

## ORGANS IN TRANSYLVANIA PART 1 – THE ORGANS OF THE BAROQUE PERIOD

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**SUMMARY.** The following study represents the first chapter of a series, which is intended to shed light on the development of the Transylvanian organ landscape throughout the centuries. It offers relevant information regarding the first historical sources which indicate the presence of the organ within the Transylvanian region, and details about the organs built during the baroque period.

**Keywords:** Transylvania, organ, baroque period, organ builders, stops, positive organ, restoration.

Since the fall of the communistic regime, intensive efforts have been made to recreate a historically accurate portrait of the Transylvanian organ landscape. Organ builders and organists alike have made important steps in identifying and classifying most of the instruments which still exist today. For example, Franz Metz, one of the important organ builders and restorers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, had made an extensive research of the organs built by the Transylvanian organ builders. The results of his research are comprised in his book *Orgeln in Siebenbürgen (Organs in Transylvania)*, which contains relevant information regarding the life and work of the most significant organ builders of the baroque period and the early romantic era. Further classifications have been made by the Evangelical Church of Transylvania, which had issued an *Organ Registry* containing information regarding the organs found in its churches<sup>2</sup>; and by the Hungarian organist and researcher Dávid István, who had edited an extensive catalogue of the organs found

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<sup>2</sup> <http://orgeldatei.evangel.ro/>

throughout the entire Transylvanian region, entitled *Műemlék orgonák Erdélyben (Monument Organs in Transylvania)*. Furthermore, organist and music academy professor Erich Türk has carried-out extensive research regarding the organ landscape of the North Transylvanian regions, which resulted in his book, *Die Orgellandschaft dreier Nordsiebenbürgischer Landkreise: Cluj, Sălaj und Bistrița-Năsăud (The Organ Landscape of Three Transylvanian Counties: Cluj, Sălaj and Bistrița-Năsăud)*.

The first evidence regarding the presence of the organ in Transylvania can be traced back to the Middle Ages. In the Codex of Gyulafehérvár<sup>3</sup> (today Alba-Iulia) from 1367, one can find an initial which represents a monk playing an *organetto*. Additionally, on the stone portal of the evangelical church in Petersdorf (Petiș), on the winged altar of Grossprobstdorf (Târnava) and on a fresco in the reformed church of Nagygalambfalva (Porumbeni Mari) one can find depictions of angels playing the portative organ. Based on this evidence one can conclude that the organ was well known and used within these parts<sup>4</sup>.

According to historical sources, the ones responsible for the establishment of the organ within the Transylvanian region were the Saxons, who had colonized the southern parts of Transylvania, beginning with the reign of King Géza the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Hungary (1141-1162). Thanks to the permanent connections of Transylvanian noblemen with the western parts of Europe, it was a certainty that the mainstream organ building techniques and the newest musical styles would eventually reach these regions. For example, Prince Sigismund Báthory (1573-1613), who was particularly fond of music, played several instruments and wanted to learn how to play the organ, had commissioned his ambassador István Jósika (?-1598) to travel to Italy and purchase the latest organ methods and musical scores. As a result, the composer Girolamo Diruta had dedicated his organ method to prince Báthory<sup>5</sup>. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, prince Gabriel Bethlen (1580-1629) commissioned an organ for the Catholic Cathedral in Gyulafehérvár (Alba-Iulia), which after his death had been donated to the Saxon community of Hermannstadt (Sibiu). This was because during that period, the cathedral had belonged to the Calvinist congregation, whose leaders did not tolerate the use of an organ during service<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The *Codex of Gyulafehérvár*, found at the *Batthyaneum* Library, Alba Iulia, Romania, R. III. 89

