

# THE HISTORIC RENOVATIONS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN VIȘTEA (CLUJ COUNTY)

Tekla Szabó\*

**Keywords:** monument protection, medieval fresco, Ottó Sztéhlo, Károly Kós.

**Abstract:** The study is based on written documents, surveys, historical replicas and plans concerning the restoration and extension of the Reformed Church in Viștea. The presented case documents the monuments protection bodies in Hungary and also Romania after 1919. It provides an overview of the principles of restoration, which differ from those laid down later in the Venice Charter.

In 1910, the medieval church was not considered valuable enough to be declared a historical monument and restored as such. The church was saved by the discovery of its medieval frescoes (1912), which attracted the attention of the National Committee for Historic Monuments (MOB). The murals were unveiled and copied in 1913. The architect in charge, Ottó Sztéhlo, made a drastic expansion plan of the building, which ultimately was not accomplished. At the beginning of the second decade of the last century the demolition of the building was decided upon. The case was brought to public attention by Károly Kós, who was later the author of two extension plans for the church, in 1922 and 1956. In the end the extensions were not carried out, just like the modern restoration planned in the 1970s and abandoned as well.

Recently, public attention was drawn to the restoration completed in 2008, when two scenes were uncovered and preserved. The surprise was the discovery of an unknown fresco layer, half a century older than the one known from the historical copies (dated to the last third of the 14<sup>th</sup> century). In November 2013 excavations took place to establish the cause of the cracks that had appeared on the exterior walls of the building. The excavation revealed the semi-circular wall of a former church. This, in the opinion of the archaeologists, could have had a quadrilobed layout. The conservation works included the construction of a new drainage system and the partial removing of the cement plaster and mortar of the walls.

**Rezumat:** Studiul se bazează pe documente scrise, relevee, copii istorice și planuri de restaurare, mai precis de extindere a bisericii reformate din Viștea. Prin acest caz este prezentat felul în care funcționau organismele de protecție a monumentelor din Ungaria, iar după 1919, din România. Este oferită o vedere de ansamblu asupra principiilor de restaurare ale vremii, care diferă față de cele stabilite mai târziu de Carta de la Veneția.

În 1910 biserica medievală nu a fost considerată suficient de valoroasă pentru a fi declarată monument istoric și restaurată ca atare. La salvarea bisericii a contribuit descoperirea frescelor medievale (1912), care au atras atenția Comisiunii Naționale a Monumentelor Istorice din Budapesta (MOB), picturile fiind dezvelite și copiate (1913). În acea perioadă, chiar arhitectul delegat, Ottó Sztéhlo a efectuat un plan de extindere drastică a clădirii, care în final nu a fost executat. La începutul anilor '20 ai secolului trecut s-a hotărât dărâmarea clădirii pentru a se construi o biserică mai mare. Cazul a fost adus în atenția publicului de arhitectul Károly Kós, autorul proiectelor de amplificare a bisericii din anii 1922 și 1956. În final, nu au fost realizate nici extinderea propusă mai târziu, în anii '70.

Mai recent, atenția publică a fost atrasă de restaurările din 2008, când două scene au fost scoase la lumină și conservate de restauratori. Surpriza a constat în descoperirea unui nou strat de pictură mai veche cu aproximativ o jumătate de secol față de cea cunoscută din copiile istorice și datată în ultima treime a secolului al XIV-lea. În iarna 2013-2014 au avut loc săpături pentru a stabili cauza fisurilor apărute pe zidul exterior al clădirii. Săpăturile au scos la iveală zidul semicircular al primei biserici, care, după arheologi, ar fi putut să aibă o formă cvadrilobă. Lucrările de conservare au inclus realizarea unui nou sistem de drenaj și înlăturarea parțială a mortarului cu ciment de pe zidurile exterioare.

Viștea (Hungarian: Magyarvista), a small village 14 kilometres northwest of the important Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca (Hu: Kolozsvár, Cluj County), is situated in the Călata region (Hu: Kalotaszeg), famous for its popular art. Today in Romania, once it was part of the Hungarian kingdom. It was mentioned as the property of the Transylvanian bishopric in 1291. We know about a palace in stone masonry from 1304, which indicates this place as one of the centres of the diocese.<sup>1</sup> The medieval church and its planned extension was in the centre of public attention in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The case presented documents the monuments protection bodies in Hungary and also Romania after 1919. It provides an overview of the principles of restoration, which differ from those laid down later in the Venice Charter.

## I. A short presentation of the church

The church, now Reformed, dates back to the last quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and consists of a rectangular sanctuary and a nave. To this construction phase belongs the western portal and the round window of the

\* Independent researcher, Budapest; e-mail: szabotekla@yahoo.com.

<sup>1</sup> Entz 1994, p. 166.



Fig. 1. The southern wall of the church.



Fig. 2. The southern and eastern walls of the nave. Calvary, around 1330.

tympantum of the same façade. Supposedly, it was constructed under the mighty bishop Péter, from the Monoszló clan.<sup>2</sup> Recent archaeological excavations revealed outside the north-eastern walls the choir of an earlier church, which seems to have been of a polylobe shape.

The first fresco layer belongs to the group of Transylvanian “Italo-Byzantine” style murals supposedly painted around 1330 (Figs. 1-4).<sup>3</sup> Its murals cover the triumphal arch, but today we can see only a Crucifixion recently discovered and few details in the stratigraphic windows opened on the arch. One is showing a tree with three leaves like branches, the other is part of a kneeling figure dressed in white decorated with pearls, both typical of this style. The aquarelle copies made in 1913 didn’t represent the scenes from this layer, which were supposedly too fragmentary. We have six decorative frames, all from these early murals (Fig. 4). This variety points to the richness of this cycle. One is the frame of the Calvary scene recently discovered, the second is of the triumphal arch, the third is of a scene on the eastern side of the nave.

The Calvary scene once decorated the interior of a stone ciborium covered with a barrel vault (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> In a rounded decorative frame we can see Christ on the cross, flanked by Virgin Mary and Apostle John holding a book. Neither face is preserved. The composition continues in a simple red frame lower on the southern wall. We can see two more figures both with lance and shield. The first is Longinus. The second is dressed sumptuously: he has a belt with imitations of different precious stones and pearls (Fig. 3). Is it the representation of the donor that could be identified in that place? Viştea seems to have been painted after 1320, when a loyal subject of King Charles I of Hungary, the 27-year-old Andreas Széchy, was elected as bishop of Transylvania. The young donor is dressed sumptuously, but not in clerical robes. We assume that he might be one of the principals of the Episcopal estate, or even the mighty bishop. It is noteworthy that in the Middle Ages bishops were obliged to perform military duties, and these skills had been considered useful to their consecration.

<sup>2</sup> About the church building see recently: Miklósi Sikes 1999, pp. 300-302. Entz saw here the work of the stone carving workshop active around Cluj-Napoca (Hu: Kolozsvár, Cluj County) on the Episcopal estate, at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He separated this workshop from that which works around 1270 at the cathedral of Alba Iulia (Hu: Gyulafehérvár, Alba County). The western portal was compared with the portals from Căpuşu-Mare (Hu: Magyarnagykapus, Cluj County), Gilău (Hu: Gyalu, Cluj County, found in the cemetery) and Turea (Hu: Türe, Cluj County) in: Entz 1994, p. 54; See also: Entz 1996, pp. 28, 166; Vătăşianu 1959, p. 538; with photos of the stone carvings: Gondos, Horváth, Pap 2006, pp. 114-126.

<sup>3</sup> Sic (Hu: Szék, Cluj County), Unirea (Hu: Felvinc, Alba County), Sântamăria Orlea (Hu: Őraljaboldogfalva, Hunedoara County), Sântimbru (Hu: Csíkszentimre, Harghita County), Văleni de Mureş (Hu: Disznajó). For the general features of this style see Szabó 2009c, pp. 89-93. First published in a comparative study on the Crucifixion scenes painted in this style in Transylvania: Szabó 2009b, pp. 225-226, Fig. 12; An extensive study including this layer: Szabó 2008-2010, pp. 143-147, pp. 152-153, figs. 3-5, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Kiss, Pál 2008. Only the places of the stones and few broken architectural elements are preserved. The plaster composition indicates that a similar ciborium was symmetrically placed also in the north-eastern corner of the nave.

