

TYOLOGICAL ASPECTS CONCERNING THE WOODEN CHURCHES OF THE SILVANIEI LAND

Ștefan BAIAS*

University of Oradea, Department of Geography, Tourism and Territorial Planning – TSAC,
1 University St., 410087, Oradea, Romania, e-mail: baias_stefan@yahoo.com

Abstract: Using a specific methodology, quantified in specialized literature, a diagnostic analysis of 22 wooden churches from an area situated at the contact of Crișana, Maramureș and Transylvania has been conducted. The prospected elements have been analyzed from a quantitative, qualitative, structural and typological point of view. The result allows an understanding connected to the territorial reality of one of the most valuable wooden architectural heritage elements of Romania.

Key words: cultural heritage, wooden church, Silvaniei Land

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

The Silvaniei Land, situated in Sălaj County, overlaps a former bay of the Pannonian Sea. This sea is found between Plopișului Mountains and Meseșului Mountains, with a wide north-western opening (Josan, 2009). The Land was built as a transitional space but in time became a regional and national heritage. This site is supported by public institutions and specialized bodies of central public administration subordinated to the Romanian Government. In a mental space (Cocean, 2005) with specific demarcations made by Josan Ioana (2009) this is a heritage that excels in authenticity. This Land is comprised of historical monuments and people who appreciate the cultural heritage. The traditional appearance of the villages in the Silvaniei Land is given by the wooden architecture (traditional architecture) and, wooden architectural creations (wooden churches). Both of these structures does not only have physical value but is a symbol of human faith. Their construction dependeds on local natural resources (wood and stone), climatic conditions, relief and economic development. The wooden churches also present a set of features specific to the Romanian traditional architecture from the studied area (architectural style, materials and construction techniques, interior and exterior decoration).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term „*cultural heritage*” had an ascendant evolution, characterized through the XXth century by expansion and semantic transfer (Vecco, 2010). It was used in the sense of paternal heritage, the heritage including everything people wish to save, from material culture to nature (Howard, 2003) and in the sense of monument. The heritage represents the most important component of a people’s cultural identity. Its destruction, therefore, can have

* Corresponding Author

negative consequences on human dignity (Silverman & Ruggles, 2007). Without cherishing and respecting a community's common cultural heritage left by past generations, we cannot speak of a people's cultural continuity¹.

The concepts and the notions regarding the cultural heritage (the notion of monument, the concept of conservation and restoration of historical monuments and the traditional architecture concept) are related to its variety and complexity which is, used both in Romanian and foreign literature. The concept of monument originates in Latin, „*monumentum*” meaning remembrance, memory. It is attributed to the most important works of humanity, such as works of architecture, monumental sculpture and paintings, inscriptions, archaeological structures, caves and groups of elements which have outstanding universal value from a historical, artistic and also scientific point of view (Curinschi, 1968; Michael, 2001). In this sense, monuments receive historical value, standing as an evidence of the past, as an artistic value, embodying an emotional power or having a practical value that depends on how they are used (Curinschi, 1968). During their long life, monuments suffer changes in their initial appearance due to human intervention, insects, fungi (Vilconciene & Drobeliene, 2000) and due to the destructive action of natural factors. For these reasons mentioned, it is necessary to conserve and restore these monuments. The conservation and restoration of historical monuments (wooden churches) are essential for the preservation of the humanity's cultural identity (Curinschi, 1968). The churches were originally handcrafted out of wood by carpenters. They were designed to be a house dedicated to the Divine power, the place where man and Divinity meet, melting through the religious act (Kiss & Bălu, 2000). In time, due to the modernization of inhabited areas and due to their decreasing number, such edifices became, coupled with their attributes of uniqueness originality and, important works of traditional architecture. Traditional architecture refers to constructions built by carpenters or people specialized in constructions who will not be their users. Carpenters received their knowledge orally from their ancestors and the materialization of their knowledge leads to an architecture specific to the area they belong to. Traditional architecture includes public buildings (e.g. churches) houses, constructions with economic character or technical facilities².

METHODOLOGY

The information analyzed in this study comes from the geography, architecture and history fields, from official statistics and from the research conducted on the field. This scientific research is the skeleton of a thematic approach which seeks to analyze notions and concepts related to the term „*cultural heritage*”. The research is designed to carry out a diagnosis of the wooden churches from the Silvaniei Land.

