

Identification

<u>Nomination</u>	The fortified church of Biertan
<u>Location</u>	Transylvania, Department of Tirnava Mare
<u>State Party</u>	Romania
<u>Date</u>	28 September 1990

Justification by State Party

The exceptional value of the Biertan ensemble is attributable to the fact that it is the best surviving and most representative example of a fortified church, of which there were once many in medieval Europe. This is a type of monument which reflects in its architecture the characteristic Saxon community and its social structure.

The fortified churches of the Transylvanian Saxons had a strong influence on the architecture of neighbouring regions. They incorporate in equal measure the social, cultural, and political elements of the communities that they serve.

The Biertan church is of historical importance in that, as the see of the Transylvanian Lutheran Church for three centuries, it has connections with a number of important historical personages, including Georgius Krauss, Daniel Neugeboren, and Johan Michael Salzer.

History and Description

In the 13th century the Kings of Hungary encouraged the colonization of the Sub-Carpathian region of Transylvania (Erdely) by a German-speaking population of artisans, farmers, and merchants, mainly from the Rhineland. Known as the Transylvanian Saxons, they enjoyed special privileges granted by the Hungarian Crown, especially in the period preceding the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Despite living in a country where the majority of the population were ethnic Hungarians or Romanians, the Transylvanian Saxons were able to preserve their language and their customs intact throughout the centuries. Their formidable ethnic solidarity is vividly illustrated by their settlements, which remained resistant to external influences. This is explained partly by their privileged status and partly by the fact that they were cut off from their German contacts during the period of Ottoman rule over the Middle Danube in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Their geographical location in the foothills of the Carpathians exposed the Transylvanian Saxon communities to danger when the Ottoman Empire began to menace the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Their reaction was to build defensive works within which they could take shelter from the invaders. Lacking the resources of the European nobility and rich merchants, who were able to fortify entire towns, the Transylvanian Saxons chose to create fortresses round their churches, enclosing storehouses within the enceintes to enable them to withstand long sieges.

The first documentary reference to Biertan dates from 1283. In 1397 it was raised to the status of oppidum (fortified town) and twenty years later the Hungarian King granted it the right of droit de l'épée (ius gladii) - ie the right to bear arms. From 1572 to 1867 Biertan was the see of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Bishop of Transylvania, and as such played a major role in the cultural and religious life of the considerable German population of the region.

Description

The church of Biertan first appears in documentary records in 1412, referring to a structure that antedates the existing Late Gothic hall-type building, which appears to have been completed around 1522/23. Despite some later modifications such as the Baroque north and south doors, the organ loft, and the baldachin over the episcopal throne, the interior retains most of its original appearance. Elements such as the throne itself (in transitional style), the altar table, the inlaid choir stalls, and the fonts are all contemporaneous with the building itself. Other notable features are the retablo (a 24-element polyptych) and three important works of sculpture. The building itself is largely built of brick, with door and window frames and some parts of the vaulting in stone.

The church stands on a low hill, within the first circuit of defensive walls, equipped with four towers, which antedates the existing building. The second line of walls, at the foot of the hill, was built at the same time as the church in the early 16th century, and an additional area to the south and west was enclosed in the late 16th/early 17th centuries. Whilst this multiple defensive system is known from elsewhere in Europe in free German bourgeois communities, it is best preserved at Biertan, where it additionally has the advantage of retaining its original urban context.

The town has retained its medieval layout and structure almost complete, and there is a group of important early buildings, including a 16th century pharmacy, around the central square. There are no later structures that disturb the harmonious relationship between the defensive ensemble, the town, and the surrounding natural environment.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The ensemble is the property of the local Evangelical community, which forms part of the Romanian Evangelical Church under the direction of its Superior Consistory.

Management

Management of the property is the responsibility of the Evangelical Church, working in association with the national Directorate of Historic Monuments, Ensembles, and Sites (Ministry of Culture) and the Departmental Commission for the Historic Monuments, Ensembles, and Sites of Southern Transylvania, Sibiu. Conservation and restoration work is supervised by these organizations, under the general control of the national Directorate, as provided for in Decree No. 91/5 of February 1990. Funding comes from central and local government bodies.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

A restoration campaign was carried out on the church in the 1930s, when the roof was replaced. Other projects have been in progress since 1977, following an earthquake. As a result of these works, necessarily limited by lack of resources, the church is now in a good state of preservation. The town itself has been the subject of only restricted restoration works. There is also an urgent need for improvements to the drainage system in the town itself.

Authenticity

Accepting the fact that the settlement has evolved organically over a period of more than six hundred years, it is inevitable that there has been continual restoration and rebuilding of many of the structures that make up the property proposed for the World Heritage List. However, this work has not in any way detracted from the overall authenticity of the town.