Bishop Imre Czudar (1386-1389) is likely to be the donor of the second fresco layer (Figs. 1, 5-13).<sup>5</sup> It is an example for the influence of the Italian Trecento. Today we can see only the composition of the southern wall, identified before as St. Nicholas calming the seas (Figs. 1, 5-6). The copies made in 1913 by István Gróh shown eleven scenes more: *Baptism of Christ*, *Flight into Egypt*, *Massacre of the Innocents*, *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, *the Last Supper*, *Agony in the Garden*, *Flagellation*, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, *Calvary*, and two sitting apostles, part of a monumental Last Judgment (Figs. 7-13).<sup>6</sup> Today we know only the place of the few scenes identified mainly through the stratigraphic windows opened. Under the west tribune on the southern wall we can locate the Massacre of the Innocents (Fig. 7), next to it on the western wall Christ Crowned with Thorns (Fig. 10). The Calvary is on the northern wall (Fig. 13). In 1987, Szallós Kis, the priest of the church described this wall as having three rows of murals, from which one begins in the north-eastern corner with the Birth of Christ and ends with the Baptism of Christ (Fig. 8).<sup>7</sup> The restorer noted the Flight into Egypt scene being on the northern wall, near the triumphal arch (Fig. 8). On the same wall, under the western tribune an angel-figure was identified.<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 3. The southern wall of the nave. Calvary, around 1330. Fragment, the image of the donor.



Fig. 4. Decorative frames, around 1330. Aquarelle copy, István Gróh, 1913, Forster Collection, Budapest, Fm 631 (603).



Fig. 5. The southern wall of the nave. Standing saints with donors and the Ship of ecclesia, around 1380.

<sup>5</sup> First published in: Szabó 2008-2010, pp. 147-155, plates 2, 6, 8; In English: Szabó 2012, pp. 151-160. Dana Jenei in 2007 connected the murals from Sântana de Mureș (Hu: Marosszentanna, Mureș County) with the group of ensembles from Sic, Vlaha (Hu: Magyarfenés, Cluj County) and Viștea, close to Cluj, where Nicolaus Pictor, Martin and George's father was active in the last quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in: Jenei 2007, pp. 53-54, Balogh proposed before the existence of an important centre in connection with Vlaha in: Balogh 1943, pp. 18-19. About this aspect see also: Entz, Sebestyén 1947, pp. 32-35; Prokopp 1983, p. 115; Jékely connected Viștea with the newly discovered frescoes from Bădești (Hu: Bádok, Cluj County) situated also on the Episcopal estate, with its centre at Gilău (Hu: Gyalu), painted after 1387, after the coronation of King Sigismund of Luxemburg, but before 1400 in: Jékely 2009, pp. 194-208. Drăguț proposed a date around 1420 in: Drăguț 1979, p. 231, figs. 267-268; Vătășianu dated it 1450 in: Vătășianu 1959, p. 775; Mentioned briefly as fifteenth century frescoes in: Miklósi Sikes 1999, p. 301; Lángi, Mihály 2002, p. 72. The enumeration of the Gróh copies in: Radocsay 1954, pp. 169-170.

<sup>6</sup> The Baptism of Christ and Flight into Egypt are copied on one sheet.

<sup>7</sup> Szallós Kis 1987, p. 300. Based on the memoir of the priest Daróczi (Daróczi 1929); Szallós Kis in the monument file written for DMI (1962) enumerates fewer scenes: The Birth of Christ, Flight into Egypt and the apostles were not mentioned. The Gethsemane has two numbers here, as it would include two scenes. INP Archive, DMI Collection, file 9856.

<sup>8</sup> Kiss, Pál 2008.



Fig. 6. The southern wall of the nave. Fragment with donor, around 1380.

The composition in Cosmatesque band on the southern wall incorporates standing saints (St. James the Greater, St Nicholas, a *holy king*) and the Madonna Hodegetria (Fig. 5). She is supposedly blessing the donor, dressed in clerical robes with pallium. In the middle we can see a ship with figures dressed fashionably, in the front a character with tonsure (possibly the same donor) is praying to the iconic figure of Mary (Fig. 6). In the middle, a woman is covering her eyes with her maphorion. There is a star on her front; the characteristic of Our Lady of the Seas. There are secondary elements that also occur in the Navicella of Giotto (flying wind demons, the woman covering her eye, the donor). Other features are similar with that kind of composition in which the ship-church metaphor is illustrated by the image of the Saviour crucified on the mast, in a ship with all the believers. We can see a similar image in Daia Secuiască (Hu: Székelydália, Harghita County). As a conclusion we can say that the image combines iconographic elements from more sources and creates a new original composition presumably meant to ask for protection for the donor's longer trip to Heaven. It appears to be Imre Czudar, bishop of Transylvania from 1386 to 1389. Before this, in 1374, he was part of a

delegation to Charles V of France. On the way back home he passed through Avignon and Rome. This event seems to be illustrated by his repeated hypothetical depiction in the ship.

The building was also enriched by the bishop László Vingárti Geréb (1475–1501), the cousin of King Mathias. The sanctuary was vaulted; the date 1498 can be read on the keystone. A bell with the inscription “*ih(es)us na(za)r(enus) 1·4·8·7*” and a stall with bas-reliefs also dates to this period.<sup>9</sup>

The southern portal with the symbolic representations of the celestial bodies cuts the second fresco layer, indicating its later construction, but before 1565, the date of a ‘hic fuit’ inscription.<sup>10</sup>

The interior of the church is now dominated by the typical Protestant painted furnishing.<sup>11</sup> The parapet of the western gallery and its coffers are the only signed work of master János Gyalui Asztalos (1699). His work was continued by the members of the famous Umling family (1765–1767). Supposedly, Lőrincz Umling the Elder made the southern entrance door. His sons are likely to have worked on the wooden ceiling of the church, on the western entrance door, on the bench panels, on the pulpit as well as on the hymn board. The ceiling consisting of 120 coffers painted with floral ornaments and animals, is one of the rare examples where the beam is supported with a central wooden column. The wooden belfry, south of the church, probably dates from the second part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The oak construction is one of the most important of this genre: it has a square base and a pyramid roof.<sup>12</sup>

## II. The historic renovations of the Protestant church

### The fresco discovery and the National Committee for Historic Monuments in Budapest

The murals of Viștea were discovered during the renovation works at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> This was a time of glory for the National Committee for Historic Monuments (Műemlékek Országos Bizottsága, MOB) from Budapest, to which Transylvania at that time belonged. Founded in 1881

<sup>9</sup> Benkő 2002, p. 300.

<sup>10</sup> Weisz 2008. In a drawing made by László Debreczeni in 1935.

<sup>11</sup> The first dates published by Kelemen 1927, pp. 460–464; see also Debreczeni 1929, p. 14; for a detailed study see: Kelemen 1977, pp. 88–99; see also: Miklósi Sikes 1999, pp. 300–302; Lángi, Mihály 2002, pp. 72–73; in English: Szabó, Ferenc, Sebestyén 2013, p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> Szallós Kis dated 1760 in Szallós Kis 1987, p. 298. Weisz connected the construction with the date of the purchase of a bell in 1773 (which was melted down in the World War) in Weisz 2008, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> The story of the fresco discovery in Viștea first published in: Szabó 2008–2010, pp. 139–160. An inverted process can be also noted: in some cases the fresco discovery pointed to the importance of the church, and the necessity of its renovation (Sântămăria Orlea), see in: Szabó 2004, pp. 39–69; Szabó 2008, pp. 14–19. General information about the history of monument protection in Hungary and more cases of fresco discoveries in: Jánó 2008, pp. 17–73.



