

SWITZERLAND

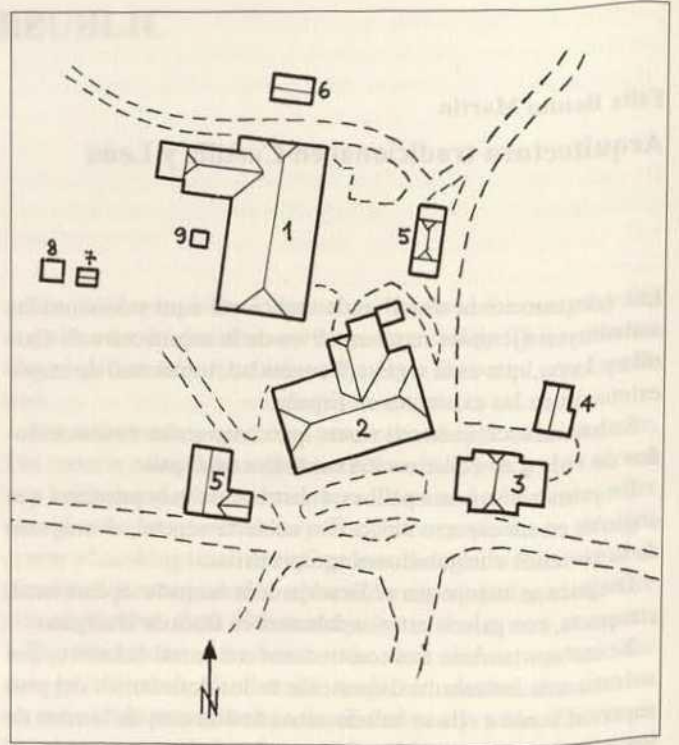
Max Gschwend

Granaries in Switzerland

When we speak of vernacular architecture, we think first of residential buildings or of barns. Both are remarkable. They have a spectacular form, they are big and sometimes elaborately decorated. In reality these buildings form an important element of rural farmsteads and they are simultaneously characteristic of the settlements.

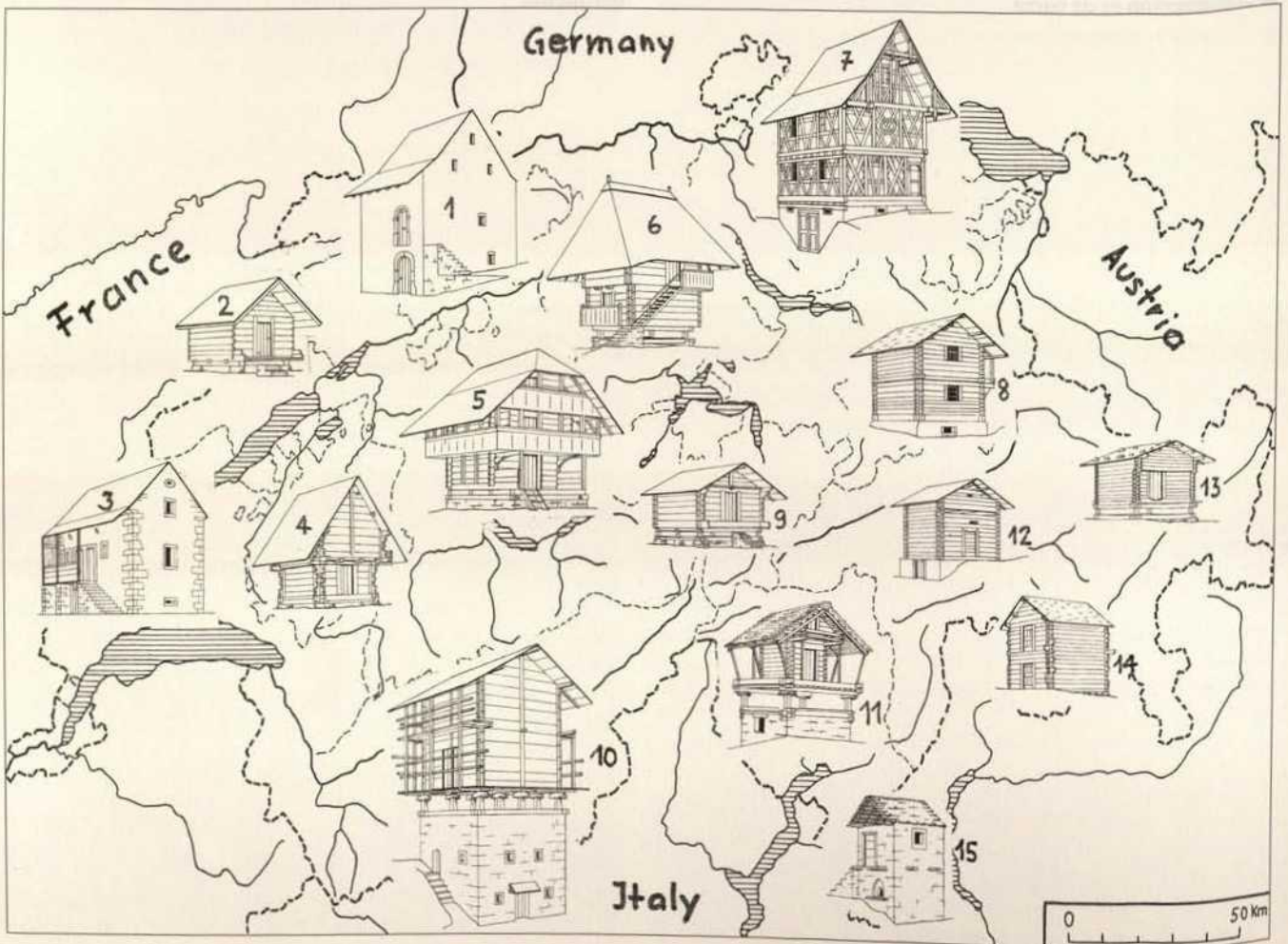
But when looking more closely, we can see that near the farms and villages there are small buildings. In the first figure a farmstead with principal buildings dating from the 18th century can be seen. Very important are the numerous small-sized outbuildings, for example the baking oven, the wood shed, the hen house, the bee house, the well house and especially the granary dating from 1688.

