

## Villages in Transylvania (Romania)

No 596bis

### Identification

*Nomination* The Villages with Fortified Churches in Transylvania (extension of Biertan and its Fortified Church)

*Location*

- Department of Alba, district of Călnic, village of Călnic
- Department of Braşov, district of Prejmer, village of Prejmer
- Department of Braşov, district of Buneşti, village of Viscri
- Department of Harghita, district of Dârjiu, village of Dârjiu
- Department of Mureş, district of Saschiz, village of Saschiz
- Department of Sibiu, district of Biertan, village of Biertan
- Department of Sibiu, district of Valea Viilor, village of Valea Viilor

*State Party* Romania

*Date* 29 June 1998

### Justification by State Party

The fortified churches should be considered as a group. Nowhere else can such a large number of fortified churches be found in such a restricted area, proof that this phenomenon was widespread within a geographical and cultural (ethnic) area. They are an outstanding architectural achievement, thanks to the variety and use of the repertory of defensive architectural forms of the Late Middle Ages in Europe. In western and northern Europe certain types of defences applied to churches are typical of a few regions or countries (eg fortified churches in France and in northern countries, or churches with a fortified enceinte in Germany and Austria).

In Transylvania, however, there are three types of church fortifications in the restricted area mentioned above: the church with an enceinte (eg Prejmer), the fortified church (eg Saschiz) and the church-fortress (eg the Valea Viilor complex). The way these fortifications have continued and adapted the special conditions of previous monuments is interesting to note. Most of them display a transformation, for defensive purposes, of the entire repertory of forms and plans of short Romanesque basilicas, with or without a western tower, and single-nave churches belonging to the late Gothic period. In certain cases,

these fortifications have created monuments with a dual function - sacred and defensive - which are perfectly balanced from the point of view of form and function (eg Saschiz, Cloasterf, etc).

To this successful defensive architecture should be added the intrinsic value of churches reflecting the spread of certain architectural styles, from the Romanesque to Late Gothic art. The churches still have precious elements of decoration and furniture: altars in Prejmer (around 1450), fragments of murals (Dârjiu), 16th century furniture (Prejmer, Saschiz, and Valea Viilor). The fortified dwelling place of nobles is also authentic and invaluable from the architectural point of view. **Criterion iv**

The sites nominated for inscription all have the features of villages built by Saxon settlers on former "royal lands," sites which have been preserved in most of the 250 Saxon colonies in Transylvania:

- The regular network of streets, even if they are sometimes affected by the relief, is exemplary in the nominated sites; most of them have developed along a street or a vast central area, sometimes doubled by secondary streets (examples can be found in Călnic, Valea Viilor, Biertan, and Viscri). Other rarer examples of villages grew around a square, created after the fortification of a church (Prejmer).

- The protected area (the historic core) still has deep and narrow plots of land attested by documents and research, as well as the method for organizing it: houses with a gabled wall overlooking the street, and a succession of outbuildings. It is also possible to reconstitute historically the layout of the cultivated plots of land (eg at Viscri) since the place names designating the old properties are still used in oral tradition.

The enclosed character, typical of these villages, has also been preserved: a continuous row of houses with a half-buried cellar and a raised ground floor, few windows, gables, and boundary walls of the same height as the facade, sometimes repeating the decoration of the latter.

The position of the buildings for public use has also remained the same. Some of these buildings, arranged around the fortified church, still function: the presbytery or dwelling of the parish preacher, the school and teacher's house placed either within the walls of the school or nearby, the municipal centre and village hall, the barns for storing grain. The number of buildings and their architectural value is significant in all the nominated sites.

In the Saxon villages built on former "royal lands" and, above all, in the nominated villages, there are two types of dwelling house which have remained unchanged. Nevertheless, the variety of ornamental solutions and certain major modifications in the repertory indicate how they have evolved over time. Until the 1980s, the sites retained their character as multi-ethnic villages, with different ethnic neighbourhoods, as can still be seen today.

**Criterion v**

The nominated sites, typical villages of the Saxon colonization in Transylvania, form "a coherent whole, an entity of historical value, having its own equilibrium and character, while at the same time including a specific system for organizing space, buildings, and signs of human activities which shape the environment." They represent a construction method reflecting the historic, legal, religious, and social conditions of their creators. They are also an integral part of a culture and a civilization weakened by the emigration of the Saxons to Germany which started in the 1970s and intensified in the 1990s.

