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A Brief History of the Franciscan Church of Arad Fortress



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Introduction in the history of the Franciscan religious establishments of the 18th century

Ordo Fratrum Minorum (logo: OFM), Ordo Fratrum Minorum Conventualum (OFMConv), Ordo Fratrum Minorum Cappucinatorum (OFMCap) are Catholic orders followers of the Monastic Rule formulated by Francis de Assisi (1182-1226), who imposed on his order the requirement of assumed poverty.

The underlying principle of this order was assumed poverty, its members subsisting by begging, without any assets, properties or fix income.

The order aimed at teaching the poor, repenting the sinners, caring the sick and converting the heretics.

In spite of tensions or even internal crisis between the members who promoted the idea of radical poverty and those inclining to accept properties with a view to supporting convents, the order spread quickly, enjoying sympathy.

The members of the order were dedicated to science and culture, some of them becoming illustrious characters. (Saint Anthony of Padua, Dante Alighieri, Pope Sixtus IV, etc.)

The Franciscan lifestyle was verbally approved by Pope Innocent III in 1209. The order enjoyed particular popularity among the population being a major tool in

the renewal of the church in late Middle Ages, when its founder passed away aged 44, the order already had several thousands disciples.

In the 14th century, the Franciscan movement inspired ageless artistic works of art: basilica Sf. Francis of Assisi, the church Sf. Clare, representing a peak in the 13th and 14th century arts.

Since 1897, the main Franciscan families have been reunited in Ordo Fratrum Minorum, the following branches remaining distinct: minors and Capuchins besides the Franciscan tertiaries (Ordo Franciscanum Secularum OFS) and the female Franciscan family: the Clares (Saint Clare of Assisi 1194-1253).

The conventual Franciscan order, known as minor order, also declares itself as active and contemplative order according to its regulations: "Our contemplative life is closely linked to our active apostolic mission. Minors live inside their communities as brothers, in the identity of friars minor conventual, which is their distinctive mark. Saint Francis established the following: brothers should work, dig, hoe, mow, carry pebbles, water, drive horses, mules, and scientists should teach, priests should preach, hold sermons, meaning each of the brothers, in their own ways and according to own skills, should act to the benefit of people, to be of help to others in their fair trades, and should not accept any financial reward, and be satisfied only with the minimum

of food and clothes necessary for living.” *(Saint Francis of Assisi, Rule II.,c.5 Opuscoli 174, 108.)

Also at present, Franciscans represent the most numerous religious order, with over 34 ths members in the three branches, (having their own independent structure), plus the over 1.400.000 tertiaries (laymen living by the Franciscan rule).

The higher authority of the order is in Rome, and in the European countries, there were the so called lands, consisting of several custodies. Within the territory of the custody there were several monasteries.

Franciscans appeared in Transylvania in the third decade of the 13th century.* (Bodó Márta: Assisi Szent Ferenc Erdélyben, St. Francis of Assisi in Ardeal.) In Banat they came in the 14th century, from Bulgaria and Bosnia, and received approval from Pope Gregory XI to build 12 new monasteries besides the existing ones. They had many advantages compared to the other religious orders: they were used to the hostile conditions of the Balkans, had experience in the relationships with Ottoman administration, spoke the languages of the local populations.

The Bosnian Franciscans of Banat had headquarters in Timișoara, Caransebeș, Lugoj and Radna.

After the conquest of Banat by the imperial army their activity continued but in better conditions. The

Franciscans order had a positive influence on the evolution of the Catholicism in Banat.* (Ciprian Glăvan: The history and establishments of the religious orders in Banat in the 18th century, p.206, 208.)

During the period of the vertiginous rise of Protestantism in Transylvania, amongst the Catholics it was only the Franciscans to be tolerated. Their re-appearance and spreading, once with the catholic reform, by late 17th century, was quick. *(Bodó)

The disciples, known under the name of Order of Friars Minor Conventual, managed entering due to their insistence on the property right of the convents.

Monasteries, parishes, Franciscan houses were set up in Braşov, Carei, Cluj, Dej, Deva, Lăzarea (Mureş), Odorheiu Secuiesc, Şumuleu Ciuc, Şebes (Alba), Radna (Arad) etc. New provinces were set up in Baia Mare (1687), Arad (1703), Bistriţa, Cluj, Târgu Mureş (1724) etc. Monasteries were run by an abbot.

