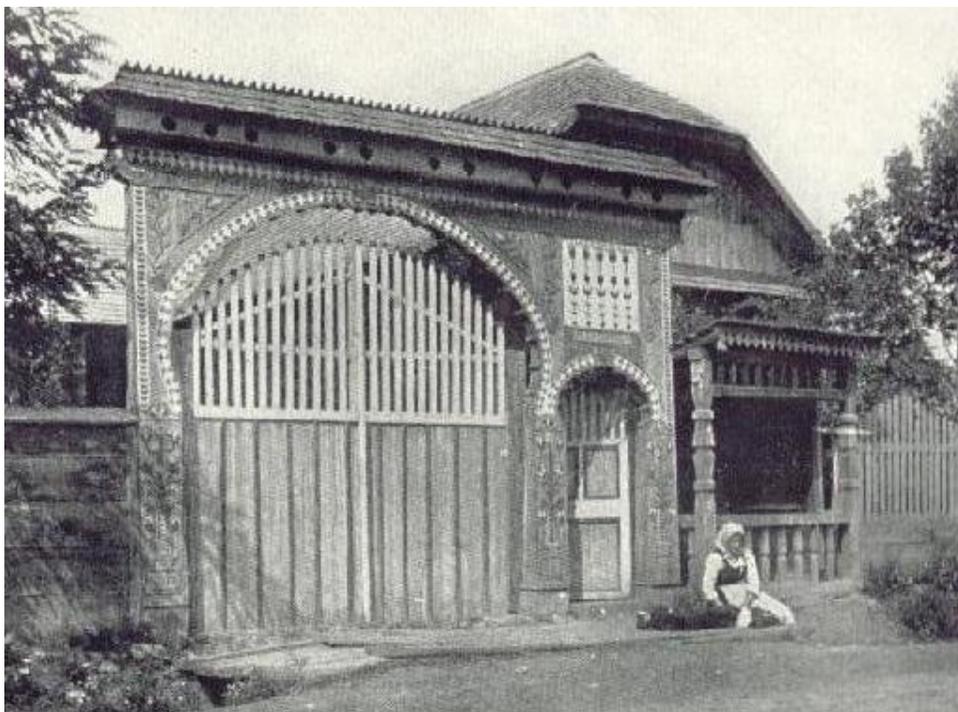


Woodcarving - Products from the Great Hungarian Plain



Edited and translated by Aranyi László

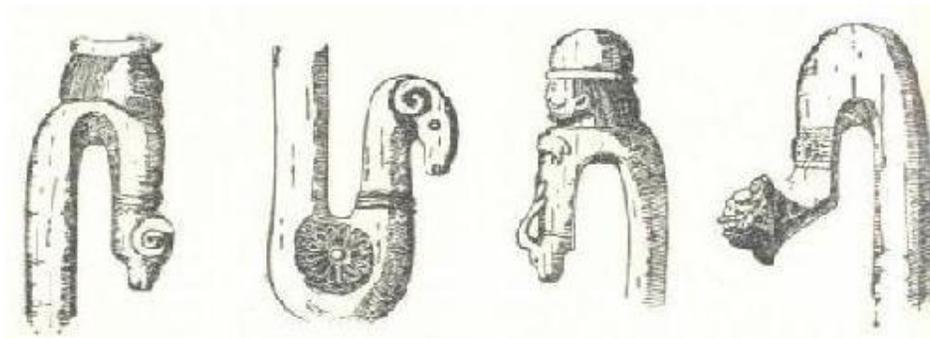
Woodcarving

The Great Hungarian Plain is unbelievable rich in woodcarving products. They show great skilfulness of the masters. In these days there could be found many wonderful pieces of woodcarving, though there are large areas in the Great Hungarian Plain without trees, because it is clear that for carving small things there is no need to have forests. At present times, it is obvious that woodcarving is connected to the arias with forests, but hundreds of years ago, most part of the Great Hungarian Plain was covered by forests, so woodcarving was very common.



