

IS “CONSERVATION IN RUIN” ALWAYS THE BEST SOLUTION? THE CASE OF THE ROMANESQUE CHURCH IN GÂRBOVA

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ABSTRACT. *Is “Conservation in Ruin” Always the Best Solution? The Case of the Romanesque Church in Gârbova.* As the leading institution in charge of built heritage protection in Romania after 1952, the Directorate of Historical Monuments (DHM) took essential steps in funding, designing, and conducting various conservation works on sites endangered by earthquakes, looting, improper use, or defective historic restorations. Partially demolished by the local community in the previous centuries and seriously affected by neglect, the Romanesque Lutheran church in Gârbova, Alba County, was in the 1960s on the verge of collapse. After a thorough cause analysis, the DHM managed to prevent disaster by undertaking a rescue intervention in line with the international trends of the time. Thus, the site became one of the first DHM projects to design the preservation of a church in a state of ruin rather than its complete reconstruction.

Part of our more extensive research on Transylvanian heritage conservation during the Communist regime of the 20th century and based on previously unpublished information found in the archives of the National Heritage Institute, our study aims at showing that despite DHM’s best intentions, the church lost the chance to be more than a romantic ruin to these days. By rigidly applying the international restoration principles, the Directorate disregarded the parishioners’ will, even though this was one of the very few examples where the owner was still interested in the monument and even suggested its adaptive reuse as a funerary chapel due to its location in the village graveyard.

Keywords: *Gârbova, Romanesque church, conservation, ruin, 1960s.*

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Introduction

Built around 1280 in Romanesque style, the church in Gârbova,¹ Alba County, was a basilica with a nave, two side aisles, a semi-circular apse, and a belfry. The church had a western gallery subdivided into three small bays with cross vaults and semi-circular arches and a slender tower rising only above the middle one. Below the gallery, the two pillars and three cross vaults formed a sort of narthex distinct from the central nave. There was no trace of a staircase leading to the gallery, meaning access was only through a wooden ladder. The side aisles also bear traces of cross vaults, while the central nave, separated from the collaterals by pillars, had a wooden ceiling.

The church received a new polygonal chancel in the 15th century, now in ruins, but which preserves the trefoiled door towards the sacristy and the traces of a Gothic tabernacle. The walls of the nave still have some of the semi-circular Romanesque windows, while the belfry has twinned windows and colonettes with cubic capitals on all four sides.²

On Christmas Eve 1870, the roofs of the church and tower burnt down because of the traditional custom of spinning fires.³ As a consequence, in 1872, the community dismantled their remains along with the two side aisles, and in 1876 the fortification wall, which they replaced by a low circular precinct to surround the church and its graveyard.

Probably after this event, the church was left in ruins, as the inhabitants continued to use only the closer one in the village.

Thus, by the middle of the 20th century, the Romanesque church was in a poor conservation state, as mentioned by the Lutheran Consistory in a letter sent to the Directorate of Historical Monuments (DHM)⁴ on July 29, 1958. According

¹ *Urwegen* in German and *Szászorbó* in Hungarian.

² Virgil Vătăşianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române* (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei R.P.R., 1959), 65–66; George Oprescu, *Bisericile cetăţi ale saşilor din Ardeal* (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei R.P.R., 1956), 24–25.

³ In Romanian *opaite*, a traditional Transylvanian custom of lighting and spinning fires to mark the beginning of Advent or Lent, but also on Christmas and New Year's Eve, <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/opaite/definitii>, accessed on June 21, 2023.

⁴ In Romanian, *Direcţia Monumentelor Istorice*. It is the generic name of the main institution in Romania that was responsible for the research and design of monument conservation, approval of projects, inventorying, restoring monuments, and conducting their own monument restoration sites between 1952 and 1989, constantly changing its official name: The General Directorate of Historical Monuments - DHM (1952–1959), The Directorate of Historical Monuments and the Directorate of Historical and Artistic Monuments - DHAM (1959–1974), The Directorate of National Cultural Heritage - DNCH (1974–1977), The Economic Directorate and of National Cultural Heritage - EDNCH (1978–1989), according to ***, "Istoricul INP", *Institutul Naţional al Patrimoniului*, <https://patrimoniul.ro/ro/articles/istoric>, accessed on June 21, 2023.

to this, almost all the roof tiles had been looted, the stones were constantly being removed from the walls for reuse in other buildings, and the vestry was often broken into to steal the materials stored inside.⁵

Besides being unused, another reason for its poor protection is the fact that, at that time, the church in Gârbova was not listed as a historical monument and, due to its remote position, was still relatively unknown to the DHM Bucharest based specialists. The only works mentioning it had been written at the beginning of the 20th century by German and Hungarian historians,⁶ while the ones in Romanian⁷ were to be published only a few years after these events.

It is fair to say that the situation hasn't changed much, as this small village is still overlooked by those travelling to or researching the more famous medieval Transylvanian churches, despite its charming appearance and very interesting past.

The recent history of the church is particularly intriguing, especially in connection to heritage conservation in Romania, considering that in the 1960s, the DHM undertook here a rescue intervention in line with the international trends of the time, the site becoming one of their first projects to design the preservation of a church in a state of ruin rather than its complete reconstruction. The case is worth discussing since it also tackles the topic of monument preservation through either continuous use or adaptive reuse, and the need for collaboration between the restorers and the beneficiaries of the buildings they deal with, to ensure their survival on the long term.

