

# *Friedrich Balthes - Attempt to Reconstruct the Oeuvre of a Transylvanian Saxon Artist*

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**Abstract:** Friedrich Balthes was a young master of the national architectural style of the Transylvanian Saxons. Being a victim of the First World War (he died at the age of only 32, on the Serbian front, in 1914), he was almost completely forgotten during the century. Only the architectural monuments created at the beginning of the 20th century, of a remarkable modernity, are left behind by Balthes. These works are part of the German architectural movement, which was the forerunner of modern and also traditionalist architecture of the 20s of last century. Balthes designed many buildings in the national style of the Transylvanian Saxons: a style brought from Germany, and adapted to the Transylvanian cultural landscape. He was a multi-talented personality, also writing various studies and essays on the architectural art, on the cityscape, the culture of housing, interior art, folk art, the maintenance of rural art, the color in architecture and the decoration of the streets with plants, about the old frescoes of the evangelical church in Cisnădie and on many other subjects. As a self-confident Transylvanian Saxon intellectual, Balthes published his articles with the purpose to educate his nation for the new cultural ideas of his time. The following study aims to present a sketch of the multidisciplinary legacy of this remarkable artist, by showing some examples of his work. One of Balthes' many architectural creations we presented herewith the evangelical school and parish house in Bruuiu (built between 1912 and 1914), which is a good example of the architect's idea of a new style, which overcomes art nouveau. It was a Transylvanian Saxon national architecture, very modern for that period. It was a harmonious combination of the Transylvanian Saxon vernacular motives, with elements inspired by the German Reformarchitektur, promoted by architect and architecture theorist Hermann Muthesius.

**Keywords:** Art History, Architecture History, Transylvanian Saxons, Reform 1900–1914, History 1900–1914

**Rezumat:** Friedrich Balthes (1882–1914) a fost un tânăr maestru al stilului arhitectural național al sașilor transilvăneni. Fiind o victimă a Primului Război Mondial (a căzut pe frontul sârb, în Decembrie 1914, la vârsta de numai 32) a fost aproape complet uitat pe parcursul secolului XX. Doar monumentele arhitecturale create de artist, caracterizate de o remarcabilă modernitate, în contextul arhitectural de la începutul secolului 20 au rămas în urmă. Aceste lucrări fac parte din mișcarea arhitecturală germană, care a fost precursorul arhitecturii moderne, dar și al curentului tradiționalist a anilor '20 ai secolului trecut. În scurtă perioadă a activității sale Balthes a proiectat numeroase clădiri în stilul național al sașilor transilvăneni: un stil adus din Germania și adaptat peisajului cultural transilvănean. A fost o personalitate multi-talentată, publicând diverse studii și eseuri despre arta arhitecturală, despre peisajul urban, cultura locuințelor, arta interioară, precum și despre arta populară, întreținerea artei rurale, culoarea în arhitectură și decorarea străzilor cu plante, iar despre vechile fresce a bisericii evanghelice din Csnădie și pe multe alte subiecte. Fiind un intelectual săsesc transilvănean, Balthes și-a publicat articolele cu scopul de a-și educa națiunea pentru noile idei culturale ale timpului său. Următorul studiu își propune să prezinte o schiță a moștenirii multidisciplinare a acestui artist remarcabil, prezentând doar câteva exemple ale operei sale. Dintre numeroasele creații arhitecturale ale lui Balthes am ales aici prezentarea complexului școlii evanghelice și a casei învățătorului din Bruuiu (construit între 1912 și 1914), care este un bun exemplu pentru ideea lui Balthes de a crea un nou stil, care a depășit art nouveau-ul. Este vorba despre o arhitectură națională săsească transilvăneană, foarte modernă pentru acea perioadă. Un stil caracterizat prin îmbinarea armonioasă a motivelor vernaculare săsești transilvănene, cu elemente inspirate de mișcarea reformei arhitecturale germane, promovat de arhitectul și teoreticianul Hermann Muthesius.

**Cuvinte cheie:** istoria artei, istoria arhitecturii, sașii din Transilvania, reforma arhitecturală 1900–1914, istorie 1900–1914

*„God made me an artist and put the urge in my heart to think about everything I create about whether it is beautiful“.<sup>1</sup>*

This is the ars poetica of Fritz Balthes, a forgotten architect from Sighișoara. The creed of an artist who only lived 32 years; he fell as a soldier in the first world war in December 1914. Despite his short career, he had a large number of plans put into action. These works from the first few

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<sup>1</sup> Ortsgruppe Schäßburg des Sebastian-Hann-Vereines (ed.), *Friedrich Balthes. Auswahl aus seinen Schriften*, (Schäßburg: Buchdruckerei Friedr. J. Horeth, 1918), p. 16.

decades of the 20th century are still masterpieces of the Saxon national style.

His full name was Friedrich Albert Balthes, he was born in Sighișoara on June 20, 1882. He completed his high school studies at the "G. D. Deutsch" Lutheran Grammar School<sup>2</sup>, then studied architecture at three German universities between 1900 and 1905:<sup>3</sup> The Technical University of Berlin (1900–1902)<sup>4</sup>, the Technical University of Karlsruhe (1903–1905),<sup>5</sup> and also enrolled at the Technical University of Munich (March 1902).<sup>6</sup>

Considering the vast number of his finished architectural works in a very short period, brings one to the conclusion that Balthes was one of the most successful Transylvanian Saxon artists of the generation of German artists who sought to bring architecture permeated by the Homeland Art Movement (Heimatstil) into effect: "We recognize that our old art was folk art - we want folk art again - home art."<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, earlier literature considered Balthes to be an artist of the modern architecture of the Transylvanian Saxon Heimatstil, which aimed to represent the culture of the Transylvanian Saxons by forming a harmonious unity with the built heritage of the Transylvanian landscape. Art historian Timo Hagen is the first to list Balthes' works in the so-called reform architecture (Reformarchitektur).<sup>8</sup>

This term, known in German and Swiss architectural history, was first applied by art historian Norbert Huse to Art Nouveau contemporary artists, whose search for a modern, national formal language became their main artistic goal around 1900, and who strongly rejected the classical „Style architecture“, and subordinated their works to the principles of homeland and function.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Actual name of the institution: „Joseph Haltrich“ Theoretic High School

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Letz, 'Ein herausragender Schäßburger Architekt:Friedrich Balthes', *Schäßburger Nachrichten*, 17/9, (2002): 21.

