

Maramures wooden churches (Romania)

No 904

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Wooden Churches of Maramures
<i>Location</i>	Region of Maramures District: Bârsana; Village: Bârsana District: Budești; Village: Budești District: Desești; Village: Desești District: Ieud; Village: Ieud District: Sisești; Village: Plopiș District: Poienile Izei Village: Poienile Izei Town: Târgu Lapus; Village: Rogoz District: Sisești Village: Șurdești
<i>State Party</i>	Romania
<i>Date</i>	29 June 1998

Justification by State Party

Certain researchers stress the exceptional character of the wooden churches of Maramures owing to their shape, construction, authenticity, equilibrium, dynamism, and atmosphere. The superlatives everyone is tempted to use at the sight of these churches are certainly not empty of meaning but express the feelings aroused by anything that is a work of art. These churches are the result of the expertise of successive generations of brilliant craftsmen and their capacity for working with an innate artistic sense. The skills of the stone cutters of Maramures have earned them a well deserved reputation, still recognized nowadays thanks to their contemporary creations.

Criterion i

The wooden churches of Maramures, nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List, are an example of the type of construction based on a *Blockbau* system. They are also an interpretation of the Gothic style, but using wood only, based on traditional techniques which crystallized in the 18th century and survived in this form until the present day, thus creating a model, and even a style, described as the "Maramures manner." **Criterion iv**

Category of Property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, these properties constitute a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

The region of Maramures, situated in the north of Transylvania, was formed over time by the fusion of very old geographic and socio-political entities called "countries," including those of Maramures, Chioar, and Lapus where the churches nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List are located. These "countries" are united by their geographic environment, composed of mountains once covered by forests and numerous rivers, but also by their history and spiritual life.

In the Middle Ages, the rural social structures were founded on community-type villages grouped in each valley, under the general leadership of the voivode of Maramures. The churches of the region were placed under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox monastery of Peri. The region of Maramures, known by the name of *terra Maramoroisiensi* (1324) and *districtus Maramoroisiensi* (1326), enjoyed a certain degree of political autonomy before coming under the authority of the Hungarian sovereigns.

It became a *comitat* (county) in 1385 and was then incorporated into the Principality of Transylvania (1538), which was annexed by the Hapsburgs in 1711. The period between the end of the 17th century and that of the 18th century was particularly rich in political and cultural events for Maramures, where Byzantine traditions intermingled with Western contributions (Uniate Church, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation). Most of the wooden churches of the region were rebuilt after the destruction caused by the last great Tatar invasions in 1717.

Description

The eight churches of Maramures that are proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List are monuments based on traditional timber architecture.

They were built in the 18th and 19th centuries and have retained their traditional plan, composed of a naos and pronaos in the shape of a rectangle, and a pentagonal recessed sanctuary. A portico was added to the western facade of the churches in Bârsana, Poienile Izei, Ieud Deal, Șurdești, and Plopiș. They are covered by a high, steep, double-pitched roof from which soars a tall bell tower with a gallery similar to stone Gothic churches, giving the churches their characteristic silhouette.

The churches stand on a base made of stone blocks and pebble fillings. The wooden beams (in oak or pine) are arranged according to the *Blockbau* system and assembled by joints in the shape of a V, U, or T, to make the construction stable and flexible. The beams of the upper part of the walls extend beyond the junction points to form supporting consoles for the framework. The outer walls are usually embellished with a torsade motif, while structural components (consoles, door and window frames, balustrade, bell tower gallery, etc) have a sculpted decoration.

The three inner areas are covered by ceilings or vaults of different forms. A gallery was installed later (late 19th – early 20th century) in the naos to accommodate the growing congregation. The inner walls were completely covered with paintings during the second half of the 18th century and first half of the 19th century by travelling

painters whose names are known. These painters belong to post-Byzantine traditions, but their iconography also reflects the ideas conveyed by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The canons of Byzantine art are reinterpreted in a graphic and decorative manner to create a more naive and refreshing style of painting. At the beginning of the 19th century, Baroque and Rococo paintings made their appearance in the wooden churches of Maramures, probably through the intermediary of neighbouring countries.

