HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN ROMANIA AND THEIR CONSERVATION

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The country and its peopling

Between Central Europe and the Soviet Union, and bordered by the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas, are located the seven countries, of which Romania is one, that form the so-called 'shatter belt'. This term characterizes the fragmentation of the area with its many political and cultural units, highlighting the instability and insecurity of its peoples. Eastern Europe is historically extremely important, separating the main body of Slavic peoples in Russia from the Germanic stock of central Europe: it is an area of transition, instability and diversification, all clearly expressed in physical and cultural-political characteristics (Fig. 1).

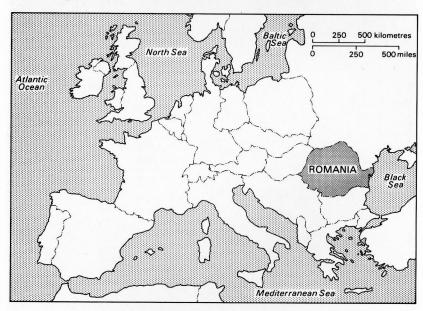


Fig. 1: The location of Romania.

Romania today is a country of 22 million people occupying a total of 237,500 sq.km. extending westwards from the Black Sea, and northwards from the lower reaches of the Danube, to straddle the Eastern Carpathians and Transylvanian Alps (or Southern Carpathians) and extend across the hill country of Transylvania to the Hungarian Plain (Fig. 2). Whilst the bulk of the population is Romanian (88%), there are important minorities of Hungarians (10%) and Germans (1.6%) as well as small numbers of Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Jews and a

few others. These figures, however, reflect a current position considerably different from that before 1945 when there were much larger numbers of Germans and Jews, and before the loss of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union. Ethnically, the population towards the end of World War II consisted approximately of Romanians (73%), Hungarians (8%), Slavs (7%), Jews (5%), Germans (4%) and others (3%). The great majority lived in the countryside with only about one-sixth of the population in urban areas, some 82% of the people being engaged in agriculture and forestry, facts of considerable significance to a proper understanding of the built heritage.



Fig. 2: Romania; some places named in the text.

The dominating physical features of Romania are formed by the Carpathian Mountains, part of the Alpine-Himalayan system, which extends in a huge arc surrounding the hills and broken plateaux of Transylvania, themselves almost everywhere over 300 metres in altitude, on the north, east and south. The Eastern Carpathians, achieving heights of 2305 metres in the north, rise west of the Pruth and extend southwards to the region of Braşov. The Southern Carpathians, or Transylvanian Alps, with several peaks exceeding 2500 metres, stretch westwards from Braşov, to turn south as they reach the Danube at the Iron Gates and Kasov Gorge. The somewhat lower, and more fragmented, Western Carpathians separate Transylvania from the Hungarian Plain. The lower slopes of the eastern Carpathians are heavily

forested with deciduous trees, beech being predominant, and coniferous forests on the higher slopes. The Southern Carpathians, more alpine in form and also well forested, flatten out into the fertile plain of Wallachia, much of it below 100 metres altitude, and Moldavia, the latter merging in the east with the Bessarabian plateau, and in the north with the valleys and forests of Bukovina. The steppe plateau of the Dobrogea, lying east of the Danube as it turns northwards, adds considerably to the Romanian share of the Black Sea coast. North and west of Transylvania lie the mountainous province of Maramures and the lowlands of Crisana, which belong geographically to the Hungarian plain. The extreme south-west of the country is formed by the Banat. The total land surface divides approximately into one-third mountains, one-third hills and tableland, and one-third plains.

Romania is emphatically un-Mediterranean in climate, its relations being with Western Europe on one hand and the Russian steppe on the other. Although there are wide variations in temperature and rainfall, the country in general experiences a short but very cold winter and very hot summers. Autumn is often prolonged with warm fine days lasting until the end of October. The wide variations in climate and relief, the richness and variety of the soils and natural vegetation are reflected in the agriculture. Traditional pastoral farming, with transhumance over large distances, is still practised by Carpathian shepherds. In the valleys and the plains, arable farming, stock rearing, viticulture and fruit growing are all found according to local conditions and regional specialization. This wide range of agricultural activity is

reflected in the associated farmhouses and buildings.

