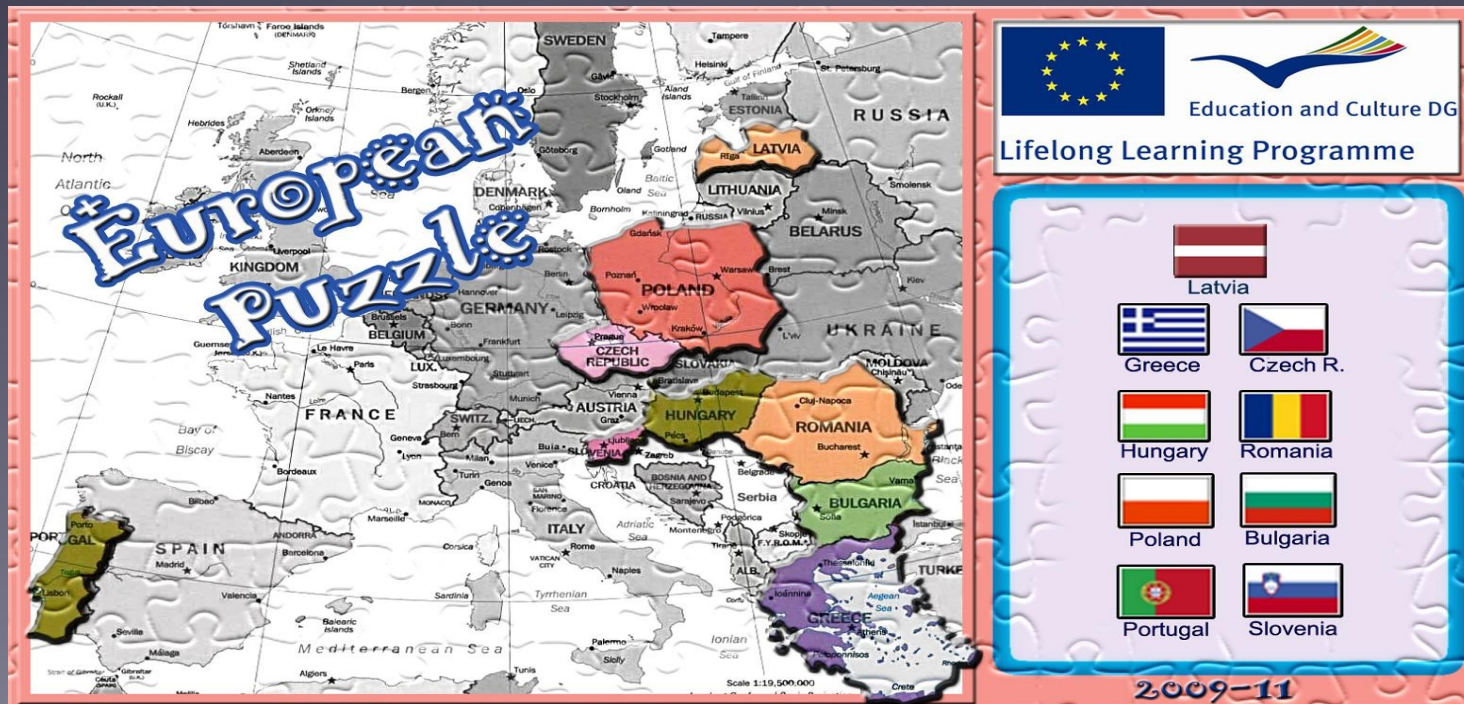


# EUROPEAN PUZZLE



Latvia 15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> August 2010

## Traditional Romanian Craftsmanship



# POTTERY





Clay making pottery is a craft whose roots are lost in time. If sixty or seventy years ago pottery making was considered a profession, nowadays it is a craft practiced only by men who master its special techniques.

The craftsman selects special clay, brings it home, crumbles and kneads it and by using the potter's wheel gives it the chosen shape. After applying specific patterns of regional design, the object is laid to burn in clay ovens, also built by the potter.

Pottery is tiresome work, needing a lot of force, handling and knowledge. Any mistake could lead to the destruction of the vase; therefore pottery is a men's craftsmanship. The women can help only by decorating the vase.

In the old times there used to be entire villages of potters; the craft was handed from one generation to the other. The pots were loaded into carts and the potters traveled to neighboring villages and even farther away, where they traded them for corn, wheat, or household tools.

Today, dishes and pots still serve for cooking, but are most frequently used as decorative objects in peasants' and town citizens' houses as well as hotels and restaurants that have a traditional theme. Once cheap plastic pots were produced, the traditional ones lost customer appeal; recently, they are much more appreciated by tourists for their originality and exotic patterns.





