

THE TRADITIONAL RURAL HOUSEHOLD FROM THE FIELD REGION OF OLTENIA

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Rezumat: În studiul de față ne vom ocupa de gospodăria țărănească tradițională din cadrul satului, structurând prezentarea pe componentele sale, împreună cu elementele particulare care conferă gospodăriei rurale din această regiune individualitatea sa.

Pentru satele situate în zona studiată, este specifică gospodăria agricolă, care, totuși, este specifică pentru toate regiunile de câmpie joasă, unde construcțiile au fost limitate strict la cele necesare pentru adăpostirea oamenilor și a animalelor. Acesta este, în general, constituită din casă, un hambar pentru depozitarea recoltelor, o magazie pentru uneltele agricole, un subsol pentru produsele vitivinicole și alte alimente, grajdurile pentru animale, curtea și grădina de legume. Rolul esențial în cadrul acestei micro-unități socio-etnografice este cel al casei, în jurul căruia sunt aranjate funcțional anexele.

Abstract: In the present study we are to approach the traditional peasant's household from the village precinct, structuring the presentation on its components, along with the particular elements that confer the rural household from this region its individuality.

For the villages located in the studied area, it is specific the agricultural household, which, nevertheless, is specific for all the low field regions, where the constructions have been limited strictly to those necessary for sheltering the people and the animals. This is generally made of the house, a barn for storing the crops, a shed for the farming implements, a basement for the wine products and other foods, stables for the animals, the yard and the vegetable garden. The essential role within this socio-ethnographic micro-unit is that of the house, around which there are functionally arranged the annexes.

Cuvinte cheie: gospodărie rurală tradițională, Oltenia, peisaj rural, casă, anexe.

Key-words: the traditional rural household, Oltenia, rural landscape, house, annexes.

The main component of the traditional rural landscape, *the household*, represents a socio-ethnographic micro-unit in itself, in which the family life unfolds. The household is the space that includes all the other constructions that provide shelter for the family, the perimeter where the productive economic activities of its members take place, and where there are gathered and preserved the goods. Meanwhile, the household is the centre of the spiritual life of the peasant, the place where there are carried out a significant part of the customs from a man's life (the customs related to "the great passing" that are directly connected to the life cycle – birth, wedding, funeral, calendar traditions, along with the rest that include the man).

The genesis, the evolution and the features characteristic for the household represent the product of a complex of factors that have been manifesting differently along the history. An important part, in the structure of the household, has been played by the basic occupations of the dwellers, according to which the annexes of the household, within itself, have been differentiated. In the villages from the area we refer to, where agriculture has been the main occupation, there emerged the necessity to extend and increase the special constructions for the storage of the agricultural products, along which there appeared buildings for the shelter of the animals. Nonetheless, there cannot be ignored the natural conditions (relief, climate, hydrography, soil) that have always been considered, and according to which the configuration of the plan for the household has been made.

In the interim, the zonal types of households have been individualised through the general composition of the house and the projects of the dependencies, their architecture and ornamentation,

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the profile and the number of the annexed constructions, the manner of grouping them within the household and their orientation according to the cardinal points, the access to the lanes etc.¹.

The traditional peasant's household has two forms:

- of permanent household, situated in the village precinct
- of temporary household, placed on the land outside the village

In the present study we are to approach the first category, *the traditional peasant's household from the village precinct*, structuring the presentation on its components, along with the particular elements that confer the rural household from this region its individuality.

For the villages located in the studied area, it is specific the *agricultural household*, which, nevertheless, is specific for all the low field regions, where the constructions have been limited strictly to those necessary for sheltering the people and the animals. This is generally made of the house, a barn for storing the crops, a shed for the farming implements, a basement for the wine products and other foods, stables for the animals, the yard and the vegetable garden. The essential role within this socio-ethnographic micro-unit is that of the house, whose interior occupies 65% of the household's used surface². Around it, there are functionally arranged the annexes. *The yard*, the place in which there is made the access from the community space, bears the statute of an intimate space, forbidden *de facto* to the strangers, but open for looking. In the Romanian peasant's vision, each person is the absolute master of this space.

First of all, as previously mentioned, the household constructions were developed as a result of the requests that had to be met for carrying out the *basic occupations* of the dwellers, owing to the fact that there was necessary an appropriate storage for the agricultural products, and proper sheltering for the farming implements, the means of transport and the animals (Fig. 1). The economic development determined the dimension of the house plan, the number and the size of the dependencies, the architecture and their ornamentation, contributing to the shaping of the specificity for the southern region of Oltenia.

