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Gábor Bethlen and the Construction of the New Seat of the Transylvanian Principedom

The development of the town of Gyulafehérvár into a town of central importance in the middle of the sixteenth century took place at the same time as the formation of the Transylvanian principality. The town became increasingly important as the princes of Transylvania consolidated power, first in the time of the rule of the Báthory family and then under the rule of the Bethlen and Rákóczi families. This essay presents the measures that were implemented by Gábor Bethlen, his predecessors, and his successors in the interests of developing and fortifying the town and transforming it into a fitting site for the court of the prince.

Keywords: Seat of Transylvanian Principedom, Princely Court in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), Gábor Bethlen, Collegium Academicum

After the fall of Buda in 1541, the royal court, which had fled with queen Izabella to Transylvania, occupied the palace and demesne of Bishop János Statileo in the interlude following his death in 1542. In 1556, with the spread of the Reformation they took possession of church estates and the town became as a matter of fact the center of the prince's lands and the seat of the Transylvanian principality.

In his study of the venues for the Transylvanian General Assemblies, Zsolt Trócsányi has noted the growth in the significance of the town of Gyulafehérvár (Karlsburg in German, today Alba Iulia in Romania) parallel to the rise in the power of the prince, first under the rule of the Báthory family and later in the era of the Bethlen and Rákóczi families.¹ In both periods of consolidation one can clearly discern efforts to make the former seat of the Bishopric a town suited to its new role. The available seventeenth-century sources make the study and analysis of these efforts considerably simpler than research on endeavors in the sixteenth century, so in this article I offer an overview of the most important measures taken under the rule of Prince Gábor Bethlen with the aim of transforming Gyulafehérvár into the effective seat of the principedom.

1 Zsolt Trócsányi, *Az erdélyi fejedelemség korának országgyűlései (Adalék az erdélyi rendiség történetéhez)* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1976), 20–22.

The Place of Gyulafehérvár among the Cities of Transylvania

Gyulafehérvár was hardly an ideal capital. Formerly the seat of a bishopric and its chapter, its economic and legal framework, adapted primarily to satisfying the needs of its lords, could not compete with the towns of Szászsebes (Mühlbach in German, today Sebeş in Romania) or Szászváros (Broos in German, today Orăştie in Romania), for instance, both of which were in the same market district, nor could it rival Nagyenyed (Straßburg am Mieresch in German, today Aiud in Romania), another market (agricultural) town (*oppidum*). The new lords of the town occupied the houses of the canons and prebendaries, which had been left empty, and divided the tenants of the bishopric and chapter amongst themselves. In the second half of the sixteenth century they began to transform the town to meet their demands. Contemporaries must have perceived more clearly than we do that the medieval castle, originally developed from a Roman castrum, with its obsolete fortifications and lack of a supply of fresh water, could offer little protection in the event of a well-prepared siege.² In the middle of the sixteenth century it was fortified at the initiative of Giambattista Castaldo with the addition of four defensive trenches, four bastions, and four artillery platforms. According to Giovanandrea Gromo, “it would have been able to withstand any large-scale attack for a time.”³

In the last three decades of the sixteenth century the first water-supply network was constructed in Gyulafehérvár, a canon foundry was created, work on the palace and churches, symbols of princely representation, was resumed, and the first residences of the municipalities appeared. It is nonetheless striking that, at least as far as we know now, little was done in these decades to strengthen the castle’s defenses.⁴

2 On the defensibility of medieval castles, see András Kovács, “Gyulafehérvár, az erdélyi püspökök középkori székhelye,” in *Márton Áron-émlékkönyv születésének 100. évfordulóján*, ed. József Marton (Kolozsvár: Gloria, 1996), 191–201.

3 According to a letter written by Giovanandrea Gromo around 1567 “...il Castaldo l’haveva posta in sicura difesa, havendolo aiutata di quattro bravi fianchi Reali et quattro piattaforme di terra in modo che havendo le necessarie provisioni dentro può difendersi un tempo da ogni grosso sforzo.” See Jolán Balogh, *Kolozsvári kőfaragó műhelyek. XVI. század* (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Science Research Group for Art History, 1986), 278. A later source: István Szamosközy, *Történeti maradványai*, vol. 3, published by Sándor Szilágyi (Budapest: MTA, 1877), 51–52. In general makes mention of “bastions” with separate mention of a kind of bastion-like structure at the southwest corner, adding that fortifications from the time of Emperor Ferdinand were ruined by the inattentiveness of the leaders. See Balogh, *Kolozsvári kőfaragó műhelyek*, 268.

4 Marianna H. Takács, *Magyarországi udvarházak és kastélyok* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1970), 194, and Balogh, *Kolozsvári kőfaragó műhelyek*, 279.

