

Magna Curia: from Castle to Museum (Five centuries of political change)

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Identifying a suitable house for the proper storage, conservation and display of museum collections was an objective of the cultural institutions and associations founded throughout the 19th century, to highlight cultural heritage. The building of the Hungarian National Museum's headquarters (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 1837–1847) was a substantial financial effort, such that for a considerable length of time no important new museum building was built (SISA 2016. 489). Only toward the end of the 19th century did this situation change, at first due to local initiatives impelled by the significant proliferation of cultural associations throughout the Kingdom of Hungary. New sites were built for museums and libraries, in the Hungarian territory (one example being the Culture Palace in Szeged, which housed the library, antiques collection, art gallery and natural sciences exhibit collection), as well as the provinces (Târgu Mureș/ Marosvásárhely, Cluj/ Kolozsvár, Sibiu/ Nagyszeben/ Hermannstadt, and Oradea/ Nagyvárad in Transylvania, Kosice/ Kassa in Slovakia) (FRAKNÓI 1908. 4, SISA 2016. 490).

As so many cultural societies were founded, it became necessary to take steps at the central level, to coordinate and regulate their activities. Thus, the General Inspectorate for Museums and Libraries (A Múzeumok és Könyvtárak Országos Főfelügyelősége) was founded in 1897, which also dealt with how the space needed for the patrimony was assigned. After 1901, the Inspectorate began to co-finance new buildings for museums, and supported spatial extension of existing ones.

The large number of cultural institutions under its patronage led to the implementation of a selection process for projects. The main condition for supporting such initiatives was that half of a given project's financial needs had to be covered locally (out of the budgets of local authorities or the cultural associations themselves). Simultaneously, the idea was adopted that, in localities with existent historic buildings, these would be earmarked for hosting and preserving the historical and cultural heritage. In Hunedoara County, the proposal for a new building for the History and Archaeology Society's museum (A Hunyadmegyei Történelmi és Régészeti Társulat) founded in 1800 was not supported; it was pointed out that Deva/ Déva, the county seat, already had a building that was ideally suited to house its collections – the *Magna Curia* castle (SZALAY 1907. 5, FRAKNÓI 1908. 5–6).

This paper targets the historical and administrative evolution of the oldest civil building in the town of Deva: *Magna Curia* (The Great Court), also known as the Bethlen Castle, from headquarters of a great princely domain to the headquarters of the Hunedoara County Museum, which today bears the name Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization (**Fig. 1**).

Deva is, and has always been, the Hunedoara County seat, headquarters of all its administrative and financial institutions. The County is situated in the west of today's Romania, at the border of the

• Fig. 1.

Magna Curia
the headquarters
of the Museum of Dacian
and Roman Civilization
(photo by the authors)



historical regions of Ardeal (Erdély) and Banat. Deva is situated approximately in county's centre, on the right bank of the Mureș River, at the junction of two major roads that crossed Transylvania from east to west and south to north. The low hills, with good visibility and natural protection, favoured the construction of a strong fortification on this site, in the second half of the 13th century, in whose shadow a settlement was formed, and then steadily grew in importance. The fortress's protection enabled the development of a power centre, around which a royal domain crystallised (CETATEA 2019. 5–6).

***Magna Curia* – the princely residence**

The history of the building covered by this study is strongly linked to the fortification that watches over the settlement, both being part of the royal domain. If the citadel's role was to control a vast area, the mansion was supposed to ensure a much higher comfort level than the robust and soldierly construction on the hilltop offered. Throughout its existence, the fortress belonged to the state. During the Voivodship of Transylvania it served as the residence of the vice-voivode, while in the course of the Principality the domain was donated or leased, for short periods of time.

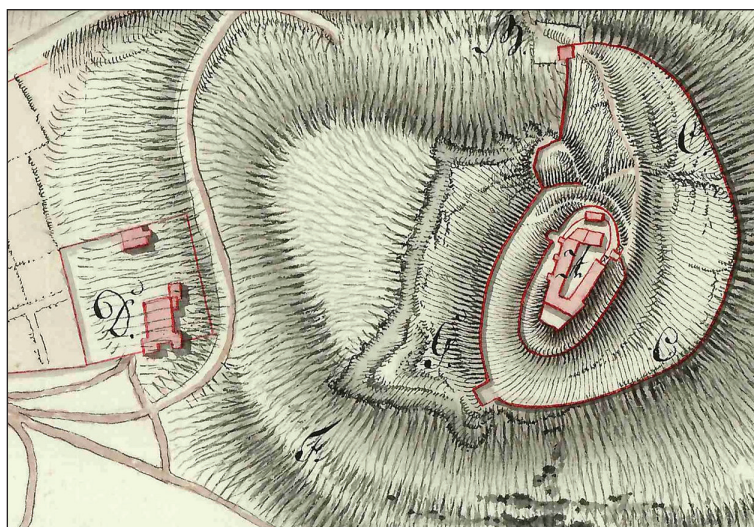
In this economic structure, the villages supplied the material and financial base, while the mansion was the economic centre of the domain, and the residence of the owners of the fortress. According to available research data, *Magna Curia* is a structure built during the Renaissance period that was radically transformed into a Baroque palace in the 18th century. Even so, the generally accepted idea is that a residence had probably stood here, at the foot of the castle hill of Deva, long before the 16th century, when it is first documented (KOVÁCS 1993, CODREA 2009A, KOVÁCS 2012, KOVÁCS 2018. 563–564).

The first recorded reference to a *curia* in Deva dates back to 1520, when Benedict is mentioned as castellan of the fortress and administrator of the domain. Later, in 1542, during a visit in Ardeal, Izabella Zápolya, the mother of young king John II, stopped for a while in Deva, where she was accommodated in 'the humble *curia* under the fortress' (CODREA 2009A. 264). The next record is provided by the tombstone of Zsófia Sulyok, deceased in 1590 at Deva, in the *curia* of her son, Ferenc Geszthy, commander of

the princely armies (KOVÁCS 1993. 154). Geszthy received the domain in 1581, by donation of the Prince Sigismund Báthory. He immediately began works to strengthen the fortification; these lasted about a year (CETATEA 2019. 27). We cannot know for certain whether he also built the first phase of the current building, or moved into a recently finished one. The construction of this comfortable residence, in the second half of the 16th century, fits with that period's tendencies, wherein many castles and mansions were built, under the Transylvanian Renaissance's influence (KOVÁCS 2018. 570–571). During the last set of major repairs, when the ground floor's plaster was stripped off, it was discovered that initially the residence was restricted to an L-shaped building, with the long side being the southward-facing body, and the short one, the western enclosure. The room layout was roughly the same as the present one (CODREA 2009A. 268).

Another unknown feature is the 'courtyard's' building complex. Alongside the main building (the noble's residence), a set of housekeeping-related annexes must have existed. In the centuries to come, the sources would also shed some light on these buildings and the interior organization of the 'Magna Curia's' architectural complex.

For the following phases of the *Magna Curia* building's evolution, the architectural observations and documents are completed by a series of cartographic sources. The oldest survey of the princely residence was drawn up by architect Giovanni Morando Visconti, and dates from July 15, 1712. The map reveals the results of all interventions throughout the 17th century (CETATEA 2019. 49) (Fig. 2).