Fig. 7. Massacre of the Innocents. Aquarelle copy, István Gróh, 1913, Forster Collection, Budapest, Fm 628.

with the first law of protection, preservation and restoration of historical monuments, its roots are older still: in 1846 the second Assembly of Doctors & Naturalists in Budapest formulated the first initiatives.<sup>14</sup> After the suppression of the 1848 Revolution, in 1850 the Habsburg ruler established the Central Commission for the Study and Protection of Historic and Art Monuments, but the Hungarian Academy of Sciences also set up its Archaeological Committees in the 1850s, which dealt with the protection of monuments.<sup>15</sup> After the Reconciliation with the Habsburgs and the foundation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867), in 1872 the Interim Committee for Historic Monuments was founded in Budapest. This organization changed its name to MOB, and was active with few breaks until World War II.<sup>16</sup>

The first document found concerning Viștea is the letter of the parish mediated by the Transylvanian Reformed Church to the MOB. In this letter, the examination of the building was asked for, before the planned extension of the church, in hopes of its listing as a monument: *“if the church as a whole or any part of it is valuable”*. In that case, according to the 1881 law for the protection of monuments, the state was obliged to financially support the renovation works. The parish of Viștea expected indications and professional help from MOB.<sup>17</sup> The following spring Sztéhlo Ottó, the architect of the institute, was charged with the survey of the values. He stated that the church was older than the keystone of the choir with the inscription 1498. However it was not proposed to be declared as a national monument, so no money was made available. Despite this, the extension plans were provided free of charge: *“We consider desirable that the church extension should include the surviving ancient details and it should aesthetically influence*

<sup>14</sup> Magyar Orvosok és Természetvizsgálók Társasága.

<sup>15</sup> Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale (Vienna), Archaeológiai Bizottság (Budapest).

<sup>16</sup> About the different periods of the institute see: Bardoly, Haris 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Forster Collection 954/1910.X.31: *“ha akár a templom a maga egészében, akár annak valamelyik része műemlék, annak helyrehozásáról kegyeskedjék gondoskodni. Vagy ha nem is volna az, legalább útmutatást nyernénk, hogy milyen formán kell helyreállítanunk s bővítenünk úgy, hogy stílszerű legyen.”*



Fig. 8. The Baptism of Christ and the Flight into Egypt. Aquarelle copy, István Gróh, 1913, Forster Collection, Budapest, Fm 632.



Fig. 9. Last Supper. Aquarelle copy, István Gróh, 1913, Forster Collection, Budapest, Fm 623.

Excerpt from Caiete ARA 6, 2015.



Fig. 10. Christ Crowned with Thorns. Aquarelle copy, István Gróh, 1913, Forster Collection, Budapest, Fm 627.



Fig. 11. Flagellation. Aquarelle copy, István Gróh, 1913, Forster Collection, Budapest, Fm FM 625.

*it in a positive way.*<sup>18</sup> The plan made by Ottó Sztéhlo in March-May 1911 is preserved in the Forster Collection (Figs. 14-17).<sup>19</sup>

The proposal included a drastic transformation of the shape and proportion of the building. The new spaces were to be added to the west of the existing structure. A two-level tribune was also planned, with a staircase in the northern part. This included the relocation of the medieval stones from the original western wall to the new one.

The renovation works began in 1912. Shortly, on the northern wall of the nave, mural paintings were discovered.<sup>20</sup> Next summer, the MOB sent its specialist in murals, István Gróh, professor at the School of Applied Arts, to copy the frescoes. The eleven aquarelles he made have been preserved in the Forster Collection (Figs. 4, 7-13).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Forster Collection 273/1911, III, 31: “*kíváncsnak tarjuk, hogy az egyház által óhajtott bővítés a fennmaradt régi részletek figyelembevételével és aesthetikai szempontból is kedvező módon eszközöltessék.*”

<sup>19</sup> Forster Collection: K-8222 – K-8234.

<sup>20</sup> Forster Collection 309/1912.IV.29.

<sup>21</sup> Forster Collection 838/1913.IX.(?). The aquarelle copies: FM 622-632. We also have information of the existence of black-and-white photos, but their place is now unknown: in Szallós Kis 1992, p. 4.



Fig. 12. Christ carrying the Cross. Aquarelle copy, István Gróh, 1913, Forster Collection, Budapest, Fm. 626.

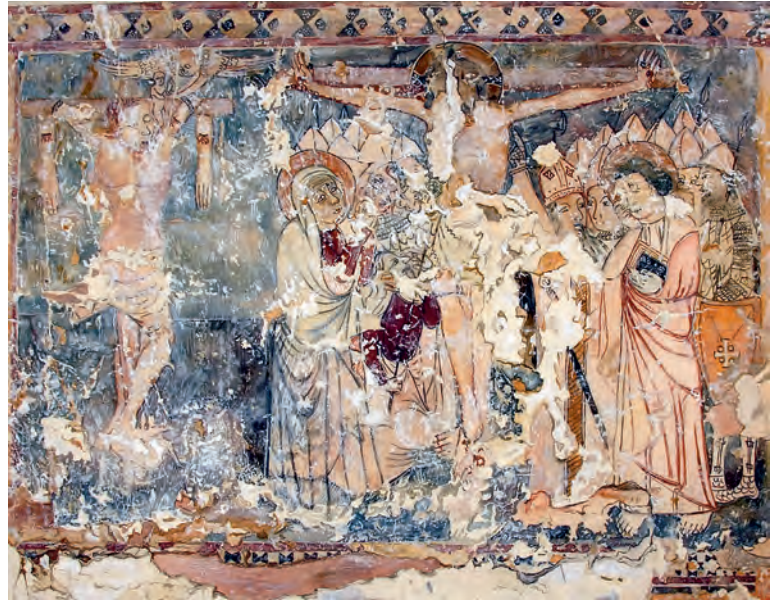


Fig. 13. Calvary. Aquarelle copy, István Gróh, 1913, Forster Collection, Budapest, Fm 622.

Hope rose again, that the discovery of the murals, presumed to be valuable, would help the church to be finally declared as a monument and properly restored. The letter written in 1914 by the parish priest Ferenc Daróczi adumbrates already the problem of the Reformed parishioners, who would prefer to cover again the frescoes: *“The whole walls were scratched, so in their semi-painted, semi-collapsed, ruined state did not offer at all a pleasant view for the eyes. We cannot keep them in such a state without revulsion... With all the respect we ask for funds for the restoration of the inner wall of the church, in order to be done during the next year. In the current state the intact and valuable paintings have only detriment...”*<sup>22</sup> He also wrote about the old roofs, which let the rain run down the walls.

In 1917, the parish announced to the MOB that the community had decided to cover the walls with whitewash.<sup>23</sup> This letter reflects the mentality of the Reformed parishioners that could hardly accept the presence of the images on the walls. The same discussions occurred, for example, at Sântămărie-Orlea, where the work of the fresco discovery was hampered by the local priest.

The harsh answer did not take long to come: *“the frescoes are among the few surviving important relics of Transylvanian Art, so they should be kept appropriate for artistic and scientific research, in concordance with the law from 1881, article XXXIX. The pre-Reformation paintings in the church may not conflict with the Reformed faith; the art of the Kalotaszeg region is worth their pride.”*

<sup>22</sup> Forster Collection 38/1914.I.19. *“Az egész hajó fala mindenütt le lévén kaparva, a maga hol festett, hol leomlott, szakadozott állapotában, nem mondható egyáltalán szemmegnyugtatónak. Ilyen állapotban nem tarthatjuk továbbra anélkül, hogy visszatetszést s a kellő intelligencia nélkül szűkölködőknél megdöbbenést ne keltené. A legmélyebb tisztelettel kérjük azért, hogy a mennyiben lehetséges, kegyeskedjék a templom belső falának helyreállítás és szükséges festési munkálatait már a jövő év folyamán eszközöltetni. Annnyival is inkább, mivel a mostani állapot az ép és értékes festményeknek is csak kárára van, mert mi ugyan megkíméljük őket s nem is bántja senki sem, de maga a vakolat is meglévén helyenként rongálva, a rongálódás körül tovább kopik, őrlődik a fal is, a festmény is. Es ugyancsak a falfestmények további megóvása és fenntartása érdekében mély tisztelettel kérjük, kegyeskedjék a templom egészen megavult fedelét is megújítani, mert a mostani fedél mellett nem sokáig maradnak meg mostani épségükben és állapotukban sem a képek – befoly a falakra a hólé és esővíz egyaránt. Eddig is befolyt, de a képeknek a rajtuk levő többrendbeli meszelés miatt ez nem ártott, ezután azonban egészen tönkretetheti...”*

<sup>23</sup> Forster Collection 1016/1917.XI.29.

