

THE SACRED SITES OF TRANSYLVANIA

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Abstract. The historical-geographical province of Transylvania has its own specificity within Romania. The multi-ethnic structure and the religious diversity of its population make it a significant model for Europe. Transylvania's mythological and religious heritage is extremely rich. Each ethnic group has its own legends and each religion has its own infrastructure, different in terms of architecture and function. The latter defines the major lines of the landscape in the "sacred sites" that have become the recurring target of intense religious pilgrimage and cultural tourism. This study delineates the main mythological, pre-Christian, Christian and Mosaic "sacred sites" from Transylvania which are important for other religions. These sites are connected to the natural landscape (mountains, caves, and springs) and to religious buildings (sanctuaries, temples, monasteries, cathedrals, churches, synagogues, and hermitages).

1. INTRODUCTION

Because of its favourable environment, fertile land, and rich soil – gold and salt resources being among the richest in Europe – Transylvania is one of Romania's historical-geographical provinces that have been inhabited since prehistory. Palaeolithic, epipalaeolithic, and mesolithic remains have been discovered in the caves of Ghețarul Vârtope, Cuciulat, Cioclovina, or Ohaba-Ponor and at the sites of Gura Baciului, Căpușu Mic, Sândominic, Nochrich, or Gușterița (Cârciumaru, 1980; *Academia Română*, 2001, pp. 68–69). Ever since this stage of its evolution, some components of the landscape (mountains, caves, and springs) have exercised fascination and a special attraction upon the human being on the whole. They often turned into myth and sacredness through legends and faith (Bleahu, 1978; Cocean, 1995). Later on, when the religious feeling got more precise contours, this tendency grew because of "the need for myths" and "the penetration into the space of the sacred" where "the religious man of all times and of all religions" found "both the universal order and the reason to live" (Delumeau, 1993, p. 7). The difference between the sacred and the profane is concisely explained by Mircea Eliade (1995, p. 13) who considers that "the sacred is the opposite of the profane." The relationships between mythology and sacredness are also very well explained by Lucian Blaga. According to him, "[m]yth is the attempt to reveal a mystery with the means of imagination" (1987, p. 219) and "the magic (the sacred) appears in religion, in any religion, as an element integrated into a complex whole of metaphysical-mythological creations ..." (1987, p. 487).

These creations of imagination were initially linked to natural elements and phenomena. Then, after the first religions emerged, they got connected to the environment where rituals were taking place and practised. It is these creations that led to the appearance of the *sacred sites*. The believers of all religions will define and delimit them in space, even by materialization in an obvious landscape. We are referring to the religious buildings (sanctuaries, temples, churches, synagogues, etc.) which turn into sacred sites, facilitating the "communication with the skies." In fact, these buildings are genuine "houses of the gods", houses of Divinity (Eliade, 1995, p. 26, 55). All religions consider the *sacred sites* the interface of the human being with divinity (Freudenthal, 2000). This interface is constructed with the help of mystical imagination. Consequently, the statement that "sacred sites are found everywhere in the world and in every culture" (Cummings, 1987) seems to be as well-grounded as possible. Religious

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faith becomes the spiritual vector calling for the need to construct religious symbols and edifices that will function as a seal for the future sacred sites (Ostrowski, 2009). The space where different religions are practised, or which has a special mythological significance, has various denominations: *land of the gods*, *sacred land*, *holy spaces*, *terre sacrée* (Horster, 2010). This space will be associated to the buildings and the itineraries marking it, or connecting it, to other sites with the same functions (Olsen, 2007). This space will define a special cultural and religious reality which means a lot not only to the believers of those religions, but also to numerous tourists from all over the world (Ielenicz *et al.*, 2014).

The methods used for the present study include the assessment, classification and inventory of the sacred sites by using such factors as uniqueness, historical evolution of anthropogenic sites, and spiritual impact upon the local community as well as on the tourists visiting the sites.

2. THE TYPOLOGY, STRUCTURE, AND FUNCTION OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN SACRED SITES

The old and intense habitation of Transylvania, as well as its multi-ethnic and religious specificity (Bodocan, 2001) has created very diverse sacred sites (Fig. 1), which calls for their classification, first of all, according to genetical-functional criteria.

