

TIMORESE ARCHITECTURE

Miniatures of the World



Map of the Island of Timor, with the identification of the distribution areas of the seven main types of vernacular architecture in the territory of East Timor, which were studied in 1958. The geographical boundaries of each type are fluid, with the overlap of neighboring types in the same «typological area».

Bobonaro

Dispersed settlements prevail in this mountain region and the settlements of 6 to 10 houses are built in areas of difficult access. Supported by numerous pillars, the house has a rectangular plan and its dimensions are approximately of 11m long by 7m wide.

Its roof is supported by two large pillars – the *earth pillar* and the *deep sea pillar* – to which sacred proprieties are attributed and which organize the house in its three main spaces: the front balcony, a large central room, with a raised floor over the other rooms, and an eventual second balcony, in case the size of the household demands it so.

The greater or smaller sophistication of the top of the roof distinguishes the two main types of houses in this region, each one associated to a distinct social status: the *uma-kakaduk*, with a more complex ridge, associated to the higher social status, and the *uma-rabi*, with a simpler ridge, used by the common families.

Photo:

House in the settlement of Loro-Bá Bobonaro region, with the covering of its roof recently replaced. In the background, roof structure in the process of being covered. Author: unknown.

The impossibility of determining the author

of the photographs published in *Timorese Architecture* is due to fact that they result not only from the 1958 Study Mission from which resulted the book but also from other field campaigns made by Ruy Cinatti in Timor over the years. In one of these campaigns Ruy Cinatti was also accompanied by Salvador Fernandes, cameraman and photographer, who is therefore another possible author of the photos published in the book.

Drawings:

Houses in Loro-Bá, Bobonaro region. In the lower left corner a *uma-kakaduc*, a type of house which roof top indicates the high social status of its owners. Author: Leopoldo de Almeida

Maubisse

In this area in the midwest of the country, the human settlement is characterized by small nuclei made of two to four houses, and their outbuildings, which are irregularly distributed from the top of the mountains to the shadowy valleys. The traditional *mambai* house is characterized by its sharply inclined elliptic or semi-pyramidal roof, which goes under the raised floor with the purpose of protecting the household from the cold winds that blow from the mountains.

The house is organized in a single compartment, used for sleeping, cooking and eating, over which several planks are

Photo:

Ai-Ho's house cluster, composed of a half a dozen houses, on the top of a hill at nearly 2000m of altitude. Perspective from the road from Maubisse to Same and Ainaro. In the background, the chain of mountains which limits the hydrographic basin of Maubisse's post. Author: unknown.

Drawings:

Houses in the region of Maubisse. At the upper left corner, outline of a house cluster in Ai-ho. The remaining drawings refers to the *suco's* chief house of Ai-Tuto, which roof top, in shape of a boat, materializes myths concerning the migration of the ancestors.

Author: Leopoldo de Almeida

Baucau

With the appearance of a ground floor building, due to its *palapa* (palm) wall, which covers its whole perimeter, the traditional house of the area of Baucau is set, in fact, on three levels of paving. These are raised respectively at the height of 0,8m, 1m and 2m. The attic is used to store utensils and supplies, as well as for the storage of the *lulic* (sacred) objects that belong to the household.

The structure of the house is set by two sets of pillars: eight, on the periphery, which give the building its octagonal plan as perceptible from the outside; four, on the inside, which organizes the two upper floors and supports their walls.

This type of house is characterized by the dense coating of its roof, approximately 50 cm thick, which provides a protection against the heat and the rain.

The construction of this type of house is done along three to four months, and its conclusion is marked by a ritual which ensures the transference of the souls of the ancestors from their old to their new house.

Photo:

Perspective of the housing cluster of the Buruma settlement, Baucau region.

Author: unknown.

Drawings:

House in the Baucau region, documented in elevations, cross sections and plans. At the top, in the center, outline drawing of a cluster of houses of the *liurai* (chief) and its family. Author: Leopoldo de Almeida

Lautém

In the region of Lautém, in the eastern end of East Timor, villages are commonly constituted by 40 to 50 houses each. The emblematic house of this region is characterized by its high roof, four-sided, almost pyramidal and sharply inclined, which raises up to 12m from the ground. In the houses of chiefs, the top of the roof is profusely decorated with ornamental *gamuti* cones, sculpted beams, strings of whelks and other symbols of power. The floor, raised 3m from the ground, is set on a complex framework, which in its turn is supported by four pillars only. The outer walls are made by wooden panels, profusely sculpted and painted with symbolic motifs.