The institute promised the renovations of the paintings as soon as the circumstances of the war would permit.<sup>24</sup> In 1918, the parish cancelled its decision.<sup>25</sup> In May, the MOB allocated funds for the fresco restoration.<sup>26</sup> István Gróh completed the fresco restoration documentation.<sup>27</sup> Ferenc Daróczi remembered that he had already sent a crate with his paints, but he personally never arrived. This crate was saved in the parsonage as a memento.<sup>28</sup> We don't have any MOB documents from 1919. Obviously, World War I and the new historical situation culminating with the Great Union on December 1, 1918 of Transylvania with the Old Kingdom of Romania, and finally the Trianon Treaty in 1920 made almost impossible any interventions of monument protection and created a completely new jurisdiction sphere.

### Renovations after World War I. The work of Károly Kós

Law 3229/1919 on the preservation and restoration of historical monuments in the Kingdom of Romania obviously had no effective force of interdiction in the new Transylvanian territories which Viștea belonged to. This law too, like the first law for the protection of monuments (3658/1892), already included the necessity of inventories and the punishment for those who build upon or transform a listed building without permit. Some state funds were also reserved for this aim. The two regional sections for Banat and Transylvania had only been established in 1921 with special research, preservation, restoration and museology tasks. The head of the new Transylvanian section (*Secția pentru Transilvania a Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*, CMIT) was Professor Alexandru Lapedatu of Cluj University (from 1921 until 1941). He succeeded to put all churches and monasteries built before 1834 under temporary protection, and input a new method for the restoration of medieval churches, in which archaeology had an important role.<sup>29</sup> The aim was to equally protect the Romanian, Saxon, Hungarian and Seckler monuments.<sup>30</sup>

Documents considering the restoration of the medieval church from Viștea are kept in the archives of CMIT in the National Museum of Transylvanian History (Cluj-Napoca) and in the Romanian National Institute of Heritage (Institutul Național al Patrimoniului), in Bucharest. We can deduce further events in Viștea also from the writings of the art historian Lajos Kelemen, and from those of parish priest Ferenc Szallós Kis, based on the memoirs of Ferenc Daróczi,

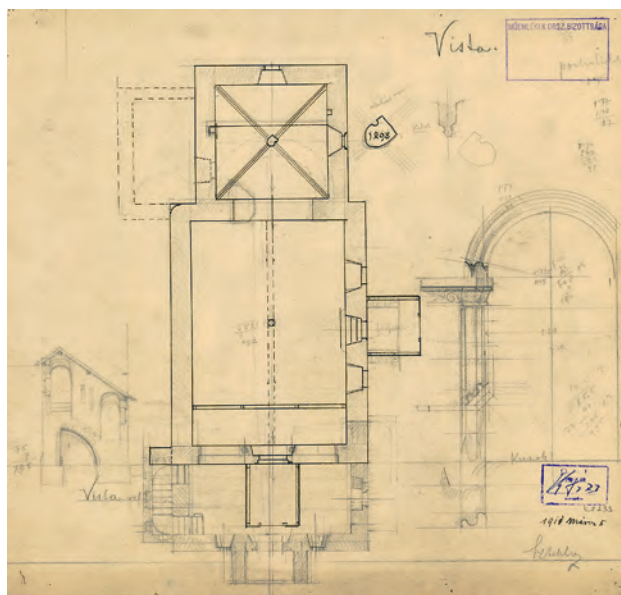


Fig. 14. Extension plans, pencil drawing, Ottó Sztehlo, 1911, Forster Collection, Budapest, K 8233.

<sup>24</sup> "az Erdélyben aránylag csekély számmal fennmaradt ily emlékek sorában a művészettörténeti szempontból figyelemre méltók közé tartoznak, miért is azok bemutatása tudományos és művészeti szempontból egyaránt biztosítandó és az 1881: XXXIX. törvénycikk alapján is megkövetelhető. A festmények mint a reformáció korát megelőző egyházi művészet emlékei a református hívekre nézve sérelmesek nem lehetnek, sőt a Kalotaszeg ősrégi művészetének tiszteltetreméltó maradványai méltó büszkeségökre szolgálnak. Érthető előttünk, hogy a festett falak megviselt, rongált állapota a laikus közönségre kellemetlen hatást gyakorol, miért is annak helyreállítása elhatározott és kilátásba helyezett, sajnos azonban a háború eseményei és az azok által előidézett körülmények miatt e szándék megvalósítása haladékos szenvedett. A viszonyok kedvezőbbre fordultával, lehetőleg már a jövő tavasszal el fogjuk rendelni a falfestmények kijavítását, úgybogy azok senkit sem fognak megbotránkoztatni, sőt a templom fő ékességét, a vidék büszkeségét fogják képezni."

<sup>25</sup> Forster Collection 92/1918.I.29.

<sup>26</sup> Forster Collection 116/1918.II.14; 362/1918.V.3; 392/1918.V.18.

<sup>27</sup> The planned restoration documents had been scrapped from the MOB collection.

<sup>28</sup> Kelemen 1940.

<sup>29</sup> For this period of CMIT see: Opriș 1988, 1986, 1994. For details of the legislation see: Potop-Lazea 2010, pp. 90-103.

<sup>30</sup> Opriș 1994, p. 47.

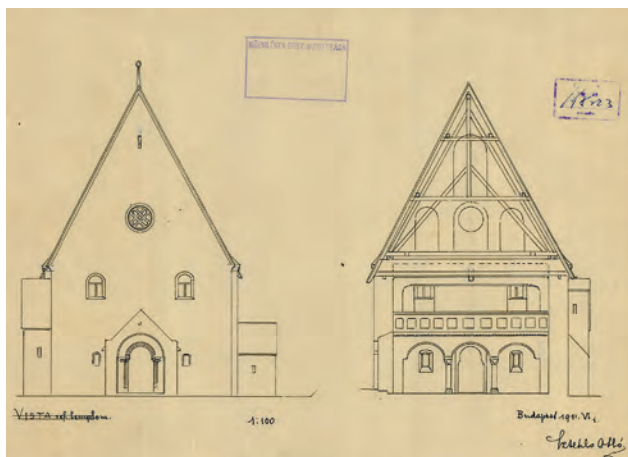


Fig. 15. Extension plans, ink drawing, Ottó Sztéhlo, 1911, Forster Collection, Budapest, K 8223.

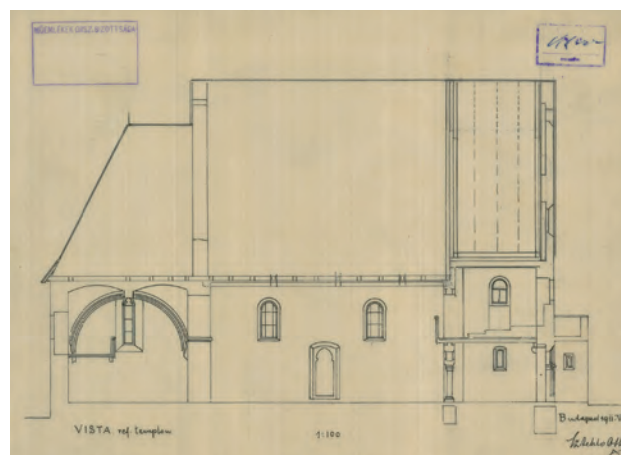


Fig. 16. Extension plans, ink drawing, Ottó Sztéhlo, 1911, Forster Collection, Budapest, K 8222.



Fig. 17. The southern side of the church, lino-cut, Károly Kós, 1922 (?), after Gall 2002, fig. 480.

published in 1987.<sup>31</sup> A recent publication is also based on these memoirs, with a focus on medieval archaeology.<sup>32</sup> The biographies, letters and press articles of the well-known architects László Debreczeni and Károly Kós also offer information. Kós, who lived close to Viștea in his remote country house at Sztána, was good friends with the priest Ferenc Daróczi, and was remembered by Daróczi's grandchild as a regular guest. The different sources are contradictory; it's difficult to find out why and when the frescoes were whitewashed, or why the extension of the church failed. One thing is sure: the church was in the centre of public attention.

