

ROMANIAN RURAL ARCHITECTURE – DIVERSITY OF HOMESTEADS

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Abstract

Aim of this paper is to present basic types of Romanian rural architecture and show it as a continuation of tradition of timber architecture of neighbouring countries. Geographic, topographic and historical situation of Romania had immense influence on the shape of Romanian vernacular wooden architecture. The paper is based upon research in the two largest Romanian open air museums in Bucharest and Sibiu representing full scope of the country's rural architecture. The paper concentrates on the most characteristic ethnic groups that created spatial identity of their homesteads and houses.

Streszczenie

Celem publikacji jest przedstawienie podstawowych typów rumuńskiej drewnianej, ludowej architektury i zwrócenie uwagi na jej związek z budownictwem sąsiednich krajów. Sytuacja geograficzna, topograficzna i historyczna Rumunii miała przełożony wpływ na kształt rumuńskiej architektury wernakularnej. Praca oparta jest o badania prowadzone w dwóch skansenach: w Bukareszcie i Sibiu, które dają przegląd wiejskiej architektury oraz na dostępnej literaturze przedmiotu. Praca koncentruje się na najbardziej rozpoznawalnych grupach etnicznych, których tradycja budowlana jest czytelna w sposobie wznoszenia budowli i kształcie wiejskich gospodarstw.

Keywords: Wooden/timber architecture; Village settlements; Homesteads; Architectural forms; Compound; Identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Romanian settlements, village timber architecture and technical inventions improving everyday life of the peasants are considered as one of the most impressive achievements of the past days of this rural country. This cannot be understood without knowledge of Romanian ethnic heterogeneity which has occurred mainly due to the country's geographic position on the border of different cultures as well as complex topography. It enabled peoples from different countries to settle there, but mountain ranges dividing the country into well defined entities prevented regular contacts and intermingling of vernacular patterns. Tangled history of this land additionally supported this situation. Village architecture clearly shows pristine differences in local tradition between the regions of Romania, variety blurred today by architectonic global culture and market [1].

2. BACKGROUND AND TOPOGRAPHIC SITUATION

First inhabitants of today's Romania were Dacians. They were conquered by the Romans in 106 A.C. Although Empire rule lasted only until 271 A.C., Romans mixed with local people and their cultural influence has shaped the customs and language of contemporary Romanians. The three largest regions of today's Romania: Walachia, Moldova, and Transylvania as well as smaller ones: Bucovina and Maramureş, Banat, Dobrogea, have developed individual cultural identities through their individual history. Topography of the country resulted in wide scope of occupational patterns and caused well-defined differences in traditional architecture. Climate varies from mild on the coasts of the Black Sea, to severe in Carpathian Mountains. Hungarian community in Transylvania still uses its own language and follows traditions that include urban and architectural schemes. Saxon settlements (Transylvania, Banat), which developed in

the same region from the 12th century, also formed characteristic village layouts and architectural forms. Szeklers' (Székely) architecture also present in the same region adds spacious agricultural compounds to the mosaic of urban and architectural solutions in the western part of the country. [2]

Carpathian mountain range divides zones of influence of neighbouring cultures, but at the same time it provided trails for exploration particularly for the inhabitants of Transylvania and Maramureş. Shepherds migrated with their flocks as far as Moravia and Silesia from the 14th to the 16th centuries and gradually founded villages there. Some 15th to 17th century documents refer to penetration of Vlach (Rumanian) groups in the western Carpathians (Lemko and Boyko ethnic groups in Poland) [3].

Carpathian Mountains cover about one-third of the country dividing Rumania into three separate areas. They surround Transylvanian Plateau and cut it off from the other two main regions: Moldavia in the northeast and Wallachia in the south. To the east and west of the mountains the land is relatively flat. The Danube River stretches for six hundred miles and forms southern border of the country and frontier with Serbia and Bulgaria. Its grand delta on the coast of the Black Sea cuts across Romanian marshlands

Transylvania, Slovakia and Trans-Carpathian Ukraine were incorporated in the Hungarian state in 18th century; later, in the 19th-20th c. into the Austro-Hungarian Empire that united Austria, Hungary, Czech and Slovakia, Transylvania, Bukovina, Trans-Carpathian Ukraine, along with a part of Poland (Galicia). This administrative, legal and economic unification encouraged contacts with the western



Figure 1. Map of Romania. Regional differences were created and maintained by topographical borders such as rivers and mountain ranges. Source: composition of maps: infotravel-romania.ro + <http://wikitravel.org/en/Romania>

economy at the break of industrial era [4]. Results of this situation are easy to trace in the forms of village production appliances made of wood.

Not limited by political frontiers, timber architecture was limited in different way: by local climate, access to high quality material, skill in building techniques and aesthetical preferences of the groups of people.