Hence, based on previously unpublished information found in the archives of the National Heritage Institute, our study aims at showing how the DHM managed to prevent disaster and save from complete collapse a church that was on the verge of crumbling to pieces. But also, that despite its best intentions, by rigidly applying the international restoration principles, the Directorate disregarded the parishioners' will and thus the church lost the chance to be more than a romantic ruin to this day.

⁵ Letter from the Lutheran Consistory to the DHM, July 29, 1958, The Directorate of Historical Monuments (DHM) Fund, File no. 5077, referring to the Ruin of the Romanesque Church in Gârbova, Alba County, *Correspondență [Correspondence]*, 1956–1973, Archives of the National Heritage Institute, București (Hereinafter, DHM Fund).

⁶ Friedrich Müller, *Die kirchliche Baukunst des romanischen Styles in Siebenbürgen* (Wien: Kaiserlich-Königlichen Hof- und Staastdruckerei, 1859), 184–185; Victor Roth, *Geschichte der deutschen Baukunst in Siebenbürgen* (Strassburg: Heitz&Mündel, 1905), 14–15; Idem, *Die kirchlichen Baudenkmaler des Unterwaldes* (Hermannstadt: 1922), 295; Halaváts Gyula, "Úti jegyzetek Kelnek, Vingárd, Szászorbó környékéről", *Archeológiai Értesítő*, no. XXVII (1907): 215–216; Szabó László, *Árpádkori magyar építőművészet* (Budapest: 1913), 329; Walter Horwath, "Der Emporenbau der romanischen und frühgotischen Kirchen in Siebenbürgen", in *Siebenbürgische Vierteljahrschrift*, no. 58 (1935): 70–71; Gerevich Tibor, *Magyarország románkori emlékei* (Budapest: Műemlékek Országos Bizottsága, 1938), 31.

⁷ Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale*, 65–66; Oprescu, *Bisericile cetăți*, 24–25.

A very picturesque but unprotected ruin in the 50s and early 60s

In the early 1960s, the Lutheran Consistory wrote several reports on the church's severe state, urging the DHM and its representatives in Sebeș⁸ to take urgent action. The DHM delegates, engineer Ivănescu, architect Bilciurescu, and Ivanovici, after a visit on-site, on May 23, 1961, also noticed that the walls were cracked and the tower was unstable, threatening to collapse since it was dangerously leaning ever more out of its vertical position.⁹

Still, in these years, the DHM only surveyed the façades and layout of the church¹⁰ since they had no authority to intervene in a building that was not protected as a historical monument.

The thing is that in Romania, listing valuable architectural sites had always been very slow, complicated, and hampered by several factors ever since its beginning. For one thing, the listing campaigns had been treated differently in the historical provinces since in the 19th century they were governed by different authorities,¹¹ while after the Great Union of 1918, the interwar Monuments' Commission, now under the sole authority of Bucharest, was clearly overwhelmed by the enormous task, always leaving things unfinished. It was only in the 1950s that the first national list was finally compiled and published, accompanied by a law that put under its protection a great number of architectural and archaeological values and allowed the opening of numerous emergency consolidation sites in the following decade. The listing process was nevertheless complicated and seen as a work in progress that would be finished at a later stage since there were numerous incomplete files put aside to be verified and corrected in the following years. Thus, thousands of monuments were left unprotected for the time being and outside DHM's jurisdiction.¹²

⁸ The Lutheran Church in Sebeș, a building erected by the overlapping of Romanesque and Gothic styles over time, underwent a general restoration in the years 1960–1964, as part of a larger project, entitled *The Feudal Complex in Sebeș*, which extended until the late 1960s. See Mariana Angelescu, Gustav Gründisch, A. Klein, et al., "Restaurarea unui monument de arhitectură din epocile romanică și gotică în cadrul ansamblului de monumente feudale de la Sebeș-Alba", in ***, *Monumente istorice. Studii și lucrări de restaurare* (București, 1960), 90–119.

⁹ Undated *Report* sent by the DHM delegates to Nicolae Bădescu, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

¹⁰ *Relevéu* [Survey], 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5078.

¹¹ Gaining their independence in the 19th century, Moldavia and Walachia united to form the Romanian Kingdom, but Transylvania was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and under the governance of Budapest. It was only after the end of World War I, that Transylvania became part of Romania and passed under the authority of Bucharest.

¹² Oliver Velescu, "Inventarierea monumentelor istorice din România. Retrospectivă istorică", *Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice*, no. 1–2 (2012): 83–147; Idem, "Evidența monumentelor istorice în țara noastră", in ***, *Sesiunea Științifică a Direcției Monumentelor Istorice, ianuarie 1963*, 61–69 (București, 1963).

This is what must have happened to the Romanesque church in Gârbova also, even though on September 23, 1954, the region's referent,¹³ architect Richard Lieblich, had visited the site and proposed its listing in the first category due to its importance,¹⁴ since on April 4, 1960, the Consistory asked the DHM why Gârbova was still not listed.¹⁵

And so, instead of already designing a project for a much-needed consolidation, the DHM had first to assess the church's value and situation. On April 22, 1960, architect Eugenia Greceanu, the new region's referent, made a trip to investigate the monument, writing in her reports the chronology of the damage it had suffered, from the fire of 1870 to the dismantling of the side aisles in 1872, that it had been left out by mistake, and proposed its urgent classification.¹⁶ Well aware that the listing would take too long, which was not in favour of the rapidly decaying church, the DHM specialists sent a request to Nicolae Bădescu, President of the State Committee for Construction, Architecture, and Systematisation, asking for special permission to carry out urgent interventions to support the belfry from the emergency fund of the institution, considering the unlisted building's high value.¹⁷ But this was not possible, and it would have to wait to be listed.