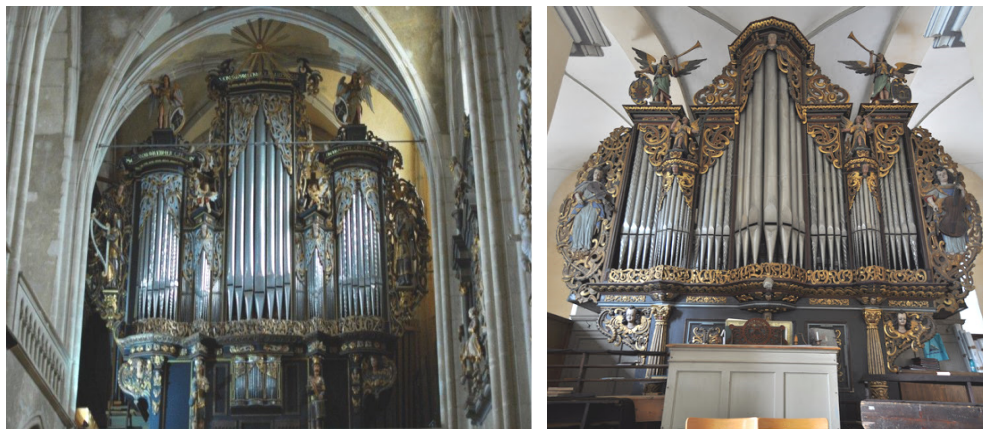
<sup>4</sup> Binder, Hermann, *Orgeln in Siebenbürgen (Organs in Transylvania)*, p. 11

<sup>5</sup> Diruta, Girolamo, *IL TRANSILVANO, dialogo sopra il vero modo di sonar organi, et istrumenti da penna [...]*

<sup>6</sup> Binder, Hermann, *Orgeln in Siebenbürgen (Organs in Transylvania)*, p. 10

Beginning with the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Transylvanian Saxons have regularly commissioned organs for the churches in their most important cities: Kronstadt (Braşov), Hermannstadt, Bistritz (Bistriţa), Mediasch (Mediaş) and Schässburg (Sighişoara). In the national archives of Sibiu one can find many written sources, such as contracts and written testimonies regarding the construction of these instruments, and the activity of professional church organists. In 1568, the National Assembly of Turda proclaimed religious freedom, a circumstance which allowed people to practice their belief freely, regardless of their religion. As a result, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, many organs have appeared in Lutheran and Catholic churches. Most of the instruments built during this period, were smaller, positive organs, with 4-8 stops, which were only suitable for accompanying the religious services. In Transylvanian cities where Hungarians represented much of the population, organs had been banned from the churches due to the Calvinistic reform. The region of Székelyföld had been an exception, because the seklers remained true to their catholic belief. The most important personality of the Székelyföld region during the 17<sup>th</sup> century was the Franciscan monk and respected scholar Kájoni János (Johannes Caioni), who had also built several organs in Csíksomlyó (Şumuleu-Ciuc) and its surroundings. Sadly, none of the instruments built by him have been preserved. From the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Reformed and Unitarian congregations also began to allow organs in their churches, and thus more instruments were commissioned from different local or foreign organ builders.

One of the most important organ builders of the Transylvanian region was Johannes Vest (1630? - 1694), who came from Neusohl (today Banská Bystrica), and settled in Hermannstadt in 1671. He had built several high-quality instruments which sadly have not been preserved. However, in the Evangelical churches of Hermannstadt and Schässburg, one can still see the front of two of his most important instruments (Image no. 1).



**The front of the Vest organs in the evangelical churches of Hermannstadt (Sibiu) and Schässburg (Sighișoara)<sup>7</sup>**

The organ built by Johannes Vest in the church of Hermannstadt in 1673 had three manuals and the following stops:

Manual 1 (*Hauptwerk*):

*Gross Principal 8', Salicional 8', Quintaden 8', Gemshorn 8', Posaun 8', Octav Principal 4', Hohflöt 4', Spielflöt 4', Quint 3', Mixtur 2', Zimbel, Subbass im manual Gedeckt 16', Grossflot 8', Pauck*

Manual 2 (*Brustpositiv*):

*Principal 2', Octav 1', Spiel flöt 2', Zimbel, Mixtur ½*

Manual 3 (*Rückpositiv*):

*Principal 4', Koppel 8', Octav flöt 4', Octav Principal 2', Super Octav 1', Quint 3', Mixtur ½, Salicional 4', Regal 8', Tremulant, Guckguck, Vogel Gesang*

Pedals:

*Subbass offen 16', Octav 8', Pomord 16', Hohflöt 8', Quintadena 16', Posaun 8', Rausch Pfeiffen 3', Octav hohflöt, Mixtur 4<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://hermannstadt.evangel.ro/kultur/stadtpfarrkirche/http://orgeldatei.evangel.ro/organ/view/683>

<sup>8</sup> Binder, Hermann, *Orgeln in Siebenbürgen (Organs in Transylvania)*, p. 43

Based on the stop list, one can observe that Vest was up to date with the mainstream European organ building techniques and had built an instrument which corresponded with the high artistic and technical standards imposed by western organ builders. Today, there is a new instrument installed behind the front of the old organ, built by the Sauer organ factory from Frankfurt, Germany. The instrument has 4 manuals and 78 stops and is provided with electro-pneumatic action.