2. HOMESTEAD LAYOUTS

Villages were formed by homesteads showing variety of local schedules. Main village buildings: churches (mainly orthodox) and boyar houses dominated in the settlement and were set usually by the village road and source of water. Common green areas were within the centre of villages: the church was also placed there. Homesteads, depending on the region and topography, represented either loosely built plan, or created cut-off yard. Architecture of peasants' houses varied depending on the region, its history, occupation of inhabitants and their socio-economic position. In villages where the houses were scattered on hills and mountains (and where the main occupation was rearing sheep or cattle), the courtyard was closed by the wall. [5.] In pastoral-and-agricultural areas, there were two courtyards to house different functions. In the mountains houses had tall, sloping saddle roofs; in the plains, the roofs were relatively flat and homesteads wide-spread.

The homesteads were complex economic entities. Number of buildings, their size and shape was a result of function, importance within the compound and building technique [5]:

- house was the most outstanding, although not always the largest building of the homestead; symbol of status of each family; it was the first to be built on the plot, then subsequently improved and decorated
- cellar was either dug under the house or separately in a comfortable distance
- traditional homesteads included larder situated at some distance from the house; basic foodstuffs and household objects were stored there
- not all homesteads had their own well; sometimes it was dug half way between the homestead yard and the road; if it was wholly within the compound, it was often used by more than one family
- barn, apart from storing crops was used for rearing animals; in agricultural areas it was often larger than the house; sometimes was accompanied by the huts for animals

- simple shelters for cattle may be set up within the compound; these constructions occasionally (in summer) were transformed into stores for wood and tools
- fodder sheds were risen above the yard level to protect maize or hay from rain and dampness; walls were made of wooden grate allowing ventilation
- haystacks consisted of four poles on which a pitched roof was slid up and down depending on the quantity of hay underneath, they were built in pastures close to the homesteads or even within the yards. In more advanced structures the sides were protected by timber grates
- fences and gates were essential elements in the architecture of homesteads; they delimited the family space and related it to the world of the village; provided social and cultural indicators expressed by dimensions, form and decoration. In secluded, highlanders' homesteads fences protected people and flocks, therefore they were built of stone or brick

- workshops of carpenters, matt makers, harness makers, pottery-makers, weavers, were set up within the homesteads. The others, particularly where sources of power or safety precautions were crucial issue, constructions were established outside the homestead or even village.

The simplest homesteads had no wells – nearby streams were the only source of water. Houses consisted of one room. Hearth was in the centre of living space. The conic structure of the hut (coliba) is considered to be the oldest type of rural structure. Primarily it was built either as independent shelter in the mountains for shepherds or wood cutters in time of collecting hay or work. While in proximity of

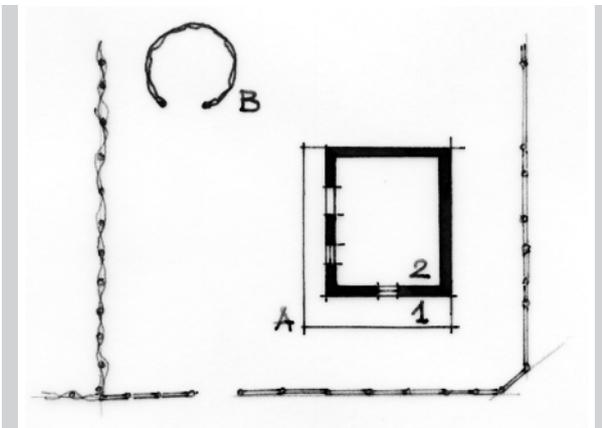


Figure 2. Moldova. Neamt region, Plan of a space house (A), with a shed (B), 1.-porch, 2.-room; 17th c., O.A.M. Bucharest



Figure 3. Moldova. One space house with a shed – Neamt region, 17th c., O.A.M. Bucharest



Figure 4. Transylvania. Maramureş county, 19th c. Entrance gates, O.A.M. in Sibiu



Figure 5. Wallachia. Tigru Carbuñesti, Gori county. Intricate decoration of the gates, beginning of 20th c., O.A.M. in Sibiu

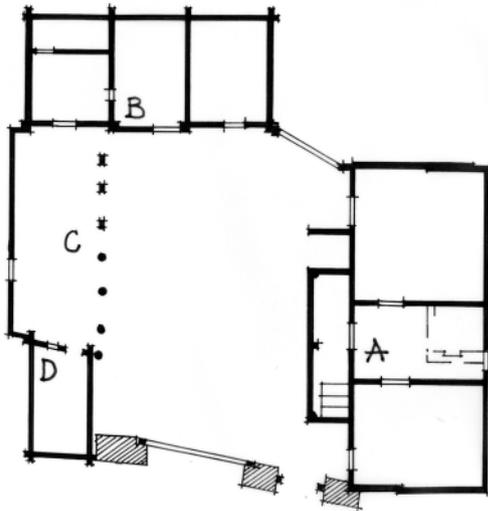


Figure 6. Transylvania. Poiana Sibiului, Sibiu county. Plan of shepherds' homestead with wool-processing workshop from 19th c., A – house, B – barn with animal sheds on both sides, C – animal shelter, D – store; O.A.M. in Sibiu



Figure 7. Transylvania. Poiana Sibiului, Sibiu county. Shepherds' homestead with wool-processing workshop enclosed by solid wall; 19th c., O.A.M. in Sibiu

a house it was used as a summer kitchen and storage space in winter.