Such detached granaries are very remarkable objects. Our country, situated in the middle of Europe, is surrounded by different cultural regions (see below). Their influences are reflected in the various construction forms. In the west and south there are stone structures, timber-frame carpentry has come from the north, in the Alps the log house is predominant. It is self-evident that the original materials in our country are also used for the construction



Typical farmstead in Kiesen, Canton Bern

Various types of granaries in Switzerland



of granaries. This applies to the regions of the Jura and of the Alps, where forests still exist today. In these parts of our country pure wooden constructions as log or pillar buildings can be found.

In general there is a difference in the size of detached granaries, depending on the varying fertility of the soil and the quantity of the stored products. In regions with a very rough climate or a weak economy, such as in the Jura and in the Alps, one finds tenants with small plots of land breeding cattle. Here agriculture is less and granaries are small, whereas large granaries are characteristic of the plains with intensive agriculture.

Particularly in the economically privileged regions the granaries serve not only to store crops but also contain meat, dried fruit or cheese, sometimes even dresses, cloth and thread, and not rarely also documents, manuscripts and money. Therefore they are named the farmer's "treasury".

It is not astonishing that this type of building is decorated with wood carvings and pictures. In former times people believed that a figure beside the door could frighten a thief. Safest was the position of many granaries in the central plain of Switzerland, where they could be controlled from the windows of the farmhouses.

Farm buildings, such as granaries, represent a very important part of traditional rural architecture. They are especially in danger of disappearing. Changes in modern agriculture and infrastructure (electricity, water supply, sewage) make these buildings superfluous. As they are not used or maintained they are often destroyed. Many granaries are very small, and it is therefore difficult to find a new and suitable use. Their conservation would lead to considerable additional expenses for the farmers. Nevertheless, it is important to at least save some of these buildings in the open-air museums where they can be preserved.



