

COMPREHENSIVE HERITAGE RESCUE PROJECT IN INLĂCENI

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There is a little village called Inlăceni (in Hungarian: Énlaka) at the foot of Mt. Firtușu (Firtos) in the Transylvanian region of Romania. It's a well hidden secret from the world, home to just over than a hundred souls whose average age is over sixty years. No paved road leads to the settlement and it has no gas or water utilities, just electricity. Even so this little village attracts hundreds of visitors a year, and in 2013 our team returned to the village for a second time to continue our comprehensive documentation of its heritage.

This region has rich built and archeological heritage. In the Bronze Age there was already a fortified settlement on the outskirts of the village. In the 2nd–3rd centuries, the period of Roman rule, there was a limes camp with a bath house at the edge of the village. The locals call these ruins as “the castle”, and they still can point out their precise location, as well as the path of the limes-road, referred to locally as the “great road” or “old road”. But Inlăceni has much greater potential than just these ancient ruins. The village’s isolation has prevented development and both it and its wider surroundings have survived as a “relic”, technologically left behind. However its surviving built heritage, its intact settlement structure and the local lifestyle have great value for research and preservation.

Most of the younger generation, who would be the basis for the town’s development, have migrated and the village’s population has aged, but despite this the village has not withered away and perished. Some dedicated members of the younger generation and the resolute older generation still fill the village with life. The community’s isolation creates a paradox. The building stock has been isolated (or protected) from development, renewal and an increased comfort level, making it less livable for the locals and inducing them to leave. However, it is this same timelessness that presently provides Inlăceni with the only asset that infuses it with life and lets it survive, tourism.

On the basis of this introduction, one may be able to notice why the process of heritage preservation here is different from a typical archeological, ethnographic or architectural challenge. We are attempting a survey that is so comprehensive so as to study all of these assets together and uncover their relationships. The research on the eastern limes of Dacia¹ is being performed within the context of an independent program² through the cooperation of five museums in Székely land (eastern Transylvania)³ and the Aerial Archeological Archive of Pécs. From the outset, the purpose of this work has been much more complex than simple archeological and architectural documentation. We did not want to create a cross-section or static picture of the current situation, but instead to provide the community with a realistic view of the future and a plan to ensure the preservation of its identity.

The project was initiated and led by Dr. Zsolt Visy, professor of archeology and the former Head of the department of Archeology in the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of Pécs. Dr. Visy is committed to trying to protect and convey the heritage of Inlăceni, and preserve the village’s continuity and life. Dr. Tamás Kondor, Head of the Department of Building Construction and Management in the Pollack Mihály Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at the University of Pécs led the survey of the building stock. Between 2006 and 2011 he had led similar heritage rescue and architectural survey camps

¹ http://book-let.com/books/danube_limes/

² <http://www.limesdacicus.ro/?lang=hu>

³ Haáz Rezső Museum – Odorheiu Secuiesc; Mureş County Museum – Târgu Mureş; Molnár István Museum – Cristuru Secuiesc; Csíki Székely Museum – Miercurea Ciuc; Székely National Museum – Sfântu Gheorghe

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documenting the buildings of several ethnic Hungarian communities in the Baranja and Slavonia regions of Croatia.⁴ Most of the members of the survey team were architectural students of the Pollack Mihály Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology and PhD students of the Breuer Marcell Doctoral School.

The archeological research focused on the village's cemetery around the Unitarian church (Fig. 1). Within the context of the project, gravestones were located, identified, excavated and restored. Grouped around the village's main attraction, its church with a painted wooden ceiling and Romanesque and Gothic stylistic features, these now well-kempt gravestones provide further character for visitors to see here. In addition to the church's eventful history, local legends – according to which it was built on the location of a Roman shrine – and the earliest relics of Hungarian runic writing attract tourists. The church was burned down by the Tatars and its vaulting collapsed in 1661, and the inscription on its coffered ceiling, including both runic and Latin writing, is from 1668.