Results were obtained using the following methods of geographical research: bibliographical documentation method - obtaining information from both the Romanian and foreign literature (Cocean, 2005); observation method. The results from the observation on the evolution of the wooden churches from the Silvaniei Land are reproduced through the geographical description (Cocean, 2005); historical method - a study on the evolution of the wooden churches „*and an investigation of the causes that determine their modification over the evolutionary time trajectory*” (Petrea, 2002, p. 21); the statistical method - collecting, processing, analysing and interpreting statistical data (Andrei & Stancu, 1995); analysis method - the data and information profiling process (Cocean, 2005); spatial analysis method - decoding the distribution of wooden churches, historical monuments in Sălaj county and quantitative and qualitative processing of the information obtained; comparison method - comparing the wooden churches from Sălaj, Bihor and Maramureș counties in order to determine differences and similarities between them (Cocean, 2005) and cartographic mapping - the transformation of information in cartographic representations (maps) (Ilieș et al., 2010; Petrea, 2005).

¹ <http://patrimoniurper.com/despre-patrimoniurper.html>

² <http://www.conservarearhitectura.ro/arhitectura-vernaculara.html>

DIAGNOSTIC ANALYSIS OF WOODEN CHURCHES IN THE SILVANIEI LAND

The land between the Plopişului and Meseşului Mountains, known as the „*Silvaniei Land*” (Josan, 2009), 22 wooden churches that have entered the national cultural heritage (Godea & Cristache-Panait, 1978; LMI, 2010; Josan, 2009). Twenty of these churches are under the patronage of Saints Archangels Michael and Gabriel (table 1). The wooden churches date from the XVIth, XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, the oldest wooden church being the church „*Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel*” in the Bulgari village, Sălăţig commune (1547) (Petrean-Păuşan et al., 2008). A meditation place for the Romanian peasant, these churches are true architectural Romanian creations in which the technical ingenuity and the skills of the carpenters, the power of adaptation to the natural, socio-historical, economic conditions and the respect for the faith of a long line of generations mix (figure 1 and figure 2).



Figure 1. Wooden church from Tusa



Figure 2. Wooden church from Port

Table 1. The wooden churches from the Silvaniei Land

(Data source: Godea & Cristache-Panait, 1978; Petrean-Păuşan et al., 2008; LMI, 2010; ³)

No.	Commune/ Town	Village/Church	Patronage	Construction year/century
1	Şimleu Silvaniei	Bic	Assumption of Mary	1778
2	Someş Odorhei	Bârsa	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	XVIII th century
3	Hereclean	Bocşiţa	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	XVIII th century
4	Sălăţig	Bulgari	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1547
5	Camăr	Camăr	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	XVIII th century
6	Şimleu Silvaniei	Cehei	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1765
7	Chieşd	Chieşd	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	XVIII th century
8	Bobota	Derşida	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1700
9	Dobrin	Doba Mică	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	XVI th century
10	Dobrin	Dobrin	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1720
11	Someş Odorhei	Domnin	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1753
12	Cehu Silvaniei	Horoatu Cehului	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1749
13	Jibou	Husia	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1815

³ www.cimec.ro

14	Cehu Silvaniei	Nadiș	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1738
15	Sălățiș	Noțiș	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1760-1762
16	Marca	Porț	Ascension of Jesus	1792
17	Chieșd	Sighetu Silvaniei	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1632
18	Sâg	Sârbi	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1707
19	Sâg	Tusa	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	XVIII th century
20	Cehu Silvaniei	Ulciug	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1781
21	Jibou	Var	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1733
22	Zalnoc	Zalnoc	Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel	1700

THE STRUCTURE OF WOODEN CHURCHES

Made of wood and supported on stone foundation or on the ground, the wooden churches prove the carpenter's artistic techniques in manufacturing the wood while complementing the beauty of the natural environment. In terms of construction techniques, the style that stands out is Blockbau, a style that is composed of a system made out of wooden logs laid horizontally in crowns, with corner joints in dovetail and saddle notch (Godea, 2008). Their structure is as follows: narthex (or the women's vestibule), nave (or the men's house), apse (or altar of God), shingle and metal roof, bell tower and porch (veranda). Based on these elements, on previous studies (Godea & Cristache-Panait, 1978; Petrean-Păușan et al., 2008) and on the field research, we can identify three categories of churches using the door's position as a criterion in relation to the geographical orientation (table 2): A - with southern entrance (figure 4), B - with northern entrance and C - with western entrance.

