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Maramures – a cultural brand name

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The Wooden Churches

We open the list of the brands from Maramures with the most representative (recognized and appreciated) component, the church, close to perfection in composition, architecture, and the artistic expression specific to its cultic use, and being made of the fundamental material: wood. It joins the **material universe** and the **spiritual** realm of religious structure, particularized by the superimposition of archaic, pre-Christian elements (defined by Mircea Eliade [1969] as “cosmic Christianity”), and the institutionalized forms of the church.

The results of this symbiosis are some of the most attractive targets for the **religious type of tourism** from Europe and the whole world (part of them included in the **UNESCO heritage**).

“It is well known that some of the **most interesting religious constructions in the world** can be found here [in Maramures]; not only from our country but also from the entire Europe. The wooden churches from Maramures have long ago gained a well deserved fame not only in the eyes of the specialists but also in the eyes of the visitors from many countries of the world. There is no doubt they represent **one of the highest achievements in the art of building with wood** on our continent” (Paul Petrescu, 1969).

Evidently, this complex of cultic heritage from Maramures has to be regarded as an integral part in a system particularized by local solutions in construction and architecture in Romania (see also the monastic sites of Voroneț, Sucevița, Moldovița, Putna – in Moldova, or Curtea de Argeș – in Muntenia), as well as in Central and Western Europe, coming from the Middle Ages, as a prolongation of the art of Antiquity into that of the Renaissance.

These churches from Maramures have treasured some of the oldest documents and testimonies of the Romanian language; these are the places where the elders of the communities gathered to make decisions in crucial moments of history; these are the places where weddings were celebrated and infants were baptized, and these are also the places where our fathers and forefathers were buried.

As a rule, these churches were built on heights, with apparently exaggeratedly high steeples and bell towers. In the past, the bell tower had served also as watch tower, and in cases of danger (invasions, fire) they used to beat the wooden plate and ring the bell in a special way, warning the community to take the security measures required by the situation” (Grigore Man, *Bisericile de lemn din Maramureș*, 2005, p.5).

The oldest and most valuable of these monuments are situated in the historical Land of Maramures, some of them dating from the 14th century, but the majority of them were in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Small size “pre-Renaissance cathedrals” can be found also in the ethnographical zones of Chioar, Codru, and Lăpuș, and this recommends the entire administrative and territorial area of Maramures County as an important target for religious tourism.

Remains of 17th century mural paintings can be seen in the church from Breb. There are relics of Celtic civilization in the churchyard of Sat Șugatag. The church tower from Budești-Josani is situated above the church porch that has four smaller towers. The church from Cuhea was built in 1718, on the site of the former wooden church the Tartars had burnt down in 1717. The church on the hill (Deal) from Ieud dates from 1364 and is also called the church of Balc, after the name of a local voivode, while the one on the plain (Șes) is considered one of the most beautiful and monumental “wooden cathedrals” from Maramures, representing also a sample of gothic architecture (see Mihai Dăncuș, 1986).

It is worth remembering that, on Sundays and on religious holidays, services are still held in many of these ancient churches, although now they are too small for the number of worshipers. Maybe this detail has saved them from destruction, the people's spirit and faith having remained intact.

Where the local people abandoned them (in favour of the new churches made of stone), the constructions show visible signs of decay.

The wooden churches are a brand, an insignia, a remembrance of the history of these places.

The Traditional Homestead

When visiting for the first time a region, the tourists' expectations are to benefit of good services, find suitable accommodation, and enjoy the picturesque landscape. In order to learn about the most interesting material and spiritual goods of the local people they will certainly plan to visit the existing museums.

Those who come to Maramures will be surprised to discover that almost each village is in itself a **living museum**, populated with people whose life unfolds quite naturally among the "exhibits". Each settlement seems to be a "village museum", with unpaved lanes, guarded on either side by farmhouses and outbuildings made entirely of wood – genuine monuments of folk art and architecture.

The **traditional homestead in Maramures** bears the specific local stamp (as concerns materials, architecture, and ornaments); it is a brand due to its originality and unique character in comparison with "reservations" of this type from other regions. And it will continue to be a brand when the rural traditionalism disintegrates in the future (as certain tendencies already predict), and the tourists will admire these homesteads only in the enclosures of specialized open-air-museums.

The traditional farmhouse and the associate buildings were usually placed on two or three sides of the farmyard forming an architectural whole. Everything, from the base to the shingle roof, was made exclusively of wood.

Ethnologist Francisc Nistor (1977) writes that the buildings of the homestead are arranged according to precise rules which take into consideration first of all functionality, and it is the arrangement of the buildings that creates the architectural complex with an evident aesthetic effect.

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For those who would like to approach with empathy this ethnographic micro-universe of Maramures, we will offer some technical, descriptive details and refer to the function of each component part of the homestead.

The farmhouse has always had an ordering function, the outbuildings being disposed in accord with it.

The barn and the stable become a complex construction only if the farmer's social and economic status allows it. The wooden structure is always set on river boulders (or from a stone quarry), and the roof has invariably in four slopes.

The **stable** floor is made of thick wooden beams and **the loft** is placed only above the lateral compartments of the barn.

The **barns** have usually monumental doors so that a cart stacked with hay could freely pass. The barn serves also for storing tools and agricultural equipment: pitchforks, rakes, ploughs, harrows, yokes, accessories of the cart, and the vessels in which the fruit collected during the summer or autumn are fermented, becoming the raw material for the twice distilled alcoholic beverage called “horinca de Maramureș”.

The **shed** is a wooden construction made of four poles joined with oak twigs and covered with a two-sloping roof. It is used to store fire wood, the log for cutting wood, but also the cart, tools and agricultural equipment.

The **hay store** is made of four, about 7 meter long, wooden poles, joined on the upper and lower parts with square wooden bars. The roof has the form of a pyramid and slides up and down the poles according to the quantity of the hay. It is interesting that ethnologists have found such constructions (hay stores with sliding roofs) also in Nordic countries. For instance, in Holland they have the same structure as those in Maramures (P. Petrescu, 1969).

The **wickerwork maize shed** has trapezoidal form and is made of woven hazel or cornel wickers. The roof has four slopes and is made of twice fixed shingles.

The **larder** is used for storing foodstuffs and household objects. It has the form of a miniature (mono-cellular) house, with a porch, a door, but has no lateral windows.

On a homestead you can find one or two square **draw-wells**, set with round river boulders, either with a shadoof (usually), or a lifting wheel. There are also wells that are used by two households.

The traditional **fences** surrounding the farm are made of wickerwork (in the form of a braid or crown) and are covered with hay and shingle.

Riverside Technical Installations

“The life of a village does not unfold only in its cult buildings but also in the places where its living inhabitants can meet in order to remember and worship their ancestors; it does not unfold only on the farmstead or in individual houses, but also in the places where there are installations that belong either to a family or to the whole village community. These are: mills, fulling mills, and whirlpools etc., which used to play an important part in the life of the villagers in Maramures and they still do nowadays” (Francisc Nistor, 1980).

Whatever makes these installations spectacular and famous is the ingenuity of the technical systems made entirely of wood, even in their mechanical parts.

The most simple and archaic installations were those worked manually and used for milling the grains (hand-riding mills). For the crushing of the seeds and the obtaining of edible oil there were manual presses with either a ram or a screw.

As old as these and used on a large scale are the **hydraulic installations** due to the existence of many rivers and streams in the region. Among these the grain **mills**, the **whirlpools** and **sawmills** are of most interest.

Usually, the mills and the whirlpools make a complex and are situated on river courses with a reduced flow of water. In the middle of the 20th century, in the basins of the rivers Tisa, Iza, and Vișeu, 276 such technical installation were registered, while in the basin of Lăpuș, 144 mills. There are documents from as early as the 14th century in which they are mentioned as part of “an ancient **hydraulic civilization** in the north of the Danube” (Corneliu Bucur, 2005).

The technology of the construction of **mills** was identical with that of house building, with the only exception that the foundation of the wall near the wheel was higher. The water was brought to the wheel by a deviation of its course. The wheels (with pots and teeth) were fixed on an axel. The diameter of the millstones was about a metre.

But what mostly impress visitors are the **whirlpools**, genuine A+ class washing machines. These are installed in the historical Land of Maramures (in the Cosău valley, at Rona de Sus, Dragomirești and Glod) and also in the Rona – Lăpuș area, and in the Land of Chioar at Preluca Nouă, Boiu Mare, Șișești, Șindrești, Coplanic, Fânațe, Ciocotiș, and Chiuzbaia.

The **whirlpools**, traditional installations which function on the hydraulic principle, are used for the washing and rinsing of large dimension textiles. They are conical constructions, made of wood logs, in which the water produces a powerful current (A. Viman, 1989). The water is collected from a mountain stream and is brought to the whirlpool with the help of a dam, so that the flow can be regulated periodically, according to the seasonal rainfall. The water falls in the wooden washtub where the various woollen textiles are cleaned and fulled. Many townspeople have lately taken their jute, woollen or synthetic carpets and also their winter clothes made of thick fabrics to be washed in the whirlpool. This entitles one to hope that the traditional whirlpools will remain of interest in the future, integrated in a profitable economic system.

The advantage of these installations, besides their belonging to tradition, is the ecological aspect and principle of their functioning and exploitation: the use of “**green energy**” as an alternative source. The more so, as recently, with the installation of upstream micro-hydroelectric stations which could provide homesteads with the necessary electric energy, the whirlpools have been integrated in a **complex energetic system**.

The Wooden Gates

The tourists visiting Maramures cannot but admire one of the most impressive sights of this ethnographical universe: the monumental **wooden gates** of the traditional homesteads to be found especially in the Mara, Cosău, or Iza valleys, and also in some villages of the Lăpuș Land.

Generally, they are made of oak wood, of three posts supporting the upper part of the gate that is covered by a shingled roof. The gates of this region have often been compared to real “triumphal arches” through which the peasants used to pass with dignity, proud of their **noble origin**.

The series of monumental gates are a living testimony of a particular historical reality. During the feudal period, in the communities of Maramures, a number of princes (cneaz) appeared who periodically elected their voivode. In time, the nobles’ power and privileges had been attentively fragmented and distributed to a growing number of families. For centuries, the members of this “caste” (with the dimension of a real community!) resisted the attempts to deprive them of their privileges. This is the explanation of the amazing result of an 18th century Austrian statistics that situated Maramures “on the first place in the whole empire as concerns the reported percentage of noblemen of the county’s population.” The number of the registered noblemen with their rank certified by authentic documents was no less than 15,000, most of them being descendants of the local princes’ families.

This fact is extremely important because only the nobles had the privilege to raise high gates in front of their homesteads, while the simple people had the right only to a simple gate.

For a period, Maramures had been a unique imperial enclave populated by peasants of noble origin. The **shingle covered gates with carved posts** are relics of a social organization that had functioned up to the 20th century due to the persistence of local traditions and the people's inborn conservative tendencies.

Nowhere in Europe did anything similar happen.

“The attachment of the local people to these valuable constructions, deeply rooted in the cultural and artistic traditions as well as in the social and political history of Maramures, is illustrated by the fact that the ranking of the homesteads after their gates has been preserved until our days. Even now, when asking them about a man living in their village, the old peasants will point to the gate of the house where the person lives, the gesture signifying the way they rank him” (Francisc Nistor, 1977).

The construction, the carving of the decorative elements, and the passage through the gate had to respect particular rituals based upon a deep faith (with mythical rather than religious connotations).

Thus, the cutting of the oak tree had to be in a night with full moon – in order to keep away any misfortune and all the “evil hours” from around the homestead. Then, the transportation of the timber from the forest had to be done on one of the weekdays when people did not fast (on Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday), according to the belief that thus the wood would bring them luck.

They used to put under the threshold beam “money, holy water, and incense, so that the black plague should not come close”. And for the protection of their fortune and house anthropomorphic figures were carved on the posts.

The carved motifs had (some of them) magical substrata, but the decoding of the elements folk craftsmen most frequently used: the rope, the knot, the solar rosette, the tree of life (“the symbol of life without death”), the snake (guardian of the house), the human figure, birds, the wolf tooth, the fir tree a. s. o., permits access to a mythological, pre-Christian universe.

For the Maramures peasant, the passage through the house gate used to be like a ceremonial act, a mental purification from the evils of the profane world so that to step cleansed into the domestic universe of the household and family. In all traditional cultures the passages through a gate, more or less imposing, has symbolized a change (either surface or structural, physical or virtual).

The Wayside Cross

For many foreign visitors the civilization of wood in Maramures is represented mainly by three elements: the church, the gate, and the wayside cross.

Fully aware of its representative character (as a brand) and in answer to the growing demand for such “products”, folk craftsmen and some specialized firms have lately oriented their main activity to manufacturing and assembling such objects requested by the market. Though only some of these bear the mark of authenticity, most being produced serially, they all contain the specific elements of traditional folk art.

As concerns their cultural value, the most important wayside crosses were those marking a border. “There are testimonies showing that at the beginning of the 17th century, many communities in Maramures had such carved wooden wayside crosses, actually complex monuments, marking borders. Only one of them, the wayside cross of the Rednic family has been preserved on the edge of Berbești village. Dated 18th century, its composing elements and the carving define it as ‘gothic’.” (M. Dăncuș, 1968)

The wayside border crosses, besides their Christian, religious significance, could be related to ancient beliefs (superstitions), deeply rooted in the Romanians’ subconscious. They were usually placed at road forks or crossroads, where people believed that evil spirits had much more strength and could get hold on travellers. Thus, the wayside crosses were integrated into a system of prevention with magic connotations (white magic).

According to some researchers, the wayside crosses from Maramures are the last extant Dacian crosses (the three upper arms passing over the circle), pagan symbols of the Geto-Dacian population’s ancient solar worship (V. R. Vulcănescu, 1987, p. 206, 207, 367, 472).

From the second half of the 20th century, the initial significance of the wayside crosses faded away and they have become especially funerary crosses, probably under the influence and fame of the “Merry Graveyard” from Săpânța. Thus, an ample process of imposing a brand from Maramures has passed over the borders of the county.

Some more recent instances come to show the importance attached to wayside crosses.

Princess Ileana of Romania, King Ferdinand and Queen Marie’s sixth offspring, former archduchess of Austria, while in exile in the United States, took the veil and became Lady Superior in “Transfiguration” convent from Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. Before her death (on January 21, 1991), she had asked that a carved wayside cross, “like those in Maramures” be set on her grave.

The Great Romanian poet Nichita Stănescu (1933-1983), with four awards from the Romanian Writers Union, Herder prize laureate (1975), and posthumously member of the Romanian Academy, rests in Bellu cemetery in Bucharest and a wayside cross embellishes his grave.

