



# **Traditional Architecture in Romanian Philately (I): the Case Study Regarding Households from Audia, Bancu and Berbești**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author BVC designed the study and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author ALP managed the analyses of the study, and the literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Vernacular and traditional architecture occupies a central place in the soul and pride of all people and has been accepted as a characteristic and attractive product of society, with a formal image. There is talk of a utilitarian architecture, which possesses interest and beauty, and which retains in the contemporary memory of the history of society. At the same time, it is unworthy of human heritage if this traditional harmony is not preserved, which is, in fact, the core of the human experience. In this context, the purpose of this study is to emphasize the beauty of traditional Romanian architecture in terms of philately. We want to expose the architectural specifics of three areas - Audia (Neamț), Bancu (Harghita), and Berbești (Maramureș) using postage stamps, illustrated postcards and other philatelic effects.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term "vernacular" began to be used in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in response to the trends of the era to take into account the globality of human societies [1]. "Vernacular" comes from the Latin language, where "vernaculus" designates the enclosure for slaves behind the master's garden. And "vernaculum" means everything that was made in the house 2, as opposed to what was purchased in exchange.

If in linguistics "vernacular" means the language spoken in a community, and in botany, "vernacular" is the common name of plants, which accompanies the Latin name, in terms of architecture "vernacular" is the term used for popular constructions made by people whose main activity is not necessarily in the field of construction [1]. It is based on empirical knowledge of materials gained over time, through repeated trials (and failures). Knowledge is passed down from generation to generation orally, but nowadays traditional knowledge is circulated in written and digital form as well.

Similarly, "traditional architecture" refers to buildings erected by craftsmen, specializing in construction, who will not be their users. The craftsmen took over their knowledge also orally, the materialization of their knowledge leading to architecture specific to the area they belong to. Traditional architecture also includes public buildings (churches, windmills, water mills, and other facilities) [2,3]. Vernacular architecture can become traditional architecture through the persistence of its forms and concepts. Applying all these notions in the case of Romanian architecture, we understand that it was born as vernacular architecture. Those who built the house were also those who used it; the techniques were passed down from generation to generation, orally, until they reached the perfection we still see in the villages.

In recent years, Romanian architecture has become traditional because the local craftsmen are the ones who build new houses, according to the principles transmitted from the ancestors. Today, architecture can be neither vernacular nor traditional, because the legislative system no longer allows the erection of any construction - and implicitly of housing - without this construction being based on a project and without this project being authorized.

Vernacular architecture, and implicitly the traditional one, is the expression of the culture of a community, it is the creation of time 3, it is the relationship with the land, the adaptability, and the expression of the diversity of the cultural world. Traditional construction is the natural way in which houses communicate with each other. It is an ongoing process that includes the necessary changes and continuous adaptation as a response to the context and constraints of the environment [4].

Human society is affected by the environment and people, in turn, shape it according to their needs. This process has a strong impact on popular architecture and is, of course, differentiated by space and time. There is, of course, an obvious connection in this regard. The reasons leading to the specific architectural features, depending on the special environmental needs, are usually of a practical nature. Lately, they are more and more limited to the inspiration coming from the outside, which induces and introduces new elements, which alter the local landscape of the community. The survival of these traditions and architectures is threatened; due to the homogenization of culture and socio-economic transformation, the vernacular structures, implicitly the traditional ones, become extremely vulnerable. Naturally, they face serious problems of aging, internal balance and integration [2]. For these causes, principles for the care and protection of the vernacular environment must be established.

A way to promote these principles, as well as the immovable cultural heritage, respectively, the sustainable development of the community, can be philately [5,6]. It has been used successfully over time as a means of diffusing tradition among the community. Having as a starting point a series of studies undertaken in the period 2018-2020 [7-9], we set out to review and analyze, through the prism of the existing philatelic material at the level of various sites, the traditional architecture in several areas. As such, this paper will focus on the importance of traditional Romanian architecture in terms of philately. The objective of the research is to expose the architectural specifics of three areas, namely, Audia (Neamț county), Bancu (Harghita county), and Berbești (Maramureș county) by using postage stamps, illustrated postcards and other philatelic effects. In fact, this case study tried to fill an existing gap in the Romanian

literature. What is missing in the current system of analysis of traditional Romanian architecture is precisely this approach, from a philatelic perspective.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The description of the zonal specificity and implicitly of the architectural dynamism was made by referring to the information from the sites with philatelic content. These include the Colnect®, Delcampe®, eBay®, Okazii®, PicClick®, and StampWorld® platform. In addition to this information, discussions with other collectors of philatelic material were also of real use. The documentation regarding the elements of traditional architecture was made through the prism of consulting some specialized sites, especially those referring to the considered areas. At the base of all was the specialized information provided by the platforms dedicated to the Village Museum.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 The Household from Audia (Neamț County)

