

# Bradeni

14 September

The fortified 15th century church at Bradeni was a high point of our visit. The nave and gallery were covered in 18th century paintwork but the real object of interest was in the poorly-lit tower, reached by dark steps. There, in serried ranks, were over 100 ark-like clamp-fronted chests, others having been transferred to other churches. The chests are believed to have been used for storing food (grain remnants could be seen), useful if the village was under attack. Seven chests were also seen in the church tower at Viscri, but it is not clear whether this was a general custom or a relatively rare one.

The chests were of similar size - typically 155 x 110 x 55cm - and showed few variations in their design. The gabled lid of five boards slotted through end pieces and was held by pin hinges. In some cases the front vertical board of the lid had a recess in the lower edge which slotted over the top board of the front, providing a tight fit. The front was made of two wide tapered top and bottom boards slotting into a narrower but non-tapered middle board. The back and sides usually had three

boards. The stile feet had a variety of wide-angled notched profiles. Similar profiles are found on early English (and later Welsh borders) clamp-fronted chests and may have been to secure the chest to a cart while being transported.

Many of the chests were plain but a few had the remains of polychrome painted decoration, with roundels and scrolling designs on the front boards. Conservation of the best preserved of the painted chests had been undertaken by a team under Prof. Dr. Maierbacher-Legl of Hawk Hochschule in Hildesheim, and these were on display in well-lit conditions in the 'church on the hill' in Sighisoara, where illustrated panels described the work. Carved roundels with zoological and other images were a feature of 14th and 15th century gothic chests in Germany (and in much other European art in that period) and are likely to have been painted. We also encountered them in wall paintings in wooden churches in open-air museums. The painted but uncarved decoration of the Bradeni chests thus has earlier origins, suggesting that the 'Saxons', actually people from many parts of Germany and the Low Countries who were settled in Transylvania from the early middle ages, brought this tradition with them. The chests were mostly beech

On returning we discovered the publication of a well-illustrated book which documents the German team's research: M.Harms, F Franke and P Klein, *Der Henndorfer Truhentfund* (Siegl, Munich 2012, £22). This reveals that 60 chests had been dated, the earliest from 1466 and most of the others from 1540-1640.

*Chris Pickvance*

A painted chest at Bradeni