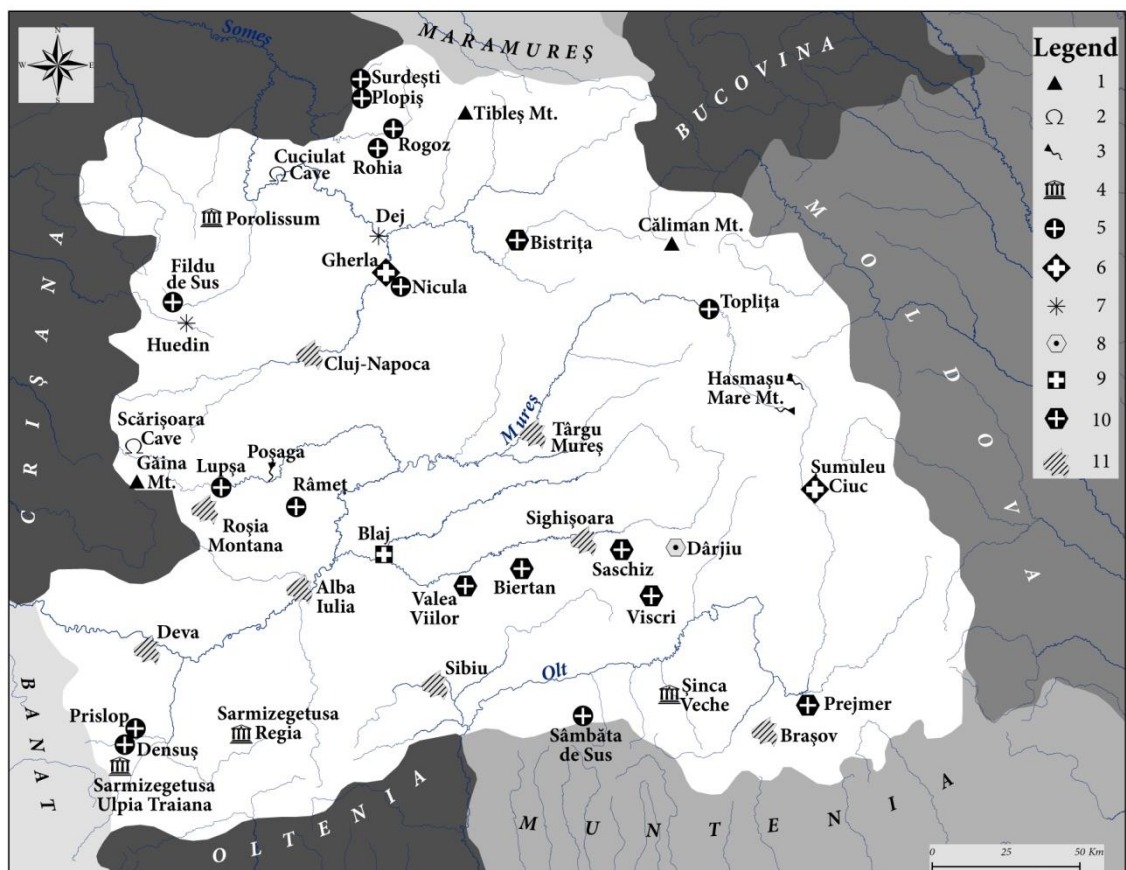


Fig. 1 – Sacred sites in Transylvania (Romania). A. Natural sacred sites: mountains (1); caves (2); springs (3); B. Confessional sacred sites: Pre-Christian Sacred Sites (4); Orthodox (5); Catholic (6); Reformed (7); Unitarian (8); Greek-Catholic (9); Evangelical (10); complex sacred sites (11).

Consequently, if we correlate the mythical (magical) perception of some natural elements with the main religions in their historical evolution, we get the first very general classification of the Transylvanian sacred sites. There are sacred sites of mythological origin and sacred sites of religious origin.