As mentioned in the book *Timorese Architecture*: «It is, without doubt, the house [...] which most surprises in all of Timor [and in which] the architectural sense exceeds by far its immediate utilitarianism.»

Photo:

Houses in the Lautém region, with a profusely decorated roof top, symbol of the high social status of its owners. At the lower left corner, the architect António de Sousa Mendes during the 1958 Study Mission from which resulted the book *Timorese Architecture*. Author: unknown.

Drawings:

Houses in the Lautém region. At the upper left corner, outline of a house cluster belong-

ing to the *suco*'s chief of Muapitine, Pehe-Fito. At the lower right corner, partial cut-away of this settlements *suco* chief's house. At the bottom, from left to right, elevation and cross section of the house of the first wife of the *suco*'s chief of Raça; elevation of the house of the mother of the *suco*'s chief in Loré, Malailatsa.
Author: Leopoldo de Almeida.

Viqueque

In the Viqueque area, where the *Tetum* Language prevails, each village is composed by two to ten houses, all belonging to the same family group, distributed around an open glade in the forest. The main distinctive characteristics of the Viqueque's vernacular architecture are its three-sided roof and the great area occupied by each house (around 15m in length by 7m in width). The structure that supports the floor is independent from the one that holds the roof. The interior of the house is compartmented in three different areas – the women's room, the men's room and the kitchen.

Photo:

Houses in Viqueque region, set in the middle of an open glade in the forest. The outer platforms (*lantens*) of the house in the centre are protected by parasols made of *palapeira* (palm) leaf.
Author: unknown.

Drawings:

Elevations, plan and cross sections of a house in Mane-Hat, *suco* of Carabalo, Viqueque region.
Author: Leopoldo de Almeida.

Suai

The Suai area features clustered settlements and houses are organized over wide spaces bounded by fences. The house, supported by a set of pillars, is of quadrangular plan and has a four-sided roof. The roof extends over the central core of the house, up to 2m from the ground, covering its side balconies. The floor features three plans, raised respectively at the height of 0,8m, 1m and 1,5m. The intermediate platform is split into three covered balconies, protected from the sun by parasols, such as the one presented at the beginning of this exhibition. The highest compartment, the only one with walls, constitutes the heart of the house: it is used for cooking and is where the owners and all the elders sleep. Suspended from beams in the ceiling, large shelves overlap in this space and are used for storing food and kitchen utensils.

Photo:

Daily life scene of a village in the Suai region. Pigs and other domestic animals move freely between the houses, in which the outer balconies are protected by parasols made of palm leaf.
Author: unknown.

Drawings:

Houses in the village of Matai, Suai region, district of Cova Lima. Outline drawing of a set of buildings which define the oldest cluster of houses in the village, showing, in the center, the sacred tree and the "parliament-house". Elevation, cross sections and plan of a house in the village.
Author: Leopoldo de Almeida.

Oecussi

In the Oecussi enclave, located in the northern coast of the western side of the island of Timor, two types of traditional housing can be distinguished. The mountainous interior, of dispersed settlements, is characterized by conical houses, of ground floor, which the book *Timorese Architecture* considers as «the most primitive in all Timor».

However, the plains of the coast, where clustered settlements prevail, are characterized by a type of housing with «flagrant kinship» with the vernacular architecture of the Viqueque and Suai areas, which was developed under the influence of the people of *Tetum* Language.

Grounded on pillars, it is a house of quadrangular plan (around 10m X 7m) and its interior is organized in three different areas: a balcony, deep and occupying the whole length of the house, and two divisions divided by walls. This house is characterized by the dense coating of its four-sided roof (50 cm thick or more), which provides a protection against the heat and the rain. This house features double-sided external walls, which results from the application of different techniques to two types of vegetable materials.

Photo:

House in Oecussi region, with a distinct parasol made of *palapeira* (palm) leaf to protect the balconies from the sun.

Author: unknown.

Drawings:

Elevations, cross sections and plan of the house of the *suco*'s chief of Lalissuc, Oecussi region. At the top, in the centre, the outline of a cluster of houses.

Author: Leopoldo de Almeida.

