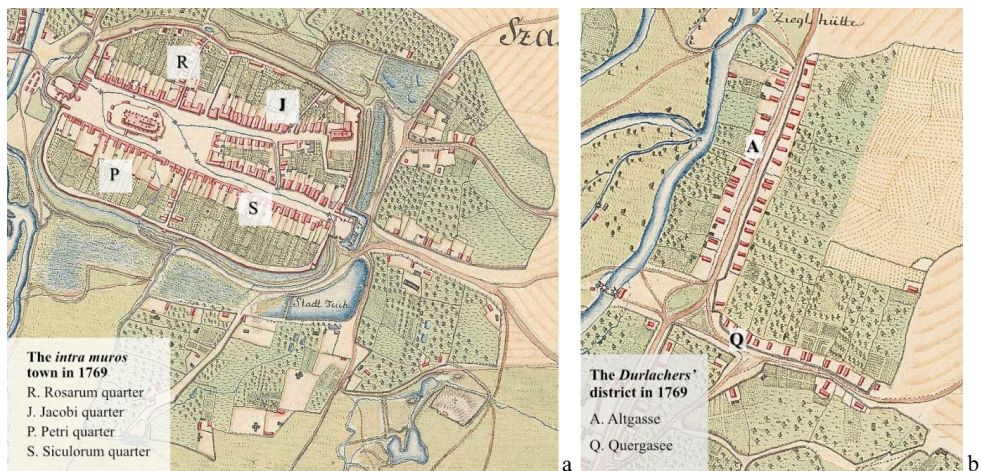
of the town, no other important urban works were to be started that would change the urban structure of the settlement. The town had fallen into a crisis and the economic difficulties were to persist through the following centuries, too.



**Fig. 2. The town of Sebeş in 1769**  
(*Stuhl Mühlentbach in dem Großfürstenthum Siebenbürgen*,  
source: <https://maps.hungaricana.hu>)

In the first decades of the eighteenth century the town was largely similar to its Middle Ages version (fig. 2), except for the fact that buildings made of more durable materials – stone and brick – would gain ground compared to wooden buildings. In the actual town, bordered and protected by the walled enclosure, the inhabited space was aligned along four main streets around which they had built as many *quarters*, named as follows: Jacobi, Sicularum, Rosarum and Petri (fig. 3 a) (Anghel, 2009, pp. 488–489). To the west of the inner town, along the river Sebeş, on its left bank, there was a suburb inhabited by Romanians and known as *Hochstadt*; it had probably been there since the sixteenth century, but it was documented starting from the eighteenth century (Anghel, 2011, pp. 169–177).

The economic crisis experienced by the town in the first decades of the eighteenth century, together with the demographic crisis, imposed the need for urgent measures for the improvement of the situation. These were probably the main drivers in the decision to allow German emigrants who had just arrived in Transylvania to settle on the territory of the town. As a result, several groups of colonists had settled in Sebeş by 1740, 583 persons in total, most coming from the Baden-Durlach County (Dörner, 2002, p. 87). The newcomers were settled on a field situated to the north of the town, along the Morii Canal, at the junction of the old road to Alba Iulia with the road to Daia. The new suburb was separated from the Romanians by this canal and the river Sebeş, and the *Meyerein* separated it from the *intra muros* town. The newcomers' plots of land were aligned along a new street lying parallel with the river – Altgasse (now Progresului Street) – which intersected Quergasse (currently Dorobanți Street) to the south, formed in the following years and leading to the village of Daia when Lutheran colonists coming from Upper Austria settled there (fig. 3 b).



**Fig. 3. Sebeş in 1769 (details): a) the *intra muros* town; b) the Durlacher's district** (*Stuhl Mühlenbach in dem Großfürstenthum Siebenbürgen*, source: <https://maps.hungaricana.hu>)

The efforts made to revitalize the town did not end there, and in 1770 another smaller group of emigrants arrived in Sebeş – 176 people also from the German world, this time from Hanau. Upon their arrival, the territory of the new suburb was divided in two, to the discontent of the first newcomers, who went to the town authorities (Streitfeld, 1984, p. 35). Nevertheless, new emigrants were also given plots of land similar in size to those of the first wave of newcomers and situated immediately after those. On the eastern end they built a new street – Neugasse (currently Avram Iancu Street) – parallel with Altgasse (Progresului Street). The land of its east site was also divided into plots, and Quergasse (Dorobanți Street) ended up uniting the two newcomers' streets to the south.

Besides the emergence of this new suburb, there was another urban transformation which would leave its mark on the evolution of the town of Sebeş later on: the emergence of new *Meyerein* and the development of the old ones upon the former glacis of the fortification. In fact, in the sixth decade of the eighteenth century there were already several street fronts

on its northeast, east, southeast and south sides (**fig. 2**) (Nacu, 2019, p. 170). A new suburb of the town was emerging and in the following period this would play an important role in reconfiguring the town's morphology (Anghel, 2011, p. 175).