Ferenc Daróczi gave an interesting interview in the daily *Pesti Hírlap*, published in autumn 1940. Between the news on the bombings of London and of the Hungarian occupation of Transylvania, this was one of the short cultural news items. We can read surprising things: the frescoes had been covered twice “because of the Romanians”, in 1921 and in 1924, and during the Romanian occupation the demolition of the church was even planned.<sup>33</sup>

Other sources, mainly the writings of specialists Kós, Debreczeni and Kelemen and the earlier MOB and CMIT documents show a different image: the community wanted both the extension-demolition of the church and the covering of the frescoes.

Public attention was drawn by architect Károly Kós, who wrote two articles on the theme of the planned church demolitions: a similar case occurred also at Bicălatu (Hu: Magyarbikal).<sup>34</sup> The writing from his personally edited illustrated weekly *Vasárnap* (Sunday) is worth being cited here (Fig. 17): “*Just before the*

<sup>31</sup> Kelemen 1927, pp. 460-464. Szallós Kis 1987, pp. 298-302.

<sup>32</sup> Benkő 2014, pp. 23-26

<sup>33</sup> Kelemen 1940.

<sup>34</sup> Halálraítélt templomok. Keleti Újság, 1922, 87. sz. (16. April) 20, in Sas 2014, pp. 150-151. Öreg templomok. Vasárnap, 1922, 17. sz. (23. April) 7-8. Translation after: Gall 2002, pp. 306-307.

*Easter holidays, the people of two Hungarian villages in the Kalotaszeg area made (the same) very sad decision: 'The old church must be torn down. It has become too small and a new one must be built in its place.'*

*Two old churches, hundreds of years old, received this death sentence. Two beautiful old buildings, the destruction of which can never ever be replaced by anything. It would be a great loss for the forsaken Transylvanian-Hungarian art and national culture.*

*It's true, the buildings are old and worn, the walls are crumbling and grey, centuries and centuries of storms have washed and beaten them, they are too small now, the growing communities can no longer fit inside. It's all true. The congregation must do something, and people of today's difficult world can only be commended for having the generosity and selflessness to want to build the appropriate shelter for their faith and their God. But they have to consider that the building they would like to build means the sacrificing of centuries: they should not begin construction by destroying treasures that cannot be replaced by any amount of work or sacrifice.*

*The old churches of Vista and Bikal are today not only the possessions of the Calvinist congregations of Vista and Bikal, they are not only the precious treasures and heritage of the Vista and Bikal Calvinist parishes; they are the possessions and treasures of all Hungarians. And we believe that if our brothers and sisters in Vista and Bikal discover that destroying their churches shall mean the impoverishment of the thousand years of old Hungarian culture and art, they will reconsider and change their decision. I know that nobody can stand in the way of people when they are trying to please their spiritual comfort with their own money... But those, whose vocation and obligation it is to teach and to lead, should enlighten the Calvinist Hungarians of Vista and Bikal that they need not destroy the many centuries old proof of our ancient Hungarian culture and art in order to have a larger church."*

Alexandru Munteanu, senator in the Romanian Parliament noticed political overtones in Kós' writings, supposed to have had the intention to bring the presumed repressive nationalist character of the Romanian Reign in front of the international forum. He sent Kós' writings translated in Romanian to the CMI in Bucharest, with the note that it would be necessary to censure the Hungarian press. From Bucharest, the letter was sent back to Cluj-Napoca, with a note recommending "to make what they do consider". The CMIT discussed the problem on August 18, when the young secretary, Constantin Daicoviciu, was charged with this task, with the observation that he should inform Kós that the commission takes care of every monument in Transylvania, including the Hungarian ones. In the same time, the church from Vistea was listed as a historical monument and funds were offered to enlarge it.<sup>35</sup> Later, in 1924, Kós was even elected as a correspondent member of the CMIT.<sup>36</sup>



Fig. 18. Extension plans, lino-cut, Károly Kós, 1922, after Gall 2002, fig. 475.



Fig. 19. The southern side of the church, lino-cut, László Debreczeni, 1927, after Sas 1984, p. 63.



Fig. 20. The north-southern side of the church, lino-cut, László Debreczeni, 1927, after Kelemen 1927, p. 464.

<sup>35</sup> Vince 2014, 23. CMIT C3 360/2, CMIT C3 359, CMIT C3 201/2. For the help offered in the research to CMIT documents I owe thanks to Melinda Mihály.

<sup>36</sup> Vince 2013, 86-87.

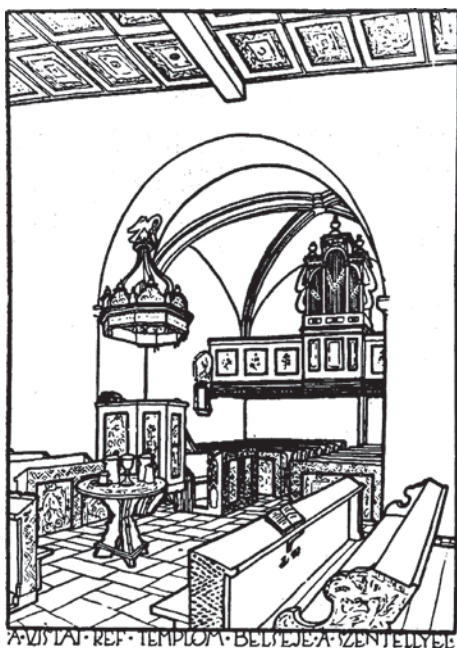


Fig. 21. The interior of the church, lino-cut, László Debreczeni, 1927, after Sas 1984, p. 119.

But this is only the end of an older story, because Kós's articles were not the first attempt to save the church. Márton Roska, specialist of the CMIT, forbade its demolition two weeks before the apparition of the articles, on 2nd of April, the argument being that the church will be classified as a historical monument. We have this information from a letter of priest Ferenc Daróczi, who asked the CMIT members to change their mind, and if not, to give instructions as soon as possible. Roska asked the institution to send the official letter in Hungarian, because the priest of the Hungarian village is now in a very difficult situation in front of his parishioners.<sup>37</sup> Finally, a letter in Romanian had been sent on the 21st of April, with the interdiction of any transformations and repairs until further instructions, according to the law for monument protection from 1919.<sup>38</sup> Soon, the new head of the CMIT, Elie Dăianu, a Greek-Catholic priest visited the church. He confirmed Roska's opinion that the building must be saved and gave further indications, from which we find out that the murals were already covered. The restoration of the wall painting was also planned on the institute's funds. Dăianu recommended the expansion of the church, following the old plans from the MOB, and ordered to address further letters to the bishopric.<sup>39</sup> The next document is the letter of Daróczi relating the atmosphere in the village, mainly on the parishioners' attitude who had wanted to build a new church, and refused to contribute to the restoration of the historical one. He also wrote that they will hardly

accept to keep the church and he will also need external support in this purpose. The building of a tower – the dream of the parishioners – would help and in this order he asked to include it to the existing expansion plans. From the considerable amount of money that would be necessary, the funds for the roof's repair were urgent.<sup>40</sup>

In 1922, new expansion plans were made by Károly Kós (Fig. 18).<sup>41</sup> As advised by the CMIT, these continued the concept of Ottó Sztéhló who also wanted to lengthen the nave westwards. Kós planned to build the new walls approximately 3 m from their original place, the old medieval stone portal and round window were planned to be moved onto the new façade. The difference was given by the new tower requested by the parishioners, planned to be constructed immediately beside the north-western corner of the building, connected with the western part of the church by a tribune. This offered a new asymmetric composition to the construction, very characteristic of the architect's oeuvre.<sup>42</sup> Of course this extension alternative was incomparably better than the total demolition, but the plan proposed significant modifications to the original shape of the medieval building.

Károly Kós's proposal was so popular among the parishioners that they decided to carry it out immediately, but the priest Ferenc Daróczi reported that the bishop Károly Nagy (1918-1926) hadn't given his permission for the construction.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Folder C3 288. For other references to CMIT documents see Vincze 2014, p. 23; Oprea 1988, p. 132, note 29, p. 51, note 60.

<sup>38</sup> Folder C3 289.

<sup>39</sup> CMIT C3 291.