Flat drawing of a carved stick - a shepherd Sunday's best stick

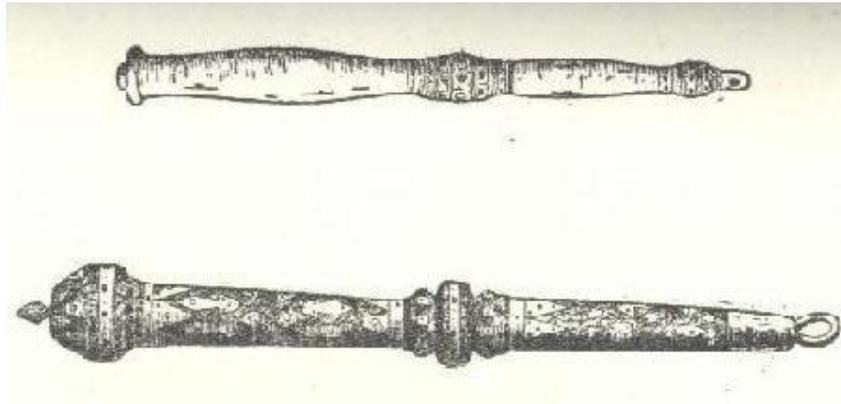
It is not possible to describe all the types of woodcarving things, but it can be said that one of the most ancient profession is the shepherds' or pastors', as everybody knows them. They made lots of different things: sticks, whip-handles, shepherd's crooks, axe-handles, drinking-cups, lamb signs, pocket-knife handles, corn-meal stirrers, plates, salt-cellars, ointment-cellars, drinking-pots, dog-clogs, mirrors, razor-cases, flutes, bagpipe heads, wood pipes, pipe-handles, frames, different pieces of furniture, and so on .



Shepherds' hooks from Zala county

The materials, used by the pastors, were different. There are some objects, which were made of the same type of wood. It was a kind of custom or

the pastors had the experiences about the types of wood or both. Here are some examples: mirrors were made usually of maple-wood, whip-handles of plum wood, and sticks of dogwood or oak-wood. Gnarled sticks were formed by not only carving, but also using the nature's power itself as well. It was common that the pastors chose a tree, made holes in it in regular lines, then put a dogwood core into each holes. By the end of the next year, the tree grew around the cores. This method was possibly used for making handles for different tools, and was known by the archaic people too.



Carved whip-handles

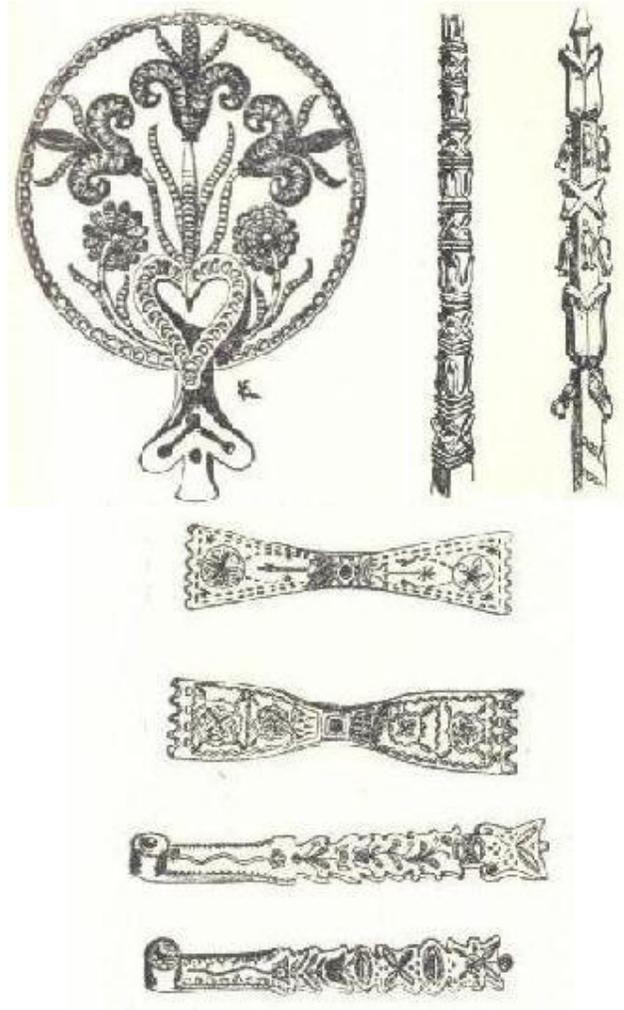
Every pastor has an own tool that is a kind of signification of his profession, a kind of shield. He is the proudest of it. It was common that the pastors carried their shields with them to dedication festivals and markets. The pastor's shield was the shepherd's crook, the herdsman's was the stick, horse-herd's was the whip, and swineherd's was the axe. There were different types for different occasions: for everyday using and their Sundays' bests .



