

SPIRITUAL PATH

FIELDWORK

ORADEA – A SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE

Being placed at transition between Central Europe to South-East Europe and East Europe, the City of Oradea has always been an interpenetration and confluence space of the currents and ideas, an interference of the cultural and spiritual space. The religious mosaic characterizes this town: there over 200 church, cathedrals, associations and religious communities.

A sunny Sunday afternoon was the perfect time for a project activity focused on churches. We learnt a lot of things about religious life in Oradea and visited the most important churches in town. Our discovery was guided by our teachers Carmen Chira and Emilia Negru.



Religious life in Bihor County, particularly Christianity, has a history dating back thousands of years. The paleo-Christian discoveries from many archaeological dig sites denote the relatively early Christianization of this area. Initially all these discoveries had everything in common with Byzantine Christianity, which would later become Orthodox Christianity after the East-West Schism of the mid-11th century. Yet with the infiltration of the Hungarian tribes, their establishment in the Pannonic Planes and their Christianization according to the Latin rites, and later with their expansion into Transylvania, the local Orthodox Christian population will learn another manifestation of religious life. This will be most apparent in the urban environment.

If before this point, as archaeological evidence suggests, Christian faith was not restricted to fixed religious administrative units, at least not for the area we are discussing, starting with the Hungarian conquest we can begin speaking of a more typical religious life. That is, beyond the formation of administrative territorial units imposed by the Hungarian state, dioceses will also be formed, along with religious administrative-territorial units, formed after Romanian fashion.



The life of any town, particularly in the Middle Ages and the modern era surely gravitated around at least one church. Often taking up an ultra-central position in urban planning, the church often fulfilled a polarizing role, gathering among its walls a multitude of holy items (some of them considered capable of facilitating miracles), relics, all sorts of sacred remains, as well as the tombs of political leaders or prelates (some of them canonized) which would bring about a large number of followers and pilgrims.



The synagogues are the highlights of the Oradea Jewish architecture. Their “creation”, operation and disappearance are the suggestive mirrors of the community’s unification, strength or decay. The existences of some of these churches, as well as the lives of their devotees, are still “alive” only in documents or in the recollections of the elderly. The appearance of the Jewish churches in the city center is proof of the growing population and the increasing importance in public life the Jews gained.



Thus, it is not surprising that in such conditions the relationships between towns and churches have taken on various guises, their symbiosis proving to be mutually advantageous. The former saw a raise in their cultural prestige because of the existence of places of worship, dioceses etc., as well as their financial strength increased due to the presence of pilgrims from far off places who came to pray within its walls and the fairs held at various holidays. The latter profited from the urban expansion as they triumphantly raised their towers to the sky, enriching their material wealth and consolidating their role as focal points of culture and spirituality.