The role of the monastery and church in the life of the city and of the military citadel

In 1702, the Bavarian minor friar Camilus Höfflich, the priest of hussars in Lichtenstein arrived in Arad upon the invitation of the church-goers, where he erected a chapel and a residence. But after only a few years, during the national liberation war conducted by prince Rákóczi, they were destroyed. A church was erected on the same spot, which was used until 1751, when a new church was decided to be built, under the patronage of "St. Anthony of Padua". The church tower was erected later only in 1821 and was placed on the Northern side of the facade, due to the laws in force at the time regarding constructions.

The minor church was visited also by the emperor Joseph II. The bishops of Cenad and of Oradea held sermons here.

This church was demolished in June- July 1902, when the works started at the current minor church in the center of Arad.

Under the guidance of the minors, Arad also hosted the German speaking elementary school, then the Hungarian elementary school that in 1845 was turned into a highschool, functioning as such until 1867, when it was taken over by the state. *(the National Archive, branch of Arad 1970; Ciprian Glăvan.)

Moreover, in the years between the world wars (1919-1940), the minors published a cultural magazine *Vasárnap* („Sunday”), being the most longest-living magazine published in Arad by that time.

Minors also focused on the mother tongue education at the Roman- Catholic Highschool in the city, starting the year 1919 until the schools nationalization in 1948. *(Puskel Péter: Magyar gimnázium Aradon. Hungarian highschool in Arad. In: Arad marad, Arad, 1997, p. 44.)

After a long Ottoman domination, by late 1685, the old citadel of Arad (in the area of the Teba factory) reached the hands of the Christians. The Franciscan priest Ferencz Preisler was delegated to hold religious sermons in the citadel. This Franciscan priest dealt with the spiritual care of the garrison (especially of the military personnel and their families) while the minors dealt with the catholic population in the city.

Due to this situation, there was also a long dispute, tough at times, between the black Franciscans (black clothes) and the minors conventual („brown Franciscans”), that ended in favor of the latter. * (Idem.). A mixed committee had to be set up in 1752, for reconciliation in the conflict regarding the area of influence on the number of the church-goers. The committee consisted of the bishop of Cenad, Anton Engl, the administrator of the estate of the prince of Modena,

Imre Bohus, prosecutor Ferenc Horváth and the chamber director, László Hrubovszky. *(Lakatos Otto: Arad története, (History of Arad), II. k., Arad, 1881, 46. old.)

In the end the decision was accepted.

The old church of the garrison inside the citadel (in the area of the Teba factory) was demolished along with the citadel and was rebuilt between 1775-1781, in baroque style in a new location, (Mureş curl), inside the star-shaped fortification (Vauban), which was already in finishing phase.

It was sanctified on 21st of May 1781 by the bishop Emmerich Christovici (1711-1798) bishop of Cenad and placed under the patronage of "Saint Joseph."

Thousands of church-goers led the Franciscan friars to the celebration of sanctification of the new religious establishment on the left bank of the Mureş. It should be mentioned that at the time, Arad was the county seat hosting a population of approximately 8.000 inhabitants: Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Serbians, Jewish.

11 friars worked in the church, the monastery and the "extended farmhouse". This church is very much similar to the Maria-Radna church (1756-1782), the most important place of pilgrimage in Banat, and both had probably been designed by the same architect and built by the same bricklayers. *(Ciprian Glăvan)

In what regards the history and description of the religious establishment, we refer to the only more complex source available: the PhD thesis in German by Swantje Volkmann at the Faculty of philosophy and history of the "University Ruprecht-Karls of Heidelberg": "Die Architektur des 18. Jahrhunderts im Temescher Banat." ("18th century Architecture in Banatul Timișoarei" (2001). We quote:

"One of the last Franciscan churches built in the 18th century in Banat was the garrison church of Arad. Its beginnings go back to the Ottoman reign. In 1705, the Franciscan branch was elevated to become a monastery. Besides the parish for the city of Arad, set up in 1702, the (old) district was assigned in 1705 its own parish, arranged by the War Chancery. Besides the importance of the monastery for the city as well as for the citadel it is worthy of notice that until 1703, the pilgrimage site Maria-Radna was in the care of the custodian in Arad. Hence, the Radna friars belonged, from canonic point of view, to the monastery of Arad.

The author of the work draws attention on the similarities between the pilgrimage church Maria-Radna and the Arad citadel church. It should not be overlooked that the constructions "enterprise" of the citadel of Arad has been operational in Radna since 1773, and the

construction was finished only one year after the church consecration, in 1782, hence it could be assumed that the same architects and bricklayers had worked on both buildings. Numerous stylistic similarities suggest the same.

