

## DOCUMENTATION OF HUNGARY-RELATED HISTORICAL BUILDINGS IN TURKEY

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*Research into the Ottoman architectural heritage in Hungary is a relatively well-known and thoroughly investigated field. The study and documentation of buildings with Hungarian historical relevance in Turkey is less developed. In addition to the Dining Hall of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II in Tekirdağ, which came into Hungarian ownership an outstanding achievement of 20th-century Hungarian-Turkish diplomatic relations, in recent years numerous other buildings have been subject to thorough research and documentation as part of international projects and university survey workshops. This paper deals with the historical background of the latest programs and gives a detailed survey of the historical building of Transylvanian Ambassadors in Istanbul. Following the same methodology, the chapel of the Feriköy Protestant Cemetery in Istanbul and the mansion of Fevzi Beler, one of the so-called ‘Hungarian houses’ in Milas, are also introduced.*

**Keywords:** Turkey, monument survey, documentation, building research, student workshop

### INTRODUCTION – DOCUMENTATION OF BUILDINGS IN TURKEY FROM THE 19TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

In the 2010s, a unique process was launched with the aim of conducting a detailed and accurate survey and documentation of buildings with Hungarian historical connections in Turkey. In the process, university lecturers and students researched three buildings, two of which are located in Istanbul, and one in the town of Milas in the Aegean Region. Typically, the Istanbul edifices used to be inhabited by Hungarians or were surrounded by Hungarian graves; the one in Milas was constructed by Hungarian master builders.

One of the most significant Turkish relics related to Hungarian history is the Dining Hall of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II in Tekirdağ. The prince and his entourage started using it during the so-called “Tulip Era” under the reign of Sultan Ahmed III (1703–1730). Researching building began at the end of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, as a key objective of Hungarian and Ottoman-Turkish diplomatic relations, the house went into Hungarian state property and, after its restoration, was opened as a museum, welcoming visitors to this day (FODOR 2024).

The first Hungarian scientific expedition arrived in Tekirdağ in 1862, when Ferenc Kubinyi, Imre Henszlmann and Arnold Ipolyi went on an official mission in Constantinople to find the Corvinas kept in the city. Henszlmann took this opportunity to prepare drawings of Hungary-related sites (IPOLYI, 1877, 464; SERES, 2006). At the same time, Bertalan Kun sent his drawings to the editorial office of the *Pesti Napló* newspaper, depicting the graves of Rákóczi in the Saint Benoît Chapel, Imre Thököly in Kocaeli, and Jakab Lang in the newly opened Protestant cemetery in Feriköy. Subsequently, the ‘Hungarian pictorial chronicler of Tekirdağ’, Kálmán Beszédes (1839–1893) visited the city, documenting it, its Hungarian monuments and its inhabitants in pencil drawings and, from 1879, publishing articles in the Pest literary daily *Fővárosi Lapok*. In 1892, it was also under the leadership of Beszédes that the Hungarian monuments were renovated (BESZÉDES 1881; HÓVÁRI 2009). This was the first time that an attempt had been made at the on-site restoration of the Hungarian monuments in Tekirdağ. In preparation for a new leather-bound illustrated edition of Kelemen Mikes’s *Letters from Turkey*, in 1904 the artist Aladár Illés Edvi made paintings in Tekirdağ and inspected the condition of the building, summarising his findings in a report (EDVI 1906).

On 25 April 1905, Hungary purchased the interior cladding and furniture of the dining hall, as well as some of the wooden panels of another building known as the Csáky House (BÉRCI 2007, 123). The disman-

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tled wooden and plaster elements were taken to Kassa (Košice). Detailed data on the Tekirdağ dining hall were needed for the building planned in Kassa, so in 1907 István Möller (1860–1934), a professor at the Royal Joseph University of Technology (the present-day Budapest University of Technology and Economics), travelled to Tekirdağ to thoroughly survey it, along with the Csáky House (BÉRCI 2007, 123). The real turning point came in 1927, when the Hungarian state purchased the prince's dining hall. Based on István Möller's plans and led by Imre Gridi-Papp, the restoration took place between 1931 and 1933, and the Rákóczi Museum was opened on 24 October 1933.