Such primitive homesteads were often open – or at least partially fenced.

Accentuating family status by means of decorations developed in the villages. Fences and gates practically and symbolically defended peasants from the evil spirits, so protective symbols were carved on poles and beams as well as on the door. Impressive wooden gates from many regions are covered with intricate reliefs. There were more than one entry to the compound – the second one leading to fields or pastures [6].

In scattered model of settlement, and such form was

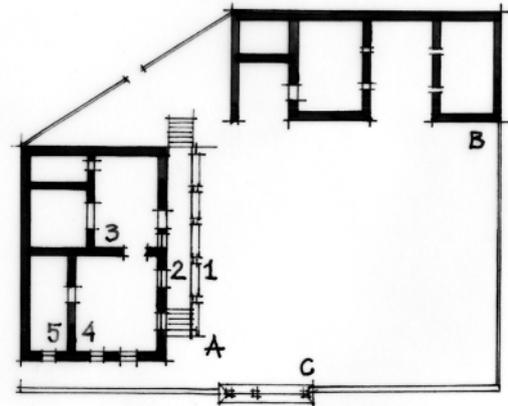


Figure 8. Transylvania. Făgăraș Mountains, Brasov region. Plan of Saxon peasant's homestead, A – house, B – shed with stable and hayloft, C – gate; 1 – cellar, 2 – porch, 3 – passage room, 4 – living room, 5 – pantry; 19th c., O.A.M. in Bucharest



Figure 9. Transylvania. Faragas Mountains, Brasov region, Saxon peasant's homestead, O.A.M. in Bucharest

common in the mountains, fences ensured protection for people and animals. All functions were concentrated in one yard with clearly defined zones. Buildings and fences were built of stones, bricks, or wood and plastered; sometimes whitewashed or painted. Such homesteads looked as inaccessible strongholds and impression was intensified by their location on slopes [7]. Mountain houses were often two storey structures with lower level built in stone or timber and wooden upper floor.

Transylvania – mountainous, upland part of the country experienced waves of settlements from the early middle ages. Different ethnic groups passed and settled there or were ordered to settle for political reasons. Among them, starting from the end of 11th century were Hungarians. Saxons arrived in the 12th century, however the first “Saxon” wave was basically from Franconian areas [2] later followed by German people. Coordinated Saxon settlements action took

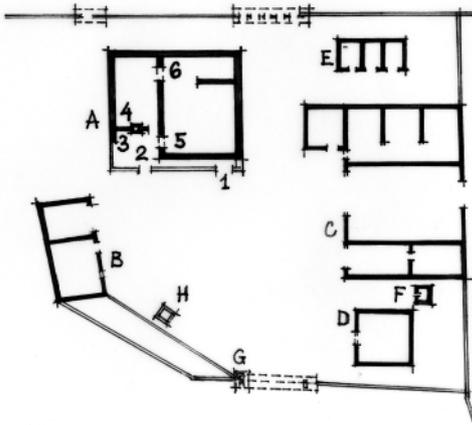


Figure 10. Transylvania. Scheklers, Hungarian-type homestead, A – house, B – summer kitchen and carpenter work room, C – sheds for animals and cart, D – granary, E – pigsty and henhouse, F – latrine, G – gate with pigeon house, H – well; 1. porch, 2. passage room, 3. cellar, 4. living room, 5. clean room, 6. pantry; O.A.M. in Bucharest



Figure 11. Transylvania. Scheklers, Hungarian-type homestead, O.A.M. in Bucharest

place in the 13th century. Villages were closely built up, the community organization was strong and common spaces and buildings (churches) were placed centrally. Very soon, or even from the beginning, brick construction became the standard and villages resembled miniature towns concentrated along several streets with pastures and fields placed on their outskirts. Fortified churches were unusual answer to permanent Tatar and Turks threat. However, there were also agrarian, wide spread villages, where timber architecture prevailed. They show similarities to German homesteads. [8].