Historical factors are of the utmost importance to an understanding of the types and variety of traditional Romanian building. From about 400 B.C., when the country was first colonized by Thracian tribes, to the end of World War II, Romania, along with other countries of the 'shatter belt', witnessed repeated invasion and migration. The country has been conquered and ruled by many peoples who have all left their mark on the landscape and its inhabitants. Today the Romanians form an island of Latin-derived culture between the Slavs to the north, east and south, and the Hungarians to the west. The origins of modern Romania are to be found in the conquest, during the years 100-106 A.D., of the Dacians, a Celtic people, by the Romans under the Emperor Trajan, a struggle immortalized by the column in Rome bearing his name. Conquest was followed by systematic colonization from Italy which, with intermarriage, gave birth to a new people, the Daco-Romanians speaking a Latin dialect, the ancestor of modern Romanian. Withdrawal of the Roman armies was followed by centuries of invasions by



Fig. 3: Săliște near Sibiu; farms in a village street.



Fig. 4: Săliște near Sibiu; a village street.

Visigoths, Huns, Slavs, Bulgars and Magyars. The Romanian language survived these upheavals and the Middle Ages saw the emergence of the two Romanian princedoms of Moldavia and Wallachia. Turkish invaders followed towards the end of the Middle Ages and for centuries the Romanians struggled against both Ottoman influence and that of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Boundary changes were frequent, Romania reaching its greatest extent at the end of World War I. Apart from the Romanians themselves, a number of ethnic groups have played important parts in the creation of distinctive settlements and

associated buildings.

The long period of invasions which followed the withdrawal of the Roman legions from Dacia led to a concentration of Romanians within the mountain areas of Transylvania and the Balkans. The Magyar invaders in the ninth century eventually settled on the Hungarian Plain and c. 1000 A.D. their Szekler advance guards began to penetrate the hill country Transylvania. During the thirteenth century groups of Saxons settled in Transylvania at the invitation of the Magyar kings, becoming established first of all near Alba Julia (Karlsburg) and then in Medias and Sibiu (Hermannstadt). These German settlers were given substantial privileges including the right to selfgovernment. They were originally Rhinelanders who were later converted to Lutheran Protestantism. After the Turkish wars of the eighteenth century, Catholic German peasants from Bavaria and Lorraine were also settled in Western Transylvania and the Banat. The Germans founded both towns and villages and did a great deal to introduce improved methods of agriculture, to modernize trade and commerce, and bring a wealth of crafts and skills to the towns.

The need for additional settlers to protect the eastern Magyar boundary in Transylvania is also related to the well-known Saxon settlements. The Szeklers, ancient frontiersmen whose task had been to guard the approaches to Hungary, in spite of their relatively recent Asiatic origin, introduced certain features of western civilization into their newly-acquired territory, particularly feudalism and Roman Catholicism. The spread of the latter towards the east brought it into conflict with the Orthodox Church in the region of the Eastern Carpathians, and out of the ensuing struggle arose the Uniate church in the seventeenth century. Although they originally had a common purpose, the two ethnic groups, Szeklers and Saxons, have remained very different in character, for whereas the Saxons are still very largely confined to the settlements which they established in the early Middle Ages, the political and ethnic boundaries of the Szeklers have been enlarged and they are now to be found over much of Transylvania.



Fig. 5: Săliște near Sibiu; a painted calvary.

Settlement

Ethnic grouping, the nature of the land, the type of agriculture practised, together with other factors, are reflected in settlement types. The extent to which differences are due to ethnographic factors, rather than to natural environment, is difficult to assess. Agrarian economy and social organization are

also undoubtedly important.

The broad pattern of settlement and its variations has been described elsewhere.1 Settlement-type differs between the Romanian peoples and those of other linguistic groups. Traditionally the Romanians were customarily attached to highland areas and to pastoral life, and their settlements are usually associated with a dispersed or loosely agglomerated type. The true nucleated settlement, in contrast, is found only in those regions settled by Saxons and Szeklers. Generally, the mountain population of eastern Transylvania is Romanian and the lower lands were peopled by Saxons and Szeklers, environments which would suit dispersed and nucleated settlement-types respectively. But the Romanian steppe villages, which one might expect to be nucleated, differ significantly from those of the Saxons and Szeklers. The houses in the Romanian villages, although often closely packed, are physically separate, whereas those in the German and Hungarian villages are usually contiguous. Even where there is limited building space, the Romanian house is usually surrounded by a garden. In many areas, the village may occupy hundreds of acres, each house, apart from a small agglomeration around the church, being separated from its neighbours by a considerable distance.