If most of the peasants' households, until the 19th century, had generally a simple structure, determined by the limits of the feudal economy, the house often representing the only durable construction³, starting with the second half of the same century, there occurred major changes in the structure of the household's elements, determined by the new social condition of the peasantry. The development of the agriculture through the extension of the farming surfaces, the improvement of the means and techniques for tilling the land and the diversification of the farming implements led to the increase of the production, which necessitated the extension and the addition of storing spaces for the agricultural products.

Within the household, Georgeta Stoica delimits two spaces: the male one, made of the yard, the land, the dependencies, and the female one, represented by the room with the fireplace, the kitchen, the living rooms, the hen coop etc.⁴. Yet, the two spaces are not strictly delimited, the family members reuniting for different householding activities in common spaces. In the room with the fireplace, on the porch, or in the good room the family often meets in the evening, after dinner, or in the morning, before starting the work, in this case the delimitation being made according to the place occupied in the room.

The villages, through their mophostructure, have determined the type and the form of the constructions within the households, along with the manner they are placed. The characteristic settlements from Oltenia Plain have *closed-yard* households, usually specific for the cluster settlements, developed on less rough lands. Here, the constructions are grouped on a limited area, separated by fences by the farming land around them. The placing of the constructions within the yards is made according to the dimension of the plots and the opening of the household towards the access lane.

¹ Butură, 1978, p. 65.

² Petrescu, Stoica, 1981, p. 44.

³ Enache, Pleșa, 1982, p. 69.

⁴ Petrescu, Stoica, 1981, p. 43.

Dominant in the mentioned area are the households placed with the narrow side towards the access way (road, lane), with yards having a linear displacement. This is one of the oldest and most practical plans of household organisation, spread among the majority of villages from the Romanian Plain⁵, which has been dominant until nowadays. The constructions are aligned along the yard, starting with the house, placed perpendicularly on the street line, continuing with shelters used as summer kitchens, the barn and the sheds for the farming implements, then the hen coops, the pigsties, the stables, sheds for stacks, near which there are the fodders. Sometimes, the annexed constructions were connected to the house, being placed under its prolonged roof.

The linear households were also frequent in Transylvania, especially in the area of Năsăud, where they were used as seasonal shelters on the plot of land, called “the field houses”⁶. According to Valer Butură, that was the initial plan for organising the colonisation, which they abandoned after 1800, once with the replacing of the wood by bricks and the straws by tiles⁷. The linear plans were also imposed in Banat, during the colonisation and systematisation process⁸.

Another type of household, frequently met in the area studied here, is that with yards *organised on two lines*. In this case, perpendicularly on the lane, the first line of constructions is made of the house, hen coops and other secondary dependencies. On the opposite side of the dwelling, there is the shed, open only towards the yard and used just for sheltering the farming implements and the means of transport, the stable (situated rather towards the inner part of the yard, close to the fodder stores). It seems that this way of building disposing provided the advantage of enlarging the garden, through the reduction of the yard space, and offered a better supervision of the animals from the stables⁹.

One of the main characteristics of the households from the field area of Oltenia is the division of the yard in two sections: 1. the front yard, where there is the house and the annex constructions; 2. the vegetable garden and the orchard. The yards are delimited with fences. In some cases, the front yard is fragmented, by separating the house from the dependencies, and, in this way, resulting two yards and the vegetable garden.

The central place within the household is therefore occupied by *the house*, this nucleus of the family life, which, in the opinion of I. Ghinoiu, can be compared to a giant tree, whose trunk (the family) ensures the connection between branches and roots, between the former generations and those that are to be born¹⁰. Along the centuries, in Oltenia Plain, there have coexisted two types of dwellings, the hut and the house built on the surface of the ground (Fig. 2, Fig. 3). They have both known an evolution in time and space, displayed in a variety of forms and answering the same continuously increasing requests of the population, on addressing the shelter and the carrying out of the householding activities. A more ample presentation of the two types of dwellings and the practices and their building rites, there was published in the work called *The habitat from Oltenia Plain, from Prehistory to the beginning of contemporary era*¹¹. What it ought to be mentioned, in the present study too, is that, an element of particularisation in the analysed space is the presence of the hut (from Antiquity to the end of the 20th century), a type of house dug either entirely or half into the ground, covered with reed, straws or corn stalks. As regarding the plan of the dwelling, the distribution of the of the rooms is similar in the case of the both types, presenting differences only in the elements of detail. From the one room dwelling, with a multifunctional role (kitchen and living room), the house has evolved towards the plan with two, three or more rooms, each with its own functionality.