#### Criterion iii

The buildings and defences erected by the Saxons of Transylvania had a cultural influence on the surrounding region, starting with the subjugated Saxon villages which tried to imitate the defensive and organizational structures of the free communities as much as possible. This influence spread to the Szeklers (churches with an enceinte and other simple defensive structures, the most eloquent example being Dârjiu), as well as the Romanians. It modified not only the appearance of the Romanian districts in Saxon villages but also the Romanian villages of the Saxon colonization, which copied the house fronts, the ornamental vocabulary, and the system of dividing the land into plots (eg Raşinari).

#### Criterion ii

### Category of Property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the property nominated for inscription is a *group of buildings*.

### History and Description

#### History

The property nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List is situated in the south of Transylvania, a hilly region bordered by the arc of the Carpathians.

In the course of the gradual occupation of Transylvania by Hungarian sovereigns, King Geza (1141-1161) established the first colonies of Germans, known as Saxons. As free settlers enjoying certain privileges, they set up associations of colonies in the region of Sibiu-Hermannstadt, governed by Counts. In 1224, King Andreas II signed a letter of franchise called the *Andreanum* which confirmed the liberties granted to Saxons in the province of Hermannstadt. Most of the existing districts were colonized by around 1330, following the emergence of new settlements encouraged by the Counts and Teutonic Knights.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, the legal status granted by the *Andreanum* was extended to cover the last colonized regions. This legally acquired unity took the name of *Universitas Saxonum*, and was recognized by the King of Hungary in 1486. It kept this status within the Principality of Transylvania until the second half of the 19th century.

The origin and development of church fortifications derive from the turbulent history of Transylvania, starting from the Mongol invasions in 1241-42, then the repeated Turkish incursions as of 1395, followed by wars waged by the sovereigns of neighbouring countries up to the beginning of the 18th century. These fortifications should also be considered as a phenomenon specifically linked to the history of their builders, the Saxons of Transylvania.

The Saxon settlers introduced into Transylvania a type of colony adapted to the position of the villages, most of which stood on hills that were easy to reach and protect. The arable land was divided according to a Flemish system and the compact villages, with a church in the centre, were composed of houses with gardens closely aligned in rows along the streets. Defending this type of village, which had certain advantages, was a constant preoccupation of the communities, and they were supported by the Hungarian sovereigns and the Church from the second half of the 13th century. It was also the basis for the development of church fortifications.

Up to the recent past, the church-fortresses as place of worship were the centre of life for village communities. The buildings set against the defensive walls housed the school and village hall.

#### Description

Despite subsequent transformations and thanks to archaeological discoveries, it is possible to have an idea of what the first church fortifications looked like during the second half of the 13th century. The churches going back to the colonization period still have a massive western tower with covered ways and loopholes. They were protected by a defensive wall, an entrance tower, and a ditch. These features were inspired by strongholds, and probably also by the fortified dwelling places of the Transylvanian Counts. The one in Câlnic-Kelling is the only example to have survived to present times.

The principles of fortification, which had already been highly developed in towns (Sibiu-Hermannstadt, Sighişoara-Schässburg, Braşov-Kronstadt, etc), were transposed to church-fortresses in the 15th century. The oldest of them stands on a plain in the Tara Barşei region, where the defensive wall of the churches was raised and fitted with a covered way and towers, as in Prejmer.

In other colonized regions where the landscape is cut by valleys, new defences were put up around the churches and the enceintes, thus offering a wide variety of forms (eg Biertan, Valea Viilor, and Viscri). The end of the 15th century was the last important phase for fortified churches. In some villages, such as Saschiz, the churches were demolished and replaced by a building with defensive storeys, loopholes, and bartizans resting on consoles or flying buttresses. A bell tower was incorporated into the defensive wall.

The fortified churches have conserved the structures needed for the daily life of the villagers (mills, fountains, bread ovens, and granaries) as well as traditional institutions, such as a school, presbytery, and priest's house grouped near the church.

The village houses are closely aligned along one or two streets or else clustered around a square. They were originally built of wood and had a thatched roof, but were replaced at the end of the 18th century and early 19th century by buildings in stone and brick with shingled roofs.

The shape of the original plots and the layout of the outbuildings in rows (stables, barns, etc) have been retained. The houses, most of them gabled and with a half-hipped roof, were joined on the street facade by a high wall with a carriage entrance and small doorway. The decoration of the facades was usually restricted to the window frames, a cornice and niches, or medallions on the pediment. Some facades were more elaborately decorated with thyrsi, garlands, or even, in the 19th century, with pillars topped by capitals. The village is still divided into separate districts for the different communities (Saxon, Romanian, or Hungarian) which lived together for several centuries.