Carved mirrors

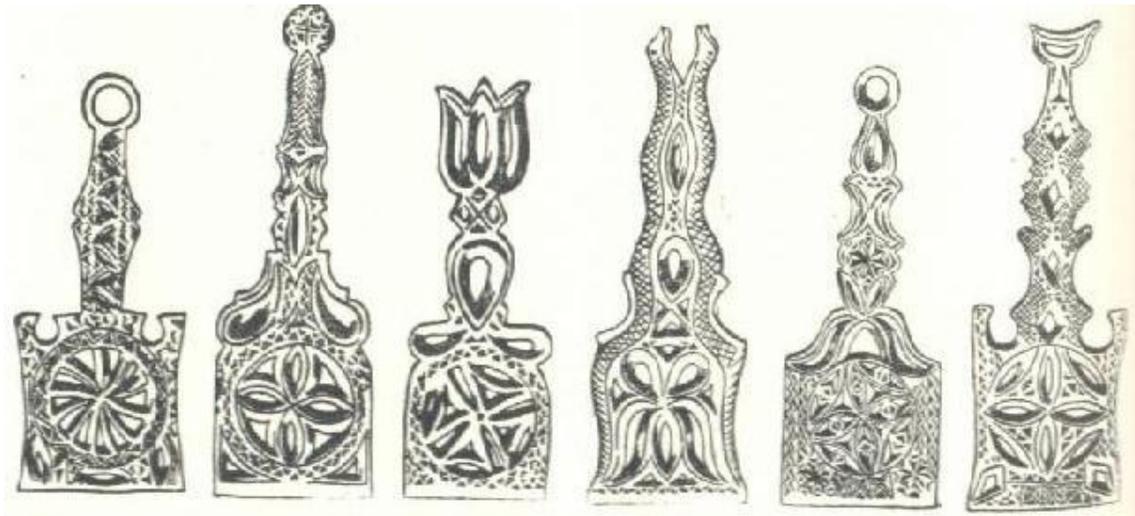
The nicest whip-handles can be found near the river Danube. They carved mainly geometric forms. On the crooks, there are ram -heads, but there are horse heads, dog heads, man heads, acorns or a group of different

decorative elements. There is also a very interesting type of carving; it is the earlier used leather motifs carved into wood.



Bottom of a drinking cup - distaffs' sticks - distaffs ssoles

The pastors' life-style and their thinking of the world can be found on their pocket mirrors motifs. Their carved lines are sophisticated, but there can be found dark spots, as well. The positions of their carved figures' bodies are well worked out, and are typical. They stressed on the clothes and dresses, the motions, and the objects surrounding. Colouring the mirrors the used vegetable paints and about two hundred years ago, it was common to use sealing wax as well.

