

Stone churches

from

the Land of Hațeg



Stone Churches from the Land of Hațeg

Land of Hațeg can be regarded as a geographical entity, a depression that extends about 50 km (from east to west) and about 30 km (from north to south). Radu Popa advocates for an extension of these limits; he spans the geographical and historical barriers going on historical arguments. It is obtained a territory nearly four times higher, which includes the lower Strei river areas near Mureș, Cerna river valley, the southern boundary is given by the Retezat Mountains and the western part by the Țarcului Mountains and Bistra Valley. Of course, changes will occur over time, new settlements will develop such as Deva, Hunedoara, who will take parts from the Land of Hațeg, at least administratively.

The first mention of Hațeg Land (*Terra Harszoc*) appeared in St. John's Knights Diploma in 1247, but a limitation to medieval history would not be correct. Traces of the past are everywhere. At Tuștea and Sînpetru were discovered dinosaur footprints. In today village Sarmizegetusa, almost 2,000 years ago, was founded the largest Roman city of Dacian Province *Colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa Metropolis*. Traces of fortresses, churches, medieval or modern mansions lay in almost every village. Colț Fortress worked up the imagination of many generations of readers, by the book "Castle of Carpathians", of no less famous Jules Verne.

Antiquity and heritage will play a very important role to the residents of Hațeg Land. During late Middle Ages and early Modern Era, the locals saw in the ancient constructions the result of some giants' work.



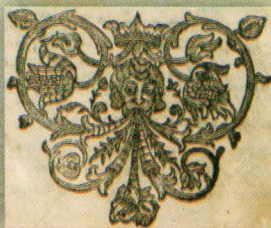
Yet they did not hesitate to reuse stone, marble, metals. Many churches in the area have benefited from building material generously offered by the ruins of *Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa* or small Roman settlements developed therein. Densuş or Ostrov are not examples alone, but only where many Roman parts have been used.

Among the oldest and numerous medieval monuments, which are a good cultural propaganda for Haţeg Land, include churches.

The churches and religious life have always been the center of attention, particularly in an essentially rural society like the one of Haţeg. This institution was a key factor in preserving cultural and national identity. Because of this, the construction, which should have been an institution and a system of values, had to call for architecture and decor.

Stone walls can be observed since the earliest examples. These walls will play an important role as a shield against foreign invasions and will be a symbol of resistance against other religions such as Calvinism. If architecture was addressing a public less informed, Roman intrusions always not getting the desired visual effect, the mural painting and its message had a much higher degree of addressability. Or, in this case, regarding imagery, we can speak of early examples.

In the following we will refer to some examples that provide recognition to the phenomenon, stopping the representation and not a comprehensive test.



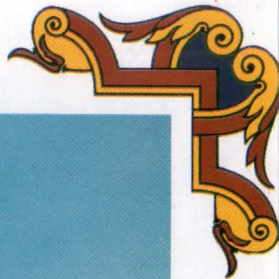
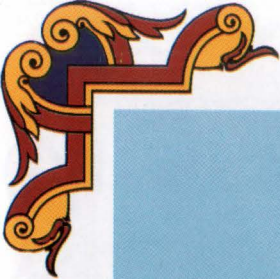


Streisîngiorgiu. The location is not between geographical limits of Hațeg Land, but lying within Strei Valley, and by using of Roman era fragments, in terms of architecture, gets the church close to Hațeg examples.

It was dated to the first half of the 12th century based on the inventory of its surrounding graves. Upon the same criteria of chronology was dated the wooden church, which preceded the plan including the stone church, sometime in the second half of the 11th century. It does not enlist among the monumental churches, its dimensions are quite small, a 4.60 x 4.20 m nave and a 3.20 x 2.80 m altar. This recommends it as a rather princely chapel. Later, in the 15th century, a tower shall be exalted, and in the 16th century will benefit from a wooden narthex.

It stands by very solid walls, almost 1 m thick, the construction of which have used large blocks of stone from the Roman era. Successive painting of walls was carried out, the oldest image dating back to 1313-1314, when we also have the author's name Teofil Zograf, and the most recent is from 19th–20th centuries. In these images were immortalized sanctuary founders, military saints or is presented the "Doomsday".








Strei. Still outside the geographical boundaries of the Land of Hațeg and not far away from Streisîngiorgiu is another old church.

Based on analogies with the church from Sîntămărie Orlea was made the framing chronology for the early 14th century, but the oldest datable tombs only come at the end of 15th century. Its small size, 6.50 x 4.80 m, seem to recommend it as a princely chapel. The tower, the nave and the altar seem to belong to a single phase of construction. In the 15th century was added a stone narthex on the west side, to which will be give up by the end of 17th century, when on the north side will rise a chapel belonging to the Reformed Church. And this chapel will be dropped out by the end of 19th century.