Mountains, caves or springs belong to the former group. Pre-Christian, Christian (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek-Catholic, Protestant), and Mosaic sacred sites belong to the latter. *Complex sacred sites* are sacred, mythological, and religious places intimately connected. The spatial relays linking different sacred sites constitute the religious pilgrimage routes and circuits.

2.1. Mythological sacred sites

Considering the numerous legends about dragons and wolves transmitted in the collective imaginary from generation to generation all over the place, Transylvania can be viewed, in its entirety and at the macro level, a European sacred and mythological site. During the 20th century this aspect was enhanced by Transylvania's literary association with Vampire Dracula whose origins were placed by writer Bram Stoker in this geographical-historical province of Romania. Consequently, Sighișoara, the birthplace of the Wallachian Voivode Vlad the Impaler, the historical prototype of the vampire and the house where he was born, became a place of pilgrimage for those interested in this character.

But in Transylvania there are also sacred, mythological spaces that coincide with mountains, caves, or springs. They are elements of the natural background the mythical projection of which is the fruit of the local communities' imaginary creations.

Sacred mountains. Among all the landscape elements, mountains are most often endowed with the attribute of sacredness, because by their pyramid-like shape and their vertical position "they show the connection between the skies and the Earth" (Eliade, 1995, p. 36). Among the numerous mountains from the four borders of Transylvania's hilly depression, the Țibleș, the Călimani, and the Găina Mountains have a well-known mythological aura.

The *Țibleș Mountains*, situated in Northern Transylvania, are of subvolcanic origin. Their main ridge is uncovered from under the Oligocene sedimentary deposits and appears as a picturesque residual form in the local relief. Arcer, Țibleș, and Bran, the three cliffs of the main ridge, are 1,840 m high and can be clearly seen against the neighbouring relief. The mythological projection of the place is intense. The name of the massive mountain seems to have derived from Cybele, the goddess of the mountains and natural fertility (Densușeanu, 1986). In the steepest and most picturesque place of these mountains, a site under Arcer Cliff, legends situate "*the Fairies' Garden*" (described by Kovary Laszlo in 1857 and quoted by Pădureanu, 2008). The local folk mythology still preserves this information nowadays, especially in the village of Târlișua, the birthplace of Liviu Rebreanu, the creator of the modern Romanian novel.

The Călimani Mountains (2,100 m), situated in the eastern part of Transylvania, are also one of the sacred sites. Their "Seat of the Lord", a smooth volcanic plateau at 1,380 m altitude, is an excellent sightseeing spot that dominates the whole Transylvanian depression. Its mythical aura comes from the presumption that this is where the Last Judgment will take place. Witches also haunt the site.

The Găina Mountain (1,486 m high) dominates the southern part of this mountainous group. It is positioned at the interference of the Zarand Land and the *Moși* Land (Lands are spatial and identity entities, highly typical of Romania; see Cocean, 2011; Miossec, 2013, p. 231). This makes the *Găina Mountain* a typical space of ethno-folkloric interference. Its sacredness lies in the legend about the hen with golden eggs whose nest was at the top of this mountain. The eggs were given by a good fairy to the newly-weds in order to secure happy matrimony. The consequence of the legend (or maybe its source) is the *Girls' Fair* on the Găina Mountain, a folklore, secular, and century-old event that takes place every year, around St. Elijah's Feast Day (20 July). Young people from all the sparse mountainous villages, well-known for their high autarchy, met on this day. Numerous marriages were then concluded.

Sacred caves. There are over 13,000 caves on the territory of Romania. About one third are in the calcareous mountains of Transylvania (the central and the eastern area of the Western Carpathians, the Rodna, the Giurgeu, the Perșani, the Postăvarul, the Piatra Mare, and the Șureanu Mountains, the Someșan Plateau) (Cocean, 1995). Numerous subterranean caves are famous because the local population found shelter in their galleries during the rigorous of the Quaternary glaciations (Bleahu, 1978; Cocean, 1995; Onac *et al.*, 2005). According to the Transylvanian population, the sacredness of the caves derives from the unusual aspect of the subterranean environment: dark, mysterious, and only difficult to access, an environment that can give birth to the most surprising imaginary shapes. In this context we can mention the Cave of the Scărișoara Glacier. According to local legends, here lives an imaginary creature called “șolomâț” who used to steal girls from the neighbourhood, take them to his subterranean kingdom, and marry them.

