

Saxon houses
- features and meanings -
yesterday and today





"The Saxons, the old settlers, people with a firm, steadfast and slow will, they rationally chose the land, where they would raise their homes and dig their tombs, they cautiously tasted the water, weighed the light, and carefully measured the thickness of the hume, they have escaped from heavier heights and have tried with the nostrils the direction of the winds."

(Lucian Blaga)

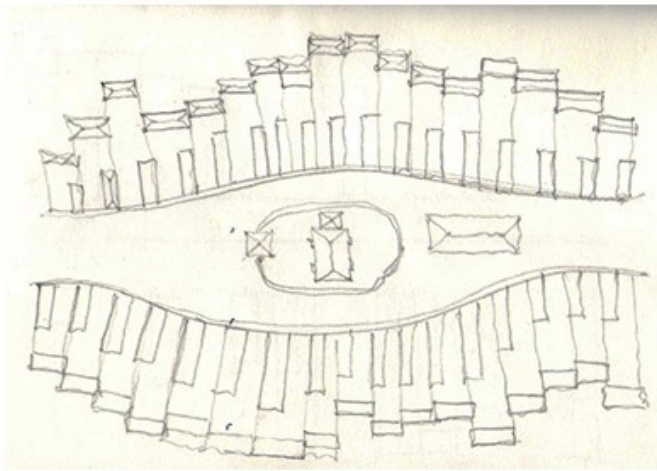
"They have not grown accidentally, with a clumsy enthusiasm, from the landscape, like the Romanian ones; they have been brought into this Transylvanian landscape, by air or elsewhere, from a country where soil poverty has taught people to fight nature, to work well, and especially steadfastly geometric."
(Lucian Blaga)

A careful analysis of the Saxon villages, especially of the Saxons household, will reveal the important features of the Saxons as nation, meanings, beliefs and adaptations of the environment, which can be argued both on a larger scale, for a village, and on a smaller scale, for a household with rooms, furniture. Military character, diligence, skill, prudence, community sense and aesthetic sense, all of this can be read in the image of the Saxon household.



But in the last period there have been many changes, other meanings appeared, some of which retain their significance, others not, and this difference I wanted to highlight in this study by the antithesis between the Saxon village of yesterday and today

Yesterday



From a prim view of the village can see that the Saxons have been preoccupied for a rigger for their household settlement. In the middle

of the village is the fortified church, the spiritual center and the first defense point of the village. Around it, the households are aligned in compacted groups that provide cohesion, but also have the aesthetic reasons.

The plots are posion side by side, by the Flemish type, with the reduction of the spatial distance between them. So they appear small and strait, but they lean on each other, and offer protection in case of war. The village landscape is a proof of the individual freedom removal, in favor of the collective one.



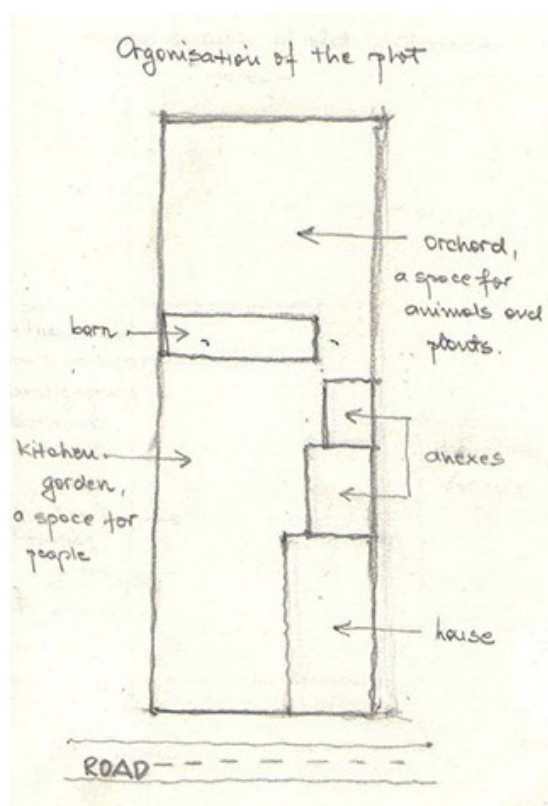
The fear of the surrounding enemies made them united, cautious and conservative. And this can still be seen from the facade line, which seems to align like a soldier, waiting to fight. This defense character of the Saxons is very present in the image of the house with tall, massive and repulsive walls, because they have something to protect and any desertation meant loss forever.