The most striking record of the vulnerability of the castle is perhaps the description written by István Szamosközy (Stephanus Zamosius) about the two sieges of the town in 1603. Szamosközy may have clad his narrative in a classical mantle, but hardly exaggerated the horrors he had witnessed. The state of affairs after the sieges is apparent from the attempt—doomed to failure from the outset—by Gábor Báthory to move his seat to the middle of the Saxon Lands of Transylvania, the well-fortified town of Szeben (Hermannstadt in German, today Sibiu in Romania). Immediately after assuming the throne, prince Gábor Bethlen had to promise to leave the town of Nagyszeben, not the least in order to consolidate his own situation, and the very fact that he managed to obtain a few months' reprieve indicates that the seat of the principality was for all practical purposes uninhabitable, and even the Saxons, who were impatiently pressing for the reassertion of their privileges, had to recognize this.⁵

The Building Operations of Gábor Bethlen

As early as the spring of 1614 the prince made a proposal at the General Assembly in the town of Medgyes (Mediasch in German, today Mediaș in Romania) on the construction of the castle of Gyulafehérvár.⁶ The positive response of the estates, who offered one florin and one day-labourer per gate and one wagon with four oxen for every five gates for the building of the princely seat,⁷ may have been prompted by the response that the Saxon community gave to the proposal: “as regards the construction of Gyulafehérvár, we wish to shoulder a third of it, though we have suffered great losses, but only if the two nations undertake the construction work.”⁸

Only some of the resolutions were implemented, and when the question of the public work came up again at the assembly in Gyulafehérvár in the spring of 1615, the sixth article of the new decrees indicated that it was precisely the Saxons who had not honored the commitment they had made a year earlier. The estates decided that they should make up for the missing public work, while, on account

5 Sándor Szilágyi, ed., *Erdélyi országgyűlési emlékek* (henceforth *EOE*), vol. 6/21 (Budapest: MTA, 1875–1898), 389–91, January 9–13, 1614. (Nagyszeben).

6 Gate = a unit for the collection of taxes, the aggregate of the serf families living on a plot of land behind one gate. *EOE*, vol. 7, 406, art. 6: “Fejvár lévén ennek utána az fejedelemnek lakóhelye és metropolisa, annak építésére és megerősítésére valóban egy értelemből viselnénk gondot...” [“Gyulafehérvár being after this the residence and town of the prince, we understandably will see to its construction and fortification.”]

7 *Ibid.*, 414–15, art. 7.

8 *Ibid.*, 410.

of political situation, they postponed the affair to the autumn,⁹ and in October at the assembly in Kolozsvár (Klausenburg in German, today Cluj in Romania) they did adopt the resolution regarding new support for the construction.¹⁰ The work was further delayed the following spring because of the complications involving the transfer of the castle of Lippa (today Lipova in Romania). In accordance with the resolutions of the two General Assemblies held in 1616, the public work first of Zaránd county and later of all the counties, which originally had been intended for use in the construction work in Gyulafehérvár, were redirected to reinforce Borosjenő (today Ineu in Romania), which had assumed the defensive role of the castle in Lippa.¹¹ Thus as was the case in Nagyvárad (Großwardein in German, today Oradea in Romania), the prince was only able to begin work on the construction project in the spring of 1618, still relying on the resolution of 1616, as mandates addressed to the councils of Kolozsvár and Beszterce (Bistritz in German, today Bistrița in Romania) indicate.¹² At the General Assembly held in the autumn of 1618 in Kolozsvár a resolution was again passed regarding the “construction in Gyulafehérvár” and a pledge was made to begin work by the spring of 1619.¹³ Data from 1619 suggest that the work had progressed significantly, if perhaps with some delays.¹⁴ The lines of a panegyric composed in December 1619 by Pál Háportoni Forró describe the prevailing circumstances before the first military campaign into Northern Hungary: “Over the past summer in the princes’ residence, Gyulafehérvár, something wondrous, having started building reinforcements for two large bastions, with these large defensive bastions in many places at the same time and all simultaneously they built with such diligence that it seemed to grow not by the work of hands, but on its own.”¹⁵

9 Ibid., 249.

10 Ibid., 277, art. 4.

11 Ibid., 325, 386. April 17 – May 7, 1616. National Assembly, Gyulafehérvár, art. 13, and October 9 – November 7, 1616. National Assembly, Segesvár, art. 4.

12 Archives of the Town of Beszterce in Arhivele Naționale ale României, Direcția Județeană Cluj (henceforth: AB), 49. May 21, 1618, Várad. The postscript from Gábor Bethlen’s letter to the magistrate of Beszterce; Arhivele Naționale ale României, Direcția Județeană Cluj (henceforth ANRC), accounts k. 14b, fasc. XXI, 91, May 21, 1618 – June 18, 1618; *ibid.*, fasc. XVIII, 137, July 13, 1618.

13 *EOE*, vol. 7, 490, art. 6.

14 ANRC, Fasc. III, 227, August 5, 1619. Gyulafehérvár. Gábor Bethlen to Imre Gellyén, chief magistrate of Kolozsvár; ANRC, Accounts k. 15a, fasc. XI, 187, August 6, 1619; ANRC, Fasc. III, 245, August 12, 1619. Gyulafehérvár. Simon Pécsi, on the instructions of Bethlen Gábor, to the Kolozsvár council.

15 “*Debreecenben, Karácson havának 18. napján, 1619. esztendőben,*” Pál Háportoni Forró’s recommendatory letter to the translation of Quintus Curtius, in *Bethlen Gábor emlékezete*, ed. László Makkai (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1980), 587.