In the early 2000s, the National Office for the Protection of Historic Monuments, the Ministry of National Cultural Heritage, the Kuno Klebelsberg Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the Hungarian Embassy in Ankara and the Consulate General in Istanbul – commissioned the Rodosto Foundation to conduct a scientific survey of the buildings considered to be Hungarian houses in Tekirdağ. Based on on-site research and investigation, the project was carried out by Tamás K. Pintér and Zoltán Deák between 1999 and 2002 (K. PINTÉR & DEÁK, 2003, 341) and is currently considered the most recent survey of its kind in Tekirdağ.

Following the operation of the Hungarian Scientific Institute in Constantinople (FODOR, 2021), which was founded in 1916 and operated for only a few years, in 2013 the Hungarian Cultural Center was reopened in Istanbul. In close cooperation with the Embassy in Ankara and the Consulate General in Istanbul, it has always seen the identification, research, documentation, presentation and promotion of Hungarian memorial sites in Turkey as one of its main goals.

In the 2010s, three additional buildings were carefully documented, starting with the historic building of the Transylvanian Ambassadors in Istanbul, followed by the Neogothic chapel in the Feriköy Protestant Cemetery of Istanbul and finally the survey of a residential building in Milas in the Aegean Region, constructed by Hungarian master builders in the early 20th century.

## THE HISTORICAL BUILDING OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN AMBASSADORS IN ISTANBUL

When the central territories of the Kingdom of Hungary came under Ottoman rule in the 16th century, the leaders of the Principality of Transylvania were turned into the Sultan's tax-paying vassals and had to maintain a permanent representative in Constantinople. The Transylvanian Ambassadors, or 'kapitihas', came from the principality and were annually replaced (KÁRMÁN 2008). During the reign of Sultan Suleiman, the Ottomans even provided the Transylvanian Ambassadors with a building within the walls of Constantinople (*Fig. 1*).

The history and location of the building were forgotten for a long time. Its research history compiled by Gábor Fodor (FODOR 2020) reveals that the archivist Imre Karácson played a major role in its identification at the beginning of the 20th century (MIKA 1907, BÍRÓ 1921). The building is located in the Balat district of Istanbul, next to a steep narrow street called Macarlar Yokuşu Hungarians' Slope which offers a beautiful view of the Golden Horn and the Topkapı Palace complex.

In the 2000s, Sándor Papp and Gábor Kármán conducted scientific research based on Ottoman and Transylvanian sources (PAPP & KÁRMÁN 2020). Information on the building's construction history is fragmentary, but we know that it underwent restoration in 1640 and a major reconstruction in 1656, during which terraces were formed on its sloping ground. Previously located in the main building, the stable was now moved to an annex, and an entire floor was set aside for visiting ambassadors and their entourages. In the first decade of the 18th century, the house was used by Thököly's porters, and later by the diplomats of Ferenc Rákóczi II. In 1729, the building was eventually destroyed by a large fire that engulfed the neighbourhood, affecting the neighbouring *mekteb* and the mosque of Molla Aşkı next to it. Although the two buildings were rebuilt at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, by then Transylvania had been under Habsburg rule for a century, therefore there was no need for the ambassadors' building. Therefore, the former complex was abandoned (*Fig. 2*).

On-site research into the building gained new impetus in the 2010s. Following the establishment of the Hungarian Cultural Center in Istanbul, the research and publication of Hungary-related memorial sites in Turkey was started, and in 2019, a complex research project was launched. The project involved lecturers