In the nineteenth century, the town of Sebeş was to enter a new phase in its evolution characterized by modernization; the dominant trend would be that the inner town would try to step out of its "isolation" of the previous centuries and be afforded easier communication with the suburbs. Thus, a few breaches were to be made in the inner wall to provide access to those inner streets which could communicate with other streets from the suburbs. The barbicans of the fortifications were to be demolished, together with the related gates and towers, except for one tower of the western gate and a fragment of the gate arch which would remain to this day. The suburbs of the town were also to be touched by modernization. The Saxon lands of the *Meyerein* were gradually to be divided into plots and sold. This evolution, coupled with demographic growth, would lead to the densification of the built base both in the suburbs and in the former *Meyerein*. By the mid-nineteenth century their entire territory would be covered with houses. The built base would become increasingly dense both in the Romanian district and in that of the *Durlachers*, and the town would spread to the south as well, where new streets were built. Broadly, it would reach the limits of its future development, only to be exceeded in the second half of the twentieth century.



**Fig. 4. Alba Iulia in 1711 – plan by Giovanni Morando Visconti**  
(*Iknografia della Citta d'Alba Iulia*, source: <https://maps.hungaricana.hu>)

### *The Urban Evolution of the Town of Alba Iulia in the Eighteenth Century*

The medieval town of Alba Iulia had developed in close relation with the former *castrum* of the 13th Legion Gemina (Kovács, 2005, p. 236), with people inhabiting both the space inside the walls and that outside. The fortress, in reality the former Roman *castrum* repaired and adapted to the times, had housed the Diocese of Transylvania during medieval times until 1556, when it had been decommissioned<sup>23</sup> against the backdrop of the Reform (Gálfi, 2019, p. 25); later on, the princely court of Alba Iulia had become the capital of the Principality of Transylvania (Anghel, 2021b, pp. 48–51).

The outer town had been built around the fortress on the same terrace<sup>24</sup>; the inhabited areas from the north and west had been the most widespread and densely populated. As in the fortress, they had also comprised important buildings such as churches with squares in front of them and houses of various sizes, as well as a complex street network, similar to that of a town and connected with the local roads. The main and probably oldest area had been situated to the west of the fortress facing St Mihail gate (Anghel, 1994, p. 292). The district had been dominated by the Church of St Mary, situated near the entrance street to the fortress, past the gate (Gálfi, 2021b, p. 11). Nearby and a bit more to the south had lain the area known as *Cărămidăria* (the brick factory) bordered by Vințului street to the southwest (Anghel, 2021c, p. 128). However, the most densely populated area had been to the north of the fortress where the Lipova suburb had developed. Within its confines, along Șardului, Lipova Mare and Lipova Mică street, there had been numerous houses, one church and two mills. That is most likely where the Macedonian-Romanian (generally known as Greek) merchants had settled, given that in the late seventeenth century a *Greeks' church* is documented to the north of the suburb. To the east and south of the fortress had lain the Maieri (Upper and Lower) suburbs, crossed by Ulița Mică and Mare Românească (Small and Big Romanian Street). In front of the eastern side there had been fewer buildings while the southern area had been dominated by the building complex of the Orthodox Metropolitan Church of Transylvania (fig. 4).

The early eighteenth century saw the emergence of a new stage in the urban evolution of the settlement; after the integration of Transylvania into the Habsburg Empire, the new authorities decided to build a Vauban-style bastion fortification in Alba Iulia to replace the old one (Stanciu, 2021, p. 137). To make room for the new fortress, which was to take up a much larger area and also incorporate a protection area with a width of 200 to 500 m where no buildings could be erected, they had to demolish all the buildings from the outside of the town and move its centre to a new location situated to the east, at the base of the terrace (Fleşer, 2009, p. 71).

The preparations started in 1713 and in this context almost all the buildings were demolished. Their owners received compensation and were provided with land in the new location of the town; however, some did not wish to remain and preferred to move to other towns in Transylvania such as Aiud or Cluj, or even to Banat, where they preferred the town of Caransebeș. Their choice was mainly due to the conditions in the new town centre, which sat on marshy ground that was easily flooded. Nevertheless, constant attention was given to solving these problems, and between 1714 and 1720 a canal was dug on an old secondary branch of the river Ampoi, subsequently named *The Sanitary Canal* (fig. 5 a–b); its aim was to drain the marshes of the central area of the new town.

<sup>23</sup> Although after the secularization of the properties of the Roman Catholic Bishopric, the prince and the court came to possess numerous moveable and unmoveable properties at Alba Iulia, John Sigismund did not wish to make his residence there, but intended to move it at Sebeș, a city located nearby where his father, John Zápolya lived (died). The early death of the young prince prevented the accomplishment of this plan. See Gálfi, 2019, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Alba Iulia was in the category of towns developed as suburbs surrounding a fortress. See Gálfi, 2019, p. 13.