The construction work in the town lost considerable momentum at the time of the military campaign into Northern Hungary (1619–1621). At the General Assembly in Gyulafehérvár in 1620 the issue of the bastions was again on the agenda and the estates decided at the time to continue the construction work, “that we not be seen as having left our work half-completed in the case of such a grand and good, praiseworthy issue.”¹⁶ As is made clear by decisions reached in May 1622 regarding the completion of the communal work and its yearly accomplishments, construction continued the following year, in spite of the fact that the National Assembly requested a temporary suspension of the work on account of the increased tax to be paid to the Porte.¹⁷ This decision settled the question of the construction work until the end of the prince’s reign.¹⁸ Records that can be dated to 1623 indicate that the Chapel of Saint Nicholas, which was not far from the southwest corner of the castle, was demolished by then, as was part of the old castle wall.¹⁹ The *Chronicon Fuchsio–Lupino–Oltardinum*, a source written in Saxon that is sprinkled with numerous details (which given the contemporary nature of the source are in all likelihood authentic), reports on the construction of the two bastions.²⁰ Under the year 1627 a passage that was written not long after 1629 summarizing the virtues of the prince gives an account of the events in Gyulafehérvár. This section contains lifelike descriptions that could not be familiar either to the nineteenth-century editor Joseph Trausch or to the authors of the texts on which he drew. They make it possible for us to understand the essence of the 1614 decision of the Diet, namely that the prince assumed responsibility for the task of building the southwest corner bastion (which contained his palace) and the Saxons undertook to build the southeast bastion, known as Kendervár, which surrounded the foundry where canons would be cast. The construction of the two northern bastions of the castle was made the task of the counties and the seats of the Székely Land.

The prince did a “laudable” job discharging his responsibility, as did the Saxons, who in 1627 left a monument to the task they had performed, a composition consisting of an inscription and a suit of coats of arms on the

16 *EOE*, vol. 7, 541, art. 6.

17 *Ibid.*, 555. April 24–29, 1621, (Gyulafehérvár): art. 1.

18 *EOE*, vol. 8, 96, art. 5.

19 András Kovács, “Humanista epigráfusok adalékai Gyulafehérvár közép- és korajútkori helyrajzához,” in István Szamosközy, *Analecta Lapidum. 1593. Inscriptiones romanae. 1598*, ed. Bálint Keserű (Szeged: Scriptum, 1992), 31.

20 Josephus Trausch, *Chronicon Fuchsio–Lupino–Oltardinum sive annales hungarici et transilvanici*, vol. 1 (Coronae: Gött, 1847), 309–10.

Kendervár bastion. The authenticity of the records is confirmed by the description of the shields in the coats of arms and by the names: Valentinus Laurentii alias Pfaff (a senator from Szeben and the foreman who oversaw the construction of the bastion), Michael Lutsch (the royal judge of Nagyszeben), and Colomann Gotzmeister (the Saxon count). The coats of arms allude to a seal²¹ used at the Saxon University as early as 1372 and even after 1659, with the significant difference that according to the description, quite possibly at the whim or even involuntary reflex of the nineteenth-century editor, the eagle, which looked to the right and thus was a symbol of Louis I of the House of Anjou (king of Hungary from 1342 to 1382) as king of Poland (from 1370 to 1382), was modified to form an Aquila Biceps, the two-headed eagle who looks both left and right. Also the crown above the composition was omitted, probably from the original as well. After 1714 these adornments were demolished and therefore were no longer available for view.

Also underpinning the authenticity of our source is the anecdote cited, whose explicitly Saxon point of view, the keen censure of the county nobility, and the emphasis on the financial burdens shouldered by the Saxon community all seem to stem from a contemporary experience. The anecdote also sheds light on the resolutions of the General Assembly regarding the project: the prince and the three nations had agreed to make additions and fortifications to the castle, but the resolutions had not addressed the construction of palace at the expense of the prince or the reconstruction of the towers of the cathedral, which was also launched at the initiative of Gábor Bethlen. The coats of arms on the bastion built by the Saxon nation and the content of the inscription demonstrate that this was indeed a shared undertaking. The skilled workers (masons, brick-makers, people who worked the lime-kilns and carpenters) were paid out of the financial contributions and the wains and unskilled workers worked under their oversight.²²

As skilled craftsmen could usually only be found in the towns where the guilds were located, their participation in the construction project hit the

21 Sigismund Jakó, “Sigilografia cu referire la Transilvania (Pînă la sfîrșitul secolului al XV-lea),” in *Documente privind istoria Romîniei. Introducere*, vol. 2 ([Bukarest]: Editura Academiei, 1956), 606–7.

22 The equal division of the work of the construction in Gyulafehérvár between the nations of Transylvania resembles—almost hauntingly—a plan that to this day has not been given the praise it deserves. The plan began to take form towards the end of the reign of János Zsigmond at the National Assembly in January 1571. It was left unfinished because of the prince’s death. The “enclosure” around Szászsebes, which needed to be modernized, was divided into four parts between the estates and the prince. See *EOE*, vol. 2, 375–77. The construction in Gyulafehérvár mentioned in the third footnote may have

communities in which they lived hard. The loss of time that came with travel and poor organization, and the limited payment in the 1620s, hardly made the work attractive to them, although it was included as an obligation in their charters of incorporation and was considered one of their obligations to the prince. This explains the desertions and the “ruses” mentioned in letters by the prince and Simon Pécsi. The prince was able to build his own bastion, as was the Saxon nation, but there was hardly any workforce with which to construct the bastions of the counties and the Székely seats. Much of the edifices, which resemble the bastions in Várad, still stand today. They were incorporated into the eighteenth-century ring of fortifications, thus allowing us to draw approximate conclusions regarding the extent of the construction efforts. The face of the western (“prince’s”) bastion, which is between the two bastions that were added to the southern corners of the 340×340 meter square of the former Roman castle, is 119.5 meters high. It is joined to the castle wall by a 21 meter gorge with casemate. A 76 meter long part of the face of the partially destroyed Saxon bastion on the eastern corner is still standing today.