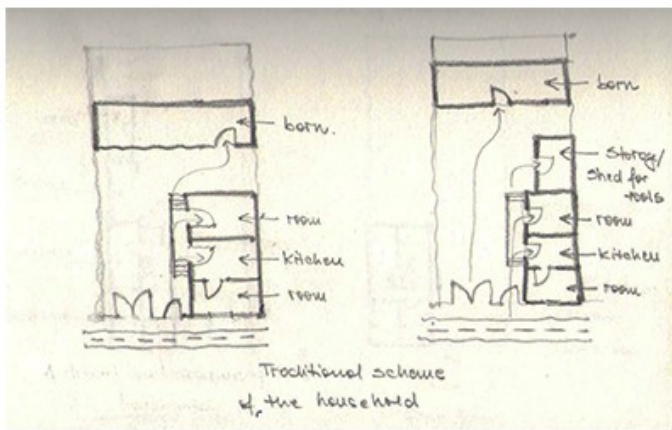
"The immemorial, the massifs Saxon villages studied- and at least it seemed to be- their place where they were to be built.

From the following that they are aliniated, confirmed by geometric examinations, is emphasized the idea of calculation. (...)

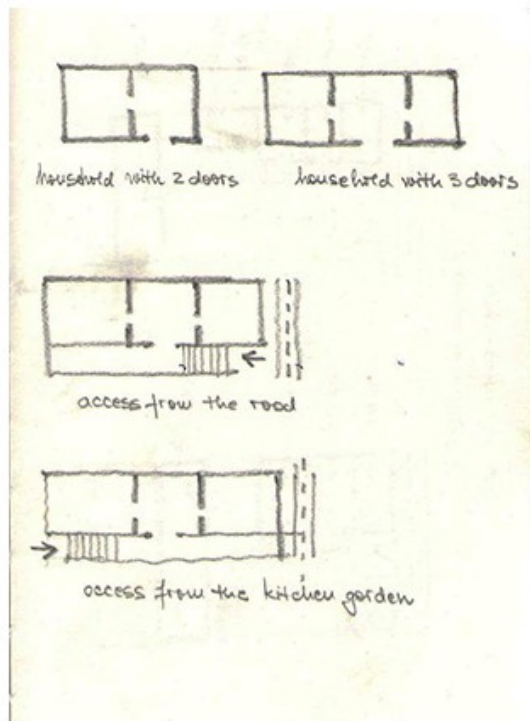
The Saxon houses stand side by side, forming a single large wall to the street, gravely, with tall windows that do not allow outward glances, conventionally carrying on the frontispiece a biblical maximum." (Lucian Blaga)



The plot is organised along a longitudinal axis, formed by a house disposed with the short side on the street, with two or three rooms: a bedroom, a "clean" room, and a kitchen; some annexes, where tools and animals can be held; and a barn. Has two gardens: a kitchen garden between the house and the barn and a orchard after the barn. The Saxons built the houses close to each other, the arable land being left on the outskirts of the village. This way they could offer mutual support in case of invasion.



The position of the house, of the annexes and the barn around the kitchen garden seem to be the result of a plastic compositional intention, but is actually dictated by a functional necessity of the household. The house is spacious enough for all the members of the family. The Saxon family had a small number of children, two, three children means a shame, and this because the Saxons did not want to see their lands divided in small pieces, so the family has a small numbers of members.



The entrance behind the house is a another method of protection, beside the tall and rough fence, but a proof that the main activity takes place in the kitchen garden and the orchard.



"Saxons are innate engineers, they impose the order of their soul on nature, they align their homes, as well as ideas, in battle with the surrounding mysteries." (Lucian Blaga)

The saxons opposed the nature, and this is obvious in the way in which the plot denies the ridge and slope lines.

The roof of the house is in two waters, with a splay pinion and a high slope. The roof of annexes and the barn has one or two slopes.

It is covered with tiles, straw or shingle in natural colors: brown or brick, forming a unity with the natural landscape.



The desire for defense and the sense of preservation can be seen in the image of the house through the height of the fence and the height of the fence and the windows, through the opacity and the use of the stone that conveys the stability of the Saxons.



