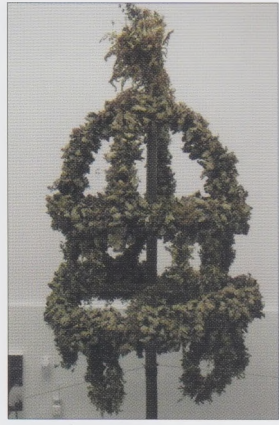


Rupea Museum

15 September

The 'Muzeul Etnografic Gheorghe Cernea' in Rupea, Brasov County, was founded by G H Cernea (1898-1965). Cernea amassed a large collection of ethnographic material, including home-wares, costume and photographs, amounting to over 8000 artefacts and 3000 songs. The collection was originally intended to be housed and displayed within a museum building in Sighisoara during the communist era, but on the eve of its opening, Cernea was arrested for the purveying of 'improper materials'. He was imprisoned for over five years, and much of the collection was dispersed or lost. The museum we see today represents what is left of that collection, and has existed in its present form since 2007. It is a treasure trove of cultural artefacts, accessibly laid out and usefully themed.

Of particular use to us, the museum has recreated two 'good rooms', one Romanian and one Saxon, and each full of the painted furniture we had already seen in profusion. Seeing the two alongside each other and in immediate succession finally helped answer a question many of us had been asking ourselves: what is the visible difference between the furniture of the two groups? When placed next to each other the precision, skill and artistry embodied in the Saxon furniture became immediately apparent. The Romanian furniture, in comparison, remained pretty, and finished to a very high standard, but without the real flair and accuracy of the Saxon. In short, the painting felt almost like an aesthetic approximation of the Saxon, rather than either an art-form in itself or a faithful imitation. Of course, it also became clear that the Saxons would produce



The Rupea Krynemachen

A Saxon 'good room' at Rupea museum



commercial pieces for sale in the market-places. Many of these, done more by rote than those intended for Saxon houses, would appear in the Romanian dwellings.

Another wonderful aspect of the Rupea Museum's collections was the *Kryinemachen*, a huge crown made of flowers and oak leaves, forming a central part of the celebration of St Peter and Paul on 29 June - the most important holiday in the Saxon calendar (see page 17). Newly confirmed members of the community would process and raise the wreath, then arrange themselves according to gender in order to recite verses of the *Bruderschaft*, perform symbolic dances and play music. Indeed, we later saw a wreath of this type, hoisted on its pole, in the centre of Malancrav.

The museum particularly emphasised the way in which all aspects of communal ritual were designed to strengthen the community: each individual had a role to play, and these roles were often intended to build links between families and sections of society. As in so many places in Romania, one left the Rupea Museum with a sense of the pride and passion people here feel for their culture and for the physical objects associated with it. Our thanks are due to the curator, Ligia Fulga, for arranging our visit and to Alina Kis, the museum's conservator for accompanying us.

Sally Gall