The six Transylvanian village sites with their fortified churches, proposed as an extension of the village of Biertan, already included in the World Heritage List in 1993, are the following:

- Village of Călnic

The fortified residence built around 1260 by Count Chyl de Kelling, consists of a three-storey dwelling tower, a chapel, and an oval enceinte. In 1430, it was offered to the village community, which raised the walls fitted with two towers and transformed the dwelling tower into one for defensive purposes. In the 16th century, it erected a second enceinte with a covered way and a bastion, and strengthened the inner wall so that it could hold the supply stores.

- Village of Prejmer

The church-fortress is set in the centre of the village square. The Early Gothic Church of the Holy Cross is in the shape of a cross. In the 15th century, it was surrounded by a wall 12m high, forming a quadrilateral with rounded corners reinforced by four horseshoe towers (two have disappeared). The entrance, a vaulted gallery, is protected by a barbican and flanked by a lateral wall. The covered way has a parapet. The complex is strengthened by loopholes and a few bartizans. The granaries and rooms to accommodate the inhabitants are arranged on four levels above the cellars.

- Village of Viscri

During the first quarter of the 16th century, the old Romanesque chapel was enlarged to form a single-nave church, with a fortified storey resting on semi-circular arches supported by massive buttresses. The conical roof of the bell tower is raised and has a hoarding. The first enceinte of the 16th century was strengthened in the 17th century by two towers with a wooden gallery, and a century later its covered way was transformed so that it could hold outhouses while a second and lower enceinte was erected.

- Village of Dârjiu

The fortified group of Dârjiu mirrors the influence of Transylvanian constructions in the neighbouring Szekler region. The Late Gothic church was fortified

towards 1520 and was decorated with a series of murals paintings going back to 1419. The rectangular enceinte was restructured in the 17th century in order to add a bastion in each corner; a fifth one was erected in the west and a bell tower in the south. The walls and bastions were pierced by loopholes and canon slits. Lean-to sheds for storing grain replaced the covered way.

- Village of Saschiz

Since the old village stronghold standing on top of the hill was probably abandoned because it could no longer protect the inhabitants, it was decided to replace the Romanesque church and its enceinte by a new and more accessible church in the Late Gothic style (1493-1525). The defensive storey gives the Church of Saint Stephen the appearance of a high bastion, with a projecting, quadrangular sacristy tower. The bell tower of the old enceinte, demolished in the 19th century, reproduces the shape of the clock tower in the neighbouring and rival town of Sighişoara.

- Village of Valea Viilor

The Church of Saint Peter was transformed into a Late Gothic style and fortified at the beginning of the 16th century. One or several defensive storeys were built above the choir, nave, and tower, all communicating with each other. The porches of the northern and southern entrances are protected by small towers with portcullises. The oval enceinte was also reorganized. The 6-7m high wall supporting the covered way and a sloping shingled roof leads to the loopholes, machicolations, and gun slits. Access is from the vaulted gallery of the western bastion, which juts out from the line of the defensive wall.

The inscription file also proposes to extend the boundaries of the *Village of Biertan with its fortified church*, already inscribed on the World Heritage List, and its buffer zone.

## Management and Protection

### *Legal status*

The seven fortified churches included in the extended nomination – Călnic, Valea Viilor, Biertan, Saschiz, Viscri, Prejmer, and Dârjiu – were included in the first Romanian National List of Monuments in 1959. They are designated as historical monuments of national importance with the status of National Treasures under the terms of Articles 1 and 2 of the 1994 Law No 11 for the Protection of Historic Monuments. Article 1 defines the surrounding conservation areas as being “part of the historic monument.” For each of the seven villages the nomination area has been defined as a conservation area including the necessary regulations. Having been approved by the Commission for Conservation Areas within the Ministry of Public Works and Territorial Planning under the terms of the Building Act, Law No 50 of 1991 for Building Regulations and Land Planning, they have a legal status.

It should be mentioned that the existing legislation for the Protection of Historical Monuments, the 1994 Law No 11, has very strict provisions relating to the

protection, preservation, and management of designated properties and sites. Nevertheless it is only a provisional one and does not provide efficient control and management at the County or local level. There is no professional body or institution (since the dissolution of the National Office in November 1994), the Directorate for Historic Monuments being included in the administration of the Ministry of Culture. A draft of the new Conservation Law, prepared in recent years, which provides for a National Board and decentralized structures at the County level, was submitted to the Parliament at the end of March 1999.