The Franciscan monastery and church in the Arad fortress throughout history

A map of 1782 contains the "Kirche aus der Festung", meaning the church of the citadel, without the citadel, indicating, beyond any doubt that the citadel, being built around the church, was not operational at the time.

The building per se, measured on the outside 32x16x22m, to which height, adding also the dimension of the tower, the entire building reached up to 35 meters. The shrine had 11x8 m. *(Ion Dumbrăveanu: rev. "Military History, issue 1/2000.)

This new church never really passed officially in possession of the Franciscan order.

In what regards the professional description of the objective, the author, Swantje Volkmann states in the aforementioned work:

"The Arad garrison church is a construction with a single nave on pilasters with elongate withdrawn body with trapeze apses. The western wall of the church has been designed as a facade wall. This is a complex with twin towers, the two towers significantly coming out of the contour. The central part of the complex is withdrawn, barely visible from the construction line. The vertical structure of the facade is achieved in the lower story by means of flat pilasters, duplicated at the middle

part edges. The second story is also divided vertically by flat pilasters, slightly coming out on the wall. Nevertheless, the volute capitals are missing here, yet are found at the tower story pilasters. The horizontal structure of the facade is achieved by a large cornice with many arches. A simple, not embellished fronton completes the central section. The rectangular windows have a frame with ears under a horizontal drip edge. Originally, the tower story was equipped with arched windows. All the other windows, emphasizing the unity and immobility of the facade are rectangular. The central point of the facade is the rectangular entry, covered by a waved fronton. Both the fronton, as well as the frame clearly embossed on the wall. The towers are covered with simple crest shaped spiers.”

In what regards the critical examination of the style, the author mentions that the religious establishment is part of the group of city churches in Banat, and the twin towers constructions are similar to the baroque lines in Southern Germany.

The facade transmits quiet and unity.

The main shrine and the four side shrines are embellished with paintings made with artistic mastery, dated 1782, signed: ”J. Cimbalinti pinxit 1782.” *(Swante Volkmann)

In what regards the living modality of the friars of the Franciscan monastery and church in the citadel, we

only have a map and a "statement" written on this map regarding events related to the "household enlargement" of the citadel and monastery, signed by Baron of Vauguey, on the 7th of October 1807, in Arad.

Below are several fragments of this precious document, translated from German: revealing interesting information regarding the friars' food sources from the market garden near the church and monastery, to its administration, as well as their way of living.

"The bright yellow color, applied along the Ziganska canal – as a borderline between Banat and Old Arad/ Aradul vechi, indicates that in 1800, it was ceded to His Excellence Lovácsz for the exchange between Small Bousack (Bujac) with the Ziganska island, including $\frac{1}{4}$ of the market garden.

The inside of the citadel is defined by the 17 or 15 plots still existing for the construction on military buildings, as well as residential houses, assigned to the local direction of the royal engineers troops for 50 years of freedom, in which time no one willing to build was found until this year. The following gardens will be cultivated for a better life of the military inhabitants during such expensive times and for air purification.

Regarding the Franciscan garden, we also find out that in the year of the citadel construction completion (1783), the yard hosted two gardens for the accountant and for the local director. During the constructions, the

officer in charge with caring for the garden was called Vogel, respectively Ecart.

The military doctor in 1784 was named Ernst, and his successor, (1803) , Glatt.

In 1797 the carer officer was called Leopold, and in 1803, it was Boyer.

In 1796, colonel Baron of Vaugner cultivated a quarter of the existing garden surface, in 1798 the second quarter, in 1799 the third quarter, and in 1800 the last quarter, consequently the plots of land have been used for this purpose for four years.

In 1798, it is recorded that the other 13 plots of land were turned into pastures for various animals, being taken over from the garrison commander in chief by the landlords who were also inhabitants, informing that the useless weeds had been left to civilians for heating, since no one from the garrison personnel wanted them.

In 1800: "When the current pensioner, Chief Sergeant von Györfi filled in the position of Garrison Commander, explained to me that it would be inappropriate to leave the cattle to circulate inside the citadel. I immediately stopped this old habit of my predecessors and offered this place to people free of charge".

In 1802: "The garrison lieutenant informed me that they would not give him more than 4 ducats for the aforementioned pasture, amount not sufficient to cover

the chancellery expenses. I responded that I would take over the pasture myself and bear all costs.”

