

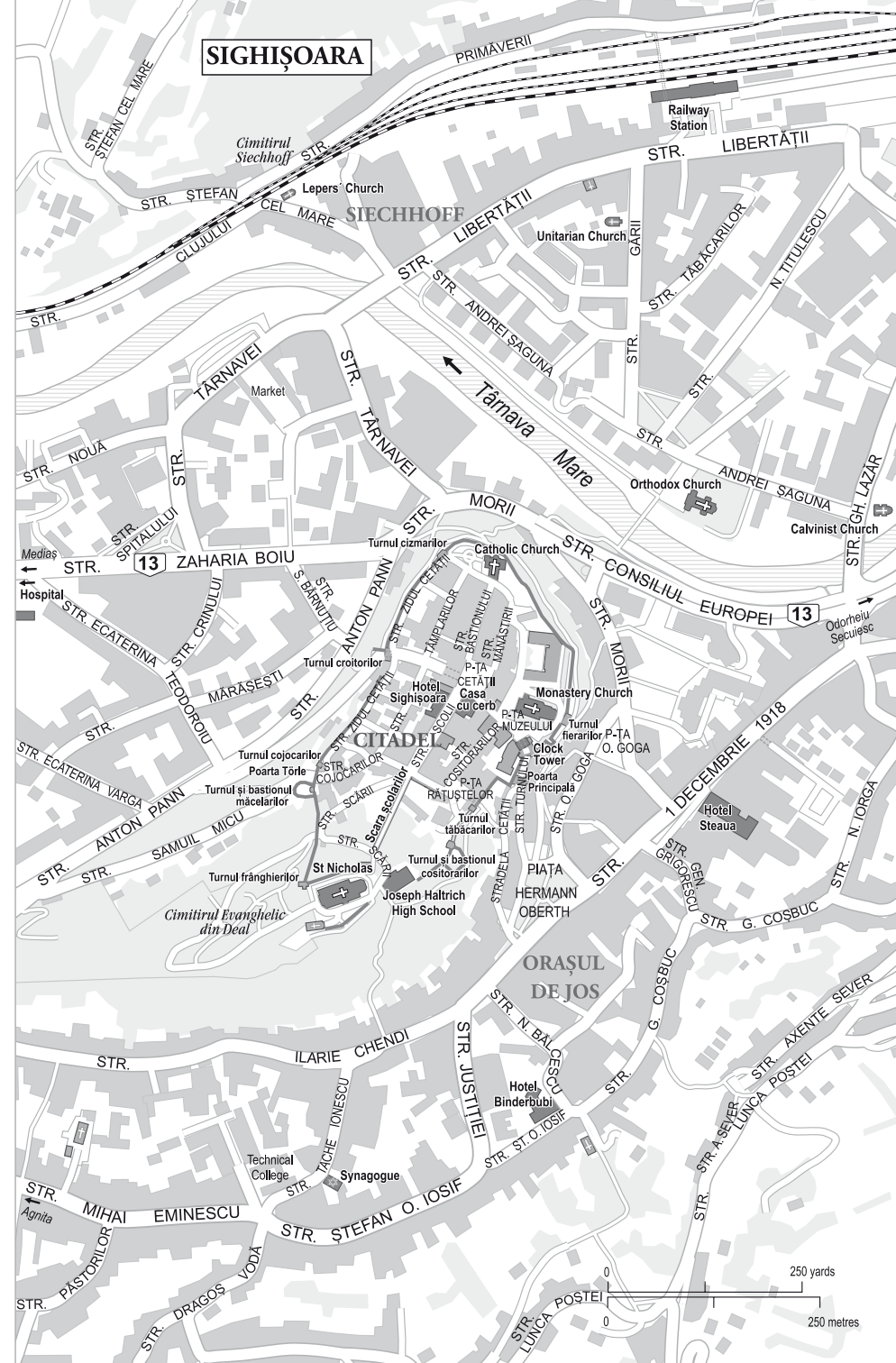
## THE CITADEL

I recommend visiting the citadel first. In the summer months it is advisable to park in the official parking at its foot and walk up. If staying in one of the many hotels in the citadel, they will send transport for the luggage. The short ascent through the double walls gives both a sense of the danger from the East and of the wealth of the city guilds who were responsible for this spectacular defence. The Sighișoara citadel is one of the few fortified towns still intact in Europe. As you climb, look out over the pre-war area near the hospital, with its charming villas of the '20s and '30s and which a friend, born and bred in Sighișoara, described as 'Belgravia'.