After the 1989 Revolution, a great number of such wayside crosses made in Maramures have been set up in different parts of the country in order to commemorate the “December heroes”. At the beginning of 1990, the first such monument made by Alexandru Perța Cuza, an artist from the Land of Lăpuș, was set up in front of the Orthodox Cathedral in the centre of Timișoara. Other wayside crosses dedicated to heroes were set up in Baia Mare and in Bucharest – one in front of the Romanian Television and the other at the University.

Any other example would only certify the brand quality of this component of the folk culture “made in Maramures”.

The Rattle Spindle

A chronological and in depth approach to the historical stages favouring the invention of this object – by now a symbol and an acknowledged brand for Maramures – takes one back to an ancient occupational context: sheep breeding practised by a sedentary population who developed a parallel household industry: the processing of wool and manufacturing of clothing for family members.

The story begins in spring, on St. George's Day, when they measure the milk and take the flocks of sheep, after being shorn, up the mountain. The sheep has become the object of various myth in Maramures (the Mioritic myth), especially due to its economic importance, as it can be learned from a local legend: "The sheep is sacred as long as it has wool" (T. Papahagi, 1925).

The wool shorn in spring is washed in the water of wells or brooks and it is spread out on the homestead in order to dry. The wool is carded with a wooden carder, tied on a distaff, spun, and the yarn is wrapped around the spindle, then yarn balls are made and the yarn is woven on the loom. The spinning and weaving begin during the autumn and continue all along the winter (see Dăncuș, 1986).

This technological process still continues, though on a reduced scale, in the traditional communities of Maramures.

Relic of the domestic textile industry, the spindle had a secondary function, for a long time quite insignificant, being used to hold the yarn only for a short span of time. From a social point of view, the distaff on which they put the wool to be spun used to have a higher value, as the distaffs were made with minute care and intricately carved by young lads for mothers, wives or sweethearts to pride with at women's traditional evening meetings.

The spindle came out of anonymity the moment when the whorl on the low spindle changed its form due to the technique of jointing pieces of wood, initially used as a solution for jointing wooden structures (beams) without the use of other accessories (nails) either made of wood or metal. Such architectural elements are found also in the wooden churches built in Maramures.

Due to the mobility of the elements of the weight (whorl), the spindle produces a specific sound. Some spindles have a slot filled with pebbles in the middle of the whorl made of jointed pieces of wood, producing a rattling sound like bells ringing. They say this innovation had a practical purpose: it helped women to stay awake when they intended to spin a certain amount of wool, during the long winter nights.

Artist Mihai Olos from Baia Mare had an important role in promoting this household object as a brand, and more precisely this technique of jointing. He has widely used this ingenious jointing of elements in making his wooden sculptures well-known and appreciated in the European cultural space. Starting from modules inspired by the folk art from Maramures, at a certain moment of his career, the artist made the project of a genuine world city significantly named by him "olopolis", in which the architecture of joints has acquired philosophical connotations.

Folk craftsmen followed this trend and tried to value the emblematic potential of this object by producing it serially and selling spindles to tourists at festivals and at specific fairs.

It is to be mentioned that due to the fame enjoyed by this spindle, the architects who made the project for the "Mara" hotel compound (during the '80s) have used it as a decorative element, placing a huge "rattle spindle" on the upper part of the building façade, like a church steeple – this becoming an emblem of the municipal centre of the county.

The Seal Engraver

Apparently an insignificant object, usually made of wood (or marble), but kept with piety by maidens in their dowry chest "among the stacked pieces of flowery cloths perfumed with basil and lavender" kept in "little white linen bags". It used only by women for marking the ritual

bread (wafers and Easter pound cake), on holidays, but it may become, in our view, one of the **brands** of cultural resistance of which the inhabitants of Maramures could be proud.

Bearing different names (*pecetar*, *prescornicer* or *prostornic*), this cultic object used to be found in each household in the villages of the Iza, Mara, and Cosău valleys. Though it has been forgotten or got degraded, luckily three important collections have been preserved: those of the brothers Victor and Iuliu Pop, and that of the priest from Breb, Mircea Antal, whose collection has been included recently in the heritage of the Baia Mare Ethnographic and Folk Art Museum.

The seal engravers are usually between 10-20 cm. in height and are composed of two parts: the inferior part resembles a pedestal in the form of a parallelepiped or a pyramid trunk with an incised religious text – IC-XC-NI-KA or IS-NS-NI-KA – meaning “Jesus Christ’s victory over death”. The wafers bear the seal of the sacred letters, in a ritual gesture “between prayer and the work sanctified by the sealing of the bread” (Ion Iuga, 1993). The upper part can be grouped in two distinct categories: “those with the decorative motifs and forms connected to the Christian rites – roadside crosses or a stylized crucifix – and those with a definitely secular character”.

These cultic objects have a strong tendency towards abstraction. Almost each piece is unique. Some have the form of columns, resembling Brâncuși’s endless column or Henry Moore’s sculptures.

Despite their miniature sizes, the collections of seal engravers are **genuine works of art** due to their superior forms: solar rosettes (Cuhea), wheat ears, “1877” obelisk, sandglass (Rona de Jos), Aztec staircase pyramid (Săcel), Thai tower, Brâncuși’s “Măiastra Bird” (an astounding likeness), the Endless Column, the King of Kings (18th century), “the Chair of the Venerable Mariș from Ieud” (identical with the chairs around the Table of Silence), or church steeples (see Romulus Pop, *Galsul pecetarelor*, 1993).

A seal engraver from Moisei was carved to look like a helmet with four little towers, very much alike the gothic steeples from the historical Land of Maramures. There are seal engravers with their three arms joined by a semicircle and the three arms transferred inside it, while others resemble the border stones from Maramures.

Sometimes the seal engravers show a naively carved human figure with evident disproportions, but the most frequent theme is that of the crucifixion, treated in an unconventional manner.

The seal engravers are distinguished by their creator’s capacity to synthesize and join the symbolism of **agrarian rites** (wheat ear, flour), and the art of gastronomy (wafers), **religious beliefs** (the theme of crucifixion and the inscriptions on the basis) **and the art of woodwork**. But all these would remain unobserved if the final product had not been enriched with **small art works**, which would flatter the pride of any consecrated artist. Constantin Brâncuși considered it a title of glory to promote worldwide with his work motifs and forms originating from the Romanian folk art, forms known and used by the peasants from Maramures when making their seal engravers to be kept in the maidens’ dowry chests, among the basil and lavender scented cloths...

The Traditional Peasant Costume

While visiting the villages of Maramures (especially those situated on the Mara and Iza valleys) on a holiday, you will have the privilege of attending a genuinely poetic fashion show full of colour offered freely by the local people. But this “parade” has nothing ostentatious in it and for the villagers it does not represent an opportunity to attract the tourists with commercial intentions. The costumes have the mark of authenticity and are worn as a reminiscence of the traditional society’s life style.

There are only few other regions where the peasants have preserved this tradition, most having abandoned a long time ago the habit of wearing their folk costume even occasionally (on Sundays, holidays, weddings etc.). The folk costumes are becoming just items in the wardrobe of folk assemblies or museum exhibits.

In Maramures, **tradition** – a sign of antiquity – and the **pride of one’s origin** resulting in **ethnic dignity** that does not allow any compromise have become provisions of an **ancient testament** that each generation feels obliged to respect almost with piety.

It is remarkable that all the elements of the folk costume are exclusively products of the **domestic textile industry** having at its origin the cultivation of textile plants (hemp and flax) and sheep breeding (for the production of wool), the processing of fibres and the weaving of cloth in household micro-workshops, tailoring and embroidering. Worth mentioning are also the craftsmen specialized in the manufacturing of sheepskin or fulled wool coats, peasant sandals and hats.

Nowadays, globalization has set its imprint also on fashion design and the famous fashion houses impose their seasonal designs on all continents in a stunning rhythm.

In the past, the cut and colours used to be preserved by each community and imposed a **local dress code** through which messages were transmitted with the help of certain symbols: “the trained eyes of the local people perceived the motifs, colours, ornamental patterns, specific to a certain village and in many instances not only could they read the message, but they could also recognize the redundant elements in the way they had been formulated” (Corneliu Mirescu, 2006).

The main chromatic element used to play a decisive role in the identification of the ethnographic zone, especially in the case of the aprons on which the black stripes alternated with **light yellow** or **green** in the Mara valley, **orange** in the Vişeu valley, **red** for the Iza valley.

Women’s costumes consist of a flowery **head kerchief** (black for older women), a **blouse** with a square neck opening and three-quarter length sleeves, a **skirt** over which two **aprons** (front and back) are worn, a **vest** made of grey fulled wool cloth or a jacket, a **coat** made of white fleecy woollen cloth, and as an accessory, an “**expensive collar**” (made of corral beads) or **collarettes** (made of small woven beads).

Men’s costumes have as principal piece the white, short, large sleeved **shirt**, white **drawers** to the middle of the calf, in summer, and long trousers made of white woollen cloth in winter, a **wide leather belt**, and a coat made of fulled wool fabric. Among the accessories we mention the **hat** and the vividly coloured woven peasant **bag** (T. Bănăţeanu, 1965).

An examination of the metope on the Adamclisi monument as well as Trajan’s Column (in Rome) can prove the antiquity of at least two of the component parts of the costume the peasants of Maramures wear with such pride: the fulled wool coat and the hood.

Săcel Pottery

As archaeological discoveries have shown, **pottery** used to be one of the ancient occupations of human beings. It appeared at the same time with the development of an economy based on cattle breeding and with the improvement of farming techniques (the beginning of the Neolithic, c. 9000 BC). Two millennia later, pottery was generalized, but the invention of the **wheel** is dated only c. 3700 BC. As a consequence of this revolutionary discovery a real **industry of pottery** sprang up, and the production of earthen pots became serialised due to the first “machine” invented by man – the **potter’s wheel**.

There is no doubt that the native Dacian population had developed their own unmistakable style, the ceramic vessels being easily recognized due to their form, decoration, and colour. Perhaps the Roman technology was needed to bring this art of pottery to perfection.

Two millennia later: Romania, Maramures. At Săcel, a settlement on the Iza Valley, red, unglazed ceramic objects are made in a rudimentary workshop set up in a peasant homestead. The earthen pots made by the craftsman preserve the Dacian technical and aesthetic characteristics and are burnt in a probably 300 year old Roman kiln, the last of its kind in the historical Land of Maramures.

According to specialists, the pottery from Săcel “holds a unique place among the ceramics produced in different centres in our country” not only because the ceramics of red clay are burnt unglazed, but especially due to the techniques of decoration – polishing and painting. “What catches the eye is especially the technique that had been used in ancient times of history – the Dacian La Tène” (Florea Bobu Florescu, 1963).

The painted ornaments consist of horizontal (rows) or wavy (serrated) lines, which sometimes form an acute angle. The ornaments are on the upper part of the pots, close to the meeting point with the handle (see Janeta Ciocan, 1980).

After the pot is cut down from the wheel, the exterior surface is rubbed with a white river stone in order to reduce the porosity and make it glossy. It is only after some days that the pots are burnt in the kiln for a day and a night (I. Vlăduțiu, 1973).

One must not forget that the pots are made to serve functional purposes (for cooking food, storing water or milk, carrying food to people working in the field etc.); only tourists buy painted pottery for decorative purposes, without having any idea of their therapeutic gains or their use in the art of cooking.

Discussion forum: “The pottery made in Săcel gives you the same feeling of age and purity as the old wooden houses and churches from Maramures. It is a real favour to possess such a pitcher or pot that have passed, from the moment they were just a piece of clay up to becoming a perfect object, through the hands of a craftsman endowed with the pious and good soul of the people who have lived in these places for ever. And it would be of great use to you if only each mouthful of water (or wine) you drink from the mug inspired you with the dignity and kindness of those who toiled to make it” (Călin, 2004-08-12).

The magic of the objects made of clay is only natural, since all the five fundamental elements have entered into their making: the earth from which the clay comes, the water with the help of which the potter moulds the clay, the wind (air) that caresses the pots, drying them before they are put into the kiln, and the fire that burns them. The fifth element, **love**, is the spirit that the potter puts in each and every pot, in order to “animate the red clay”.

Remember. This alchemical combination is based upon a Dacian decorative style and a Roman technology. And this has been happening for 2000 years in a simple peasant homestead from the Iza Valley.

The Traditional Cuisine

A plate of “tocană” (ground maize boiled in milk) with sheep cheese, cream and fried bacon scraps, a helping of rolls of soured cabbage stuffed with minced pork and coarsely ground maize, a slice of homemade bread baked in the hearth, a glass of “horincă” (plum brandy), and as last course: a crinkled pie or a pound caked with nuts – these would be some of the specialities of the traditional cuisine in Maramures.

The art of local gastronomy does not excel in delicacies and sophisticated combinations of foodstuffs and spices (like other Latin cuisines – French or Italian). It is rather sober and extremely ecological, alike the agriculture, cattle breeding and fruit growing that are the principal sources of food.

The culinary tradition relies mainly upon the **mobile pastoral dairy** the shepherds install in the mountains during the summer, the period when they graze their sheep. In these “miniature” dairy factories, the principal actor is the shepherd in charge of the sheepfold who is also responsible for the processing of the dairy products. The owners of the sheep used to climb to the sheepfold taking turns in order to collect their share of the product which had been established at the milk measuring. The ewe’s milk is used to prepare milk curds, cottage cheese, pot cheese, and a mixture of whey with the sediments from the boiled curds. The young cheese brought from the sheepfold is aged in the homestead.

As the meteorological and climacteric conditions and the quality of the soil had not favour the cultivation of wheat in this region covered mostly by hills, agriculture was based mainly on the growing of **maize**. Beginning with the 17th century, maize flour used to be “the principal element of nutrition for the rural population” (Petru Dunca 2004). The maize was used in the preparation of the “mămăligă” (maize flour boiled in salted water), and for the baking of the **daily bread**. This is why, as I. Bârlea stated it (1924), “bread made of wheat flour is eaten only on important holidays; otherwise people eat only maize bread”. White flour was used for the preparation of the **communion bread** and of the **ritual knotted bread** for the important holidays.

But for the inhabitants of Maramures, according to their ancient customs, the meal is rather a **cultural act** with **social** significances. It represents actually an **integration rite**.

Hospitable and filled with empathy, the peasants of Maramures invite the stranger in their house animated by the thought that “having travelled so much, the visitor must be hungry”, but this is done also in order to facilitate a **cultural interaction**. Thus, the peasants value the most efficient way of having a **dialogue**, whether they do or do not speak the same language as their interlocutor. The **intercultural dialogue** by means of sharing the food is achieved on a non-verbal level, the words being superfluous. Each gesture and impression of the guest is watched attentively and decoded according to the behavioural acquisitions of the individual and the local customs.