⁵ Butură, 1978, p. 69; Stănculescu *et al.*, 1958, p. 15.

⁶ Butură, 1978, p. 70.

⁷ Butură, 1978, p. 70.

⁸ Petrescu, 1963, pp. 161-162.

⁹ Mureșan, 2005, p. 241.

¹⁰ Trebici, Ghinoiu, 1986, p. 300.

¹¹ Ceașescu, Lazăr, 2014.

Considering the agricultural specific of the settlements, in the structure of the households, there have appeared different *annex constructions*, mostly for storing and preserving the agri-food products, but also for sheltering the animals, the farming implements and the means of transport. The place for their construction is chosen in connection to the house, and according to the type of annex, or the local configuration of the land.

On addressing the building materials for the annexes, they are usually the same with those used for the construction of the house, respectively wood, clay, straws, reed, bricks, for the erection of walls and installing of roofs. There used to be dominant the constructions with clay walls, made differently according to the quantity of timber the builders had: from clay applied on weaved twigs, from clay introduced between the planks, from adobes. Specific was the technique of construction using thick wooden beams, inserted in the ground or in the basis of the building, over which there was added an enclosure of twigs, consolidated with successive layers of clay, mixed with straws or chaff. This is a very old technique, attested during the time of the Dacians, and used in constructions until the beginning of the 20th century.

The *barns* are always present in the organisation of the rural houses, being constructions built for the storing of the corn (Fig. 4). They were usually placed in the sunniest and airiest spots from the household, in order to favour the drying of the stored corn.

With a square or rectangular shape, the barns were built at variable heights above the ground (0.60-2m), on pillars stuck in the ground, for protecting the grains from rodents. Dominant were the rectangular barns, with the length of 4-6 meters and the width of approx. 1.2-1.5 meters. Vertically, in the foundation, there were stuck pillars, between which there were attached weaved twigs or wooden boards (starting with the first decades of the 20th century). It was then covered with straws, corn stalks, reed or tiles, tin plates (in the 20th century). Gradually, *the shed* was added to it, on the front side or laterally, used for sheltering the farming implements and the means of transport, or for performing certain works, as corn peeling, in the autumn.

Quite often, in the space underneath the barn, there were created *pigsties* or *hen coops*. Sometimes, the grains storehouse was built here¹².

The characteristics of the traditional household from the area, until the beginning of the 19th century, are represented by *the cereal pits*, an archaic version for the storage of the grains, used mostly in the field regions from Oltenia, Muntenia and Moldova.

The storage pits were dug into the ground (approx. 2-3m), having the shape of a funnel, wider at their mouth and narrower at the basis (Fig. 5). Sometimes, they could be wider at the bottom than the mouth. Other times, they had attached *an opening* straight down, with a depth of 0.80-1m. The width of the opening varied between 60 and 80cm. From the opening downwards, the pit had *an arch* or *a funnel shape*, reaching even 2m at the bottom¹³. After the earth was dug out, the interior of the pit was burnt with straws or logs, to become dry and to be filled with grains. They were covered with a wooden door, or a cart wheel, over which there were placed straws and a layer of earth, in the form of a mould of approx. 50cm height. The grain pits also presented the advantage of hiding the products.

The cereals were also preserved in wicker baskets, or in large boxes, made of beech or oak wood, called *chests*¹⁴.

In each household, there were sheds for the animals. The incipient forms were those of simple shelters, made of wicker, round and uncovered, or with a simple roof, and polygonal, made of horizontal poles, attached to pillars stuck in the ground.

The most important one was *the stable* (Fig. 6), a more evolved form of shelter (it appeared in the peasants' households at the beginning of the 20th century), which offered protection for many categories of animals (cattle, sheep). Initially, it was built close to the house, as an extension of it,

¹² Iordache, 1985, p. 190.

¹³ Iordache, 1985, p. 184.

¹⁴ Iordache, 1985, p. 182.

or even sharing the same roof, for a better supervision of the animals, and it was later placed next to the garden. The stable was built from twigs, glued with clay, clay mixed with straws, half-timber walls, and later from bricks and covered with straws, reed, tin plates or tiles. In its attic, there was usually kept the hay (the space known as *the hay loft*), and, underneath the prolonged roof, there were sheltered the farming implements and the means of transport.