- The Church of the Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple (Bârsana)

The old church of the Bârsana monastery, built in 1720, became a parish church in 1806 when it was moved to the present site. On this occasion, a two-level portico, connected by a staircase, was added to the western facade. Because of its plan, the church belongs to the tradition of churches of the Maramures region, but differs by its smaller size. The painter Hodor Toader did the painted decoration in 1806, using an iconography and style which confirms the influences of Baroque and Rococo painting, especially in the naos and sanctuary.

- The Church of Saint Nicholas (Budești)

The church of Saint Nicholas was built in 1643 on the site of a 15th century church. It is an outstanding example of the wooden churches of Maramures which served as a model for many other churches. It is also distinguished by its size and the four pinnacles at the base of the spire, which indicates a link with the neighbouring region of Lăpuș. The paintings inside come from two different periods : those of the narthex and naos are the work of Alexandru Ponehalski (1762) who also painted several icons, while those in the sanctuary are by Ioan Opris (1832).

- The Church of the Holy Paraskeva (Desești)

The church, which was built in 1770, reflects the artistic maturity of its builders. The external architectural elements are highlighted by decorative motifs (serrations, leaves, etc) incised or cut in the wood to create a homogeneous and valuable ensemble. The painter Radu Munteanu, known as the leader of an 18th century school of religious painting, was responsible for the interior decoration (1780), assisted by the painter Gheorghe.

- The Church of the Nativity of the Virgin (Ieud Deal)

The present church, built in the middle of the 18th century, replaced the one destroyed by the Tatars in 1717. The structure of the inner space, especially the vaults over the naos and narthex, reveals the ingenuity of the builders. The painter Alexandru Ponehalski, who was already active in the region, did the interior decoration, which has a particularly rich iconography (1782). The wooden churches of Maramures usually formed a complex with a cemetery, but in Ieud it is also completed by a bell tower standing on its own and a Way of the Cross with stations built in masonry.

- The Church of the Holy Archangels (Plopiș)

Situated in the "country" of Chioar, the church of the Holy Archangels (1796-1798) shows certain analogies with the church in Șurdești, such as the flat roof slightly lowered over the sanctuary, the slender bell tower with four corner pinnacles, and certain elements of the sculpted decor outside (torsades in the middle of the

walls, motifs on the base and the balustrade of the belvedere). The decoration, painted in 1811 by Stefan, a native of the village, is preserved on the vaults and the iconostasis with, in particular, a Descent from the Cross.

- The Church of the Holy Parasceve (Poienile Izei)

The church of Saint Paraskeva, one of the oldest of the wooden churches of Maramures (1604), reveals two phases in the development of such buildings. The first phase can be seen in the lower part of the walls with a sanctuary based on a square plan, a typical feature of the oldest wooden buildings. In the 18th century, the walls were raised, the naos was covered by a semi-circular vault, and the interior was decorated with paintings (1794). The portico protecting the entrance was added during the first half of the 19th century.

- The Church of the Holy Archangels (Rogoz)

The church built in 1663 was moved from Suciul Sus to Rogoz in 1883. It is characterized by a recessed heptagonal sanctuary, a polygonal pronaos, a southern entrance, and a large asymmetrical roof. It is also distinctive for its profusion of decorative sculpture ("horsehead" consoles, old traditional Romanian motifs, an accolade frame for the entrance, torsades, rosettes, crosses, etc). The partly preserved murals were painted in 1785 by two painters from the country, Radu Munteanu and Nicolae Man.

