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Graffiti Discovered in the Western Tower of the Church in Cincu*

Adrian Stoia

Abstract: In 2010 I discovered several graffiti in the upper levels of the western tower, which will be analyzed in this material. Most of the inscriptions consisted of letters or numbers used for writing the year, all placed inside or outside shields or hearts. All these inscriptions were made during four centuries, between 1531 and 1924.

Keywords: graffiti, inscriptions, German colonists, Cincu, Transylvania.

The settlement established by Saxon colonists in the middle of the 12th century on a plateau between the rivers Olt and Hârtibaciu, an affluent of Cibin, is located along the present-day road connecting Agnita and Voila. It soon became the center of the Seat of Cincu (*Schenk*), since a royal judge resided there. It is first mentioned in 1329, when a certain Renendus of Cincu (Renendus de Chenk – Urkundenbuch, I, No. 467) featured in a historical document¹. The settlement developed fast; in 1474 it was granted the status of a market town – “oppidum” and in 1586 it received the right of holding a weekly market and two fairs at six dates each year.

The church dedicated to the Virgin is a Romanesque basilica with three naves and a western tower; the side naves also had towers above their eastern ends, but they were later demolished to the level of the roof. The building was started in the first half of the 13th century. It stood on a hill with three steep slopes, thus it only had to be defended on the western side. In 1499 the Virgin was added as patron of the church, besides Apostle Paul. Sources mention the fact that the church was destroyed in 1500 and the choir was rebuilt above the old foundations but it received a polygonal ending during the third decade of the 16th century.

Artistically, just like other monumental buildings in Transylvania dating in the second half of the 13th century, one can note a combination of Late Romanesque and Early Gothic traits², a phenomenon also encountered in the case of the basilicas in Cincu, Alba Iulia, Toarcla, Hârman, Hosman and Săcădate.

The main nave measures 27.6 × 8.4 m, the side naves measure 3.66 m in width and 38 m in length, while the choir is 7.4 × 6 m, separated from the nave by a triumphal arch; on the northern wall of the main nave, the wall painting was created by E. Antoni.

Through time, the church underwent several changes due to both natural destruction and the community's increased financial power; the nave and choir ended up receiving Gothic shapes and rich interior decorations. It was surrounded with two walls, with 9 defense towers, five part of the first precinct. Most of the fortification elements of this church were demolished during the 19th century; a single bastion still stands today, SW of the church and the surrounding wall was lowered to 2–3 m on three sides. The gate tower on the western side of the church can still be seen in an 1897 image³.

The western tower, initially conceived as a bell tower, covers an area of 11 m², has a tower on the ground floor, open towards the naves on three sides. The western portal has two flights of steps and two rows of columns with capitals decorated with palmettos. A new tower was built in 1591, renovated by carpenter Georg Zimmermann in 1753. The roof was rebuilt in 1754–1755 above the central and side naves. The big fire of 1789 destroyed the roof, three bells and the tower clock; the tower and the church were covered again in 1791 and since then the monument has preserved the same outlook⁴.

* English translation: Ana M. Gruia.

¹ <http://germa229.uni-trier.de:3000/catalog/453>.

² Drăguț 1979, 28.

³ Fabini 2010, 202–203.

⁴ Fabini 2010, 202–203.

In the autumn of 2010 I discovered a number of graffiti in the upper floors of the western tower and I will subsequently discuss them. Most inscriptions consist of letters, sometimes in ligature and numbers noting the year when the graffiti was made, all elements placed inside or outside graphic elements in the shape of shields and hearts. In the case of some inscriptions, the heart-shaped decoration sometimes extends in the middle-upper part with lines or groups of lines probably suggesting the burning flame of faith, a shape often encountered among Christian symbols. Inscriptions of years are sometimes clear on these graffiti, but other times they can only be guessed: possibly starting with 1531 and ending with 1924.

In the first image (Pl. 1/1) one can note in the left side the symbol of a heart containing the inscribed year 1793, placed on two lines. A shallower inscription in the central part depicts a shield with a cross inside and the letters MKIS above the shield, of which M and K are in ligature. Another shield-like shape can be seen, this time in deeper lines, to the right; inside the shield one can distinguish the letters M and W in ligature, followed by a possible letter T. inside the shield; below the letters, there is the year, 1791 and below it, on a smaller scale, possibly the letters DIO ISM.

The following image (Pl.1/2) depicts an inscription of a year, possibly 1531, with the digits separated by pilcrows.

In the third image one can easily note the shape of a heart with indentations in the upper lobes and on the lower part; it contains the letters MB, above there is the year 1797 and in the lower part possibly some poorly visible digits (1819?). Connected to this heart in the upper left part there is another heart, with a cross in the middle and another graphic sign to its right.