The most typical Romanian settlement is scattered, with a tendency to true dispersion in the mountains and towards nucleation in the plains. There is here a flexibility which readily adapts to varying environmental circumstances. Truly compact settlements are characteristic of the areas of Saxon and Hungarian colonization in Transylvania, from Sibiu eastwards to Braşov and northwards as far as Gheorgheni. To the west of this nuclear area, the trait is still strong across the whole of western Transylvania, including the areas around Cluj and Alba Julia. Fairly strong nucleation is also characteristic of settlement along the Olt valley and along the southern edge of the South Carpathians as far as the Danube near Turnu Severin, and to beyond Craiova and Pitești. Strong agglomeration is characteristic of the whole of the south-east of the country, most of Wallachia, Dobrogea and eastern Bessarabia. A large area of similar settlement type occurs north of Jaşi, and also on the western fringes of the country, from the Danube, past Timişoara and Arad to Satu Mare. The whole of the eastern margins of the Eastern Carpathians supports a transitional type. Here, on the

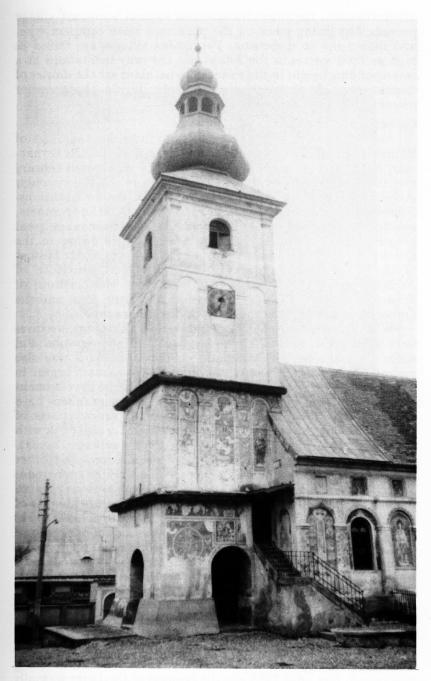


Fig. 6: Raşinari near Sibiu; the painted church.

Moldavian side, the more characteristic form of 'scattered' village prevails, but giving place on the plain to a more compact type, and higher up, to dispersion. Permanent villages are found as high as 1200 metres in the Bihor, but the only habitations at a corresponding height in the eastern Carpathians are the dairies of transhumant shepherds, occupied only during the summer months.

Conservation policy

An awareness of the richness of the traditional buildings of Romania, particularly those that might be described as vernacular, has its origins in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century when vernacular architecture began to attract the attention of the art historians. Subsequently the subject has been studied by ethnographers, sociologists, geographers and architects. Studies have made great progress, notably during the last three decades owing to the activity of groups of researchers from the Institute of Art History of the Romanian Academy, the 'Ion Mincu' Institute of Architecture of the University of Bucharest, the Institute of Ethnology, the 'N. Grigorescu' Institute of Plastic Arts, and the

numerous museums of popular art and ethnography.2

Whilst research was being undertaken in all regions, archives were established to include plans, surveys, photographs and slides. A campaign of systematic collection of data was also undertaken for the ethnographic atlas of Romania,³ begun in 1965. A series of publications has resulted from the development of interest in this subject,⁴ architects and ethnographers have contributed studies on rural architecture in various parts of Romania,⁵ whilst architects and art historians have also dealt with other aspects: urban architecture, fortified dwellings (koula), inns, country houses, churches, bridges, well-covers and other minor edifices.⁶ Vernacular architecture, the work of anonymous artisans, representative of long-lasting traditions, is seen as an important index by which the originality and separate identity of the Romanian people can be assessed, its ability to achieve works of high artistic merit even during the long periods of oppression.⁷