Table 2. Typology of wooden houses according to their entrance

Type	Wooden churches from the localities:
A - with southern entrance	Bic, Bârsa, Bulgari, Camăr, Cehei, Chieșd, Derșida, Doba Mică, Noțiș, Domnin, Horoatu Cehului, Husia, Nadiș, Porț, Sighetu Silvaniei, Sârbi, Tusa, Var, Zalnoc
B - with northern entrance	Dobrin
C - with western entrance	Bocșița, Ulciug

Planimetrically speaking, the wooden churches from the Silvaniei Land have a rectangular plan. The altar's apse is unhooked and polygonal with five sides (figure 3), „*followed by the unhooked, square apse, deeply rooted in the Transylvanian Romanian architecture*” (Godea & Cristache-Panait, 1978, p 239; Godea, 2008).

The three rooms (narthex, nave and apse) are arranged along the longitudinal axis east-west. The slender shape (form) of the wooden churches is given by the roof and the bell tower. The wooden or metal roof (figure 5 and figure 6) is supported by a system of beams and brackets which create, in some churches, a double roof that also covers the porch through broad eaves. The short bell tower is supported on the narthex and it is designed to shelter the semantron and the bells. These bells serve as an „*extremely important means of communication in the village life*” (Godea, 1996, p 81). The tower plan is square shaped and is equipped with belfry and cone shaped roof (Petrean-Păușan et al., 2008). On the spire of the wooden churches from Chieșd, Derșida and Ulciug localities, we can notice the presence of certain turrets that give them a particular charm.

The wooden churches from the Silvaniei Land are unique due to the spectacular bell towers which include, double roofs and proportions similar to the wooden churches from Maramureș. They are also, in terms of the presented characteristics, similar to those of Bihor (figure 7, figure 8 and figure 9). Another important difference is given by the church entrance. In Sălaj and Bihor, most of the wooden churches have access through the south side while in Maramureș the entrance is on the west side. In return, the wooden churches from Bihor, are richer in notched or carved ornaments compared to the ones in the Silvaniei Land, (Berindei et al., 1979).

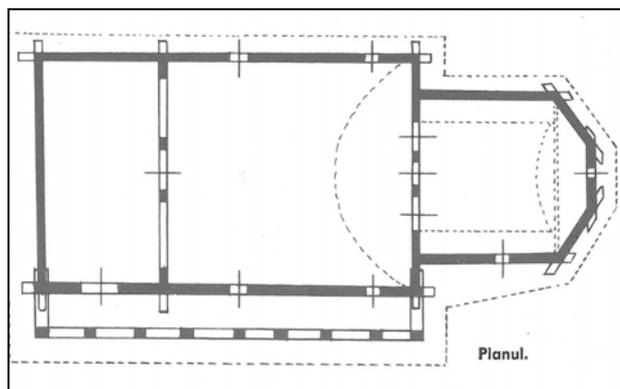


Figure 3. Rectangular plan with the altar's apse being unhooked and polygonal with five sides for the wooden church Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel from Derșida locality (Source: Godea & Cristache-Panait, 1978)

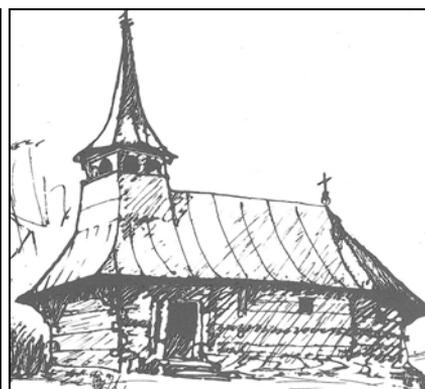


Figure 4. Sketch for the wooden church Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel from Doba Mică locality (Source: Godea & Cristache-Panait, 1978)



Figure 5. The wooden church with wooden roof from Sârbi



Figure 6. The wooden church with metal roof from Chieșd (Source: Petrean-Păușan et al., 2008)



Figure 7. Wooden church from Cehei, Sălaj County



Figure 8. Wooden church from Brădet, Bihor County



Figure 9. Wooden church from Ferești, Maramureș County

The interior structure and the paintings from the wooden churches are specific to the Orthodox Church (figure 10). The massive door frames, the small windows, the thick rope looking friezes and the carved pillars are the most important external elements that enhance their artistic value and originality (Godea & Cristache-Panait, 1978; Josan, 2009).



Figure 10. Images with the interior of the wooden church Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel from Sârbi

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF WOODEN CHURCHES

The wooden churches from the Silvaniei Land are located in the villages from the basins of the Barcăului, Crasnei și Sălajului valleys (figure 11) (Godea & Cristache-Panait, 1978; Petrean-Păușan et al., 2008).