The village of Audia, whose inhabitants were mainly engaged in raising animals and working in the forest, is located in the Bistrița Valley (Neamț). In its vicinity is the Ceahlău massif, and the accumulation lake of the Bicaz hydropower plant, the area itself being particularly picturesque. The household dating from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is surrounded by a fence made of round "cepi". This includes the house and the stable with "breast" (wide box for hay). Both buildings have been part of the Village Museum in Bucharest since 1957 [10].

The house, with walls made of round fir beams, closed at the "sheepfold" corners, glued with clay

and whitewashed, has a free porch on four sides, with simply decorated pillars. Its distinctive element is the small pavilion, located on the left side of the house (see Fig. 1a) [11], above the vaulted cellar and the raw stone walls without a binder. The gabled roof gains in beauty through the lacy ends of the sawtooth-shaped shingles.

The plan of the house includes a porch and four rooms, of which two living, on either side of the porch, the "large room" with fireplace, chimney, and oven with sleeping space and the "small room" with cooking stove, as well as two pantries located on the backside of the house. The interior of the house gives off a welcoming atmosphere, as can be seen in Fig. 1b [12], made of the harmonious ensemble of exposed objects. The living space comes to life through the polychromy of fabrics with geometric and floral decoration - stylized (lacquers, carpets, wipes that cover the walls, countertops, beds). The various objects or tools in the porch, pantry, or living rooms - dowry boxes, holiday costumes, curd patterns, spinning forks, reflect both the ingenuity and talent of those who created them and the occupations of the inhabitants of this ethnographic area.

### 3.2 The Household from Bancu (Harghita County)

The Bancu household comes from a village located in the south-eastern part of Harghita county, in the intramountain depression in the Gurghiu and Harghita mountains, inhabited mostly by Szeklers. The town was also known as the Hungarian names Banfalva and Csikbankfalva, on the Josephine Map of Transylvania, which contains data on settlements from 1769-1773 [13]. During the interwar period, the town was part of Ciuc County.



(a) Exterior view, close-up 11



(b) Interior view 12

Fig. 1. Illustrated postcards representing the household from Audia (Neamț)

The area rich in forests and pastures facilitated the development of occupations such as logging and cattle breeding. The practice of these occupations is reflected in the structure and large proportions of the buildings intended for housing animals, tools, and means of transport. The household in Bancu village is composed of a house, a summer kitchen, and a carpentry workshop, an annex building typical of the rural Szekler household from the 19th century, where the craft of carpentry and carpentry, stables with stables and woodshed, huts grain storage.

The gate of the household was built of oak, with three carved pillars, connected at the top by a beam; the connection between the pillars and the beam is usually made by carefully shaped counterfeits, which also have a decorative function. The gabled roof is fixed to the crown by beams. The shingle beaten in two rows is pulled with knives "in the fangs" (sharp tip) or dovetail, as can be seen in Fig. 2 [14]. Throughout the opening of the gate under the roof, a small space was arranged, with holes, for pigeons. The pillars and the beam are decorated by carving with a bard, by excision of material, with phytomorphic motifs, leaves, potted flower, and various other flowers: tulips, lily, and carnations. Apart from the date of construction of the gate, the proper names of the family are engraved on the forehead.

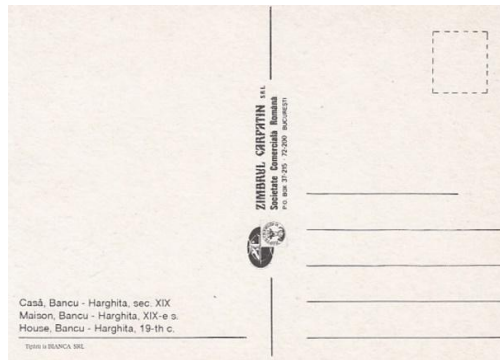
The house is built of wreaths of horizontal rectangular fir beams, ended in notches at right angles, placed on a stone foundation. The beams were covered with a clay mortar over which it was whitewashed. The roof of four fast waters, has a drainage roof, with a rupture of the slope in the upper third to facilitate the gradual evacuation of a large amount of snow.