Pottery summarizes a series of traditional elements of living conditions and the evolution of aesthetic taste. The objects of ceramics are distinguished by elegant shapes and decoration, they have a unitary character well-defined by technique, form, decoration and color. Traditional pottery is wheel-shaped and its burning is usually made in stoves.







For the lover of history and beauty, watching the craft in space and time can be an extraordinarily pleasant concern. Pottery is an almost gone craftsmanship because few people, most of them old, practice it these days. However, a handful of people still continue to spin the wheel and burn clay pots in the oven stifled, like their ancestors.





# THE WHEELWRIGHT

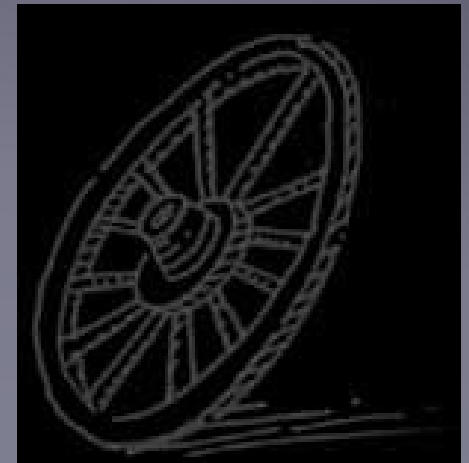


The wheelwright was much appreciated in the times when carts were the only means of transportation.

In Banat wheelwrights are called "voacnar". The artisan made the whole cart, not only the wheels. He did the final assembly together with a blacksmith, who applied the metal bands to the wheels and some other metal reinforcements to the rest of the wooden parts. It took about a month to make a cart.

The tools were expensive, so if the old master did not have a son or son-in-law to take over he gave them to his best apprentice at the end of the training. There are very few artisans left. Due to economic reasons, this craft is dying out.

Wood has been replaced by iron, and the iron carts with rubber wheels are more resistant, thus rendering the wooden ones obsolete.



# OLD CRAFTSMANSHIPS

## PLANT PAINTS

- Between peasant and land, there was always a close connection. Everyday life is conducted according to the requirements of earth, a perfect union with nature.
- In recent centuries, peasant life has undergone changes and, implicitly, his relationship with nature has changed. Today, only a handful of traditional crafts are kept.



Preparation of paint plant was a long practiced craft, an ancient custom in which different house paints were prepared from different plants. Spontaneous flora richness allowed obtaining a palette rich in colors, which, used with skill and talent, contributed to the ambient decoration: fabrics, carpets, leather goods, paintings, furniture, household objects, pottery, etc. Unfortunately, during the nineteenth century, natural dyes have been replaced almost entirely by the chemicals invented by modern science.



# EGG PAINTING



Egg painting is a very old custom in the Romanian tradition. With a penholder the egg can be decorated with different symbols like: a leaf, wheat, the Sun, the Moon, a Christian cross or some domestic animals and objects in the house.



Egg painting with different colored paints is done with wax throughout a procedure called „headscarf”. The white egg, with it’s content taken out is decorated with wax on the spots that will remain white. The egg is submerged in yellow paint, taken out, dried and then submerged in red paint and so on. Finally, the egg is covered with a layer of special lacquer which will make the egg shiny and protect its decorations.



# SHEEPHERDING



Sheep breeding is an occupation with deep roots in history and our culture, even with some mystical touches, creating traditions and preserver of ancient models.

Since the oldest times people have bred sheep. Sheep are kept in specially designed spaces circled by fences. These places are called sheep-folds. The sheep-folds are usually situated on a grassy hill which is close to or sometimes far from the village.