<sup>40</sup> CMIT C3 292. „...Új templom építésére teljesen fel voltak készülve a kedélyek s áldozatra készen vállaltak minden közmunkát és rovatból (?) az összes költségeket. – Csak a ki ismeri népünk lelkét, érti meg, hogy most már a másik végletbe csaptak át: ha ezt le nem bonthatják, nem is akarnak hozzájárulni semmivel a restauráláshoz. Nehéz küzdelem vár előjárásunkra, hogy meggyőzhessük őket. – Hogy megbarátkoztassuk őket a gondolatral, hogy közelebb vihessük a lelkekhez régi templomunk megőrzésének parancsszavát, szükségünk van minden külső támogatásra is...” A letter asking for funding was repeatedly sent in December 1922 (CMIT C 480).

<sup>41</sup> Kelemen 1927, pp. 460-464.

<sup>42</sup> Gall 2002, pp. 306-307.

<sup>43</sup> Szallós Kis 1987, p. 298.

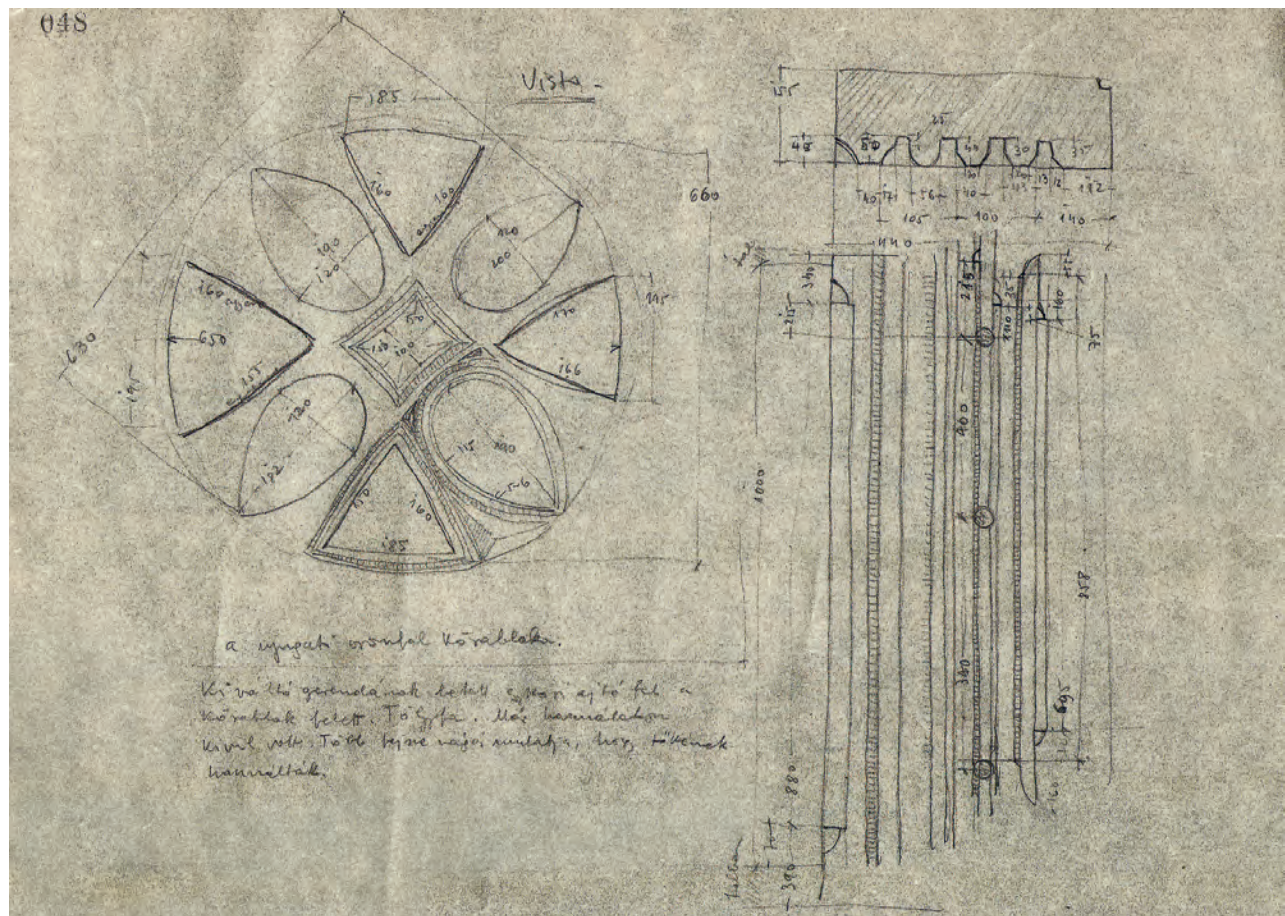


Fig. 22. The exterior of the church, detail of the round window and the western portal. Pencil drawing, László Debreczeni, 1935, Forster Collection.

The art historian Lajos Kelemen published a study on the church in 1927. In it he shortly related the events of the restoration and the planned demolition. He underlined the role of the pastor in the work for the salvation of the church.<sup>44</sup> The illustrations were made by the young László Debreczeni (Figs. 19-21). This was the first work of the architect who later became one of the few specialists of monument protection in Transylvania, taking part in the big inventory of the Calvinist monuments in 1928. Debreczeni was the one who wrote a letter addressed to the Calvinist bishop, Sándor Makkai, in which he related about the desolate state of the Reformed Church art treasures. He noted the immediate necessity of a registry of the Calvinist heritage, and an inventory of at least the most perishable artefacts, the wooden furnishings and towers. In this letter, he mentioned again Bikal and Viștea as two typical cases with different solutions. In Viștea, the community finally realized the value of their church and the fact that the extension would be considerably cheaper: they decided to keep their old church, even if they had permission from the bishop to demolish it. At Bikal, the community in counteract with the bishop finally carried out the extension of the church, but the wooden tower had to be demolished because of its precarious condition. In Viștea, because of the obstacles put in the way “*The beautiful, full with Hungarian clean air extension*” couldn’t be achieved, either the construction of the planned new church and Calvinist school because of which the extension was cancelled.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Kelemen 1927, pp. 460-464.

<sup>45</sup> Emlékirat. Főtiszteletű és méltóságos dr. Makkai Sándor úrhoz, Erdély református püspökéhez, pp. 33-36. Published in Sas 2005, pp. 33-36.

The letter finds open minds, so Debreczeni was employed from the bishopric to make the inventory of reformed church property. Debreczeni, in his later writing, emphasized the initiating role of the architect Károly Kós.<sup>46</sup> In the periodical of the church, the *Református Szemle* from February 1928, a circular addressed to the priests was published. They were asked to relate to all old buildings, wall painting, furnishings, klenodiums, carpets, clothes, forsaken cemeteries and ruins by 1<sup>st</sup> of March that year. The aim was to inventory and draw them in order to offer material for mainly informative publications, to offer sources for further reformed artefacts.<sup>47</sup> In 1929, a catalogue was published including most of the materials from the first campaign of inventories, but Debreczeni continued the inventory work for almost a decade. The illustrations were published on detachable sheets in order to be suitable for exhibition in parish houses, community spaces.<sup>48</sup> Among the 50 images presented, Viştea is included with two pictures of its interior, representing the precious painted wooden furnishing: the ceiling with the west tribune and the choir. These two illustrations were already published in the study of Lajos Kelemen (Fig. 21).

In 1930, a new institute, the Transylvanian Calvinist Diocesan Monument Commission (*Műemlék Bizottság*), was formed, an official organism for the Hungarian minority to register their monuments. In the published circular, every artefact made before 1850 was declared as provisory monument, until further analysis. The priests were warned that destroying, selling, changing, abusing, non-compliance of the maintenance, repairing of any kind need to be strictly reported and made with the permission of the commission. Any work done without permission will be penalised with 100-5000 lei, beside which the law 322 will punish anybody for any kind of monument destruction (even of personal property). They were asked to bring every old stone and grave in rain-protected areas and to copy their inscriptions. Special attention was asked for priests' graves, as these dates needed to be sent to the office.<sup>49</sup> Among the members we also find Károly Kós, who was the principal initiator.<sup>50</sup> The inventory of the church from Viştea was completed in 1935. The survey sketches made by Debreczeni show all important architectural details of the church completed with notes (Fig. 22).<sup>51</sup>

The renovations didn't stop at Viştea, but in the end only a few transformations were completed. In 1927, Kelemen describes in his article a recently built little porch to protect the southern portal, planned by the reformed priest Ferenc Daróczi.<sup>52</sup> In 1923, the church was covered by the CMIT with cement plates.<sup>53</sup> The priest, together with the teacher from Viştea, János Székely, an amateur archaeologist and the brother in law had begun the excavations, supposedly without official permission in 1935.<sup>54</sup> They wanted to search for the walls of the old sacristy, but they found the semi-circular walls of the early church and human bones. Székely was mentioned in the daily *Keleti Újság*, as the first archaeologist who worked around Viştea, and found many antique sites.<sup>55</sup> In 1940, Daróczi spoke about an ossuary being found.<sup>56</sup> The community from Viştea asked again in 1939 the enlarging of the church from the bishopric.<sup>57</sup> Finally the plans had been interrupted again by the war.