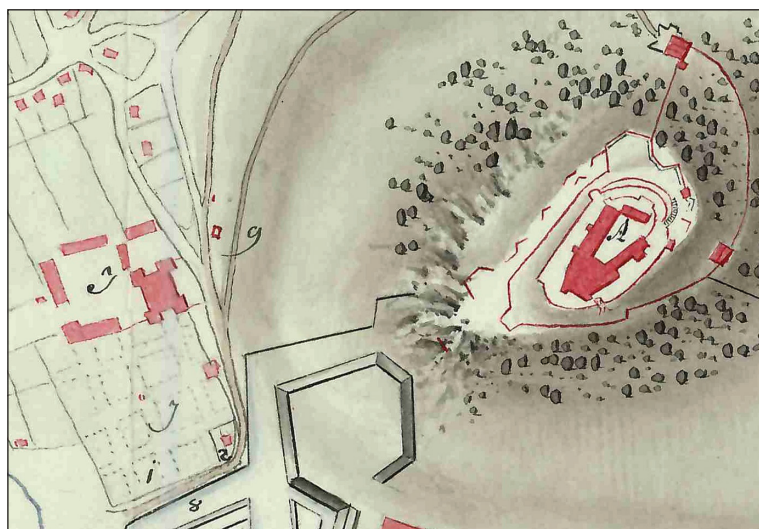
• Fig. 2. • Giovanni Morando Visconti: *Del Castello di Deua ...*
Map presented on the July 15, 1712; detail (Source: CETATEA 2019. 49)

In 1608, Gábor Bethlen received the domain from Prince Gábor Báthory. According to the documents, the next year he purchased construction materials from Cluj and Sibiu, to repair 'the large palace'. These works affected not only the main building, which got new doors and a partial roof restoration, but the annexes: the stable roof was repaired, and a barn was built. After being elected Prince, Gábor Bethlen donated the vast domain to his wife, Zsuzsanna Bethlen. Letters dated to 1614, 1617 and 1618 attest construction works at Deva, but do not distinguish between those for the fortress and those for the residence at its foot. The *Magna Curia* works, ran by architect Giacomo Resti da Verna after 1615, were probably finished in 1621, the same year the entry gate into the premises was built (KOVÁCS 1993. 155, CODREA 2009B. 39)¹.

¹ The only image of this gate, demolished when the plot was prepared for the construction of the Royal Tribunal in Deva (begun in 1897), dates back to the winter of 1896/1897. The photo shows us a large gate with two openings, one for carriages, with a semicircular arch with the keystone decorated with a heraldic shield, the other, for pedestrians, with a rectangular frame – masonry, by that point; the gate was crowned with a simple triangular pediment, with a niche in the middle. There was an inscription (Psalm 121.8, along with the year of its building) under the cornice, and on the heraldic shield, the prince's coat of arms (CODREA 2009B. fig. 2).

After the death of Zsuzsanna Bethlen the domain became the property of István Bethlen, the prince's nephew, and Mária Széchy, his spouse. István Bethlen died in 1632 and, eight years later, his widow sold the domain to Prince György Rákóczi the Ist, who continued working on the site, beginning in 1641. His work was carried on by his son and successor to the throne. When the domain was sold, an inventory was drawn up, wherefrom we learn that the edifice had about the same number of rooms as the present one (KOVÁCS 1993. 156).

Multiple inventories, showing the amplitude of works on the *Magna Curia*, are preserved from 1640–1660, when it belonged to the Rákóczi family. György Rákóczi I repaired and enlarged the princely residence in 1641–1643. After 1648, his son replaced the roof as well, adopting a new structure that could support a tile wrapping. He also built the northern bastions. By 1663, the south-eastern pavilion, where Prince Mihály Apafi was housed, also existed. Only the south-western pavilion was missing from the castle's present outline. These inventories also mention a chapel built immediately next to the residence, due west, and a 'building with pillars' which András Kovács identified in the 1640 inventory.



• Fig. 3. • Plan des Bergschlosses und Schanz Deva ...
Map drawn in the summer of 1751; detail
(Source: CETATEA 2019. 56.)

He also located this building on top of the cellar next to the *Magna Curia* building, which today hosts part of the Deva Museum's Lapidarium (KOVÁCS 2018. 564).

The residential ensemble's image is completed by the garden's description. Its evolution can be traced through the 17th and 18th centuries. Whereas in 1634 Mária Széchy had a 'pergola garden', Rákóczi family inventories attest the presence of a new *parterre* garden, and of geometrically structured vegetables gardens, the latter on the lower slope of the fortress hill. Both gardens had the plant beds separated by trees in symmetrical patterns (KOVÁCS 1993.

159, KOVÁCS 2010. 149). This garden was not represented on the 1712 map, but appears on the 1751 one (Fig. 3); a garden in French fashion, dominated by straight lines and geometric spaces that gravitate around a central element, a fountain (CETATEA 2019. 56)².

The 1751 map of Deva presents the *Magna Curia* building in its final phase, as we know it today, after the baroque transformations carried out between 1744 and 1746 by the new owner, János Haller, the governor of Transylvania and by his wife, Zsófia Dániel. Changes to the entire complex were fairly radical, with relatively few Renaissance art elements having been preserved. From that moment and until the present, any works undertaken have consisted only in improvements and consolidations, maybe partitions, without transforming the overall aspect.

² In 1892, the *Magna Curia's* garden was transferred from the Treasury's patrimony to that of the town of Deva, which began transforming it into a promenade space (Public Garden) – today named 'Parc municipal Cetate' / 'Fortress Municipal Park' (Budapesti Hírlap XII: 130. 1892. May 10. 2; Magyar Polgár VI: 185. 1892. August 13. 1).

Magna Curia is a two-storey building with pavilions on each corner. The main façade is composed of simple rectilinear forms. The ground floor has rectangular openings accentuated by stucco-decorated pediments adorned with mouldings depicting shells and phyto-anthropomorphic motifs. The upper floor has openings accentuated by simple pediments, preserved from the 17th century Renaissance structure (inside the residence, some doorframes and consoles from the same period are still preserved); in the middle of the façade there is a balcony decorated with balusters and supported by consoles adorned with four masks carved in stone. The grand Baroque staircase that dominates the eastern façade of the castle has balusters decorated with vegetal motifs. The chambers from the ground floor are vaulted, while half of the upper ones have ceilings, decorated with stucco. A Rococo chimney is preserved in the main chamber, abundantly adorned, including the coats of arms of the Haller and Dániel families (**Plate I**).

The rebuilding of the Renaissance residence in the Baroque style was designed by Conrad Hammer. Its contractors were the master craftsmen working at the fortress of Alba Iulia; and the sculptor that executed the artistic elements of the stairs, windows frames, chimney, and of the richly decorated balcony was Friedrich Wachterberger from Sibiu (KOVÁCS 1993. 157–158, SABĂU 2002. 41–42). The 1756 inventory shows the *Magna Curia* ensemble at its peak development; one entered the premises through the abovementioned gate, next reaching the interior courtyard's newly built gate, followed by the main building (its rooms, their inventory and purpose are described); outbuildings throughout the premises are mentioned: the house by the bastion near the granary, soldiers' dwellings, annexes with various purposes: brewery, kitchen, washhouse, warehouses, and stables; the gardens were outside the premises walls (KOVÁCS 1993. 158–159, Annex)³.

***Magna Curia* – the administrative headquarters**

Throughout its entire existence, the *Magna Curia* played a double role as a lordly residence and an economical-administrative centre for the Deva fortress's domain. After Transylvania was conquered by the Habsburgs at the end of the 17th century, the old domain of Deva fortress was divided: the citadel came under the administration of the military authorities; the rest formed the Financial District of Deva. The new financial policy of the domain's administration introduced its lease system. The first beneficiary was István Steinville, the military governor of Transylvania. Later, in 1730, count Giulio Visconti was gratified with *Magna Curia* and the District. At first, he rented out the District to an entrepreneur, De Nicola; afterwards, Visconti renounced it in favour of János Haller, in 1743 (KOVÁCS 1993. 157). After the death of count Haller, in 1755, the residence remained in his family's possession. In 1783, when Zsófia Dániel died, a lawsuit began between the inheritors of Haller family and the Transylvanian Treasury. The latter eventually prevailed (KOVÁCS 2012. 61).

