

TRADITIONAL CHAIRS IN ROMANIAN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract:

Since ancient times, improving the living environment in general and housing in particular has been humanity's primary concern, the interior reflecting the lifestyle and social fabric of community residents. Thus the gate, house, furniture, household tools, there are simple objects made of wood, but the creator, using the beauty of wood essence, transformed them by adding a decoration done by multiple techniques and created works of art. By customizing useful objects, the home is developed in conjunction with remarkable moments of human life, and has printed its own and unique identity given by the ones who live in it. At the same time, the interior bears the essential features of a historical era. So the chairs from the middle of XIX century and XX century from Maramures, Lapus, Chioar and Codru studied are examples of vigorous treatment of wood. These are generally made by the owner of the household, each seat is suitable for one family member. As a result, common in the rural houses, there are no two identical chairs. We have also noticed that the wood core is taken into account to elevate the look and small ornaments are excluded, the embellishments being used only on large areas. So the anonymous craftsmen were able to respond to the human necessities in each historical period, folklore remaining an inexhaustible source of inspiration for contemporary creation.

Key words: chair; wood; rural; tradition; ornament.

INTRODUCTION

From immemorial times home has been one of the major concerns of the humanity, the inside the home reflects the lifestyle and social fabric of the community residents. As we can see in the rural areas and in museum collections the houses gates, furniture and household tools are not simply objects made of wood, but the creator, using the beauty of wood essence of its form, decoration achieved by working the wood with multiple techniques to create works of art (Stoica 1973, Olărescu *et al.* 2008).

The furniture pieces that we encounter in the rural house are few, but are distributed in a definite order, created over hundreds of years. "The traditional furniture is the master craft of the village craftsmen, ingeniously working with wood bonded on the joints only with pegs, using simple constructive solutions, perfectly adapted to the intended track" (Pauncev 1971). There is to be noticed that any piece of furniture inside the rural home does not exist by itself, between it and other objects in the room there is a fully compliant. Thus, we can assign these parts besides dedicated coordinates: functionality, durability, artistic appearance and interdependence in a given space (Coman and Coman 2009).

The chair is a piece of furniture that has no fixed place within the traditional home. In the scientific literature the classification criteria for this group of furniture includes a classification on two types, namely three or four legged chair *without backrest* and with backrest (that is usually with four legs). (Capesius 1974). In terms of the chair size, they differ depending on the role they play. Thus, around the hearth of the house the seats are low, round or rectangular, with three or four legs and were not made to have a decorative role, that have been developed because of the wood quality and harmony of proportion, and there are chairs with backrest that are placed around the table or where they are needed (Bănăţeanu 1985, Dăncuş 1986, Bodiu 2006).

In Maramureş County all of the households' items were made, until recently, naturally, only from wood. In rural areas, the craftsmen were specialized in certain areas (tools, furniture etc), and also, the householders made some of the objects. In The Old Maramures province usually the landowner knows how to use wield ax, drill, ax etc.

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Facilities and home decorating styles mark the succession from age to age, they show a way of thinking and express the spirit of the community, while being adapted geographically. The inner space where we can spend most of our life is complex and reflects the spiritual and material wealth of its inhabitants. Therefore deserves to be studied in detail and valued for its perfection obtained from the long selection process.

The interior space develops over a human life and has printed its own and unique identity, influenced by the one who inhabits it. At the same time, the interior bears the essential features of a historical era.

THE STUDIED AREA. THE RESEARCH METHOD

In the northern Romania, especially in Maramures Country, but also in Lăpuş and Chioar areas there is a permanent contact with the forest, contact that created "a mood that shows itself as an intimacy between man and the forest, mood reflected in a series of old beliefs, practices, rites and customs, legends from another time" (Nistor 1980). This close relationship with the forest has developed into what today is called "the art of wood in Maramures".

There have been studied the ethnographic areas of the northern Romania: Maramures Country, Lapus, Chioar and Codru. The research was conducted in this area through field trips, interviews with locals, questionnaires and it is based on the material found in museum collections in Baia Mare, Sighet and several other villages in the area museums.

RESULTS. TRADITION AND SPECIFICS

The wood species from which chairs have been made in cen. XIX - XX in the study area are varied. We have discovered various species, such as beech, pear, cherry and sometimes oak. The sitting platform of the rustic seat is square, rectangular or trapezoidal. In this platform the legs are inclined set. In the past, oblique position of chair legs was a necessity, because the piece of furniture had to be stable on rough terrain (soil floor). The typical rustic furniture from the studied area has preserved the inclined position of the legs, even after the emergence of the plank floor. The seating platform has at one end a groove, approx. 2-3cm in width, in which the backrest is settled with two wooden dowels. The backrest, usually much higher than feet, generally has a rounded shape at the top.

The chairs ornament is exclusively on the seat backrest and the characteristic is the contrast between full and empty. Decorative elements are cut back or incision made in the full back. The cutouts have functional role,

facilitating the gripping and lifting of the seat, but they also have a decorative role. Seats in the middle of the twentieth century are achieved by cutting small ornaments on the backrest.