The porch is placed only on the facade of the house, it is partially open on pillars, and at the entrance, it is closed up to the top with the perforated board. The porch, next to the porch, this closed space, locally called "eresz" allows double access: to the living room and the guest room [13]. The dividing wall between the rooms, next to the hearths, was built of stone. The two rooms communicate through a door. From the perimeter of the cleanroom is delimited through a median wall, a space for storing food or clothing, and in special cases, for the elderly in the family. The interior is distinguished by the robustness given by the ceiling beams and heating systems. In the living room, above a free hearth, the frustoconical basket is suspended, and in the guest room, the hearth basket is supported by pilasters and covered with ceramic tiles.

The utilitarian-decorative arrangement of the living space is functionally differentiated in two rooms, one for living and the other for guests. All categories of objects: utensils, clothing, ceramics, ornaments, etc. are brought together in specific structures. The beds, benches next to the walls, the high table, and the closet in the cleanroom are part of the category of furniture painted with floral motifs, representative of the Szekler population in the area. Carpets are chosen with geometric motifs, pillowcases, and woven bedding are combined with warm shades of color, giving the interior shine and comfort.

### 3.3 The Household from Berbești (Maramureș County)

Coming from a beautiful Romanian settlement on the Mare valley, the household in Berbești village consists of a house barn with barn, a corn basket, cage for housing tools, and sheep in



(a), (b) Exterior view, double-sided [14]

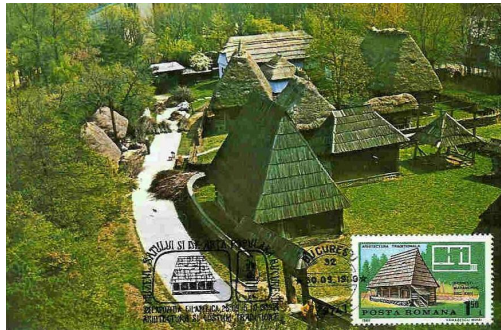
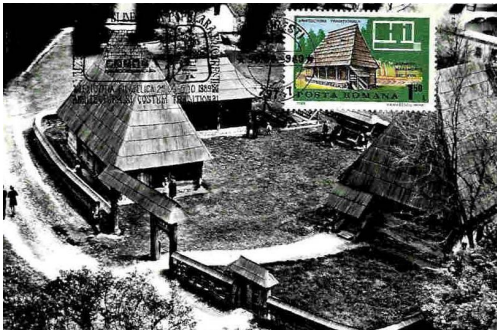
Fig. 2. Illustrated postcard representing the household from Bancu (Harghita)

winter, as well as a shed with bark - ingenious construction for storing hay [15]. As construction materials were used: foundation stone, oak

beams for walls, and drainage as a deterrent (see Fig. 3) [16-23].



(a), (b) Exterior view, distant plane, double-sided, without other philatelic elements 16-19



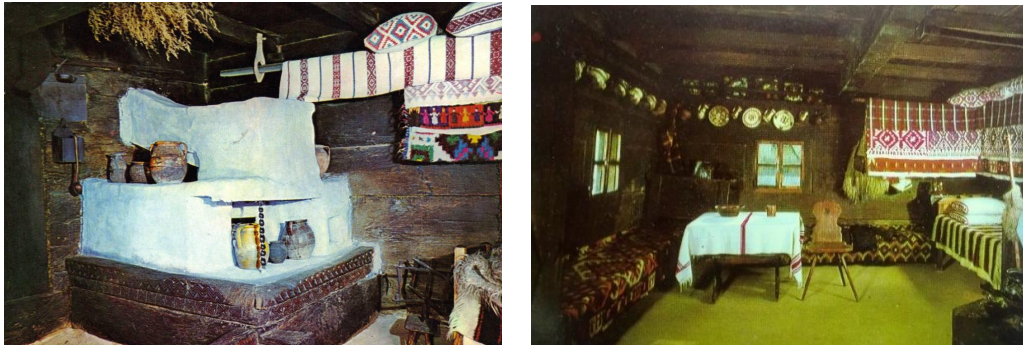
(c), (d) Exterior view, distant plan, bearing the stamp with a face value of 1.50 lei from the philatelic issue "Traditional Architecture" (G #5216, Mi #4525, S #3550, Yv #3828) and the stamp of the Philatelic Exhibition "Architecture and traditional costume" from 25.09.-05.10.1989 and the day stamp, 30.09.1989 of Postal Office no. 32 from Bucharest [20,21]



