

ETHNOGRAPHIC VALUES OF THE TRADITIONAL VILLAGE OF „ZARAND LAND”

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Abstract: Superimposed on the depression passage of the Crișul Alb, “Zarand Land” is a valuable ethnographic area, with various elements, whose touristic potential is more or less rendered valuable. An important role in preserving this precious dowry had man, who, through his/ her presence and activity, is the creator and bearer of traditions and folk customs, which according to their importance or uniqueness can become valuable touristic attractions. So the spiritual foundation of the rural community, which is built around the “Zarand” village civilization, is represented by the popular customs and traditions that are deeply rooted in the soul and consciousness of people. In this sense, they store and display them to identify within the community and then pass them on to the next generation to ensure the continuity of time that elapses forward irreversible. Famous folk festivals, folk art of woodworking, wooden churches, and so on, are still living traditions by craftsmen who create objects of a particular value, they combine all skills, give life to clay, iron or wood.

Key words: ethnographic area of “Zarand Land”, rural community, village civilization, popular customs and traditions.

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INTRODUCTION

„Zarand Land”, superimposed mostly on the hydrographic basin of the Crișul Alb, is well framed by the peaks of the Codru-Moma Mountains and the Bihor Mountains, to the North, and by the peaks of the Zarand Mountains and Metaliferi Mountains, to the South, while West it intertwines, especially at the level of the meadows, with the lowlands of the Cris Plain (Tudoran, 1983) (figure 1).

The Crișul Alb Valley has a wild upper watercourse, with fast slopes, reaching the area of the Crâșcior commune (only 31 km from the spring) at a height of 291 m. From here, the Crișul Alb enters the Brad Depression, following the Brad-Hălmagiu lane, and in Joia Mare (where it becomes narrower, forming a canyon) it separates the depressionary basin of Gurahonț from the actual bay of Zarand. In this bay of Zarand, the valley widens and it resembles an alluvial piedmont plain.

Although, geographically, Teuz Valley is a tributary of the Crișul Negru, it is part of „Zarand Land”, proof being also its belonging to the ethnographic area of the Crișul Alb, being closely connected with it, and representing a remarkable ethnographic interest.

Being a region with vast oak and beech forests, with many pastures and rich gold-silver ores, „Zarand Land” has offered favourable conditions for the development of shepherding, cattle breeding, mining, and woodworking, while agriculture has been practiced and is still being practiced to a lesser degree and only on smaller land lots, on sunnier lands (fields) near households.