Taking into account that in the small boroughs of Deva the existing buildings were rather modest, *Magna Curia* was the only structure suited for housing the county government beginning with 1793

³ All these outbuildings were demolished, one by one, starting in the last years of the 19th century, with the area being reshaped into its current state by the interwar period. The first building demolitions started in March 1896, when we know that Gábor Téglás and Sándor Fogolyán were appointed to identify, and obtain for the museum, any items of historical interest that might appear during these works (*Hunyad* XX: 10. 1896. March 7. 3). The 1885 Deva map, drawn up before the town's urban systematization in 1890, is the last survey that includes all the buildings (SJHAN. ITC. 524. 48/1851–1947. 14). Based on preserved photographs, we can assert that the last outbuildings were demolished at some point between 1918 and 1929.

(FÖGLEIN 1942–1945. 247). In the second half of the 19th century the castle was an official residence as well (**Fig. 4**). At the middle of the century, the estate was rented by Baron László Nopcsa and his son, Elek, who resided in one of the rooms of the main building. Nopcsa underlet the building to the county's administration for 1,560 frt. yearly; this sum was not paid directly by the county, but transferred from the state cash desk since, by law, 'covering this burden was the *duty of the state budget*'. When the contract

• **Fig. 4.**

Magna Curia; 1861
watercolour by Thomas
Ender (Original
in the private collection
of dr. Lucian M. Ștefan)



neared expiry in 1878, the county's leadership requested the construction of a new establishment from the Ministry of the Interior, going so far as to buy a plot of land immediately next to the *Magna Curia* and present a project. The ministry rejected the plan (which called for 60,000 frt.) proposing instead to accept Baron Elek Nopcsa's offer of permission to use the building for the next 14 years for an advance payment of 18,000 frt. (an offer which would have resulted in almost 4,000 frt. in savings). The local authorities' refusal led to a conflict with the Ministry of Interior, which did not escalate because Baron Nopcsa withdrew his offer. Thus, the county's leadership prepared a new letter to the Ministry, repeating the request to build a new edifice, also requesting free use of the castle for five years while the new building would be completed⁴.

Still, the *Magna Curia* continued to be let to private persons; in 1887 the renters were János Horváth and the widow Bildhauer⁵. At the same time, the palace's main hall (the one with the rococo fireplace) was available for events, including cultural association gatherings. For example, the General Assembly of the Hunedoara County's Society of History and Archaeology was held there on June 15, 1884⁶, along with the General Assembly of the Hungarian Association for Culture in Transylvania (Erdélyi Magyar Közművelődési Egyesület) on September 7, 1890⁷. The Administrative Palace of Deva⁸ was finished in 1890. Hence, the county government moved into the new building, leaving the Royal

⁴ *Ellenzék* I: 4. 1880. October 5. 2.

⁵ *Ország Világ* VIII: 38. 1887. September 17. 614.

⁶ *Budapesti Hirlap* IV: 146. 1884. May 27. 2.

⁷ *Székely Nemzet* VIII: 141. 1890. September 13. 1.

⁸ Building the Administrative Palace of Deva began in spring 1889 in accordance with architect Ignác Alpár's plans; the building was put into use in autumn of the following year (*Építő Ipar* XV: 34. 1891. August 26. 306).

Hungarian Financial Department (Magyar királyi pénzügyigazgatóság) to occupy *Magna Curia* until after the Great War.

One of the major events for the County and the town from this period was Emperor Franz Joseph's visit⁹. In September 1887, the Emperor participated for a week in military exercises held in Hunedoara County, and his general headquarters was established in Deva¹⁰. His master of ceremonies arrived as soon as the middle of July 1887 (and stayed for several days), studied the *Magna Curia*, announced that all its rooms were needed, and required the tenants active therein to clear the premises by the first of August. At the same time, he checked the rooms of the tenant – János Horváth – and then those of the Pedagogic School (*Parva Curia*)¹¹. The Engineering Office performed 'necessary' transformation and adaptation works on the *Magna Curia* premises for the occasion of the emperor's visit¹². Its halls were prepared for the activities during the emperor's stay, for the guests' official reception; for example: the great hall was to be prepared to serve meals, and 'the tax office was moved to house the Court's cafeteria'¹³. At the same time, reparations on the bridge leading up to the main entry were performed. These works were funded with 3,145 frt. and 49 kr. (TÚLKIADÁSOK 1888. 72).

Up to September 14, one day before the emperor's arrival, 'all had been transformed'. 'Past the gates, lines of trees lead to the interior courtyard, in front of which stands the *Magna Curia* castle. To the side, [there was] a smaller house with a friendly exterior, compared to the severe main building, leaving a pleasant impression.' This served as the emperor's lodging, and the main building, with its freshly refurbished rooms, was to be used for official receptions, banquets and meetings¹⁴; 'the garden was improved, being made verdant and beautified with groups of flowers'¹⁵.

The historical and artistic importance of the *Magna Curia* building was noted by members of the Society of History and Archaeology of Hunedoara County¹⁶, who expressed their desire that the local government and royal financial authorities cede this castle to the Society's Museum. During the years 1880–1914 there were countless requests and attempts to take over the building, all unsuccessful. Right after the establishment of the Society, in 1880, the county government temporarily offered a chamber in *Magna Curia*, but the necessary adjustments were expensive, so, in the end, the Society dropped this

⁹ This event was reflected in the local and national press of both Hungarian and Romanian languages (*Tribuna* IV: 154. 1887. July 10. 614; *Tribuna* IV: 164. 1887. July 22. 654).

¹⁰ Preparations to receive the emperor and his entourage were extensive, even including a 'makeover' of the town: the roads were repaired and illuminated, building façade were restored, the creek flowing in front of the main entrance in the *Magna Curia*'s courtyard was regularized, improvements were made on the Fortress Hill. The works, coordinated with local authorities – deputy lord-lieutenant of the Hunedoara County Kálmán Barcsay and mayor of Deva Antal Issekutz – began as early as the year's start, in January 1887, when repairs were already underway on the *Magna Curia*. Wooden triumphal arches, beautifully decorated, were also built along the emperor's itinerary. (*Kolozsvár* I: 16. 1887. January 20. 3; *Budapesti Hírlap* VII: 224. 1887. August 14. 11).

¹¹ *Kolozsvár* I: 169. 1887. July 21. 3.

¹² *Budapesti Hírlap* VII: 243. 1887. September 4. 4.

¹³ *Kolozsvár* I: 178. 1887. August 1. 3.

¹⁴ *Ország Világ* VIII: 38. 1887. September 17. 614.

¹⁵ *Kolozsvár* I: 214. 1887. September 14. 3.

¹⁶ The Society of History and Archaeology of Hunedoara County was founded in 1880, and one of its objectives was the establishment of a museum accessible for the general public. The Society's Museum has been housed in various locations in Deva, each move being determined mainly by the lack of adequate space for the collections and exhibitions, to which artefacts were added every year.

option¹⁷. In 1890, the management of the county moved in the newly built Administrative Palace. Therefore, the Society resumed inquiries regarding the old castle. The following arguments were presented: a) the museum should be located in an accessible place for the visitors; and b) the layout of the building at the foot of the Fortress Hill also ensured visiting the medieval fortification, of *Magna Curia* (the oldest construction in town) and of the museum's displays (BODÓ 2017. 173) (Fig. 5). After the 1903 elections

• Fig. 5.