The sacredness of some caves also comes from their contact with the primitive man. This was mentioned by Mircea Eliade, the well-known historian of religions (1992, p. 32), who said that “the caves and the sites decorated with rupestrian paintings from the Spanish Levant were considered holy places”. Blaga (1987) talks about “the magic thinking” of the primitive who considered, “by analogy,” that the antelopes he painted on the cave walls would make the real ones come within the range of the hunter’s weapon. This opinion was reinforced by more recent arguments according to which parietal, prehistoric paintings are frequently associated with worshipping altar-caves (Clottes and Williams, 2015). By mere analogy with the painted caves from France or Spain, the Cuciulat Cave from the Someșan Plateau, can be integrated into this category because of its prehistoric paintings (Cârciumaru, 1980) (Fig. 2).

Sacred Springs. Water sources have always been and still are vital for the foundation of any human habitat. Hence, the frequent projection of springs, rivers, or lakes in spirit and mythology. Among all the springs, karst springs impress by their flow capacity, way of functioning, and drainage that can be continuous, intermittent, gravitational, or under pressure (vauclosian). An intermittent karst spring is Bujorul from the Poșaga Gorges in the Trascău Mountains, a site of pilgrimage for Orthodox Christians who visit the Poșaga Hermitage, situated nearby.

More complex, also because of its spatial location, is the site where the Olt and the Mureș, Romania’s most important rivers, spring from. This site is located in the Negru Peak from the Hășmaș Mountains. The legend of the twin brothers has numerous local variants. One of them is about an old man called Hășmaș. He had two worthy sons who were killed by the ogres. Another legend, which is better known, is about a great city with two towers. Here lived an emperor whose sons would leave in two different directions in order to look for him after he had lost a battle. In the end, the two sons would turn into rivers. A convent was built at Izvorul Mureșului, which reminds of the legend, and is a pilgrimage site that is getting ever more popular.

Besides the above-mentioned stories, in the Transylvanian space there are numerous legends about the “bottomless lakes”, such as Cetățele (Bistrița-Năsăud County), Ighiu in the Western Carpathians, or the Death Lake at Dumbrăvița (Brașov County). These stories give these forms of hydrographic organization a special mythical aura, with particularly sombre elements.

2.2. Religious sacred sites

The sacred religious sites appeared as religious beliefs spread. These sites include pre-Christian sacred sites (they belong to the monotheist religion of the Dacian-Getae) and the sacred sites associated with Christian denominations (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek-Catholic, Protestant), or the Mosaic religion. Although in Transylvania there are no sacred cities, such as Jerusalem, or Mecca (Freudenthal, 2000; Massi Dakake, 2011), the density of sacred sites is very high due to the ethnical and the religious diversity of its population.

Pre-Christian Sacred Sites

The territory of Transylvania has been inhabited since the Lower Palaeolithic, 62,000 years ago. “The Vârtop Man” left his footprint on the hardened moonmilk crust of the Vârtop Glacier Cave (Onac *et al.*, 2005). In this Central European space there was a succession of civilizations and cultures: the Aurignacian, the Gravettian, the Tardenoisian, the Gura Baciului, the Starčevo-Criș, the Vinča, the Petrești, the Wietenberg, the Suciul de Sus, and the Noua cultures, etc. (Rotea, 2009, pp. 31–42). Each of them had its specific religious practices. Written sources and obvious archaeological evidence only talk about the Geto-Dacian culture whose spatial nucleus is the Transylvanian Depression and the Carpathian Mountains surrounding it (Eastern Carpathians, Southern Carpathians, Western Carpathians) (*Academia Română*, 2001, pp. 784–788).