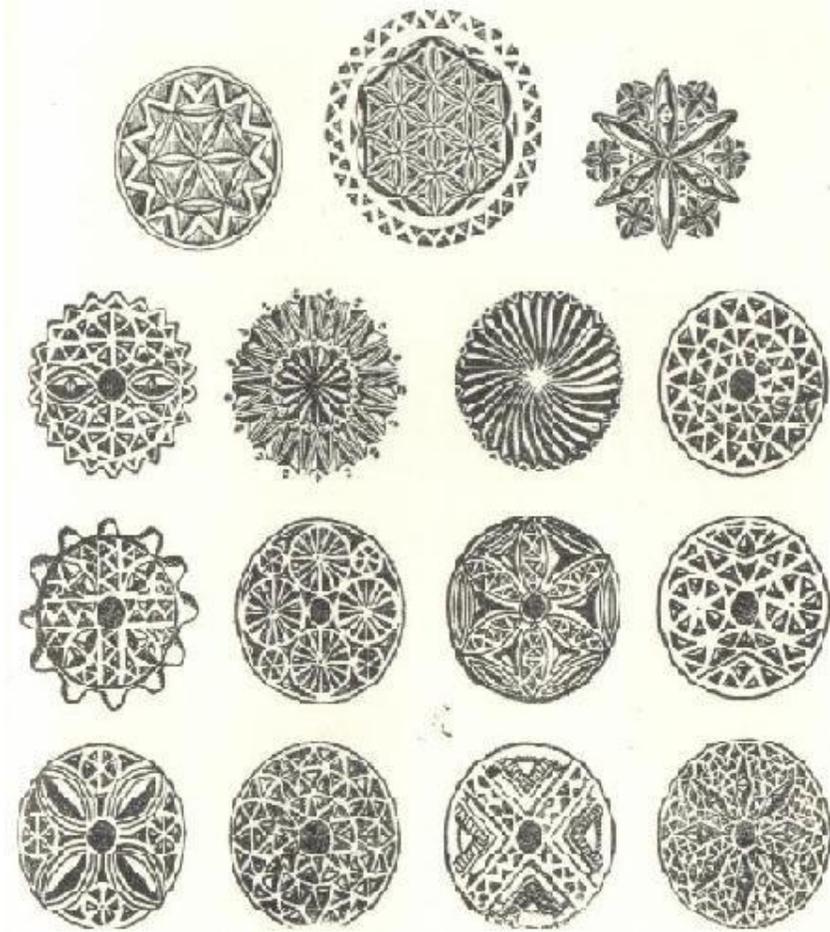


Hoe-cleaners

In the beginning, flat works were general, but from the 19th century, mainly relief style was used. In the beginning, the long objects' (for example flutes and sticks) flat and sealed waxed motifs followed each other in different tracks, but from the 19th century, we can see that the motifs make complete compositions in most cases rounded them by snakes. The motifs themselves are as packed as possible that way is very typical in folk art .

The main themes of the pastors' woodcarving are men and animals, but can be found a great part of the flowers, too. The flowers are generally in bunches, as it was common used in the furriers' and tailors' works.

The pastors in their everyday work could be without their drinking cups. It was carved from one piece of wood. They carried them on their satchels' straps. Drinking cups, with or without handles, are known from the very ancient times. They represent the oldest pieces of the archaeological objects in Europe; because of this, they are very important. They similar to those drinking cups, which are well known in Asia and they are made of leather. They usually show different types of animals. They often form the bird carrying the water of life.



Rosettes

Among the objects and tools of the pastors, we have to talk about those kinds of tools, which are known from the most ancient times. Such kinds of tools are for example the spinner and the viewer tools. From these, the distaff, the shuttle and the linen stretcher. Their motifs are similar to the mangles' and the washing weighs'. From the point of view of decorating art these objects are very important, because in general they were made by young lads or young married men for the young girls or young

wives using traditional decorating arts. It was common to show the wedding ceremonies parts, the dances, the dressing up, and so on. Because the traditions were changed, the decorating styles were changed too.