#### *Management*

Ownership of the various properties is diverse. The fortified churches, like the other places of worship in the villages (the Orthodox, Catholic, Greek Catholic, or Uniate Churches), are the property of their respective religious communities. Where the community no longer exists because of emigration to Germany, ownership is taken over by the Superior Council of the Lutheran Church in Sibiu. This is the case of the fortifications of Călnic, given by the Superior Council in custody to the Foundation *Ars Transilvaniae* in Cluj-Napoca to create a Transylvanian Documentation Centre for Historic Monuments. The public buildings in the villages, including administration, education, commercial facilities (schools, the village council, inns, shops) are still in the propriety of the State (in the administration of the local authorities); most of the farmsteads are in private ownership. Some of the Saxons who emigrated to Germany after 1990 are still the owners of their farmsteads.

It is the responsibility of owners of designated buildings and areas to manage and repair them and open them to the public. Any alterations require the permission of the Ministry of Culture and the National Commission for Historic Monuments.

There are clearly defined and adequate conservation areas for the village sites, and also adequate buffer zones including parts of the typical Transylvanian cultural landscape around all the nominated properties. As a result of the ICOMOS evaluation mission revised delimitation maps have been provided for Călnic and Dârjiu, and those for Biertan have also been redrawn. These are provided for in the 1994 Law No 11 for the Protection of Historic Monuments, the 1991 Building Law No 50 on Building Regulations and Land Planning, and the regulations for each conservation area related to urban planning in conformity with the Order of the Minister of Public Works and Land Planning concerning conservation areas.

Overall supervision of nominated properties is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture. It carries out this work in collaboration with the National Commission for Historic Monuments, the National Office for Heritage Protection, and, where appropriate, with the Ministry of Public Works and Land Planning, the Ministry of Education, or the County Inspectorates for Culture, the County Offices for Heritage, and the local authorities.

The management of the nominated area in the villages is in the responsibility of the local

authorities. There is no overall management plan for the whole body of properties included within the nomination. Based on the completed scientific recording as the result of the German-Romanian documentation project, two of the nominated villages (Biertan and Viscri) are the subjects of feasibility studies for a revitalization programme, initiated and financed by the World Bank. It is the intention of the World Bank to offer financial aid also for the conservation projects of the two fortified churches in the villages, the planning being covered by the National Office for Heritage Protection as part of the Ministry of Culture.

Substantial financial aid is available for non-governmental owners (especially the religious communities and the Lutheran Superior Council) from the Ministry of Culture for conservation and restoration projects. Financial aid is also available from the Transylvanian Saxon Foundation in Munich, which sponsors the fortified churches of Prejmer and Viscri, the Foundation for German Heritage in Romania in Stuttgart, and, for maintenance and repairs works within the conservation areas of the villages in particular, the former Saxon communities organized in Germany through the Cultural Council of the Transylvanian Saxons.

#### **Conservation and Authenticity**

##### *Conservation history*

Respect for tradition and sacred places resulted in the continuity of maintenance and restoration works even in the communist period. In the early 1960s the fortified church of Prejmer was restored by the National Office for the Protection of Historic Monuments. At the Călnic castle, at that time in state ownership, that office in the early 1970s carried out structural consolidation work on the main family tower and the outer curtain wall, inserting an inadequate concrete skeleton, though without altering the monument. In the late 1950s the Lutheran Superior Council created a department for architecture and historic monuments within its central administration, coordinating minor repair and maintenance work on the fortified churches.

Maintenance work has, however, been carried out continuously because the fortified churches have been in use as the centres of the daily public life of the communities up to the present time. Most of the interventions are of good professional quality, without reconstructions, additions, or the use of inadequate materials. The care for maintenance and repair is also reflected in the interior layouts of the churches with their traditional furniture, pews, galleries, altarpieces, organs, and mural paintings, some of them Late Gothic masterpieces, in this way reflecting continuity in use of the liturgical space by the communities since the Reformation up to the present day. The famous altarpieces of Biertan and Prejmer were restored in the 1980s by the Conservation Workshop of the Superior Lutheran Council set up in the 1970s in Braşov.

At Valea Viilor and Viscri maintenance and repair work on the church fortifications have been in

progress since 1990. For the fortified church of Saschiz, which was in a poor state of conservation owing to lack of maintenance (emigration of the community) and being in a seismic area (there have been several earthquakes in the last two centuries), a structural consolidation and a conservation project have been initiated by the Ministry of Culture, to be carried out in 1999. Conservation work at Dârjiu (including restoration of the mural paintings) took place in 1981, at Prejmer in 1994-98 and at Biertan in 1989-92. The Foundation Arts Transylvaniae has worked out a conservation plan for the fortifications of Câlnic in cooperation with the National Office for Heritage Protection, parts of which have already been implemented.