Thanks to the archaeological work, about 300 18th–19th century gravestones carved from sandstone and inscribed by the locals have come to light, which were erected outside the walled church's graveyard. These reveal the history of the families who lived here, showing off the distinctive decorative arts and language of the area. Through the documentation of the form and epigraphy of the surveyed cemetery's gravestones, the separation of the burial sites of the families is clearly shown, and even today this plays an important role in selecting graves for the deceased.

During the course of the survey of the built heritage, our team set a standard of quality over quantity, so we chose only some houses on which to perform a full architectural and ethnographic survey (Fig. 2). The lots in this village made up of clustered district units were geodetically surveyed and the location and orientation of the residential and farm buildings as well as land use and construction history provided important data for understanding the life and development of the village. The effects of the division of the original district units (decimals) into lots (Fig. 3), the change in the proportion of cultivated areas and the similar yet varying development of the farmyards surrounded by outbuildings, usually in a U shape, can be clearly seen.

Our survey included not only the present conditions and the history of the building, we also documented their structures. For each property we noted technical problems, errors and damage and their causes. This made it clear how urgent intervention is for each particular building. The solutions must always promote the maintenance and preservation of the building, to retain its unified character. Our work will be useful to those performing the repairs or replacing certain elements in the future.

The ethnography students researched the ethnographical characteristics of the surveyed buildings. The completed documentation includes photographs and audio recordings of recollections by the locals as well as descriptions of furniture, the way the house is used, agricultural methods and tools. These reports



Fig. 1: The cemetery of Inlăceni (photo by Zsolt Visy)

⁴ dr. Kondor Tamás: *Őstől maradott... – Népi építészetünk nyomában, Drávaszög és Szlavónia* (Remaining from Ancient Times... – Tracing Our Vernacular Architecture, Baranja and Slavonia) (Pélmonestor: Magyar Egyesületek Szövetsége, 2011)

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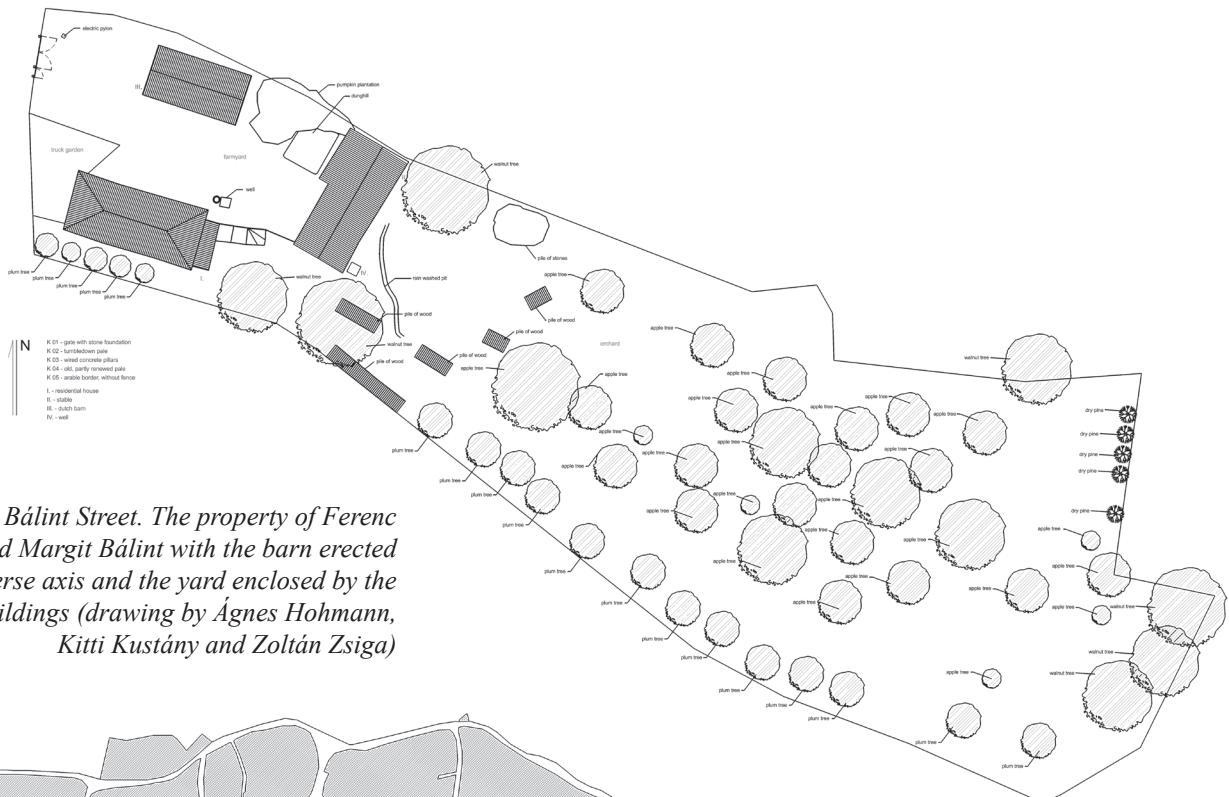