Legislation for the preservation of historic monuments dates from 1892 when a Board of Public Monuments was created, to be transformed in 1900 into a Board for Historical Monuments. Modifications and improvements in 1919 resulted in the creation of regional sections with responsibility for specific areas. It was during this period, the first part of the twentieth century, that the principles and methods of restoration were worked out. Attention, however, as elsewhere in Europe at the time, was directed to the greater buildings, vernacular structures being overlooked. Not until 1955 was the position of the latter formally recognized and legislated for. By 1974 fresh legislation dealing

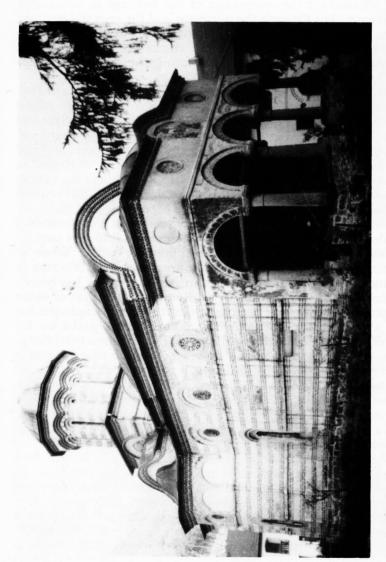


Fig. 7. Cálimánegti: the Cosia monastery. An ensemble of outstanding historical interest dated 1388, and founded by the Wallachian ruling Prince. Built in the fourteenth-century Serbian style, the structure was restored in 1959-63. The porch dates from 1707.

with the national cultural heritage had come into force, tackling a wider series of problems, the preservation and restoration of monuments of all categories being seen in a wider cultural context. It is as a result of this legislation that a vast campaign has been initiated for the assessment of the heritage of vernacular architecture, but through the museums and the regional heritage offices. Eventually the inventory so produced will be published in analytical form. At the same time efforts are being made to conserve the heritage without preventing the natural development of settlements.

Many of the current problems facing planners and environmentalists in Romania are all too familiar elsewhere. Rapid transformation of the way of life, particularly rural life, since the end of World War II, with rapid rural depopulation, change of occupation and the need to expand industries in the towns and provide housing for large numbers of people is mirrored in western Europe. A particular problem in Romania is the former extensive use of wood, notably pine, for nearly all peasant buildings including many churches. The use of new material, brick and concrete and steel, produces structures completely out of scale with traditional buildings. The need to find new uses for old buildings and to protect and preserve whole areas of traditional buildings in conservation areas is acute. Whereas in England, the change from rural to urban ways of life has been a long-lasting process, the history of Romania, like that of other European countries, has been such that the urban explosion has been a very recent phenomenon, posing severe problems for conservation. Many local councils would like to renew everything. There are also architects who insist on building new structures rather than preserving old ones and conservationists must work hard to persuade both councils and architects, not an easy task. Furthermore, public opinion is not always invited, but there have been instances when in order to replace a city or housing estate, plans and models have been prepared for public exhibition, as in Bucharest and Rîmnicul Vîlcea.

The implementation of conservation policy falls into four main categories: individual vernacular buildings preserved in situ, including houses, fortified dwellings (koule), inns and many non-domestic buildings; buildings preserved in a group as a conservation area—market places, whole streets, urban and rural centres, or whole settlements (Figs. 3-9); individual buildings reerected on a new site, perhaps because they were in the way of a road-widening scheme or hydro-electric project; individual buildings re-erected in folk museums (Figs. 10-16). Each of these categories presents conservationists with its own problems. Monuments have had to be cleared of later accretions, important missing components have had to be re-constructed; the specific



Fig. 8: Sibiu: Piața 6 Martie. Arcaded town houses and the German Protestant church.



Fig. 9: Rimnicul Vilcea; town houses.

character of an historical area has had to be re-established, relations between the various components of the town structure have had to be preserved, and the street plan observed. Only wooden buildings of exceptional value which could not be

preserved in their original location have been displaced.