The facade of the Saxon houses has as its dominant feature the triangular fronton with a splay pinion, with two vents for ventilation and illumination of the attic. Eaves covered with tiles protects windows and inscriptions from weathering. The windows are not positioned in the axis of the fronton to preventing the cracking of the wall, and the lower band, often treated in another color, conveys the fact that the basement are made from stone and brick, and the upper part only of brick.

The fences with two doors: one for people and one for animals and machines, are very important because is the first image which the passerby sees and offers the information about owner 's beliefs and superstitions. Most of the saxoon doors have motifs with the tail of the peacock, which means fertility and abundance.

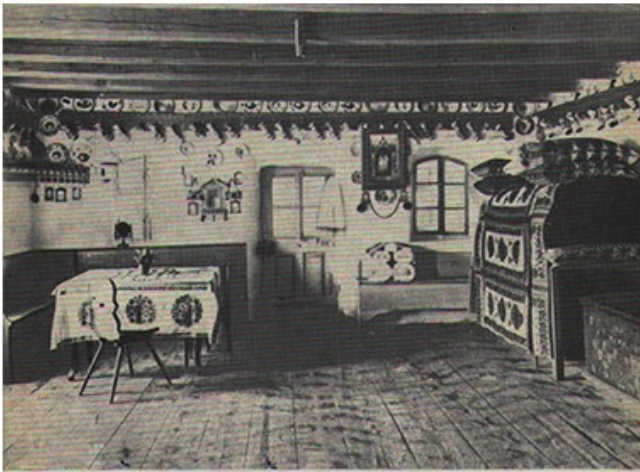


Placed in the axis of the fronton is a rosette or a circle shape niche, symbol of unity and perfection. The fronton often presents floral motifs, the cross - as a symbol of faith, the peacock - symbol of fertility, grape as a presence of the vineyard or inscriptions with the name of the owner or the year of construction.





Saxon houses are very colorful, but the main color they use is cobalt blue, a color that also has a practical use because the paint contains substance that chase away the insects. Another aspect is that the blue cobalt shades reflect the richness of the owners. So the richest people have the most intense shade of blue.



*source: Das siebenbürgisch-Sächsische bauernhaus
Rowith Capesius*

The Saxons rooms are decorated with wood furniture: benches, table, hanger, bed, wardrobe; ceramic objects, household pieces and interior textiles: carpets for walls, tablecloths, covers for bed. The interior of houses are impregnated by meanings, each piece of furniture, each piece of ceramic or textil are carefully handmade by them, decorated with motifs which tell a story.



What are the most important motifs used in...

"We must first explain its importance for the inhabitants of Transylvania, how well it fulfilled the needs of the Saxon peasant, and the deep relationship that exist between nature (for peasant the flower was the embodiment of solemnity) reproduction and symbolism. " (Roswith Capesius)

Flower motifs are most often used on decorative textiles as well as on ceramics and painted furniture. We remember the tulip, which is the sign of pride, hospitality, power and happiness. The zoomorphic motifs are represented by peacock - as a symbol of fertility, the sparrow - as a symbol of abundance and fertility, the pigeon - as a symbol of love.



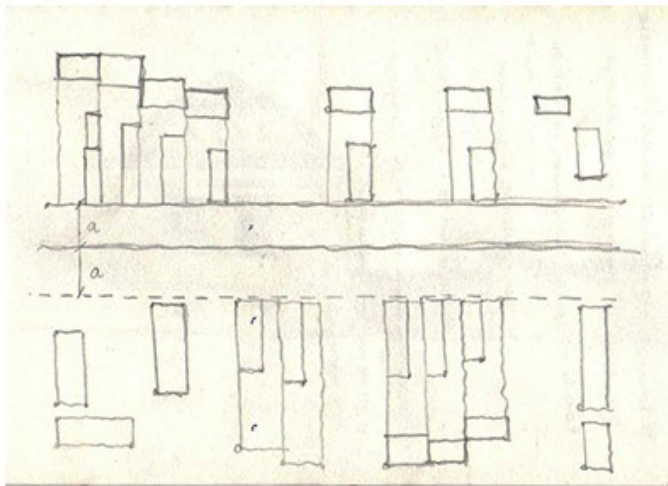
*But nowadays...
the image of the Saxon village is
not the same, a lot of saxons
have left their villages and in
their place came Romanians
or Gypsies and this fact caused
the loss of the old meanings, loss
the old spirtuals values which
gave a certain magic to the
villages*