The oldest still existing organs of Transylvania have been built during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The organ of the reformed church in Pócsfalva (Păucișoara) was built in 1693. Regarded as the oldest instrument still in use, it has been recently restored (Image no. 2) and is kept in its original state, except for the front pipes which have been replaced during the restoration process. Its builder is unknown, however, due to its ornaments, for a long time it had been regarded as a Johannes Vest organ. Today, Hermann Binder, who had carried-out the restoration works, locates its origins in Eastern Slovakia. The organ once belonged to the evangelical community of Zagăr and had been sold to the reformed congregation of Balavásár (Bălăușeri), who in turn sold it to the community of Pócsfalva, where it stands since 1885<sup>9</sup>.

**Image 2**

Stoplist:  
 Födött (Stopped fl.) 8',  
 Principal 4',  
 Födött (Stopped fl.) 4',  
 Octav 2',  
 Quint 1 1/3  
 Mixtura



**The organ of the Reformed Church of Pócsfalva<sup>10</sup>**

<sup>9</sup> Türk, Erich, *Fonte di Gioia meets Romania's oldest organ*, CD Booklet, TransilVANTIqS, 2013

<sup>10</sup> <http://transylvantiqs.ro/fonte-di-gioia-meets-romania%27s-oldest-organ>

The smallest positive organ of Transylvania is found in the St. John the Baptist Chapel of Bánkfalva (Bancu), Harghita County (Image no. 3). The instrument has only two registers, a *Flöte 4'* and a *Principal 2'*, and was brought to its present place by the organ builder Kolonics István in 1883. The exact year of its construction is unknown, but the embellishments of its front indicate the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thanks to the short path from the keys to the valves, it has an extremely sensitive touch, thus offering the possibility of accurate articulation. Due to its small size, it does not offer too many possibilities, however it is suitable for chamber music and for interpreting works from the early baroque repertoire, which do not require a large instrument.

**Image 3**



**The organ of St. John the Baptist Chapel Bánkfalva<sup>11</sup>**

Most of the instruments found in the Székelyföld region have been built in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, except for a few organs, such as the ones found in Csíkszentgyörgy (Ciucsângiorgiu), Csíkszentmihály (Mihăileni) and Nagybacon (Băţanii Mari), which have probably been built during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, by unknown organ builders. However, during

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<sup>11</sup> Photograph made by the author.

the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Boltres<sup>12</sup>, an organ builder from Braşov had been active within the Székelyföld region, building organs in Nagyalambfalva (Porumbenii Mari), Székelymuzsna (Mujna) and Székelyvaja (Vălenii).

The organ of Reps (Rupea) was built in 1699 (Image no. 4). It has been restored in 2012 by the C.O.T. organ construction and restoration company and is now installed in the Black Church of Braşov. The organ has a short octave, like many of the organs found in Transylvania, and is provided with a mechanical tracker action.

Stolist:

Manual: *Principal 8', Koppel 8', Principal Octav 4', Flött 4', Quint 2 2/3', SuperOctav 2', WaldtFlött 2', ManualMixtur*

Pedal:

*Subbas 16', Pedaloctav 8', Pedal Oct. Min. 4', Pedal Mixtur (vacant)  
Tremulo*

**Image 4**



**The organ of Reps in the Black Church of Braşov<sup>13</sup>**

<sup>12</sup> Wrongly named *Thomas Balthasar* by Dávid István in his book *Műemlék orgonák Erdélyben (Monument Organs in Transylvania)*.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.forumarte.ro/?portfolio=2258>

The organ of Michelsberg (Cisnădioara) built by an unknown master in 1724, has been restored by the organ builder and restorer Hermann Binder, and is currently used during holy service and in concerts (Image no. 5).