Huge strides have been made in restoring the fortifications. The MET (see p. 239) has repaired two of the existing towers using one, the Turnul Cojocarilor ('Tower of the Furriers'), as their central office. Attached to this is a shop making leather goods.

### Piața Cetății

The old main square of the citadel is Piața Cetății. Sighișoara has wisely retained its cobbles, which give texture and sit well with the details and materials of the buildings. The centres of Brașov and Sibiu have all been re-paved to their detriment. The hoteliers in the citadel have also retained some of the original elements of the ancient buildings: as you look around this enchanting mix of architecture it is difficult to believe that most of the buildings are of the late 17th century and later. Have a drink in the **Hotel Sighișoara** to see the frescoes, and enjoy the carved stag's head rearing from a frescoed body on the **Casa cu Cerb**, which gives this hotel its name. The square also contains the putative **house of Vlad Dracul**, now a restaurant. Vlad Dracul was one of the warriors against the Turks and was the father of Vlad the Impaler, notorious as the inspiration for Bram Stoker's Dracula. The Canadian author never set foot in Transylvania and the Dracul house is much later than Vlad. Alas, in this case, fiction is stronger than fact and, as a result, shopping in the citadel is a dispiriting experience unless you want teeth or T-shirts. All the antique shops have gone. In the 1990s there was an ill-conceived scheme to build a Dracula



## MĂLÂNCRAV

To reach Mălâncrav (Almakerék/Malmkrog) from the main valley road, you must pass through **Laslea (Großlasseln/Szászszentlászló)**. The turning is between Sighișoara and Șaroș. Laslea shares a priest with Mălâncrav. It is not really worth a special stop unless you are buying some food in the shop, but if you feel like exploring, the key to the 19th-century church can be obtained from Johannes Halmen (*T: 0740 172 015; please call a few days before you plan your visit as, although he keeps the key in the Priest House, he is usually only there two or three times a week*). Alternatively, ask in the blue-painted shop on the corner. Beside the church is the hospital with a matching façade. It was possibly built in the 1840s (perhaps by the Hallers, who bought Mălâncrav from the Bethlens?). The earlier church was of the 13th century and now only the west tower survives. It is a curiosity.

For Mălâncrav, take the road to the left by Laslea's corner shop. Your journey is along another beautiful valley and will take about 20mins from the turn-off. En route you will pass hop fields. This was a very successful crop during Saxon days. Even today some farmers are succeeding in selling to Germany. It is labour-intensive.

The road to Mălâncrav is now tarred, but there is still a great sense of arrival at this beautiful Saxon village. Mălâncrav, as with Dumbrăveni and many other villages in the Târnava Valley, was the property of the Hungarian Apafi family (*see p. 102*), from among whose number came one of the most successful of the elected Princes of Transylvania. There are tales of secret tunnels from Mălâncrav manor to Dumbrăveni—which must be questionable but it is an attractive thought.

Today there is a higher proportion of Saxons in Mălâncrav than in most villages in the Siebenbürgen, which may be due to two factors. The first is that the priest lives in the village, in the Priest's House near the church. He is from Germany but, at the time of the Saxon exodus, was on secondment to the priest of Mălâncrav. The original priest failed to return from his holiday so Father Joachim Lorenz remained and, along with him,