Evaluation

Qualities

This type of medieval defended town, in which the nucleus of the fortifications is the church, was once widely distributed in Europe. However, Biertan is the best preserved and most complete of the few surviving examples.

Additional comments

At the 15th Session of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee, held in Paris in June 1991, examination of this nomination was deferred, since the Bureau felt that it was

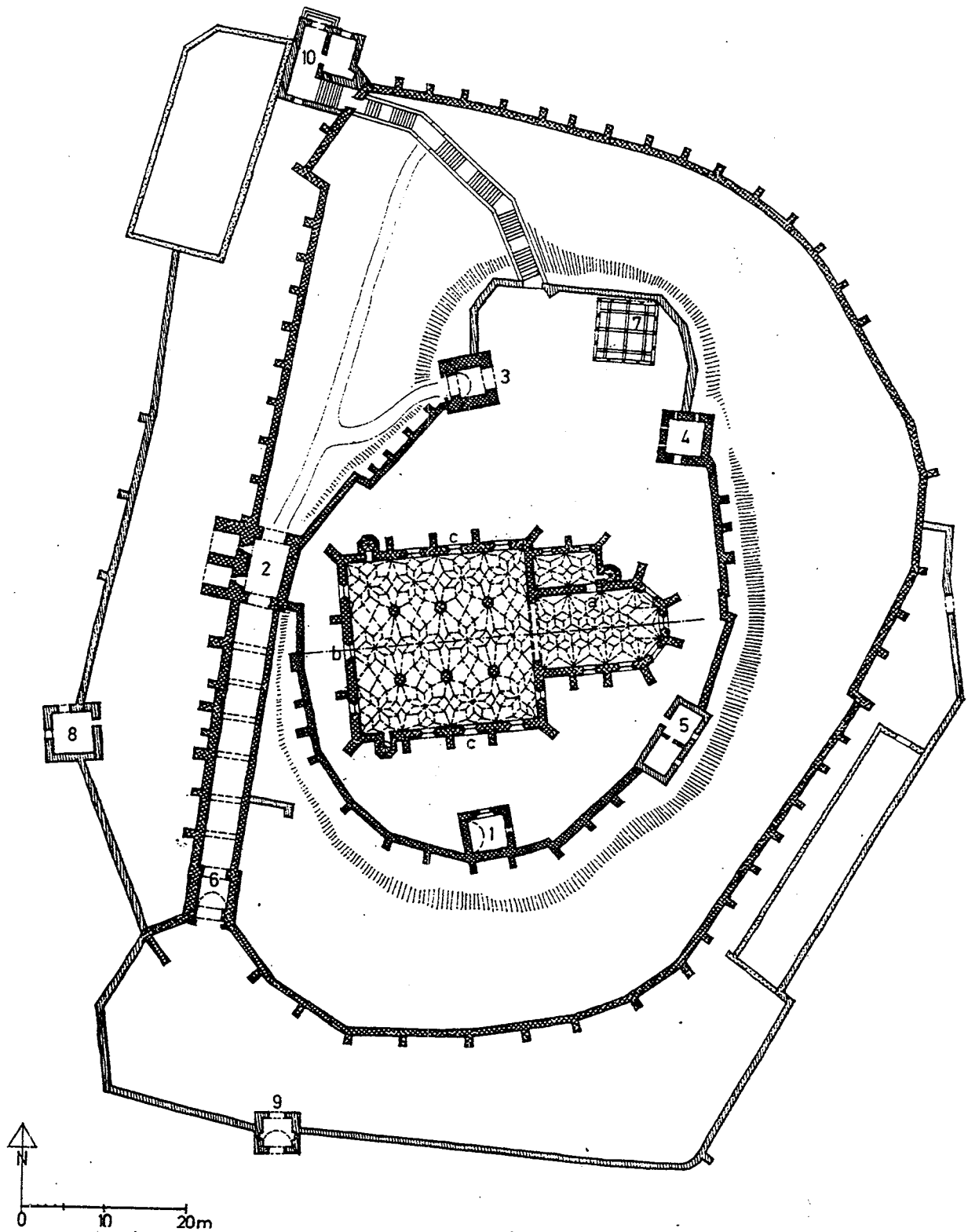
necessary for it to be afforded satisfactory legal protection, particularly with regard to the proposed protective perimeters. An ICOMOS mission visited the property in the autumn of 1993 and reported that adequate protective measures are in place.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion iv:

- Criterion iv The town of Biertan is an exceptional example of the communities founded by the Transylvanian Saxons, with a traditional urban structure, numerous old houses, and the best preserved fortified church in its region.