**Image 5**



**The organ of the Evangelical church in Michelsberg<sup>14</sup>**

Stolist:

Manual:

*Principal maior 8', Viola da gamba 8', Flöt maior 8', Principal Octav 4'  
Flöt minor 4', Quinte 2 2/3', Superoctav 2', Sedecima 1', Mixtur 3 fach*

Pedals:

*Subbass 16'*

Pedalkoppel

A particularly interesting instrument is the procession organ built in 1752 by Johannes Baumgartner (1714-1758) (Image no. 6), which had been donated to the Historical Museum of Cluj-Napoca by the Armenian

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<sup>14</sup> <http://michelsberger-spaziergaenge.evang.ro/orgel/>



Catholic community of Dumbrăveni (Erzsébetváros). It represents a fine sample of craftsmanship, because despite its small size, it comprises 6 registers and 300 pipes, a *tremulant* and six other extra sound effect stops. The organ is provided with two fronts, and to maintain its authenticity, the wind supply of the instrument is provided by two wedge shaped blowers on its top. Sadly, this instrument is kept away in the cellar of the museum and is seldomly used.

Stoplist:

*Großflöth 8', Kleinflöth 4', Principal 2', Quinta 1 1/3', Oktava 1', Mixtura 2fach*

*Diskant, Fortekoppel, Pauck, Guckuck, Vogelgeschwey, Stern, Tremulant*

**Image 6**



**The Baumgartner procession organ<sup>15</sup>**

One of the most important Transylvanian organ builders of the baroque period was Johannes Hahn (1712-1783). Born in Leutschau (today Levoča), Hahn settled in Hermannstadt and established an organ shop

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<sup>15</sup> Photograph made by the author at the Museum of Art in Cluj-Napoca.

from where he provided high quality organs for the southern regions of Transylvania. Many of his instruments have been preserved and restored and are still in use. One of the finest instruments built by Hahn is the organ of the evangelical church in Mediasch (Medgyes), and instrument with two manuals and pedals, which comprises all the characteristics of a Hahn organ (Image no. 7).

**Image 7**



**Hahn organ in the Margarethenkirche in Mediasch<sup>16</sup>**

The organ was originally built with a short octave, which has been completed to a full octave by Wilhelm Hörbiger during the restoration works carried-out in 1873.

Stoplist:

Pedal:

*Violon 16', Subbass 16', Octavbass 8', Cello 8', Flöte 4', Posaune 8'.*

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<sup>16</sup> <http://orgeldatei.evangel.ro/organ/view/437>

Manual I:

*Bourdon 16', Principal 8', Spitzflöte 8', Viola di Gamba 8', Octav 4', Spitzflöte 4', Quinte 2 2/3', Superoctav 2', Waldflöte 2', Quint 1 1/3', Mixtur 5-6 fach.*

Manual II:

*Coppel 8', Fugara 4', Flöt 4', Principal 2', Sedecima 1', Mixtur 3 fach, Regal 8'. Tremulant, MK, HW/P, Pos/P*

Johannes Prause (1755-1800) was the most prolific organ builder of the Burzenland (Țara Bârsei) region during the baroque period. The largest organ built by him is the found in the Evangelical church in Bistritz (Bistrița), which is currently under a restoration process carried-out by the COT<sup>17</sup> organ construction company (Image no. 8).

**Image 8**



**The Johannes Prause organ in the Evangelical church in Bistritz<sup>18</sup>**

<sup>17</sup> <http://pipe-organs.com/ro/despre-noi>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.siebenbuenger.de/ortschaften/bistritz/bilder/19201.html>

Stoplist:

Manual I:

*Bourdon 16', Principal 8', Gemshorn 8', Flaut 8', Gamba 8', Gedackt 8',  
Octave 4', Salicional 4', Nasard 4', Quint 2 2/3', Mixtur 4f*

Manual II:

*Geigenprincipal 8', Liebl. Gedackt 8', Viola 8', Aeoline 8', Fugara 4', Flöte  
4', Weitflöte 2', Sesquialter 2f*

Pedals:

*Principalbaß 16', Violonbaß 16', Subbaß 16', Octavbaß 8', Cello 8', Tuba 16'  
Couplers: RP/HW, HW/Ped.*

Other instruments built by Prause can be found in the Evangelical Churches of Bucharest, Felmer, Fogarasch, Honigberg (Härman), Zeiden (Codlea), etc.