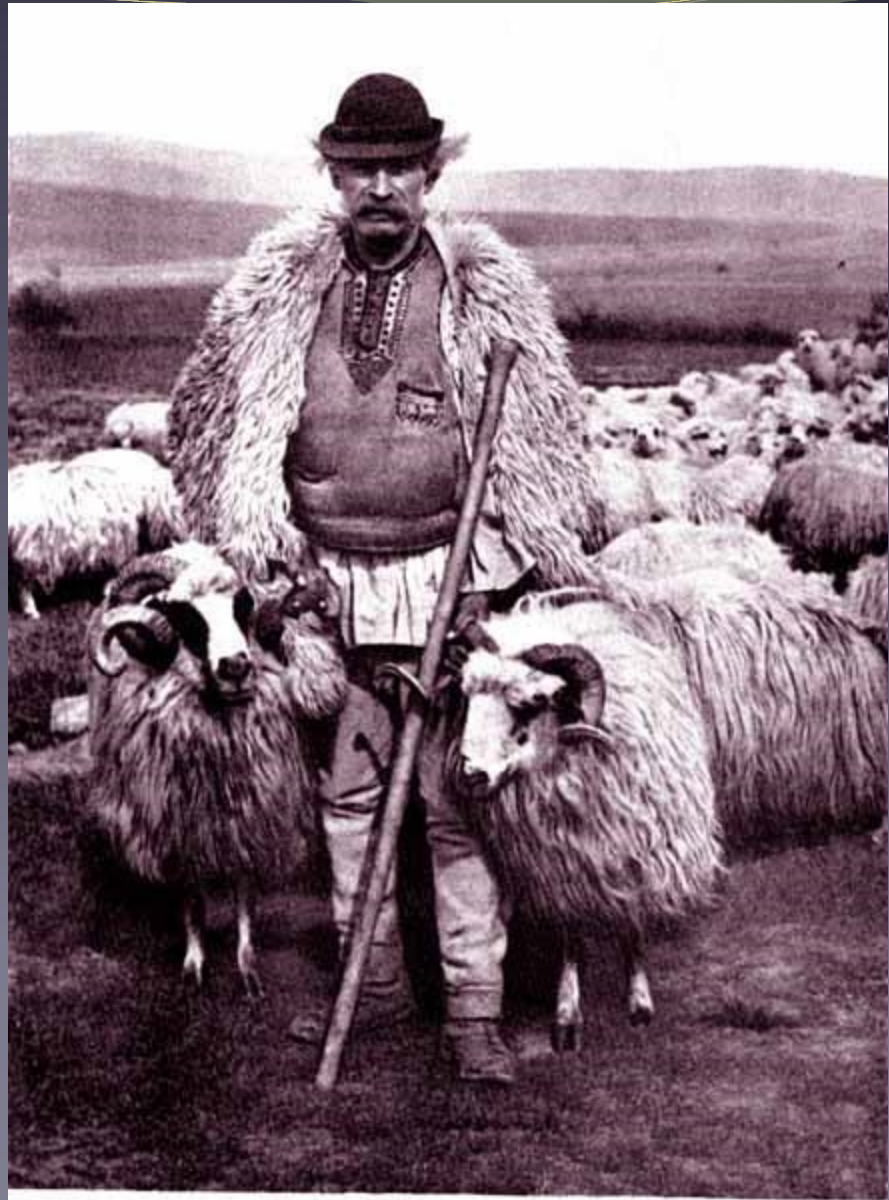
Sheep offer a large variety of products: milk(from which cheese is made), meat, skin, wool etc.

Sheep are marked with a distinctive sign (paint spot or burn) to be able to be identified by the shepherd and to keep the sheep from going with another herd. Nowadays, sheep are labeled with yellow labels which contain the sheep's number.



The caretaker of the sheep herd is called shepherd. The shepherd is aided by dogs which are used to guide and guard the sheep.

Shepherds wear a large fur coat which covers their body integrally. They also wear a hat, and hold a long staff in their hands.