Fig. 2: 33 Bálint Street. The property of Ferenc Bálint and Margit Bálint with the barn erected on a transverse axis and the yard enclosed by the buildings (drawing by Ágnes Hohmann, Kitti Kustány and Zoltán Zsiga)



Fig. 3: The settlement structure of Inlăceni; the original district units (decimals) and their division can be clearly seen (drawing by Zoltán Zsiga)

summarize the life of the farm owners. The family histories help us in understanding the society of Inlăceni, the study of its everyday life, holidays, births and deaths and connections to its immediate and wider surroundings.

The real-time results of the project, the documentation of the cemetery and other technical documentation have created a database that provides assistance for local improvements, repairs and construction, including limits on materials used for new construction or structural interventions. More importantly, the research work taking place here and the presentation of the materials it produces instills the locals with pride. We have initiated a process that makes the residents proud of their properties, recognizing the value represented by their everyday living environment. It is also of significance that the published material will later be used as baseline documentation for the development of the settlement and heritage conservation projects.

In the long term, using our knowledge of the conditions, opportunities and needs, we can form a development concept that preserves character and value while also meeting the needs of local residents. It is an important goal not to interfere with development, but to properly coordinate it, because the owners



Fig. 4: Aerial photograph of Inlăceni with the Unitarian church and the cemetery in the foreground (photo by Zsolt Visy)

should not be forced to forego modern comforts. Technological and social development is essential for the survival of the town. Prudent maintenance, repair and occasional new construction will be able to establish an infrastructural fabric that can meet the inhabitants' demands for comfort and provide prospects for young people, thereby halting or to a certain extent reversing the depopulation. For all this we are proposing the use of methods that do not destroy the townscape and that show respect for its character and value. During the creation of our concept we put a strong emphasis on the presentation of archaeological sites and artifacts, combining into one synergistic system the values of the recent and distant past as well as the present character of the settlement.

Therefore, the long-term objective of the project is the continuing presence of a wide range of experts. The first steps have already been taken for this: negotiations have begun on the functional remodeling of the school building, the method of expanding the buildings catering to visitors and the transformation of a vacant building near the cemetery into a funeral home. During the assignment and performance of the tasks it is of the utmost importance to involve the residents in both the negotiation and implementation phases, creating "user feedback" that will engage the community, giving rise to an animated and developing solidarity that will aid in the retention of young people.

Nine properties containing more than thirty separate buildings, a school and a cemetery were surveyed by our team. This was only the beginning of a process, through which we hope to build bridges between the past and the present, between the heritage and its caretakers. I believe that this project is a good example of the fact that rescuing heritage is a complex process, where not only the physical assets but also those who preserve and maintain them must be involved in the process. I think it is fortunate that a future generation of experts will be able to gain an up-to-date and diverse understanding how to rescue heritage in practice under the guidance of experienced leaders.

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