<sup>4</sup> László Szögi, *Magyarországi diákok németországi egyetemeken és főiskolákon 1789–1919* [Hungarian Students at Universities and Colleges in Germany 1789–1919] (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Levéltára 2001), p. 509.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.545.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 589.

<sup>7</sup> *Friedrich Balthes. Auswahl aus seinen Schriften*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>8</sup> Timo Hagen, 'Gedächtniskirchlein - Grab gefallener Helden - völkisches Mahnzeichen. Das Studentendenkmal in Marienburg. Ein Entwurf siebenbürgisch-sächsischer Identität am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkriegs.' in Bernhard Heigl - Thomas Şindilariu (eds.), *Kronstadt und das Burzenland. Beiträge von Studium Transylvanicum zur Geschichte und Kultur Siebenbürgens* (Heidelberg - Braşov: Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskde, 2011), pp. 139–179.

<sup>9</sup> Sigrid Hofer, *Reformarchitektur 1900-1918: Deutsche Baukünstler auf der Suche nach dem Nationalen Stil*. (Stuttgart: Axel Menges, 2005), pp. 22–23.

This movement emerged at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, having the main objective to reform architecture. Its artists operated with great enthusiasm in the German states and embraced almost all areas of architecture. There are many similarities in this style to both historicism and the beginnings of classical modernity. Since the early 2000s, art history increasingly considered this movement as an independent chapter in the history of architecture and not a transitional phenomenon between historicism and modern, as previous literature simplified it. It had a concrete architectural program, which, although controversial, saw the modernity of the future as well-founded in the study of tradition.<sup>10</sup>

This art movement for the development of a modern, national language can be considered a pan-European phenomenon, as well as its contemporary Art Nouveau. Nevertheless, the German terms Heimatstil, Heimatschutzbewegung and Reformarchitektur have no equivalents in other European languages. It is remarkable, that almost everywhere in Europe and in the United States of America of that time there were tendencies to create a regional, national architectural style. For example, the English term of the National Romanticism describes this movement in Finland and Northern Europe. In France and Spain, the so-called Regionalism<sup>11</sup> and the Neo-Romanian<sup>12</sup> style in Romania can be related to these tendencies. Very similar trends can be observed in the Transylvanian activities of the Hungarian Ede Toroczkai Wigand<sup>13</sup> and Károly Kós and the group of young architects, called Fialatok (The Young Ones).<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Achleitner observed in a 1997 published work on architecture theory that there probably was no movement for a regional national architecture in the eastern parts of the Habsburg monarchy with the scope and ideological explosiveness, with a cultural-political charge like the Heimatschutz-movement of the German states, and added that if

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Storm: 'Die Ideologie des Regionalismus in Architekturzeitschriften Deutschlands, Frankreichs und Spaniens 1900-1925', in Kai Krauskopf - Hans-Georg Lippert - Kerstin Zschke (eds) *Neue Tradition. Vorbilder, Mechanismen und Ideen* (Dresden: Thelem, 2012), pp. 133-151.

<sup>12</sup> Prezentare generală: Căutările naționale - arhitectura neoromânească [General Presentation: The National Searches - Neo-Romanian Architecture]. (<http://www.archi-web.com/uar/333.htm>) accessed on 29 March, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Katalin Keserü, *Toroczkai Wigand Ede* (Budapest: Honlap Kiadó, 2007), pp. 18-21.

<sup>14</sup> Beáta Fabó -Anthony Gall, *Napkeletről jöttem nagy palotás rakott városba kerültem: Kós Károly Világa (1907-1914)* [I came from the East to the great palace-stacked city: The World of Károly Kós, 1907-1914] (Budapest: Budapest Főváros Levéltára, 2013), pp. 46-53.

it existed, then it did so only among the German population.<sup>15</sup> Achleitner's observation thoroughly describes the situation in Transylvania. The terms Heimatschutz, Heimatkunst only exist in the vocabulary of the German ethnical group of this region.

The German Reform movement, with its ideology of the interaction of form and function was actually the forerunner of the German Werkbund, founded in 1907. Therefore, it is no coincidence that among the Werkbund's founding members counted a significant number of artists who were active members of the Reform-organization Deutsche Bund Heimatschutz (DBH), founded in 1904, with the focus on the preservation of cultural-historical, regional traditions as well as the historical elements in landscape and architecture. Among leading architects of the DBH were counted: Hermann Muthesius, Theodor Fischer, Fritz Schumacher, Paul Bonatz, as well as Peter Behrens, Henry van de Velde, Josef Maria Olbrich and many others.<sup>16</sup>

The same year the DBH was founded, among the Transylvanian Saxons, an Association called Sebastian-Hann-Verein für Heimische Kunstbestrebungen<sup>17</sup> was established. This Association seems to be a Transylvanian German version of the Deutsche Bund Heimatschutz. Its activities bear witness to the formation of such a home-art movement (the so-called Heimatsitlbewegung). It was founded in Sibiu (its leading figure was the painter Arthur Coulin) and its main purpose was to protect and develop Transylvanian Saxon culture, especially fine arts, by organizing exhibitions of modern and Saxon folk art, various conferences, by publishing various studies and essays of folk-educating nature, and by initiating and conducting the preservation of various Saxon monuments.<sup>18</sup> The existence of this well-organized movement among the Transylvanian Saxons, strengthens Achleitner's observation regarding the idea, that the model of the German Heimatstil/Heimatschutz was adapted in the Eastern part of the Habsburg monarchy by the German-speaking population of Transylvania.