The Geto-Dacian civilization was attested in written sources in the 6th century B.C. when Herodotus described the incursion of the Persian King Darius into the Black Sea basin and his confrontation with the Getae tribes. In reality, this civilization began much earlier (“the Dacians or the Getae were the people of the Bronze Age and they had inhabited the above-mentioned lands since around 2,000–1,800 B.C.”– Giurescu, 1981, apud Vasile Pârvan). Herodotus (484 – 425 B.C.) and Strabo (63 B.C. – A.D. 26) gave us a lot of information about their religion, about Zalmoxis, their supreme god, and about Kogaionon, “the sacred mountain” which is, at least up to now, only a mythic supposition. But the archaeological remains, the *sanctuaries* and the *temples* from **Sarmizegetusa Regia**, the capital of the Dacian state, and from **Costești**, a neighbouring fortress, are real. At Sarmizegetusa there is a genuine “sacred precinct” (Fig. 4) that used to include two sanctuaries: a round one, with a complex structure, and a rectangular one that is much smaller and includes eighteen columns arranged in three lines, each line with six columns. The round sanctuary is considered a “calendar sanctuary.” At the fortress from Costești was uncovered a sanctuary containing thirty-six columns also arranged in lines of six (Daicoviciu, 1968, pp. 210–218). The Dacian fortress where one can find the sacred precinct from Sarmizegetusa is among Romania’s seven sites which belong to the UNESCO patrimony.

“The Temple of the *Ursite*”¹ in the village of Șinca Veche, Brașov County also belongs to the pre-Christian period. This cave sanctuary was sculptured in the friable rock of a hilly slope. It has two altars whose functions have been given various interpretations².



Fig. 2 – Wall painting in the Cuciulat Cave
(Source: Cocean, 1995).



Fig. 3. The sacred precinct at Sarmizegetusa Regia.

¹ A sort of Weird Sisters who can predict the future (translator’s note).

² <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/biserici-manastiri/manastirea-rupestra-sinca-veche-67910.html>.

After the destruction of the Dacian sanctuaries by the Romans during the 101–102 A.D. and A.D. 105–106 wars, the religious centres were moved to the Daco-Roman towns built later. First of all, *Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana*, the capital of the new province, Dacia, was built in the Hațeg Depression, about 35 km from Sarmizegetusa Regia, the former capital of the Dacian state. It is here that the future Roman religious edifices, such as sanctuaries (Aesculapius, Hygia), or temples (Liber Prater, the Great Temple, Silvanus, Nemesis) (Pop and Nagler 2009, p. 162), would be built. Temples with a similar function would also be built in other cities from the analysed area, for instance: in *Apulum*, *Potaissa*, *Napoca* or *Porolissum*.

Christian Sacred Sites

Researchers consider that Christianity was already attested on the Transylvanian territory during the A.D. 4th–6th centuries. Religious objects (rushlights, crosses, gems, ritual vessels) were discovered at Porolissum, Bucium (north of Gherla), Dej, at Napoca, in the centre of the Transylvanian Depression, or at Biertan, Apulum, and Ampellum in the south and south-west of the Depression. The 4th-century Christian inscriptions are known by everybody: “*Ego Zenovius votum possui*” – “I, Zenovius, put this offering”³ and “*Ego...ulus Vot (um) P (osui)*” – “I ...ulus put this offering”⁴ (Giurescu, 1981, pp. 78–86). The former inscription is from Biertan, the latter from Porolissum.

The geographical position and the tight contacts of the Romanian population with Eastern Christianity influenced Transylvania. After the separation of the two Christian churches in 1054, Transylvania was circumscribed to the area of the Orthodox Christian influence promoted by the religious centre of Constantinople. Consequently, Orthodoxy would become the religion of the Romanian population in Transylvania till the 1689 *Union* when the Greek-Catholic Church was founded by the Edict of Alba Iulia. A significant part of the Romanian population joined this new church

During the 11th century, Catholic Hungary started the conquest of Transylvania. Consequently, the two fundamental Christian denominations, Catholicism and Orthodoxism, interfered all over the region.

The religious Reformation started during the 16th century and led to the appearance of the Protestant Churches: Reformed, Evangelical, and Unitarian. Some of them became very influential with the Hungarian, or the Germans, who initially had been Roman Catholics.