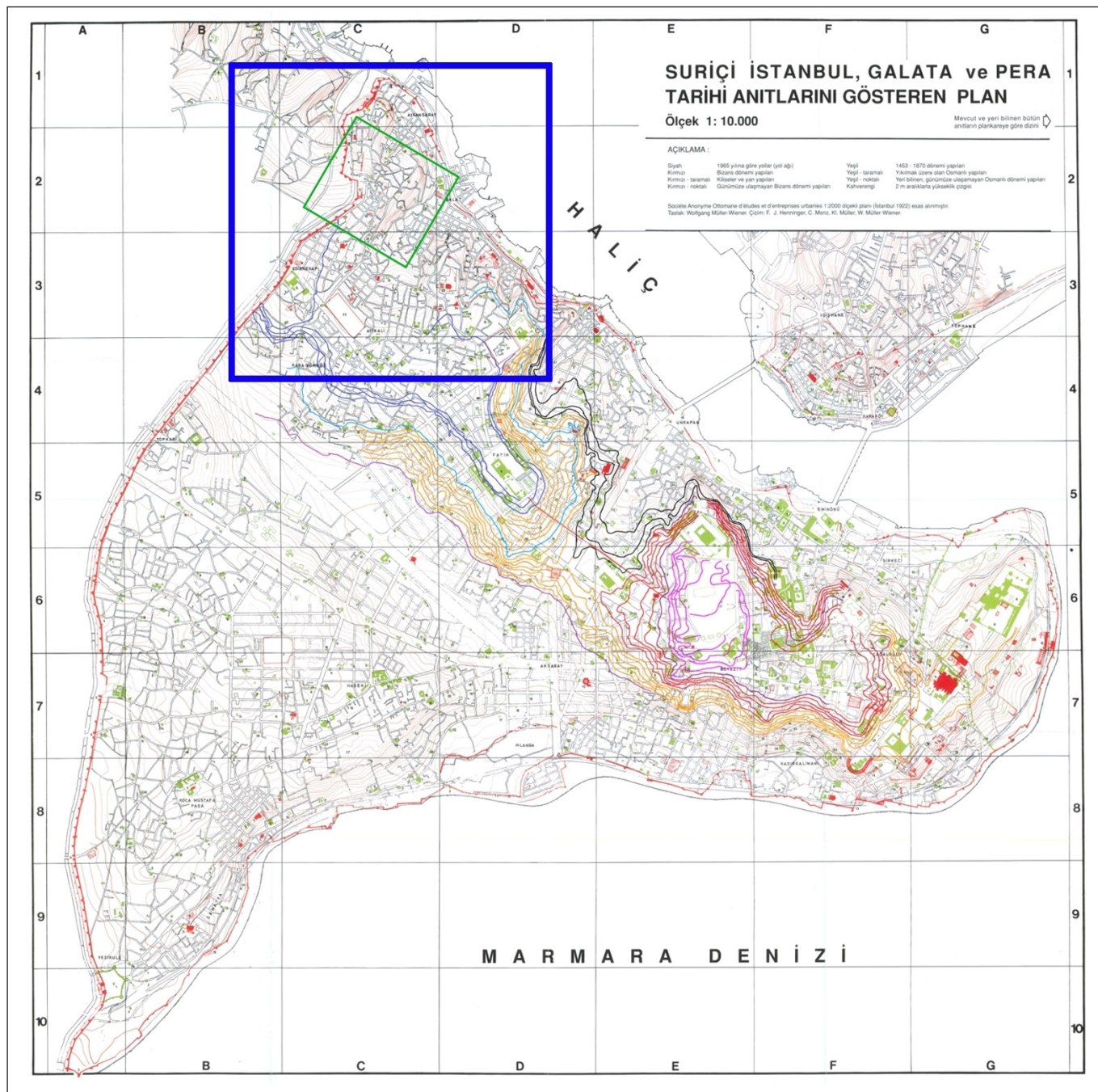


Fig. 1. The Balat and Fener districts (blue frame) and the vicinity of the Transylvanian house (green frame) on the historical peninsula of Istanbul (map source: MÜLLER-WIENER 2001)

and students from the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME) and Yıldız Technical University in Istanbul.<sup>2</sup> The research was conducted with the permission of the current owner, the Directorate of Foundations of the Republic of Turkey (T.C. Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü) with the support of the Presidency of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA).

The first phase of the two-part workshop for building survey, research and heritage took place from 25 September to 1 October 2019, with the aim of the in-situ survey and documentation of the building, under the guidance of Turkish and Hungarian lecturers and attended by Turkish and Hungarian students of architecture. During the program, detailed, hand-drawn, true-to-form survey drawings (manuals) (Figs 3 and 5) and digital survey drawings (Figs 4, 6 and 7) based on point clouds created with a TLS scanner were produced.

<sup>2</sup> For a list of participants, see the acknowledgements.



Fig. 2. The house of the Transylvanian Ambassadors in Istanbul, distant view (Photo: István Pi Tóth)

The second phase of the workshop took place in Budapest in October 2019, where participants continued to process the survey drawings, compared written sources with the documentation, and discussed ideas for the possible use of the building. At the Hungarian Scientific Student Conference, students presented their papers about the information they had gathered about the history of the building, and in 2020, a comprehensive exhibition of the material was held in Istanbul.