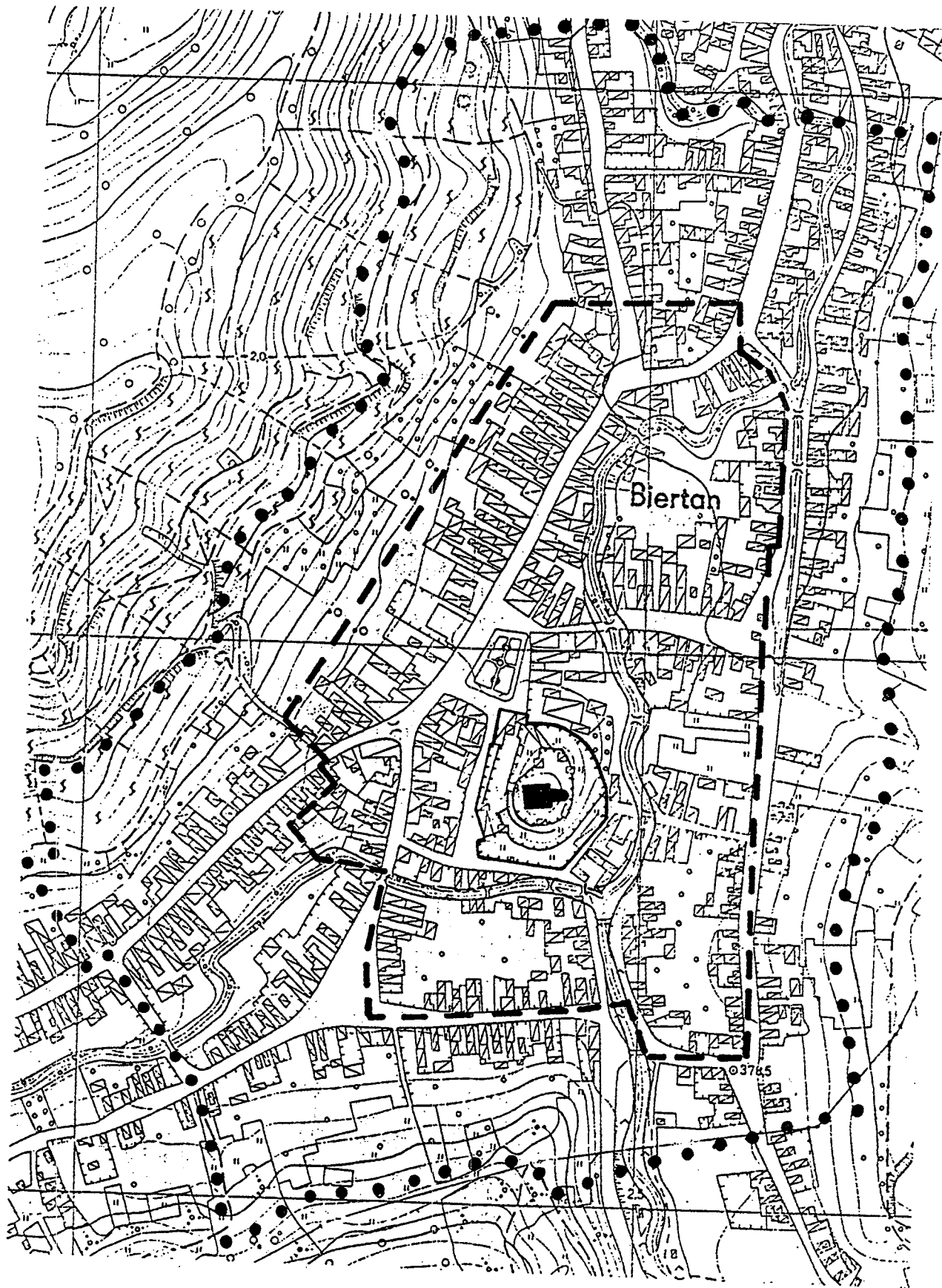
ICOMOS, October 1993



Plan-ensemble avec l'indication des étapes de construction de construction

- a. Porte de sacristie
- b. Portail ouest
- c. Portails sud et nord
- 1. La tour catholique
- 2. La tour de la Mairie
- 3. La tour de l'horloge
- 4. La tour Mausolée
- 5. Le bastion est
- 6. La tour d'entrée de la deuxième enceinte
- 7. Le clocher
- 8. La tour de défense de la troisième enceinte
- 9. La tour d'entrée de la troisième enceinte

Biertan : plan d'ensemble avec indication des étapes de construction /
 general map indicating the stages of construction



Biertan : zone proposée pour inscription et zone tampon /
nominated area and buffer zone