As a result of the introduction of the socialist system into agriculture after 1945, most of the ancillary working buildings within the farmsteads, especially the stables and barns, went out of use and so most of them are in a poor condition; some of the typical barns have already been lost. Maintenance work has been carried out on the houses in most cases, the main problem nowadays being the abandoned or empty houses of the emigrated Saxons. A conservation and revitalization programme for the farmsteads should also form part of the management plan for the nominated areas.

#### *Authenticity*

The level of authenticity of the various properties included in the nomination is very high. Traditional maintenance and repair work on the fortified churches and the conservation principles of the 1990s have ensured that replacement of damaged or degraded architectural elements has respected the materials and techniques used by the original builders. The well preserved interior layouts and furnishings of the churches with their artistic masterpieces are authentic documents for the traditional religious life of the Reformed communities over the centuries.

The villages are authentic documents for a specific vernacular tradition, and they preserve the original layout of the settlement. The church is placed in the centre of the village, so as to be accessible very quickly in times of danger from all parts of the village, and the rows of very narrow and deep plots are aligned on both sides along one or two main streets (Câlnic, Valea Viilor, Saschiz, Viscri) or grouped around a rectangular village square (Biertan, Prejmer). This type of land-use system is characteristic of the early settlements of German colonists in Eastern Europe, and it was maintained even when the former timber architecture (log-house constructions, timber framing) was replaced by masonry buildings at the end of the 18th century and in the first half of the 19th century everywhere in the Saxon settlements. The rows of gabled houses, boundary walls with arched entrances (the so-called Franconian row) facing the streets or squares, the adjacent working buildings of the farmsteads added in a row to the front house along the narrow and deep plot closed by the transversely located barn, the plot continuing with the orchard outside the barn and limited by a fence or a small wall – all these are typical elements of the Saxon vernacular tradition, which have been preserved up to the present day.

This type of vernacular architecture has also had a very strong influence on the architecture of the Romanian and Hungarian peoples settled in Transylvania, not only by the Romanian peasants in the Saxon villages adapting their farmsteads to that architectural tradition, but also in the Szeklers settlements, like the village of Dârjiu, where the type of settlement and the architecture of the farmsteads was similar.

As a consequence of the socialist system, the farmsteads and hence the villages did not suffer any damage from the industrial revolution in agriculture: the buildings of the collective or state farms were located outside the villages, which are therefore authentic documents. This not the case at the village of Dârjiu, where the former socialist systemization activity and the economic development of recent decades has resulted in several modifications; the conservation area is restricted to a small area surrounding the fortified church.

#### **Evaluation**

##### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the nominated properties in February 1999. The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture was also consulted.

##### *Qualities*

The properties that make up the nomination of the Transylvanian village sites with fortified churches provide a vivid picture of the vernacular traditions preserved over the centuries in the settlements of southern Transylvania, based on the characteristic land-use system, settlement pattern, and organization of the farmstead units and their architecture of the German colonists, which exerted a strong influence on the vernacular architecture and traditions of the other ethnic groups in the area. The variety of building types and defensive solutions, preserved over the centuries and documented by the church fortifications, should also be considered as a unique vernacular expression of the cultural traditions of those communities.

##### *Comparative analysis*

The special value of the Transylvanian village sites with fortified churches lies in the fact that they are outstanding examples of a specific vernacular tradition in south-eastern Europe, the well preserved homogenous settlements of the Transylvanian Saxons and Szeklers, which form a compact unit around their fortified church. They are representative of a group of more than 200 preserved settlements with church fortifications that are unique in the world.

##### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

The *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* make it a condition of inscription on the World Heritage List that every property should have an appropriate management plan in force. The original nomination dossier did not contain any information about management plans, and so this nomination was referred back to the State Party by the Bureau at its

meeting in July. The State Party has provided extensive information about the management plans in force, which fully satisfy the requirements of the Committee.

**Brief description**

The Transylvanian villages with fortified churches provide a vivid picture of the cultural landscape of southern Transylvania. They are characterized by the specific land-use system, settlement pattern, and organization of the family farmstead units preserved since the late Middle Ages, dominated by their fortified churches, which illustrate building periods from the 13th to 16th centuries.

**Recommendation**

That the extension of the property be *approved*.

ICOMOS, September 1999