Some 1300 rural buildings have been saved in this way and reerected in one of the fourteen open-air museums (Figs. 2, 10-16). This total is an astonishing achievement and one which, for its success, must depend on a determined policy-decision emanating from central government. Displaced buildings were selected both for intrinsic value and aesthetic appeal, and the settings of the open-air museums have been designed where possible to accord with the type of building and its original settlement. Other important historic buildings have been re-adapted for new use. Those arranged as museums or exhibition halls include koule, country houses, and inns. They have been adapted to display exhibitions of history, ethnography or art. Others, the former homes of eminent people, have been preserved in their memory, as, for example, the home of C. Brincusi in Hobita, or that of Tudor Vladimirescu in Vladimir-Gorj. Other representative homes have been furnished with period furniture. As the object was to show off the building to the best effect, great care has to be exercised to blend the exhibition design with that of the building.

Those monuments equipped for tourism—inns, hotels, cafés, shops—mostly continue to be used for such purposes after restoration. One of the best-known of such structures is 'Hanul lui Manuc', built during the years 1804-6, and now a complex of hotel, beer-house, and various shops, mostly in a nineteenth-century style. Other examples are to be found not only in Bucharest, but also in Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca and a number of

smaller towns.

A further category of conserved buildings are those monuments restored through the 'state tenement fund'. These buildings are generally modest in character and comprise two main groups: houses where only the façade has been maintained, the interiors having been completely rebuilt; and houses whose interior has been conserved through modernization. These buildings generally form groups, or conservation areas, in villages and towns, or indeed sometimes constitute whole settlements. Many Romanian towns have examples of such conservation including Medias, Sighisoara, Sibiu, Brasov, Cluj and Timisoara (Fig. 8). There are two types of conservation area, those which are untouchable and in which everything must stay, and those where some building under licence is permitted providing it is 'in sympathy'. Whilst the law is adequate, its application is sometimes less so, and buildings are occasionally deliberately allowed to decay in order to facilitate renewal. Whole villages of



Fig. 10: Rimnicul Vilcea: Muzeul arhitecturii din Bujoreni. A general view of part of the museum in its magnificent setting in the Olt valley, surrounded by foothills of the southern Carpathians.



Fig. 11: Rîmnicul Vîlcea: Muzeul arhitecturii din Bujoreni. A tower house (koule).

traditional buildings are grouped into conservation areas, but wooden buildings present serious problems and are difficult to preserve. The State does not wish to condemn peasants to living in discomfort in inadequate space.

The fourth major category comprises the wooden ecclesiastical buildings dating from between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries but which represent much older traditions, frequently with internal mural paintings. These have been restored *in situ* keeping their original functions. There are

numerous examples in many parts of the country.

The region around Rimnicul Vilcea provides recent interesting examples. Where buildings stood in the way of a recent hydro-electric project, in the Olt valley, the really valuable structures are to be transported to a new site. Thus a church dated 1529, with murals by a local painter, and situated on an island, is to be raised some five to six metres above the level of the water. The monastery of Cornet, of 1666, is also to be moved.

The organization of conservation

The central institution for conservation in Romania is the Council for Culture and Socialist Education which operates through a network of forty offices at district level functioning in close co-operation with district museums. Practically all work for conservation and preservation is surveyed from these district offices whose staff represent several academic disciplines. For the more complex work, the services of the Commission for Historic Monuments of the Council for Culture are drawn upon with recourse to many specialists from different fields including architects, archaeologists and art historians. Joined to the principal museums at, for example, Sibiu, Cluj, Jaşi and Timisoara, are laboratories dealing with the restoration of their own heritage. An important part is also played by the Institute of Fine Arts, with its several conservation departments, where students are trained not only in painting or sculpture but also in the restoration techniques of their chosen field. This institution also comprises an architectural studio linked with other institutions for the research and conservation of monuments. The Voronet monastery is currently being restored under its guidance. The Institute thus compares with the Central Institute of Restoration in Rome.

Buildings are classified and the list of such structures is the responsibility of the Council for Culture. Formerly buildings were classified as Grade 0, 1 and 2, but following a tendency by the regions to neglect buildings not in the higher categories, subdivision into classes was abandoned and there is now only one grade.

