

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE:
BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE ADRIATIC

OSTMITTELEUROPA: ZWISCHEN OSTSEE UND ADRIA

VOLUME / BAND 2

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András, Sófalvi, Homoródszentmárton templomvára.
Esettanulmány az erdélyi templomerődítések
történetéhez (The church-fortress of Mărtiniș. Case study
on the history of church fortifications in Transylvania).
Cluj-Napoca, Transylvanian Museum Society, 2025.
ISBN 978-606-739-292-0.

As the author observes in the introduction, “historical Transylvania is the homeland of church fortresses.” In Székely Land and Saxon Transylvania, this distinctive form of communal self-defence became widespread during the Middle Ages and the early modern period in response to both external threats and internal conflicts. A considerable number of these fortified churches have survived, in varying states of preservation, and continue to attract scholarly attention owing to their imposing architectural presence. Although several comprehensive studies have been published in recent decades, relatively few have approached the subject through detailed archaeological case studies of individual sites. Moreover, the integration of a broader European perspective with a systematic analysis of church fortifications within the Kingdom of Hungary remains comparatively rare in international scholarship. András Sófalvi’s monograph seeks to address this gap.

András Sófalvi – an archaeologist, historian, and museologist based in Odorheiu Secuiesc – was born on 22 August 1973. He is currently a staff member of the Haáz Rezső Museum and serves as an associate lecturer at Babeş–Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. He completed his studies at Eötvös Loránd University in 2000, majoring in archaeology and history, and was awarded his PhD in 2012 with a dissertation entitled *The Border Defence and Self-Defence of the Székelys from the Middle Ages to the Age of the Principality: Castles and Other Defensive Structures in the Settlement History of Udvarhelyszék*. His research interests centre on the medieval and early modern history

of Székely Land and Transylvanian fortification systems, including church fortresses, cave fortifications, and linear earthworks. He has published extensively in both scholarly and popular formats and is a regular participant in international conferences.

Sófalvi's engagement with church fortifications dates back to his early career, notably to the excavation at Balatonszárszó in 1999, where the remains of a late medieval church precinct revealed a distinctive architectural layout. A later defining phase in his career was his leadership of the archaeological investigation of the church-fortress at Mártiniş between 2011 and 2014. The present volume is thus the result of many years of sustained research, or, as the author himself remarks, "this book was born out of pivotal professional experiences and insights."

As indicated by its title, the monograph presents the results of the archaeological investigation of the church-fortress at Mártiniş, complemented by an interdisciplinary methodological approach. At the same time, the site serves as a case study through which broader questions of medieval and early modern church fortification are explored within both regional and European contexts, highlighting parallels and local particularities.

The bilingual (Hungarian–English) volume, published in 2025 by the Transylvanian Museum Society, is clearly structured and reader-friendly. It comprises 163 pages and is organised into seven main chapters, in addition to an introduction and a concluding section. Broadly speaking, the book falls into two parts. The first section (Chapters I.1–I.3) offers thematic overviews and comparative case studies, focusing on Western and Central Europe as well as selected Mediterranean regions, before turning to the church fortifications of the Kingdom of Hungary and the current state of research in Székely Land. The second section (Chapters II.1–II.4) is devoted to the church-fortress at Mártiniş, including its architectural development, written sources, and archaeological investigation.

The volume concludes with a section entitled "Concluding Thoughts on the Research of the Mártiniş Church-Fortress" (pp. 139–143), followed by an appendix containing key documentary sources (pp. 144–148), a bibliography (pp. 149–154), and an index of place names (pp. 155–163). The author employs an in-text citation system throughout, which facilitates continuous reading and avoids the fragmentation often caused by extensive footnoting.

The introductory chapters establish the conceptual and terminological framework of the study. In the "Preamble," Sófalvi reflects on the intellectual

background of the work, while the “Introduction” provides a more systematic discussion of the phenomenon of fortified churches and the terminological challenges associated with the field.

Chapter I.1 surveys regions in which rural church fortifications were particularly widespread. The author guides the reader through East Franconia, where the so-called *Gadenburg* type developed, before turning to the Thiérache region on the Franco-Belgian border, where approximately one hundred churches were fortified in the absence of urban defences. Further examples are drawn from northern Italy, especially Friuli, where fortifications known as *centa* or *cortina* are documented, as well as from Carniola, Carinthia, Styria, and South Slavic regions, where such structures are collectively referred to as *tabor*.

Chapter I.2 examines church fortifications within the Kingdom of Hungary, including the Great Hungarian Plain, Transdanubia, and the northern regions of the kingdom. Particular attention is devoted to the fortified churches of Transylvanian Saxon settlements, which are among the best-known examples in Europe and continue to define the architectural character of these communities.