In order to be shown respect, the guest is given “the place of honour” at the table, as it happens with the elders or with persons of authority (priests or teachers). The host, following the unwritten law of hospitality, has the obligation to be the first who tastes the drink, showing by this that it is clean and deserves to be tasted, and the guests drink only afterwards.

Another local custom demands that the guest should eat everything offered by the host. The rule applies also to drinks.

To conclude, the cuisine of Maramures can accede to the status of a brand if the dishes will be promoted in the rural guesthouses from the region and the products will be also included in the menus of the great restaurants.

The Ethnographic Museum of the Historical Land of Maramures. Sighetu Marmatei

History. The first museum was founded in Sighet in 1899. But a part of the collection had been lost during World War II. In 1954, the museum was entrusted to Francisc Nistor’s management. The objects bought during the field researches would constitute the nucleus of the present museum. On the 1st of March 1957, the museum was reopened for the public with a heterogeneous exhibition that remained unchanged till 1967. After four years, the museum was reorganised being divided into sections, and on the 26th of December 1971 the ethnographic museum was opened in a building from the centre of the town (No. 1, Bogdan Vodă Street)

Collections. The exhibition is installed in rooms forming a free circuit arranged according to the principal categories of folk culture. The first rooms show people’s primary occupations: food gathering, hunting, fishing, bee keeping. These are followed by the principal occupations of agricultural and pastoral type, i.e. forestry and rafting. The inventory of agricultural equipment consists in wooden ploughs, harrows, rakes, vessels for storing grains, seed crushers, screw oil presses etc.

In order to illustrate animal husbandry, the exhibition presents the inventory of a sheepfold: wooden buckets for the milking of the ewes and vessels for the preparation of cheese. In another room there are tools used by women in the household textile industry: scutchers for hemp and flax, carders for cleaning the wool, distaffs, simple spindles or rattle spindles, a loom etc.

The furniture specific to peasant houses is shown in a distinct room. There also elements belonging to folk architecture recuperated from old houses: window and door frames, veranda props, barn doors, well poles, fragments of wickerwork fences etc.

Two rooms exhibit textiles objects: towels, pillow cases, towels for girl’s poles, woollen bedspreads and rugs decorated with geometrical motives and coloured with natural dyes, items of folk costumes etc. The last room is dedicated to the pottery from Săcel. The first floor entrance-hall houses a rich collection of folk masks.

The Maramures Village Museum.

The museum was inaugurated on the 30th of May 1981, on the occasion of the International Day of Museums, on Doboieş hill, Sighet. It constitutes a reserve of rural architecture, recreating a village with the specific of an ethnographic zone that had developed from a

“scattered” type to a “compact” type of settlement. All the lanes and paths converge to the village centre marked by the church. The well-conserved houses and homesteads are grouped according to the main sub-zones of the historical Land of Maramures: Cosău-Mara and the lower course of the Iza up to Strâmtura, Middle Iza, Vişeu-Borşa, the sub-zone of Tisa and the Ruscova basin.

The church is the oldest construction preserved in the museum. Dating from the 16th century, it was relocated from the village of Onceşti (Vadu Izei). Ilea’s house from Călineşti is dated from the end of the 19th century. The house has an access space divided into two and a large room. It has a remarkably beautiful veranda surrounding the house on both sides, with poles and arcades made of fir wood. The Marinca house from Comirzana, with a porch, is built of round fir logs, and is from 1785. The Țiplea house from Fereşti dates from the 18th century. It is made of massive oak wood, and the crossbeams have impressive dimensions. The joining system is what they call “cheutoarea românească” (Romanian jointing).

The Ethnographic and Folk Art County Museum Baia Mare

History. In 1899, a Museum Association was founded in Baia Mare. Its members donated the objects which were to make up the first collections of the museum. The approval for founding a section of ethnography and folk art was given in 1964. The research activity and the organizing of the museum collections started only in 1968, by the setting up of exhibitions, a systematic research of the material culture and acquisitions, so that in its present stage the museum owns over 7000 exhibits, some of them real pieces of national treasure. The museum was organized having an indoor section (thematic arrangement: curator Janeta Ciocan) and an open-air section – i.e. the village museum (curator Sabin Şainelic). The indoor section was installed in the building of the former open-air theatre (on a 500 square meter surface). The village museum was set up on a neighbouring area, the Flowers Hill, on a 12 ha surface and was inaugurated in 1984.

The indoor section houses the material treasure of folk art creations from the four ethnographic areas of the county: the historical Land Maramures, Chioar, Lăpuş, and Codru. The first room includes objects illustrating the basic occupations of the people, farming and cattle breeding, as well as beekeeping, food-gathering, hunting and fishing. The second room displays technical equipment and three of the most important crafts: smithery, joinery, and carpentry. The third room is mainly dedicated to pottery with a collection of household ceramic objects (from the 19th century) and also objects used in religious ceremonies (17th century icons on wood and 19th century icons painted on glass). The fourth room displays folk costumes and textile wares.

The outdoor section (The Village Museum) houses homesteads from the four ethnographic areas, each of them with the associated buildings important for economic reasons. The museum was installed around a wooden church brought over from the hamlet of Chechiş (Dumbrăviţa village), which used to belong to the domains of Baia Mare (as attested by documents from 1566). The church, dated from 1630, was moved to this new location (Flowers Hill – Baia Mare) in 1939. The latest restoration works were made in 1990 and, in 1998, the church was dedicated to St. Martyr George. The construction is composed of porch, front narthex, nave and altar. It was made of oak wood and has reduced dimensions (12.45 m / 4.5 m).

Among the architectural monuments which have been bought one should mention the houses from Cărpiniș (1758), Giulești(1794), the farmsteads from Broșa (1795), Berbești (1806), Prislop (1811), and the shed for storing crops from Chechiș (1794).

The farmhouse from Petrova is dated from the 19th century. From an architectural point of view it is a construction from that period typical for the well-to-do people from the area. This is where Dr. Gheorghe Bilașcu, the founder of the Romanian school of stomatology and of the Faculty of Stomatology in Cluj, was born. (www.etnografie-maramures.ro)

The Vernacular of Maramures

The nowadays county of Maramures was constituted as an administrative unit in the post-war years, on the basis of geographical and political criteria. Four “lands” (the south of the historical Maramures, Chioar, Codru, and Lăpuș) were thus reunited. There are similarities among these zones but also differences as concerns traditions, elements of folk culture, and vernaculars.

Referring to the **Romanian language**, linguists consider that it has four dialects: Daco-Romanian, Istro-Romanian, Aromanian, and Megleno-Romanian. The Daco-Romanian is divided at its turn into five main sub-dialects, those spoken in Moldova, Muntenia, Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș. It has to be specified that the **sub-dialect of Maramureș** is spoken exclusively in the historical Land of Maramures, in the villages of the Mara, Cosău, Iza and Vișeu valleys.

The vernacular from the **Land of Codru** belongs to the sub-dialect of Crișana. Specialists include it in the so-called “someșean” vernacular.

As concerns the **Land of Chioar**, Professor I. Chiș Șter (1983) stated that “it is almost the same with the vernacular from the Land of Codru”. Though, one may say that there is a “transition” between Codru and Lăpuș.

The vernacular from the **Land of Lăpuș** seems to have a powerful “personality”. From a geographical, ethnical, and historical point of view, it represents the extreme northern part of Transylvania. Nevertheless, we would rather consider it as a kind of “lateral area” of the historical Land of Maramures from where it has borrowed a rich vocabulary, a great number of ethnographic characteristics and a rich folk repertoire.

Irrespective of their belonging to one or another of the sub-dialects, the vernaculars from Lăpuș, Chioar, and Codru have borrowed some particularities of the Maramures vernacular due to the geographical closeness and the social and cultural connections.

One can find a relatively unitary character of the vernaculars of the four regions situated in the Nordic territory inhabited by Romanians only as concerns their vocabulary.

These are the arguments that come to certify that the vernaculars from the county of Maramures are undoubtedly a **brand**.

Nevertheless, the above presentation refers to a description applicable only to the past. Nowadays, the situation is somewhat different because of the degrading of the traditional local word-stock. The phenomenon is directly influenced by the political, economic, and social events from the last decades. One can predict without being mistaken that only after a generation the traditional culture of north-west Romania, so conservatory in the past, will disappear.

The word-stock of the Maramures vernacular, as a brand, has a nationwide notoriety, and can be distinguished from among the vernaculars spoken in other regions. And it is the cultural policy of the European Union that recommends the preservation of linguistic diversity with local colour as an inheritance of people's traditions.

The Folklore Archive

More and more tourists come to visit Maramures each year, sometimes with a mysterious excitement, being attracted by the splendour of landscape, the reserves of folk architecture (homesteads, churches) and by the exemplary way in which the traditions, customs and folklore have been preserved. The fact that the component elements of **folklore** are (still) part of the population's active fund (and not of the passive one) in this region, has to be considered a model and a justification for the identification of a new and valuable brand.

"Maramures. Here's a region, a famous zone, considered both by Romanians and strangers unmatched as regards the preservation of customs, **traditional folklore**, and costume, alive and important in the inhabitants' life" (J.M. Marrant, USA, 1982).

The determinant aspects of the specificity of the zone are the historical and the geographical ones. These two elements have given the region the status of "cultural enclave". Moreover, the region has shown a stability of traditions able to generate **cultural productions irradiating in other zones** as well, qualities thanks to which it can be considered one of the so-called by Ernest Gamillscheg "nuclear territories", or what Nicolae Iorga and Ion Cernea called "popular Romanias", and Nicolae Dunăre – "ethno-cultural settlements".

In these conditions it is only natural to regard the folkloric universe of Maramures as an **institution** representing us in relationship with other regions in the large European family. And it is also natural to focus on a project of founding an Archive of the folklore from Maramures. At the moment this Archive is a virtual one, scattered in a great number of collections and anthologies published along the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Besides, there are numerous unpublished private folklore collections and also the results of researchers' field work: recordings, photographs and video recordings. The archive should be enriched also with the materials held in the custody of the Cluj and Bucharest Institutes of Folklore.

In Maramures there are also institutions which at a certain moment gathered significant collections: The Ethnographic and Folk Art Museum of Baia Mare, The Faculty of Letters of North University, The Ethnographic Museum of Sighet and, evidently, The County Centre for the Promotion and Preservation of Traditional culture in Maramures (the former House of Popular Creation).

The first step in the foundation of the Folklore Archive of Maramures should be the **unification of the existing funds**. After this the archive should be systematized by the realisation of a Typology and of a Corpus of folkloric texts. The third stage would evidently have in view a competent and exhaustive analysis of the themes, motifs, and key-words for the elaboration of the fundamental books of the spirituality of Maramures: Magic, Mythology, Folk tales and legends, Religion, History etc.

If folklore is recognised as a brand, it goes without saying that the Archive gains its recognition. An important starting point in the recuperation of these values should be that the important published folklore collections be declared "patrimonial books".

Memoria Ethnologica

Memoria Ethnologica is the ethnological patrimony and cultural memory review, edited and published by the County Centre for The Preservation and Promotion of the Traditional Culture of Maramures (director Ștefan Mariș). First issue: December 2001. The latest issue of the publication was No.24-25 (July-December 2007), it is accredited by the CNCSIS (code 615) and the members of its editorial board are prestigious scientists from Romania and abroad.

The review is one of the most prestigious publications of this kind in the country, being appreciated by outstanding intellectuals and researchers from many continents.

The premise of the review is “Maramures is the still living ancestral memory of Europe”.

The review publishes collections of folk poetry (carols, lyrical and epic poems, folk sayings, riddles, and proverbs), humorous tales, folk tales, legends, and also studies of ethnography, anthropology, and folklore history, illustrated by photographs with a documentary character, glossaries of regional and archaic terms.

Along the years notable personalities have expressed their appreciation about the exceptional performances of this publication: “I think I am not mistaken when I say that this is an extremely original review, having a subtle personality. Besides the over one thousand pages of the tomes published until now, there are the two force-ideas guiding it: the intensive publication of information concerning the traditional world preserved in many private collections of Maramures and, what metaphorically could be called the ‘homecoming’ of some already classical texts about the traditions from Maramures” (Otilia Hedeșan, 2004). In Alexandru Ștefănescu’s opinion (2002) the review published in Baia Mare is “an encyclopedia in continuous expansion of the Romanian folklore”. Constantin Eretescu (2003) “I dare say that it is one of the most interesting cultural and not only folklore publications I have had the opportunity to read”.

It is incontestably a brand from Maramures that excels in the context of the developments of European multiculturalism, in accord with the cultural policies of modern Europe.

Let us not forget about the activity of the “Ethnologica” publishing house, coordinated by the same institution, having published till now over 15 volumes.

The Repertoire of Traditional Folk Music

As Mihai Pop had observed (1980), the peasants of Maramures have a special word for their songs: “hori” and hence the verb to sing “a hori”. For them, the word from the standard Romanian language “a cânta” means actually to mourn for someone, to lament. Mainly lyrical, the repertoire of traditional music is completed with carols, lullabies, wedding songs, laments, and ballads.

As a rule, the melodic line accompanies the lyrics, but there are also individual instrumental pieces or even for orchestral accompaniment. In this case, there is a particularity to be observed in the folklore of Maramures: the interpretations of instrumental music can attain in certain cases real virtuosity, the sound of the music and the tonality of the words attaining a perfect symbiosis.

Thus, a legend collected at the beginning of the 20th century, on the theme of “the plundered sheepfold” (considered by all the Romanian ethnomusicologists as the oldest Romanian folk-song, about a millennium old) is about a young girl who announces the villagers that thieves have plundered the sheepfold just blowing a horn: “trâmbiță” – a three metre long archaic pastoral musical instrument: “**In the sounds of the horn they could distinguish the following words:** ‘Come, father, come! /our sheep are gone, / stolen by thieves / I’ve been bound by these / come, father, come / our sheep are gone!’” (Collected in Sat Șugatag, in 1923; see T. Papahagi, 1925).

Besides the traditional pastoral musical instruments (horn, shepherd’s pipe or flute), there is the four-stringed fiddle – “cetera” in the local vernacular. This is usually accompanied by what they call “zongoră”, a guitar with two, three or four strings. Recently, they have added also an artisan made, middle size drum (“dobă”), with two heads. The folk music band (“taraf”) has a second fiddle (“contră”) and a small double bass “gordună”.

In the absence of musical instruments, the rhythm is marked by the dancers’ stamping or by clapping, something that makes these contemporary cultural acts similar to the **ancient ritual acts** or even manifest a kind of transcendental character.