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<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Achleitner, *Region, ein Konstrukt? Regionalismus, eine Pleite?* (Basel - Boston - Berlin: Birkhäuser, 1997), pp. 7-16.

<sup>16</sup> Hofer, *Reformarchitektur*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>17</sup> Sebastian Hann Association for Homeland Art Endeavors.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Engber - Trude Schullerus, 'Der Sebastian-Hann-Verein und seine Sektion Heimatkunst', *Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde*, 24/1 (1981): 98-109.

Austria was indisputably one of the most important centers of the European art nouveau and its architectural revolution. But it was also the only region of the multinational Habsburg Empire, that hardly had any kind of national architecture. In contrast to Austria, practically every nation of the Empire placed the issue of creating its own national style at the centre of their architecture.<sup>19</sup> Even if the Transylvanian Saxons were German-Speaking, they considered themselves a separate nation, being much more connected to the German Empire rather than Austria. Their architects studied mostly in the German “Kaiserreich” and were embossed by the ideologies and architectural theories of the region.<sup>20</sup> The need for a national style, that should represent the culture of the Transylvanian Saxons is to be explained by the situation of this German-speaking ethnical group, which was confronted with various factors that were understood as threats for their economic, social and cultural existence. These threats were, for example, the emigration of their population to America, the decreasing population compared to the stronger growing Romanian population in Transylvania and the Magyarization policy of the Hungarian state.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, not only the Saxons had developed endeavors for a national architecture in Transylvania. The Transylvanian Romanian master builder Gheorghe Dușoiu and Ioan Leucă, from Brașov, were followers of the Neo-Romanian style, initiated by the end of the nineteenth century from the architect Ion Mincu in the Kingdom of Romania, as a specific Romanian form of Historicism, that made reference to the architecture from Wallachia at the time of Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714), which combined the regional forms with elements of the late Renaissance, Baroque and also oriental architecture. Only a few buildings realized before 1914 in this Romanian national style are known in Transylvania (like the boarding school of the Andrei Șaguna High School in Brașov, built in 1910-1911 and the Romanian Orthodox Church Seminary in Sibiu, built in 1913-1914, both buildings realized by Dușoiu and Leucă). The Neo-Romanian style became widespread in Transylvania only after World War I.<sup>22</sup> Considering these circumstances and the fact that these

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<sup>19</sup> Dániel Veress, in Nari Shelekpayev – Francois-Olivier Dorais – Daria Dyakonova (eds.), *Empires, Nations and Private Lives. Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the Great War* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 1-39, especially pp. 27-28.

<sup>20</sup> Hermann Fabini, ‘Architektur’, in Karl Göllner (ed.), *Die siebenbürger Sachsen in den Jahren 1848 – 1918* (Köln-Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1988), pp. 409-428, especially p. 426.

<sup>21</sup> Timo Hagen, ‘Gedächtniskirchlein’, pp. 159-161.

<sup>22</sup> Timo Hagen, ‘Architektur als Spiegel ethnischer Koexistenz? Sächsische und rumänische Bauten in Hermannstadt und ihre europäischen Vorbilder’, *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 32/103 H. 2 (2009): 149-161, especially 155-156.

Transylvanian-Romanian builders were searching for role models as national representation in the Romanian Kingdom, outside Transylvania, brings one to the conclusion that they hardly had architectural interactions with the Saxons, and much less with the Hungarian architects of the region.

By comparing the tendencies of the national architectures of the German and Hungarian artists of the Transylvanian region, it is to be observed, that the ideas of architecture theory - functionalism and organic architecture- had their common roots in the English Arts and Crafts movement. The visible difference between these styles was in the formal languages, which aimed to give them the particular national aspect: while the Hungarians with Kós, Toroczkai and The Young Ones found inspiration in Finnish and Hungarian vernacular architecture of the Transylvanian landscape,<sup>23</sup> Balthes's buildings were much more characterized by a combination of influences of the reform architects from the German Empire and the Saxon vernacular and historical regional forms from Transylvania. If there are a few similarities between the Hungarian architects and Balthes' Saxon national architectural forming, these can be a result of the coexistence and cultural exchange between these ethnical groups during many centuries in Transylvania and did not necessarily mean a cooperation between the architects.

That the Transylvanian Saxon architects did not know the buildings of the Hungarian artists is out of the question; after all, they all lived in the former Hungarian Kingdom. The Architect Albert Schuller from Braşov started his studies at the Higher Trade School in the Hungarian Capital,<sup>24</sup> and Balthes also had the occasion to study the new buildings in Budapest. Balthes must have learned the new Hungarian architectural aspirations at the latest at the time after he projected the Evangelical High School in Mediaş, when the local evangelical presbytery sent him, together with a delegation, on a journey to Budapest. The goal of this trip from August 1911, was to learn about the most modern interior equipment, furniture of the recently built schools in the capital, in order to collect ideas for the interior design of the new High School building in Mediaş.<sup>25</sup> Still, it is to be underlined, that the shape language of Balthes doesn't really show any influences of the Hungarian architecture. As we will show in this study, Balthes, but also Albert Schuller had a clear orientation to the modern architectural developments in the German Empire.

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<sup>23</sup> Beáta Fabó -Anthony Gall, *Kós Károly Világa (1907-1914)*, pp. 24-53.

<sup>24</sup> Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.), *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815-1950'*, 15 vols, (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1957-2018), vol. 11, pp. 323-324.

<sup>25</sup> S.n., 'Der Gymnasialbau', *Mediascher Wochenblatt*, 19/955 (August 19th, 1911): 1-2.