Szeklers are the third community with strong historical tradition, living mainly in Transylvania. Their origin is unclear: some authors adhere to Turkish roots of the group [2], while others consider them to be Hungarians [9]. Their confession to Hungarian cul-

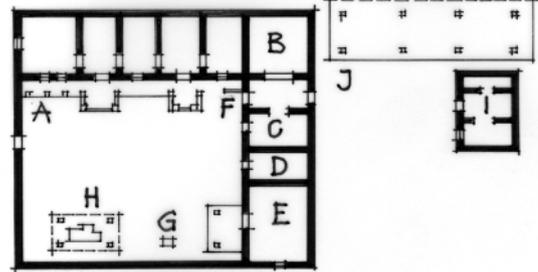


Figure 12. Dobrudja. Tulcea region, plan of Lippovans homestead, A – house, B – tool-store, C – food store, D – smoke house, E – stable, F – ice house, G – poultry house, H – summer kitchen, I – steam bath, J – shed; Tulcea region, 18th c.; This homestead shows strong bonds with Russian timber architecture brought to Romania by this Slavic ethnic group, O.A.M. in Bucharest



Figure 13. Dobrudja. Lippovans homestead, Tulcea region, O.A.M. in Bucharest

ture results in architecture resembling that of Hungarian villages [10]. Sometimes their homesteads were multi-functional, containing barns, animal sheds, workshops etc., hence complicated layout of the compound and two or more yards for different purposes. It is worth noting that summer kitchens, dangerous for the fire risk, were often placed outside the house not only in Szeklers' settlements. Transylvanian Szeklers' compounds and buildings resemble that of Hungary.

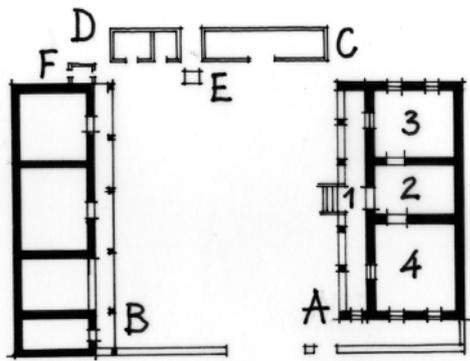


Figure 14.
Banat. Sarbova, Timiș region, layout of “Frankish” (Habsburg) homestead from 19th century, O.A.M. in Bucharest



Figure 15.
Banat. Sarbova, Timiș region, “Frankish” (Habsburg) house from 19th century, O.A.M. in Bucharest

Lowlands in Romania have mild climate, different accessible raw building materials and different model of homesteads economy. Fishing and agriculture was main occupation of the people so the layouts were different from those in the mountains. Structures were built with sparse use of timber. Walls were constructed of wattle-and-daub and thatched roofs of straw or reeds superseded shingles. Furthermore Dobrugea region was penetrated in the 17th century by groups of Russian adherents of old rite in orthodox church, fleeing persecution after reform [11]. The local name of the group is Lipovians and refers to the first area (Lipoveni) where they have settled. Lipovians brought forms typical for Russian architecture: elaborate cut-wood decorations framing windows, doors and gables, details painted in vivid and contrasting colours with dominating shades of blue. This architecture was different from Romanian village architecture basically on decorative level. Functionally it followed the scheme of the two yards: centre of everyday life of the family, and another serving animal sheds, barn, accessed by back gates.

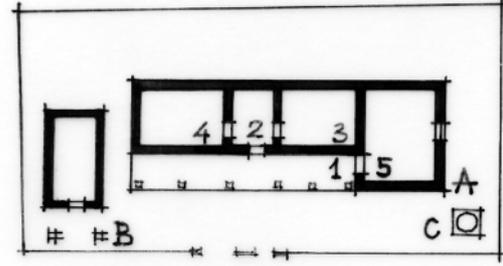


Figure 16.
Dobruja. Ostrov, Constanța region, plan of a house of a fisherman (A), barn and boat shed (B), bread oven (C). 1.-porch, 2.-entrance hall, 3.-living room, 4.-clean room, pantry - 5; 19th c., O.A.M. in Sibiu



Figure 17.
Dobruja. Mahmudia, Tulcea region, homestead of a fisherman O.A.M. in Sibiu

Placed outside of the main compound was, almost in every homestead, Russian “bania” – sauna.

Habsburg regulations concerning village and compound layouts are characteristic for their regular scheme, long and narrow plots. Villages built on such layouts are called “Frankish”; homesteads were separated from the street by solid fence with elaborated gates, confined by a house and a barn with store rooms, and at rear by smaller buildings for animals and storage. These compounds were often open towards the fields and pastures creating one of many similar entities that formed a village.

Fishermen farms were spread along the banks of Donau delta and lagoons (limans). Fish smoking stoves placed in some distance from the rest of buildings and racks for net drying were their characteristic features. If the fisherman’s house was placed right on the bank, it was one-body structure that included additional spaces for equipment and storage, risen on timber pillars to avoid flooding with waves or rising level of water.

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