Finance for conservation derives very largely from the State, but there are many cases where restoration is paid for by the



Fig. 12: Rîmnicul Vîlcea: Muzeul arhitecturii din Bujoreni. A shepherd's mountain hut.



Fig. 13: Sibiu: Muzeul Dumbrava Sibiului. A fisherman's homestead, from Mahmudia, Tulcea, in the Danube valley, with windmills beyond.

owner, as, for example, by the Orthodox Church, the richest private owner in Romania. The conservation of all State buildings is funded by the State, but in the villages, the houses are owned by peasant proprietors and conflicting interests frequently arise when an owner wishes to modernize. Current restoration of the Catholic Cathedral in Bucharest is being paid for by that church itself just as the Romanian Orthodox Church is paying for work on the Voronet monastery, but restoration of the monastery at Cuta de Arges, in use as a museum, is being funded by the Council of Culture. For villages in conservation zones, the State provides technical assistance and assures a supply of materials, but the proprietors pay for the work. Whilst there is no classification of rural buildings, the priorities are known to those in charge. Generally, buildings whose 'health' is in danger receive first priority and if two such structures have to be chosen between, then age and artistic value are taken into account. Decisions, however, are taken by the Central Commission, not at local level.

The open-air museums

The first of the open-air museums of buildings in Romania, and one of the earliest in Europe, was the Village Museum founded in Bucharest in 1936 by Professor D. Gusti of the School of Sociology of the University of Bucharest. Initially intended to be a laboratory of experimental sociology rather than a museum, the Village Museum came into being at that moment in time when Romania was beginning to experience an intensification of the rate of change of the economic and social transformation of peasant life. Shortly afterwards steps were taken to establish a museum at Cluj, but World War II brought development to a standstill and those buildings that had been erected at Cluj were destroyed. The post-war period proved too difficult for any immediate development and it was not until 1956 that steps were taken to re-establish the open-air ethnographic museums. From then on their development was very rapid indeed. No fewer than ten open-air museums were created in fifteen years with funds made available both by central government and by local bodies. Four more museums were to follow (Fig. 2).

The Village Museum at Bucharest has buildings representative of many parts of the country although any hope of creating a 'village' has long since been abandoned as the number of buildings has grown and the site, in part of a large park on the outskirts of the city, has become virtually full (Figs. 15 and 16). At Cluj, however, attempts have been made in the Transylvanian Folk Museum to re-create the environment of the Romanian village with a characteristic relationship between the settlement and the natural background. Other museums are rather more specialized. That at Dumbrava Sibiului, for example, has folk



Fig. 14: Sibiu: Muzeul Dumbrava Sibiului. A farm from Risculita, Tomești, Hunedoara.

The home of a craftsman who made wooden combs for looms.



Fig. 15: Bucharest: the Village Museum. An eighteenth-century farmhouse, Chiojdu Mic, from Bazžu. The gateway is dated 1909.

techniques as its theme, each building representing one or other of the many rural crafts and trades (Figs. 13 and 14). At Goleşti, it is viticulture and fruit-growing which unify the exhibits: a museum of peasant civilization in those regions where villages had

such a specialized economy.

Thus the Village Museum in Bucharest is representative of the whole of Romania, whilst the museums at Dumbrava Sibiului and Golești also cover the whole country but only in respect of a single theme. Twelve museums illustrate the particular region or province in which they are located: the open-air museums at Iasi, Cluj, Timișoara, Curtișoara-Gorj, Bujoreni-Vîlcea, Reghin, Negrești-Oaș, Tulcea, Simian-Turnu-Severin, Focșani, Maramures and Bran. Whilst the Village Museum in Bucharest has almost reached the physical limits of its development, considerable further potential for growth is present at many of the other museums, notably at Dumbrava Sibiului, Golești, Ćluj, Reghin, Negrești-Oaș and Bran.

Inevitably with such a rapid development many problems have arisen and, given the rapid change in rural society, a great deal of material has been collected which has yet to be studied in detail. Many buildings lie in store awaiting the resources to reerect them. Nevertheless Romania has a remarkably wellbalanced network of open-air museums, which ensure the preservation of its most important building-types coupled with large archives of material concerned with building history, construction and the folk-ways of the people who lived and

worked in them.

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