“Among the folksongs of Maramures the foremost is, no doubt, the ‘**horea lungă**’ (long song) or leaf song” (M. Pop, 1980). The world famous ethnomusicologist Béla Bartok (1923) mentioned it as found in the historical Land of Maramures. But nowadays it is sung only in the Land of Lăpuș. The melody has no fixed contour and the length of the song depends on the context and on the interpreter’s mood.

Refrains play an important part in the development of both music and lyrics. Repeated several times, at regular intervals, the refrain has the power of transferring to the audience the state of mind contained in the lyrics and underlined by the melodic line. Thus, a special psychological effect is obtained; the words are transformed into **incantations** (rather magical than religious) through which a passage from the profane, lay universe to the sacred (mystic) is achieved.

Thus, we identify in the refrains of certain songs, lullabies, and especially in those of carols, a relationship with the sacred. It is believed that in ancient times incantations and music had a therapeutic function, used in curing different diseases (mainly psychic), as the medical process of recuperation had in view both body and mind.

Choreography

Almost ritual in the architecture of its steps, the naturalness of gesture and the transfigured mimicry of the interpreters, “the dance from Maramures, compared to other dances in the country, is characterized by extremely rich and varied rhythms and is unique as concerns the quality of its musicality (...). The natural beauty of the irregular matrix of the musical phrases is set into value by the combinations of rhythms with different values, nuanced stampings and small steps, with counterpoint accents and syncopated at the pitch beat of the music. The stamped rhythm is pregnant in all the dances from Maramures.”

The dance specific to lads is “Bărbătescul” (or Feciorescul). The pair dance is called “Învârtita” (De-nvârtit) – because while the young man continues his stamping, the girls walk (around him) with small steps, to the right or to the left. A dance specific for the zone is: “The dance of Vili”, a men’s dance coming from the haiduc’s tradition.

The “Marmația” Winter Festival of Folk Customs and Traditions

Since 1969, in Sighetu Marmației municipality, the former administrative capital of Maramures, a fabulous festival of folk customs and traditions takes place each winter. It is quite unique through its originality and the authenticity of the costumes and folk productions presented. The developments of the festival are neither the result of a scenario nor of being staged by the organizers who offer only the setting and just let things happen.

Preceded by a great number of other events, such as concerts of old carols, art shows, book launchings, the Festival begins with the reception of the villagers from Vadu Izei with the “Little Plough”. This is followed by the parade of those coming from the other villages of Maramures with their carols, masked dances, and the presentation of other specific winter customs. The devils and masked characters, the decorated carts and the riders impress the lookers-on. The first day ends in a gala show.

From its very first editions, the festival became nationwide known, traditions from other ancient regions of Romania – Moldova, Bucovina, Banat, Oltenia, Dobrogea – have been presented as well, and participants from Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and other countries have lately joined the festival bringing their traditions.

Thus, a primarily local brand has become, for the first time, a **Euro-regional brand**, due to the promotion of multiculturalism.

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History. It must not be forgotten that the festival had its beginnings under the communist regime. Its first stage had been the organizing of a concert of carols housed by the Baia Mare Drama Theatre (on the 28th of December 1968), with the members of the County Bureau of the party and of the Popular Council being present. In its second stage, the festival moved to Sighet, under a name meant to avert the authorities’ suspicions: “The festival of the **secular** winter folk customs and traditions”. On the 28th of December 1969, a concert of carols was given in the Studio Hall at Sighet. The following day, allegorical carts and groups of carollers paraded in the streets. Artist Alexandru Șainelic had prepared the decoration of the allegorical carts and of the town, while Traian Hrișcă had made 48 canvas paintings of masks to decorate the town. After the third edition, the organizers abandoned the name of “secular customs”, and since 2003, it has been included, via the International Organization of Folklore (I.O.V.) affiliated to the UNESCO, among the International Festivals.

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Since December 1970, **the brand** has had also a component with scientific character, hosting the **Session of scientific papers and reports on the theme of folklore**, held on the second day of the festival. The mentor of this manifestation is Dr. Mihai Dăncuș, director of the Museum of Maramures. Along the years, a great number of researches, both Romanian and from abroad, have presented papers; among them: Jean Cuisenier, Claude Karnooh, Gail Kligman, Miya Kosei, Marie Gabrielle Leblanck, Patrick and Christine Weisbecher, Pierre Dutron, Joel Marrant, Mihai Dimiu, Constantin Eretescu, Sanda Golopenția, Aurora-Preju Liiceanu, Nicolae Dunăre, Liviu Sofonea, Dumitru Pop, Mihai Pop a. s. o.

Some of the over four hundred papers have been included in the series of *Acta Musei Maramoresiensis* (Vol. I – 2002), an academic publication, being itself a **brand**.

“Tânjaua de pe Mara”

One of the oldest folk customs from Maramures preserved up to our days is known as “Tânjaua de pe Mara” (“The Yoke on the Mara”). It is celebrated in the villages of Hoteni, Hârnicești and Sat Șugătag on St. George’s Day (the 23rd of April) or, more recently, around May Day. In its essence it is meant to honour the peasant who was the first to plough his land, actually the most hardworking man in the village.

An incursion into the ancestral tradition of the Romanian people would show that certain elements of the custom correspond to the ancient New Year (spring) practices, remarkable not because of their grandeur or opulence, but for containing the necessary gestures specific to the agrarian and pastoral traditions to which these ceremonial elements belong: “It is more than probable that the first furrow made by the plough at the old New Year was a real one, the first made that year in the field where the seeds were to be sown, followed by other furrows, made by the ploughs of all the members of the community, till the ploughing and sowing were completed” (Dumitru Pop, 1982).

Searching for Roman vestiges in the autochthonous folklore, Dem. G. Teodorescu (1885) had found the legend according to which **Emperor Trajan** reserved himself the honour of starting the agricultural works in spring by drawing himself a furrow in a field close to Rome.

There is no doubt that such customs, more or less influenced by the practices of the Romans, were specific to other Indo-European peoples as well, and certainly to the population living on the territory of our country.

But the Land of Maramures, in comparison with other ethno-folkloric zones in Romania, has the privilege of having preserved the custom in a less altered form. The first ploughman in the village is celebrated as if he were an emperor, being carried in triumph along the lanes down to the river where the elders of the village utter formulas meant to influence the fertility of their lands and to persuade the Sun to make the fields yield.

It is true that by now the stages of the ceremonial have acquired a certain tendency towards the spectacular, so as to please the numerous and heterogeneous lookers-on. Nevertheless, beyond nowadays colourful developments, one has seen the original ritual that had been sober and without any artifice and bearing multiple significances.

There is a similar custom still alive in Șurdești (Land of Chioar), called “Udătoriul” (“dipping”), dedicated similarly to “the first ploughman”, the one who has opened up the field and started the agrarian cycle of the year.

Though in other parts of the country this agrarian fertility rite was abandoned in practice, it has been preserved in poetry and in the winter custom of the “Little Plough”, a kind of New Year’s “folk drama” or pageant.

Whether the Hoteni (or Șurdești) celebration is a live relic of autochthonous traditions or was brought by the Roman legions when they colonized Dacia, there is no doubt it belongs to the ancient Indo-European culture.

We have the privilege to discover a millenary rite that is part of the **active fund** of traditions in Maramures and it has to be presented under this particular perspective to those who come from other parts of the world. Most probably not even the descendants of the ancient Romans have preserved it in its country of origin (Italy); for if the custom had been preserved in one way or another it is only sure that they would have found a way to include it their offers for tourists.

We have got this chance and we advertise it (in folders or on sites) as a simple colourful event, a local carnival ending in a picnic.

“Nopti de Sânziene” Midsummer Night’s Festival (Borșa)

If Borșa, situated in the extreme eastern part of the county, is better known for tourists as “little Switzerland”, being an ideal place for a winter ski resort (even on Olympic level!), few people know that, at the summer solstice, it hosts a festival called “Nopti de Sânziene” (Midsummer Nights). The festival has been happening for over two decades by now and it is superimposed on an ancient custom.

Each year, on the night of the 24th of June, lads and children, and also maids whirl around their heads burning torches. The torches are made some days before, out of dry straw split into four or eight in the middle of which they put resin collected from spruce and fir trees. In order to light them faster, they add wood splinters and tow. (Afterwards, the torches will be put on vegetable beds or between the rows with potatoes to protect them from pests.) It is also then that the girls pick “sânziene” (ladies’ bedstraw) flowers, and during the night, in hidden places, they bathe naked in the waters of Repedea, Vișeu or Tișlea. The festival “**Nopti de Sânziene**” is held in the town and begins with a promenade, a presentation the folk costumes, after which the folk assemblies present their performances on an outdoor stage.

In the past, the feast was celebrated in other Maramures communities as well, e. g. in the villages of Vișeu, Săcel and Budești.

In the traditional society the blooming of the “sânziene” marked the beginning of the summer agricultural works, the cutting of hay etc. Groups of children and lads used to climb on the hills with torches, gathered in circles, lit their torches and whirled them round their heads in the direction of the Sun’s rotation.

During the same night, they used to make wreaths of “sânziene” (Lat. Galium verum, Rubiaceae family) and throw them on the roof, one for each family member. According to tradition that night the wind is stronger. Those whose wreath did not fall down could expect to have a beautiful life. It is also said that “the same night, the beautiful fairy **Zâna Sânziana** bathes in the waters of Vișeu and then puts on a long white shirt made of the flowers whose name she bears”.

According to folk tradition, **Sânziana** is a mythical character, identified with the Moon, the Sun’s sister, or with a fairy of flowers. On an ancestral cultural level she used to be the goddess of love and of flowers.

As concerns the etymology of the name, researchers have two theories: the noun Sânzeana comes from Sancta Zea (the feminine of Zeus), like “Sângeorz” from the Latin Sanctus Georgius (“Saint George”); in the same way the name of the goddess Diana (Sancta Diana) has become in Romanian Ileana or Diana (Ileana Sânziana). There is a third hypothesis according to which the two mythological figures – Ileana for the Geats and Diana for the Romans – have been superimposed, having the same function. Thus, the same divinity, with different names in two different cultures, had been venerated under both names.

Fact is that this custom, admirably preserved in the space of Maramures, has to be related to the Sun cults and to the Indo-European solar myths, in which the sun used to be the principal divinity of the pantheon. It is well-known that the Mythraic and the Sol Invictus cults had been widely spread on the territory of Roman Dacia.

Dragoș of Bedeu and the Hunting of the Wisent

The **wisent head** has been on **the coat of arms and the seal** of the Lands of Maramures and Moldova (beginning with the 14th century), and it is nowadays on the coat of arms of the Republic of Moldova (since 1990), and also on that of the post-December '89 Romania.

The story of this heraldic insignia begins in the legendary land of Maramures, in the time when the kings of Hungary were trying to introduce the tenets of their administration and feudal politics in this “surrounded by royal garrisons” but still independent “country”.

In this context, in 1352-53, a Transylvanian army enters Moldova, and with the support of the local population, drives the Tartars over the Dniester, in Crimea. A small army of fighters from Maramures, under the leadership of Dragoș from Bedeu, took also part in the expedition. As a reward for his courage, the king of Hungary awarded him the title of voievode and royal deputy in Moldova, aiming thus to defend the eastern side of the Carpathians from the Tartars' attacks. Dragoș installed his seat at Baia. These are the historically attested facts.

Still, the “official founding” of the principality of Moldova is, according to the chroniclers' historiography, connected with a legendary event: the hunting of the wisent (aurox) by a Romanian from Maramures, Dragoș, who then became the first voievode of Moldavia.

In all the chronicles, up to that by Grigore Ureche, the story is roughly the same: “And among them, there was a wise and valiant man by the name of Dragoș, and he hath started together with his merry men to hunt the wild beast and, at the feet of those tall mountains they found the traces of a wisent...And they passed the mountains and caught up with the wisent on the banks of a river, under a willow tree, and they killed it and feasted on their hunt. And Dragoș set up his seat on the waters of Moldova at first, and then, he settled in the place called Baia, and then in other places...And he made a royal seal for all the country with a wisent head on it. And Dragoș hath reigned for two years.”

Historian Alexandru Filipașcu (1940) stated that the pretext of the wisent hunt “is nothing but a creation of folk fantasy, impressed by the presence of the fierce animal in the forests of Maramures”. On the other hand, Mircea Eliade (1970) considered that “the legend of Dragoș represents only one of the multiple variants on the theme of the **ritual hunt**”, of meridional origin and with roots in prehistory. But the ritual hunt of the wisent has to be considered as purely autochthonous for the reason that for the Dacians this animal had a “religious” prestige.

According to unconfirmed information, the last wisent was shot in 1852. Nevertheless, folk literature and the numerous place names from the area have preserved in the collective memory the remembrance of that memorable hunt and the character of the participants in it. The Wisent Head has been a “registered trademark” and a state insignia for hundreds of years. And Dragoș remains the hero who had generated this brand, a prince from Maramures, the first voievode of Moldova, his personality being overshadowed only by his contemporary – Voievode Bogdan of Cuhea.

Bogdan of Cuhea, the Founder of Moldova

Like the majority of the European countries, the modern Romanian state was wrought through the unification of the historical provinces inhabited by Romanians. The merit of the public and military foundation of the principality of Moldova belongs to Bogdan of Cuhea from Maramures, in the middle of the 14th century.

According to his exploits recorded in the chronicles of his time, he detached himself from among all the other leaders and lords more preoccupied with defending their own properties and privileges in front of the expansionist tendencies of the Hungarian kings.

Bogdan came from a family that had owned twenty two villages on the upper course of the Iza (between Strâmtura and Bârsana), and also on the valley of the Vișeu river, and he had a fortified official residence at Cuhea.

At a certain moment, during the reign of Charles Robert d'Anjou (1308-1342) Bogdan had been proclaimed **voievode of the entire Maramures**. In this interval he succeeded to maintain the autonomy of the country as a principality; but at the beginning of the reign of Louis d'Anjou I (1342-1382), the royal house succeeded to banish Bogdan (probably in 1343). There are two hypotheses concerning the reasons of this political decision: either a conflict with the Hungarian noble Ioan, lord of the stronghold Visc, and representative of the king of Maramures, or a decision of the former king Charles Robert to impose a taxation (18 denari) for each "bondsmen's gate", that could have resulted in an "ample movement of the peasants from Maramures" under the leadership of Bogdan, in defence of their former rights.

Almost two centuries of skirmishes followed, but in spite of the Hungarian crown's accusation of "infidelity", they did not dare to confiscate Bogdan's properties or to take other measures, either legal or military, against him, due to the notoriety he enjoyed in the communities of Maramures.

