

The Ethnographic Museum of Cluj

11 September

We visited this superb museum on our first morning, accompanied by our ever-helpful guide Flavia Stoica. We were welcomed by the director, Tudor Salagean while looking at a special exhibition of historic photos depicting farming communities, which was also an early introduction to the ethnic diversity of Transylvania, these farmers being of Hungarian origin. Transylvania was only absorbed into Romania in 1920. The museum had been set up in 1922 by the eminent Professor Romulus Unia, and is currently housed in the building occupied by the Transylvanian Diet in the 18th century.

The exhibits show the way of life of rural communities in Transylvania during the 18th to 20th centuries. Animal husbandry was vitally important. The contents of a sheepfold are displayed, and there are cups and spoons carved out of cherry-wood, a range of wooden buckets used for cheese-making and a fine collection of shepherds' crooks, interestingly all straight. We saw lots of tools used for cultivation - a wooden plough with horizontal ploughshare, a wooden harrow, hoes, scythes and sickles, a wooden pitchfork, a yoke for oxen. Grain was then processed using flails, rakes and brooms and the seeds stored in woven baskets. Finally, grain and seeds were milled in wooden mills. There were tools and containers for growing and harvesting fruit, including plums to be

Cereal grinder, Cluj museum



turned into the plum brandy (*tuica*) with which we were plied by all our generous local hosts; and grapes for wine.

We saw many interesting exhibits to do with occupations such as fishing, bee-keeping and animal trapping, including a hollowed-out boat with nets and baskets for the fish, traps for martens, bears and wolves together with stag and cattle horns for storing gunpowder. Metalworking included tools for mining and processing gold, which has been mined in Romania for millennia. We saw carpentry tools for handling whole tree trunks, constructing buildings and furniture and finishing smaller wooden vessels.

There were some very good ceramics, notably brightly glazed earthenware. Tiles, mainly glazed, have always been important due to their use on stoves and hearths. Textile production is extremely well represented, ranging from leather and furs to spinning, weaving and embroidery. Some highly decorated pieces, such as distaffs, were made by young men for the girls they were courting. An unusual piece of equipment was a freestanding frame with blade, used for crushing locally grown hemp stems. There is a separate section showing traditional dress, mostly a white blouse and skirt or, for men, shirt, tunic or trousers under brightly coloured, woven or embroidered, aprons, jerkins, bonnets and belts. Dress would have been a clear indicator of ethnic identity.

Reflecting the importance of music to all the ethnic groups of Romania, there is a display of a variety of musical instruments such as violins, lutes and pipes.

Sally and Neil MacLennan

Gold-panning scoop carved from a single piece of hardwood, Cluj museum (£1 coin for scale)



Spades, a wooden harrow and wooden plough, Cluj museum



Shepherds' crooks, Cluj museum