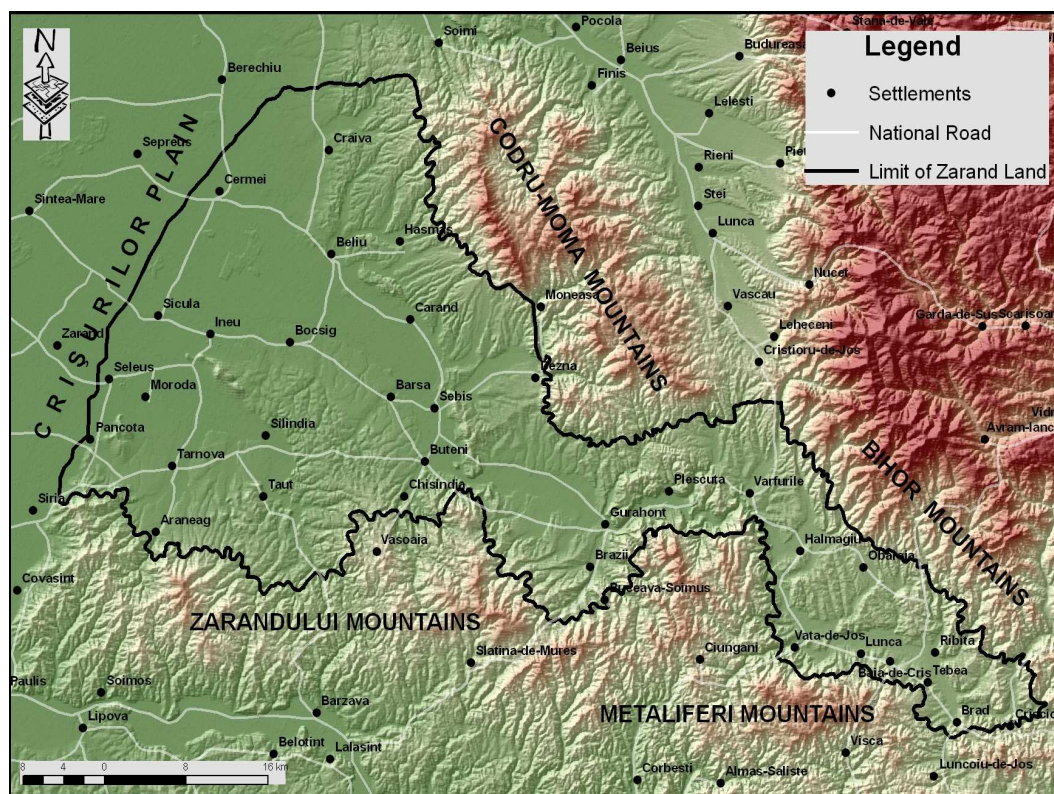


Figure 1. Limits of „Zarand Land”

Material proofs regarding the continuity of man in the region of „Zarand Land” go back to the Paleolithic Age. At the beginning, the population has settled mostly on the upper course of the Crișul Alb and its tributaries; we can remark the mining settlements in Ruda-Brad, Crășcior, Mesteacăn, Țebea, Ribăța etc. (Mózes Tereza, 1975). Nevertheless, documentary mentions of the settlements in „Zarand Land” go back only to the beginning of the Middle Ages (Ineu – 1214, Dezna – 1261, Beliu, Șicula – 1332, Hălmăgiu – 1359, Gurahont – 1386, Bârsa – 1489, Sebiș – 1506, Răpsig – 1552, Bocsig – 1553 etc.) (Roz, Kovach, 1997).

Burdened by their historical past, the people of Zarand have left neither their homes, nor their traditions and customs, nor their faith, stubbornly decided to remain in their „land”, where they tied their life to cartage and wood, manufacturing of ancient tools, forks, vessels (“ciubere” and “doniți”), that they carry even today throughout the country and not only.

Ethnographic values of the traditional village. Apparently avoided by the present and isolated in a very picturesque region that preserves their identity, the people of Zarand are keepers of a model of Romanian past, in which work and morality represent true laws of life.

About „Zarand Land” we can say that it is a „land” almost as vast as „Maramures Land”, but little known; almost nothing is known about it. Of course, it cannot be considered part of the Banat area or „The Land of the Moți”. It is unknown even what kind of people live in those villages, almost no one explores their old popular customs and traditions, and no one supports them economically.

Many of the tourists that pass across the area do not even stop here due to the lack of places of accommodation; the villages do not have those much coveted touristic guest houses, or the possibility to develop agrotourism. But, if you will turn aside some kilometres from the main road, following the country roads that are guarded by a special picturesque landscape, with houses that combine past and present, only then you will be able to notice the hidden traditional values of „Zarand Land”. These are some of the reasons that have led us not to let unnoticed and to record and promote some of these priceless values.

THE TRADITIONAL HOUSE

Because „Zarand Land” belongs to the ethnographic area of the Crișul Alb, the traditional peasant house is built unitary, so we can notice some differences between the upper and the lower course of this river.

The traditional house that is typical for the upper basin of the Crișul Alb consists of two or three living rooms, to which are added a food pantry, and in the yard, there are outbuildings for the fodder or animal shelters.

The dwelling usually has, on one of the long sides (toward the yard) a porch, which in local terms is called „tindă” (figure 2).



Figure 2. Traditional house – Gurahonț (Arad County)

Usually, in this Eastern half of „Zarand Land”, we can identify (depending on their age) three categories of dwellings.