After the military expedition commanded by the king of Hungary against the Tartars, Dragoș of Bedeu, the Founder, became voievode of Moldova; but both he and Sas, his son and heir to the throne, militated for the instalment of the feudal relations of subjection to the Hungarian crown.

In 1358 (or 1359), voievode Sas died and king Louis was too busy with his campaign against Dusan of Serbia and had no time to take care of a "faithful" succession to the throne of Moldova, though the Romanian territory on the eastern side of the Carpathians was a priority to the Hungarian royal house that was dreaming of an Angevine empire from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic.

The imperial dream was shattered by Bogdan who, in 1359, started from his residence in Cuhea, together with a number of warriors and crossed over the Prislop-Borșa pass to Moldova where drove away from the throne the heirs of Dragoș.

It is believed that Bogdan's enterprise would not have been successful had he not used the surprise factor and the favourable moment, and if he had not had faithful and well-trained soldiers to whom the local population, dissatisfied by Hungary's tendencies to sovereignty, adhered.

During the six years of his reign, Bogdan's main concern was to repel King Louis' attempts to take over the power in Moldavia. In 1859, Moldova will unite with Muntenia and in 1918, with Transylvania, giving birth to the modern Romanian state.

Haiduc Grigore Pinteă "the Brave"

In the 17th century Transylvania, under emperor Leopold I of Austria, the Habsburg rule in this Romanian province had given rise to an ample movement of resistance of the population and also of the nobility. On this background, Rakoczi II started a "national liberation movement" relying both on the support of the bondsmen and on the help promised by the French king (Louis XVI) and the tsar of Russia (Peter the Great).

In the north-west of Transylvania (Maramures, Sătmar), the captain in Rakozı's army was Grigore Pinteա (1660-1703), leader of some bands of "haiduci" (outlaws) who for a number of years had supported the local population and were loathed by the Austrian nobility and authorities. That is why at the imperial court in Vienna they spoke with fear and admiration of "Pintyland"- a country where Pinteա was "the fear of the rich and the mercy of the poor".

It results from documents of those times that Grigore Pinteա was an educated man, knowing several foreign languages and military techniques he had learned in the imperial garrison. An able diplomat and negotiator, Pinteա was considered by the historians as "one of the most important Romanians from the 17th century" (N. Densușianu, 1883).

In the spring of 1703, many towns from the north of Transylvania (Zalău Sătmar, Bistrița, Dej, Sighet) had fallen into the hands of the rebels. Pinteա's army had to conquer the stronghold Baia Mare. During August the town had been under siege. After an ambush, Pinteա was mortally wounded in front of the town's southern gate.

The years have passed, but 20th century ethnologists who had studied the traditional culture from this region were surprised by the richness of the folkloric productions whose characters were either Pinteա or his men. The area on which these "documents" had spread covered not only Maramures but also other counties.

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"Pinteա was a great and brave man. He had a wise horse. Then, the emperor's men wanted to catch him. But he remained on horseback, there up, on a rock of the mountain Gutăi, and you can see even now in the stone the track made by the horse where he stood. Then, all of a sudden, the horse took off from the mountain with Pinteա on his back, flew to the Stone peak of Șugatag; from there as fast as thought he flew to the Stone of Săpânța. None such valiant man had ever been." (Dumitru Lupu Feier, 72 years, Giulești, 1924)

Connected to this testimony and the strategy used by Pinteա's "haiducs" (rapid attacks and rapid withdrawals at distances of tens of kilometres), another legend has circulated, about a glider Pinteա had built in order to escape from the Austrian soldiers.

The "Pinteա Viteazul" brand has been enriched by the instalment of a tomb on the southern side of mountain Gutăi, close to the highway connecting Baia Mare to Sighetu Marmăției. An inn was built on the pass, bearing the name of Pinteա Viteazul. Artist Geza Vida had consecrated him a study and sculptor Ioan Marchiș made a bust of the hero. During the '70s, there was a film made in Maramures about him and the wooden church from Budești preserves a chain mail shirt that probably had belonged to the famous "haiduc".

The Art Museum – The Baia Mare Cultural Artistic Centre

The Art Museum – the Baia Mare Cultural Artistic Centre is installed in a massive 18th century building (No. 8, 1 Mai Street). At the first stage of its existence (starting from 1748) there were only the basement and the ground floor. The upper floor was built in the 19th century and the room facing No. 1 Secondary School was added in the middle of the 20th century.

Initially, the destination of the building had been for the Salinary Offices and the salt deposit (in the basement). One hundred years later, it became the seat of a bank, and then, a private house. After the nationalization, it became the seat of the Maramures County Museum (since 1954), and finally its destination has become to house the **art section** of the Museum. Due to the decentralization of this county institution (2007), the **Art Museum – Baia Mare Cultural**

Artistic Centre has become an independent cultural entity, under the patronage of the County Council of Maramures.

The museum collection consists of 3,300 pieces illustrating European art from the 18th to the 20th century, as well as Romanian art. What makes it special in the country and abroad are the over 250 artworks created from 1896 to the present, bearing the signature of 90 artists considered as belonging to the Baia Mare Artistic Centre.

A complex cultural phenomenon, unique for an extended Euro-regional area, the Baia Mare Artistic Centre has had (according to a chronology proposed by Tiberiu Alexa, 1993), three distinct periods: the stage of its affirmation (1896-1918), the stage of its development (1919-1950), and the stage of diversification (1950- the beginning of the 21st century). These stages are marked by some important moments: “the Hollosy years”, the neo-modernist revolt between 1906-1914, the “Strâmbu years” (1919-1929), the Mikola–Ziffer–Gh. Manu polemics (1929-1931), the crises in the forties, and the foundation of the Society of Plastic Artists from Baia Mare (1937), a. s. o.

Hollosi Simon was born on the 2nd of February 1857, at Sighet, in a rich Armenian family. After graduating the secondary school in his native town, he studied fine arts in Budapest and Munich. In 1896, together with Ferency Karoly, Reti Istvan, and Thorma Janos, they founded **a private painting school** in Baia Mare. This would soon become an **artistic Colony**, besides the other around 40 colonies extant in the Europe of the 19th century: at Barbizon and Pont-Aven (France), at St. Ives (England), Lare (Holland), Skagen (Denmark), Darmstadt (Germany), Szolnok (Hungary) etc.

The artistic effervescence of those times favoured the honourable for Baia Mare association with the name “a town of painters”. Along a century, time in which the artistic activity developed continuously in this space, 3,000 artists (painters, sculptors, engravers, black-and white artists, ceramicists, designers) originating from Central and Eastern Europe had worked (for short periods or permanently) in the Colony.

The appearance of institutional forms of organisation of the fine art producers (the Society of the Painters from Baia Mare – 1911, the Society of Plastic Artists from Baia Mare – 1937, and, later on, the Baia Mare subsidiary of the Union of Plastic Artists from Romania, and respectively the Art Museum) gave a new dimension to the phenomenon and a new name: the Baia Mare Artistic Centre.

In comparison with the European values, this centre is already a **consecrated brand**, some of its products being well sold at auctions and extremely well appreciated in the continental circuit of exhibitions. “The cultural significances and market value of this historical and contemporaneous patrimony make of the art works created in Baia Mare most competitive **products for export**”.

An elevated event, meant to set its mark on the evolution of the Baia Mare Artistic Centre and to honour the guild of contemporary artists, takes place each year on the 5th of May – it is the Day of the Plastic Artist.

The Florean Contemporary Art Museum

In a leafy forest from Cernești, on the road that leads to the Land of Lăpuș, spreading over a surface of 40 hectares, there is an original park of monumental sculptures. Fluid extensions from tens of creation workshops have their meeting point in “Poiana Soarelui” (Sun Clearing). Huge blocks of stone, limestone and marble, their superfluous parts being cut off in

order that they carried ideas and messages to the future. These artworks have already won an international prestige and have become objectives of cultural tourism.

The Florean Museum is the result of the private initiative of a businessman, Victor Florean, to which artist (and manager) Mircea Bochiş added his monumental vision. The collection of the Florean Museum numbers at present 10,000 contemporary artworks from all over the world.

Each year, the Florean Museum organizes three prestigious manifestations: the “Cărbunari” sculpture camp, the International Salon of Small Engraving and Mail-art, and The International Festival of Experimental Film.

The first edition of the camp – intended to be a “symposium of marble sculpture” – was held in 1998. It functions according to the principle of having a contest that awards five creation prizes which would permit the selected artists to continue some of their experimental work. The organizers offer the artists all the necessary material resources and at the end of the camp the work of art is installed in the sculpture park of the museum. Besides this, each artist donates a piece of small sculpture to the museum collection. The host of the opening show ceremonies is the Bucharest art critic Pavel Şuşară.

“All the works are conceived and executed as outdoor sculptures, integrated in the landscape, their size being monumental, and the permanent material – stone: whether they are made of marble, granite or limestone, the technique is imposed by the nature of the material, such as cutting, chiselling, assembling, while their conception regards strictly all the above mentioned characteristics. (...) Conceived from the beginning as a long time project, organised strictly as an investment with an undetermined end, subjected to a much more ample cultural and managerial development, this symposium has taken into consideration, from the very moment of its birth, a flow of evolution, like a river course...” (Pavel Şuşară, 2008).

It is significant that the ninth edition (2007) of the international symposium of small engraving organised by the Florean Museum took place in Sibiu, as one of the events which marked for this location the status of European cultural capital. The exhibits numbered a total of almost 1,200 works of art belonging to about 300 artists coming from Europe, Africa, the Far East, the Middle East, and South America.

An event with a European and international character, the Salon “has become a landmark for the artistic manifestations in Romania” and it “represents a cultural construction and a model of managerial competence, as well as a rapid and efficient means of enriching and diversifying the patrimony” (Pavel Şuşară, 2008).

The International Festival of Experimental Film (first edition in 2004) is seen as the Florean Museum’s “enfant terrible”. At its fourth edition, 113 art films, covering all the geographical zones of the planet, were shown. “The marathon projection lasted for over ten hours, and brought into the foreground two components defining the fundamental nature and language of the experimental film: first, self-reflexivity, i.e. the return of the language upon itself, the instrumentation of the image as aim and not as medium, and secondly, the ethical vocation and the moral engagement, the exploration of existence and the sanctioning of history” (P. Şuşară, 2008).

Three events (a camp, a salon, and a festival), two names (Victor Florean and Mircea Bochiş), one institution: the Florean Museum. It is one of the private initiatives from the post-Decembrist Romania that has proved to be viable, effervescent, and of a high artistic standard.

Dramatic Art

Before the ancient Greeks would organize their sumptuous performances in the amphitheatres of Athens, even before the ancient Romans would manifest their interpretative talents at the Saturnalias (the feast of their sun-worship), the Geto-Dacian tribes from the Carpathians had their mini-dramatic performances during which zoomorphic masks were worn. The characters embodied sheep, stags, bears, and in the first act of the performance, with a violent character, the representative of the animal kingdom being hunted/sacrificed/killed, in the second act, to the spectators' satisfaction, it came back to life, the way the entire nature is reborn in spring. This kind of popular drama degenerated later on into burlesque forms of carnival, with the transfer to the festivities on the occasion of the New Year, during the winter season.

In Baia Mare, the first (semi-professional) theatre company was founded in 1796, under the directorship of Nagy Janos. A century later, more precisely on the 30th of December 1952, they set up a **State Theatre** (later called "Dramatic" and at present "Municipal"), first installed in the hall of the former "Popular" movie. The first night show was "The Acacia Grove" by Al. Korneiciuk, directed by Octavian Rappaport. Since then, over 350 premieres have been presented and thousands of other performances.

It is significant that the great actor and theatre director **Liviu Ciulei** (who in 1965 received the Cannes Festival award for his directing "The Forest of the Hanged") had staged two plays at the Baia Mare theatre: "Today's a Holiday" and "The Sleep of Reason" both by Antonio Buero Vallejo.

Starting with the 2005/2006 theatre season, The Baia Mare Municipal theatre has become the organizer of the prestigious "**Atelier**" **International Theatre Festival** (director Radu Macrinici). The previous 13 editions of the festival had been held in Sf. Gheorghe and Sighișoara. As an unconventional theatrical event, the performances take place on the stage, in the Studio hall, in the theatre foyer, in pubs, and in town squares. The festival intends to signal the latest tendencies in dramaturgy, directing, stage-design, choreography, stage music, and the art of acting.

The "**Atelier**" International Theatre **Festival is a cultural brand** in its very conception, as during the seven days of its developments, there are also discussion, workshops, meetings with the public, book launchings, concerts etc. In other words, it is a complex manifestation meant to involve the members of the community in the creative act of performance, to give them back their "quality" of "leading actors" on the dynamic stage of the 21st century. Thanks to the messages conveyed by the participating companies, there is an original **intercultural dialogue**; the new acquisitions, as a result of this dialogue, will be taken later on to different continents. The spectators also take over those elements which resonate with their inherited traditions, their education, and personal aspirations. This osmosis will generate later on attitudes and behaviours of tolerance and bring innovative ideas in domains related to the arts.

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In 1994, on the initiative of professor Nicolae Weiss (the present artistic director of the Baia Mare Municipal Theatre) a francophone high-school theatre company, "Dramatis Personae", was founded at the national college "Mihai Eminescu" from Baia Mare. Since then, the company of high-school students from Baia Mare has presented performances at forty international drama festivals in Europe, Africa and North America, in most of these as representative of Romania.

The company was awarded with the Great Prize at the Arad Festival (1996, 1997, 2000), in Brno, the Czech Republic (1999), in Cagliari, Italy (2005). It was the only non-professional

company invited to Paris on the occasion of the World Congress of Francophony, in June, 1998. It is annually invited by the French Embassy in Romania to give performances at the French Institute.

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Under the patronage of the Drama Theatre, on the 1st of June 1956, the **Baia Mare Puppet Theatre** was founded, its initiator being Mircea Crişan. The inaugural show (“The House on the Plain”, director – Mihai Crişan, stage design Ella Conovici) was on the 30th of December 1956, on the stage of the Dramatic Theatre, where it continued its activity till 1961, when it moved to its new location, No.3, Dacia Street. A devastating fire severely damaged the building in 1982, but two years later, the performances would move back to the same building. In October 1995, the puppet section of the Dramatic theatre has become an independent institution under the directorship of Aurel Cucu (university lecturer). The repertoire includes adaptations of great authors’ work, both from world (Grimm Brothers, Pancio Manov, John Lawson etc.) and national literature (Ion Creangă, Petre Dulfu, Victor Eftimiu).