The oldest times mainly geometrical motifs were used, form example different types of rosettes. We could recognize these very old motifs on the furniture or in gothic buildings as well. We can rank the hoe-cleaner among these objects. That is also made for present.

This closed style of motifs is well known through over Europe and Russia. It is interesting that these typical geometrical forms are still used in the Great Hungarian Plain for decorating razor boxes. This method can have very old traditions.

There are many different objects and tools in the Hungarian carving art with geometrical and flourish motifs together. In the beginning, these flowers were very similar to the rosettes. The more realistic motifs of flowers spread out later. Then they were used from the full scale of objects from the smallest one to the doorposts.



Mangle

A typical piece of our carving art is the clothes -box or *szuszek*. It was kept in the room of the peasant-house and was full of clothes. Its top and its sides were covered by decorative carving works. These motifs were always geometric although there could have been enough places to form something else. It is a tradition. In addition, of course, different carving styles can be found in different areas. It was common in Hungary to make much more sophisticated carving works than the other nations nearby us.

Among the agricultural tools, we can find a lot with carving. For example, here are some: yokes, rakes, scythe whetstone boxes, whip -handles, scythe handles and coaches. And, in the households, there were plenty of carved objects, in addition to those that were mentioned before, for examples decorated spinning wheels, looms, salt cellars, spoon -boxes, matchboxes, candlesticks, flower-stands and so on.

Of course, furniture was carved as well. Mainly oak trees were used to make wardrobes, tables, chairs and so on. They are well known in the west part of Europe too. In the west part of Hungary, we can recognize four typical themes of carving; these are hunting, shepherding, farming and the life of soldiers.

Wooden crosses and headboards

The first group of the so-called monumental works is the wooden crosses, the wooden headboards and the cemeteries' doorposts. From the groups, mentioned before, the wooden headboards are the most important because they show plenty of thousands of years old traditions. They represent a kind of writing as well, carving in wood. These kinds of headboards are still in use in the Hungarian inhabited area of Romania .



Wooden crosses

Their shapes were usually like columns, becoming narrow on their tops. The most ancient pieces of them were decorated with geometrical motifs. They are very similar to the motifs that we can find on the distaffs. Their typical elements were the eight tipped, mace-like carving, rounded by equal sided triangles, and a four-petal flower-like element and a kind of mix of them. Some parts of Hungary it was common to use red and blue painted headboards.



Headboards

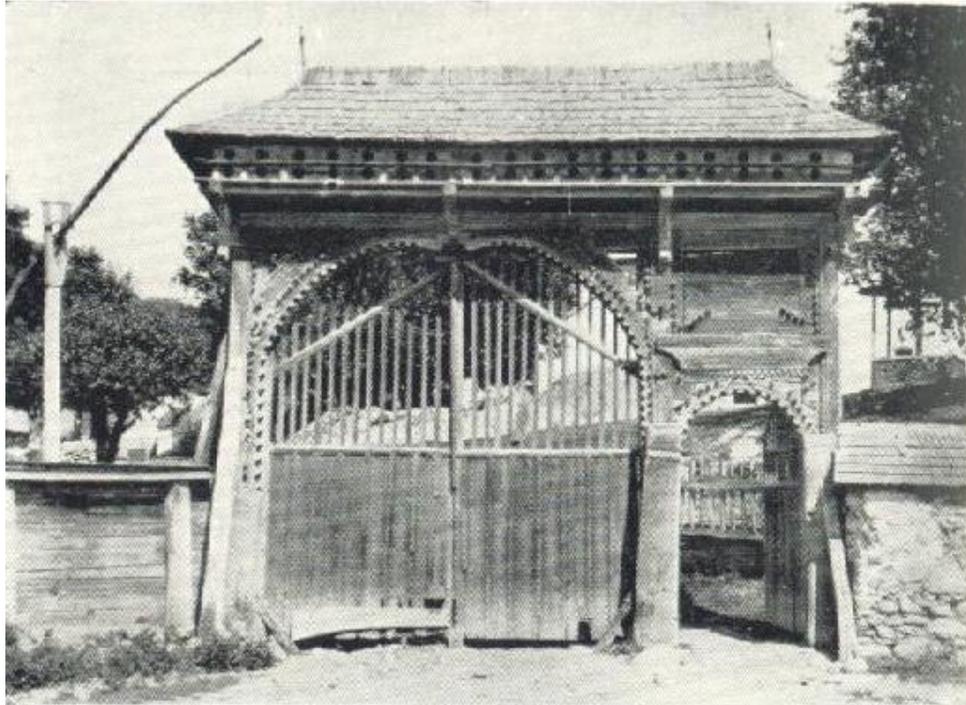
The nicest wooden crosses are known from the north part of Hungary. These are mainly in Baroque style. In the great Hungarian Plain, the chiselled decorations were general. These motifs were adjusted the natural waves of the wood, and show mainly flowers and leaves. These stems sometimes came out from flowerpots, and on the top of them, we can see looking-back birds, the messengers of the other world. Similar type of carved wood columns were used to show the frontiers. They usually show