Whether there was a contemporary artist Balthes` at all, who created buildings in this regional-national style, is still hardly researched. At the present state, it is to be observed, that Balthes was one of the initiators of this modern national architectural style among the Transylvanian German-speaking nation. Architect and architecture historian Hermann Fabini wrote in 1988 a short history about architecture by the Transylvanian Saxons between 1848 and 1918, in which he also mentioned Balthes as a representative figure of this new direction, which was influenced by the Heimatschutzbewegung and the Werkbund (the style had at that time no institutionalized designation). Fabini also mentioned Albert Schuller in Braşov and Ludwig Orend in Sibiu as architects of this generation, who also practiced this new, functional architecture.<sup>26</sup> Although Albert Schuller was well known among the locals in Braşov as the architect of the representative Hotel "Krone", his works had hardly been researched by art historians. Albert Schuller projected in 1909 the Hotel "Krone" in Braşov, which was considered to be the most modern and functionally designed hotel at the time, but it was still characterized by the formal language of the Jugendstil from Munich (where A. Schuller studied architecture).<sup>27</sup> Schuller's building did not carry the vernacular elements, that were so obvious on the Hotel „Goldener Stern" in Sighişoara, projected one year later by Balthes. Therefore, this vernacular, regional architectural style with national character practiced by Balthes seems to be unique, considering the current state of research.

Balthes and Schuller must have known each other. A competition between the architects for the projecting of a new building for the evangelical elementary school in Mediaş, by the beginning of the year 1914 proves this theory. An expert opinion of the construction projects, kept in the Evangelical Archives in Sibiu, evaluated both plans and recommended the adaptation of Balthes' project for the new school building.<sup>28</sup> Whether both architects had other interactions or could have influenced each other is still a question that needs further investigation.

From the local perspective, Balthes really was the architect, who brought this new ideology from Germany and rendered it acceptable and applied by the architects and engineers in his home town, Sighişoara. Balthes was a self-confident personality, and knew very well, that he was

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<sup>26</sup> Hermann Fabini, 'Architektur' pp. 426–428.

<sup>27</sup> Anca Maria Zamfir, 'Hotel "Krone". Reflexe Jugendstil la Braşov', [Hotel "Krone". Jugendstil reflexes in Braşov] *Cumidava*, XXV (2002): 370–445, especially 372.

<sup>28</sup> Sibiu, Arhiva Centrală a Bisericii Evanghelice C.A. din România [Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche A.B. in Rumänien], I. N., 'Gutachten über die Entwürfe zum Neubeu der ev. Volksschule A.B. von Fr. Balthes (B) und Schuller und Goldschmidt (Sch. G.)'



a kind of teacher to the master builder of his home town. He wrote on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1913 in his diary:

„When I saw the pretty houses that master builder Leonhardt was building at the city garden in the winter, a sorrowful envy and a deep sadness rose up in me and I said to myself: One learns everything from you. How soon, and you are superfluous. Today I passed by again and when I saw the houses, it cheered in me: You will be superfluous here, they have learned what is needed“. (Original text in German language: „Als ich im Winter die hübschen Häuser sah, die Baumeister Leonhardt bei der Stadtgärtnerei baut, da stieg ein kummergrauer Neid und eine tiefe Traurigkeit in mir auf und ich sagte mir: Man lernt dir alles ab. Wie bald, und du bist überflüssig. Heute ging ich wieder vorbei und als ich die Häuser sah, da jubelte es in mir: Du wirst hier überflüssig, man hat gelernt, was Not tut“).<sup>29</sup>

The ideas of the Reform-movement can be recognized also in Balthes' architecture theory and are reflected in the functional buildings he had projected and adapted to the regional landscape of his homeland. To sum up, his style is characterized by a simplified, modern historicism of the Transylvanian Saxon regional forms in a combination with the decorative language of Art Nouveau.

Two of Friedrich Balthes' most notable works are the buildings of the Hotel Steaua (Star Hotel, former name: Hotel "Goldener Stern") in Sighișoara (fig. 1) and the Stefan-Ludwig-Roth High School in Mediaș. Both monumental buildings perfectly integrate into the architectural landscape and are characterized by a well-thought-out functionality: a very modern way of architectural projecting,<sup>30</sup> also a Leitmotif of the Reform and of the Werkbund artists.

Among his many buildings count the community houses of Dealu Frumos and Șomartin (Sibiu county), the Evangelical-Saxon schools in Bruuiu (fig. 6), Gherdeal, Veseud (Sibiu county) and Cincșor (Brașov county) - fig. 2 - as the kindergarten in Agnita (Sibiu county) and several residential buildings, such as: the Eugen Schotsch house in Sighișoara and the Haner, Ambrosi, Dr. Fabini and Karres private houses (fig. 3) in Mediaș, as well as the parish house in Netuș (fig. 4) and the house of the paper mill owner Fritz Schiel from Brașov, in Bușteni (Prahova county). The former savings bank in Mediaș can also be classified as one of the

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<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Balthes, *Tagebuch 1908 - 1914*, Manuscript, Photocopy in the Central Archives of the Evangelical Church in Romania, Sibiu, sheet nr. 16 (numbering not from the author).

<sup>30</sup> Herbert Letz, *Ein herausragender Schäßburger Architekt: Friedrich Balthes*, p. 20.

buildings projected by Balthes (fig.5).<sup>31</sup> One of the rare and outstanding examples of the national identity and cult of remembrance of Transylvanian Saxons is the "Monument to the Students of Feldioara" carried out under the plans of Balthes.<sup>32</sup>

The next short introduction of Balthes' **evangelical school and parish house in Bruuiu** aims to exemplify his architectural style.