The resulting religious puzzle led to the foundation of sacred sites for each religion. A notorious example, in this respect, is Roșia Montană, a rural mining locality from the Western Carpathians where there are five churches belonging to the five religions typical of the whole of Transylvania: Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Roman Catholic, Reformed (Calvinistic), and Unitarian (Cocean, 2012, p. 58).

Orthodox sacred sites are numerous as this is the dominant religion in Transylvania, 65.1 % of the population belonging to this religious denomination (Pop, Niță, 2014). These sacred sites include both religious buildings (monasteries, cathedrals, churches, hermitages) and landscape elements that have a sacred aura, such as mountains, caves, or springs.

The Orthodox monasteries that qualify as sacred sites are those at Rohia, Nicula, Râmeț, and Sâmbăta de Sus. Their number was much higher but the decision of the Vienna Court that the Orthodox believers should convert to Greek-Catholicism also led to punitive measures, such as those initiated by General von Buccow, Governor of Transylvania from 1762 to 1764, when numerous Orthodox monasteries and churches were burnt down and destroyed.

Rohia Monastery was built in a very picturesque spot in the southern area of the Lăpuș Depression in 1923. It quickly became a place for regional pilgrimage in the northern and central part of Transylvania. Its aura was increased by the image of Nicolae Steinhardt, a monk philosopher, who chose this monastery as his last habitat after getting out of the Communist prisons. It is also here that Steinhardt wrote his best known work: *The Diary of Happiness*. Pinteș the Brave, an outlaw and much

³ “I Zenovius put the offer”.

⁴ “I ...ulus put the offer”.

beloved popular hero worshipped in the local folklore, was born in Măgoaja, a nearby village. He used to roam all over the area where this edifice was built.

Nicula Monastery is situated near the municipium of Gherla. It is the most representative sacred place for the Orthodox believers of Transylvania, but it is also a major religious site for the other historical-geographical provinces of Romania. Its fame is due to the miracle icon that represents the Vergin and the Holy Child. The icon was painted by Luca of Iclod (Fig. 4) in 1681. The monastery has two dedication days: 15 August (the Assumption) and 8 September (the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary). They attract thousands of pilgrims. This monastery is on "Via Mariae," a route of international pilgrimage. The circuit starts in Czestochowa (Poland) and Mariazell (Austria), goes to Mariapocs (Hungary), Nicula, Șumuleu Ciuc, and Hodoș-Bodrog (Romania) and ends at Medugorje (Bosnia-Herzegovina). At Nicula there is also a very well known school for painting glass icons.

Râmeț Monastery is situated in the most picturesque environment: the spectacular Gorges of the Monastery in the Trascău Mountains. It is a very old monument (13th–14th centuries) and its troubled history enriched its mystical aura, as well as its religious and tourist attractiveness fully valorised by the yearly pilgrimage on the feast of the Life-Giving Spring day.

Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery is situated in the Făgăraș Land. It was built by the family of the enlightened Voivode of Wallachia Constantin Brâncoveanu in the 17th century. The monastery is a sample of an original Romanian architectural style, the Brâncoveanu style. The Orthodox believers from the south of Transylvania prefer this place of pilgrimage.

Prislop Monastery is a religious edifice situated in the northern area of the Hațeg Depression. It became a pilgrimage place literally assaulted by huge waves of Orthodox believers fascinated by the aura of Arsenie Boca, "the Saint of Transylvania."

Păltiniș Hermitage is a discreet site that impresses by its scholarly sacredness. It is worshipped by philosophers and literati because this is the site where the great philosopher Constantin Noica found his creative shelter.

The wooden churches from Lăpuș, Sălaj, or the Western Carpathians are sacred sites of national importance (Șurdești, Rogoz, and Plopiș), regional importance (Gârda de Sus, Sânmihaiu Almașului, Poarta Sălajului, Fildu de Sus, Peteritea, and Stoiceni), and local renown (Boereni, Cupșeni, Dobric I–II, Drăghia, Dumbrava, Fântânele, Groape, Inău, Larga, Lăpuș, Libotin, Peteritea, Poiana Botizii, Răzoare, Vălenii Lăpușului, and Vima Mică). The sacred sites of national importance are included in the repertory of the UNESCO monuments.