The basements or *the cellars* could also be found in any household. They were built both under the ground, as a small pit „resembling a miniature huts”¹⁵, connected to the dwelling, or independent to it, and on the ground, as one room construction.

In the villages from the Danube Valley, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the next one, as a specific feature, there appeared the hard-packed earth technique. In the north of the plain, in few settlements (Caraula, Cornu), the cellars „dug into the ground” were built from wood: „there was used a special technique, the boarding of the cellar with thick planks (approx. 8 cm), positioned vertically and fixed on a wooden frame. In the middle, there were one or two wooden poles, carved octagonally”¹⁶.

The loom hut is another component element of the traditional household from the area. It is a partially buried construction, similar to a larger hut, with double functionality: practical and strategical. There it was placed the weaving loom, used by women during the winter, and autumn when the weather was not appropriate for working on the field. During the invasions, it also served as shelter for children, women and elder.

The stables, for the shelter of animals, the huts dug in the ground for the shelter of buffaloes (Fig. 7), the pigsties, the hen coops, the barns, the storehouses made of bricks or wood, for the storage of grains have all constituted characteristic elements, showing elements of the folk architecture, proper for the southern region of Oltenia.

The entire household was surrounded by a *fence*, which delimits it from the community space (Fig. 8). Initially having the function of delimiting the dimensions of a property, later on, the fence also gained the role of protection provider. The fence had to exist firstly for dividing two places, the one that belongs to the rightful owner and that of the neighbour: „Indeed, there are such places too. If a fence comes between you, you don’t know what’s over it. Everyone minds their business”¹⁷. The access in the household is allowed through *the gates*, one for people, and another for animals and carts.

Moreover, the fence represents a magic circle that protects the micro-cosmos within it. The fact that it is made of weaved twigs, covered with thorns, or sharp wooden boards, can also be considered a defender of the household, not only against the thieves, but also the evil spirits.

In the second half of the 19th century, the enclosure of the households from the south of Oltenia was realised with the help of ditches dug in the ground, or fences made of weaved twigs, wooden boards, or reed. The most frequent were the weaved twig fences, either horizontally, on poles firmly stuck into the ground, or vertically, between two pairs of horizontal boards, attached on poles or pillars. For an extended endurance, but also for being harder to trespass it, it could have a protecting roof, covered with thorns. After 1900, as the constructive and aesthetic process of a dwelling has advanced, there has been registered an improvement in the quality and aspect of the fence, becoming generalised the fences made of boards, with different geometrical patters, making the transition towards the one from nowadays, made of iron or concrete.

ABBREVIATIONS LIST

AMET - Anuarul Muzeului Etnografic al Transilvaniei, Cluj.

¹⁵ Stahl, Stahl, 1968, p. 46.

¹⁶ Enache, Pleșa, 1982, p. 69.

¹⁷ Bernea, 1985, p. 34.

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Fig. 1. The traditional rural household from the field region.
(after *Atlasul Etnografic Român*, vol. I, *Habitatul*).