As reported by V. I. Buta, 1999, a first category of houses where those built of oak or beech trunks carved on two or four sides, being ended at the extremities by notches in the form of a dove tail. The walls were pasted on the inside and on the outside with earth, and the roof was tall and had a trapeze shape. The house consisted of a large room, having at the entrance a “tindă” (porch) and next to it a pantry. Although we do not know exactly the age of this type of house, the elders of the villages place them somewhere between 150-200 years and they are said to be a continuation of other houses of the same type, that lead back to remote centuries.

Another category of traditional houses is the house of „vagon” type, with an age between 30-120 years, comprising two or more rooms lined one in continuation of the other, with the front side toward the street. These houses were built on stone foundations and have walls built of wood, stone, or unburnt brick (adobe), being covered with tile or shingle (figure 3).



Figure 3. House of „vagon” type – Tisa, Hălmagiu commune (Arad County)

In front it has a corridor (“târnaț”) with the width of about 1 m, from where you can step into each room. The partition wall between rooms has a door through which you can enter from one room into another. The ceiling of this type of house is built of deal boards and it leans upon oak or fir beams.



Figure 4. New generations of dwellings – Hălmagiu (Arad County)

The third category of houses includes those dwellings built of durable materials, typical for the contemporary period, on stone foundations with belts of concrete and iron. The walls are built of brick, they have large windows, and the roof leans upon wood

frameworks having a pyramid shape. The steps of this type of house are built of stone, cement or mosaic, some of them having in front terraces covered with board or glass. Mostly, these houses belonging to the last three decades have at the entrance a hall from which one can pass from one room into another, then a kitchen, the food pantry, and the bathroom (figure 4).

In order to capture even better the specificity of the traditional house in „Zarand Land”, during our field research we have stopped in the place called Almaș, in Arad County, where, at number 283, we have pointed out a traditional household from Zarand (figure 5).



Figure 5. Traditional household. Almaș, Arad County

This household, which was built around 1882, is currently owned by Teodor Miclea, who has inherited it from his grandparents. They have received as gift from some relatives a building plot on the main street and they have decided to move the house and the outbuildings from the hill (where they lived) on the current precincts. This happened between the two World Wars (around 1928).

We also know about the house that it is said to have belonged before to the orthodox priest of the village, and that it would be a „parson’s house”.

The household consists of the following buildings: house, “colnă”, coop, well, and an annex in which the summer kitchen (“cuptoriștea”), the “tinda”, the wood “colna” and the food pantry (“găbănaș”) are connected (Fig. 6). The stable is situated behind the pantry, and beside it there where the hay mows and the straw pile.

Between the house and the “colnă” are the two ovens, one for baking bread, and the other a “clotan” for the boiler in which the food for the pigs is boiled.

The actual house, consisting of the large room and the small room was built of massive sessile oak beams, that reach the width of 0,5 m. The thick sole at the basis leans upon the massive boulders from the corners and from place to place between them was made a filling of fine river stone. The walls of the two rooms were decorated with icons, plates with towels woven on a weaving loom, frames with family photos and one lamp, because traditional lighting was done with oil lamps. The walls of the rooms were whitewashed everywhere, an operation that was done always before the major holidays.

The porch (“târnaț”) of the house has a considerable width, because it had multiple functions: it was a passing way, meaning intermediary between yard and the actual living place, at the end toward the garden was the attic access ladder; in autumn, they

temporarily stored here the corn combs, the sheaves of hemp and linen, potatoes, pumpkins, and other vegetables, the apples, the sunflower heads etc.

As we find ourselves in the household of a fruit grower, it is understandable why the “colna” has such large sizes (10x6m), because it must shelter the tubes, the barrels, the grape press (or wine press), and any kind of household tools and utensils.



Figure 6. House and household annexes

All the constructions in the household are currently covered with covers of „fine tile” (scales) once obtained from the brick factory in Bârsa. It is more likely that at the beginning (18th century) the house had covers of shingles that was subsequently replaced.