The fact that the Consistory was very interested in the building's fate and was willing to make efforts for its survival is proved by its own numerous reports, in which it presents the historiography of the monument, identifying its various mentions in art history studies, with the purpose of bringing a solid argument to justify DHM's care for the church.¹⁸

Finally, the Historical Monuments Commission remedied this omission, and on July 25, 1961, approved the proposal for the church's listing,¹⁹ while on April 3, 1962, they drew the Obligation and Conditions of Use, an Inventory, a Minutes of the Monument, and a record of the protection area, represented by the enclosed graveyard.²⁰

¹³ Ever since its founding, the DHM appointed some of its employees as regional delegates, who had the task to visit the various endangered sites, as well as to present and refer to the conservation proposals for these during the approval meetings, n.a.

¹⁴ Richard Lieblich, *Report*, September 23, 1954, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

¹⁵ *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, April 4, 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5077. The reply came on May 30, 1960, that the proposals for classification were still unfinished and were to be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval at the end of the year, after which the church of Gârbova would be included for sure.

¹⁶ Eugenia Greceanu, *Report*, April 22, 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

¹⁷ Undated *Report* sent by the DHM delegates to Nicolae Bădescu, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

¹⁸ *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, June 3, 1961, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

¹⁹ *Letter* from the Historical Monuments Commission to the Consistory, 1961, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

²⁰ *Listing file*, April 3, 1962, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

The first conservation proposals

Still, this didn't mean that they went straight to design the emergency consolidation works, the years 1962 and 1963 registering in the DHM archives only more reports from the Consistory, which as late as September 12, 1963, approached the DHM again, reminding them of the ever-present instability of the tower.²¹ They even tried to take advantage of the fact that the DHM was at that time involved in other conservation works in three settlements nearby, Câlnic,²² Sebeş and Cricău,²³ asking if they could use the remaining materials.

But that was not that simple, and thus, they had to wait their turn.

It was only in October 1963 that the DHM's delegates Balş, Mănciulescu and, Bordenache made a new visit to Gârbova, acknowledging the imminent danger of collapse and the fact that the interventions had become mandatory since the deterioration of the church had worsened.²⁴

The 1964 temporary consolidation

Finally, on December 19, 1963, the DHM drew up Project 41A for the support of the church's leaning tower, with Eugen Chefneux as the chief architect and Theodor Barbu as the structural engineer,²⁵ planning to complete the emergency consolidation in 1964. The strengthening design proposed the implementation of two wooden buttresses to support the walls, as well as to become the future

²¹ Report from the Consistory to the DHM, September 12, 1963, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

²² The fortress in Câlnic was built during the 13th–17th centuries, but partially ruined in the 20th century because of poor maintenance, imperfections in the foundations, earthquakes, and flooding. Under these circumstances, in the 1960s the DHM launched an extensive research and restoration campaign. See Ştefan Balş, "Restaurarea cetăţii ţărăneşti din Câlnic", in ***, *Monumente istorice: studii şi lucrări de restaurare* (Bucureşti, 1965), 38–52; Ioana Rus, "Cetatea din Câlnic. Un monument restaurat în anii 1960-1964", *Ars Transilvaniae*, no. XXI (2011): 105–134.

²³ The Romanesque Calvinist church in Cricău had been seriously endangered ever since the 19th century, with severe cracks in the central nave's walls. Here, the DHM undertook in 1961 and 1964–1967 a complex restoration work, which involved lowering the ground around the church to the original level, marking the missing aisles, and the consolidation of the tower with a reinforced concrete belt and metal tie rods. See ***, "Cronică - Principalele lucrări de restaurare a monumentelor istorice din Republica Socialistă România (1959-1969)", *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice*, 39, no. 1 (1970): 73–78; Gheorghe Curinschi-Vorona, *Arhitectură. Urbanism. Restaurare* (Bucureşti: Editura Tehnică, 1996), 62–63, 339–340, 346.

²⁴ Internal note from the DHM's Implementation Group to the Study Group, November 2, 1963, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

²⁵ Project 41/1963-1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5080.

scaffolding necessary for masonry research and the tower's consolidation. The intervention would insert reinforced concrete belts and anchor the loose stone blocks that threatened to fall.²⁶ So, in 1964, a provisional consolidation work took place with a temporary wooden scaffolding. On this occasion, in the central nave 35 cm below the ground level, they uncovered the original brick pavement and found traces of the initial steep slope of the roofing on the tower wall. They also studied the former side aisles' remains which were 20–30 cm high and cut by the tombs, while the walls of the central nave they completed up to cornice level.²⁷ They carried no archaeological research, seen as unnecessary for the time being, but only studied the structural elements of the preserved walls.²⁸

On December 12, 1964, the reception of this temporary emergency intervention took place²⁹ in the presence of Lajos Bágyuj.³⁰

Further consolidation proposals

Finally, the DHM drew up Project 41A for further consolidation works, with Chefneux as chief architect. The file included photographs, a description, a history of the church and the works carried out until then.³¹ For this phase, the project included provisions for complete archaeological investigations.³² But now the real problems arose since the design proposed two variants, which launched a heated debate on the final appearance of the church and the number of works to be done.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Project 41A/1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5079.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Letter from the DHM to the DHM's Transylvania Site*, November 23, 1964, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