At the same time, the distance between the two southern bastions, roughly 435 meters, indicates that on the southern side a third of the curtain wall was covered by the bastions, so the firepower of the castle grew dramatically. The mantle of the bastions, which were edged with ashlar, were built of brick, except for a strip in the middle third of the prince’s bastion, which was built of blocks of unhewn stone. The beveled base of the bastions were separated from the upper band of the wall face by a semicircular string-course built of brick. The bastions were only later filled with pebbles and dirt, probably during the reign of György Rákóczi (who ruled from 1630 to 1648). The princess Zsuzsanna Lorántffy’s hanging garden was made at that time in the southwest bastion.²³ The flora and structure changed with the fashions in gardening, but to this day it still retains something of its spirit of a bygone age, with its winding paths and their Roman inscriptions and its quiet nooks, which invite one to meditate and reflect.

The next step in the project, however, the complete construction of the defensive ring, was not continued under Gábor Bethlen, and one finds

been a kind of precursor to the construction in the seventeenth century. If this were to prove to be the case, it would illustrate the continuity of the same attempts to address similar tasks and the deep roots of these efforts, which may have stretched back to the Middle Ages.

23 *Szalárdi János. Siralmas magyar krónikája*, prepared for publication by Ferenc Szakály (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1980), 300–1.



Figure 1. The Fortifications of the Castle of Gyulafehérvár. 1687. Sketch by an Italian Military Engineer. Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Magyar Történelmi Képcsarnok. T. 8913.

no reference to it in later sources either.²⁴ In spite of the fact that in other places György I. Rákóczi sedulously continued the work of building castles begun by his predecessor, no further fortifications were made to the town of Gyulafehérvár. We can do little more than venture tentative hypotheses as to the underlying reasons. The aforementioned difficulty of procuring the necessary skilled craftsmen might well have been one significant factor, but one might also consider the possibility that in the meantime the builders themselves had noticed, perhaps with some astonishment, the indefensibility of the castle, the inadequacy of its corner fortifications, and the vulnerability of the walls—which were surrounded by little more than dry ditches—to mines, and their observations would have been all the more keen given the growth in the role of artillery at the time.²⁵

This explanation for the dwindling interest in the fortifications of Gyulafehérvár is also supported by indirect observations. The resolutions of the General Assemblies make clear that the estates made financial contributions in order to meet their obligations with regards to support for the construction instead of actually contributing to the workforce.²⁶ In all certainty György Rákóczi did not use these sums to compensate for the work left undone by sending the tenants from his estates, thus one can conclude that the construction of the castle was simply not resumed. Instead of continuing work on the Gyulafehérvár castle, the prince had to search for other solutions in the event of an attack against him and his court.²⁷ The castle of the town of Fogaras (in German Fugreschmarkt, today Făgăraș in Romania), which belonged to the princess, seemed the perfect place to take refuge. It had wide moats and as of the end of the late sixteenth century an external ring of defensive fortifications with four bastions, three of which had been built between 1619 and 1626 and perfected during the reign of György I Rákóczi. What is more, in 1638 in a

24 Ibid., 96.

25 It is worth noting that even one-hundred years later the newly built complex ring of fortifications would only have been considered defensible from the south if it had also been possible to fortify the nearby Akasztófa (Gallows) Hill with a crown of ramparts. The plan remained unfinished because the castle lost its strategic importance. One notes in the case of the construction projects of György I. Rákóczi along the Görgény River and in the settlement of Déva that the increasing effectiveness of canons made it necessary to extend the defensive belt. See Szalárdi, *Siralmas magyar krónikája*, 295.

26 *EOE*, vol. 9, 138: 1638; 218–19, 219–20: 1639; 278: 1640; 311–12: 1641; 327: 1642; 365–66: 1643.

27 At the time of the attack of István Bethlen in 1636 the prince sent his family to the border fortress of Nagyvárád, which seemed like a safe place of refuge. True, the unflagging loyalty of Mihály Ibrányi, the commander of Nagyvárád, also played a role in his decision, as did the proximity of Sárospatak, the center of his estates.

profession of allegiance to György I. Rákóczi the people of Szeben pledged to allow the prince and his escort entry into the well-fortified town “in a time of need.”²⁸ This pledge constituted a recognition of the fact that, considering the prevailing circumstances in Transylvania in the middle of the seventeenth century, Gyulafehérvár could not be effectively defended from potential threats. It is therefore hardly surprising that a “Lusthaus” was built to fill the southwest bastion and the castle walls that formed the southern front of the prince’s palace contain a row of Renaissance windows, indicating that by the late years of the reign of Gábor Bethlen, who had initiated the transformation of the structure, any thought of preparing the castle to endure a serious siege had been abandoned. Parallel to the fortification of the castle of Gyulafehérvár, work also began on projects to beautify the seat of the principality. Under his rule, which lasted barely fifteen years, a two-storied block consisting of three courtyards began to take form in the southwest corner of the castle the floor plan of which was 195×69 meters. It was intended to fulfill a symbolic function as a representation of the ruling house and an example for all of the construction work taking place across Transylvania of new technical and ornamental innovations. In the early years of the prince’s rule, parallel to work done on the palace in order to make it a livable dwelling place, the cathedral, which had been badly damaged in the upheavals of the turn of the century, was restored and later continuously embellished and beautified.