Painted figure on granary in Tafers, Canton Fribourg



Typical granary from Lütschental, Canton Bern

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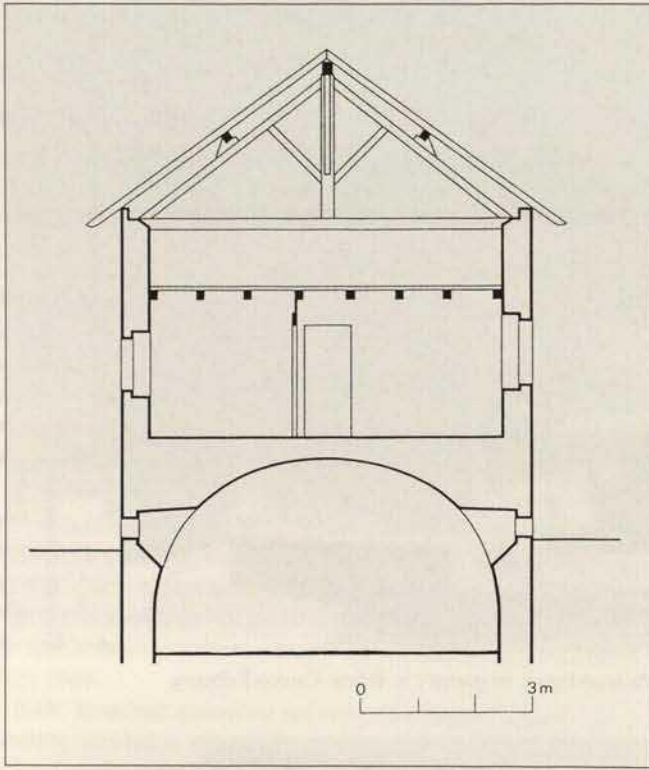
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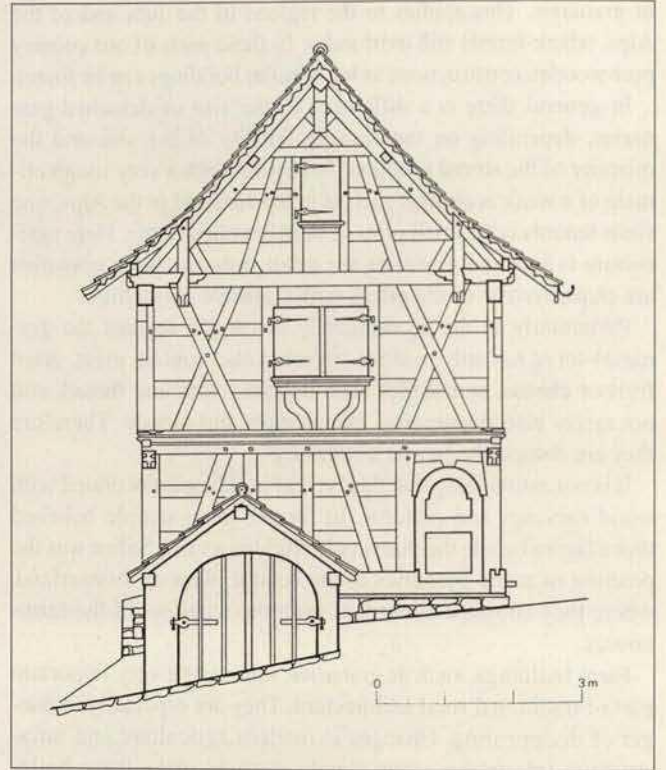
Granary in Visperterminen, Canton Wallis

Granary from the middle plain in Ostermundigen, Canton Bern



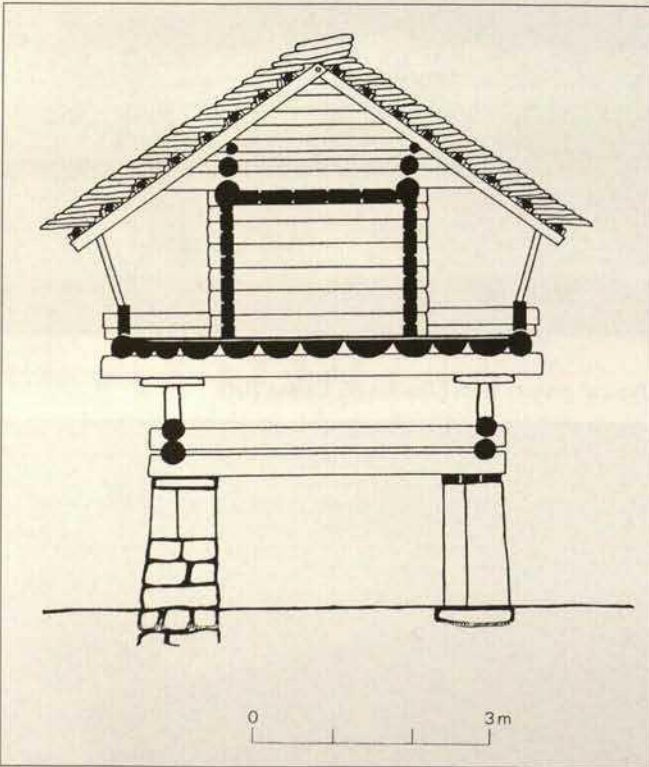


Three-storied granary in Chouilly, Canton Geneva



Large granary with timber-framework in Oberwenigen, Canton Zurich

Small granary of log construction (1661) in Fusio, Canton Tessin



Four-story granary in Kerzers, Canton Bern