The prestige of the Baia Mare puppeteers is proved by the numerous distinctions got at national and international festivals: Prize for the best show (at the Festival of Puppet Theatres, Constanţa, 1993, with “The she-goat and her three kids”, director Aristotel Apostol); the same show gets the 1st Prize at The International Festival of Puppet and Marionette Theatres (Parma, Italy, 1978) and 1st Prize in Paris, France, in 1980. The play entitled “Little Soul” (director Kovacs Ildiko, stage design Ida Grumaz) received two prizes for interpretation and the prize for the best performance of the International Festival of Puppet Theatres in Esperanto (Norway, 1978), and the play “Five Wonderful Siblings” got the prize for Best performance and the prize for promoting the traditional Chinese technique of shadow theatre (Zagreb, Yugoslavia, 1980).

In Baia Mare there is also a company whose members (amateurs) give performances in Hungarian: the “Marton Lendvay” theatre company.

The Historical Centre of Baia Mare

Vestiges of pre-historical settlements (dating from the age of unpolished stone and the bronze ages) have been discovered around the town Baia Mare. During the pre-Roman period some occupations seem to have developed. In the beginning a mining camp or colony, the settlement had gradually become a village with a sedentary population whose main occupation was the exploitation of minerals.

A document dating from 1347 allowed the town, “according to the old customs, to extend starting from the Săsar Mine within a radius of three miles (about 5 kilometres) over all the lands and royal bridges”. The town was fortified with stone walls and bastions (around 1470), and lasting edifices and castles were built in the interior. The walls delimited an approximately circular, irregular zone, divided initially into five sectors, around the Central Circus (Circulus fori) – with 32 buildings in 1790.

Neither the configuration of the town, nor the number of the inhabitants had suffered great changes up to the middle of the 20th century. In 1948, the town became the county seat and the budgetary investments favoured its horizontal extension (23,000 hectares at present) and have given rise to a demographic explosion (148,000 inhabitants).

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In 1993, the Baia Mare municipality launched an ample project for the rehabilitation of the Old Centre (Piața Libertății). The execution of the project started in 2003 and was finished in 2004.

The Old Centre has an architectural patrimonial complex declared historical monument constituted of 20 medieval buildings in gothic style. The division of the terrains around the square is similar to the configuration of the Central European towns from the same historical period (14th and 15th century).

One of the buildings included in the project was the former “Vulturul Negru” (Black Eagle) inn, built before 1790, which has become the “Millennium III Business Centre“. In 1920, the former inn became the seat of the town-hall; between 1950 and 1999 the building housed the Court and the Land Registry Office. One of the most “pretentious” and well-known buildings in the town is the “Casa Lendvay” (Lendvay House), the name being consecrated in 1881, when a commemorative plaque dedicated to the memory of actor Marton Lendvay was placed on it. Number 18 is “Casa Elisabeta” built by Prince Iancu de Hunedoara. The buildings housing the Popular Art School and the Medieval Restaurant date from the 18th century. The house which had belonged to the Order of the Minori Monks (at No.6, Piața Libertății) was built in the same period.

But the most “spectacular” part of the rehabilitation project focused on the public space (M4 – Business Plaza), closing the access of vehicles to the eastern zone of the square and leaving it for the pedestrians. The square has thus become an open air space for exhibitions, dominated by restaurant terraces and an artesian well – an ideal place for promenade.

If we could go back in time only a century ago, the square would show an idyllic image: Sunday, after the mass, ladies with frilly umbrellas, gentlemen wearing hats, and couples of lovers would be strolling. In the centre of the square: the local brass band. In the afternoon, the rich men retired to the Casino. The owners of the local manufactures relaxed at the Club.

Turnul lui Ștefan (Ștefan’s Tower)

The most representative building in the municipality on the banks of the river Săsar is the bell tower of Saint Ștefan’s church, situated on Crișan and 1 Mai streets, close to Piața Libertății (Liberty Square) and Piața Centrală (Circulus fori) in the old town.

The first documentary attestation of a catholic church located here dates from 1347, but it was officially inaugurated only in 1387. The tower, built of massive stone was raised in the honour of Prince Iancu de Hunedoara in order to mark the victory against the Ottomans at Ialomița (1442). The construction of the tower had begun in 1446, but it was finished only in 1468, under the reign of Matei Corvin.

Being several times damaged by lightning and fires, the two buildings had suffered many capital repairs but, in 1763, only the tower was rebuilt. This is when the lookout was built on its top.

The entrance to the tower is through the southern door. A spiral stone staircase leads up to the first floor. From there the access is by climbing the wooden stairs. The height of the building is about 50 meters, and from the lookout one can enjoy an interesting panorama of the whole town.

According to those who had seen it, there are many similarities of this old tower from Baia Mare and the tower of the old City Hall in Prague. Others compare it to the Fire Watch Tower

in Bucharest, but in this latter case the similarity consists only in their function: to watch over the city and prevent fires. In Moldova, at Piatra Neamț, there is a building bearing the name of “Turnul lui Ștefan cel Mare” (The tower of Stephen the Great). But in that case it is a bell tower (of St. Ioan church), which had belonged to the Princely Court; it was raised in 1491, during the reign of Ștefan cel Mare (1457-1504).

Returning to “Turnul lui Ștefan” from Baia Mare, we should add that the old mechanical clock from the 17th century has been replaced by an electronic one.

A more recent action for the rehabilitation of the building and the consolidation of its walls started in 2007, the costs of the repairs being supported by the Ministry of Culture.

The great edifice is not only an important historical objective; it became a cultural landmark at the beginning of the ‘90s, when (an initiative of actor Paul Antoniu) the tower was the place from where poems were recited periodically, a manifestation they called “Poetry from the Tower”.

Members of the Baia Mare painting school as well as other well-known artists have been fascinated by the silhouette of this old tower with a clock and a veranda on its upper part, and immortalised it from different angles in memorable works of art.

The Historical Centre of Sighetu Marmăției

Former residence of the voievodes of Maramures, **prefectural capital**, Sighet was built around a **fortified settlement**, dating from the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. It is considered to have been the centre of a group of settlements situated on the Tisa river valley, at its confluence with Iza, and it is connected with the exploitation of the salt mines from the zone of Maramures. Till the 14th century it had served only “as a gathering place and for fairs”. Its first documentary attestation dates from 1346, being recorded as Zyget. Nevertheless, in many documents it appears as “Marmăția”.

The majority of the buildings had been built before the first decades of the 20th century, to serve as seats of the administrative institutions of the regional prefecture.

The building of the **former prefecture of the historical Maramures** was raised in the year 1690-91. The architecture is a combination of baroque and eclectic elements. After the Sighet prefecture had been dissolved in 1948, the edifice became the seat of an industrial secondary school. Later on, due to a restoration project, both the structure of the building and its destination were changed, and it has become a commercial complex.

The **Museum of Maramures** occupies another building from the historical centre of Sighet. Initially it had been a catholic convent (dated 1730-1775) and it had also housed a piarist school. The baroque style is evident.

The house with caryatides was built in an eclectic style in 1890. At present, on its ground floor, there is one of the Sighet bookshops.

The building which at its first destination had been the **Comitatens Tribunal** (1893-1895), during World War II was used as a hospital. Since 1948, it has become the seat of the municipal town-hall. Its architectural style has Renaissance and Classical elements. The entrance gate is protected by a balcony supported by four Doric columns continued each in a stone urn.

The building of **No. 2 Secondary School** (1902) “is one of the purest secession style houses in Sighet. It has a remarkable attic with crenelations and the floral decorations are made of green burnt ceramic.”

Situated at the crossing of the Iuliu Maniu and Mihai Viteazul streets, the former seat of the **National Bank of Romania** (1911) has an extremely original 45° angle belevelling of the corner. The carved entrance door, the forged iron fence closing in the yard, and also the numerous decorations (garlands, volutes), all these make of it one of the most beautiful buildings in the town.

The ASTRA Cultural Palace was built in 1913, at the initiative of the Association for the Culture of the Romanian People from Maramures. There was a restaurant on the ground floor, on the first floor – a casino and on the second floor – the seat of the Museum. At present, it is a real culture palace with the Culture House, the People’s Art School and the “Laurențiu Ulici” Library housed in it.

The centre of Sighet is a valuable architectural reserve, specific to the capital of Transylvania in the 19th century. Behind nowadays dusty facades one can easily guess the splendour and brilliance of the past. It had never been a cosmopolitan borough, but, until the second half of the 20th century, Sighet was the only urban locality in the historical Maramures, and this is the reason why, even later, the peasants from the riverside villages used to call it simply “Oraș” (Town).

“Petre Dulfu” County Library

It is only natural to have libraries all over the country, whether they are urban or rural ones. Some of these institutions are simply storing books and readers rarely pass their thresholds. Others are real cultural establishments attracting and stimulating people, and housing different local events. Nevertheless, few libraries fulfil the conditions for attaining the status of “cultural brand”. One of these exceptions is the “Petre Dulfu” County Library of Baia Mare (due to the managerial performances of its director, Teodor Ardelean).

Officially inaugurated in 2003, the library offers a generous space in a modern building. It is organized on three levels, with the following divisions: Lending for adults, Children’s section, Reading room, Periodicals, Special collections, Britannica room, the Arts room, the Multicultural section, Bibliographical services, Multimedia room, and the Titulescu room.

Besides cultural and professional events with a yearly character, the library develops important cultural programmes: Books for Romanians abroad – in November 2001, a “Maramures” subsidiary has been opened in Chișinău (Republic of Moldova), and in 2005 an identical subsidiary was set up in Spain; Books for the golden age (in 2001 they opened a subsidiary “Day centre for aged people” in Baia Mare); Books for the libraries of the new village centres; Writers from Maramures and their books in the public libraries of Maramures; Partnerships with other cultural or educational institutions from the county.

On the 17th of May 2004, the library opened its “Ludoteca” (in the section for children), and on the 9th of November 2004, a section of patents, called “Brevetoteca”, a novelty for the public libraries in Romania.

It is fact that since 2003, the most important occasional or annual events from the county of Maramures (such as book launchings, first shows, conferences, debates, scientific sessions, meetings of the local writers association etc.) have moved to the “Petre Dulfu” County

Library. In the meantime, the library's book fund has been enriched and the number of readers (pupils, students, researchers, specialists from various domains) has substantially increased each year, for many of them the library becoming their "third home".

Teodor Ardelean, director of the institution: "Public libraries have lately gained a well-deserved place of honour in the city. It is a sign of good omen for our civil society and it is also a moral reward for all the efforts made by the guild of librarians to achieve this. Consequently, a new target has been set: the assuming on a worldwide scale as a watchword of public libraries '**The library – your third home**', referring to the relation of libraries with the communities they serve and whose financial support sustains their activity.

In other words, people's first home is the one where they live, the second home being where they study or work, and thus, *the third home* would be the place where they spend the remaining time, most of which could be in a library room, reading a book borrowed from there or accessing information from a modern database.

The simple citizens, the taxpayers, should consider the library not only with admiration and, even if they do not attend it, they ought to be determined to accept it as an essential, necessary and useful institution, a *sine qua non* factor for the social life of the community, an element of prestige for the area where they live."

The Mineralogy Museum Baia Mare

The Baia Mare Depression is situated in the contact zone between the Someșana Platform and the Oriental Carpathians. By the end of the Pliocene, this region was part of a marine basin. During the Neocene, there was an intense volcanic activity in the region whose result was the development of a 50 kilometre long mountain range: Văratec, Gutâi – Oaş. The eruptive rocks from these mountain massifs contain ores with non-ferrous metals: lead, zinc, copper, as well as un-combined gold and silver.

The first mining activities in these zones can be traced back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. Baia Mare had developed around these mining settlements.

After 1468, under the reign of Matei Corvin, the coins minted in Baia Mare had **two crossing mining hammers** on them and these will appear also on the town seal and on its coat of arms. This explains why the then official name of the town was Civitas Rivuli Dominarum (City of the Ladies' River – 1329) and Rivulus Dominarum (Ladies' River – 1347). The process of washing the gold from the sand was done mostly by women, the miners' wives. This "image" had inspired foreign visitors to name Baia Mare "City of the Ladies' River". Centuries later it was called "the California of the Middle Ages".

In the second half of the 20th century, mining became unprofitable. Nevertheless, the communist regime considered that it was in the interest of the state to massively subsidize this sector. After the fall of the regime (1989), and on the basis of the preliminary clauses of the adhering to the structures of the European Union, mining reached its final stage and the mining areas entered into conservation.

Nowadays, mining belongs to the history of the zone. What has remained after it is a complicated network of galleries passing through the mountains of the region, an imperial mint that has become the seat of the History and Archaeology Museum of the county, a statue representing a miner (made by Vida Gheza – 1956) and a **Museum of Mineralogy** unique in the world (No.1, Bd. Traian,).

The museum houses an exhibition covering 900 square metres, having over 1,000 samples of minerals, rocks and fossils. The deposit of the museum stores other 15,000 samples. The Mineralogy Museum in Baia Mare is the largest regional museum in Europe, many of its exhibits being considered world-wide rarities with patrimonial value.

The unofficial name of the museum, with cultural connotation and unanimously used, is “**The museum of mine flowers**”. “A *mine flower* is a mineral sample collected from the mine, consisting either of a single mineral or a formation with different minerals, possessing special aesthetic qualities due to the way the crystals have grown together, due to the colour, form, or the exceptional dimensions of the crystals in it, qualities which give a well-individualised character to each sample when compared with the others” (Victor Gorduza, director of the museum).

On the ground floor, the exhibition presents the geological structure of north-western Romania. The most impressive exhibits are shown on the upper floor, the background music added to the beauty of the exhibits creating a poetic atmosphere and the syncretism of image and music makes of the environment a proper place for elevated cultural events. This is where the local subsidiary of the Romanian Writers Union organizes its yearly festivity of awarding the prizes for the “Books of the Year”.

The conception of this institution and its transformation into a genuine cultural foundation is the most inspired way of valuing the defining historical features and characteristics of this region and creating out of them a cultural objective: a national and even European brand.

The Memorial of the Victims of Communism

Romania’s neutrality declared at the beginning of World War II was shattered a year later (1940) under the pressure of both Russia and Germany. Menaced by the spectre of disintegration, Romania, joining the Tripartite Pact, entered the war on the side of Hitler’s Germany with the support of the legionary movement.

After four years of war, on the background of a popular movement, Romania joined the United Nations, an action that brought about the collapse of the Germans’ system of defence in the Balkans.

But after ten years from the end of the military conflict, the Soviet tanks were still in the country. With their support, the political forces of the Left falsified the results of the 1946 elections and installed the communist regime in Romania. From this moment on, a fierce warlike prosecution followed directed against all the opponents of the regime (especially against the elite of the society).

