

Saschiz (Keisd, Sászkézd vára) is located in the south-eastern part of Transylvanian, in the area of Saxon colonization. We have to look for its medieval origin during the eleventh to the twelfth centuries. It was first mentioned in documents in 1309 and during the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries, it was a regionally important settlement, in many ways comparable to Sighişoara. The Evangelical church was built in a late gothic style in the years 1493–1525. Its originality consists in the architectural project, which included from the beginning, the necessary components for a double functionality: a church and a fortress that can protect the inhabitants in case of an unexpected danger. The church in Saschiz thus became the model for an entire series of fortified churches in southern Transylvania, known as “reduit churches”. The church consists of a large nave (41 × 4 m), an elongated choir, closed with a polygonal apse and a sacristy on the northern side. The sacristy is next to the choir and it is superposed as so, on the outside, it resembles a small tower. All these constructions are superposed by a bracketed defense floor, supported by buttresses. A fortified tower is placed on the northern side, about 10 meters away from the church. The archaeological research was conducted along with a restoration project between 1999–2010. The excavations were concentrated on relatively small surfaces, outside the church, inside the tower and inside the choir. The research mainly tried to solve some technical problems concerning the characteristics and stability of the building, the construction stages and the evolution of the ground level. This article presents the research on the church, the investigations in the tower area, the cemetery and the archaeological materials are to represent a future paper. The Evangelical church in Saschiz was built on a short, irregular plateau, with a higher area in the central part of the current nave. The foundation ditches were lowered in a layer of yellow clay, with hard, brown insertions, almost petrified in some segments. The ditches generally go 1.3 meters deep, with variations determined by the rigid structure of the soil, most accentuated in the sacristy area. The masonry infrastructure of the church is regular, made of river stone and local sandstone of variable sizes; a large quantity of relatively friable mortar, made of lime and sand was used. The profile of the foundations is irregular, mostly viewed from the outside. The archaeological research has established that the church, formed of a large nave, elongated choir, closed with a polygonal apse and a sacristy on the northern side, was built on a single stage of construction, including the buttresses, as foreseen in the initial project. The first ground level, laid out on the inside, consisted of a tile floor with brick measuring 36 × 18 cm. The floor was identified in the nave at a depth of – 0.4 m. It was evidenced that, inside the choir, after the construction of the foundations, the surface was leveled out, the ground floor being standardized at around – 0.2 m, by a thick, clayish layer that must have been part of the structure of a first paving. The first ground level inside the apse of the altar is hypothetically proposed around level 0.00, corresponding to the inferior level of an ancient plaster layer. The ground level before the restoration is. in the nave and choir at – 0.1 m (on average) and inside the apse of the altar at + 0.46 m. A cemetery developed around the church, of which we have managed to research over 30 graves. The necropolis is thin and the overlappings suggest the existence of familial burial grounds. We did not notice burials prior to the church;

therefore the inhumations have started as early as the beginning of the construction site, around 1500. As we know, these cemeteries were closed toward the middle of the sixteenth century, after the Reformation, whose adoption in Saschiz is accepted for the year 1545. The fact that the cemetery is not much extended is therefore explainable by its limited duration, which we can estimate to the first half of the sixteenth century. An exception are the inside burials, usually reserved for peers of the community, especially clergy and their families. These inside burials have continued even after the closing of the exterior cemetery. Although the excavations were relatively small, we can conclude that on this spot there never was an older church. We have not identified any kind of vestiges (ruins, stratigraphic deposits, cemetery or artifacts) that could relate to an older stage of constructions. The older speciality papers have constantly claimed such an evolution, in which the older church of the Saxon community, probably a twelfth century basilica, was more or less directly overlapped by the fortified nave church at the end of the fifteenth century. Such a theory was sustained by the presence of a small lapidary inside the church, by the use of profiled carved stones in the gothic building and, of course, that fact that, naturally, this is the evolution of most of the Saxon communities in southern Transylvania (among churches of different stages of construction one can notice a spatial continuity). However, the archaeological discoveries at Saschiz did not confirm such a scenario. It is evident that the Romanesque church functioned in a different location, together with its own cemetery. This is probably the cemetery that remained, after the Reformation, the main community cemetery.