

**Social Time and Life in the Epitaphs from Săpânța
Tradition and Cultural Innovation in the “Merry Cemetery” from
Săpânța**

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Abstract

The analysis of the Săpânța cultural phenomenon requires first of all the considering of the relation between tradition and innovation, and the manner it manifests itself in the cemetery of Săpânța. Even if the painted, tall and narrow funerary crosses so peculiar for Săpânța have performed the role of a substitute of the defunct, being at the same time the display surface for the epitaphs generally celebrating life, I still consider them an innovation introduced by Ioan Stan Pătraș. He intuitively exploited the local traditions of poetry, painting and architecture. Confusions still exist also with regard to the chronology of Pătraș' concept; however, I advance the opinion that Pătraș' art dates back to 1934.

The funerary inscriptions from Săpânța have been considered, at least on the level of public opinion and present-day oral culture, as expressions of a secular and even socialist morality. However, I claim that they are an integral part of the system of popular aesthetic attitudes with a defensive value, emphasizing the value of life and the community axiologies which perpetuate themselves even after death.

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During the age of communism, and especially during Ceaușescu's rule, there was a purposeful attempt “to turn to good use and diffuse this rich patrimony of traditional popular forms”.¹ The ideologists

¹ V. Savonea, *Arta naivă în România* (Naive art in Romania), Bucharest, Ed. Meridiane, 1980, p. 16.

of cultural policy, beginning already with the 1950s, but especially in the nationalist-communist period denied the genuine and lay character of both the funeral inscriptions,¹ the satirical side of which, although moderate, has been defined as a desecrating element of popular culture, and the images, the vivid colouring of which has been interpreted as a national-popular cliché. Thus the painted crosses from the cemetery of Săpânța² have been considered an expression of the national spirit. The adaptation of the phenomenon of the Săpânța cemetery by the “official” culture in the 1970s provoked the “snob rejection” of the Romanian intellectual elite, who ignored the authentic cemetery from Săpânța,³ which has become an object of research (exclusively) for Western researchers.⁴ It was only V. Savonea⁵ who discussed this phenomenon, albeit superficially, including Ion Stan Pătraș in his analysis on Romanian naïve art, and stating that the expression “Merry Cemetery” displayed the “tourist’s mentality”.⁶ He did not insist on studying the relationship between the art of I. Stan Pătraș and the tradition of funeral epitaphs in the Maramureș village. Several speculations, even theories have been launched by tourists who put forward their travel impressions

¹ Savonea, *Arta naivă în România*.

² The laicization imposed on the society by the official discourse of the communist regime is best reflected by the iconography of the crosses manufactured in the communist period, although it is not as visible as stated. During this period religious symbols such as the representations of saints or the crucifixion were almost completely absent from the iconographic repertory. Yet, as I will demonstrate in the following analysis, the essential religious symbols still prevail. The disciples of Stan Pătraș - Gheorghe Stan, Toader Stan, Toader Turda, and Vasile Stan called Colțun – stressed the art of Pătraș and imposed new approaches in script, the quality of drawing, as well as in the dimension and organization of the figurative compartments. Nowadays the “school of Săpânța” is represented by Dumitru Pop called Tincu, a pupil of the disciples, who has been making crosses since 1978; he, signing himself as “Mitică” (see an epitaph from 1978) uses a more strident colouring, larger images, and naturally the elements of religious iconography also seen on icons painted on glass.

³ Most Romanian research was conducted from the perspective of the study of plasticity or at best the monograph. See Simion Pop, *Cimitirul vesel, monografie sentimentală*, Bucharest, Editura pentru Turism, 1972; *Sapanta. Le Cimetière Joyeux. The Merry Cemetery*, photograph Gérard Pestaque, introd. Anca Mihăilescu, Éditions Hesse, 1991.

⁴ Bruno Mazzoni, *Le iscrizioni parlanti del cimitero di Sapintsa*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 1999, 12 sq.

⁵ V. Savonea, *Arta naivă în România*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16 ff.

(either publishing them or joining discussions on thematic forums), as well as folklorists and theoreticians, about the cultural identity of the “Merry Cemetery” in Săpânța. In my opinion, this formulates again a false dilemma. The analysis of the cultural phenomenon of this village imposes, in the first place, a discussion of the relation between tradition¹ and innovation², as well as the way this relation is manifested in the cemetery of Săpânța. Even if the typical cross from Săpânța – painted, high, and narrow – fulfils the (traditional) role of a substitute of the deceased and serves as the support of the epitaph which celebrates life, it still remains an innovation for Săpânța, a result of Ion Stan Pătraș’ enterprise: intuitively, he explored (in an original way) the traditions of local poetry, fine art, and architecture. Although the chronology of

¹ Besides the art of wood processing, tradition lies also at the basis of the iconography of painted crosses. The geometrical, vegetal, and astral motifs, the serpent stripe, and the colours are also inspired by the tradition of icons on glass and the textile dying of the area (carpets and folk costumes of the Maramureș area).