The building has undergone numerous alterations over the past centuries, as confirmed by both the current condition of the surveyed wall structure and the available literature introduced above. Based

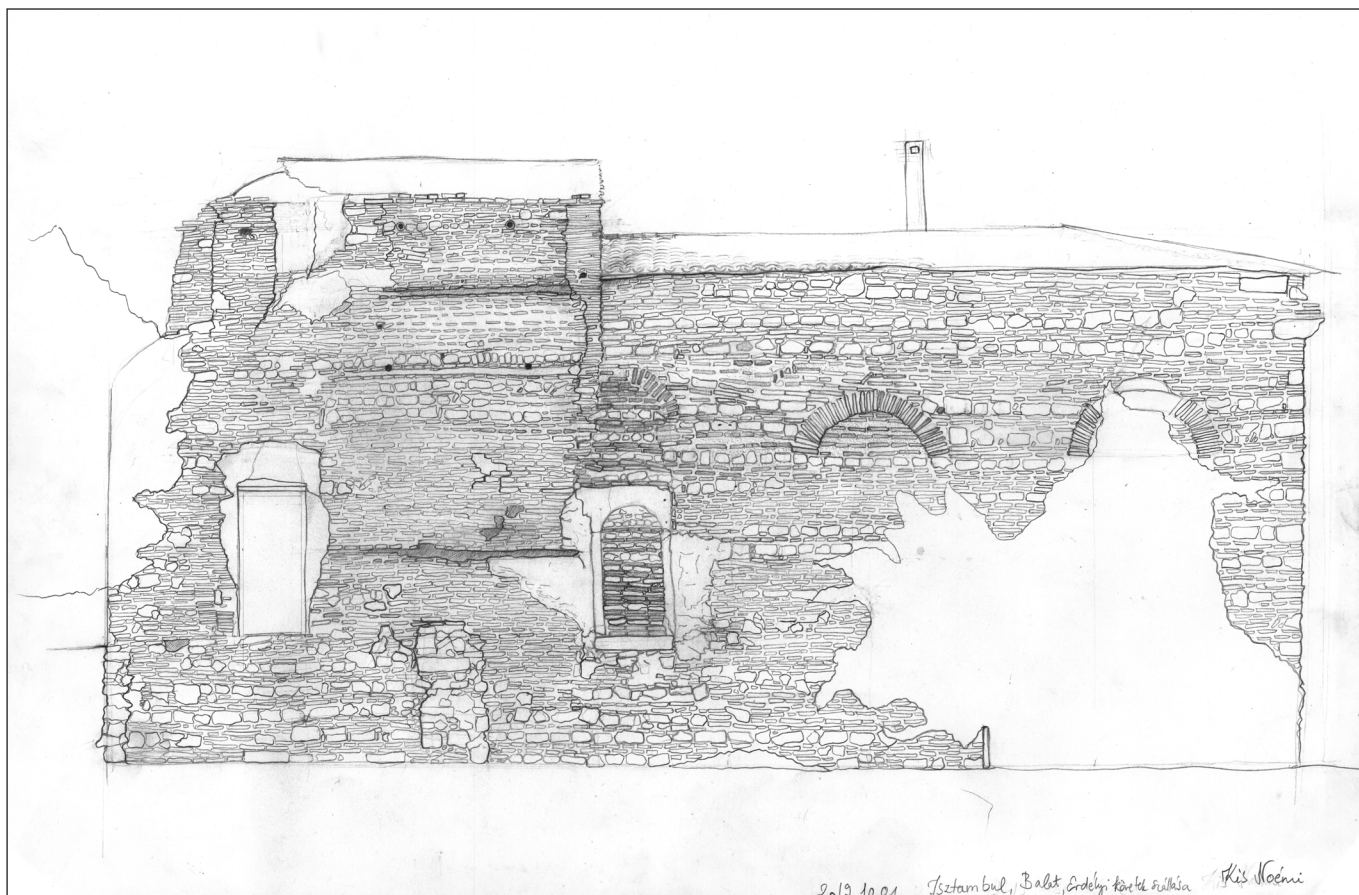


Fig. 3. On-site manual drawing of the south-western façade of the Transylvanian Ambassadors' House (Made by: Noémi Kis, 2019)

on the survey, it was possible to determine the historical function of several interior spaces and to identify traces of the alterations made to the building and its destroyed elements.