Chapter I.3 focuses on Székely Land, discussing both general defensive strategies and the specific conditions that led local communities to fortify their churches. As current research suggests, these fortifications developed from pre-existing ecclesiastical structures. The chapter also analyses defensive elements in detail and highlights the case of Dârjiu, where the transformation of the defensive system anticipates aspects of the Italian bastion system.

The subsequent chapters turn to the site of Mărtiniş itself. Chapter II.1 outlines the origins of the medieval church, which – based on archaeological finds and documentary evidence – can be dated to the late thirteenth century. This Romanesque structure represents the earliest phase in the development of the later church-fortress.

Chapter II.2 reconstructs the historical circumstances surrounding the fortification process, drawing primarily on written sources. These indicate that military conflicts in the Homoród region during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including Ottoman incursions, played a decisive role in the construction of defensive elements such as the Gothic gate tower and the enclosing wall. The sources also reveal tensions between the mother church and its affiliated communities, which complicated the process of fortification.

Chapter II.3 examines seventeenth-century documentation relating to the operation of the church-fortress. These sources suggest that internal disputes delayed construction, contributing to the gradual institutional separation of daughter churches. Nevertheless, a privilege charter of 1636 indicates that the fortifications had been completed by that time.

Chapter II.4 presents the results of the archaeological investigations carried out between 2011 and 2014. The excavation focused on key defensive elements – towers, gates, and enclosure walls – as well as the remains of the medieval church. In addition, two stone buildings with cellars were identified, possibly serving multiple functions, including residential, storage, and educational purposes. Significant finds, particularly stove tiles and ceramics, were also recovered. The chapter demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary approaches, incorporating dendrochronology and geophysical survey alongside traditional archaeological methods.

The volume is not only strong in terms of content but also notable for its visual and material presentation. The hardcover edition features a carefully designed cover by Elemér Könczey, combining clarity with symbolic richness. The front cover displays a reconstruction drawing by János Gyöngyössi, while the back cover presents a collage reflecting the diverse sources employed in the study, from written documents to archaeological evidence.

The interior layout is equally impressive, with high-quality illustrations, including photographs, maps, reconstruction drawings, and tables. A QR code provides access to additional documentation of the excavation, further enhancing the usability of the volume.

In conclusion, Sófalvi's monograph represents a significant contribution to the study of church fortifications. By combining detailed archaeological analysis with a broad comparative framework, it offers both depth and contextual richness. At the same time, the clarity of presentation ensures that the volume is accessible not only to specialists but also to a wider readership interested in the history of fortified ecclesiastical architecture.

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Aims and Scope

The East Central Europe: Between the Baltic and the Adriatic (ECE) is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the Institute of History at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen. As its title suggests, the journal focuses on the history of Central Europe, covering the region between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. This region was for centuries a crossroads and meeting point where diverse ethnic groups, religions, traditions, and political entities interacted in unique ways. In addition to studies directly examining the history of the region, the editors welcome methodologically and/or theoretically relevant contributions for the analysis of historical processes.

The journal seeks to create an interdisciplinary platform to facilitate dialogue and disseminate new research on the region, whose findings are often limited in international scholarship due to language barriers and the influence of national narratives. To support this goal, ECE is an open-access journal, published at least once annually, available in both print and online formats.

Zielsetzung

Ostmitteleuropa: Zwischen Ostsee und Adria (ECE) ist eine begutachtete wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift, die vom Historischen Institut der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Debrecen herausgegeben wird. Wie der Titel schon andeutet, konzentriert sich die Zeitschrift auf die Geschichte Mitteleuropas, insbesondere auf das Gebiet zwischen Ostsee und Adria. Diese Region war über Jahrhunderte ein Schnittpunkt und Begegnungsraum, in dem unterschiedliche ethnische Gruppen, Religionen, Traditionen und politische Einheiten auf einzigartige Weise interagierten. Neben Studien, die Geschichte der Region direkt untersuchen, erwarten die Herausgeber methodisch und/oder theoretisch relevante Beiträge zur Analyse historischer Prozesse.

Die Zeitschrift möchte eine interdisziplinäre Plattform schaffen, um den Dialog zu fördern und neue Forschungsergebnisse über die Region zu verbreiten, deren Ergebnisse aufgrund von Sprachbarrieren und der Prägung durch nationale Narrative international nur begrenzt bekannt sind. Zur Unterstützung dieses Ziels ist ECE eine Open-Access-Zeitschrift, die mindestens einmal jährlich erscheint und sowohl in gedruckter als auch in digitaler Form verfügbar ist.

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