The revivification of the town as the seat of the principality constituted a more difficult task. The sieges, the abuses of the military administration, the flight that took place in 1603, the absence of the prince’s court (which was the foundation of the economy of the town) for a prolonged period of time doomed the people of the town to a state of stagnation or prompted them to leave and seek their fortunes elsewhere. In January 1614 the prince saw to it that Gyulafehérvár regain its privileges (which it had lost in the course of the wars), and he granted the people of the town exemption from taxation.²⁹ The letter of privilege that was issued in 1625 helped populate and revive the town. With this letter, Gábor Bethlen exempted his subjects in Gyulafehérvár from taxation and service, with the exception of the construction of Kendervár, the cultivation of

28 *EOE*, vol. 9, 150, art. 4: May 7, 1638.

29 In January 1614 the prince renewed and strengthened the privileges that the town had lost during the time of wars. He also took measures concerning the use of arable land, the mill, and the market duties. See Ágoston Ötvös, “Közlemények a gyulafehérvári városi tanács Vörös Könyvéből,” *Dejtiné* 2 (1859): 270, XI and XIII.

the prince's garden, and maintenance of the Gálffy house (which was used to receive foreign emissaries) and the water-supply network, which was still under construction. The letter of privilege also enabled new arrivals to the town, regardless of their origins, to purchase any vacant lot at the appraisal value if they undertook to build on it.³⁰ The new water-supply network, the construction of which had begun in the 1620s, also helped further the reconstruction of the castle and the town. By the end of the prince's rule the network reached the wells in front of his palace,³¹ and in the following decade the water that came from the springs in the western vineyard, which flowed into the town through underground tile pipes four kilometers long, was fed into the palace, the hanging garden in the southwest bastion, and the prince's garden along the southern side of the castle.³²

In the last years of Gábor Bethlen's rule the area around the palace (which in the meantime had grown) and the town behind the castle walls were also renovated and restored. Ever since the era of the Báthory family it had been customary for the counties, towns, and county seats within the borders of the principality to procure housing in the town for the representatives they sent to Gyulafehérvár. According to the earliest relevant sources, the towns of Szeben,³³ Brassó³⁴ (Kronstadt in German, today Braşov in Romania), and Kolozsvár³⁵ all had houses in Gyulafehérvár.³⁶ Later sources dating from the end of the

30 August 19, 1625. Károly Veszely, "Képek Gyulafehérvár múltjából," *Az Alsófehérmegyei Történelmi, Régészeti és Természettudományi Társulat Évkönyve* 6 (1894): 40–41.

31 Szalárdi, *Síralmas magyar krónikája*, 96.

32 Cserni Béla, "A Bethlen Gábor-féle vízvezeték Gyulafehérvárt," *Az Alsófehérmegyei Történelmi, Régészeti és Természettudományi Társulat Évkönyve* 11 (1908): 53–61; Gheorghe Anghel, "Date noi în legătură cu apeductele medievale de la Alba Iulia," *Sargetia* 5 (1968): 155–63. The water-supply network was linked to the palace between 1636 and 1639 with the assistance of János Csorgós from Hungary: ANRC, Accounts, k. 21a, fasc. II, 487: January 2, 1636. and AB, 87: May 14, 1639. In 1640 one spout worked in the princess' quarters. See Sándor Szilágyi, *A két Rákóczi György fejedelem családi levelezése* (Budapest: MTA, 1875), 62. Giovanni Fontanici of Venice supposedly built fountains in Gyulafehérvár sometime before 1655. See Andrei Kovács and Mircea Țoca, "Arhitecți italieni în Transilvania în cursul secolelor al XVI-lea și al XVII-lea," *Studia Universitatis "Babeş-Bolyai," Series Historica* 18 (1973): 32–33.

33 Andrei Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești*, vol. 2 (Bukarest: Cartea Romaneasca, 1930), 246–47; Balogh, *Kolozsvári kéifaragó műhelyek*, 292, 379.

34 Gernot Nussbächer, "Contribuții documentare privind dezvoltarea arhitectonică a oraşului Alba Iulia în secolul al XVII-lea," *Apulum* 20 (1982): 185–92.

35 The contract was drawn up on September 18, 1591: ANRC, fasc. IV, 101–2. They received their letters patent from Zsigmond Rákóczi on May 12, 1607.