Gradually, the new settlement came to life, there were squares and a street network, houses were built together with churches and other public buildings and shops were opened. A 1771 blueprint illustrates its outlines and morphology. There was a Hungarian district (*Ungrische Stadt* or *Város*) and a German one (*Teutsche Stadt*) and the Romanian suburb – Lipoveni (*Lippovain / Lipoveny Vorstadt*) – was in the northeastern part of the settlement, beyond the river Ampoi (fig. 5 b)<sup>25</sup>. Such was the structure of the privileged town. The other two suburbs – Maieri and Heiuş – were jointly known as Alba Iulia-Village and were not part of the privileged town. The districts were aligned around two squares; the main streets started in these public spaces and intersected the secondary streets at several points, thus creating a chessboard-like street network (Anghel, 2021d, p. 200).



**Fig. 5. Alba Iulia in the eighteenth century: a) in a Josephinian topographic survey, 1769 – 1773 (*Großfürstentum Siebenbürgen* (1769 – 1773) – *First Military Survey*, source: <https://maps.arcanum.com/>); b) in 1771 (source: Dumitran, 2015, p. 8)**

The name of the town was also changed from Alba Iulia to Carlsburg/Karlsburg, after Emperor Charles VI during whose reign the fortress was erected and the town centre moved. The change came in response to the request of a local delegation which travelled to Vienna in 1716 and asked the emperor to agree for their town to bear his name (Fleşer, 2006, p. 13). Nonetheless, the new name was only used in the official documents issued by the authorities and the administration, while in their everyday lives the Transylvanians continued to use the old names of the town (Anghel, 2021a, p. 17).

In the nineteenth century, the town was to continue its urban development. Houses, churches and public institutions would be built on the barren plots of land. New streets would appear, some as extensions to existing ones, as the inhabited area extended both to the north and to the south. Towards the end of the century, the width of the protection area around the fortification would be reduced, allowing some development to the west all the way to the left side of the Sanitary Canal. The trend would continue in the first decades of the twentieth century when the built territory would increase even further. In the early 1930s, the town would even closer to the fortress as plots of land were given out for the construction of houses

<sup>25</sup> For the integration of the suburbs into the town, please see Dumitran, 2015, pp. 5–25.

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in the protected area of the fortress; this project would be initiated by the new authorities and its beneficiaries would be mainly the representatives of the new Romanian elite and their families (Moga, 2021, p. 333). Hence the town would acquire a size and aspect that would preserve for approximately half a century.

**The Conclusions.** In the eighteenth century, Transylvania's town network revealed its weaknesses. The integration into the Habsburg Empire meant it was also possible to make comparisons also with the towns of the other provinces. A lagging-behind was evident. Transylvania had few towns and boroughs, they were rather small and their economic activity was mainly dominated by guilds more reminiscent of the Middle Ages. And what was not obvious at a first glance was revealed by the fiscal conscriptions repeated throughout the eighteenth century as stages in the efforts made by the new authorities to render tax collection more efficient and thus provide the necessary income for the maintenance of an administrative apparatus which became increasingly heavy and expensive (Ionaș, 1997, pp. 63–72). This image is completed by the numerous concrete data giving an outline of the then-current situation of the towns – number of tax gates, name of owners, material state, value of profits yielded by crafting and merchant activities – and of the debts they had accumulated by delaying the payment of their duties. There were many small towns in this situation in the mid-eighteenth century. The causes were manifold, among them the precariousness of economic activities and the low number of taxpayers. However, these shortcomings were not recent; the evolution of the previous centuries had left its footprint on how the towns evolved, especially the small ones. The economic mechanisms in action here were exacerbated first by violent events, natural calamities and epidemics numerous in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also by the violence of the early eighteenth century caused by the anti-Habsburg mutiny also known as Rákóczi's War of Independence.

The towns of Sebeș and Alba Iulia, in a difficult situation in the first half of the eighteenth century characterized both by a low level of economic development and partial depopulation, redefined their urban morphology. The first did it by its own initiative as a consequence of efforts made by the local authorities to attract new, German taxpayers to the town; thus they managed to increase the numbers of their population quite considerably while also rebalancing its ethnic structure compared to at the beginning of the century, when it had tipped in favour of Romanians. The building of the *Durlachers'* district and increased size of the *Meyerein* marked significant moments in the reconfiguration of the inhabited area of the town, heralding the evolutions of the next centuries, when the town acquired its present layout.

If we speak of Alba Iulia, the rather radical change of morphology came as a consequence of the decision of the Habsburg authorities which gave the town an important role in their strategy to defend the new borders by building a strong Vauban-type bastion fortification in the place of the medieval fortress and the civil settlement surrounding it. The extreme measure they chose – the demolition of the buildings from the outer town and the relocation of the inhabited area to the east, at the base of the terrace on which the new fortress was to be built – forced the few inhabitants that had remained to start from scratch. In practice, this meant the emergence of a new town which even had a different name as of 1716 – Carlsburg/ Karlsburg – since the *intra muros* space was almost exclusively taken up by the army and the bureaucratic apparatus of the Roman-Catholic Diocese. Once it was set up, based on a pre-established blueprint, the town was endowed with privileges and it became a *free royal town*, continuing its evolution under this statute in the following centuries, too. In the inter-war period it acquired the configuration it was to keep until the start of the systematization works of the communist period.

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*The article was received May 14, 2024.  
Article recommended for publishing 29/11/2024.*