The stone churches from the Hațeg Depression (Densuș, Sântămăria Orlea, and Clopotiva) are also sacred sites of regional importance.

Catholic Sacred Sites. Catholicism has penetrated into the Transylvanian space since the 11th century, when Transylvania was submitted to the royal Hungarian crown. The Catholic denomination has its own sacred sites visited by its believers. Its most representative sacred place is Șumuleu Ciuc, a neighbourhood of Miercurea Ciuc municipium where the church dedicated to Virgin Mary shelters the miracle icon representing Virgin Mary (16th century) (Fig. 5). Every year, on the Pentecost, there is a grandiose pilgrimage to the Șumuleu Mic Mountain. Hundreds of thousands of Catholic pilgrims from all Central European countries come to Șumuleu Ciuc. Another special sacred space is the Armenian-Catholic Cathedral at Gherla, which polarizes the faith of all the Armenian community from Romania. Other Catholic edifices of importance are in Alba Iulia (the oldest Roman Catholic Cathedral in Transylvania, built in the 13th century, the burial place of John Hunyadi, Hungary's regent, and of John Sigismund Zápolya, the king of Hungary), Cluj-Napoca (St. Michael's), Târgu Mureș, Turda, etc.

Greek-Catholic sacred sites. The Greek-Catholic denomination spread in Transylvania after the Alba Iulia Edict of 1698. This document was meant to attract the Romanian population to Catholicism. The Greek-Catholic denomination became quite popular during the next centuries. Between the two

World Wars, 28% of Transylvania's population were Greek-Catholics (Bodocan, 2001). From 1948 till 1989 this denomination was forbidden by the Communist regime. After 1990 it was again recognized by the state. The town of Blaj is the main site for the Greek-Catholic believers. It is here that one can find the main Greek-Catholic archbishopric and an impressive cathedral.

Protestant sacred sites. We include into this category representative churches belonging to the three Protestant denominations: the *Unitarian* one, which was founded in this historical-geographical province, the *Reformed* one, and the *Evangelical* One. All of them have a lot of believers among the Hungarian and German communities.

Transylvania, namely its spiritual capital, the municipium of Cluj-Napoca, is the birth place of a Protestant denomination. Minister David Ferenc founded Unitarianism in this town, in 1568 (Marga, 2014). Later on, this denomination spread in many other countries. In Cluj-Napoca is the edifice that functions as a cathedral for the Romanian believers of this denomination and is their ecclesiastic pole. A fortified Unitarian church exists in Dârjiu. It was built in the 13th and 14th centuries and it is included on the world list of protected historical monuments.



Fig. 4 – Nicula – the miracle icon.



Fig. 5. The Catholic Church from Șumuleu Ciuc.

Over 10% of Transylvania's inhabitants belong to the Reformed denomination which has numerous buildings with sacred functions in towns or rural localities. Such are the Central Reformed Church from Cluj-Napoca (15th century), an important church for this denomination, the church from Târgu Mureș (15th century), Alba Iulia, Sibiu (18th century), Dej (15th century, the parochial church), Huedin (13th century), Deva, or Sic, etc.

The German population from southern and eastern Transylvania converted massively to the Evangelical (Lutheran) denomination. The sacred sites of this denomination coincide with the churches, or the cathedrals, from big cities (Brașov – *the Black Church*, Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca, Bistrița) and especially the 200 fortified churches of Transylvania (Schreiber, 2000). The list of the UNESCO heritage includes five of these churches: Biertan, Saschiz, Viscri, Valea Viilor, and Prejmer.

Mosaic Sacred Sites. The Jewish population has been living in Romania for over 600 years (Grunea, 2000). Synagogues exist in numerous Transylvanian cities: Cluj-Napoca (3), Braşov (2), Târgu Mureş (2), Dej, Sibiu, Alba Iulia, Bistriţa, Deva, Târnăveni, Mediaş, Haţeg, Turda, Făgăraş, Orăştie, Jibou, Gheorgheni, Gherla, etc. The number of Mosaic believers has decreased drastically because the number of the Jews is much lower as a consequence of the tragic events during World War II and the intense emigration afterwards. The above-mentioned synagogues preserve their initial function and diversify of the religious aspect of localities. They are pilgrimage sites for the descendants of the former inhabitants of Jewish origin who settled down in other countries, mostly in Israel.