<sup>46</sup> Debreczeni 1968, pp. 43-52.

<sup>47</sup> *Református szemle*, 1928, 10. Feb. p. 96. Circular: 1397-1928. IV.

<sup>48</sup> Debreczeni 1929, p. 14. sheet 36-37. műlap.

<sup>49</sup> *Református Szemle*, XXIII, 1930, 15, Jun. 16. p. 238. Circular: 1433-1930. Members: Dr. gr. Miklós Bánffy, Vilmos Csutak, János Herepei, Károly Kós, Dr. gr. Domokos Teleki, Boldizsár Vásárhelyi.

<sup>50</sup> Debreczeni 1968, p. 45.

<sup>51</sup> The originals of the sketches had been preserved by the Transylvanian Reformed Church District. The archives are currently not accessible because of the moving of the institution. The Foster Collection has 1:100 proportional photocopies inventoried under the numbers of K-11448 – K-11453.

<sup>52</sup> Kelemen 1927, p. 462. The unsigned plans were preserved at the parsonage. It's hard to believe that they really were designed by the priest, maybe he was helped out by Kós or Debreczeni.

<sup>53</sup> Szallós Kis 1987, p. 302.

<sup>54</sup> Gáspár 2010, interview with the grandchild of Daróczi, also an archaeologist.

<sup>55</sup> *Keleti Újság* XIX, 215, 18 Sept. 1936. The author did not mention the excavations near the church.

<sup>56</sup> Kelemen 1940.

<sup>57</sup> Gall 2002, p. 304, note 29; Vincze 2014, 23.

### After World War II

A difficult transitory period was between 1949 and 1951: new institutions were formed in conformity with the communist state structure. This included also the nationalization of the reformed churches buildings and the closing down of the religious schools. The old CMI was also dissolved, the new institution generally was named Direction of Historical Monuments (DMI, Direcția Monumentelor Istorice), but changed its name and appearance in different state organisms many times. In 1977, the year of the big earthquake, the fall of many buildings in the centre of Bucharest gave the opportunity to soften the monument protection commitment, and finally to neglect them totally, in order to permit demolitions in the historic centre of Bucharest (and not only). Many restoration works and workshops that had opened in the prolific period at the beginning of the 70's were also closed.<sup>58</sup>

The Transylvanian Calvinist Diocesan Monument Commission (Műemlék Bizottság) also stopped its activity during the war, but was reorganized in 1951 (Építésügyi és Műemlékvédő Bizottság) at the initiative of Károly Kós, the only constant member of the organization. At this time, the commission also controlled new construction. It functioned in collaboration with the official state institute, and it was a model for other religious organizations with the same purpose. As the circular published in the *Református Szemle* writes: the monument protection is a state duty, but the owner has also obligations in the inventorying and maintaining process. The same circular asked for the inventory of the monuments in the possession of the church to be accomplish. Every request for renovation was to be sent annually by August 1<sup>st</sup> in order to have time to forward it to the authorities. The priest was responsible for all artefacts kept in his church. The commission declared temporary protection for everything older than 1850, not taking into account whether it was declared as a monument or not. It also refers to the inventory work of the officials that began in 1953, but they remarked that the specialists sent hadn't actually finished their work. In this order there still was the possibility to put other artefacts on the monuments list.<sup>59</sup>

The village of Viștea had the luck of having during this period another erudite parish priest Ferenc Szallós Kis, who became one of its researchers. In 1955, new renovation works were made in the interior of the church. Szallós Kis relates how he personally found the niche in the southern walls of the sanctuary.<sup>60</sup> In this period the walls of the first church were again excavated (1962), supposedly, again, without official permission. Szallós himself did not relate in his writings, but during the archaeological works of 2013–2014, a time capsule with this message was found.

The main problem the community still had persisted, the parishioners wanted an extension of the church.<sup>61</sup> In 1958, Károly Kós updated the old plans; the client was the reformed church again (Fig. 22). The changes were minimal, he slightly modified the shape of the windows, the tower became richer with four towerlets characteristic of the architecture of the Călata region.<sup>62</sup> It's interesting to note that Károly Kós himself had doubts concerning the propriety of his plans. This is proved with two letters with similar content addressed to the famous Transylvanian art historian Géza Entz, at that time living in Hungary. One was mailed, the other was sent through a friend, to be sure that it arrived. Both contained the request to help find the documents and fresco copies preserved in Budapest. Kós wanted to localize the wall paintings, in order to keep those walls intact. He also wrote about his intention to ask for funds for the fresco restoration from the Romanian state institute.<sup>63</sup> We didn't have the answer of Entz, but we know this: the western wall is also covered with murals. Supposedly this was one of the causes that the extension plans weren't carried out again.

<sup>58</sup> Potop-Lazea 2010, pp. 106–119.

<sup>59</sup> *Református szemle*, XLVIII, 1955, 7–8. pp. 222–223. Circular 1930–1955. IV. Debreczeni 1968, pp. 43–52.

<sup>60</sup> Szallós Kis 1987, p. 299.

<sup>61</sup> Szallós Kis Ferenc: A Magyarvistai Református Templom. *Kalotaszeg 3 évf. (8 sz.)*, p. 4. 1992. [*belytörténet/vallás.*] Szallós Kis Ferenc: Bemutakoznak falvaink: Magyarvista. *Kalotaszeg 3 évf. (5 sz.)*, p. 2. 1992. [*belytörténet.*]

<sup>62</sup> Gall 2002, p. 485.

<sup>63</sup> Sas 2003, p. 422. Cluj-Napoca, 1958.IV.9. The note 735 has the errant information that Kós's renovation plans had been realized; pp. 422–423. Cluj-Napoca, 1958.IV.11.

The archive of the former DMI keeps a folder with documents of a planned restoration of the frescoes.<sup>64</sup> The first is a monument inventory file completed on 10.10.1962 by Ferenc Szallós Kis. The document was accompanied by plans and drawings made by F. Balogh, I. Moldovan and László Nagy, all verified by Károly Kós. The wall paintings covered by plaster, the wooden western gallery and the tabernacle were proposed for restoration, and also a change was planned to the inadequate porch. The monument's degree of deterioration was estimated to 20 percent.

In another letter sent in 1973 to the Transylvanian Reformed Church District in Cluj from the Cultural Department, the restoration of the frescoes is asked for in concordance with the earlier research executed by the department (30.IV.1969). In 1974, the director Eugenia Munteanu also referred to proposals of restoration regarding which copies should be archived.<sup>65</sup>

As we know, the restoration ultimately did not happen, supposedly because of the dissolution of the institute in 1977. In 1977-1978 a few works were still carried out at Viştea: the building of an exterior wall around the churchyard to stabilize the hill on which the church was built and a staircase leading up to it.<sup>66</sup> The construction was made on the advice and plans of László Debreczeni, mainly with voluntary work, and with cement plaster. In the wall of the staircase, 18-19<sup>th</sup> century old gravestones taken from the cemetery had been built. In the 80's the stone base of the wooden belfry was repaired. On this occasion a few medieval carved stone was found, two with architectural forms and two sculptures.<sup>67</sup> The foundations of the church were strengthened; a concrete footway around the church was also built, right by the walls.