Historical analogies of the building have also been investigated. This has revealed that the house is similar to the so-called “*sibyan mektebi*”, i.e., a type of building used as a lower-level educational institution (SAĞDIÇ 2020). Therefore, it seems that Sultan Suleiman provided an existing building to the Transylvanian ambassadors. Shown on the map published by Jacques Pervitich in 1928, the analysis of historical maps has revealed that as late as the early 20th century, behind the current stone building there still was a multi-storey wooden structure, which is no longer visible today (Fig. 8).



Fig. 4. Digital survey drawing of the south-western façade of the Transylvanian Ambassadors' House  
(Made by: Noémi Kis, 2019)

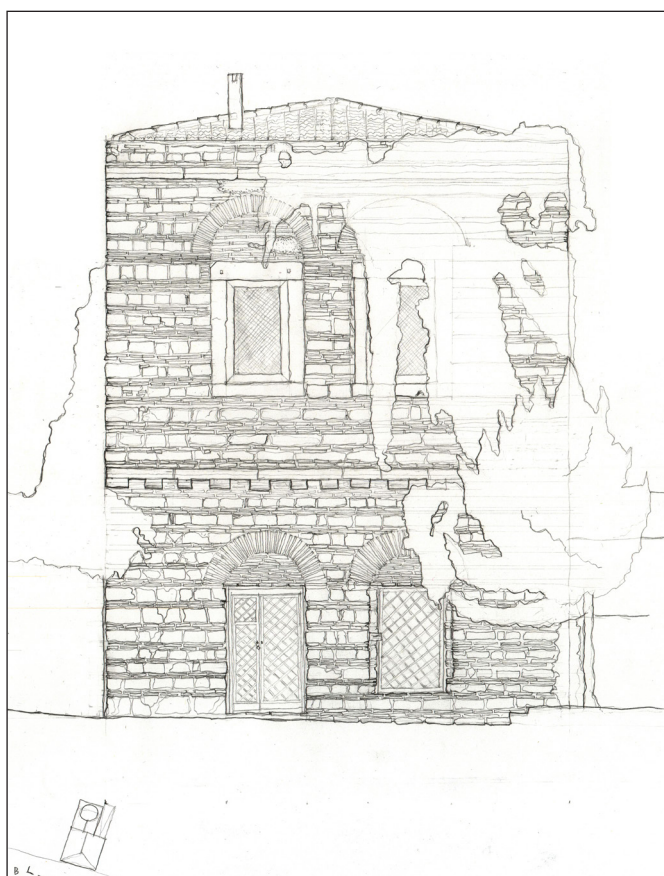


Fig. 5. Manual drawings made on site of the south-eastern façade of the Transylvanian Ambassadors' House  
(Made by: Róbert Kulcsár-Kilyén, 2019)



Fig. 6. Digital survey drawing of the south-eastern façade of the Transylvanian Ambassadors' House  
(Made by: Róbert Kulcsár-Kilyén, 2019)