According to the official mandate of April 4, 1912, the Presbytery in Bruuiu commissioned Balthes to build the new school, prepare the plans for the conversion of the old school into a teacher's apartment, and conduct the construction management.<sup>33</sup>

The plans for the new school and the teachers house were finalized by Balthes before May 1912. The architect counted the fee for the architectural management work at 1,830 crowns, of which he was awarded with 963 crowns for the designing.<sup>34</sup>

The manuscript documenting the construction conditions of the new school and the teacher's apartment was dated June 1, 1912.<sup>35</sup> The contractor of Balthes' plans were the master builder Gustav Zimmermann from Sibiu and Georg Schuster from Bruuiu.<sup>36</sup>

By the fall of the year 1914, the new school building was still not ready to be used. After the second inspection on 2 October 1914, the master builder Franz Letz, who worked in Balthes' workshop, sent some plans for certain window blinds to Bruuiu.<sup>37</sup> At that date, Fritz Balthes was already fighting on the Serbian frontline of the I. World War.

From Balthes' plans for the construction of the school and teacher's house two design proposals still exist. They are kept in the Evangelical Archives in Sibiu.<sup>38</sup> Both of them show the western entrance frontage.

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<sup>31</sup> Spar- und Vorschußverein in Mediasch 'Bauvergebung', *Mediascher Wochenblatt*. XVIII/878, (February 26th 1910).

<sup>32</sup> Herbert Letz, *Ein herausragender Schäßburger Architekt: Friedrich Balthes*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Sibiu, Arhiva Centrală a Bisericii Evanghelice C.A. din România [Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche A.B. in Rumänien], Dokumente Braller/Bruuiu, 400/259, f. 217/135.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

The second version of the plan (fig. 8) arranged the school's classrooms not next to each other, but on top of each other. This version „separated” the storied wing of the school from the teacher's apartment, located in the lower, north wing, much more effective in mass management. While in the first plan (fig. 7) the west wing and the entrance are covered by a common gable roof, in the second plan the entrance block is separated from the school and the teacher's house. The teacher's house is covered by a hip roof, and the school is crowned by a half-hip roof with a small bell tower, which also emphasizes the school function of the wing.

From the two plans, the second version with a few minor changes was implemented.

The schoolyard can be accessed from the west through a stone-framed gate. Inspired by Saxon village architecture, the gate and stone-walled fence are among the characteristic elements of the Transylvanian Saxon national style of Balthes.

The exterior design of this building complex in Bruuiu could be inspired by a building, illustrated in Hermann Muthesius's book "Landhaus und Garten" (fig. 9). The massing of the school based on Balthes' plans can be related to Richard Riemerschmid's two-family house plan with the portico connecting the two buildings.<sup>39</sup> A small stair railing in the school's staircase, with a squat column holding two semicircular arcades (fig. 10), could have been inspired by the Smoking Room in the house of Paul Korff (fig. 11), a reform architect working in Laage near Rostock (Also published by Muthesius in "Landhaus und Garten").<sup>40</sup>

Hopefully, this short presentation of a building of Balthes could help us create a picture of the national, but also very modern architectural style of our artist, combining the Transylvanian Saxon vernacular motives, with elements inspired by the German Reformarchitektur, promoted by architect and architecture theorist Hermann Muthesius.

Fritz Balthes, however, was not just an architect. Posterity considers him a multifaceted, determined character, a person endowed with extraordinary will- and creative power. All of these qualities and art perceptions can be tracked in many of his articles, lectures and theoretical writings. His treatises on the architectural art, on the cityscape, the culture of housing, interior art, drawing education, dressing, folk art, the maintenance of rural art, the relationship between the environment,

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<sup>39</sup> Hermann Muthesius, *Landhaus und Garten* (München: Verlagsanstalt F. Bruckmann A.G.,1907), p.12.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

nature and art, the color in architecture and the decoration of the streets with plants, about the founding of the Transylvanian Association Sebastian – Hann, about the old frescoes of Cisnădie (Ger. Heltau) and on many other subjects testify his versatility. He was also a very talented graphic artist, lithograph, architectural theorist and architectural restorer.

He was also actively involved in the undertakings of the Sebastian-Hann Association, which supported the propagation of Saxon culture and art and can be considered as the organized forum of this reform movement in Transylvania. With the Association, Balthes organized an exhibition in 1909, entitled "Ausstellung für heimische Bauweise" (Exhibition for Domestic Architecture) and wrote several treatises in the journal "Die Karpathen".<sup>41</sup>

This journal actually was the platform, where the Transylvanian Saxon artists of the time propagated their ideas regarding the new, modern style. One of Balthes' most significant studies, regarding housing culture, was published in Die Karpathen's number 3 from the year 1909. Here we learn about the young architect's conception on housing architecture, which was very close to the theories of movements from the time around 1900 in Germany. The architect emphasizes the meaning of housing culture, according to which man and apartment would represent an ancient interaction. He exemplifies this with the development of housing architecture in Transylvania: as the three-bedroom Saxon farmhouse (Vorderstube – Haus – Hinterstube, i.e., Front room – house – back room) emerged from the one-room farmhouse, behind which in time the farm buildings, under a separate slush, were built. One of the most important theories of Balthes, is the principle of organic architecture. According to this, Balthes emphasizes in his study entitled „Über Wohnungskultur“ [About housing culture] the organic, natural relationship between housing and the environment, quoting his words: "Man creates his housing just like the snail his house, the bird his nest, according to the rules of nature". At the same time, the interaction between man and his housing (socially and culturally approached), can be summed up into Balthes' next sentence: "Show me how you live and I will tell you who you are".<sup>42</sup>

According to the architect, like the combination of rooms in an apartment, the streets and squares of the ideal city should also form an integral unit. Just as the furniture in the room fits into the surroundings and atmosphere, the buildings of the streets and squares must reflect the

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<sup>41</sup> Herbert Letz, *Ein herausragender Schäßburger Architekt: Friedrich Balthes*, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> Friedrich Balthes, 'Über Wohnungskultur', *Die Karpathen: Halbmonatsschrift für Kultur und Leben*, 1/III. (1909): 14–19.