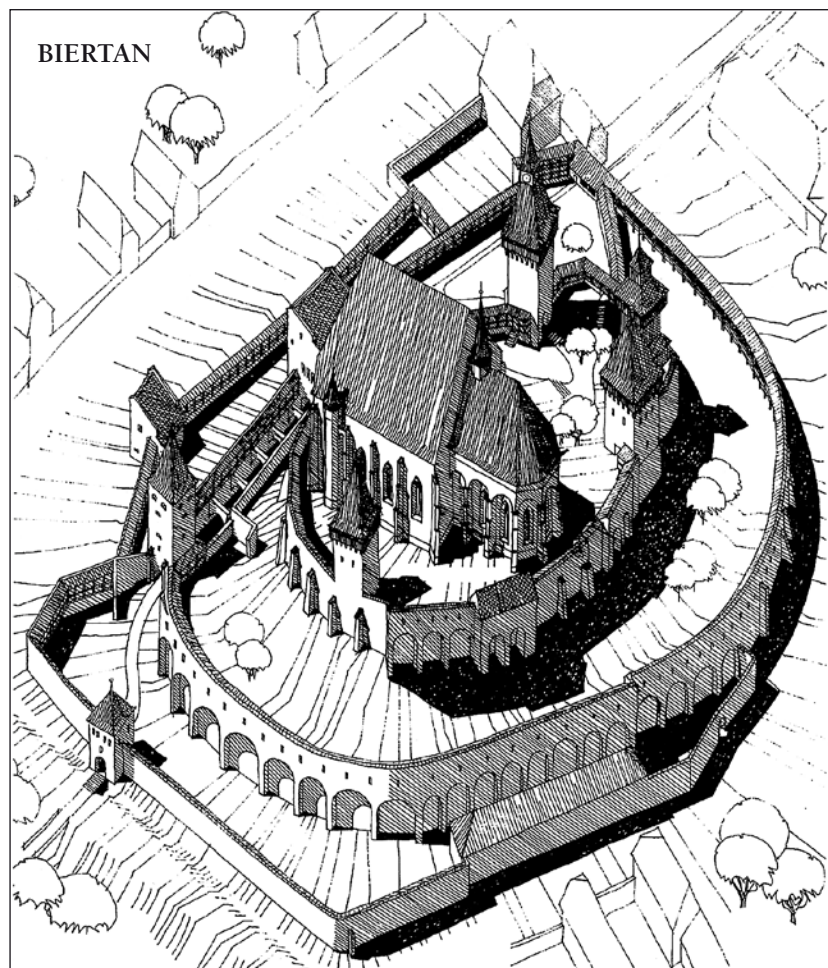
Transylvanian Saxons in 1938.

his congregation. The second factor may be the long restoration process carried out in the village by the Mihai Eminescu Trust (*see p. 239*) and Horizon (*see p. 240*). This 'Whole Village Project' provided work for the villagers and restored many village houses.

### The manor house

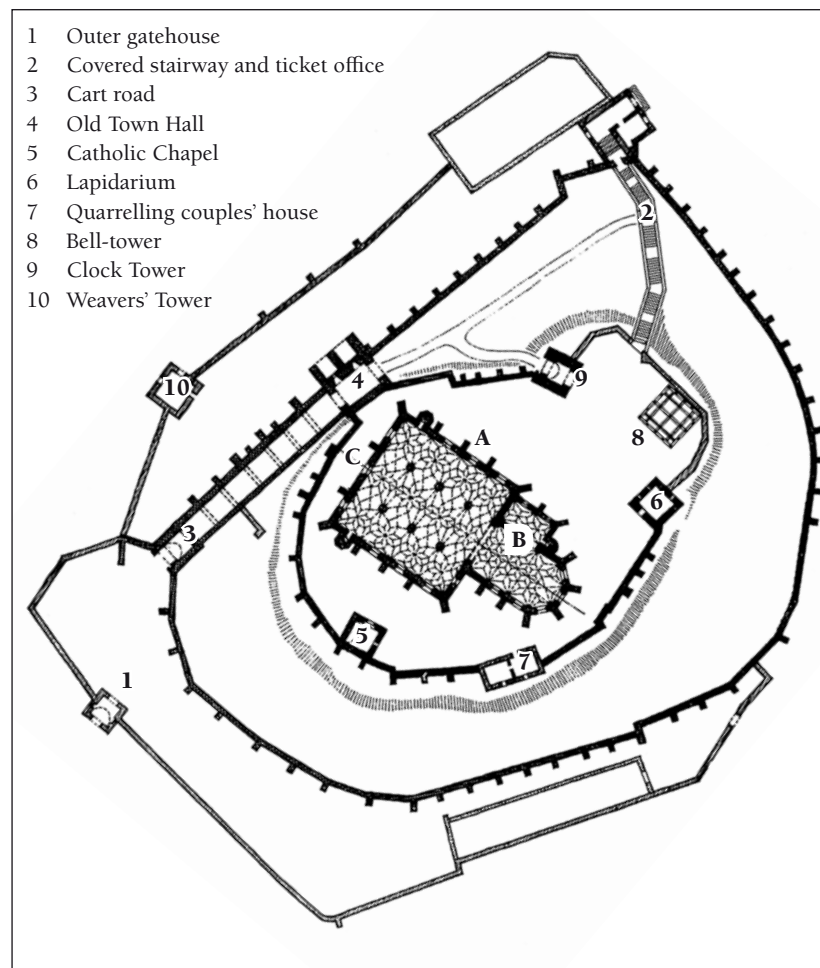
Although the village itself was inhabited by Saxons, Mălâncrav Manor, sitting near the church above the village and separated from it by a flower meadow, could hardly afford a more perfect example of a Hungarian aristocratic seat. The house itself has great charm, mixing Transylvanian Renaissance and northern European features. Its fine colonnaded façade recalls that of some of the great houses of the Hungarian aristocracy, including three covered in this book: Sânmiclăuș (Bethlen family; *see p. 195*); Dumbrăveni (Apafi family; *see p. 101*) and Criș (Bethlen family; *see p. 79*). The dumpy Transylvanian Ionic columns became a leitmotif of the