In the construction walls have been used Roman pieces, some of them probably come from a *villa* discovered in the neighborhood of the Christian sanctuary. Mural painting is dated to the mid 14th century and seems to be due to a group of painters, among which stands Grozie, who made his portrait on one of the walls. Here are caught a number of characters such as Jesus, the apostles, "Mary and Child" Eleusa type, etc., and also biblical scenes such as the Baptize, worship of the Magi, Flight from Egypt, etc. As a special element can be observed the exterior painting, of which some fragments have been preserved.







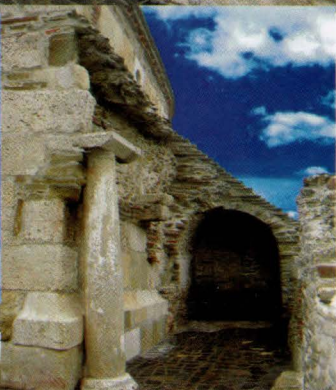
Densuș. With this church is entering the geographical limits of the Land of Hațeg, standing at the foot of the hills which enclose its northern part.

Regarding the chronology of this holy place; a number of assumptions have been advanced over time, some of them even fanciful. Based upon an inscription on a Roman part of the church, it was said to have been the tomb of Roman general Longinus, who was caught by Decebal, and in exchange for whom the Dacian king sought a favorable peace. Another idea was that over a pagan monument, perhaps a Roman temple, developed a Paleo-Christian church. Most hypothesis have advocated for a dating sometimes during the 13th century.

In this case also, the dimensions are reduced, by a nave of 7.40 x 7.25 m and an altar of 5.50 x 4 m length, we are dealing with a yard chapel. The central tower was supported by Roman reused parts. Later, probably in the 15th – 16th centuries were added a diaconicon, a chapel and a narthex, marking the transition from the yard chapel to the parochial church.

To construct the walls that were almost 1 m thick were used many Roman pieces, whose origin could not be established with certainty. If for some tombstones and a few architectural fragments we could say that they were brought from any Roman building in the vicinity of Densuș, whereas the large marble columns, blocks of stone aqueduct, sanitation blocks, they come from *Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa*.

The oldest interior painting dates from the 15th century and is due to Stephen the Painter and an anonymous painter. The iconostasis was painted later in 1789 by Simion from Pitești. As with other founders from Hațeg among represented characters appear military saints, the archangel Michael and St. George or, saints wearing military equipment. These representations must be linked to the historical events of that time, namely the Turkish attacks, which seem to have managed to enter the abode of Densuș, causing damage to interior painting. And outside, just above the entrance, there are fragments of painting, where appear the Virgin Mary and St. Nicholas.





Ostrov. It is situated close to the foothills of the southern part of the Hațeg Land, not far from Sarmizegetusa.

An approximate dating may derive from the information that in 1360 Peter de Ostrov was dean of Hațeg Land, which can leave us feel that the abode already existed at that time. In this case we are not dealing with a monumental building, the nave was the size of 5.25 x 5.12 m, and the altar was 1.90 x 2.20 m. The bell tower had dimensions of 2.70 x 2.18 m and a height of 11.30 m. The roof was built with Roman stones and bricks. Unfortunately today the building has lost its medieval flavor due to renovations and covering the walls with plaster.

And as in the case of other Hațeg foundations, the Roman parts are in highly esteemed, but at Ostrov, besides theft walls present at a later date, probably in the second half of the 16th century, here were used in large numbers. On this occasion, the cemetery found around the church was surrounded by more than 200 Roman stoning artifacts, some of them are epigraphs and others are figurative.

The oldest mural painting seems to date from the 15th century, unfortunately there have not been preserved many fragments. In the bell tower, just above the portal, can be seen the picture "Mary with Child", from Hodighitria type. Researchers assume that under the plaster of exterior walls, as well as of those inside, there is also a chance to find parts of this painting.







Șintămărie - Orlea. At the moment, in terms of worship, we are dealing with a Calvinist Reformed Church. Initially it was orthodox, and was founded by Cârdea family members (which by policy of adhering to Catholicism and Magyarization shall become Kendeffy) at the end of the 13th century.

It is built in a composite style, which makes the transition from Romanesque to Gothic. It consists of a rectangular nave, a tower on the western façade and a rectangular altar cross vaulted on the ogives.

The interior mural painting is very old and can be noticed three layers of three different steps: the first comprises two consecration crosses in the church construction phase, the second seems to be the work of a painter originally from southwestern Balkan Peninsula, dated by a fragmentary inscription from 1311, to whom may be assigned the paintings in the nave, the third layer is represented by the altar paintings that appear to be the work of a local painter.

Inside the church are preserved many Roman architectural pieces, whose origin can only be Sarmizegetusa.







There are just a few examples of the many old churches that were built during the time in these lands. The taking over and mixture of the artifacts corresponding to different eras are not but increasing, if this were necessary, our cultural continuity.

Although the conservation status is not satisfactory in all cases, we believe that any Romanian should see these monuments, since they are nothing less than those from Bucovina and Maramureș. That are less publicized, that do not appear in lists of international institutions or travel firms can not be a justification for their ignorance.





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