- The Church of the Holy Archangels (Șurdești)

Built in 1767, the church of the Holy Archangels of Șurdești synthesises all the features of the wooden churches of Maramures at the height of their development with, in particular, a double canopy and superposed windows. The two-level portico and its tall bell tower date to the 19th century. In 1783, three painters, including Stefan (iconostasis and sanctuary), shared the task of decorating the inside of the church.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The eight wooden churches included in the nomination are designated as historical monuments of national importance with the status of National Treasures (List of Monuments, category A) under the terms of Article 1 and 2 of the 1994 Law No 11 for the Protection of Historic Monuments. Article 1 of the same statute defines the surrounding conservation areas as being "part of the historic monument." For each of the eight wooden churches a surrounding conservation area and a buffer zone have been defined in 1993, including the necessary regulations. Having been approved by the Commission for Conservation Areas within the Ministry of Public Works and Territorial Planning under the terms of the Building Act, Law No 50 from 1991 for Building Regulations and Territorial Planning, they have a legal status.

It should be mentioned that the existing legislation for the Protection of Historic Monuments, Law No 11 of 1994, has very strict provisions relating to the protection, preservation, and management of designated properties and sites. Nevertheless, it is only a provisional one, without providing efficient control and management at the county or local level. There is no professional body or institution (since the dissolution of the National Office

in November 1994), the Direction for Historical Monuments being included in the administration of the Ministry of Culture. A draft of the new Conservation Law prepared in recent years, including a National Board and decentralized structures at the county level, will be submitted to the Parliament end of March 1999.

Management

As places of worship, the wooden churches are in the ownership of their religious Orthodox communities.

It is the responsibility of owners of designated buildings and areas to manage and repair them and open them to the public. Any alterations require the permission of the Ministry of Culture and the National Commission for Historic Monuments.

There are clearly defined and adequate conservation areas and also adequate buffer zones around the nominated properties. They have been designated already in 1993 on the initiative of the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works and Territorial Planning and the County administration. The conservation areas and buffer zones are provided for in Law No 11 (1994) for the Protection of Historic Monuments, the Building Law No 50 from 1991 on Building Regulations and Territorial Planning, and the regulations for each conservation area related to urban planning in conformity with the Order of the Minister of Public Works and Territorial Planning concerning conservation areas.

Overall supervision of the nominated properties is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture. It carries out this work in collaboration with the National Commission for Historic Monuments, the National Office for Heritage Protection, the State Secretariat for Church Affairs, and, where appropriate, with the Ministry of Public Works and Territorial Planning, the Ministry of Education, the Maramures County Inspectorate for Culture, the County Office for Cultural Heritage, the Maramures Orthodox Archbishopric, and the local parish.

Substantial financial aid is available for non-governmental owners - especially the religious communities - from the Ministry of Culture for conservation and restoration projects. Financial aid is available also from the State Secretariat for Church Affairs and the Orthodox Archbishopric. Between 1992 and 1997, the Ministry of Culture contributed to a conservation programme for 17 wooden churches in Maramures County, and since 1997 a pilot conservation project for seven wooden churches (including the nominated properties), the "Maramures Project," has been under implementation. Other initiatives to be mentioned are applications for financial support from the European Commission for mural painting conservation works for Șurdești and the Getty Grant Program for wood conservation works at Bârsana, Ieud, and Rogoz.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Respect for tradition and for sacred places resulted in the continuity of maintenance and restoration work, even in the communist period. Between 1958 and 1977, the National Office for the Protection of Historic Monuments managed to train several specialists for conservation, specifically for the Maramures timber architecture, and to

coordinate conservation interventions on almost all the nominated churches. At Bârsana in 1963-65 during conservation works some inadequate additions from 1929 were eliminated. At Budești in 1970, the stone foundation was renewed and the vault of the naos replaced partially. At Ieud-Deal in 1957-59 and 1960-62 structural consolidation work was carried out on the clock tower and the shingle roofing was replaced. At Plopiș repair and consolidation works took place in 1961 (foundations and base in stone), and in 1973 structural consolidation of the tower. At Poienile Izei complete restoration work was carried out in 1961-62 (enlargement of the gallery in 1970). At Rogoz in 1960-61 a new foundation and base in stone were inserted, some logs were replaced; the roof timbering was repaired and in 1968 treatment was carried out against biological attack (*Merulius lacrimans*). At Șurdești structural consolidation works took place in 1960-62.