³⁰ Lajos Bágyuj, a constructor with studies in Budapest, an autodidact in the field of restoration, was involved in interventions on several Transylvanian monuments after 1948, becoming chief of the DHM's Transylvania Site. Among the ensembles where he worked are the Saint Michael's church in Cluj, the Calvinist church in Kogălniceanu Street in Cluj, the Franciscan church in Cluj, the Calvinist church in Nima, the Catholic church in Florești, the Calvinist church in Crișău, the Saint Michael's cathedral in Alba Iulia, the Castle in Hunedoara. See Sas Péter, "Bágyuj Lajos műemlékfelújításai", *Művelődés közművelődési folyóirat* LIX (2006), <http://www.muvelodes.ro/index.php/Cikk?id=261>, accessed on June 21, 2023; Balogh Edgár (ed.), *Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon: Szépirodalom, közírás, tudományos irodalom, művelődés I. (A–F)*, (București, 1981), <http://mek.oszk.hu/03600/03628/html/b.htm#B%C3%A1gyujLajos>, accessed on June 21, 2023; Ioana Rus-Cacovean, "Dezbateri principale cu ocazia restaurării Bisericii Reformate de pe Strada Kogălniceanu din Cluj în anii 1957-1962", in *Istoria ca interogație. Mariei Crăciun, la o aniversare* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2020), 587–611.

³¹ *Project 41A/1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5079.

³² *Ibid.*

The first option included all the necessary consolidation works, with the construction of reinforced concrete canopies, a protective layer of boulders over the ruined walls, fixed window frames, an open roof structure covered with scale tiles, and a roof above the tower. This variant also included extensive archaeological research and marking the foundations of the side aisles, the complete uncovering of the brick floor in the nave, and walling in the arches on its northern side.

Engineer Th. Barbu proposed reinforced concrete belts to strengthen the tower and a reinforced concrete beam to tie it to the nave's walls. He also suggested dismantling and rebuilding the southeast pilaster after installing the beam, underpinning the walls, and placing reinforced concrete belts under the windows and the nave's roof structure. Finally, he pointed out the need to dismantle and rebuild the two pilasters on the south side.³³

The second option provided some archaeological research, but most of all, fewer interventions related to the strict consolidation works that had to protect the walls and to preserve the monument in a state of ruin, with reinforced concrete canopies at the nave and tower, but without re-roofing.³⁴

The designer team recommended the first variant, understanding that proper protection and reinforcement could not be ensured without the roof covering, and also taking into consideration the functional needs of the edifice.³⁵ This option was also in tune with the Consistory's intentions, which on September 10, 1964, had already approached the DHM, saying that they were pleased about the consolidation works that had begun during the summer, but it also requested the covering of the tower and the nave, according to the request of the village, to use the church as a funerary chapel.³⁶

Nevertheless, other DHM specialists thought differently, Eugenia Greceanu suggesting as early as April 22, 1960, a simpler solution. She believed that instead of a reconstruction of the church's missing parts, it would be preferable to design a project that included the research, consolidation, and protection of the monument only in a state of ruin³⁷ since its very picturesque appearance made it similar to the former monastery in Cârța.³⁸

³³ *Ibid.*; Th. Barbu, *Report*, June 2, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

³⁴ *Project 41A/1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5079.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, September 10, 1964, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

³⁷ Eugenia Greceanu, *Report*, April 22, 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

³⁸ The Cistercian Monastery in Cârța, built in the 13th century, was the first Transylvanian Gothic ensemble but gradually fell into decay. In the interwar period and between 1961 and 1962, it went through a series of interventions, becoming the first Romanian site preserved in a state of ruin. See "Cronică", 77.

Conservation in ruin was not the DHM's usual approach, but the Romanian specialists, probably aware of the cases in UK, Greece, or Italy, sought to introduce in our country as well, this cutting-edge method as a substitute for the more brutal traditional restorations and reconstructions. Still, because of the always urgent interventions in Romania, they lacked the time for extensive research, and certainly the freedom to travel abroad to visit the international sites.

On June 4, 1965, took place a DHM meeting which analysed the two variants and issued the final approval for Gârbova.³⁹

Greceanu had the task to present the two options, noting that rebuilding the covering with an open roof structure had the advantage of restoring the volume of the building and protecting the vaulted bays framing the west tower and the brick floor in the nave. However, she thought that walling in the arches or their fitting with windows or doors distorted the authenticity of the ruin. She also believed that neither aesthetic nor scientific grounds justified the designed flat form of the nave's roof.⁴⁰ If this first option was to be approved, Greceanu suggested keeping the arches open to the sides since the purpose of the intervention was not to restore the church as a place for worship, but to preserve the ruin in all its authenticity while protecting it with a covering. But in this case, the roof ridge should be up to the line of the west tympanum. On the question of the tower roof and balcony, she proposed to rebuild it according to one preserved drawing, but some members of the committee considered it a *'doubtful source'*.⁴¹

Concerning the second option, Greceanu believed it had a more scientific character, preserving the romantic aspect of the construction. She pointed out, however, that the proposal should carefully study the insulation of the vaults in the three western bays and the drainage of rainwater inside the church, as well as provide solutions to protect the uncovered brick paving.⁴²