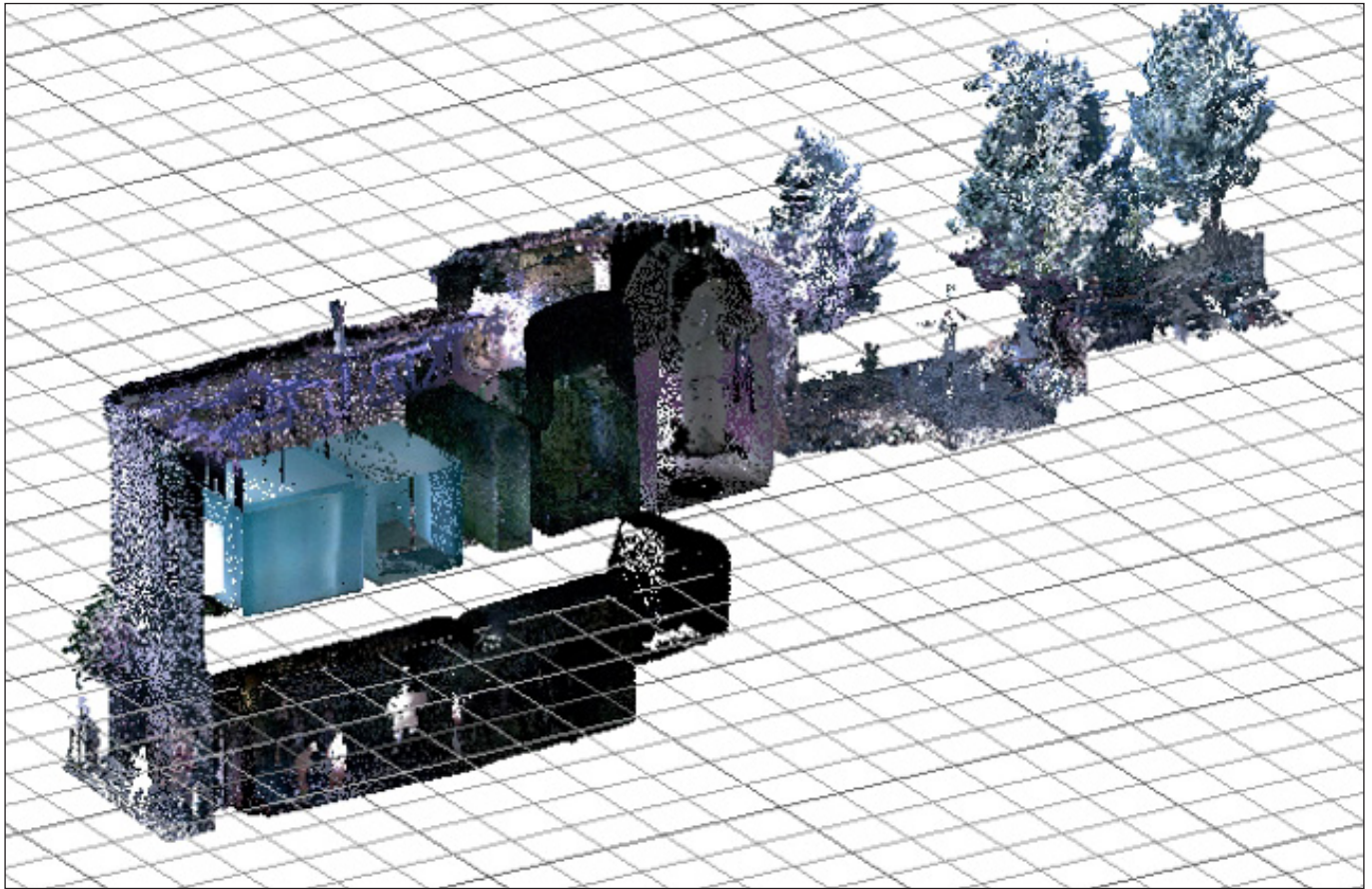


Fig. 7. Point cloud section of the Transylvanian Ambassadors' House (Made by: Gergő Máté Kovács, 2019)

The survey camp gives new impetus for further architectural and historical research on the house, as well as for the possible heritage protection of the building remains, which are currently in a sad state of disrepair. Preparations for this undertaking were started during the 2024 Hungarian-Turkish Cultural Year and the 2025 Hungarian-Turkish Year of Science and Innovation, and are expected to continue.



Figs. 8. Map of the Egri-Kapu and the Tekfur-Seray areas created by Jacques Pervitich and published in 1928. The numbers give the number of storeys, while the colours indicate the building material (yellow: wood; red: stone or brick structure)

## FURTHER SURVEYS: CHAPEL IN THE PROTESTANT CEMETERY IN THE FERIKÖY DISTRICT OF ISTANBUL AND THE “HUNGARIAN HOUSE” IN MILAS

In the Feriköy district of Şişli, Istanbul, there are two Christian cemeteries – one Protestant and one Catholic – located next to each other. The cemeteries were opened under the reign of Sultan Abdul Mejid I. The Hungarian section of the Protestant cemetery contains the graves of approximately fifty individuals connected to Ferenc Rákóczi II and the 1848–1849 revolution and war of independence. The cemetery is managed by the board of several consulate generals in Istanbul and the Feriköy Cemetery Initiative, both of which involve Hungarian participation (Feriköy Cemetery Initiative, 2025). At the heart of the cemetery, there is a 19th-century historicist chapel with Gothic features, no drawn documentations of which have survived. In 2021, with the cooperation of several Hungarian and Turkish institutions, a survey camp was organised aimed at manually and digitally surveying the chapel, scanning it in 3D, and digitally scanning a few selected tombs in the vicinity (Figs. 9-10). The program served an important objective in terms of the bilateral exchange of university experience, the teaching of historical building documentation, as well as in the 2022 restoration of the chapel (JOHNSON 2021).