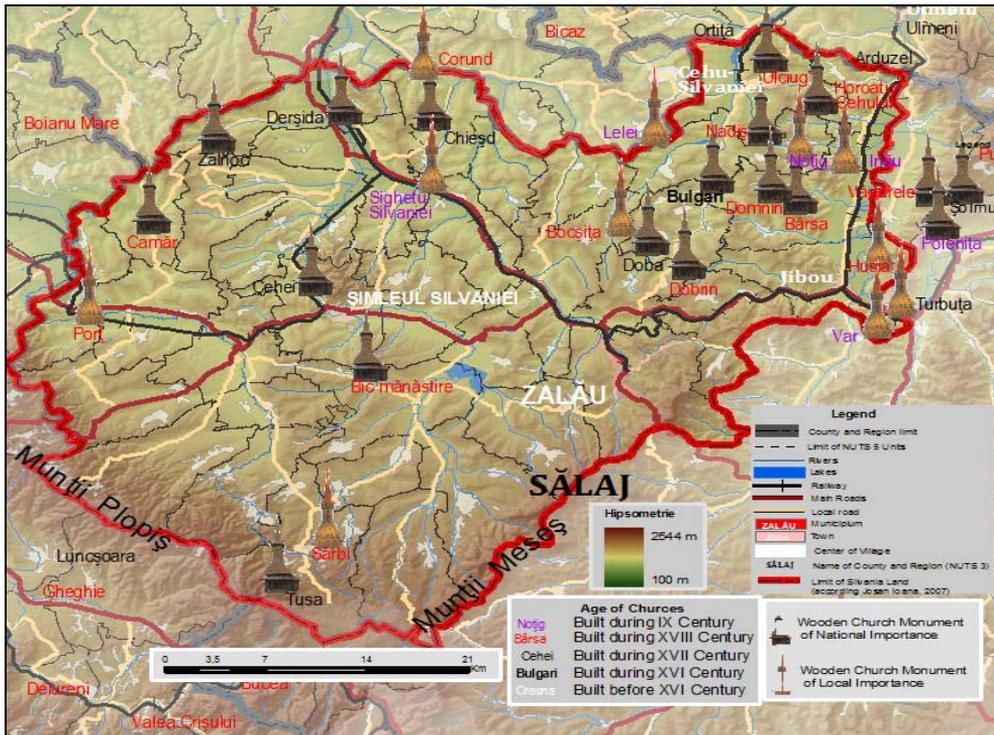


Figure 11. Spatial distribution of wooden churches from the Silvaniei Land Located on hill tops, in the precincts of the village, the churches remained mostly inactive due to their historical monument status and the construction of brick churches (table 3)

Table 3. Wooden churches typology according to their roof type, their location in the precincts of the village and their liturgical activity (Data source: Godea & Cristache-Panait, 1978; Petrean-Păușan et al., 2008)

Commune/ Town	Village/ Church	Location in the precincts of the village		Roof		Liturgical activity	
		Geographical orientation	Geomorphologic aspect	wood	metal	Yes	No
Șimleu Silvaniei	Bic	west	hill	X		X	
Someș Odorhei	Bârsa	central	hill		X	X	
Hereclean	Bocșița	central	hill	X			X
Sălățiș	Bulgari	vest	hill	X			X
Camăr	Camăr	north	hill	X			X
Șimleu Silvaniei	Cehei	east	hill	X		X	
Chieșd	Chieșd	central	hill		X		X
Bobota	Derșida	central	hill	X			X
Dobrin	Doba Mică	east	hill	X		X	
Dobrin	Dobrin	South	hill	X			X
Someș Odorhei	Domnin	east	hill	X			X
Cehu Silvaniei	Horoatu Cehului	central	hill	X		X	
Jibou	Husia	central	hill		X	X	
Cehu Silvaniei	Nadiș	central	hill	X		X	
Sălățiș	Noțiș	central	hill	X			X
Marca	Porț	east	hill	X		X	
Chieșd	Sighetu Silvaniei	central	hill	X			X
Sâg	Sârbi	central	hill	X		X	
Sâg	Tusa	South-east	hill	X			X
Cehu Silvaniei	Ulciug	central	hill	X		X	
Jibou	Var	north	hill		X		X
Zalnoc	Zalnoc	central	hill	X			X