Regarding the archaeological research, on January 31, 1962, the Consistory had asked the DHM to consider delegating Radu Heitel to Gârbova, "*who in recent years had specialised in excavations on the early medieval period in Transylvania*", to carry out investigations to clarify the chronology of the church.⁴³ Also, on September 14, 1964, the DHM had replied to the Consistory that they would study the archaeological excavations and the covering of the tower and the nave as part of a future restoration project.⁴⁴ But despite this previous discussion, during the approval meeting of June 4, 1965, Greceanu was also a bit maliciously

³⁹ *Minutes* of the DHM approval meeting, June 4, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Letter* from the Consistory to the DHM, January 31, 1962, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁴⁴ *Letter* from the DHM to the Consistory, September 14, 1964, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

ironic, believing that archaeological research needed more careful attention, but reminded the commission that “*the DHM does not compete with the Institute of Archaeology for extensive excavations*”.⁴⁵

So, based on Greceanu’s report on the design, the commission gave a favourable opinion for the second variant,⁴⁶ provided that the brick floor was re-covered with earth. Consequently, on July 12, 1965, the DHM requested the Department for Systematization, Architecture and Construction Design (DSAPC) the building permit.⁴⁷

In the spring of 1965, Bágyuj informed the DHM that 30000 lei had been provided for Gârbova for the second quarter of that year, but he had not yet received the design and thus could not order the supply materials. He urged the DHM to hand over the design for Gârbova, since at the church in the nearby Cricău, work always paused as they did not receive the project details on time either, and they thus had to open another worksite to make rational use of the permanent skilled workers.⁴⁸

The project was finally implemented only in 1966: in some parts the walls were consolidated and received reinforced concrete belts, the cracks were filled, while in others the masonry was demolished, rebuilt, and grouted. The works included the minimum archaeological research, a tiled roof over the sacristy, the rebuilding of the tower’s windows, uncovering up to the walking level of the side walls, paving with stone slabs, sewerage, and wall canopies.⁴⁹

The strict consolidation works ended in 1966, but the second stage of this intervention was left unfinished, with the intention to allocate funds in 1967.⁵⁰

A disappointed beneficiary

But the following debate shows that the Consistory was unhappy with this solution, which led to a heated debate and several problems which affected the final stage of the works.

⁴⁵ *Minutes* of the DHM approval meeting, June 4, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁴⁶ *Internal note* from the DHM to the Design Group, June 9, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077 – *Favourable opinion for the restoration project of the Romanesque church in Gârbova*, June 30, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁴⁷ *Letter* from the DHM to the DSAPC Hunedoara, July 12, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁴⁸ *Letter* from Lajos Bágyuj to the DHM, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁴⁹ Oteleşteanu, *Report*, March 8, 1967, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

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THE CASE OF THE ROMANESQUE CHURCH IN GÂRBOVA

On August 24, 1965, the Parish had addressed the DHM through a letter, asking them to reconsider the approved solution and not to stop the works only with the consolidation. They were dissatisfied that they had found out from the Cricău site workers and from the *Neuer Weg* newspaper of August 20, 1965, but not from the DHM, that contrary to their expectations, the project was not for a restoration but only a consolidation of the church in a state of ruin.⁵¹

*"We, owners, custodians, and beneficiaries of the monument, have never been invited to participate in any discussion with the DHM, which we consider necessary so that something that has aroused so much enthusiasm in our community does not result only in disappointment and dissatisfaction."*⁵² Underlying that DHM's concern came in response to an old intention of theirs, thwarted only by the uncertain financial situation in the past, the Parish offered to help with construction material they had recovered from an old barn. To make things clear, they also stated that they did not want the reconstruction of the side aisles either and that a roof to cover the central nave would be more than enough for them, ending with a plea: *"We urge you not to override our sincere interest in this restoration!"*⁵³ Two other similar requests came on April 19 and October 27, 1966, the Consistory asking the DHM again to consider covering the nave with a roof since they only wished to use it as a funerary chapel.⁵⁴

The Parish also stated that they looked forward to the promised archaeological research, perhaps carried out in parallel with the fortress and the village church, which would transform Gârbova into an even more sought-after attraction than it was then.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, they received a negative reply again, which stated that research would be restricted only on the church, necessary to mark its stages of construction, not at the other monuments in the area.⁵⁶

Moreover, on June 6, 1966, the DHM stubbornly answered the Consistory that they had designed the proposal on the scientific principle of preserving the ruin in its present state without being distorted by other additions. As a result, they could not place a roof above the nave, and the brick floor would be covered again with earth.⁵⁷

⁵¹ *Letter* from the Lutheran Parish in Gârbova to the DHM, August 24, 1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Letters* from the Lutheran Parish in Gârbova to the DHM, April 19 and October 27, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁵⁵ *Letter* from the Lutheran Presbytery to the DHM, September 2, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁵⁶ Oteleşteanu, *Report*, October 15, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077 – *Letter* from the DHM to the Consistory, October 22, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁵⁷ *Letter* from the DHM to the Consistory, June 6, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

This correspondence is valuable for understanding the situation, showing that the DHM had never presented their intentions to the beneficiary and obviously made here a complete mistake by not keeping in touch and making scientific decisions without consulting them. But since they were merely at the beginning of their activity, always acting in a rush because of the severe state of the monuments they had to restore, the DHM had not yet fully understood that working with the beneficiaries can be crucial. If they saw that the church was in ruins, they applied the scientific recipe, failing to realise that using it, even partially, would save the church, as the local community was still quite large. They would see only later, in the 1970s, that most of the time an interested owner meant the survival of the monument, but by then it would be too late for many other ensembles.