(e) Exterior view, distant plan, bearing the stamp with a face value of 1.50 lei from the philatelic issue "Traditional Architecture" (G #5216, Mi #4525, S # 3550, Yv #3828) and the stamp "first day of the issue", 18.02.1989, Bucharest [22]

(f) Exterior view, closer plan, bearing the stamp with a face value of 1.50 lei from the philatelic issue "Traditional Architecture" (G # 5216, Mi # 4525, Yv # 3828, S # 3550) and the stamp of the Philatelic Exhibition "Architecture and Costume traditional" from 25.09.-05.10.1989 and the day stamp, 30.09.1989 of Postal Office no. 32 from Bucharest [23]

Fig. 3. Illustrated postcards representing the household from Berbești (Maramureș)



(a), (b) Interior view without other philatelic elements applied [24,25]

**Fig. 4. Other illustrated postcards representing the household from Berbești (Maramureș)**

As decorative artistic elements, inlaid in wood, the gates, door, and window frames stand out, all are decorated with motifs such as torsada, wolf tooth, rosette, sun, moon, and the human figure. It entered the patrimony of the Village Museum in 1962.

The household, rebuilt in the Village Museum since 1962, is representative of the material and spiritual culture of Maramureș, an area rich in valuable wooden architectural monuments, erected by skilled craftsmen, such as "Pasco de pe Sălaje", which in 1775 was signed on The "master beam" of the house on display in the museum [15].

Impressive in proportions, the constructions that make up the household of Berbești are built of massive planks, carved in oak wood. All components of the household are surrounded by a wicker fence made of hazelnut twigs, a fence sheltered under a shingle roof. A tall, double gate, masterfully carved in oak wood, dated 1903, completes the ensemble. Decorative motifs specific to the area - torsade, wolf teeth, rosettes, as well as symbolic motifs of great refinement - the sun, the moon, and anthropomorphic motifs are present on the constituent elements of the gates, on the door and window frames.

The household of Berbești, through the construction and the inventory of tools and objects, highlights the main occupations of the inhabitants: cattle breeding, agriculture, and working in the forest. The plan of the house comprises three rooms: the living room or house, the cold porch, and the pantry, lined up along an open porch, on carved pillars and united by

arches. An idea of the arrangement of the space can be found in Fig. 4 [24,25].

The living room is equipped with a fireplace, oven, and "prichici", a place arranged next to the stove, towards the wall, a platform, where children or the elderly could rest in the cold winter days. The interior is characterized by simple and functional furniture: the bed arranged on one side, the seats placed at a right angle, the table surrounded by comfortable chairs in the center of the room. The specificity of the decorative system is given by the top or relative polychrome fabrics placed above the bed, by the plates and jugs from the Vama ceramic center, worked in bright colors, placed on hangers, and by the woolen fabrics in vegetable colors, laid on the beds.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Vernacular architecture is a contemporary architecture, but also an architecture that holds the history of society's memory, it is the creation of time (it is born from tradition and can be synonymous with popular architecture). Vernacular construction is the way houses communicate with each other. It is an ongoing process that includes the necessary changes and continuous adaptation as a response to the context and the constraints of the environment, which are becoming increasingly evident.

Although modern architecture has replaced the vernacular, late traces still exist. On the other hand, there is a problem; it has become visible that the vernacular is struggling to survive in an environment dominated by modern and academic architecture (in the peripheral areas of cities have appeared hut cities and, at the same

time, there are examples of museum architecture). The Romanian architectural creativity of our century is facing some challenges, but it should not abandon 1000 years of vernacular culture. We can even hope that in the future there will be a rebirth driven by a nostalgia for the old ways of construction. Nostalgia for the essential values of the human being, which can also be achieved through the image proposed by the shows and philatelic effects that have still been preserved.

As it could be observed, the novelty of the case study was the presentation of the specifics of traditional architecture to philately. For the three areas considered, some interesting philatelic pieces were reported. Although few in number, these materials revive the memory of places with special concerns in wood processing. As well as in arranging durable constructions. The exterior, but especially the interior of the households, is the one that impresses by immortalizing the living of the community.

## DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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