OBJECTS

1. Parasol, made of palm leaf, used for sun protection in house balconies. Cova Lima, region of Suai. Col. Ruy Cinatti; MNE: AF.510 MNE: AJ.787

2. Wall section, composed of two panels, with incised decoration filled with lime and spikes on both ends for fixation. A set of ten boards fits between the panels, held by its internal notches. Col. Ruy Cinatti; MNE: AF.602 / AF.608

3. Bracelet (Keke), in silver, with the representation of a timorese house, lined by two human figures holding roosters. Col. Palmira da Luz Guimarães; MNE: AM.445

4. / 5. Boxes, in silver, with representation of a house on top. Col. Almirante Sarmiento Rodrigues; MNE: AK.693 & AK.702

6. / 8. Combs (Sasuit), made of turtle shell, also used as adornments. Its decoration evokes the roof cover of several types of Timorese houses. Col. Ruy Cinatti ; MNE: AF.463 & AF.464 ; Col. Agência Geral do Ultramar; MNE: AJ.787

9. «Our village», miniature with silver figures, offered to Sarmiento Rodrigues on the occasion of his visit to Timor, as Minister of Overseas, in 1952. In the engraved metal plaques on the wooden base, the identification of the local of production: «Indigenous artists Mau-Bruma and Bau-Ana – Homage to the people of Maubara». Col. Admiral Sarmiento Rodrigues ; MNE: AK.788

10. Pot, for water storage, decorated with several motifs, among which the drawings of houses. Col. Ruy Cinatti ; MNE: AF.601 CDDCT: 10

11. House-shaped Basket. Made of palm leaf, with a compartmented interior, used for the transportation of offerings. Col. Agência Geral do Ultramar ; MNE: AI.902

12. / 13. House-shaped Baskets.

Col. Ruy Cinatti; MNE: AF.404 Col. Palmira da Luz Guimarães ; MNE: AM.633

14. Miniature of a sacred house *Fatalucu*, a type of vernacular architecture characteristic of the eastern tip of the timorese territory. Made in East-Timor in the beginning of the XXth Century, it was shipped to Portugal after World War I. Col. João Tolentino / Pedro Tolentino ; CDDCT: 10

15. /16. House pillars, with notches on top for fixation and incised decoration filled with lime. Col. Ruy Cinatti ; MNE: AF.613 & AF.615

17. Door, with hinges, made from one single piece of wood. Among the profuse incised decoration, filled with lime, the figuration of female breasts stands out, symbol of fertility, as well as, in the upper section, the representation of a diadem (*Kai-Bawk*).
Suco of Fatumaca, Baucau region. Col. Ruy Cinatti ; MNE: AF.511

18. / 19. House pillars, with notches on top for fixation and incised decoration filled with lime. Col. Ruy Cinatti ; MNE: AF.616 & AF.614

20. Model of a totem pole in Ai-ho, Ainaro district, made according to documentation published in the book “*Motivos Artísticos Timorenses e a sua Integração*” (Timorese Artistic Motifs and their Integration), by Ruy Cinatti. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino CDDCT: 11

21. Model of an altar with an anthropomorphic pole in the place of Ai-Ho, Maubisse, Ainaro district, made according to documentation published in the book “*Motivos Artísticos Timorenses e a sua Integração*” (Timorese Artistic Motifs and their Integration), by Ruy Cinatti. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 13

22. Model of house in Loro-Bá, Bobonaro district, made according to the documentation published in the book *Timorese*

Architecture. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 2

23. Model of houses in Ai-Ho, Maubisse, Ainaro district, made according to the documentation published in the book *Timorese Architecture*. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 4

24. Model of houses in Muapitine, Lautém district, made according to the documentation published in the book *Timorese Architecture*. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 6

25. Model of the *Fatalucu* house, Lautém district, made according to the documentation published in the book *Timorese Architecture*. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 9

26. Model of house in Nuno-Heno, Lautém district, made according to the documentation published in the book *Timorese Architecture*. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 3

27. Model of a circular altar with megalith, Bobonaro region, made according to documentation published in the book “*Motivos Artísticos Timorenses e a sua Integração*” (Timorese Artistic Motifs and their Integration), by Ruy Cinatti. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 14

28. Model of sacrificial altar, in Maubisse region, Ainaro district, made according to the documentation published in the book *Timorese Architecture*. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 12

29. Model of house in Matai, Suai, Cova Lima district, made according to the documentation published in the book *Timorese Architecture*. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 5

30. Model of house in Mane-Hat, Suai, Cova Lima District, made according to the documentation published in the book *Timorese Architecture*. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 8