spirit and taste of the environment.<sup>43</sup> These ideas of perceiving architecture as an organic unit, as a three-dimensional complete art work, have their origin in the 1889 published work of Camillo Sitte: „City Planning According to Artistic Principles“, which also had a great impact on the German reform movement.<sup>44</sup>

Balthes played a leading role in the restoration work of the Evangelical Church of Cisnădie in the early twentieth century. A short study from him, regarding the frescoes revealed at that time, was published in the 1908/1909 journal of the Sebastian Hann Association.<sup>45</sup> The artist started his treatise with the exclamation "Peccavi!" and admitted that he let the Romanesque frescoes that were revealed during the restoration, be whitewashed again. Balthes regretted seeing the damaged works of art, which had not been spared by time, and thought they should be covered up, for it would no longer be possible to give them back their old glow. After all this, the architect was forced to admit that the colorless paint had a completely lifeless and cold effect compared to the original old frescoes.

The study also includes a floor plan and a schematic perspective of the choir drawn up by Balthes as a drawing showing the frescoes. After the description of the scenes of Salvation History, which once adorned the choir, at the end of his study, Balthes offered the church community the re-decoration of the walls as a compensation for the loss of the old work of art. In his opinion, with this act "the history of art would suffer a loss, but art and life would win". This short study also provides an insight into the 1908 monument protection activity, documenting the contemporary state of the Cisnădie frescoes with visual evidence.

It is known, that Balthes also worked for the restoration of the church in Sebeș; and he also published an article in 1912, in „Die Karpathen“,<sup>46</sup> presenting his plans and proposal for the removal of the old meat stalls, which closed the west side of the market square behind the church choir (fig. 12 and 13). The architect argued in favor of keeping the row of arcades that closed off the market square, and restoring it. Balthes explained, that the preservation of the arcade row, which was built to be used as meat market, is thus justified historically. In other

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<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Balthes. *Auswahl aus seinen Schriften*, pp. 20–22.

<sup>44</sup> Bernd Evers (ed.), *Architekturtheorie - Von der Renaissance bis zur Gegenwart: 89 Beiträge zu 117 Traktaten* (Köln: Taschen, 2003), pp. 660–662.

<sup>45</sup> Fritz Balthes, 'Alte Wandmalereien in der Kirche zu Heltau' *Sebastian-Hann-Verein für heimische Kunstbestrebungen, Bericht über das Jahr 1908/1909*, (Sibiu, n.d.): 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> Fritz Balthes, 'Zur Freilegung der Mühlbacher Kirche' *Die Karpathen: Halbmonatsschrift für Kultur und Leben*, 5/ XVII (1912): 488–494.

words: "Looking at the church in Sebeş with its surroundings makes it easy to see how the whole complex was created historically, how a certain situation gradually developed with the growth of the city and its traffic and wealth, and finally the architects in the spirit of their time with a clear understanding of the nature of the things themselves have given their artistic form to the practical purpose." As the layout of the city center suggested an old trading place, this picture should have been conserved with the arcade building, which strengthened this idea of a market place.

Besides the historical role, the low, horizontally positioned building mass behind the church choir underlined the powerful effect of the high, monumental church building. Quoting Balthes' words: "Every great impression in architecture is based on opposites".

Another argument from our architect was that the building with the row of arcades was like a wall that closed off the market square. He wrote: "The market square of Sebeş is a beautiful example of a square that still seems closed despite its size. The quiet rows of houses on three sides help to achieve this effect. On the fourth side it would have the effect of falling apart if the calm baseline of the arcade building didn't hold it together. The removal of the corridors would be artistically a disaster for the square. "

Whether it was the effect of this article or not, is hard to reconstruct. Nevertheless, the building with the arcades is still standing today, being a part of the complex of the monumental evangelical church of Sebeş.

Balthes' drawings and lithographic works – postcards – also revealed him as a very good graphic artist. This fact was underlined by Dr. Hermann Fabini, in a study commemorating Friedrich Balthes. Hermann Fabini's father worked in Balthes' workshop and recalled with admiration how easily and beautifully the master drew.<sup>47</sup>

From the years of his studies, sketchbooks have been preserved, which also confirm his talent. They showed that Balthes was deeply connected with the artistic Avant-garde before the 1st World War. He made his study drawings after living models and after nature (fig.14). His style, line handling was clearly in Art Nouveau. His sketches and self-portraits reveal not only searching curiosity, but also his self-confidence.<sup>48</sup>

The postcards made by the artist were also remarkable. According to Konrad Klein, Balthes made these lithographs in his personal press

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<sup>47</sup> Hermann Fabini, 'Vertreter der Neubesinnung. Zu Erinnerung an den Schässburger Architekten Fritz Balthes' *Neuer Weg*, 36/ 9 (1985): 1.

<sup>48</sup> Hellmut Fabini, '„Die Construction des Inneren“ – Zu künstlerischen Äußerungen in Skizzenheften der Architekten Friedrich Balthes' *Schäßburger Nachrichten*, 42/21 (2014): 49 –50.

office. He distributed them with the intention to present and propagate the Saxon national style and the Art Nouveau in Transylvania, as well as to show his own plans for new buildings<sup>49</sup> – like the postcard with his design for a community inn of Dealu Frumos (fig. 15).<sup>50</sup>

The present study aimed to make a short review of the overall work of Friedrich Balthes, outlining the fact that he should be rediscovered not only as a very talented Transylvanian Saxon architect of his time, but also as a remarkable graphic artist, architectural theorist and restorer.

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<sup>49</sup> Konrad Klein, 'Siebenbürgische Kunst- und Künstlerkarten: Zur Geschichte künstlerischer Ansichtskarten im deutschen Umfeld Siebenbürgens', *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 2/20 (1997): 159–161.