In 1803: ”I took over the crop from captain Tomaschich, upon his leaving, and in 1807 I returned it to same. The same happened now, as the custom is, in Mezöhegyes, namely when one person leaves, gives the produce of his garden to the person taking it over, in exchange for money.”

In 1804: ”Upon the request of the battalion commander at the time for the main officers and the community to plant vegetables and potatoes for a better living and for their successors in the garrison, these plots remained now to the artillery personnel, the citadel’s accountant and the trenches corporal, until persons willing to build will appear.”

In 1806: ”In December, the commander in chief of the garrison, according to this distribution, I cared for the common welfare of these individuals as well as of keeping the air clean. Additionally, the chancellery expenses were covered for these years. Once in a while, on the 2 plots, No. 16 and 17 along the communication road some pasture remained, from which I received the first crop which was more productive due to heavier rain, and was assigned to the temporary commander of the citadel...”

This statement also reveals to us that the garden land hosted already in 1803 a hut made of woven branches for the gardener.

Besides the sources mentioned above, we have few other sources regarding this green area. The Arad historian Somogyi Gyula in its vast monograph published in 1913 regarding the citadel only mentions: "On the Northern side of the main square of the citadel we find the church and the hospital building. The orchard and the vegetable plants for officers are well cared for."*(Arad vármegye és Arad sz. kir. város Monographiája. Monograph of the county of Arad and of the free royal city, Arad, Arad 1913, p. 94.)

In Central Europe, there are military churches also in Budapest, Trento (Italy), Vienna, Hranice na Morave, Olmutz, Terezin (Czech Republic) etc.

During the Hungarian revolution of 1848-1849, the Hungarian revolutionary troops, after a long siege, managed to conquer the citadel (1 July 1849), and general Damjanich became the commander of the citadel. Previously, during the negotiations carried with the commander of the citadel, colonel Johann Berger, ordered the free withdrawal of the priests that wish to leave the fortress. *(Az aradi vár története, History of Arad citadel, p.148.)

Also a document issued and signed by the chaplain supervisor and deputy of the parish, Alajos Magyari, reveals us the inventory of the silverware belonging to the church, handed to the revolutionary army, at commander Damjanich's order, after the citadel was occupied by the Hungarian revolutionary troops, on the 16th of August 1849. The inventory mentions 12 items: silver incensory, silver crucifix, silver wine and water cups with tray, silver bell, silver urn for the sick, flat crown, small silver jewelry placed on the shrine by the church-goers, etc. *(Arad Museum Complex)

Also a manuscript in Latin signed by the same Alajos Magyari dated 22nd of September 1849 addressed to the Vicar, the chaplain of the Arad monastery expresses his hope that he would be returned the church patrimony, surrendered to general Damjanich. *(the Archives of the Roman-Catholic Episcopate, Timișoara)

It could be rightfully believed that the church and the monastery played a particular role during the Hungarian revolution of 1848-1849, especially in the weeks of detention of the generals imprisoned, judged and then executed at the dawn of the 6th of October 1849 inside and outside the citadel.

It was not how things were.

The monastery became military hospital for care of the wounded. No historical document (of those available to us), or literary work contains information on

the spiritual services given by the Franciscan monks to the patients of the hospital or to those sentenced to death, although the Hungarian literature speaking of these events is particularly rich, being rather strange that the church or the monastery are rarely present in the paintings or drawings made by the prisoners in the citadel, although there is an impressive number of such works in the relics collection of the Arad County Museum. The drawing made by the Major-prisoner Kovách (Galsai) Ernő in 1854, presenting the main yard and the Franciscan church, is an exception.

In the period of the delivery of the sentence of death by hanging and shooting of the 13 generals, a single monk remained in the citadel, Eduard Marchot, the empire general, Howiger (1793-1849) who referred to the order of friars minor conventual in the city to delegate a group of priests to accompany the convicts on their last way and to provide them spiritual service.* (Az aradi vértanúk, I. K. Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1979, Arad martyrs, vol. I., p. 43.)

After the revolution, during the absolutist governance, the citadel, increasingly losing its strategic role, became a huge prison for the officers sentenced for participating in the revolution. Over 260 of them were sentenced to death and many were executed.

In this context, the church and the extension building increasingly lost their roles, the monastery was

probably abandoned for a while. Upon the visit of 17th of June 1852 of the emperor Franz Joseph to the citadel, around one hundred convicts were pardoned, and others had their sentence reduced. In 1854, on the occasion of the emperor's wedding, other pardons occurred. None of the documents available to us contains any references to the participation of the citadel monks to such events.