Today

Another kind of rhythm appears, one that has no connection to the saxon spirit and the local landscape, this way overshadowing the defining image of the village, the church.



the source of the image: Hanna Derer



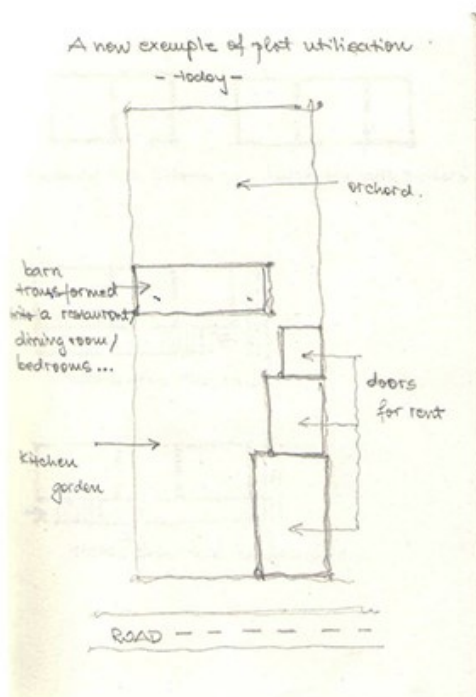
First of all, the overall picture of the village has changed, it is no longer dominated by unity and geometric rigor, because the plots are not grouped together, there are empty lots next to them, the houses are not supported by each other. Some houses are away by the general line of frames and the road has diminished its width, thus creating another perspective, but also a distance of houses. This is a first indication that the community spirit has changed, the connection between people is not the same as it used to be, as well as the atmosphere.

If initially the stone and brick used by the Saxons meant steadiness, today the use of other more ephemeral materials is evidence of the absence of the Saxons and the loss of their stability...

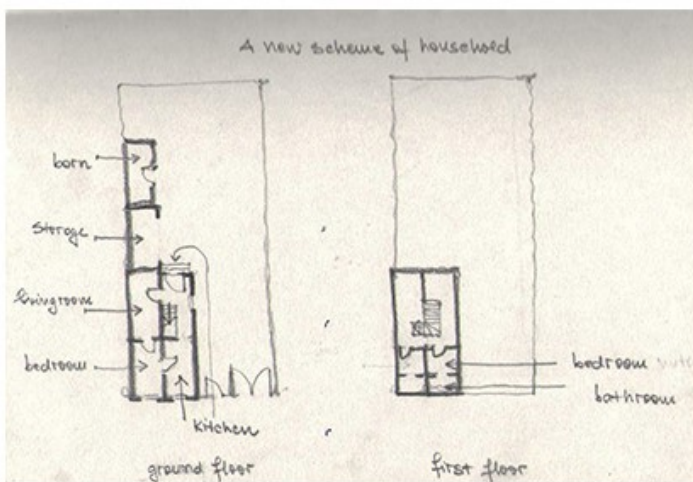


*The roof in two waters without a sparkle pinion, another volumetry, other windows,
another full-empty report, other colors, other materials, all these changes do not
identify with the real image of the Saxon village.*





But fortunately, some houses have been preserved at their true value and have been reconditioned. Although they may have changed their function, they still evoke the same spirit of the Saxons. For example, the rooms of the house and annexes became rooms for rent, and the barn became a restaurant, dining room or other rooms for tourists.



Or Saxons returned to their native place, made some changes to the old house, brought some modern influences, but respected the tradition. For example, the living room has kept its function, making it more simplistic and the attic has become a place for bedrooms, from where you can even see the image of the fortified church in the village.

Example of houses that preserve the traditional image



source: www.experiencetransylvania.ro

Old rooms with a new traditional appearance



Dinning room on the ground floor



Bedroom on the first floor

New examples of using the barn and the annexes



*barn turned into a store for
handmade objects*



*annex transformed into a pottery
workshop*



*barn transformed into a summer
dining room for tourists*

Conclusion

Maybe the Saxon village no longer looks like in the past, no longer expressing the same fascination because the inhabitants left or those who have stayed have changed their concept of life, but still the houses express in a sincere manner, as in the past, the new mysteries, rhythms and meanings of the inhabitants of the Saxon villages.

And the new intentions to use old homes by changing some functions seem to be the key to ensuring the continuation of the Saxon village and the preservation of its magic.

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