In this context, in Romania, several prisons for criminal offenders had been transformed into extermination camps of “the enemies of the people”. In 1950, the prison from Sighet – built in 1897 – was given the sad name of “The Prison of Ministers”. During a single night (5/6 May) more than 100 dignitaries from all over the country had been imprisoned, some of them condemned to heavy punishments, many of these without a trial. In the autumn of the same year, 50 catholic prelates were also imprisoned in the penitentiary situated at two kilometres from the border of the Soviet Union.

Five years later, following Romanian’s joining of the Geneva Convention, some of these political prisoners were released while others were transferred to penitentiaries in different parts of the country. The consequence was dramatic – over 50 prisoners found their end in the

prison cells from Sighet: Constatin Argetoianu, former Minister of Justice (1918), Minister of Finance (1920), Minister of the Interior (1931); Constantin I. C. Brătianu, President of the National Liberal Party; Dumitru Burileanu, Governor of the National Bank; Ion Cămărășescu, former Minister of the Interior (1921-22); Tit-Liviu Chinezu, Greek-catholic bishop; Grigore Dumitrescu, former Governor of the National Bank; Stan Ghițescu, Vice-president of the Chamber of Deputies, former Minister of Labour; Ion Gruia, former Minister of Justice; Ion Macovei, former Minister of Public Works; Iulia Maniu, one of the most important statesmen from the history of Romania, President of the National-Peasants Party, former Prime Minister etc.

The list of the victims of communism does not end here. Other important personalities of the Romanian and European culture had been condemned to long years of imprisonment in the “Romanian Gulag”: Ion Caraion, sentenced to death for “treason”, the death penalty being commuted for lifelong imprisonment; Paul Goma, writer, Ion Ioanid, sentenced to 20 years of hard labour; Constantin Noica, philosopher and essayist; Nicolae Steinhardt, Doctor of Law, writer; Petre Țuțea, philosopher a. s. o..

The Civic Academy Foundation considered it necessary that, in the bloodstained cells of the Sighet penitentiary, a silent trial ought to take place, in which the jury (i.e. the visitors) should judge and condemn the deeds of the torturers.

In 1995, the Foundation takes over the derelict building of the former prison and turns it into a painful Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance. The organizers collected photographs, documents, letters, newspapers, books, manuals etc. A great number of workshops, symposia, meetings with the victims of communism have taken place, books with the victims’ testimonies, studies and statistics about the anti-communist resistance and its repression have been published.

In the courtyard of the museum there is a sculpture group (made by Aurel Vlad): “The Procession of the Sacrificed” – eighteen human bodies walking towards a wall that shuts out the horizon.

Each year, under the aegis of the Sighet Memorial, a Summer School is organised for 100 high school students who attend lectures given by professors from the country and abroad. This institution will remain an important landmark in the history of Europe, a landmark we never wanted to have. But the generations that follow ought to learn from the mistakes of the past. History is something we inherit and we cannot rewrite the events. Though we can forgive, we cannot forget.

The History and Archaeology Museum

Close to the Old Centre of Baia Mare, on a typically medieval, narrow street, there is a building which, during the Middle Ages, had been the Imperial Mint. Here, the gold mined from the Baia Mare basin was changed into ingots and coins. This is why the town was allowed to build fortifications, its inhabitants were granted privileges, and the town prospered from economic, social and cultural points of view.

At present, the building is the seat of the History and Archaeology Museum of Maramures County and the exhibits illustrate the evolution of the local history beginning with the 14th century. The section of archaeology brings evidence about the existence of human settlements in the area since the early times of pre-history.

In the absence of a systematically elaborated, monographic and objective History of Maramures, referring to all the stages of its development, this institution is the only “**open book**” which reconstitutes (evidently, only fragmentarily) – through palpable material evidences – the dynamic image of bygone times.

The proof of the existence of tumular necropolises allows the extension of one’s vision of the way of life and beliefs of an ancient population. The collection of medieval weapons (the broadsword of the town, thin swords, and chain-mail shirts) tell about medieval knights, heroes and covered by glory armies who battled for ideals and interests. The guild seals (of the silversmiths, goldsmiths, tailors and butchers) reconstitute the economic life and the fascinating treasures allow also the finding of the roads travelled by merchants.

In the precincts of the museum there is a Library of old books with patrimonial value – testimonies of an effervescent cultural life in the previous period. There are also photographs, correspondence, and documents which had belonged to personalities of the local culture (Ion Şugariu, George Pop de Băseşti), facilitating a sentimental contact with the work of these illustrious forerunners.

The management of the institution has launched different programmes and cultural projects with an interactive character in order to educate through the museum (e.g. “The live museum”), and to enhance the interest of the community for the knowledge of history. A series of temporary exhibitions were dedicated to multicultural regionalism or to objectives of universal patrimony (e.g. “The cultural heritage of Maramures under the aegis of the UNESCO”).

Besides these, the museum organises campaigns of archaeological researches in different parts of the county, some of the sites presenting an interest that passes over the country’s borders (such as the tumular necropolis from Lăpuş).

Along the years, the members of the staff have contributed with studies and scientific papers to the periodical “Marmatia” edited by the History Museum.

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In order to configure the component elements of the culture of tomorrow it is necessary to identify the tendencies of nowadays culture, which often are pursuing the trajectories traced centuries (or even millennia) ago. Both museums and libraries are institutions of yesterday’s culture, the preservers of the sacred springs from which the culture of tomorrow will take its energy.

Memorial Houses

There are all over the county of Maramures edifices (simple houses made of wattle and clay, or noble’s palaces) with a sentimental value added to the certificate of patrimony justified by their age or architectural style. They are those constructions blessed by the role they had played as birthplaces or just temporary shelters for Romanians or foreigners who had become (or already were) prestigious personalities of the cultural life in this country or abroad. Those who have passed their threshold humbly confess that the overwhelming presence of the objects which had belonged to those characters (added to history) made them feel something like a tender presence of their ideas.

These former dwelling places have become for some people places for pilgrimage, while for others, an opportunity of meeting with history and culture. As a rule, from an administrative point of view, these houses belong to a museum from the region or to the local communities.

The **Vasile Lucaciu Memorial Museum** (Șișești). Its component parts are the parochial house where the priest Dr. Vasile Lucaciu (1852-1922) used to live, the Church of the Sacred Unification of All the Romanians (1890), with documents and photographs, and a library with 15,000 volumes. Vasile Lucaciu, also called “The Lion of Șișești”, was a leader of the Romanian’s national emancipation movement from Transylvania, and one of the artisans of the creation of the “Great Romania”.

The **Ion Țugariu Memorial House** (Băița). Situated on the steep hill of Băița, close to Baia Mare, the house where poet Ion Țugariu was born (1914-1945) has an out of place look in a would-be residential district. Țugariu, a graduate of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, in 1941 was elected president of the Refugee Students Association from all over the country. He died during the war while fighting in the Tatra mountains. His work was published only post-humously.

The **Gheorghe Pop de Băsești Memorial House**. The building dates from 1885-1890 and had been raised by the fief of Transylvanian intellectuals (Vasile Goldiș, Ion Rațiu, Teodor Mihali), artisans of the 1918 Union. Gheorghe Pop de Băsești, descendent of a family from the nobility, was an active member of the ASTRA Association. In December 1918, at Alba Iulia, he was elected president of the Great Assembly that proclaimed the union of Transylvania with Romania.

The **Petőfi Sándor Memorial House** (Coltău). The Hungarian poet Petőfi Sándor had lived in the Teleki castle from Coltău between the 8th of September to the 20th of October 1841, spending his honeymoon and writing some of his best love poems. Nowadays he is considered the national poet of the Hungarian people.

The **Stan Ion Pătraș Memorial Museum-House** (Săpânța). The house of the famous folk artist has remained as a genuine museum, overwhelming due to the numerous base-relief sculptures painted in his characteristic style. It has three rooms, and a veranda with arcades.

The **Ioan Mihaly de Apșa Memorial House** (Sighetu Marmăției). On the ground floor of the building at No. 1, Tudor Vladimirescu Street, there is an art collection; on the upper floor there is a drawing-room with Louis VI style, and a study. Ioan Mihaly de Apșa was a correspondent member of the Romanian Royal Academy and founder of the Association for the Culture of the Romanian People from Maramures; he founded the Sighet department of the ASTRA.

The **Elie Wiesel Memorial House** (Sighetu Marmăției). At No.1, Tudor Vladimirescu Street is the building where Elie Wiesel, winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace, novelist, dramatist and essayist, spent the first 15 years of his life. The museum was inaugurated in August 2002, in the presence of Elie Wiesel and of the Romanian President.

The Merry Churchyard from Săpânța

The “Merry Churchyard” from Săpânța is certainly the most advertised, controversial and commercial brand in Maramures. Confusing and disowned, admired and venerated, commented from different perspectives: ethnographical, folkloric, and philosophical, fascinating because of “the blue of Săpânța”, visited, photographed by hundreds of thousands of tourists from all over the world – the churchyard with its coloured crosses and witty poems has to be regarded

as an original combination between **spirit** (spirituality, ancient beliefs, conceptions, traditions) and **matter** (wood, natural pigments).

What is shocking for the modern man's eye and mind is the final **destination** of these monuments: artefacts in a **necropolis**. In other words, grave crosses in a country churchyard. Nowadays people who live in another cultural context (related to Christian dogmas), are used to consider burials as sober and solemn occasions. Therefore it is very difficult for western people to imagine that in the Europe of the 20th century there can be a different kind of religious worship in which the Christian faith is imbued with reminiscences of conceptions about life and death coming from ancient beliefs.

The paradox of "the Săpânța phenomenon" would be less shocking if the funerary monuments were the object of an itinerant exhibition in famous galleries of the world. The spectators would enjoy the satirical texts and admire the colourful engravings. The mental shock would occur only when they were told that these artefacts are component parts of the funerary monuments enriching a graveyard in Romania.

The questions following this revelation could contain words like: showmanship, kitsch, or marketing for tourists.

In 1935, when Ion Stan Pătraș (1908-1977) was assembling the first of this kind of crosses in the village churchyard of Săpânța, neither he nor the priest or the villagers could have imagined the dimensions the world tourist industry would acquire in the 21st century. As always, the **artistic expression** of the material universe in Maramures comes second after the **utility** of the object. Moreover, any innovation and shade of originality has to have its roots in **tradition** and has to get the unanimous **approval** of the **community**. And so it has happened in the case of the Săpânța churchyard.

The appearance of this tourist objective on the map of Europe has given rise to numerous speculations about the ancient beliefs described in studies quoting sometimes uncertain historical sources.

Thus, it was a surprise to discover that the inhabitants of Maramures have preserved in their collective memory the conception according to which death should not be viewed with fear or disregard, but be considered as a natural act of integration into the world beyond the grave. A world organized in a similar way like our own, where the ancestors perpetuated the same organization and fulfilled the same functions, and practiced the same activities as before. They were beneficent and protective beings. Therefore the funeral rites were like banquets, with merriment and reconciled soul. At the death of the unwed young ones there were wedding feasts. From time to time, the whole community met in the village churchyard at the "Feast of the Dead", lighting candles and sharing food and drink over the graves, proving once again that between the world of the living and the world of the dead there is a very narrow, hardly perceptible threshold.

The Merry churchyard from Săpânța is decrypting its messages as seen from the angle of an approved ethnological reality.

Monastic Establishments

Until the appearance of modern cultural institutions, the places of cult (churches and especially the monasteries) had often represented the only "centres of excellence" in which complex cultural activities were undertaken.

Built as a rule in isolated places – on hills or on the edge of forests – the monastic establishments had a discrete and peaceful activity. This was the environment of a concentrated spirituality where the first manuscripts and books in the Romanian language had been **edited** and **printed**. The circulation of these writings had favoured a circuit of ideas among the intellectuals, and, through them, the transmission to all the members of the parish. The monasteries were also the places where the first **workshops** of **painting** and engraving had been set up, thus becoming schools which imposed their style taken over by the local and regional communities.

Then, the long spiritual exercises and preoccupation with theological problems gave rise to **philosophical meditations** and new concepts were born. Writers, poets, and philosophers had found there a proper place of refuge where to concentrate on their work.

Many monasteries shelter impressive libraries and treasures belonging to the national patrimony in the fields of history, science, literature, ethnology, arts, and education. We could even say that the network of monasteries in Romania had been the first “**ministry of education**”, the educational activity being developed in the rural churches.

Even though today these establishments are perceived rather as places of meditation, confession, and of pilgrimage – as they (still) give rise to popular processions –, monasteries attract people especially from the perspective of **ecumenical tourism**.

Certain testimonies and documents (topographic) show that, in old times, Maramures had a great number of monasteries. The vicissitudes of history brought about the destruction of many such places of cult. The most important mediaeval monastery built in the region was at **Peri** – on the right bank of Tisa (nowadays the locality is in Ukraine). It is believed that the first writing in the Romanian language was produced here.

St. Ana Monastery at Rohia (Lăpuș)

Situated at 900 meters from the centre of village Rohia, in a natural amphitheatre protected by woods, the monastery was founded in 1923, under the patronage of the Assumption of the Virgin, by the vicar Nicolae Gherman. The library built from the initiative of the abbot Iustinian Chira has about 25,000 volumes. In the precincts of the monastery there a “Poet’s house” built of bricks, with a verandah in the Brâncoveanu style, in 1977. This is where poet Ioan Alexandru used to retire and monk Alexandru Steinhardt had spent the last years of his life writing books which have entered in the Romanian patrimony.

The Bârsana Convent

The monastic complex from Bârsana could be considered a “vanguard” establishment. First of all due to its atypical location, close to the county road that links Sighetu Marmăției to Vișeu, on the Iza valley. The route is intensely circulated by groups of foreign tourists who visit the historical Land of Maramures. From this point of view, it is a “visiting card” and an incentive to strangers to visit the other monasteries from the region as well. The buildings of the complex have been executed in a style called “neo-maramuresan” in which the traditional style is combining with traces of modernism and monumentality.

The Moisei Monastery

Since its foundation in 1672, by archpriest Mihai Coman, the monastery of Moisei has not interrupted its activity. The merit of this consequence belongs to the local community that has always considered it as a “collective foundation”. Maybe this is the explanation why, each year on the 15th of August, impressive processions with pilgrims from all the valleys come to Moisei.

The Săpânța Monastery – Peri

All what has remained from the legendary monastery of Peri from Maramures are its ruins. In order to rekindle the memory of the establishment and to resume the local monastic tradition, a new monastery has been built (1995-2003) on the left bank of the Tisa, at Săpânța. The church tower is 75 metres high, being considered the highest in the world. The crosses are gilded with 4.5 kg gold, and the roof has 200,000 shingles.