human shapes.

Our tombs' signs remind us human figures. It is possible that in the ancient times they were human figures. They watched into to infinitive space as the frontiers' figures the owned lands.

Gates

They are called monumental works. The masterpieces can be found in Transylvania (Erdély). Of course there were made a lot through the country, but they are the best. It was common to build hedgerows round the villages. In these hedgerows, you could pass through these gates. There are very nice gates all over the Great Hungarian Plain as well, in spite of the fact that there are no big forests there. The nicest and the best worked-out gates were made in Kalotaszeg and the Hungarian inhabited Transylvania.



Székely Gate

They were decorated with carved and painted rosette motifs, and sometimes the masters carved flowers as well. There are doorposts with festoon of flowers and branches of flowers in flower pots, but on these types of gates, we can see geometrical motifs as well, but they are in the background or in the sides of the gates. They have a special name: Székely-gate.

The size of the Székely-gate is monumental too. They were built around three columns. On top of the columns, there can be seen a kind of roof, and between the columns, there is a big and a small gate (for humans and for coaches). Both of the tops of the gates are usually arched, and covered with dovescotes. Over the small gate, there are relieves-like and sometimes, painted carving. In the eastern part of Erdély the common style is just carving, in the western part of the country mainly painted too. The best carved are known from Háromszék, and the best painted from Udvarhelyszék .



Székely little gate

In the ancient times in Erdély, it was general to build a little bit smaller gates leading to the yard. The gate could move on giant doorpost that had a dovecote on top of it. This dovecote was the sign that a noble family lived there. These kinds of buildings and decorating styles sometimes were used in gates that were built from stones.

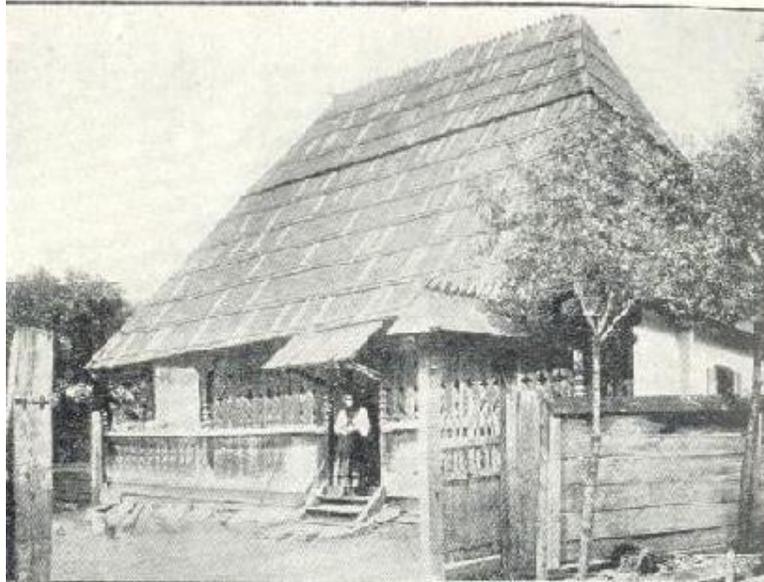
The oldest Székely-gate we know about was made in Marosszék, in 1673, and it was stood up before the monastery named after St. Francesco. This gate can be seen in Budapest now, in our National Museum. Every decoration on this gate is geometrical.