36 The assessment of taxes that was prepared on October 26, 1698 following the fall of the principedom only lists buildings that were inhabited by taxpayers. Within the castle walls, the houses belonging to the cities of Kolozsvár, Nagyszeben, Brassó, Medgyes and Szászsebes were listed. The houses that were listed

seventeenth century indicate that in practice every municipality had a house in the seat of the principality. These buildings varied significantly. Alongside the prestigious houses found within the castle walls there were more modest houses in the outskirts that were used solely as lodgings for emissaries to the General Assemblies, who came to address questions that had arisen at the court. In the last years of the prince's rule the owners of these houses and their households were obligated by a decree of the General Assembly to rebuild their homes and to replace the wood tiles of the roofs with earthenware tiles in order to prevent the spread of fire.³⁷

The work began, as we can conclude on the basis of information pertaining to the Kolozsvár house,³⁸ though in all likelihood not all of the buildings were completed by the new target date, the autumn of 1629.³⁹ The prince had another, more ambitious plan for the town as well, though one finds only one modest (but all the more valuable) reference to it in the sources. In the middle of September 1627 György Sükösd, the builder of the manor house in Alsórákos (Ratsch in German, today Racoș in Romania) sent a letter to the magistrate and council of Beszterce regarding the town's house in Gyulafehérvár. The letter indicates that in the early fall the prince himself had attempted to transform the town according to his own visions.⁴⁰ He had designated sites where each of the counties, towns, and "other posts" would build houses for their emissaries to the town, without, however, giving any consideration to the question of who owned the houses that already existed. According to the letter he also ordered the servants of his court to purchase the houses in the street in which the house for the town of Beszterce was found at appraisal value, regardless of their location or distinctive features or the demands of the market, i.e. for much less than the

but fell outside the town walls include: in Saint Mihály street the house owned by Nagyenyed, in Tövis street the house owned by Csíkszék, in Kis Lippa street the house owned by Marosszék and Csíkszék, in Nagy Lippa street the house owned by the "Lugosi gentlemen," in Boldog Asszony street the house owned by Udvarhelyszék, in Sárdi street the house owned by Doboka county, in Temető street the house owned by Újgyházszék, in Vinci street the house owned by Aranyosszék, Kézdivásárhely and Szászváros, in Nagy Téglá street the house owned by Debrecen. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, Erdélyi Kormányhatósági Levéltárak [National Archives of Hungary, Archives of the National Governmental Authorities of Transylvania], F 49 Archivum Gubernii Transilvanici (in Politicis) no. 577/1698.

37 *EOE*, vol. 8, 369. The National Assembly held in Gyulafehérvár on April 4–10, 1627, art. 3.

38 *EOE*, vol. 8, 375: March 3, 1629: ANRC Accounts k. 18a, fasc. II, 568; March 9, 1629: *ibid.*, 570; November 10, 1629: *ibid.*, 647; February 24, 1630: *ibid.*, fac. VII, 307; February 8, 1630: *ibid.*, 269; February 9, 1630: *ibid.*, 271.

39 *EOE*, vol. 8, 494. The National Assembly held on April 8–24, 1629, art. 2.

40 AB 141, September 15, 1627. György Sükösd's letter to the chief magistrate of Beszterce.

actual value of the buildings and the plots of land. The author of the letter asked the council to allow him to purchase the house that was in the possession of the town of Beszterce.

What is surprising about the letter is not that Sükösd wanted to obtain permission to purchase the Beszterce house, but rather that the prince hoped to take advantage of a decades-old tradition of purchasing homes in order to transform the town of Gyulafehérvár, and he sought to do so in the spirit of the early representatives of Renaissance attitudes to architecture and the visions of Utopian thinkers regarding social engineering by separating topographically, within the town, the political representatives of the estates, counties and towns. There is no trace in the letter of any kind of solidarity among the estates. The author seeks simply to obtain more comfortable lodgings in the town by presenting himself as a supporter of the prince's will.

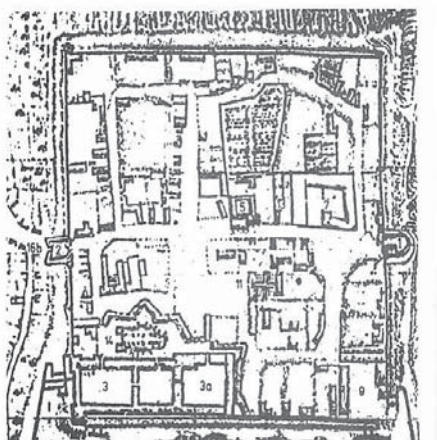


Figure 2. The castle of Gyulafehérvár and its surroundings in 1711. On the basis of a detail from the survey by Giovanni Morando Visconti.

1. Saint George's Gate. 2. Saint Michael's Gate. 3. Prince's palace. 3.a Deanery, later the stables of the prince's palace. 5. Jesuit church and cloister (small college). 7. The Collegium Academicum. 9. Kendervár–Armamentarium. 11. The Gálffy House (?). 13. The Gyulaffy House. 14. Saint Michael's Cathedral. 15. Marketplace. 16. Church of the Blessed Virgin (in 1711 it was still the Church of Saint Michael. 16.b Saint Nicholas Street.