A change of mind

After all these requests, the DHM specialists finally reacted, chief architect Chefneux himself writing a report on April 26, 1966. He asked the reconsidering of the approval, saying that there was no reason for restoration without the roof, him, and the engineer themselves having actually proposed this variant since, in fact, they believed that the very absence of the roofing had caused the monument's deterioration, and also thought this was the best solution to protect the brick floor. In addition, he showed that there was very little difference in cost between the two options because in the second variant too, the walls needed to be covered and the rainwater drained. He also arose the question of functional necessity, showing that the only remaining argument for the first option was that of the more romantic appearance of the church in a state of ruin.⁵⁸

On November 15, 1966, probably after Greceanu focused more on other projects and Oteleşteanu became the new referent for central Transylvania, he presented a report in which he proposed the solution's revision, suggesting covering the nave and mentioning that the conditions of ruin had been, in fact, given mainly for the side aisles, that were not to be rebuilt or the arches closed.⁵⁹

And so, during the approval meeting of January 4, 1967, the Consistory's request to rebuild the roof for the use of the ruin in burial ceremonies was finally reconsidered.⁶⁰ They approved covering the nave, on the condition to investigate the traces of the original roofing, along with a suitable one for the tower.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Eugen Chefneux, *Report*, April 26, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁵⁹ Oteleşteanu, *Report*, November 15, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁶⁰ *Minutes* of the DHM approval meeting, January 4, 1967, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Since the second stage of the consolidation had been left unfinished due to insufficient funding, the DHM sent on March 9, 1967, an internal note to Chefneux, requesting him to complete the previous project from 1965 according to these new provisions.⁶²

On March 14, 1967, DHM also informed the Consistory that their request for a roof for the nave had been finally approved, asking also to communicate what materials the Parish had available and what workforce it could provide, according to their address of April 23, 1966, which stated that "*the community of Gârbova is ready to contribute to the implementation of these works with materials, and voluntary work.*"⁶³

On March 16, 1967, the Consistory expressed its gratitude for the works carried out so far, and their expectations to see the intervention completed.⁶⁴

Unfinished works

But the only works made that year were those related to archaeology research. On January 7, 1968, Radu Heitel and Alexandru Bogdan handed over a Preliminary Archaeological Survey, carried out between October 25 and November 2, 1967, with the question of whether the investigations would continue in 1968. The answer was no.⁶⁵

And nothing else followed later either, the archives registering only on June 27, 1973, a letter from the Consistory which informed the reorganised Directorate of Historical and Artistic Monuments (DHAM) that on May 31, the tower had been struck by lightning, knocking down the upper row of stones. Weathering damage to the rebuilt vault of the gallery was also present, jeopardising the effects of the consolidation work carried out by the DHM but interrupted before completion.⁶⁶

No written justification for the interruption appears either, only another internal note sent to the design group on July 19, 1973, which urged Oteleşteanu to draw the project theme with the roofing.⁶⁷ On October 8, 1973, a new internal note recommended that that year's design plan included the addition to the original documentation of 1965, the roofing in the first variant, approved during the meeting in 1967.

⁶² Letter from the DHM to the Consistory, March 14, 1967, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁶³ Letter from the Consistory to the DHM, April 23, 1966, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁶⁴ Letter from the Consistory to the DHM, March 16, 1967, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁶⁵ Project 41/1963-1965, DHM Fund, File no. 5080.

⁶⁶ Letter from the Consistory to the DHAM, June 27, 1973, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

⁶⁷ Internal note from the DHAM to the Design group, July 19, 1973, DHM Fund, File no. 5077.

But these were never implemented. Since we see no other reason for this than the insufficient workforce at the DHAM, the lack of funding, and the institutional reorganisation that had the same effect in another case we have studied,⁶⁸ we hold this situation responsible for the interruption of works in Gârbova also. The church was left unfinished, not only without a roof, but without the final emergency consolidation that might have put the monument under at least temporary protection.

In the end, the only works took place in 1964–1966, followed by some preliminary archaeological research in 1967, and then they stopped for good. Most of the Saxon inhabitants left Romania after 1973, and so disappeared the interested beneficiary also. Since then, only the surrounding graveyard remained in use, while the tower of the church received a tiled roof as late as the 1990s.

Conclusion

The fact that today's image of the church is undeniably dreamlike and picturesque is certainly due to the DHM's efforts which managed to prevent disaster and save it from complete collapse. So, conservation in ruin appears as a proper solution for a building that has lost too many of its original elements to ensure its initial function, but the remaining ones are preserved in all their authenticity.

Nevertheless, in the case of Gârbova, we cannot help regretting that the intervention failed to give a sense of accomplishment to the well-intended community, which was left only with a deserted, unusable ruin. Willing to achieve a result similar to Cârța, the DHM disregarded that the former Cistercian monastery was still in place because its standing choir had been reused as a Lutheran church. I believe that this intervention did not necessarily suit Gârbova, the conservation in ruin being rigidly forced onto an owner who was still interested in using the former church, and who would have provided the monument's continuous maintenance, mandatory for preserving it in a proper conservation state.

⁶⁸ Ioana Rus-Cacovean, “<A Disaster for the History of Transylvanian Architecture, a Disgrace for the Local Bodies that Take Care of it and a Load on the Conscience of Architects and People of Culture from This Country>. The Fate of the Bánffy Castle in Bonțida During the Communist Regime in Romania”, *Revista Brukenthal. Acta Musei* (2021): 813–831.