In the household there are many tools and means of transportation, old pieces of furniture, woven materials, ceramics, household utensiles etc., that complete the ethnographic value of this wonderful household of a fruit grower in Zarand Land.

According to some researchers, like the ethnographer I. Godea, it seems that this would be the largest house built of sessile oak wood in Romania, and artistically, one of the most remarkable traditional living places of the Romanians.

As we progress toward the lowlands, *on the lower course of the Crișul Alb*, the rural settlements are more and more compact, and the number of people larger and larger. Although the distance from Hălmagiu to Ineu is not so long, nevertheless, between the two ethnographic sub-areas there are certain differentiations, especially regarding the structure of the rural inside of the house. The houses in the part toward the lowlands have almost always three rooms: to one side there is the bedroom (for guests), with the windows always oriented toward the street, in the middle the “tinda” (the kitchen), and to its right the food pantry. Subsequently there was added another room, toward the garden. Along the house, on the side toward the yard, there was a porch called „târnaț” (figure 7).

The clean room or the house toward the street, as it was also called, was characterized by an obvious preference for symmetry. It always had two beds placed around the longitudinal walls of the room and a simple bench or a bench with a decorated backrest.

On the wall toward the street there was a bench with a backrest and a box at the bottom, also called *lădoi* (figure 8).



Figure 7. Traditional peasant house with "tinda" in the middle – Chereuș, Arad County (I. Godea collection)



Figure 8. Inside of a clean room - Chereuș, Arad County (I. Godea collection)

The house toward the garden was a kind of living room, being the room where the family was constantly living and it represented a more modest replica of the room toward the street, and the furniture often came from the other room, after it was replaced there with newer furniture (figure 9).

"Tinda" was the room in the middle, its main function being connected to preparing the food (figure 10). On the wall opposed to the entrance, in a corner, there was the free fireplace where they prepared food. In the "tindă" there were also stands for plates and tableware, a chair for the water pitcher, the table, chairs and more rarely a narrow bed (Stașac, 2005).

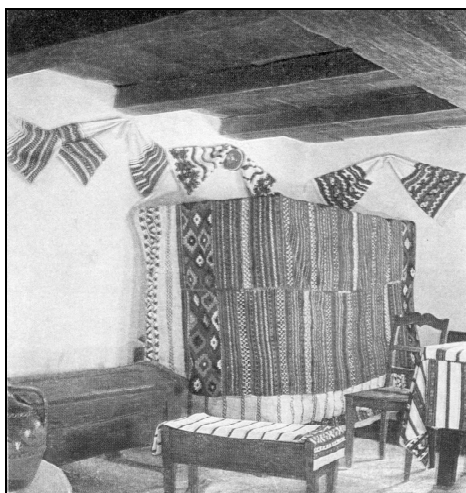


Figure 9. Corner of a living room – Chereuș, Arad County (I. Godea collection)

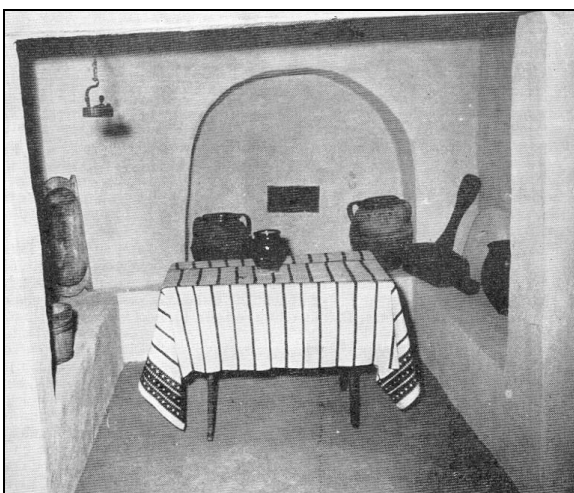


Figure 10. Look inside a "tinda" - Șicula, Arad County (I. Godea collection)

The pantry was a small room with entrance from the “tindă” in which food, vessels, and other smaller objects in the household were kept. Partially, the function of the pantry was taken over by the garret of the house where grains, beans, and during the colder periods in winter, smoked pork, were stored.