31. Model of house in Ilat-Laun, Marobo, Bobonaro region, made according to documentation published in the book “Marobo: une société ema de Timor”, by Brigitte Renard-Clamagirand. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 1

32. Model of the village of Ilaut-Laun, Marobo, made according to image published in the book “Marobo: une société ema de Timor”, by Brigitte Renard-Clamagirand. Author: Pedro Tolentino / João Tolentino ; CDDCT: 7

33. Project for the cover of the work from which resulted the book “Arquitetura Timorese”, at the time (1960/1961) entitled “A Habitação no Timor Português” (Housing in Portuguese Timor). Author: Leopoldo de Almeida ; Archive MNE / Col. Rosa de Almeida

34. Letter of May, 9 (1960) from Leopoldo de Almeida to Ruy Cinatti, identifying the status of the preparation of the work which resulted in the book *Timorese Architecture*.

35. Drawing of a house in the Lautem region, published in the 1st edition of the book *Timorese Architecture* (1987). India ink over tracing paper
Author: Leopoldo de Almeida ; Archive MNE / Col. Ruy Cinatti

36. Working drawing of a house in Suai, with handwritten notes for the identification of the several elements in the house. Author: Leopoldo de Almeida ; Archive MNE / Col. Rosa de Almeida

37. Working drawing of a house in Bobonaro, used to confirm the names of the different elements in the house. Author: Leopoldo de Almeida ; Archive MNE / Col. Ruy Cinatti

38. Working drawing of a *parlament-house* in Suai.

Author: Leopoldo de Almeida ; Archive MNE / Col. Ruy Cinatti

39. Working drawing of a house (floor plan) in Bobonaro for the identification of the several components of the house and its occupation according to the different family members. Author: Leopoldo de Almeida ; Archive MNE / Col. Ruy Cinatti

40. Working drawing of the village of Buruma (Baucau), published in the cover of the 2nd edition of the book *Timorese Architecture* (2016). Author: Leopoldo de Almeida ; Archive MNE / Col. Rosa de Almeida

41. Working drawing of mountain village. The information concerning the numbering of the houses and of other constructions is unknown as well as its region. Author: Leopoldo de Almeida ; Archive MNE / Col. Rosa de Almeida

42. / 43. Elements of decorative panels of a house, with the figuration of a couple of ancestors, male and female, sculpted in low-relief.
Col. Ruy Cinatti; MNE: AF.572 & AF.573

44. / 45. Fragments of the decorative panels of a door, with male and female figures sculpted in high-relief. *Suco* of Fatumaca, region of Baucau.
Col. Ruy Cinatti; MNE: AF.515 & AF.516

46. Miniature of a house from Balibó, Taha Fatuc, Fatuc Laran, Bobonaro region, possibly made in the 1960's.
Author: unknown. MNE: MAQ.001

47. Miniature of a *Mambai* house in Letefuó, Ermera district, possibly made in the 1960's.
Authors: Mau Huno, Nai Buti e Mau Bere.
MNE: MAQ.002

One Book, an Exhibition

This exhibition is a tribute to the research made by Ruy Cinatti (1915-1986), Leopoldo Castro de Almeida (1932-1996) and António de Sousa Mendes (*1921) on the traditional construction systems of East Timor, from which resulted the book *Arquitetura Timorese* (Timorese Architecture).

This book, the main work on the issue on Timorese Architecture, was first published in 1987 and was recently reissued by the Museu Nacional de Etnologia (National Museum of Ethnology) within a partnership with the Camões – Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua, I.P. (Camões – Institute for Cooperation and Language).

Taking as reference the seven types of traditional housing which that team considered emblematic of the several geographical and cultural areas of the Timorese territory, the exhibition presents a selection of objects of several of the Museum's collections on East Timor, from which are highlighted the architectonical items collected by Ruy Cinatti.

In the exhibition it is also highlighted the set of scale models of houses and ritual constructions made by Pedro Tolentino, in collaboration with João Tolentino, from the early 1990's onwards. These models constitute tridimensional reproductions of some of the houses documented, either by rigorous drawing or by photograph, in the first edition of that book.

Documenting the vast diversity of traditional building techniques in East Timor, the exhibition also forwards us to the complex symbolism of the Timorese housing, both as the expression of social organization and as a the reflex of the conception of the universe and of the relation between man and the Sacred.