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IS "CONSERVATION IN RUIN" ALWAYS THE BEST SOLUTION?
THE CASE OF THE ROMANESQUE CHURCH IN GĂRBOVA

Illustrations



Fig. 1. Inside the church's main nave, view from the east, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).



Fig. 2. View from the southeast, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).



Fig. 3. Inside the church's nave, view from the west, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).



Fig. 4. View from the north, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).

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Fig. 5. The stone frame of the Gothic tabernacle on the main nave's northern wall, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).



Fig. 6. The church in the early 1960s. (Photo in *Proiect 41A/1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5079).

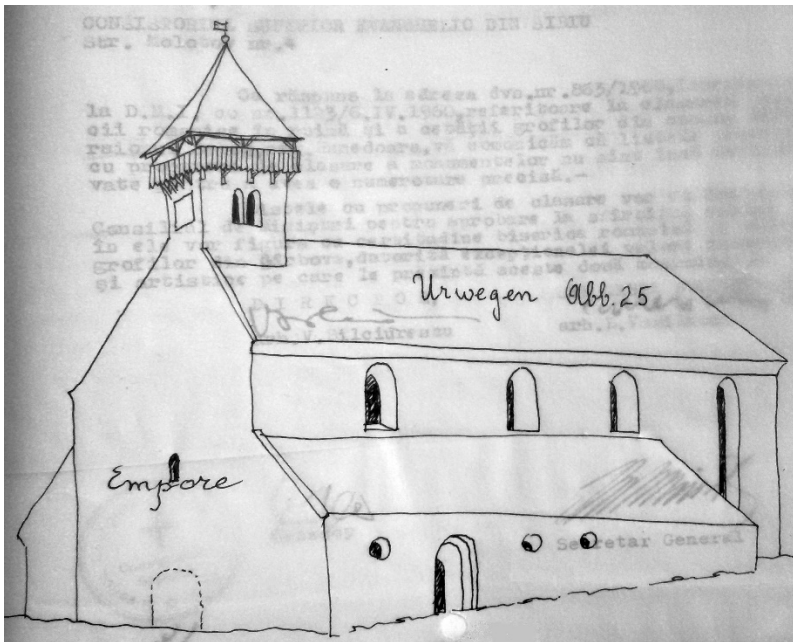


Fig. 7. The 'doubtful source'. (Reproduction of an early 20th century drawing in *Corespondență* [*Correspondence*], 1956-1973, DHM Fund, File no. 5077).

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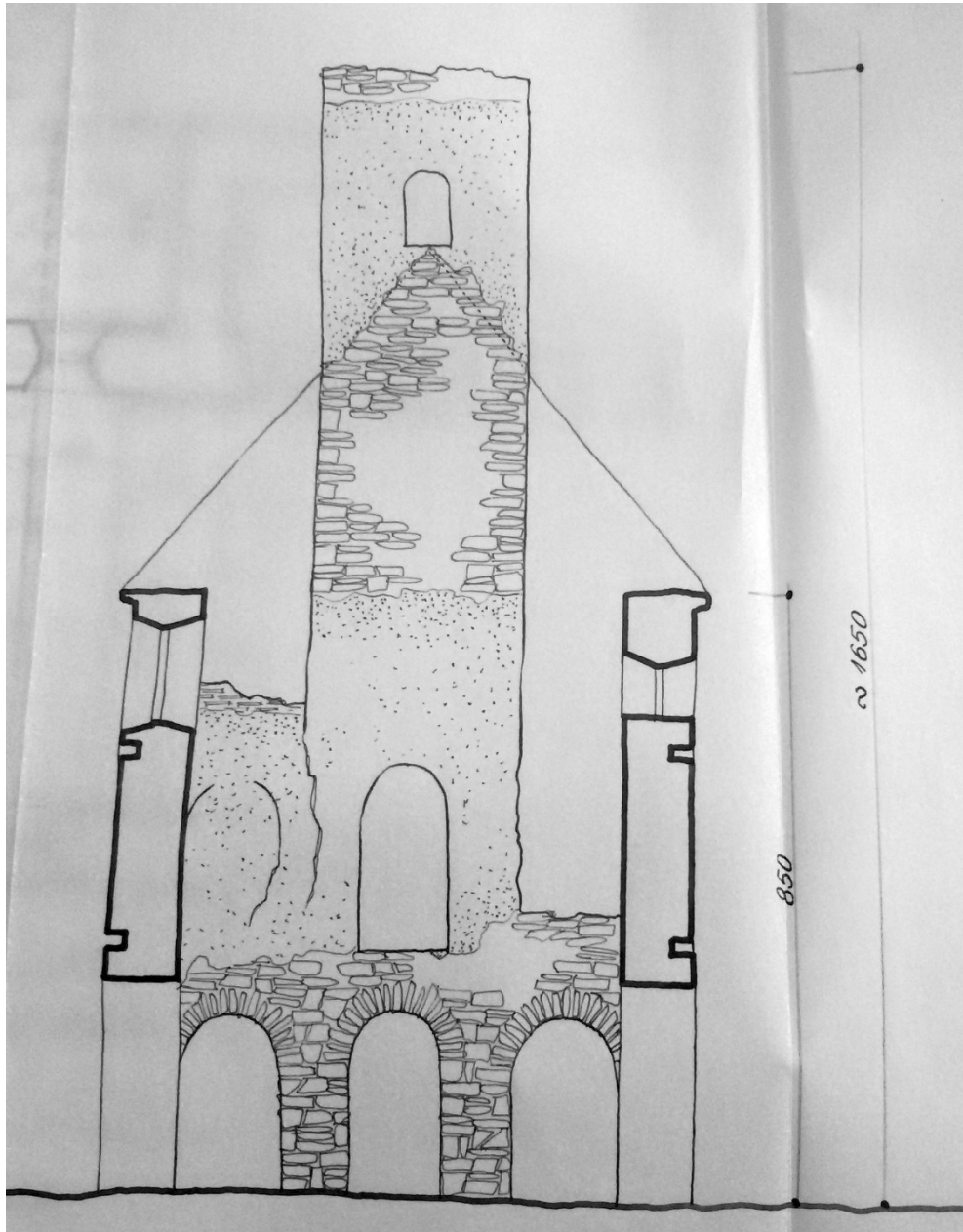