### Events after 1989

In 1992 Szallós Kis wrote about promises for the fresco restoration.<sup>68</sup> In 1996, the restorer Péter Pál from Târgu Mureş opened a stratigraphic window on the southern side of the nave: the scene with the Ship of Ecclesia was found.<sup>69</sup> In 1998-1999 the church was plastered on the exterior and whitewashed in the interior. In September 2006, the architect István Mányi from Hungary and his colleagues, on the advice of the Transylvanian Reformed Church District, completed the survey of the church and of the belfry. In 2008, the restorer Loránd Kiss and his team carried out cleaning and conservation of two scenes at the southern and eastern side of the nave.<sup>70</sup> In November 2013 new excavation works were made to find the source of the cracks that had appeared in the walls, in order to include them in the documentation for the church renovation. Under the supervision of the archaeologist Zsolt Csók, five test trenches were made.<sup>71</sup> One was opened at the north-eastern exterior corner between the nave and choir. Here, the semi-circular walls of the older church were again discovered. After the first analyses, the archaeologist found it possible that a four-lobed church might exist, situated largely under the actual choir. Until excavations in the church's choir are carried out, the question stands; the structure could also be part of a chapel or even a side chapel. A new drain was also installed. On the exterior walls, the cement plaster was removed, up to an average height of 1 m. Around the cracks of the northern wall and the north-western pillar, the walls were completely cleaned of cement plaster and mortar, under the supervision of Dorottya Makay.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>64</sup> INP Archive, DMI Collection, file no. 9856. The ensemble of the church is listed with the code: CJ-II-a-B-07811, the church has the subcode: CJ-II-m-B-07811.01, the belfry CJ-II-m-B-07811.02.

<sup>65</sup> INP Archive, DMI Collection, file no. 9856.

<sup>66</sup> Szallós Kis 1987, p. 302.

<sup>67</sup> Miklósi Sikes dated 1985 in: Miklósi Sikes 1999, p. 301. Weisz reports these reparations for 1988-1989 in: Weisz 2008.

<sup>68</sup> Szallós Kis 1992, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Lángi, Mihály 2002, pp. 72-73, with the photo of the stratigraphic window.

<sup>70</sup> The works were financed by Dunaferri K.F.T, the women's handball team from Dunaújváros, Hungary. The connection was made by the psychiatrist Tibor Kollár, editor of art history books. The link was the Teleki Foundation, the main intermediary for Hungarian funds.

<sup>71</sup> Csók 2013; Benkő 2013.

<sup>72</sup> See article on the Teleki Foundation website: *Befejeződött a magyarvistai református templom statikai problémáinak feltárása* ([http://www.telekialapitvany.hu/joomla/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=254:befejezodoett-a-magyarvistai-reformatus-templom-statikai-problemainak-feltarasa&catid=83:egyeb&Itemid=479&lang=hu](http://www.telekialapitvany.hu/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=254:befejezodoett-a-magyarvistai-reformatus-templom-statikai-problemainak-feltarasa&catid=83:egyeb&Itemid=479&lang=hu) , retrieved 2014.11.20): Libra Impex SRL Makay Dorottya. See also Papp 2013. For information and the manuscripts regarding these works I owe thanks to Dorottya Makay and Zsolt Csók.

## Conclusions

The direct and indirect sources point to the exceptional public attention directed to the church of Viștea. Today, we can say that the monument was fortunate with the failure of all three extension projects. The same is true for the murals, conserved under the covering plaster, instead of suffering the renovations planned by István Gróh. The earlier excavations, made without permission, lead to the fact that the new works of 2013 didn't find the original layers, so that the dating of the first church is not possible until further archaeological works are carried out inside the church.

The extensions plans made by Ottó Sztéhlo in 1911 need to be interpreted without forgetting that at that time, the building was not considered to be valuable enough to be listed as a historical monument. The question is rather why Sztéhlo, who was the architect sent by the MOB to analyse the church, made this decision. He recognized correctly that the church was older than the date 1498 carved on the keystone of the choir, with older Romanesque architectural elements. It seems that in the practice of that time the research of the walls to find wall paintings was not included, these were discovered later, at the time of the renovation works.

Károly Kós was a pioneer in the field of restoration of historic buildings in Transylvania, but his oeuvre is ambivalent. Kós, with his articles and with the initiative for an organism of monument protection of the Calvinist church, saved from demolition many important churches. On the other side his extension projects, even harmonious with the original building, were not in conformity with the actual monument protection criteria. We need to note also, that extensions were in many cases the alternative to demolition. The Venice Charter was only written in May 1964, and was adopted by ICOMOS next year. Kós made the more recent plans for the church in Viștea in 1955. The charter in Article 13 reads: "*Additions cannot be allowed except insofar as they do not detract from the interesting parts of the building, its traditional setting, the balance of its composition and its relation with its surroundings.*"<sup>73</sup> An early renovation work of Kós is the Feleacu Greek-Catholic church commissioned by the CMIT (1924). His solutions are very close to the planned extension for Viștea, but here the tower was built close to the northern wall of the church, and more to the centre of the surface.<sup>74</sup> Also appointed by the CMIT, Kós made the restoration plans of the Bonțida (Hu: Boncida, Cluj County) church. His plans have been applied only years later, in 1936-1937, funded by the parishioners, since in 1926 the CMIT hadn't provided the means for the restoration. Vincze considered this as a possible split between Kós and the institution, the moment when he felt that the Hungarians needed to have their own institutions.<sup>75</sup> At Bonțida, Kós succeeded to convince the Bánffy family not to demolish a bastion of the nearby castle with cracks in the walls, saying that a rebuilt structure would never be like the original. Instead, he reinforced it with strong iron rods that were introduced in carved recesses in the walls.<sup>76</sup> In 1943, we find him at the renovations of the house where, supposedly, King Mathias was born in Cluj-Napoca. We have an interesting memory of this work from the famous Hungarian art historian Géza Dercsényi, who was the supervisor of the works. He asked Kós to change the plans of the medieval-looking doors (similar to the style of the building) into something more modern in order to permit the identification of the original elements. This is one of the criteria set forth by the Venice Charter.<sup>77</sup>

The first restoration of the reformed church from Sic (Hu: Szék, Cluj County) offers the richest information.<sup>78</sup> The plan was made immediately after World War II, in 1946. The historic research and documentation was undertaken by the most important specialists: Géza Entz and József K. Sebestyén. It represents a milestone in the restoration of historic buildings of Transylvania, but it is far from what we can call as a proper restoration. It's again a case where the exceptional value of buildings only surfaced in the time

<sup>73</sup> International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, ([http://www.icomos.org/charters/venice\\_e.pdf](http://www.icomos.org/charters/venice_e.pdf), retrieved 2014.11.30).

<sup>74</sup> Gall 2002, pp. 319-320.

<sup>75</sup> Vincze 2013, pp. 82, 88.

<sup>76</sup> Gall 2002, pp. 384.

<sup>77</sup> Sas 1984, pp. 68-73; Gall 2002, pp. 421-426

<sup>78</sup> Gall 2002, pp. 438-442. See also Entz, Sebestyén 1947.

of the restoration which partially destroyed them. Kós noted that the community of Sic, after they found out that their church was of Árpadian origin was ready to seek the resources for the restoration work. In the end, it was more a part reconstruction, part extension and alteration with quite drastic changes representing a compromise (hardly acceptable today) between restoring and offering new spaces to the congregation. In this order, the central tower was demolished and a new one constructed on the main façade. A new semi-transept like wing was elevated to the northern side of the building. The current complete restorations with European funds try to recover the effect of these older works, mainly the static problems, but it's clear that the original shape is history now.

The renovations of the church of Viştea from the 70's, planned to apply the Venice Charter criteria. Szallós Kis reported in 1987 that in conformity with the new opinion of the specialists it is very good that the extension hadn't been achieved, and that the church was more valuable in its original medieval form.<sup>79</sup> However, damaging renovations were also made after this date. In 1988-1989, in a period when the monument protection had essentially stopped in Romania, the walls were plastered with cement mortar and a concrete sidewalk was constructed, both resulting in water accumulations, which then needed to be eliminated urgently. The western interior wall was also covered with cement plaster, which will be very hard work for restorers to eliminate.<sup>80</sup> The church of Viştea still needs restoration work. Besides the building consolidation, the uncovering and restoration of the frescoes could bring to light one of the most considerable mural ensemble in Transylvania, with two equally important layers. The donor representations also offer additional cultural-historical combinations of either. The technical documentation is almost ready, now the funds need to be found. A well-deserved reclassification of the church to first class monument (A) would help this work.

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