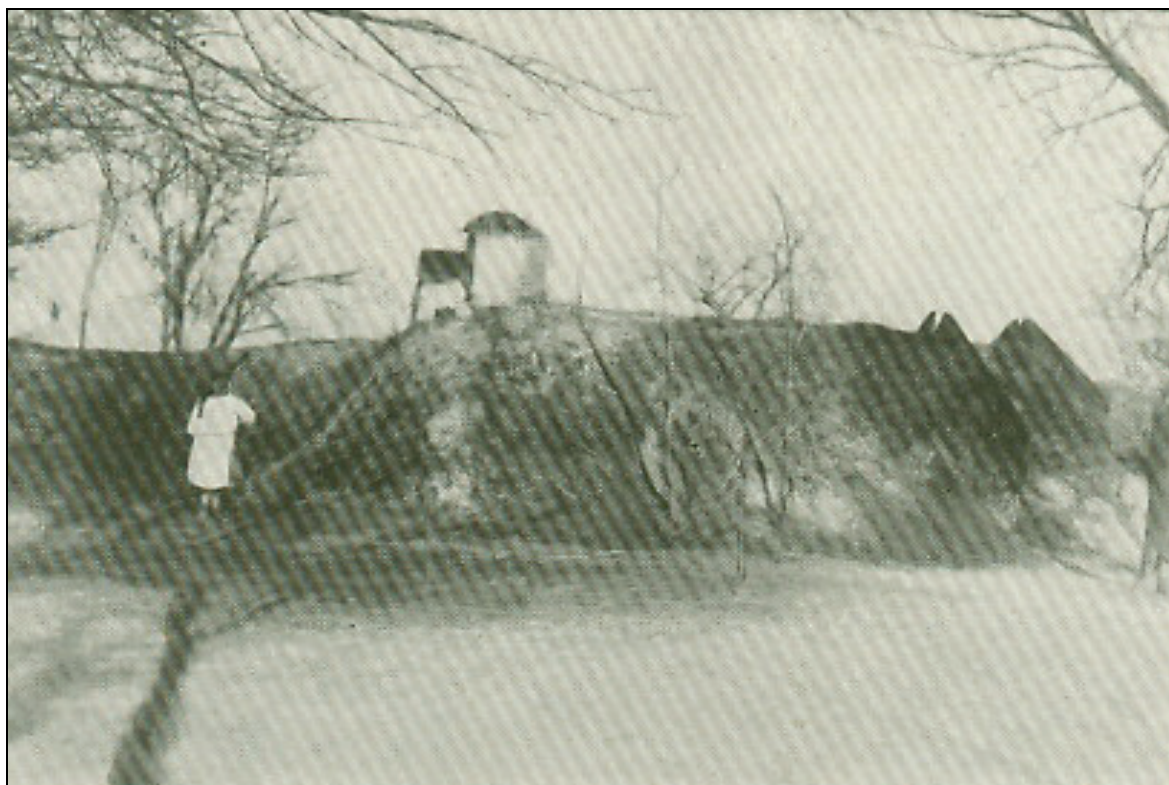


Fig. 2. Hut in the Oltenia Plain.
(after Tache Papahagi, 1934).



Fig. 3. Traditional house with two rooms and porch.



Fig. 4. The barns of braided rods.
(photographic library of the Museum of Oltenia, Ethnography section).

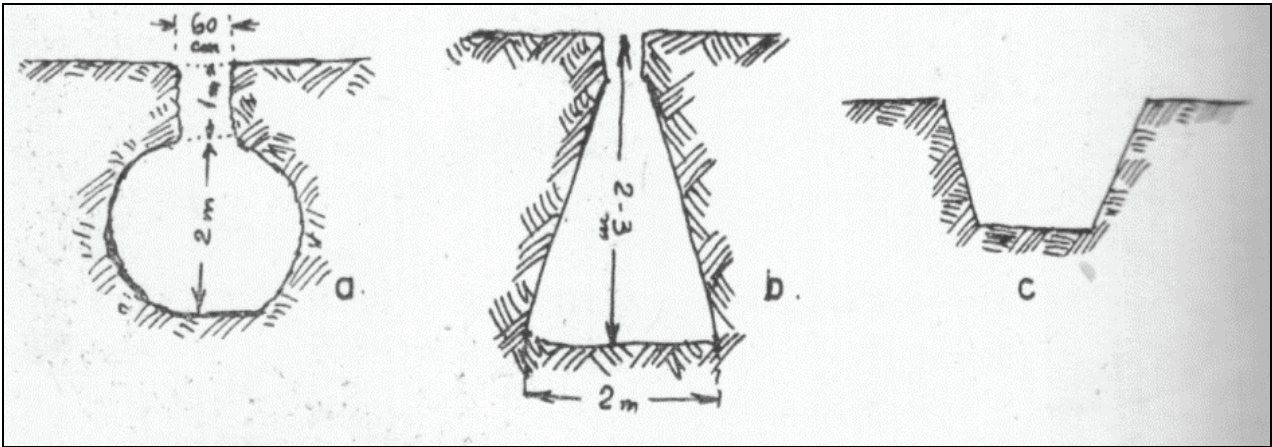


Fig. 5. *The cereal pits.*
(after Gheorghe Iordache, 1985).



Fig. 6. *Stable covered with straw.*
(after *Atlasul Etnografic Român*, vol. I, *Habitatul*).



Fig. 7. The huts dug from Rast, Dolj county.
(after Tache Papahagi, 1934).



Fig. 8. Fence from the beaten earth.
(after *Atlasul Etnografic Român*, vol. I, *Habitatul*).