The shields-like decorations, the notes in Latin ABC, the curses upon enemies, the historical signs in decorations, show, that the origin of the Székely-gates maybe come from the castles' entrances. We could see such kinds of gates in Schedel's World Chronicle from 1498. The dovecotes could be originated from the balconies that were built over the castles' entrances .

The master of the Székely-gate was the carving-miller. The type of this gate was familiar in Czech, in Germany, in Dutch, and in Russia too. We also know carving gates from Turkey.

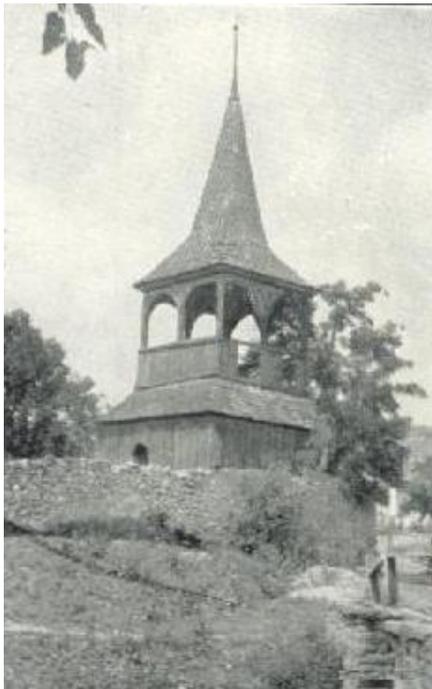
Houses, Churches

In the medieval ages, the peasants lived in much simpler houses than they did later. They generally were poor, as in almost every part of Europe. The technique methods they applied were depended on the materials they could use. Through the centuries, they made perfect their building techniques. We can say that their works are beautiful. Thatched huts and underground sank shacks could be also very nice. To decorate anything is just possible when there are materials that can be formed, there are lots of them nearby, they are easy to form, and they are long lasting. Such kind of material is the wood. As we really see, the traditional folk style decorations were formed by carving axe, by chisel, and much later by saw.



A typical house

During the centuries when the Hungarian tribes got home to the Carpathian basin we can see buildings made of wood, and churches too. However, many of the villages were very poor, sometimes they could not build church from reeds either. There were lots of village with just one real house. Most part of the fortresses was not built from wood or bricks, but from hedge or mud. For example: Baranyavár, Kolozsvár and Sövényvár.



Bell tower

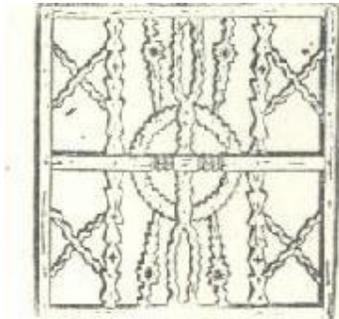
Many of the castles were not really built but were twisted as we can see during the Turkey's occupation of Hungary. These very ancient methods of building were used for building churches, too. And we can see these types of houses recently as well, the upper region of river Tisza it is common for building peasantry houses. There were of course many churches building from wood, for example, the Protestant Church of Fels bányá from 17th century. We have hundreds and hundreds notes from similar churches.

Wood churches are remained in those areas where the churches are too poor to use stones or bricks for building in these days as well, mainly outside of the present Hungarian border. It was common to sell the wood church if they had enough money to build a new one from stones or bricks. In these cases, the churches were carried away for more kilometers. We had famous church-carving villages. They made the churches in pieces, and then the

pieces were carried to the customer's village, and were put together there. Vámosatya in Bereg was such a kind of village where famous wood churches were carved.