If today there are few houses in which furniture of urban origin is not present, about a century ago furniture was processed by the local people.

WOODEN CHURCHES

The power of faith kept unaltered by the population of „Zarand Land” is materialized through the presence of numerous churches, of which the wooden ones have a special significance, even touristically, but especially as expression of the material and spiritual life of the people in this region. These wooden churches prove at the same time the craftsmanship of the local people in the art of woodworking.

Wood has not only been an accessible building material, but also a means of expression through which the popular craftsman, mostly anonymous, has expressed his skill and his whole artistic sense. The craftsmen were Romanian carpenters present in almost all villages, capable through their skills to make admired churches, by carving shapes and sculptures into wood dainty beauty (Vesa, 1997, p. 7).

Table 1. Wooden churches that are representative for „Zarand Land”
(Data source: Godea, I., Medeleanu, H., 2009)

No.	Village	Commune	Year of the building of the church
1	Bodești	Hălmagiu	1750
2	Budești	Pleșcuța	1772
3	Ciuntești	Craiva	1648
4	Cristești	Hălmagiu	1860
5	Groșeni	Archiș	1724
6	Honțisor	Gurahonț	about 1780
7	Iercoșeni	Șilindia	1786
8	Ionești	Hălmagiu	1730!
9	Luncșoara	Hălmăgel	1825
10	Mădrigești	Brazii	1842
11	Poiana	Vârfurile	Beginning of the 18 th century
12	Șoimuș	Brazii	1867
13	Tărmure	Hălmagiu	1780
14	Tisa	Hălmagiu	1770
15	Urviș de Beliu	Hășmaș	Middle of the 19 th century
16	Vidra	Vârfurile	1724
17	Voșdoci	Hălmăgel	1860

The most representative wooden churches appear in the Eastern half of „Zarand Land”, and especially in Hălmagiu Land and Gurahonț Land, regions that are better afforested, with plenty of wood (table 1 and figure 11).

Although modest, the wooden churches were built along centuries, in true centres of Romanian culture and spirituality, preserving at the same time numerous proofs of the unity of the Romanian people. They have taken over and have brought from distant history building systems, plane types, or decorative patterns (Vesa, 1997, p. 7).

Next, we try to render some features of two wooden churches in Hălmagiu Land, which we have found on-site during our journey in these regions.

Wooden church in the village Tisa (figure 12). Tisa, as a village in Hălmagiu commune in Arad County is a rural settlement typical for „Zarand Land”, with households scattered among pastures, orchards, and groves situated at a considerable distance one from the other. The village was documentary recorded for the first time in a document from 1439 (Suciu, 1968, p. 195).