<sup>50</sup> Konrad Klein, *Grüße aus dem Bärenland: Siebenbürgen in alten Ansichtskarten*. (München: Verlag Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1998), p. 118.

Annex: Illustrations



Figure 1 Hotel Steaua, Sighișoara (Picture taken by the author, 2010)

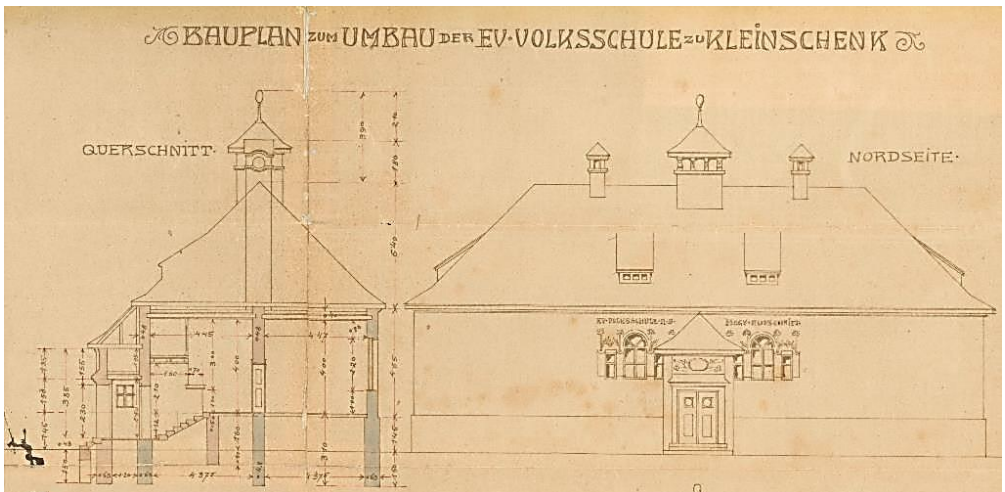


Figure 2 The Ev. School in Cincșor (Plan drawings from Balthes - Archive of the Evangelical Church in Sibiu)





Figure 3 The Karres-house in the periodical: "Ostland" from July 1919.



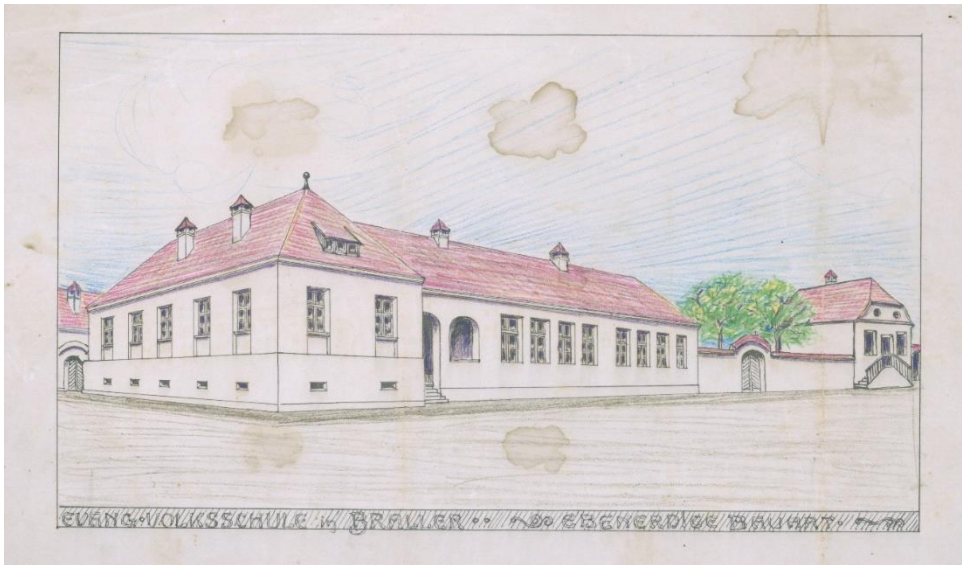
Figure 4 The parish house in Netuș (Picture taken by the author, 2016)



**Figure 5** The former savings bank in Mediaș (Picture taken by the author, 2010)



**Figure 6** Western front of the school in Bruuiu  
(Picture taken by the author, 2016)



**Figure 7 Fritz Balthes, Proposed plan for the school and teacher's apartment building in Bruiu - Ground-level construction (Digitized example from the Evangelical Archives in Sibiu)**



**Figure 8 Fritz Balthes, Proposed plans for the school and teacher's apartment building - storied version (Digitized examples from the Evangelical Archives in Sibiu)**





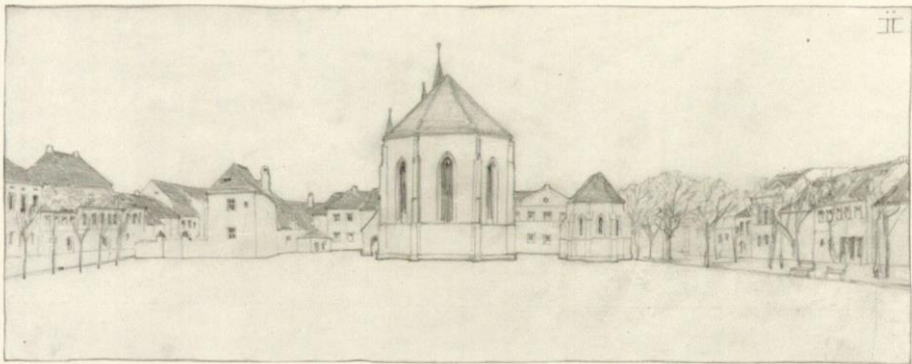
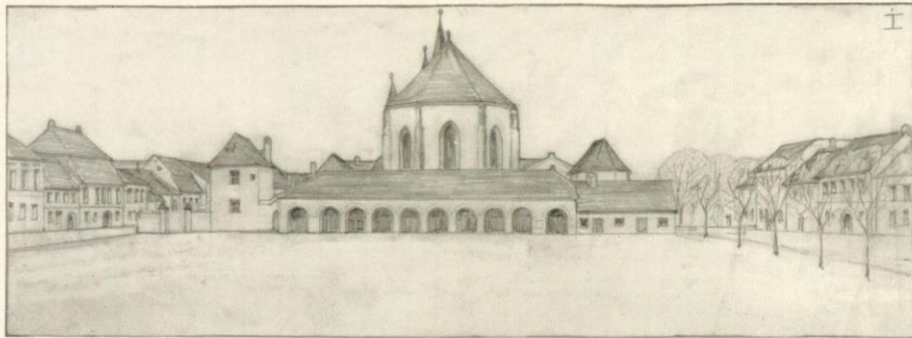
Figure 9 Richard Riemerschmid: Two-family house (Illustration in: Hermann Muthesius, *Landhaus und Garten*, Munich, 1907.)