Archaeological Sites

The legends about giants – those mythical creatures “who had probably populated the Earth before the human beings” – have occupied a special place in all peoples’ covered in the dust of history mythologies. Romanian mythology is no exception in this respect, neither is that of Maramures.

“The old folks were telling that these places had been inhabited by some giants. They were saying that on the plains, on the Troian, between the villages of Groși and Suci, there had lived some people who were huge in comparison with how we are today. They dug where it was said they had lived and they found some pieces of huge pots in which they had been buried.”

The ethnologist and collectors of folk poetry were followed by teams of archaeologists who began digging in the zones indicated by the local people, trying to elucidate whether there was any grain of truth in the mystery surrounding the legends. Thus, in the Lăpuș–Maramureș area they discovered tumuli dating from the late Bronze Age. “Such a graveyard was found on a some kilometres long and hundreds of meters wide terrace, called ‘Troian’ (mound), at 1.5 km north-east from Suci de Sus” (*Marmăția*, 2003). The 3,000 year old necropolis had about 20 tumuli in which there were calcined bones which had belonged to humans and to sacrificed animals.

The scientific research done by archaeologists permitted the reconstruction of the aboriginal people’s religious practices on a temporal axis of two millennia. This was the interval during which the passage from the ancient rite of incinerating the dead to the burial in underground graves had happened.

Some legends from the historical Maramures are also about giants who had been either the founders of some settlements (such as Rozavlea) or inhabitants of some old strongholds. “The **Giants** had been there in the **stronghold**. This is what the old folks used to say”; “the giants had been here, at **Oncești**, in the place people call ‘**Cetățaua**’. From Borcut, you climb a round hill”.

The archaeologists gave their verdict: in the indicated area at Oncești they really discovered the vestiges of a two thousand years old settlement, but there were only the remains of a group of 3-5 surface dwelling places, without stone foundation, made of light materials (probably wattle covered by a thin layer of clay). “The Giants” had belonged to the Dacian population of the area and probably had been shepherds.

Another legend, the one about “the giant Bogdan” – the founder of the country, had become, during the ‘60s, an incentive for the starting of diggings at Cuhea, whose result was the discovery of a fortified medieval settlement that had been really a residence of the voievode of Maramures, Bogdan I – the founder of Moldova.

The map of the archaeological sites in Maramures shows a great number of locations declared as protected historical monuments: in **Ardusat**, the place called “Sub Pădure” from the bronze age; at **Bârsana**, the point called “Cetățuia” (Hallstatt culture), and “Podul miresei” – bronze age; at **Bicaz**, the point called “Igoaie” and the necropolis with tumuli (Suciu de Sus culture); at **Bușag**, “Coasta Bușagului” point (Palaeolithic); at **Călinești**, the point “Rogoaza” (bronze age); at **Crăciunești**, the point “La Mohâlca” (period of migrations); at **Groșii Țibleșului**, “Tăușor” (bronze age, Suciu de Sus culture); at **Ieud**, the point “La Mănăstire”; in **Lăpuș**, a necropolis (bronze age); at **Lăpușel**, village Recea; in the **Chioar** Valley; at **Oarța de Jos**, the point “Vâlceaia Rusului” (bronze age, Wietenberg culture, Suciu de sus culture and period of migrations); at **Oarța de Sus**: at **Oncești**; **Prislop**, village Boiu; **Sarasău**; **Seini**; **Suciu de Sus** (bronze age); at **Tisa**, village Bocicoiu Mare; at **Vad**, village Copalnic Mănăstur (Hallstatt culture).

Strongholds and Castles

Despising private property (both material and intellectual), the exponents of the communist regime destroyed buildings and churches and purged literary works for the simple reason that they had belonged to the “remnants of the bourgeois-landlord regime”. In other cases they minimised the value of patrimonial buildings, giving them unsuited destinations (“in the service of the proletariat”). Thus, the former Episcopal Palace from Baia Mare (No.61, Lucaciu Street), dating from 1891-1892, was turned into a knitwear factory. The Pocol House (1903) from Valea Borcutului became an orphanage, in the same way as the Blomberg Castle (19th century) from Gârdani.

The **Chioar Stronghold**. Political and military centre of Chioar, “Cetatea de Piatră” (the Stone Stronghold) was raised in the 13th century (but mentioned only in 1319), on an isolated hill at a bend of the river Lăpuș: the stronghold is situated at 400m altitude, on the saddle of a hill surrounded by the waters of the Lăpuș which make at the hill foot a strait among the rocks. In 1378, the stronghold was donated to the voievodes Balc and Drag, and to their brother Ioan, the descendants of voievode Dragoș from Maramures, who kept it until the last representative of the family died (1555). Between 1599 and 1600, the stronghold and the domain were handed over to Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave) who unified the Romanian principalities. This is when Chioar became a district – part of a “comitat” (county) with certain autonomy. After 1662, Mihai Teleki was nominated captain of the Stronghold Chioar; later on his family extended its influence over the whole region. By the end of the century, Rákóczi’s revolt spreads over Transylvania and the inhabitants of Chioar take the opportunity to rise against Teleki. After the Satu Mare Peace (1711), the Austrian nobiliary authorities decided the demolition of the Chioar Stronghold in order to prevent the anti-Habsburg forces from re-grouping, and it was blown up in 1718.

The **Teleki Castle from Pribilești**. The locality Pribilești, Satlung village, had belonged to the domains of the stronghold Chioar, and it was one of captain Mihai Teleki’s properties. The castle and the summer residence were built by Geza Teleki. In 1897, the building got an upper store and was modernised. After World War II, the Teleki family emigrated and the castle was nationalised and used as a movie theatre, then as a crop store and as the seat of the collective farm. At the moment it is an advanced stage of degradation.

The **Teleki Castle from Coltău**. Built between the years 1740-1780, the castle was renovated in 1821. In 1845, the administration of the estate was taken over by Sandor Teleki, who was a close friend of the poet Sándor Petöfi. The latter had thought it as a welcome idea to spend his

honeymoon at Coltău, together with his young wife, Julia Szendrey. The last owner of the castle, count Ioan Teleki, left for good the village of his birth in 1937, and donated the old castle to the village Coltău. Later on, it was used as a store of the collective farm, as a cultural centre, and aid post, and since 1989, it houses the elementary school, the kindergarten and the communal library. The Teleki museum was opened on the first floor of the building in 1960.

The Blomberg Castle from Gârdani. In 1780, count Blomberg received as a donation from the emperor of the Habsburg Empire, Joseph III, the domain Gârdani, 500 hectares of land and 1,000 hectares of forest. The construction of the Blomberg castle began in the same year and it was finished in 1821. Around this property, the peasants of Gârdani founded a new settlement. The Blomberg family left the country after 1945, and the castle was transformed into a school. Since 1957 to 1963, during summer, it hosted national summer camps for pupils. In 1963, the special school for children with mental disabilities was transferred to the former castle of baron Blomberg from Gârdani. Four decades later, when “the children’s houses” (the invention of the communist regime) were closed, the castle has regained its former silence and sobriety.

The Monument of the Moisei Heroes

The Moisei Monument, placed on a hill on the edge of the village, with its stone columns bearing only scratches, open to the sky, with no vault, at first sight seems to be a Dacian Temple in which invisible priests officiate over and over again the rite of an ancient solar cult. But, in reality, this is the work of artist Geza Vida (1966) and represents a moment of recent history, a reminder of the dramatic events that happened at Moisei in the autumn of 1944.

This is what the artist himself confessed: “In conceiving this monument in the form of an arc I started from the sun cults. The statues symbolizing the twelve months of the year are set in a circle with twelve radiuses; and I had made them thus in order that the inhabitants of Maramures who are passing by should remember what happened here at Moisei, in every month of the year and in each day of the months.”

On the 14th of October 1944, at Moisei, the horthyst army produced a mass murder. Thirty one peasants were gathered in two houses and massacred. Then the village was set on fire.

Geza Vida: “I wanted it to be representative for Maramures. The material is wood. Carved wood... The wood from which the peasants of Maramures have made masterpieces... The models have been the masks. The old masks from Maramures... fully expressive... They convey the essential expression.”

The twelve pillars do not impress only by the place where they are set, but also through the significance of each piece: “There, on the pillars, are the Man of Wood, the Man of the Night, the Man of the Waters, the Singing Man...” (G. Vida).

Writer Geo Bogza, the one who had suggested the sculptor the idea of monumentality, compared this work with the Târgu-Jiu complex made by Brâncuși, and the author was “inspired by the Dacian sanctuary from Grădișteea”.

Simion Pop (1972): “They are like fatuous laic tables of laws, and one has the feeling that the ten voices of the law could be heard from the pyre-pillars, psalms sung by ancient male voices about the reasons of our opposition in front of those who pass our borders with the intention to conquer.”

Then, due to the humid climate from the region, the wood began to crack and to rot. The artist rebuilt the monument.

Very few of those who pass through Moisei know about the artist's testimonies and of the primary significance of the monument. But the monument expresses a wider spectrum of symbols out of which the visitors can choose whatever interpretation suits their tradition and the culture they belong to.

The “Bogdan Vodă” Statue Assembly

The monument is in Cuhea (now Bogdan Vodă), on the Iza Valley, at 42 km from Sighetu Marmăției. It is made of bronze and represents voievode Bogdan on horseback surrounded by five of his noblemen, and bears the signature of artist Ioan Marchiș.

In the village Cuhea, at number 413, in a wooden house dated 1780 (registered as a patrimonial monument by the Ministry of Culture), lives Vasile Deac, nicknamed “Moșu”. He had been the mayor of the village for 31 years. Among other achievements, he decided to leave for generations to come an impressive monument representing the illustrious ancestor, voievode and founder of the country, Bogdan from Cuhea.

After lengthy discussions, in 1979, the then en vogue sculptor Geza Vida made a project of poplar wood, representing the voievode sitting on a throne. But Vasile Deac Moșu realized that he actually had wanted an equestrian statue. Five years later, he met sculptor Ioan Marchiș who had just inaugurated his first monumental work (Solar Gate) in Baia Mare. But Deac hesitated to entrust him with the work, considering that the artist was “too young” for this.

In 1985, the perseverant mayor, dressed in his traditional costume, went up to the capital city to ask money from the communist authorities for commissioning the statue. His project was refused, but the man from Maramureș did not return empty handed but with the money for the making of the plaster statue of a... dinosaur that was later “to be donated to a museum”. They built the “skeleton”, the plaster was cast, but the Revolution came in 1989.

Some years later, Moșu resumed his negotiations with Ioan Marchiș who in the meantime had become one of the most renowned sculptors from region. The projects, the official approvals, the clay model, and then the casting in bronze of the monument took some years. In the autumn of 2005, the monument was finally inaugurated.

The assembly of statues from Cuhea – Maramureș (Bogdan Vodă, Voievode of Maramureș and the first Prince of Moldova) has become what the inhabitants of Maramureș had been expecting for years: a monument that embodies in bronze not only the history of their place but also the legends, myths, and the spirit of the people from the north of the country.

Ioan Marchiș, the creator of the monument, has succeeded to offer the inhabitants of Maramureș something that they had needed in order to remember their true identity: something like a landmark, an insignia inscribed in the book of time, something to feel at home with.

“Standing close to the base of Bogdan’s statue, it is impossible not to feel the force of the 22 bronze moulds. Nevertheless, the energy emanated by the group of statues (the voievode on horseback, surrounded by his five noblemen) does not come from the weight of the material, but from an artistic ‘artifice’ used by the sculptor in his work: the characters (five noblemen) have their fists closed, their hands sticking together have a monotonous rhythm, being like posts, and their energy is not rolling, it is potential, and you feel that they are bursting. They

are like musical instruments of the land, you can feel their resonance. The static figures around Bogdan reinforce the aerial movements of the horse's hoof. Hence comes the energy needed for the founding of a country" (Florin Pop, ethnologist).

The proportions, force lines, the expressivity of the statues, and especially the privileged position held by Bogdan Vodă in the founding of the mediaeval Romania – by the foundation of Moldova and of the dynasty of kings among which the most illustrious had been Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) – recommends this monument as a representative brand for Maramures.

The Elders' Council

It is a sculpture group representing five characters. The first version had been made of wood in 1972, and it is in the collection of the Baia Mare Artistic Centre (at the Art Museum). The stone replica, dated 1973, is placed in front of the Administrative Palace in Baia Mare. It is the work of artist Geza Vida.

The traditional society in Maramures is known for its preservation of archaic forms of social organization specific to the pre-mediaeval period, in which the decisive factor, the law-maker, is the gathering of noble and the men. The voievode never had absolute and exclusive powers in the village community, as it was believed that his decisions could have defended his own or a group's interests. Thus, the power was distributed to a so-called council that operated according to the (unwritten) law of the land in the interest of the community.

From a historical perspective, it resulted that the "group of old and good men" (whom the Romans had called "homines vertes et boni") had been the first leaders of the gentile and tribal communities, and afterwards, of the ethnic communities similar to the village communities, and that they had created beliefs, customs and traditions of ethical and juridical or magical-mythological types of behaviour (R. Vulcănescu, 1987).

According to some researchers, the social-historical organization had the form of a pyramid of superimposed layers and consisted in: the opinion of village, the young lad's group, the industrious men's group and that of the elders (from among whom the village chieftains were elected).

As concerns the functioning of justice, the following scenario has been supposed to have taken place: "the court had to be made up before sunrise, so that the activity could start right at sunrise with a prayer addressed to the sun and the proceedings had to end at sunset, with the pronouncement of the verdict and the prayer of gratitude addressed to the sun for everything had been done so that the judgment be passed with impartiality and justice be made according to the ancient custom."

In Maramures, all these elements of judicial ethnology had been preserved until late, being lost in the post-feudal period only at the instalment of the capitalist type of relations. But they have remained deeply rooted in the in the conscience of the inhabitants, some reminiscences persisting up to the 20th century.

These are the symbolic elements in the "history" of the statue group "The Elder's Council". But the perspective is much wider if one takes into consideration the significance of these characters in relation to the statuette known as "The Hamangia Thinker", dated 6th century B.C., or with reference to Auguste Rodin's "Thinker" (1880).

About Geza Vida's grave and robust "elders", here's an art critic's opinion: "In the language of sculpture, everything is expressed via the objective and mute calm of forms taking us to times and spaces devoid of theory and interpretations, at whose margin there is the impenetrable Sphinx. Like it, Vida's elders build a bridge between life and death. With their desolate external appearance, these angular men are still mild, at their age there is nothing left, not even their memories, only the reality of some wooden statues and the abstract frame of a victorious generation. The history of this, like the history of any generation, does not offer merry images, especially when the movement of the society has happened through its deeds. The Elders' Council takes its force from the power of its art" (R. Șorban, 1981).

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