THE PRINCELY PALACE OF ALBA IULIA –
THE BEGINNINGS OF RESEARCH

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Abstract: This paper provides a first insight into the architecture and research of the monument known today as the Princely Palace of Alba Iulia. Moreover, it maps the most important wall findings by areas and rooms, in introduction to a series of detailed studies on building elements, decorations, and other subjects. Several preliminary conclusions and working hypotheses have been formulated during the investigations. One of the major findings was that all the changes made by the armies during the 18th–20th centuries have dramatically altered the coherence of the buildings and decorations from the age of the Principality. This has also implicitly affected the previous heritage, rich in Roman, medieval and Renaissance remains.

The building complex known today as the Princely Palace covers the southern half of the Alba Iulia castle, south – south-east of the Roman Catholic cathedral, and consists of two-level buildings forming two approximately rectangle-shaped, unequally sized courtyards (Fig. 1). These buildings make up around two thirds of what was once the residence of the Princes of Transylvania, built mainly on previous constructions of the Bishopric of Transylvania, the provost and some houses of the Catholic clergy. At its peak in the 17th century, during the rule of Princes Gabriel Bethlen (1613-1629) and George Rákóczi I (1630-1648), the palace had three interconnected courtyards, also connected to the north to the cathedral, and to the south to the outer side of the castle. This extensive shape is partly reflected on G. M. Visconti’s plans from 1711 and 1714 (Fig. 2). At the beginning of the 18th century, the Habsburg administration changed the function of the palace. The western courtyard and the cathedral were returned to the Catholics after the bishopric was re-founded (giving birth to what is now the Roman Catholic Episcopal Palace), and the eastern courtyards were passed over to the Arsenal (Zeughaus) and the Artillery Barracks.1 The two eastern courtyards

![Fig. 1. Aerial view of the princely palace (Photo by: Dan Stefan, 2015).](image1)

![Fig. 2. The Princely Palace on plans of the castle from 1711-1823.](image2)

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