# WOOD PROCESSING



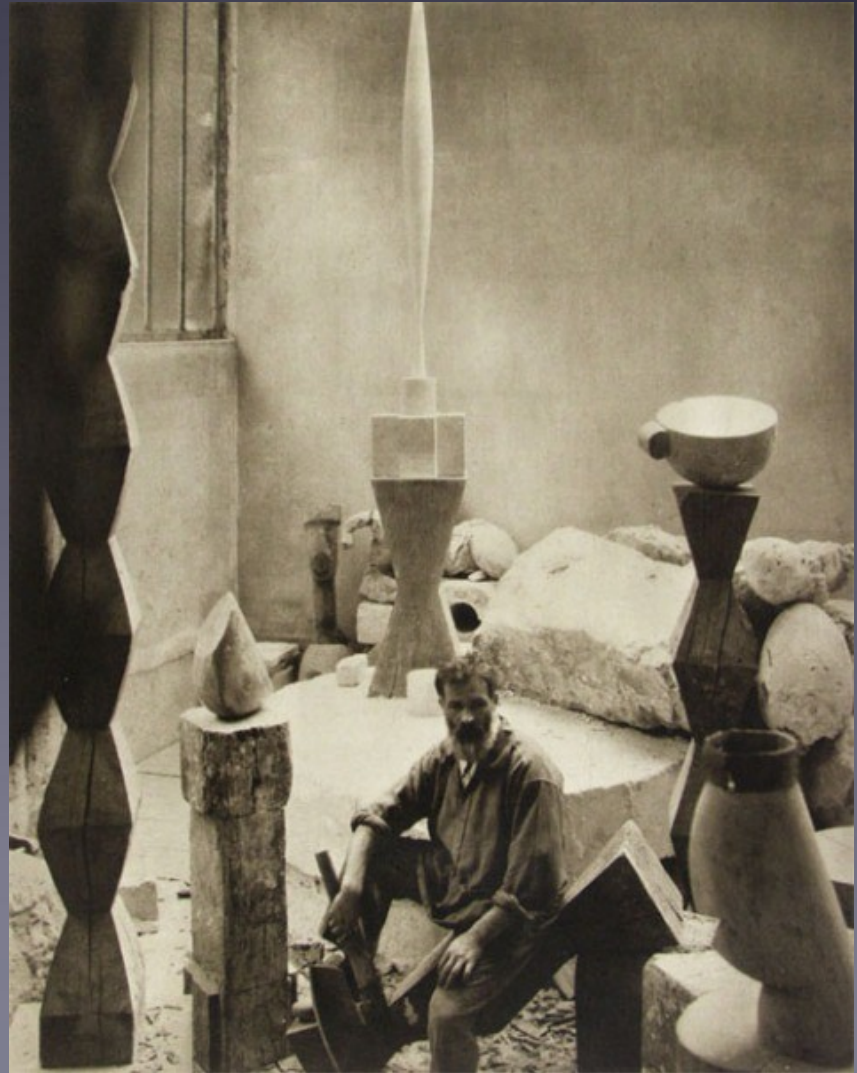


# Wood Art - plasticity of forms and figures

Wood is another craft that is a constant in Romanian traditional art. Wood has always been a sensitive material in which the artisan put both urge and artistic skill.

Since old times, the wood was cut and transported to the workshops where it was turned into various objects. This craftsmanship can be found in Romania as well as in Greece and Poland.

People have always been faithful to wood, using this material to make the bowl they were eating from, the roof above the house, the churches where they were praying in.





The symbolism of traditional folk motifs carved on Romanian churches may predate Christianity and may have been originally intended to ward off spirits and keep worshippers safe. In the popular view, the figures carved on the door pillars were designed to protect the house from evil forces.

Carved wooden figures had their own meaning: the twisted rope represented infinity, the connection between heaven and earth; the tree of life symbolized eternal life and youth without old age; the sun was the symbol of "life-giving."



Carved figures with traditional folk motifs are great souvenirs from Romania. They are easy to pack, make great gifts, and are carved by local craftsmen.



Although this area has been invaded in the last centuries of industrial manufactured products, people have kept some of the customs and traditional crafts, undoubtedly a very valuable legacy of the past to be "taught" to the future generations .





# BARREL MONGERS



This trade is being practiced by fewer and fewer people and the young generation is not attracted to it because they consider it unprofitable. The technique is very old and has been preserved with such strictness that has become almost a cult.

The type of wood is chosen depending on the destination of the barrels: oak or white beech for food, mulberry or acacia for drinks; barrels have different names according to their capacity. The staves for curved barrels are exclusively hand-made, tailored to the wood's fiber. The most difficult operation is the gathering of staves with circles and the proofing of the barrel with bulrush.



There are some unwritten rules about a barrel monger's relation with the customers, as no contract or paper is signed when an order is received. Mutual understanding is taken for granted.

The tools are old and most of the times a family inheritance. The craftsmen take very good care of them because they are impossible to find these days. The names of the tools have a German touch, which confirms the fact that this craft was brought here centuries ago by German or Austrian craftsmen.





# THE TANNERS



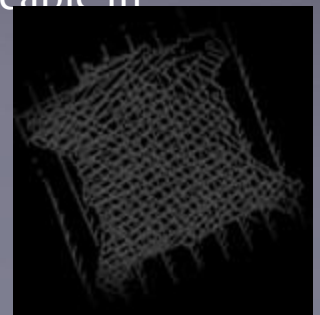
Provided by animals, leather was man's first piece of clothing. In the areas where people bred cattle and sheep a small industry of leather making developed. Since the number of people practising tannery and furrier's trade is on the fall, the two operations are usually done by one person.

The procedure for tanning skins has remained unchanged since the beginning of the twentieth century; most standards are the same today, although fashion has changed, which makes it hard for the artisans.

The barrels in which skins are tanned are made by local people and are over one hundred years old.