Generally, Transylvanian organs of the baroque period were built in accordance with the mainstream European organ building techniques, but, except for a few organs, mostly found in larger cities, the instruments were smaller, probably due to limited financial resources. Naturally, the choice for smaller instruments was also because the congregations in Transylvanian villages had smaller churches (sometimes there were 5 different congregations in one village), which could only be equipped with positive organs that did not require a lot of space. These positive organs are spread throughout most of the Transylvanian region, and are exceptionally reliable instruments. Due to the short path between the keys and the valves ensured by the so-called *stecher* (trigger) mechanics, these instruments have a very precise sound and touch. In addition, due to their small size, their maintenance does not require considerable financial resources, an aspect which made them particularly popular. These instruments are usually provided with 4-6 stops and are suitable for playing chamber music.

The organ music which had emerged in Transylvania during the baroque period was uncomplicated. The most important music collection of the period was the *Codex Caioni*, which had been edited by Joannes Caioni and his colleague Mátyás Seregély between 1634-1671<sup>19</sup>. The collection contains sacred and popular, vocal, and instrumental works of different genres. The *Codex Caioni* is one of the most important musical documents of the region, since it reflects the way Transylvanian musicians have perceived

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<sup>19</sup> Diamandi, Saviana and Papp, Ágnes, *Codex Caioni sæculi XVII, vol. 14a*, Musicalia Danubiana, Budapest, 1994, p. 15

and adapted their music to European mainstream standards. The different instrumental works found in the codex, such as the preludes, *canzonas*, fantasias and the *ricercar*, can also be played on the organ. Although in most of the cases the author of the different works is unknown, the influence of early Italian baroque music is obvious. For the rendition of these works one does not need a large organ, a positive organ with a few registers being sufficient for their interpretation.

Another composer who had dedicated works to the organ was Daniel Croner (1656-1740). His organ works are compiled in a tabulature entitled *Tabulatura Fugarum at Praeludiorum*, which is currently in the possession of the archives of the Black Church in Braşov<sup>20</sup>. These pieces belong to the usual baroque genres, such as the prelude, fugue and the fantasia. They are short, uncomplicated pieces, mostly written for three voices, which are particularly suitable for the small positive organ type found in the majority of Transylvania.

Martin Schneider (1748-1812) had been active as an organist at the Black Church in Braşov, between the years 1772-1792. Aside a series of vocal-instrumental works, he had dedicated a series of pieces for keyboard instruments, such as coral preludes, preludes, sonatas, which had been collected and published by Steffen Schlandt, organist at the Black Church in Braşov<sup>21</sup>. Schneiders works are situated at the border between the baroque and classical styles, polyphonic and classical elements being present in them at the same time. Most of the works can be played on the organ and on the piano, whilst some of them, especially the ones which were created under the influence of the galant style, are suitable for the harpsichord too.

Since the Revolution of 1989, there had been a growing tendency to restore the organs which are in dire need of repair works. Sadly, many of the instruments have been altered by people who lacked the necessary know-how for a proper restoration. These interventions have literally destroyed the original state of the instruments, which in many cases cannot be recreated anymore, due to the lack of information and original materials. Such is the case of the Hahn organ in the Central Reformed Church of Cluj-Napoca, where the front of the organ still exists, but the original pipe work has been sold, and in lack of necessary information, it cannot be recreated.

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<sup>20</sup> Schlandt, Steffen, *Daniel Croner, Preot și compozitor braşovean al secolului al 17-lea*, (*Daniel Croner, Priest and Composer in Braşov During the 17th Century*), <http://tara-barsei.ro/>, p. 3

<sup>21</sup> Schlandt, Steffen, *Martin Schneider: Werke für Tasteninstrumente (Martin Schneider: Works for Keyboard Instruments)*, Edition Musica Coronensis, 2009

In a brighter note, thanks to the restoration efforts carried-out by the local organ building and restoration companies, many of the instruments are used for concert purposes in the concert seasons organised by different congregations and cultural organizations. In the future, it would be auspicious to include these instruments in a cultural tour, which could lead to the recognition of their value and would be a possible way to raise the funds necessary for their proper restoration and preservation.

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<http://orgeldatei.evang.ro/>