Sacred Sites of Several Religious Denominations

The spatial association of the sacred sites belonging to several religions is typical of the big cities and many one-thousand-year-old rural localities which have complex functions. The result is a many-sided “sacred land”, such as Cluj-Napoca, where the remains of ancient, pre-Christian, Daco-Roman temples co-exist with the buildings representative of the Roman Catholic denomination (St. Michael’s from the 14th century; Calvaria), the Orthodox denomination (the Orthodox Metropolitan Church), Unitarianism, the Reformed Church, the Greek-Catholic denomination (the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ), the Evangelical Church or Judaism.

Another sacred land is situated in Alba Iulia (the ancient Apulum) where the temples from the Roman castrum are next to the oldest Roman Catholic Cathedral from Transylvania (11th–12th centuries), the Orthodox Cathedral of the Reunification, and a Reformed Church.

Braşov is dominated by the Black Church (14th century), the most impressive Gothic building in Romania which belongs to the Evangelical religious denomination. In the neighbourhood of Scheii Braşovului is St. Nicholas’, the Orthodox Cathedral. Braşov, the most important city in Țara Bârsei (Bârsa Land) also has Reformed and Greek-Catholic churches, and two synagogues.

The municipium of Târgu Mureş is also very complex from the religious point of view. It is dominated by edifices belonging to the Reformed, the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox, the Greek-Catholic, and the Mosaic denominations. The Reformed Church was built in the 14th century.

In Sibiu there are important buildings of the Evangelical, the Orthodox, the Reformed, the Roman Catholic, the Greek-Catholic denominations, and a synagogue. The Evangelical Church was built in the 14th century.

2.3. The sacred aura of the religious routes and circuits

Practising a religion often means following itineraries that include visits to sacred sites or specific activities.

Such a **ritual route** is the “Way of the Cross”, which follows the biblical model, of course, at another scale and in different places. Very well-known is the “Way of the Cross” from Lupeni to Straja Hermitage (1,450 m) in the Parâng Mountains. This route is popular with thousands of believers. Another such itinerary is the “Way of the Cross” from Aiton where the route, including fourteen stops, climbs the Ciolt Hill (718 m). The Greek-Catholic believers follow this route every year.

The sacred circuits of the “camino” type are longer and combine even at international level, sacred land or sacred sites with an impressive mythical aura (Nicolae, 2015). Transylvania is part of the “Via Mariae” route that links monasteries housing miracle icons and miracle statues: Mariazell (A) – Czestochowa (PL) – Mariapocs (H) – **Nicula** (RO) – **Şumuleu Ciuc** (RO) – Hodoş-Bodrog (RO) – Medugorje (BH).

A circuit that is about to get shape links the Transylvanian Orthodox monasteries: Rohia – Dobric – Salva – Topliţa – Izvoru Mureşului – Miercurea Ciuc (St. Nicholas’) – Sâmbăta – Cârţişoara – Orlat – Râmeţ – Rimetea – Lupşa and Nicula.

3. CONCLUSIONS

1. Transylvania has been inhabited since prehistory because of its diverse and rich natural resources, as well as its favourable environment. The material and the spiritual cultures that have been developing here since the early Palaeolithic have created sacred sites closely connected to the development of the local populations' mythical thinking.

2. As the religious feeling – in all its forms – has appeared, consolidated, and diversified with the various ethnical groups having interfered and cohabited along centuries in the Transylvanian space, various sacred sites representative of different religious denominations (Orthodox, Catholic, Greek-Catholic, Protestant, Mosaic) came into being.

3. Unlike the sacred sites of mythological origin and coinciding with some natural elements (mountains, caves, etc.), religious sacred sites point to a very precise localization marked by representative religious buildings (cathedrals, churches, monasteries).

4. The sacred character of these sites is proven both by the permanent ritual activities typical of any religion and especially by the pilgrimages to these sites.

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