Magna Curia seen
from the Fortress's hill;
photograph taken
in the last decade
of the 19th century
(Source: MCDR, CIM. 1408)



within the General Assembly of the Society, secretary Samu Kolumbán presented the documents that he drafted on behalf of the Executive Board of the Society: one address towards the National Monuments Commission in Budapest, requesting that the *Magna Curia* should be declared a historic building, and another one by which it was requested that *Magna Curia*, as a historic building, should be granted to the Society so that its museum, library and archive could receive a permanent headquarters¹⁸. In the next meeting Kolumbán stated that he heard that the Ministry of Finances was planning to build a new Palace of Finance, so that, in no more than two years, the Hunedoara County Financial Department was to move to a new location, and *Magna Curia* would come into the Society's possession¹⁹. The same rumour reappeared in 1911, also without any result²⁰. Unfortunately, the new administrative palace, intended to house the Financial Administration, was built only in 1934–1937, so that officials did not leave their headquarters until 1937²¹.

¹⁷ SJHAN. FSIACH. Own Fund. 2. 21v, 25v, 26.

¹⁸ SJHAN. FSIACH. Own Fund. 3. 144v.

¹⁹ SJHAN. FSIACH. Own Fund. 3. 154v.

²⁰ SJHAN. FSIACH. Own Fund. 2. 588–589.

²¹ SJHAN. PJH. 63/1940. The construction of the new administrative palace of Deva, as a continuation of the Prefecture headquarters' right wing (the Administrative Palace built in 1890) began in 1934 through the initiative of prefect Romul Mioc, and was to house the financial administration, collectors' offices, and other county services (*Universul* 51: 199. 1934. July 24. 6). The building was inaugurated with great pomp on August 6, 1937, with the participation of Liberal minister Valer Pop, officials from Bucharest as well as local ones, and members of the clergy; the statue of Dacian king Decebal in the Public Garden was unveiled on the same occasion (*Telegraful Român* LXXXV: 33. 1937. August 15. 1).

In the years that followed the 1903 elections, given that the Society's museum was in danger of becoming homeless, actions to take over the *Magna Curia* have been intensified with the help of the General Inspectorate of Museums and Libraries. In April 1907, the Inspectorate approached the Ministry of Finances regarding the request of the old castle as the headquarters of the Museum (SZALAY 1907. 5, HÍVATALOS KÖZLEMÉNYEK 1909. 173, A FŐFELÜGYELŐSÉG 1912. 188). However, the Financial Department needed the building because their promised new headquarters hadn't materialised. The correspondence of the Society with decision makers continued in the following years as well. After another series of demands initiated in 1913, in 1914 the Ministry of Finances informed that the Treasury would still need this establishment for some time; therefore it couldn't be given to the Society of History and Archaeology (A MÚZEUMOK 1914. 129, A MÚZEUMOK 1915. 52–53).

In the same year, the county was informed through statement no. 73271 that the *Magna Curia* had been declared a historic building of national significance and was to be restored by the National Monuments Commission, a project that the start of the Great War thwarted. The building's poor condition was also remarked on by Géza Horváth, Inspector General of the Museums and Libraries General Inspectorate, during a work visit to Deva in 1916 (A MÚZEUMOK 1917. 159).

Even if the *Magna Curia* had not been ceded to the History and Archaeology Society, just before the start of the Great War, the first artefacts were placed inside the building. In 1909, Countess Margit Lónyay listed for sale the collection of Roman-era stone monuments from her family castle in Fărcădinul de Jos/Alsófarkadin²². They were bought by the Society and entered the collection of the museum (BODÓ 2021. 81). The pieces were transported to Deva only in 1914 and deposited in the hallway of *Magna Curia*. This event was recorded in the documents of the Society as a first step towards 'taking possession of the building for the museum', by the director of the museum, József Mallász²³.

One of the reasons behind the unsuccessful relocation of the Society's museum to a suitable location was the lack of involvement of local authorities. A report drafted by Béla Pósta in 1908, and sent to the General Inspectorate, emphasized that unlike the situation in other counties, the authorities of the Hunedoara County and the town of Deva were 'too preoccupied with daily political infighting ongoing in the county to pay much attention to cultural institutions' (VINCZE 2014. 326). In these circumstances, the improvement of the museum's condition depended on individual efforts by the Society's members. József Mallász²⁴ was able to move the museum collections between the walls of the former orphanage, administered by the Women's Association of Hunedoara County. The steps begun before the Great War were continued after 1918; in May 1919 Mallász began to prepare the halls so that he could move and arrange the museum and library collections²⁵. At the end of 1920, by order of the prefect of Hunedoara County, the 'Hunedoara County Museum' was established, and took over the patrimony of the Society of History and Archaeology of Hunedoara County (BODÓ 2021. 323).

²² Today the name of the village is General Berthelot.

²³ SJHAN. FSIACH. Own Fund. 37. 143–143v.

²⁴ József Mallász was the director of the Society's museum from 1913 to 1920, and director of the Hunedoara County Museum between 1920 and 1933.

²⁵ The museum housed its collections in these building between 1919 and 1929, then, by the Hunedoara County Prefecture's decision no. 22903 from December 12, 1929, the County Museum was moved into the so-called 'Poorhouse' (the current headquarters of the Paediatrics Department of the Hunedoara County Hospital, Deva) (SJHAN. PJH. 64/1930. 11).

***Magna Curia* – the headquarters of Hunedoara County Museum**

After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the Great War, Transylvania, Western Banat and small areas of the Partium became part of the Kingdom of Romania. Between 1920 and 1922, the authority of the Romanian state was established through the General Directorate from Cluj, which addressed the county administrative issues²⁶.

The *Magna Curia* building was registered in the Land Registry Book on February 5, 1923, from the Hungarian state into the property of the Romanian Ministry of Finances, based on an ordinance issued by the General Directorate from Cluj. Its purpose was the same as before, namely headquarters of the local financial authorities²⁷. From 1923 until 1938, when the building was granted to the Hunedoara County Museum, the documents do not offer any relevant information (just that the county officials have moved out in 1937, after the new building of the Administrative Palace that was finished in that summer). Out of the *Magna Curia* building complex, only the main structure (headquarters of Romanian financial authorities), and a 'house for rent' remained both belonging to the Finance Ministry; the first valued at 2,000,000 lei, and the second at 300,000 lei²⁸.

In 1938, the *Magna Curia*, property of the Romanian state, was given over to the Hunedoara County's use, according to statement no. 107679 issued by the Ministry of Finances²⁹. That same year, state authorities decided that the *Magna Curia* would become the County Museum's headquarters. The available information reveals that the transfer of museum's collection began to its new location in August (PICIORUȘI 1979. 530, note 18), an action that had not been finished the following month³⁰. Certainly, all museum collection pieces were inside the building by December 24, 1938³¹. From that moment on and until the present day, the old castle has been the headquarters of Hunedoara County Museum, without interruptions.

This event sent ripples on the national level. Moving 'this Romanian cultural institution' whose name 'has travelled far beyond the country's borders' in 'the only building that could truly serve as its seat' received plaudits from the contemporary press. We also learn from here that 'if certain absolutely necessary repairs are completed, the Deva museum could be opened for even the most demanding Romanian and foreign visitors'³².