There are not any wood-churches remained. All of them were destroyed the previous centuries by Tatars, Turkeys, and so on. After the hard historical ages, the churches built from stones and bricks. However there are very nice wood-towers or belfries remained. They generally were built in Roman style with Gothic archways, and were connected to the churches, mainly protestant churches. In some places, it was common to build a baroque style cover on top of the bell tower. A kind of mix of the different architectural styles there can be found inside the churches. In spite of this, they are very nice.

These wood churches and bell towers were planned by the popes of the villages, and they directed the buildings themselves. They specified the styles of the churches, based on the technological and cultural backgrounds. These methods were also used for the inside furnishing and decorating. From the decorating styles, the most common was the renaissance type of colorful ceilings that usually made by wandering painters, not the craftsmen of the villages. In their work we can see a kind of mixture of scholar, provincial and rustic styles. Such kind of painted ceilings can be found in the southwest, northeast of Hungary, and in Erdély.



Window grating

These painted ceilings were important for the folk art too, because their motifs were a kind of base for other folk craftsmen in their decorated works, for example, in woodcarving, in embroidery, in painting, in pottery, etc. We could find some written notes on the ceilings by the ancient Hungarian cuneiform ABC. The using of this ABC was prohibited in the medieval era by the Christian

Church.

The Hungarian peasants' houses were less decorated. However, there were typical ways for making nicer them. The gables, the verandas, the columns, the eaves, the frames of the doors and the windows, the window gratings, the window boards, the crossbeams, the buttresses, the walls covered by planks and the painted walls had rich decoration. By our experiences, we can tell that these kinds of decorations were used just for the noble persons houses in the beginning.

Furniture

The customs of furnishing has changed. Recently it is common to have many pieces of furniture, the houses and the flats are packed. Centuries ago it was not so. The old pieces were made of oak-wood or beach wood without using saw or sometimes plane. This kind of furniture could not be painted. The only type of decoration that could be used was carving. The first piece of

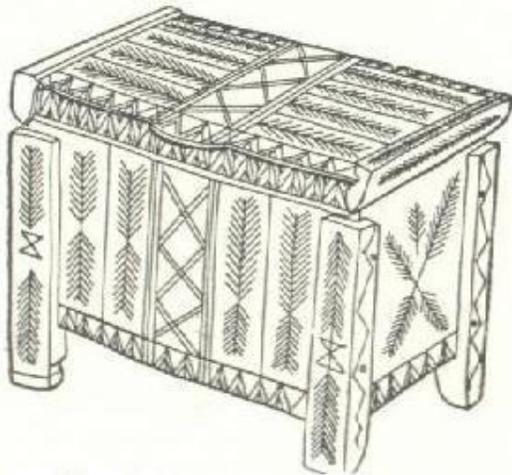
furniture that became common in the peasant house was the small cupboard, or *szuszek*. The varied decorations were made by using rules and compasses.



Chairs

The next generation of the furniture was the painted types. The carpenters of the little towns worked to orders. They had to use those common decoration motifs that were liked by the inhabitants. The masters formed a kind of local style for peasant houses, and these styles were mixed. The using of the different colors made the peasants houses kindly, decorative and friendly, but individual.

Szuszek



A special type of *szuszek*, the tulip *szuszek* (with full of different colorful flowers) became famous and fashionable all over Hungary about the 15th century, mainly in the noble people's houses. Later they could be found in the peasant houses as well. The manufacturing technologies were changed. By the 17th century resin, cold or worm woodworking glue, and pitch were used to fasten the planks together.

From the renaissance, the *szuszek* inherited the using of arched columns. It was a very fashionable piece of furniture. We can find similar types of *szuszek* in Germany and Austria. If you want to see some new ones you have to travel to *Erdély* where they are still in use.

Recently we can see a new fashion wave to have carving things as well.