The prince's vision for the town was an impossible Utopia. Not surprisingly, the owners protested against his plans to dispossess them and turn over buildings they had owned and maintained for years as representative edifices, in particular

the towns that stood to lose their houses. Nonetheless the plan itself clearly fits into the series of measures described above, measures that were undertaken by the prince with the intention of transforming Gyulafehérvár into a genuine capital. It offers a sense of the bustle and haste that were characteristic of the last years of his rule. One discerns no trace whatsoever of his attempt in the 1711 drawing by Visconti, which essentially depicts the town much as it stood in 1658, after the changes that had been made under the rule of Gábor Bethlen. Szász street (which was also known as Szeben street), where the town of Beszterce purchased a house in 1624 for 110 florins (the very house György Sükösd had hoped to acquire), was probably the street that ran between the college and the eastern castle wall, continuing from there along the northern wall of the castle, the street in which the house purchased by the town of Beszterce in 1624 was found, in a prestigious neighborhood, near the home of scribe András Tordai and the houses owned by Segesvár (Schäßburg in German, today Sighișoara in Romanian), Medgyes, Brassó, and Szeben.⁴¹

The plan for the edifice of the “upright” college also fits, both chronologically and from the perspective of its ambitiousness, into the prince’s plans to transform the town. This plan began to take form at the same time as the abovementioned initiatives, i.e. 1627–1628. In the spring of 1622 the General Assembly decided on the construction of the college. The site was to be the buildings—which lay in ruins—of the Franciscan and later Jesuit cloister in Farkas street in Koložsvár. However, this resolution notwithstanding, the college began to function that year in Gyulafehérvár in the former Jesuit cloister and school⁴² that had been used decades earlier, in all likelihood as a gift of Gábor Báthory, by the Calvinist school, which had been given the title of college by the Jesuit priest István Szini. In response to the changes that took place after 1622 (primarily in 1623) following the departure of Martin Opitz and his adherents, in the fall of 1624 István Szini may have told his superiors that Gábor Bethlen was building something in Gyulafehérvár similar to what had been destroyed by Tilly in 1622: “Heidelbergensem Academiam hic erigere conatur, accersitis undique professoribus, inter quos est Molnar et Gallus quidam Rupensis professor.”⁴³

41 AB 14, February 17, 1624.

42 I will dispense with listing the rich secondary literature on the beginnings of the Collegium Academicum of Gyulafehérvár. On my ideas regarding the materials of the building and the sources on which these ideas are based see András Kovács, “Colegiul Academic de la Alba Iulia,” *Ars Transilvaniae* 4 (1994): 35–47.

43 The reports of István Szini: *Erdélyi és bódoltságai jezsuita missziók*, vol. 1/2, 1617–1625, ed. Mihály Balázs et al. (Szeged: József Attila Tudományegyetem, 1990), no. 163, 267; no. 189, 307–8; no. 314, 433. On the possible gift of Gábor Báthory see footnote 49.

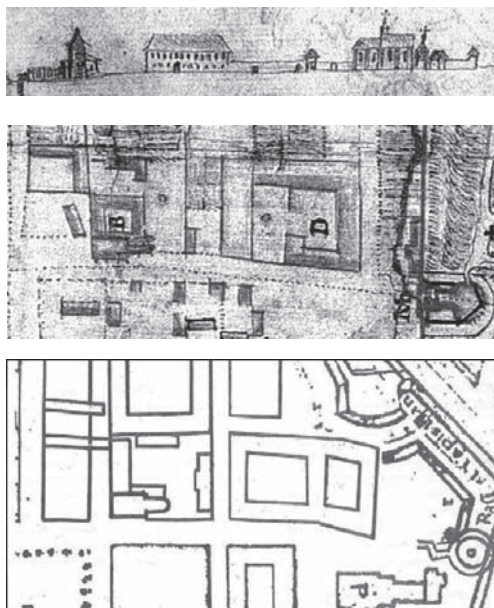


Figure 3. The Collegium Academicum

1. A sketch of the Jesuit Church, the façade of the “upright” college, and the Saint George’s Gate in 1711 in the survey by Giovanni Morando Visconti. 2. The floor plan of the Jesuit church, the cloister, the “upright” college and Saint George’s Gate in 1711. 3. The Jesuit Church, the college, and the remains of the barbican in front of Saint George’s Gate (which was turned into a gunpowder mill) in 1736 in the survey by Conrad von Weiss.

The prince’s plans, however, were realized only very slowly. This is indicated, for instance, by the failure of the plans to invite Albert Szenczi Molnár, which corroborates Szini’s contentions.⁴⁴ The turn came in 1627–1628, when at the command of the prince the construction of the new college began. According to the Saxon source cited earlier, while the craftsmen and artisans were at work on the construction project, the prince sent Gáspár Bojthi Veres to Germany to bring professors to the college. He returned from this “fact finding” trip, from the German village of Herborn, in December 1628 and recommended Alstedt, Bisterfeld and Piscator to the prince. In May 1629 he traveled back to Germany with letters of invitation from the prince, and the younger and more mobile Bisterfeld returned with him to Transylvania in August.

44 János Herepei, “Adatok Szenczi Molnár Albert életéhez. Az 1624. esztendei útról,” in *Adattár XVII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez*, vol. 1, ed. Bálint Keserű (Budapest–Szeged: Szegedi József Attila Tudományegyetem Magyar Irodalomtörténeti Intézet, 1965), 11–13.