A report from September 4, 1939, drafted by the delegates of Deva Town Hall, includes a short, technical description of the museum's building; this also had three plates attached (annexes of the land

²⁶ For a few years, the main focus was installing Romanian authorities in place of the Hungarian ones, and co-opting officials who had sworn themselves to Romania and knew the Romanian language. The files kept at the Hunedoara County Service of the National Archives on the funds controlled by the Hunedoara County Prefecture and Deva Town; reveal that in 1919–1920 knowing the Romanian language was optional for government officials, becoming compulsory from 1921. Preparatory courses were organized in this period for those who did not know the Romanian language.

²⁷ SJHAN. OD. 31/1938. 12.

²⁸ SJHAN. OD. 31/1938. 9.

²⁹ SJHAN. OD. 31/1938. 10.

³⁰ *Curentul* XI: 3825. 1938. September 25. 8.

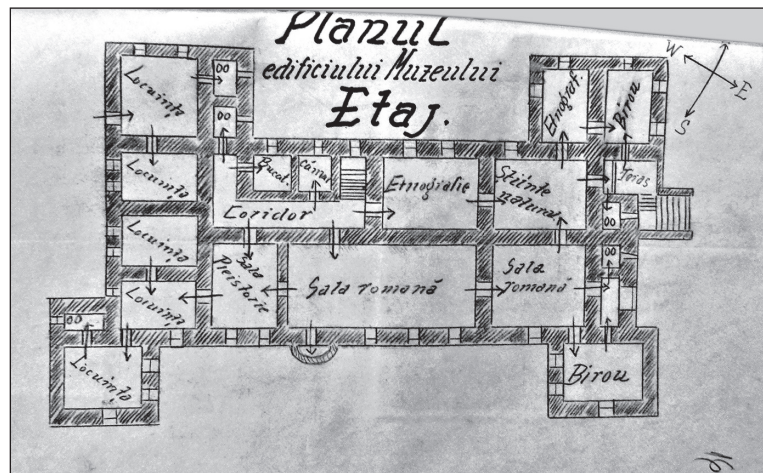
³¹ *Universul* 55: 351. 1938. December 24. 10.

³² *Curentul* XI: 3825. 1938. September 25. 8.

book no. 1170) (**Fig. 6**). The edifice had thirty-three rooms, of which twenty were used for displayed items, six for the residence of the director (Octavian Floca³³), four were inhabited by the bureau chief (Victor Winkler), while three were used by the guardian. Beside Winkler and the guardian's rooms, there were eight rooms on the ground floor that displayed the stone monuments from Roman sites Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa and Micia, a laboratory, two archaeological repositories, and the entry hall. On the upper floor, there were the director's rooms, a kitchen and pantry, two offices, a room for prehistoric artefacts, two rooms for the display of Roman-era objects, two chambers for ethnography, and one room for the natural sciences exhibition³⁴. A few years later, the first floor also housed the archive, library, and a laboratory for the conservation and restoration of archaeological materials (MOGA 1941. 657).

An important step in the history of the Museum was the 1942 enactment of new Organizational Regulations for the Museum. According to director Octavian Floca, the old mission statement was outdated and inapplicable³⁵. The Regulations Project³⁶ was forwarded to the Hunedoara County prefect, Col. Constantin Dumitrescu, on January 30, 1942. After a few changes, the Prefecture Cabinet forwarded the project to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on February 7, and on March 21, 1942, the minister Gen. Dumitru I. Popescu approved 'the Regulations for the organization of the Hunedoara County Regional Museum' through statement no. 47971³⁷. Among others, Article no. 6 of the Regulations stipulated that 'the headquarters of the Museum is forever the town of Deva, inside Bethlen Castle / *Magna Curia*, which is itself a historic building'³⁸.

From a letter to the prefect in February 1942, we learn that Octavian Floca wanted not only to renew the regulations, but also to reorganize the exhibits. 'To produce the maximal effect on foreign personalities used to well-organized and aesthetically built Western museums, a swift solution to the problem of the museum's space is required', without which 'the museum's collections could not be



• **Fig. 6.** • Hunedoara County Museum; 1939 plan of the upper floor
(Source: SJHAN. OD. 31/1938. 16)

³³ Octavian Floca was the longest-serving director of the Hunedoara County Museum, leading the institution between 1934 and 1963. Although József Mallász died in 1933, the post was vacant for a time due to the County Council actions, which tried to impose Floca's contender, Valer Paveloni (a Greek-Catholic priest without relevant studies or preoccupations, in this matter, but an active member of the National Peasants' Party). Thanks to the interventions of attorney Victor Șuiaga and Constantin Daicoviciu, at that time professor at Cluj University, this decision was annulled by the Administrative Court in Timișoara (ȘUIAGA 2011. 146–147).

³⁴ SJHAN. OD. 31/1938. 10–16.

³⁵ The museum's previous 1920 Statute had been drawn up by József Mallász, who based it on the text of the Archaeology and History Society's statute.

³⁶ SJHAN. PJH. 158/1942. 24–34.

³⁷ SJHAN. PJH. 158/1942. 36, 37.

³⁸ SJHAN. PJH. 158/1942. 40.

exhibited to their best advantage³⁹. According to the Regulation we know that the collections were organized as follows: a) prehistory, b) archaeology and numismatics, c) medieval period, d) ethnography, e) natural sciences, f) fine arts, religious art and industrial art, g) archive and library⁴⁰. In March 1943, the museum director sent a request to the prefect that the unspent amounts allocated for the archaeological excavations from the previous year should be used ‘for the internal arrangement of the exhibition areas’. A few months later, three cabinets, worth 85,000 lei, were finished and received⁴¹; such small acquisitions are scattered throughout the museum’s documents for the following two decades.

In the same year more reparation works were conducted on the museum’s building as well⁴², and in 1949 the roof was rebuilt⁴³. A series of documents preserved in the museum archives are showing ample repair works between 1951 and 1953. These administrative records (execution contracts, tally-sheets,

bills and assessments) reveal that this was not a unified project, but multiple contracts regarding different works, coordinated by the museum’s director; these were conducted both on the building’s exterior and its interior (‘capital repairs’), and both to consolidate and to improve the exposition area⁴⁴ (Fig. 7).



• Fig. 7. • *Magna Curia*; photograph taken around 1960
(Source: MCDR. Phototeque. n. p.)

The director’s activity reports and notes by delegates of the Ministry of Culture offer important information regarding the museum’s organization throughout this period, along with the changes made by the new socialist regime. In March 1955 Ion Paşa noted, during his travels in

the Hunedoara Region⁴⁵, that: ‘the Deva Regional Museum had 20 halls open for visitors, all collections are inventoried and well-preserved, presented, and accompanied by good complementary materials and scientific texts. It contains history sections [exhibitions]: the Stone Age, life of the Dacians, Roman-era slavery, and feudalism;’ and natural science sections [exhibition]: transformism, species richness. The museum only has four scientists: a director, two assistants and a preparer, as well as three janitors. The museum lacks a guide and secretary, such that these labours impose on the scientific cadre’s time, they

³⁹ MCDR. CIC. Correspondence 1920–1940. 21883.

⁴⁰ SJHAN. PJH. 158/1942. 42.

⁴¹ SJHAN. PJH. 248/1944.

⁴² SJHAN. PJH. 71/1943.

⁴³ Tiles leftover from the works, numbering 500, were requested by the Deva Penitentiary (today’s Hunedoara County Directorate of the National Archives) (SJHAN. PJH. 101/1949).

⁴⁴ MCDR. CIC. Decisions-Contracts. n. p.