Fig. 9. Participants of the survey camp in front of the chapel of the Feriköy Protestant cemetery (Photo: Gergő Máté Kovács, 2021)



Fig. 10. Point cloud of the chapel of the Feriköy Protestant cemetery created with a TLS scanner (Made by: Gergő Máté Kovács, 2021)

Following the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, many Hungarian professionals went to various settlements of Turkey and worked in various areas, contributing to the country's development and modernisation (SARAL 2017). The some one thousand or fifteen hundred Hungarian citizens were mostly involved in projects that required expertise and manual labour, such as sewerage, construction and railway works, building pavements and green areas, water supply, electrical engineering tasks and lighting technology (SARAL 2022). Engineers and construction workers also assisted in the construction of some buildings in Muğla, Milas and Aydın near the Aegean Sea in south-western Turkey (ÇOLAK 2006).

One of the so-called ‘Hungarian houses’ is the former residence of the district governor, *Kaymakam* Fevzi Beler and his wife, Nedime Beler. Built by Hungarians in the 1920s, it now functions as a girls’ dormitory (Fig. 11). The Milas workers’ names are unknown, but it is a proven fact that the house was built by Hungarians, and local memory still refers to it as the ‘Hungarian house’ (AKDENİZ n.d.). The house became the property of the Milas Municipality, and a cooperation was established between the Municipality, the Hungarian Embassy in Ankara, and the Liszt Institute - Hungarian Cultural Center in Istanbul for the purpose of heritage preservation work on the house. Involving the cooperation of several institutions, the project was implemented during the 2025 Hungarian-Turkish Year of Science and Innovation.

Thanks to the program, the workshop led to Hungarian-Turkish university cooperation for the preservation of Hungarian memorial sites abroad, knowledge sharing concerning innovative methods of document-

ing the Hungarian architectural heritage value of historic buildings, a detailed manual survey reflecting the current condition of the building, and a 3D point cloud. The on-site documentation and survey were supplemented by various structural diagnostic tests. This enables the identification of the knowledge of architectural and building structure that Hungarian masters brought to Turkey. All this knowledge was later used in academic publications (PATAKY et al. 2025) and in papers presented at the Scientific Student Conference in the autumn of 2025. In addition, a documentary film was made about the program, while the exhibition and the associated booklet summarising the findings of the survey are expected in the spring of 2026. The Municipality of Milas will carry out further building conservation so that the ‘Hungarian house’ can be used again.



*Fig. 11. Participants in the Milas workshop in front of the house under investigation  
(Photo: Máté Gergő Kovács, 2025)*

## SUMMARY

The documentation of Hungarian heritage in Turkey has a long history, entering a new phase in the 2010s. Thanks to a complex interdisciplinary approach, the projects have yielded not only graphic documentation but also numerous other collaborations and achievements, and they play an important role in the education of the next generation of architects. The international context is another important aspect: on the one hand, the exchange of experiences between Hungarian and Turkish university lecturers and students, which has often been followed by further academic cooperation, student and guest lecturer mobility, and on the other hand, the cooperation established in various international organisations and the international circle of supporters and sponsors.

The use of the interdisciplinary approach was of particular importance. On the one hand, it provided an opportunity to learn about various aspects of the architectural profession and for its representatives to think together. On the other hand, various fields of history and archaeology were represented in individual events.

The organisers placed particular emphasis on ensuring that the results were introduced to as wide an audience as possible in the students’ academic papers, in the lecturers’ academic publications and conference presentations, as well as in exhibitions, virtual reconstructions and films.

Finally, it was a key objective of the entire project to ensure that the documentation could be used in the future heritage protection of individual buildings. The organisers and participants hope that the good practice can be continued in the cases noted above, as well as in other buildings.

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