Fig. 8. Cross-section of the church in the early 1960s. (Blueprint in *Relevéu* [Survey], 1960, DHM Fund, File no. 5078).

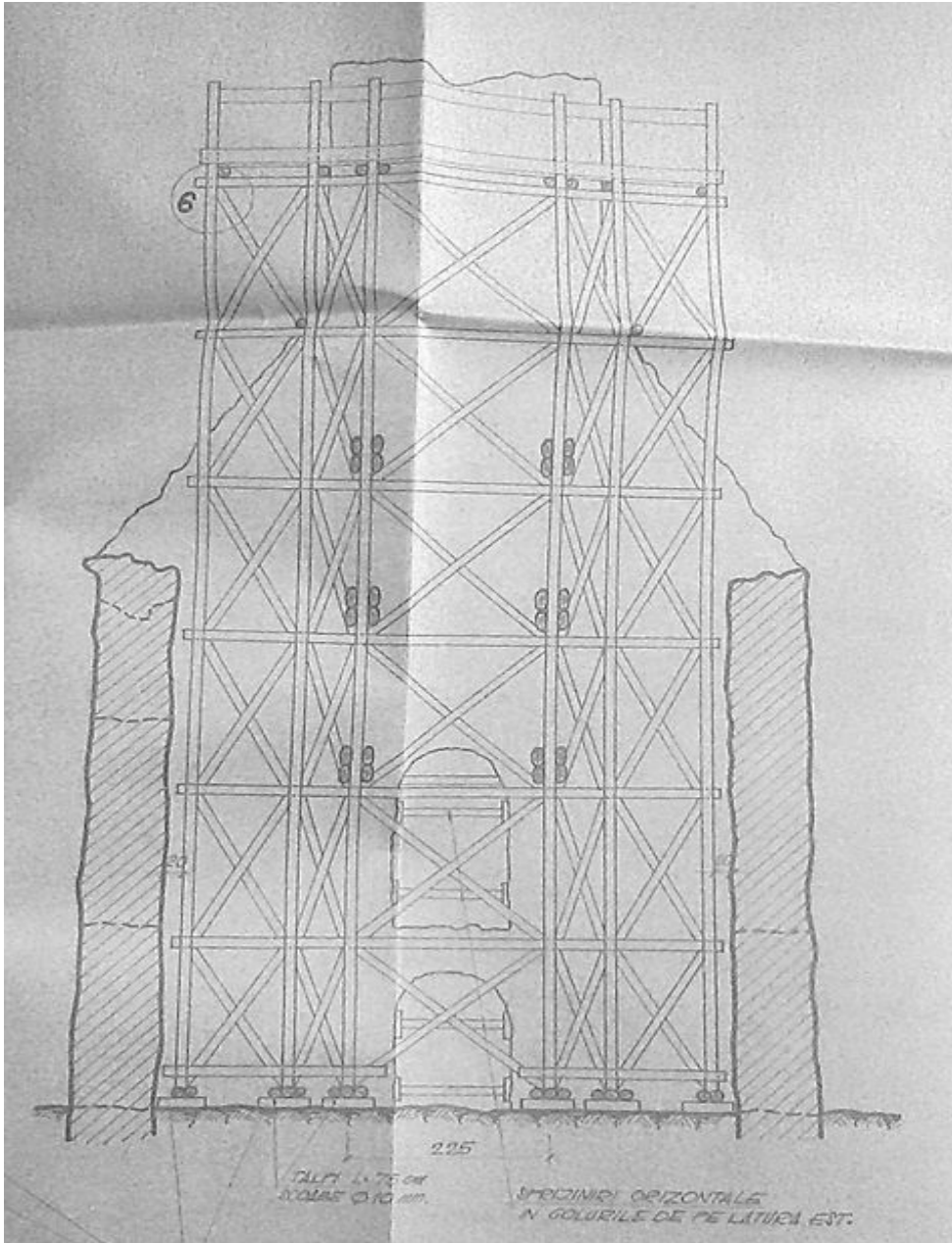


Fig. 9. Cross-section of the church with the temporary consolidation of the tower. (Blueprint in *Proiect 41/1963-1965*, DHM Fund, File no. 5080).

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Fig. 10. Details of the consolidation with concrete beams, view from the south, 2023. (photo: I. Rus-Cacovean).



Fig. 11. Gârbova, the Romanesque church, bird's eye view, 2017.
(Photo: Raimond Spekking & Elke Wetzig, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6b/Mountain_church_Garbova%2C_Romania-0276.jpg, 25.06.2023).