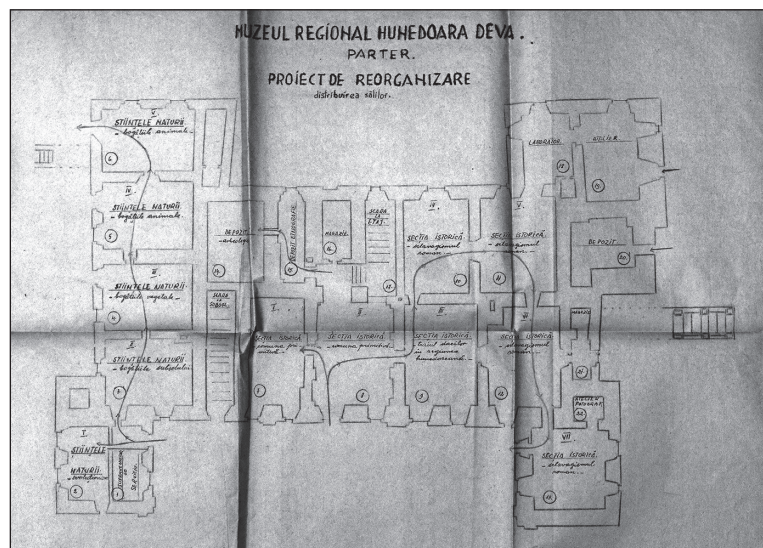
⁴⁵ The 1950–1968 Hunedoara Region consisted of considerably more land than current Hunedoara County, including almost all of the current Alba County. Thus, when the Culture Ministry’s delegate visited the Region, he went not only to the Deva, Orăştie, Aurel Vlaicu and Hunedoara Castle museums – contained within the county’s administrative area to this day – but also those in Alba Iulia and Sebeş.

also being responsible for investigations in the field'. He also remarked that 'for 1955, the museum is planning completion works for the feudalism section' but also that 'the museum scientific personnel's pay is less than that of secondary teachers and neighbouring regions' museum personnel'⁴⁶.

One of the problems that plagued the museum's activities from the beginning was insufficient space for a continuously expanding patrimony. In May 1955, in a document forwarded to the Popular Council of Hunedoara Region, Octavian Floca notified local authorities that the museum's available display space 'does not enable the organization of a Capitalist formation exhibition, much less for the development of the important *Building of the Socialism* exhibition; the situation was no better regarding storage space, with pieces being 'stuffed into various corners'. In these conditions, he thought that 'the continuing organization and the insurance of future development of this institution is completely paralysed'. To solve the problem of space, Floca proposed an intervention toward giving over the building of the former Franciscan monastery, at that point occupied by the Regional Trust of Local Construction Hunedoara⁴⁷ for the museum's use. Floca justified his request with the fact that the monastery was on the list of historic buildings of the Romanian People's Republic and that the Hunedoara Regional Museum was on the short list of museums proposed by the Ministry of Culture to be declared museums of republic-wide significance⁴⁸. We do not have any more information on any reply on this matter, but knowing the Deva museum's historical evolution, we believe the request was not approved.

It is possible that works undertaken at the beginning of the decade may not have covered all the needs of a historic building, since after only a few years, on February 11, 1956, Octavian Floca requested the Hunedoara Region's Architecture Service 'draw up documentation on necessary works and assign the money needed for the proper conservation of this important monument, from the funds allocated for the protection of the historic buildings from this region'⁴⁹.

A few days later (by statement no. 48 from February 16) a report was also forwarded, accompanied by three sketches, regarding the works needed for the museum's organization and development. After a short presentation of the museum (which had over 50,000 pieces in its patrimony and had been visited by 42,277 people in the previous year, including a number of personalities – which are mentioned), the director made a few proposals for making the exhibition space more efficient. The Lapidarium for Roman-era



• **Fig. 8.** • Hunedoara Regional Museum; 1956 plan of the ground floor
(Source: MCDR. CIC. Decisions-Contracts. n. p.)

⁴⁶ MCDR. CIC. Museum Archive. 130.

⁴⁷ The Franciscan monastery was abandoned in 1951, as the order's functioning had been banned.

⁴⁸ MCDR. CIC. Museum Archive. Record no. 168/ May 13, 1955. n. p.

⁴⁹ MCDR. CIC. Decisions-Contracts. n. p.

stonework should have been organized in the building's cellars, clearing some halls for the natural sciences collection (five rooms), prehistory (two rooms) and Dacian and Roman antiquities (five rooms). Furthermore, at the ground floor chambers were intended as warehouses, workshops, a laboratory, and two repositories (**Fig. 8**). Upstairs, it was necessary to evacuate the living spaces, gaining five rooms, which, according to the sketch, were to be dedicated to the 'Building Socialism' exhibit. Also on the upper floor, three halls were designated for the Medieval exhibition, and one for a Modern history exhibition. In addition, the upper floor comprised three warehouses, an office, an archive room and another one for the library⁵⁰. The report was signed by director Octavian Floca and main curator Beniemin Bassa. They also proposed that after the total reorganization of the interiors of the building a Museum Guide should be printed⁵¹. The only evidence that the exhibition space within the *Magna Curia* was reorganized is a 1957 photograph wherein the great hall shows artefacts illustrating 'Feudalism' (at that moment, the room hosted a temporary ethnographic exhibition that illustrated 'the popular art of the cohabiting nations')⁵². Regarding the investment into the building, only a September 22 report, attesting to plumbing installation works, is preserved⁵³.

For a long time the use of the museum's rooms did not suffer major transformations. In the first part of the 1950s, the rooms from both floors in the western side of the museum were used as dwellings, a situation which was to change in the following years, once the exhibition rooms had to be reorganized in accordance with the new ideological demands of the period. Sometime between 1956 and 1966 the spaces of the *Magna Curia* were redistributed. From a 1966 building survey we discovered that the residents from the western rooms were evicted in order to make room for new exhibits, without any specification of the historical period represented and the type of pieces on display. There is an address to the Historic Monuments Directorate in Bucharest in the museum's archive, indicating the drawing up of a repairs project, in 1963, for the Hunedoara Regional Museum⁵⁴.

This is the same year Mircea Valea took over the museum's directorship. It was in his time that the first major reorganization of the museum's exhibition took place – between 1968 and 1970. The project included major rehabilitation of the *Magna Curia* building and the redesign of the permanent exhibition. At the same time, repairs were started on the close-by building, which entered the patrimony of the County Museum in 1967. After these were completed, this building housed the permanent exhibition 'Natural Reserve in Hunedoara County' (NUȚU 1982–1983. 176). Therefore, only items from the archaeology collections have been exhibited inside *Magna Curia*. The twenty rooms that comprise the Museum's exhibition were offering glimpses into the history of Hunedoara County from prehistory up to the early Middle ages through the display of original artefacts, exclusively from the area of the county (IRIMESCU-ANDRUȘ 1982–1983. 41).

The desire of Octavian Floca, expressed more than a decade and a half earlier, was now accomplished: a Guide of the museum was drafted and published. This task was completed by Liviu Mărghitan

⁵⁰ MCDR. CIC. Decisions-Contracts. n. p.

⁵¹ MCDR. CIC. Decisions-Contracts. n. p.

⁵² *Scînteia Tineretului* XII: 2679. 1957. December 19. 7. In another 1959 national newspaper, it is stated that 'work is ongoing to organize a contemporary history section in the Deva Museum, comprising the regional working class's struggle-filled past, as well as the new, present life of working people in this part of the country' (*Scînteia* XXIX: 4707. 1959. December 16. 2).

⁵³ MCDR. CIC. Decisions-Contracts. n. p.