In the meantime work on the college had progressed, and according to our source by the time of the death of the prince roughly a third of it had been completed.⁴⁵ As is the case with the previous citation, this contention is retrospective, and in later rewritings and variants the history of the college included events of the eighteenth century as well, but the source offers a precise account of the information that is relevant here, namely the travels of Gáspár Bojthi Veres, as is evident if one compares it with other sources.⁴⁶ The return of the court historian to Segesvár with “certain Calvinist books” again appears to be based on personal experience, so the information regarding the dimensions and unfinished state of the construction seems credible, and it is confirmed by József Benkő’s *Transylvania specialis*, written entirely independently of the source mentioned here.⁴⁷

Two texts that were only recently discovered and have not yet been consulted with regards to the history of the college offer further significant information. Both of them date from 1716 and both are the work of András Zilahi, a professor at the college who was writing on the history of the school, the legal status of the disputed properties of the Church in Gyulafehérvár, and the status of the Calvinist Church in general.⁴⁸ Writing on the college,⁴⁹ he contends that the Jesuit college, which had been in the possession of the Calvinist Church until 1702 and had provided lodgings for “private” students from Gyulafehérvár whose board was paid for out of tax revenues, might have been given to the school by Gábor Báthory. The college, he claims, was built by the prince himself on his own hereditary noble plot.⁵⁰ Work was begun on the

45 Trausch, *Chronicon*, 310–11.

46 Kovács, *Colegiul*. See footnote 13.

47 Josephus Benkő, *Pars posterior sive specialis Magni Principatus Transylvaniae cognitio*, vol. 1, 69–70. Egyetemi Könyvtár [University Library] (Cluj-Napoca), Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület Könyvtára [Library of the Transylvanian Museum Society], Mss 217. See Kovács, *Colegiul*, footnote 44/25.

48 Akadémiai Könyvtár [Library of the Academy] (Kolozsvár), Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Levéltára [Archives of the Transylvanian National Museum], Collection of Sámuel Kemény: Chartophylatium Transsilvanicum, Mss 3/X. (Religiosa), a composition of professor András Zilahi from before February 28, 1716: *Declaratio collegii et templi Albensis*; Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Központi Gyűjtőlevéltára [Central Archives of the Transylvanian Calvinist Diocese], Az Erdélyi Református Főkonzisztórium Levéltára [Archives of the Transylvanian Calvinist Consistory] 5/1716, February 28, 1716. Letter of András Zilahi to András Szentkereszti. Professor Zsigmond Jakó called my attention to the first and archivist Gábor Sipos to the latter.

49 Letter of András Zilahi, *ibid*.

50 In 1596 one of the neighbors of the house of Mihály and Gábor Lenchés built by Brassó mentioned “*domus orphanorum magnifici quondam Volfgangi Bethlen de Iktár*” in Szász street. See Nussbächer, *Contribuții documentare*, 185.

unfinished wing of the building in the middle of the courtyard on the model of the German academies to serve as an auditorium, hostel, classroom, and a library. The other source reveals that there were some thirty rooms in the eastern and southern wings of the eastern courtyard (including the rooms on the upper floor, of which the author of the letter makes no specific mention). One can discern these rooms, with their more antiquated vaulting, in the floor plan of the ground floor today, thus the division of the space has not changed much with the passage of time. The cross-wing (the base of which can be seen in the floor plans dating from 1711), which divides the two irregular courtyards, was not destroyed in the catastrophe of 1658–1661. On the contrary it had not even been built. It was intended to house the building's lecture rooms and library, which in the end were built on the ground floor of the southern wing.

A later change, as a consequence of the transformation of the building of the college into barracks, the four almost symmetrically arranged gateways and the 1711 outlines of the courtyard were filled in with the wings that were built or rebuilt before 1736. The arcaded loggia of the western courtyard was cemented to the wall face later, presumably in the second half of the eighteenth century, because its ceiling covers the keystone of the baroque stone frame of the barracks gate. The rows of rooms on the northern side also were built in the course of later transformations, as was the present-day main front, which after the demolition of the Saint George's Gate looks out on the west side onto a new little street. The question of the locations of the two bakeries mentioned in the text still awaits further research, as does the question of the number and location of the cellars, which from the perspective of preliminary architectural structures is of decisive importance. It is quite certain, however, that the outlines of the



Figure 4. The floor plan of the building of the former college in the 1960s.

floor plans of the ensemble of buildings are in concurrence with the outlines on the survey of 1711. Thus the survey offers a credible image of the Collegium Academicum, visions of which Gábor Bethlen and his advisors based on the Heidelberg University destroyed by Tilly.⁵¹

Some of the primary sources on the construction have not yet been found. One could perhaps draw conclusions on the basis of references to the *gratuitus labor* in the resolutions of the 1629 General Assembly, since some of the information available regarding the construction of the college later, under the rule of György I. Rákóczi, includes mention of construction work done as part of a communal project⁵² that was interrupted (and brought to an end) in 1638–1639, when, again in the wake of a decision of the General Assembly, the reconstruction of the Kolozsvár church and school in Farkas street began.

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51 Letter of András Zilahi, see footnote 49.

52 Kovács, *Colegiul*, 42–44.

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