Figure 10 Evangelical School in Bruiu, detail of the staircase, picture taken by the author, 2016.



Figure 11 Smoking room in Paul Korffs - House Korff, Laage, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany (Illustration in: Hermann Muthesius, *Landhaus und Garten* Munich 1907.)

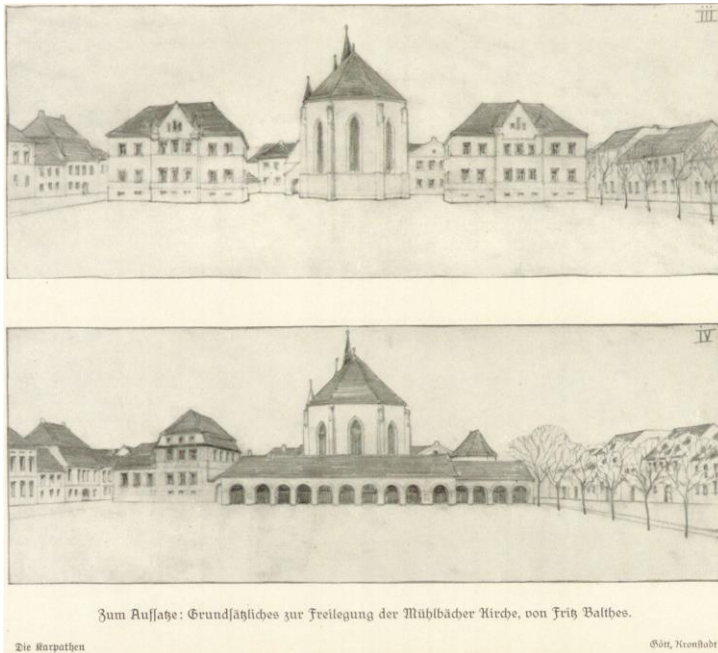


Zum Aufsatz: Grundsätzliches zur Freilegung der Mühlbacher Kirche, von Fritz Balthes.

Die Karpaten

6/10, Straußhdt

**Figure 12 Fritz Balthes: The church with the meat stalls in 1912 (above) and after their demolition (below) In: *Die Karpaten*, 6/10, May 1912**



**Figure 13 Fritz Balthes: Plan variation for the market place without the meat stalls (above) and with the restored arcade row (below) In: *Die Karpathen*, 6/10, May 1912**



**Figure 144 Portrait of Emilie Fuchs, Sketch from Balthes, digital copy from the Evangelical Archives in Sibiu**

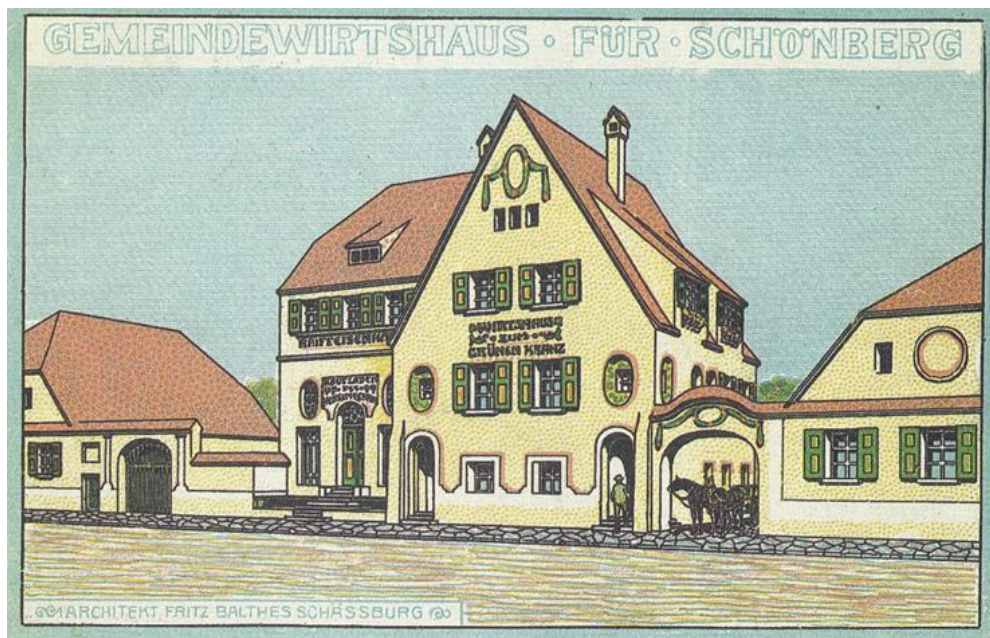


Figure 155 Fritz Balthes, Design for the Community Inn in Dealu Frumos, Chromolithography., 1909. In: Konrad Klein, *Grüße aus dem Bärenland: Siebenbürgen in alten Ansichtskarten*, Munich, 1998, p. 118.