All these conservation works were executed to a high professional level, respecting and using only traditional materials, methods, and technology.

After the dissolution of the National Office in 1977 some of the trained craftsmen had the chance to continue their work within the open-air museums and so the traditional skills survived.

Since 1990 all the authorities responsible for the protection and conservation of the wooden churches on the national and regional level have started different initiatives and projects for training specialists, both in traditional timber conservation work and in biological treatment (professionals have had specialized training in Norway, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere). Special attention has been paid to the conservation problems of the mural paintings; some restorers have become specialists and international courses are organized (at Rogoz in 1998). At the moment, there are four high-level specialized companies in the Maramures County for conservation, maintenance, and repair work on the churches. Maintenance and conservation work on the nominated properties continued after 1990: at Bârsana in 1997 structural consolidation works for the clock tower and the roofing (protection of the painted vault); at Budești restoration currently in progress (replacing of the roofing and parts of the clock tower); at Desești repair of works from the beginning of this century (foundation base replaced in concrete, the roofing material changed) in 1996-97 (including the conservation of the mural paintings); at Poienile Izei in 1996-97 restoration of the gallery to its original dimensions and the roofing renewed; at Rogoz in 1997-98, treatment against biological attack and conservation of the mural paintings, now completed; conservation of the mural painting at Șurdești since 1997.

Authenticity

The level of authenticity of the various properties included in the nomination is very high. The traditional maintenance and repair work on the wooden churches and the conservation principles of the Maramures craftsmen have ensured that replacement of damaged or degraded architectural elements has respected the materials and techniques used by the original builders.

The well preserved interior layout and decoration of the churches with their mural paintings are masterpieces of art and authentic vernacular documents for the traditional

religious life of the orthodox communities over the centuries.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An expert ICOMOS mission visited the wooden churches of Maramures in February 1999. The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture was also consulted.

Qualities

The properties that make up the nomination of the Maramures wooden churches provide a vivid picture of the traditional timber architecture in the northern part of Romania from the 17th century to the present day as a result of the log house tradition responding to the requirements of Orthodox liturgical space, combined with a specific interpretation of Gothic architecture materialized in timber. The nominated churches with their mural paintings and the surrounding churchyards and cemeteries are representative examples for the geographically and historically different areas of these vernacular traditions in the mountainous regions of the northern Carpathians.

Comparative analysis

The special value of the Maramures wooden churches lies in the fact that they are outstanding examples of a specific type of religious timber architecture resulting from the combination of Orthodox religious traditions and the interpretation of the Gothic spirit in wood, the architectural expression, design, and proportions being very different from the wooden religious architecture of the adjacent Carpathian regions to the north and north-west.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* make it a condition for inscription on the World Heritage List that every property should have an appropriate management plan in force. The original nomination dossier did not contain any information about management plans, and so this nomination was referred back to the State Party by the Bureau at its meeting in July. The State Party has provided extensive information about the management plans in force, which fully satisfy the requirements of the Committee.

Brief description

The nominated Maramures wooden churches - a selection of outstanding examples of different architectural solutions from different periods and areas - provide a vivid picture of the variety of design and craftsman skill expressed by the small but nevertheless lofty timber constructions with their characteristic tall and slim clock towers at the western end of the building, single or double roofed and covered by shingles, which are a particular vernacular expression of the cultural landscape of that mountainous area of northern Romania.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criterion iv* :

Criterion iv The Maramures wooden churches are outstanding examples of vernacular religious wooden architecture resulting from the interchange of Orthodox religious traditions with Gothic influences in a specific vernacular interpretation of timber construction traditions, showing a high level of artistic maturity and craft skills.

ICOMOS, September 1999