

## **HISTORICAL PATH**

### **FIELDWORK**

### **ORADEA FORTRESS**

This workshop was led by our Visual Art teacher, Emilia NEGRU, who was a real guide for us during our visit to the Fortress. During this (art) history lesson we imagined the happenings behind the thick walls of the fortress over many hundreds of years. The Fortress is the most famous building in Oradea, the city's emblematic symbol and an historical masterpiece.

We learnt many interesting things and consider that the Fortress of Oradea has a well established place within the heritage of our city.



The Fortress of Oradea – pentagonal, with battlements at its corners and water ditch – was built between 1570-1618 by Italian architects. It is the best kept Italian Renaissance fortress in central Europe.



Between 1097-1557 it served as residence of the Roman Catholic bishop of Oradea, period when the fortress became an important religious and cultural center.

A library, an astronomical observatory, a printing house and a school functioned in the fortress. In the catholic church and in its cemetery seven crowned people found their eternal peace: Ladisla I (died on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1095 in Zvolen, taken to Oradea between 1130-1134), Andree II (buried in 1235 in Oradea, later taken to the abbey of Agria), Alexander II, Ladisla IV the Cunsenian (killed in 1290 at Cheresig), queen Beatrix (wife of Carol Robert de Anjou, in 1319), queen Mary (wife of Sigismund of Luxembourg, in 1396) and king Sigismund of Luxembourg (in 1437). The fact that these kings were buried in Oradea seems to confirm the legend that the city was truly founded by St. Ladisla (Ladisla I).



He “found, (...) between the Rivers Criş (...), a place where, beckoned by angels, he decided to erect a monastery to the Virgin Mary, place which he named Varad”. He had expressed during his life the desire to be entombed in Oradea: “While alive, he commanded that he be brought to Oradea of Bihar and that his body be entombed there, after his passing. But the Hungarian leaders, seeing that the weather was foul and the way was too long, were afraid that, due to the great heat, the devoutly body of the holy king would start to rot, and thus, holding council, they decided to head towards Royal Alba, being closer by, as the place where the bodies of holy kings were laid to rest. And when, during a halt, they closed their eyes, God and the blithe saint did not sleep. At dawn, when they roused to continue on their way, they saw that neither the carriage, nor the holy body were there any longer. They were saddened and began to run to and fro, asking if anyone had seen the body. But when they headed towards Oradea, they saw that, without any help, the holy body was traveling towards the city, carriage in tow. And seeing the great Godly miracle, they praised the Lord.” In reality though, his death came in Zvolen, on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1095, and the bringing of his earthly remains to his foundation in Oradea came a long while later, sometime after the year 1134. His entombment here would turn his grave into an important pilgrimage spot (he was canonized on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1192), which had an exceptional importance in the evolution of the settlements which were eventually established in the area, and on the future fortress.



Since 1557 the role of the Fortress had become strictly military being attacked by the Tartars (1241), Turks (1474, 1598, 1658, 1660), the Transylvanian revolutionaries (1290, 1514, 1664, 1703-1710), armies of the Transylvanian Principality (1557, 1603) and by the Austrians (1692). The Fortress had been besieged without any success for 5 weeks by the Turks.

Due to the development of firearms and artillery, it was found that buildings around the Fortress had become perilous to its security, being useful for potential attackers. In 1714, the Captain issued an order prohibiting any construction within 500 meters of the external walls. The measure will lead to the immediate demolition of 162 buildings. Only after 1780, when the Fortress will lose part of its importance, the constructible area of the city will extend to right next to the moat.

During the 1848 Revolution, the Fortress' garrison switched to the side of the Revolution. In the night between 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> March, national badges were displayed as a sign of joining the revolution, the danger of forced intervention against the revolutionaries thus being removed. At the end of the year, the Diet of Hungary to turn Oradea into an important military base, with a nucleus in the Fortress deserted by the Imperial garrison. As a result, in January 1849, the armament workshops which produced rifles, bayonets and swords were moved here, and a great amount of munitions was stored within the Fortress. Around 250,000 bullets were being made in these workshops, on a daily basis.



Through a decree emitted on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1857, the Emperor Franz-Josef definitively canceled the military aspect of the Fortress, which continued to serve, until 1918, as a mere auxiliary space for military activity. Between 1883 and 1887, multiple repairs were carried out within, as well as consolidating and design work, preceded between 1881 and 1883 by the first archaeological research to be undertaken within the Fortress, which led to the discovery of the traces of the Gothic cathedral of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

After 1918, during the interwar years, the Fortress would be the headquarters of the dragoon school, and after 1945 it will return to military objective status, used both by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defense. Starting from the mid-70s the Fortress started hosting economic establishments, which fully contributed to its severe degradation, due to completely inappropriate exploitation in disregard of its uniqueness and age.

The Oradea Fortress is almost completely rehabilitated, and within it we found pictures, objects and stories of this place that survive over the nine centuries of its existence.



We strolled around the fortress' grand exterior, reflecting on the significant events that have taken place here over the years. The fortress is surrounded by a wide moat, now home to a pleasant park dotted with small ponds.