### Visiting the church

The church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Take the beautiful covered **wooden stairway (2)**, newly restored, up to the ticket office (*open 10–1 & 2–6; Nov–March Tues–Sun 11–3; the office contains an adequate bookshop*). From the stairway, if you take the first exit on the right you will find yourself looking down on the cart entrance, with sturdy flying buttresses. Continue to the entrance ahead, where under the roof of the church are



- 1 Outer gatehouse
- 2 Covered stairway and ticket office
- 3 Cart road
- 4 Old Town Hall
- 5 Catholic Chapel
- 6 Lapidarium
- 7 Quarrelling couples' house
- 8 Bell-tower
- 9 Clock Tower
- 10 Weavers' Tower

fragmentary architectural frescoes. The **north entrance (A)** has a Baroque wooden door, surrounded by a jamb with carving by Ulrich from Braşov, who arrived in Biertan in 1523. The carving echoes that on the pulpit inside.

On entering, the grace and light of this hall church is a delight. The interior is both rich and airy, the net vault over the chancel having been repainted after damage by the severe earthquake in Bucharest of 1977.



## ANATOLIAN RUGS/TRANYSLVANIAN CARPETS

When visiting the Protestant, Lutheran churches in Transylvania, you will experience one of the finest collections of Ottoman rugs from Anatolia outside the museums in Budapest and Istanbul. These rugs are known generically as ‘Transylvanian’ carpets though they were mainly made in Western Anatolia from the 15th–19th centuries but preserved in Saxon churches here as objects of great value. They fall into various categories depending on pattern and where it is thought they were made: major centres were Gördes, Kula, Selendi and Uşak in western Anatolia.

The rugs are of wool pile, knotted onto the warp with the double Turkish or Gördes knot. They are dyed with natural dyes (madder, indigo, walnut, etc.) and multiple dipping was used to vary the colours. The vast majority of surviving rugs are from the 17th century, but there are many from the 18th and a few from the 19th centuries too. The 19th century saw a shift in taste at the Ottoman court, which was looking to the West for inspiration. But taste, habits and politics had changed in Transylvania too. The years 1848 and 1849 were hardly conducive to trade, as the country was immersed in a virtual civil war.

Many of the ‘Transylvanian’ carpet styles are classified under the names of 16th-century Western artists who used them as props in their studios to reflect their sitters’ wealth and status or to give a sense of the exotic. Lorenzo Lotto used an Uşak rug, henceforth named a ‘Lotto’. A ‘Holbein’ is of the type used in his famous painting of *The Ambassadors*. ‘Crivelli’, ‘Ghirlandaio’ and ‘Memling’ rugs are also found in the pattern types. From Selendi come the beautiful ‘bird’ and ‘scorpion’ rugs, so named from the stylised motifs on them which resemble scorpions with upturned tail or birds in flight. It has been suggested that some of these carpets might equally have been made in the Balkans. Of great beauty too are the Çintamani rugs, with a motif of three balls and wavy lines, derived from Buddhist symbolism. This probably entered along the Silk Route and spread in Anatolia through inspiration from Chinese fabrics.

**Detail of a 16th/17th-century western Anatolian white-ground Selendi bird rug in Biertan church. Bird rugs feature in a few European paintings from 1557–1625.**