Several of the Franciscans returned to the monastery, probably, after "things grew calm." A certain thing is that in the last years of the monastery, only four monks had remained, yet they no longer lived in the monastery either.

The last four monks left the citadel monastery in 1861, and the next year it was dissolved. Most of the inventory items went to Budapest.

The entire architectural ensemble was sold to the state for 15.000 florins, becoming military hospital.

In parallel with the increasing loss of its strategic role, during the dualism time, the citadel served as barracks for three battalions within the 33 regiment infantry of the Caesar – royal army.

In this period, on certain days, the citadel was opened to the public. *(Dan Demsea: Az aradi vár a világosi fegyverletétel után. In: Az aradi vár története, Budapest, 1998. Arad citadel after the surrender at Şiria. In: The History of Arad citadel)

During the First World War, thousands of Bosnian prisoners and civilians were held in the citadel, hosted in casemates, in precarious conditions. Epidemics were ravaging and the hospital became insufficient to host the sick and many of the prisoners died. Public collections were made in the city to help the patients.* (Dan Demşea. p.170)

By the end of the war, the citadel is under temporary occupation by the Regiment 93 infantry troops of the Romanian army. The French General Gondracourt becomes governor of the city. Upon leaving, (12 July 1919) the French colonial troops took with them a large part of the church clothes.

The Arad garrison hospital is set up on the 25th of August 1919 by the appointment in position of the doctor lieutenant colonel Sava as chief doctor. In September the same year the hospital is assigned 30 lower ranking soldiers for ambulance.

On the 3rd of November 1938 the Military Hospital is dissolved and the building enters possession of Reg. 93 Infantry "Closca", but shortly after this, according to the order, the hospital re-setting up is approved.* (various historical data regarding the Domain. In: the "Regina Maria." Military Hospital)

The church is still in good condition, yet requiring urgent repairs at the roof.

In the context of the historical conditions and of the creation of Greater Romania, a group of Romanian intellectuals, run by the military Bishop dr. Ioan Stoica, the parish priest captain Gheorghiu, Arad garrison confessor, with support from the Arad Red Cross, as well as from civil societies organizations decided in 1921, to turn the Franciscan church into Romanian orthodox church.

Their endeavor benefited also material support from general Anton Iovanovici.

The works started in 1923.

The paintings are executed by the artist Dimitrie Cabadiu (1877-1934), who, throughout his career painted over 20 churches in Transylvania, and the golden sculptures and furniture were executed by the cabinet-maker Busuioc.

The orthodox military church preserved from the former Franciscan church only five paintings of particular artistic value, representing Saint Francis d'Assisi, the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Theresa and the Holy Family.

The military bishop dr. I. Stoica approved Saint Anthony as saint of the church. The Romanian orthodox military church of the citadel was consecrated on the 6th of December 1928 by the military bishop dr. I. Stoica and by the Bishop dr. Grigore Comsa. *(Ion Dumbrăveanu: rev. "Military History", issue 1/2000.)

During World War II, the church and the monastery are turned into military hospital.

After the war, the citadel has been occupied by the Soviet army troops until 1958. During this period, the church suddenly lost its religious establishment character. It was turned into bedrooms for soldiers, stables, then into driving school for the soldiers in the citadel, and later into ammunition store. After the Soviets left, the Romanian army arranged here the military unit washroom. Meanwhile also the church organ had disappeared as well.

Starting 1989, the former Franciscan church and the monastery have been uncared-for, suffering major degradation. The windows have been partly walled, and trees grow on top of the roof.

At present, the premises is still a military site.

Specialists claim that saving and restoring this precious historical monument of A class in terms of national importance depends on the mobilization of actions to reinsert the Citadel of Arad in the civil circuit, one major objective that the Arad Local Council has been pursuing for years.

In the process of accelerating this wish of the municipality, two successful musical events took place in the yard of the citadel and in front of the church, organized by the Arad State Philharmonics, with the approval of the Ministry of National Defense.

The Franciscan church of the Arad citadel is the most precious baroque monument, preserved to this date, of the city of Arad.

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The archive documents were made available by the Roman- Catholic Episcopate of Timișoara, the National Archives of Romania, Arad County Department, The Minors Order of Arad and the Museum Complex of Arad.

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Photographs

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