Regarding the decor of the Maramures rural chairs, we encountered the point of view that this area falls under the artistic conception of the manufacturers of wooden churches, which requires first a monuments silhouette. (Capesius 1974) From the construction point of view, certainly the oldest seats with backs have been created after the wood stumps from which they were created, as shows a piece from the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Baia Mare collected from the Chioar zone (Fig. 1a).



Fig. 1
a - Chair made from a single stump (Chior, middle of the XIX century)
b - Chair made with the hatchet (second half of the XIX century).

The most common is the small chair with a high back made with the hatchet. The main feature of this type of seat is the backrest anthropomorphism, which suggests that the body line is placed on them. In some seats case the backrest is made of curved lines, inspired from the Baroque period, pointing that they have been created using a template.

Also the V art, the heart or the three circles sculpted in the middle of the backrest are impressive, the three circles reminding of an anthropomorphic figure with lateral fins at its base (fig. no. 1b). Many of the chairs have a sun sculpted on the backrest, sun that represented as a rosette with six rays. Others have the backrest sophisticatedly crafted, the art being done by sculpting the wood, even if the platform has only been shaped by ax (Fig. 2 a,c).

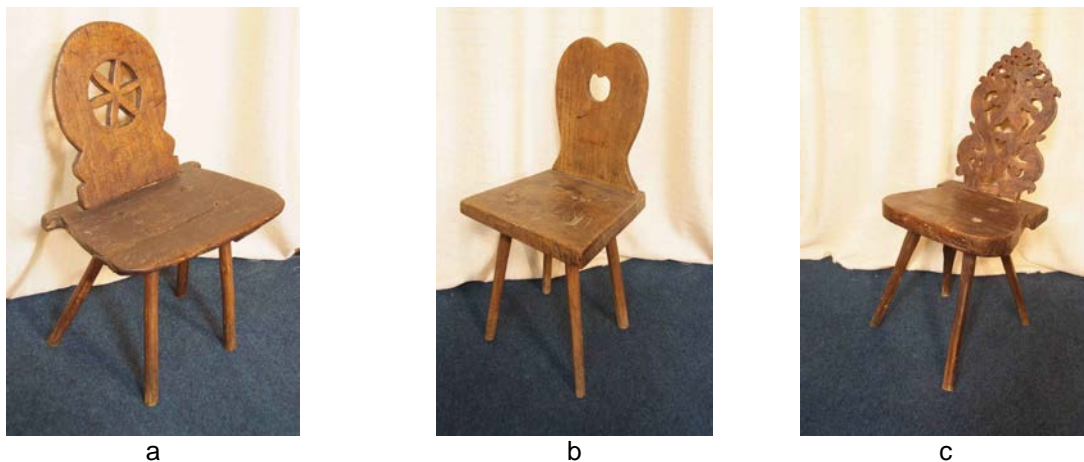


Fig. 2
Diferent types of ornaments for the backrest
a - solar motive; b - anthropomorphic motive; c - chair sculpted, vegetal motives.

In the Baia Mare museum's collection we can also see chairs from Lăpus zone that have backrests that strikingly resemble the tombstones of Nadis (Fig. 3). These are great pieces that reveal that the Romanian folk art has been influenced by the European styles of folk art belonging to the Hungarians and Germans. So the chair from Ciuta village is the best example that combines a specific crop from Maramures zone with foreign forms, resulting a very stylized transposition of the two-headed eagle, above which rises a cross. (Fig. 3b)

In villages around the city of Baia Mare, who were influenced by the city and in which the duties were related to the mines, we can see a reflection of the influences in the creation of rural craftsmen and therefore we find chairs with mining resembling art on the backrests. (Fig. 3c).



a



b



c

Fig. 3

Diferent types of chairs

a - with a funeral stone resemblance on the backrest; b - with a coat of arms resembling backrest; c - with mining motives on the backrest.

In the collection of the museum of Baia Mare city have been selected some pew chairs (Fig. 4). They look like armchairs, only being larger and having arm supports and the cross as decoration. Pew chairs are certainly made under urban influence; their backs are made of small boards, being shaped with the hatchet.



Fig. 4

Ethnographic Museum of Baia Mare Exposition - pew chairs.

CONCLUSIONS

The Romanian rural interior requires a detailed study, reflecting extreme complexity and, most of all, its inhabitants spiritual wealth, wealth that we need constantly. The chairs inside the rural home contain the answer to man's material needs and to the need for artistic expression. If the construction needs are met quickly in the studied area by working with the ax, the spiritual needs are met more delicate. The decor of the chair faithfully reflecting the social position of the holder (as an example, we can observe the specific mining influenced signs or rich ornaments), the decorated space (the specific chairs that decorated the pews) and landowner skill in handling tools (most seats being made in the household).

The traditional working techniques used to create an object so useful can be feed back into the modern design of the furniture, design that can bring back into the contemporaneousness the artistic value of these items and the effective use of wood.

The anonymous craftsmen were able to respond to their own human needs in each historical period, folklore remaining an inexhaustible source of inspiration for contemporary creation, the folklore being the new so needed ecological and practical inspiration source.

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