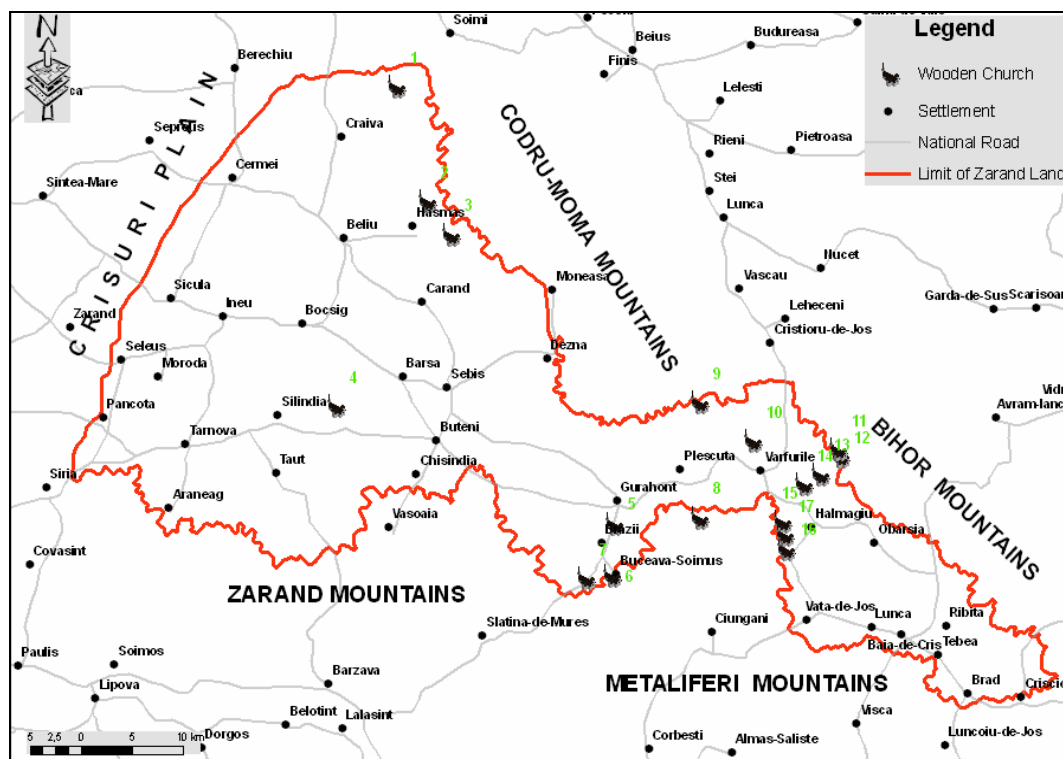


Figure 11. Wooden churches in „Zarand Land”

There are no certain data about the year in which the wooden church in the village was built, but oral tradition in the village indicates the year 1770, the church being built on the place of another wooden church that seems to date back to the second half of the 17th century (Vesa, 1997, p. 73).

Over time, the church was often restored and repaired and that is why its current appearance does not correspond to the initial one anymore. The tower of baroque influence was also restored in the 19th century, when the shingles cover was also replaced with that made of tiles. With this tall tower and at the same time with a roof that is also large, the wooden church in the village Tisa appears as one of the most impressive church buildings in the old rural world in „Zarand Land”.

Wooden church in the village Ionești (figure 13). The village Ionești in the same Hălmațiu commune is mentioned for the first time in documents of 1441 (Roz, Kovach, 1997).

The church is situated only some meters away from National Road 79A, that connects Hălmațiu to Brad, on a hill peak, so it can be seen from a long distance. It is assumed that it was brought from the village Hălmațel, but other opinions assert that it was built in another part of the village from where it was moved in the year 1730 to the current place (Godea, Medeleanu, 2009, p. 56). Next to the church there is a splendid sessile oak that guards this sacred place, protecting it against lightning.

Princely Church in Hălmațiu commune (figure 14) is believed to be one of the oldest churches in the area, dating back to the 14th century. Although it is not a wooden church, we think it represents a special interest for the visitor, especially because under the current plaster a painting of byzantine type was discovered whose age is determined by some researchers as dating back to the 12th-13th centuries, coming from the beginnings of the Romanian Medieval painting. Currently, the church is in full process of restoration.



Figure 12. Wooden church in the village Tisa (Hălmagiu commune, Arad County)



Figure 13. Wooden church in Ionești (Hălmagiu commune, Arad County)



Figure 14. Princely Church in Hălmagiu (Arad County)

CONCLUSIONS

Even if it is not so famous in terms of developing and promoting its touristic potential, like other areas of the country (Maramureș, Bucovina, Rucăr-Bran area etc.), we are convinced that the Zarand region „hides” a rich ethnographic, cultural, spiritual etc. heritage, that could distinguish it from this point of view.

In the attempt to point out only a small part of this heritage, we have insisted upon two remarkable ethnographic components, i.e. the traditional peasant dwelling and the wooden churches, keepers of an archaic Romanian architecture.

If the traditional peasant dwelling has quite disappeared from the rural landscape of „Zarand Land”, many households being subject to the process of modernization, instead the wooden churches have undergone less changes in time, they were not replaced with other more modern ones, so that in a series of villages in Zarand the service is held in this wonderful places of worship.

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