CONCLUSIONS

The knowledge of the wooden cultural heritage is important for the community from the Silvaniei Land because it reflects its past, present and future. In agreement with this idea, we studied 22 wooden churches from an area of contact between Crișana, Maramureș and Transylvania. These were approached in terms of quantity, quality and local and regional characteristics (structure, architectural style and typology). Made of wood and supported on stone foundation or on the ground the wooden churches community from the Silvaniei Land prove the carpenter's artistic techniques in manufacturing the wood. Located on hill tops, in the precincts of the village, they present a series of characteristics: rectangular compartmental plan (narthex, nave and apse), unhooked and polygonal or square apse, porch (veranda), wood and metal double roof, short bell tower supported on the narthex, with belfry and cone shaped roof, and turrets on the spire of three churches. The external elements that enhance their artistic value and originality are the massive door frames, the small windows and the friezes which resemble thick rope. Taken into consideration the presented characteristics, the wooden churches from the Silvaniei Land differ from those of Maramureș (high bell tower, double roofs...) and are similar to those of Bihor except in terms of ornament. Included on lists, in heritage programs and strategies elaborated by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the wooden churches have managed to survive the current economic, social and cultural evolution.

Aknowlegments

This work was partially supported by the strategic grant POSDRU /107/1.5/S/80272, Project ID80272 (2010), co-financed by the European Social Fund-Investing in People, within the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

REFERENCES

- Andrei T., Stancu S. (1995), *Statistica: teorie și aplicații*, Editura All, București.
- Berendei I., Dumitrașcu S., Faur V., Godea I. (1979), *Bihor: Ghid turistic al județului*, Editura Sport-Turism, București.
- Cocean P. (2005), *Geografie regională*, Editura Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- Curinschi Gh. (1968), *Restaurarea monumentelor*, Editura Tehnică, București.
- Godea I. (1996), *Biserici de lemn din România (nord-vestul Transilvaniei)*, Editura Meridiane, București.
- Godea I. (2008), *Biserici de lemn din Europa*, Editura CD Press, București.
- Godea I., Cristache-Panait Ioana (1978), *Monumente istorice bisericesti din Eparhia Oradiei, Județele Bihor, Sălaj și Satu-Mare, Bisericile de lemn*, Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Oradiei, Oradea.
- Howard P. (2003), *Heritage: Management, interpretation, identity*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, USA.
- Ilieș M., Ilieș Camelia Dorina, Ilieș A., Josan Ioana, Ilieș Gabriela (2010), *The gateway of Maramureș Land: geostrategical implications in space and time*. *Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia (Slovenia)*; (20) 2, p. 469 - 479.
- Josan Ioana (2009), *Țara Silvaniei: studiu de geografie regională*, Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea.
- Kiss I., Bălu D. (2000), *Casa Domnului, casa omului. Valori patrimoniale multiculturale: catalogul arhitecturii religioase din județul Satu Mare*, Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, Satu Mare.
- Michael M. C. (2001), *Cultural Heritage and Development A Framework for Action in the Middle East and North Africa*, Published by The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Washington D.C., USA.
- Petrea D. (2005), *Obiect, metodă și cunoaștere geografică*, Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea.
- Petrea Rodica (2002), *Didactica geografiei*, Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, p.21.
- Petrea-Păușan Ileana, Chende-Roman Gh., Ghiurco I. (2008), *Bisericile de lemn din Sălaj*, Editura Sylvania, Zalău.
- Silverman Helaine, Ruggles F. D. (2007), *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, Springer Press, Illinois, USA.
- Vecco M. (2010), *A definition of cultural heritage: From the tangible to the intangible*, *Journal of Cultural Heritage* (11) 3, p. 321-324, Grecia.
- Vilconciene N., Drobeliene J. (2000), *Conservation of the wooden garner in Paezeriai Lithuania*. Wood structures: a global forum on the treatment, conservation, and repair of cultural heritage, vol. 135, p. 107-115, SUA.
- *** (2010), Lista Monumentelor istorice (LMI), <http://www.inmi.ro/lista.html> (accessed on 12.11.2011).
- www.cimec.ro (accessed on 20.02.2012).
- <http://patrimoniu-rper.com/despre-patrimoniu.html> (accessed on 10.01.2012).
- http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biserica_de_lemn_din_Sighetu_Silvaniei (accessed on 12.12.2011).
- <http://www.conservarearhitectura.ro/arhitectura-vernaculara.html> (accessed on 24.10.2011).

Submitted:
April 20, 2012

Revised:
May 09, 2012

Accepted and published online
June 15, 2012