The following inscription (Pl.1/4) is made on a reddish stone and reads, clearly, MRD AN(N)O (with an abbreviation mark above N) 1676, in which digit 1 has a double contour line. In the fifth image one can distinguish the letters HB and AF in ligature and to their left a shield with a Latin cross in the center. Image 6 depicts a shield containing the letters GRGS, below them 179 (7?)6 and, possibly the number 949.

Image 7 contains in the central part a heart surmounted by a sketched graphic sign, possibly a flame. The letters RD are placed inside the heart and under them the year 15(6?)95. Image 8 features a more recent inscription, with the name H. Glätzer and the year 1924. From the same year dates an inscription placed inside a heart, containing the text Geu(?)... B Georg besides the year 1924 (Pl.2/9). In image 10 two letters are engraved inside a heart; the first is an M, the other cannot be distinguished. Image 11 depicts the letters MEA (M and E in ligature) followed by SAEI (?). In image 12 one can see in the upper part the shape of a shield containing two letters; the first might be a C or a G, while the second cannot be read. Outside the shield, in the left bottom corner there are the letters MB in ligature and in the right bottom corner, the letters JB. In image 13 one can easily see the letters GE, possibly followed by a cross, then letter E, AN(N)O with the abbreviation mark above N and the year 1706. Image 14 illustrates the letters IH inside a shield and possibly the year 1557 outside it. Other letters or numbers (G, IN) are also drawn in stone. There are also numerous heart-shapes (Pl. 4/19, 21; Pl. 5/25 and Pl. 5/29) and shields (Pl. 3/15–16; Pl. 4/24 and Pl. 5/27) without inscriptions or with inscriptions that cannot be read due to weather or human destructive interventions. Image 17 contains the letters ZRLW and the year 1584. In image 18 one can distinguish two hearts containing the letters S(...)H and WG. Image 20, depicting probably one of the best preserved inscriptions, shows the text STEPHANUS, with most letters in ligature, MANG (... ?) with letters M and A in ligature, ROSAE with AE in ligature, followed by a series of letters in lower script (oalkm?) and I(N) A(NNO) 1695. On the stone block in photo 22 one can see several letters and digits, destroyed by other intentional scratch marks; one can still read some letters such as DG...R and digit 7, probably part of the year (1757). Photo 23 depicts a heart containing the letters Geo(rg) Göel(ner) An(n)o (with an abbreviation mark above n) and the year 1762. To the right of the year inscription there is the group 8o (octo?) and on the right side, outside of the heart, there is the text ian(uarii). In image 26 one can see a heart containing the inscription MFO 1887, several sketched shields, a rectangle containing letters HEALK and, possibly placed later, the year 1903. In image 28 there are similar depictions of hearts and shields, with letters inside and around them; in the central part of a shield-like shape there are letters CVM placed in a vertical row, connected by a vertical line. In image 30 have the shape of the shield, inside it one can see two letters, possibly BB and below a(nno) 1739. Image 31 depicts the letters MH in ligature besides the

year 1767. In the final image (Pl. 6/32), one can note a shield-like shape containing several letters, GR OLh(?); letters WW and the year 1957, were added later, during the contemporary period for certain, below the shield.

Starting from these graffiti and not knowing the real reasons for which their authors wished to remain for posterity, one can only presume that they wished to leave behind a personal imprint, as close as possible to this sacred space, i.e. the church. For certain, the shapes of these shields do not belong to the category of heraldic coats of arms and the heart-shape might have suggested love and protection. Future research and analogies with other such forms of inscriptions might certainly lead to new working hypothesis.

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1



2



3



4



5



6

Plate 1.



7



8



9



10



11



12



13



14



15



16



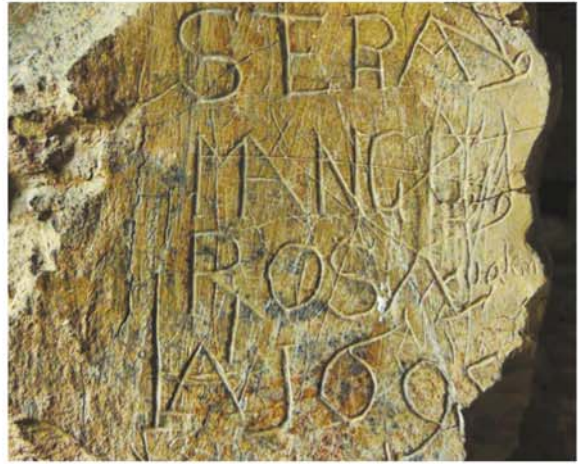
17



18



19



22



21



22



23



24



25



26



27



28



29



30



31



32

Plate 6.