⁵⁴ Statement no. 364 from August 8, 1963 (MCDR. CIC. Correspondence 1963/II. n. p).

and Ioan Andrițoiu. According to this Guide (published in two editions – 1971 and 1972) the archaeology exhibition started with the ‘State of the Primitive Society’ and ended with ‘The Period of Early Feudalism’, thus from the Palaeolithic until the 10th century. Roman-era epigraphic and sculptural monuments were on display in six chambers on the western side of the building’s ground floor; items from the Roman-era were exhibited in the eastern halls (four rooms) and items dated to the 3rd and 4th centuries were displayed in one room. On the upper floor, prehistoric pieces were presented in three rooms on the eastern side: one room housed Roman objects; the rest, five rooms, being meant for the Dacian period artefacts. The few preserved photos, published in the Guide, show artefacts displayed in glass cases, accompanied by texts, photographic images and other complementary materials that make reference to their original environment and function (MĂRGHITAN, ANDRIȚOIU 1971. fig. 11. 19, MĂRGHITAN, ANDRIȚOIU 1972. fig. 20. 57).

At the end of the 1970s, the new orientations of the Nicolae Ceaușescu⁵⁵ regime in regards to cultural politics affected museums as well, gradually leading to the standardization of permanent exhibitions, which, with the exception of some aspects of local history, had to reflect national history. More than thirty museums in the country were ‘updated’ after 1980. The exhibitions were supposed to ‘reveal the formation of the working class, the creation and activity of the Romanian Communist Party, the revolutionary and democratic struggle, its corollary being social and national liberation, the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist Revolution commenced on August 23, 1944⁵⁶, and the Building of the Socialism in Romania’ (MOISA 2012. 5). The year 1980 was designated by communist propaganda organs as a jubilee year – ‘2050 years from the creation of the first centralized Dacian state, led by Burebista’ – in this year, Hunedoara County was to see a series of actions, including a visit by ‘beloved leader’ Ceaușescu. Preparations for this began in 1978, when director Mircea Valea was advised to retire and Ioachim Lazăr was brought in his place from Hunedoara Castle Museum (FERENCZ 2019. 114).

The last organization of permanent exhibitions at the Hunedoara County Museum was performed in this context. Previously, in 1978–1979, capital improvements of the *Magna Curia* building took place (Fig. 9). The Lapidarium for Roman-era stone monuments was moved outside, under an awning behind the building. Inside, the items housed in twenty-two rooms were displayed chronologically, ‘following the development stages of the Romanian nation’. In order to complete the historical context, pictures, replicas, and facsimiles were used especially for the modern and contemporary times. During the layout, certain priceless architectural elements were covered (like the Rococo chimney and most of Renaissance consoles). The exhibition was undertaken after the project drawn up by ‘State Enterprise Decorativa’ from Bucharest⁵⁷, and launched in 1981. A short description of the main aspects of the new exhibit is found in 1982 interviews by Ioachim Lazăr, and ones of Rodica Andruș the following year: prehistory and protohistory are reflected by Palaeolithic and Iron Age findings. The Dacian period, by iron tools, local, Rădulești-Hunedoara coins, silver jewels – bracelets, rings, hairpins (the Sărăcsău treasure), photographs from the Dacian fortresses in the Orăștiei mountains (the heartland of the Dacian kingdom), scale models of these fortresses, a diorama showing the distribution of fortresses and towers around Sarmizegetusa Regia (the Dacian kingdom’s capital), a copy of the Dacian banner (a wolf-headed,

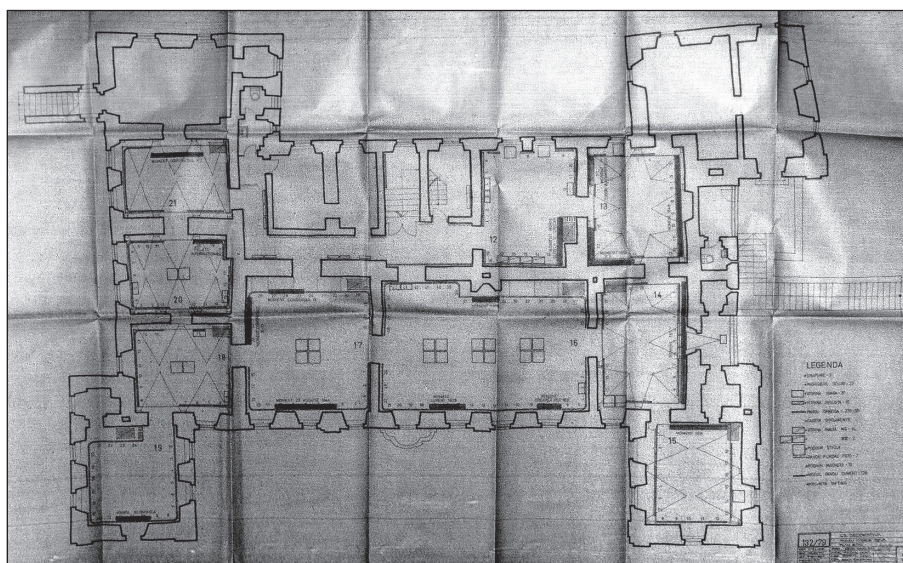
⁵⁵ Nicolae Ceaușescu was leader of Socialist Republic of Romania from 1965 until he was overthrown in December 1989.

⁵⁶ On August 23, 1944, Ion Antonescu, prime-minister of Romania, was dismissed from office and arrested. This act marked the beginning of military collaboration with the Soviet Union, the end of Romania’s alliance with the Axis Powers, and the turning of weapons against Germany.

⁵⁷ MCDR. AM. Projects. 173.

• Fig. 9.

Hunedoara County Museum; 1979 plan of the upper floor (Source: MCDR. AM. Projects. 173. n. p.)



serpent-bodied dragon). After the battles between the Dacians and Romans, the Roman province's era followed, with findings at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (the Roman province's capital) and other settlements, bespeaking the flourishing economic life, hypocaust remnants, funerary stones, and cult statues. After the migration period, one year deemed worth noting was 1269 – 'when the founding document for Deva was issued'⁵⁸. Next came objects and documents bespeaking the Romanians' 'struggle for freedom', referring the Peasants' Revolt from Bobâlna (1437), 'Ioan of Hunedoara'⁵⁹, 'Gheorghe Doja'⁶⁰ (1514), the Mihai Viteazul moment⁶¹ (1600), the Peasant uprising led by Horea, Cloșca and Crișan (1784), the 1821 Revolution in Wallachia led by Tudor Vladimirescu, the 1848 Revolution (with aspects from all three Romanian provinces). Regarding this last event, the exhibit also contained images of Áron Gábor and Mihály Táncsics, together with the central figure of Avram Iancu, whose activity was shown with many images and documents. The passing through Deva in 1866 of Alexandru Ioan Cuza⁶², on his road to exile, is also marked; information on the activities of Hunedoara's women during the First World War follows (there was a picture showing Ecaterina Teodoroiu⁶³ with an injured soldier, from Ilia). A special hall was dedicated to the Great National Assembly at Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918, and the Hunedoara locals' participation in this event. Next came documents and objects from the interwar period and the 'strengthening of the workers' movement', then the post-war period, where key moments in the 'Building of Socialist Society up to the present day' were marked, beginning with August 23, 1944, and ending with the 12th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party in 1979⁶⁴.

⁵⁸ The 1269 document actually refers to the donation of the Deva fortress by Duke Stephen, son of King Béla the IVth, to Chyl of Călnic.

⁵⁹ János Hunyadi.

⁶⁰ György Dózsa.

⁶¹ Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave) was Prince of Wallachia in 1593–1601. In Romantic Romanian historiography, he is considered the first unifier of the three Romanian Principalities, Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia, in 1600.