Today's artisans are grateful to those who taught them the secrets of the trade. As with any other trade, the aspiring artisan has to go through several stages: apprentice ("sagart" in dialecta language), journeyman ("calfa") and finally, after many years, he is declared master ("maistor").

The acquisition of furs is done according to an ages-old procedure. When people sacrifice an animal, they bring its skin to the tanner, who tans and uses it. Many years may pass until the client wants a fur coat, but the number of skins is traceable in the books and the skins are even transferable to children or grandchildren.





# THE HARNESS MAKERS



# Belt crafting

Belt crafting has become a very rare craftsmanship.

The customers bring the horses for measure taking. Only a skilled belt crafter can measure the horse by eye. The harness is necessary to tie the horse to the cart. There are more types of harnesses. The normal harness is used for light carts. It is made up of several ingeniously binded belts. There is another type of harness used for pulling heavy loads. This harness has a wooden holder with a skin pillow filled with pig hair on it.

A system of belts which surround the horse's waist are tied to the harness. The bridle is put on the horse's head.

To make a good harness, a good crafter needs at least two weeks.



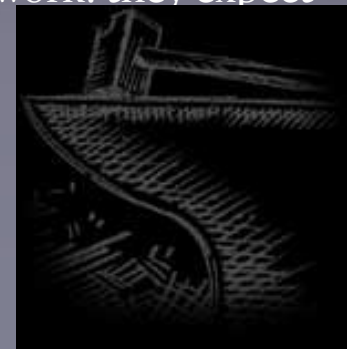
# THE BLACKSMITHS



One can still find representatives of this well respected trade in the villages of Banat. Their average age is above 65. None of them has apprentices, although there is a lot of commissioned work. They make all sorts of tools: hoes, axes, ploughs, carts and wrought iron ornaments. The horseshoe is the symbol of this trade.

The blacksmiths' shops are called "covaci" and they have remained almost unchanged for the past two centuries. Very few have a forge or a motor to ventilate the hearth; most of them have the leather fan, operated manually. Only blacksmiths in large villages have welding devices; the others combine the parts for ploughs or the metal band for cart wheels through an ages-old procedure called "boiling". In the past, an important part of the trade was the gathering of coal from the mountains. Today they buy the coal.

One cannot practice this trade by oneself. The blacksmith needs at least two people to assist him; if he doesn't have apprentices, he gets help from his own family. Blacksmiths don't work on holidays. In some cases they barter their work: they expect help to work the field in exchange for their own service.





# THE SAW-MILLERS



# THE MILLERS





# THE VILLAGE DRUMMER



In the old days the drummers ("guarzii" as people call them in Banat) would spread the orders of the mayor, announce the schedules of animal or grain fairs as well as the important events in the life of the community.

All villages had drummers, paid by the office of the mayor, which made them respectable. Often the drummer was a speaking newspaper, spreading news from the press and peppering his announcements with anecdotes.

They could also be hired by salespeople to publicize the prices on the market. Their appearance was always an event. In order to announce the news they needed a couple of hours, as they stopped at every crossroads and hit the drum until all people in the neighborhood were gathered.

Drummers were the most efficient means of communication.

The few drummers still working today are old, and the young generation is not eager to take over, as they consider the trade shameful.



# WOOL SPINNING and WEAVING





After the wool is cut off the sheep, it is washed, fluffed and then it is turned into plies which will be used for weaving and knitting. This craftsmanship is known in Greece as well as in Romania.

The fabrics, handcrafted in one's own house, have a very important role in the traditional house. They are the most important decorative elements. They are placed on the floor, on the wall, on the furniture and are of different styles depending on the ethnographic region.

The fabrics are made of raw matter existent in the house like sheep wool, goat fur, cotton, hemp etc. The fabrics can be made from one or more materials, and some can be made of combinations of animal origin fibers and vegetal origin fibers. Silk, straws or beads can be added as ornamental elements.






# Mining - multimillenary occupation

For settlements of the Upper Black Cris, mining and metalworking strongly influenced the economic development of people, since Dacian times. After the withdrawal of Roman domination in Dacia, the locals - who have "stolen" mining craft - have continued this pursuit.

Deposits such as gold, especially, were exploited by *"the natives ... long before the peasants moved to forms of mining."* according to historical documents. Mines of gold, silver and copper were the economic basis of feudal domains that ruled, for a long time, this geographical area.







Traditional occupations  
which point to the rural life  
are at the boundary  
between craft and  
profession, because they  
involve dedication, passion  
and art to make things  
beautiful.