⁶² Alexandru Ioan Cuza was the first ruler of the United Principalities, and thus of the Romanian national state, by his election as ruler of Moldavia on January 5, 1859, and of Wallachia on January 24, 1859.

⁶³ Combatant in World War I; died at the end of the Battle of Mărășești while fighting at the head of a Romanian Army infantry platoon, in 1917.

⁶⁴ *România Pitorească* X: 10 (130). 1982. October. 14; *Dolgozó Nő* XXXIX: 10. 1983. October. 11.

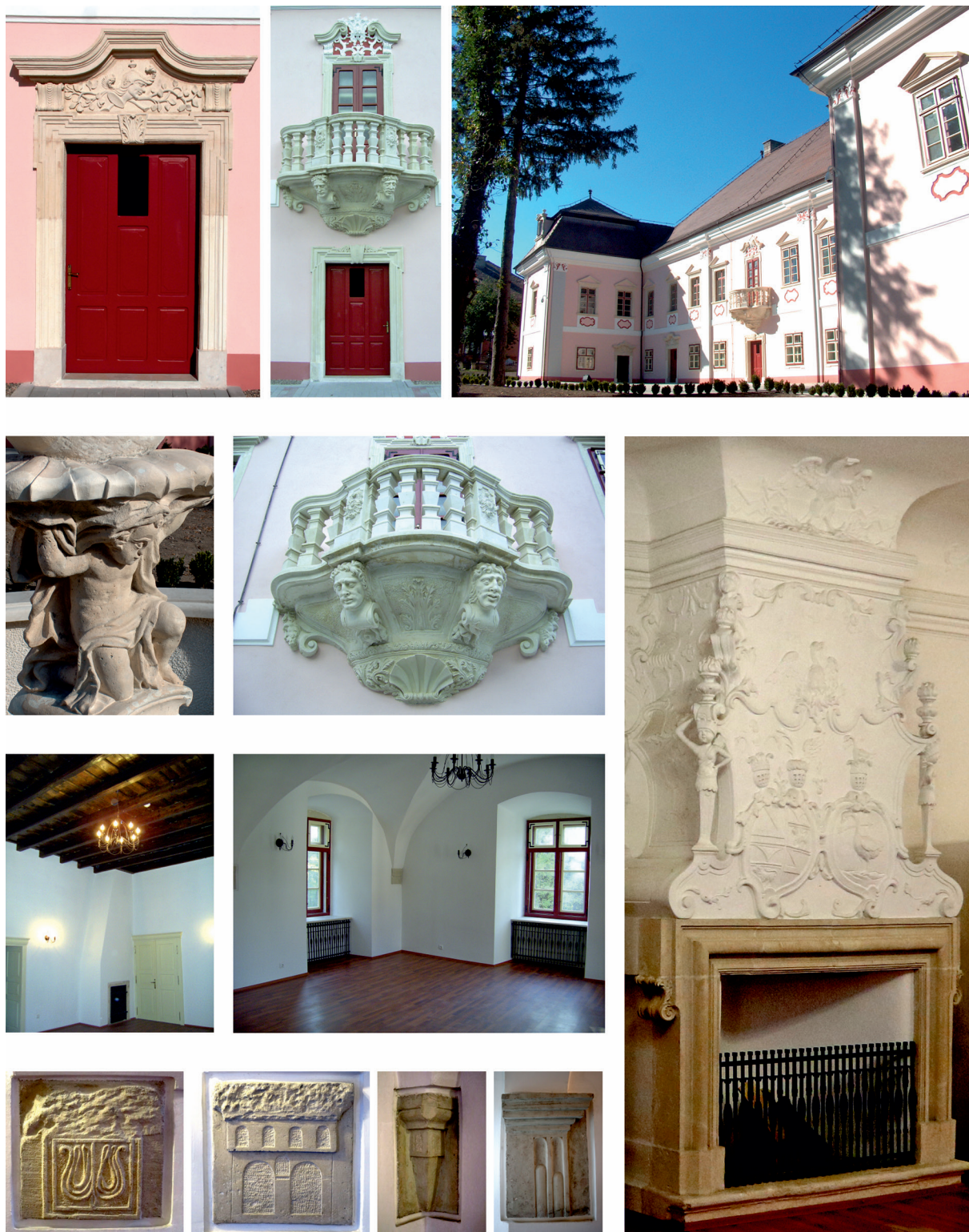
After December 1989, the exhibitions depicting the Communist period were gradually dismantled. (In 1987 Ioachim Lazăr had been replaced by Adriana Rusu Pescaru, the latter ran the museum until 2006). In 1994, the denomination of Hunedoara County Museum was changed to the present one: the Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization (in order to be individualised amongst other regional museums, keeping in mind that both the centres of pre-Roman and Roman Dacia were located in Hunedoara County). All the previous departments, collections and features have been preserved.

The permanent exhibition of the museum was taken apart in 1998 in order to perform a major restoration process. This project had a rough start and the restoration was completed only in 2006. Restoration works emphasized the historic monument, focusing on rebuilding its artistic and architectural components, as well as establishing visiting circuits, a starting point for a future exhibition project. Unlike the previous renovation projects which facilitated a continuous visitation flux that corresponded to a chronological approach to the concept of museum exhibition, the present space is fragmented, suitable for thematic exhibitions.

As soon as 2004, two years before the rehabilitation works were finalized, a temporary exhibition was organized, dedicated to the 80 years elapsed since systematic archaeological investigations began at Sarmizegetusa Regia.

After restoration works were finished, in the absence of substantial funding for a permanent exhibition, most part of the upper floor chambers have been transformed into offices, with small temporary exhibitions being organized in the ground floor rooms. The first temporary exhibition put together in this space, in November 2006, was 'Săcărâmb – Romania's Chamber of Treasures'. In 2012, repair works were completed on the museum's outbuilding (that housed the former Natural Sciences exhibition), and transformed it into the Administrative Headquarters⁶⁵. After all offices were moved into the newly modernized building, *Magna Curia* started hosting temporary exhibitions. In time, some museum initiatives were successfully made permanent: the yearly 'Historical Restitutions' exhibition, showing restored artefacts from the Deva museum's Restoration Laboratory (already organized for five years), and in the rooms dedicated to Visual Arts, apart from displays of the museum's art collection, local artists and photographers are promoted. Likewise, long-term presentations were successfully realized: the natural sciences exhibits, the Treasure, and a room dedicated to the Bronze Matrix – a unique piece, discovered in the former Dacian Capital, Sarmizegetusa Regia; the Lapidarium for Roman-era stone monuments was organized behind the building. Apart from these, the following temporary exhibitions are open to the general public: History of the Deva Fortress (2019, celebrating 750 years from the first recorded mention), the 140-year anniversary from the establishment of the Society of History and Archaeology of Hunedoara County (December 2020), a hall furnished with 19th century artefacts, integrating products of faience fine from Batiz, an exhibition reflecting aspects of Dacian civilization (the last of five thematic exhibitions in the sustainability period of SEE funds: 'When everyday life becomes UNESCO patrimony. The scanning, digital restoration and contextualization of Dacian artefacts from the Orăștiei Mountains') and an archaeological exhibition showing the museum collection's most important pieces (**Plate II**).

⁶⁵ Between 1998 and 2006 museum personnel had their offices into a wing of the old Administrative Palace and the upper floor of the museum's Natural Sciences Department building.



• Plate I. • *Magna Curia* after the restoration works, finished in 2006 (photo by the authors)



• Plate II. • Images from the exhibitions that can be seen nowadays in the *Magna Curia* Castle (photo by the authors)

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