² The innovations introduced in the funeral were appreciated greatly by the village community. The innovation lies not only in the introduction of a funeral inscription which reconstructs the identity of the deceased, but also in including, in the upper part of the cross, certain images which reproduce some characteristic scenes from the life of the deceased, and his/her portrait. The painted crosses were conceived by Ion Stan Pătraș, but were ordered by the families of the deceased persons, and later, as the fame of the Master grew, also by those who preorganized their grave while still alive. The cross is placed on the grave a few months after the death of the owner; or in some particular cases, such as for those who died far from the village, at war, or in prison, the cross is placed only years later. There are cases when several persons’ names and epitaphs appear on the same cross, as a sign that two or more members of the same family have been buried in one grave. There is some confusion about the crosses which are painted on both sides: they mark a family grave. In these cases the more recent inscription indicates that the cross was repositioned, so that the former *recto* became a *verso*! The crosses manufactured in the recent past, especially by Stan Pătraș’ disciples, exhibit a tendency to become higher and larger, to allot more space to the epitaph, or on the contrary, to provide the cross with a double image (usually portraits or static and dynamic images of the deceased in edificatory scenes of their lives, or of the circumstances of their death) and one single epitaph. After about ten years from the elevation of the cross, the survivors have them redyed. If the crosses have been neglected for one reason or another, and were inevitably deteriorating, they were taken off the grave and burnt. Others however are still preserved in the Pătraș Memorial House or in private collections.

Pătraș' enterprise is still uncertain,¹ and although there are cultural clichés which claim that the phenomenon of Săpânța is an artificial cultural product typical for communism, I prefer to mark the year 1934 as the starting point of Pătraș' creative period, because it bears the visible evidence of his art, epitaphs written in that year and preserved until the present. The crosses and epitaphs created by Ion Stan Pătraș make use of the popular art of wood carving, which the artist had mastered since his adolescence; the tradition of carved, sculpted, and painted crosses (which can be found all over the territory of Romanian Orthodoxy, especially at the entrance of settlements or road intersections, in Moldavia, Transylvania, and even Oltenia); and the tradition of icons painted on glass.

It seems that in the period between 1934 and 1977 the artist raised around 800 crosses in both Orthodox cemeteries from Săpânța. "The other Orthodox cemetery" (even the local people use this differentiation when they speak about the former Greek Catholic cemetery), less known than the so-called "Merry Cemetery", is situated outside the village; the graves are for free there, so they are occupied by poorer families. In the "other Orthodox cemetery" (which, as briefly hinted at before, used to be a Greek Catholic one prior to 1948) which is relatively neglected, the crosses with unique texts rapidly degrade, and the inscription is now often illegible. Some of the crosses are even more interesting than those in the famous cemetery, while the inscriptions are longer and offer more detailed biographies of the deceased. I refer, first of all, to the "family" graves such as that of Maria Săvuleasa (1897-1959) and her children: Irina, Anuța, Ioan, and Mărie. The manufacturing of the "merry" crosses of Săpânța as a process employs certain traditional techniques of wood processing and artistic design: choosing the wood for the cross (knotless oak, 20-25 years old), drying the wood (this natural technique lasts for 3 to 5 years), cutting the oak (with circular saw), carving the oak (the cross must be 8 cm thick), rasping and polishing the wood, painting it in blue, ornamenting the cross, sculpting the bas-relief which depicts household scenes or the portrait of the deceased, "digging" the text of the epitaph with white letters against a blue background, execution of details, that is, decorative, general, and framing elements.² The painting is made with colours obtained from natural pigments, and it is applied on both sides of the cross. The basic colour is blue, a special

¹ Certain sources claim as initial dates 1836 or even 1940.

² Virgil Udrea, *În cimitir la Săpânța, moartea și-a pierdut sămânța* (In the cemetery of Săpânța, death has lost its seed), Cluj, Ed. Semne, 2002, p. 66.

kind of blue, called by experts “Săpânța-blue” (experts have distinguished six tones of this colour). The other colours are greatly symbolic: green represents life, yellow reminds of fecundity and fertility, red means vitality, and black symbolizes death. (The colours are not “pure” in fact, but resemble the dyes used for textiles, such as: yellow-orange, vivid green, or even gloomy green.) The crosses comprise two structures or registers: the central register which contains the iconography of the deceased’s domestic life, or his/her portraits, and the inferior register which contains the geometric and floral stripes. In order not to be affected by bad weather, exactly as normal fences, the crosses have a double-sloped roof. The technical and artistic complexity of the cross is imposed by its functions (as it consecrates life), iconography, and the epitaph, the explicit elements of the grave, emphasizing its character as a “canonical” depiction of the traditional world, the beliefs about worldly life as the ethos of labour and the observation of the norm, the practice of “humanity”; these attitudes are also conditions for passing to the Otherworld, to a state of post-existence. The epitaphs by their few, repetitive, stereotypical words, also express the paradoxes of the attitude of Romanian village people towards death. Thus, although the beliefs about death confirm that it is not conceived as the end of the soul, but as a possibility to attain salvation in another “World”, as a gate to post-existence (this destination is still conditioned by worldly life), death is (still) perceived concretely, as a tragic event. By dying, the individual is separated from his/her social being, his/her private and family life, and the roles and functions he or she fulfilled in the community. Death is that part of human condition which man cannot elucidate, because by its nature it conditions the existence of the humane and civilization itself. The tragic nature of individual death is amplified if the life of the deceased ended before its second stage, maturity beginning with marriage, considering that those who could not enjoy their lives long enough did not end their life cycle, which, for mysterious, but also interconnected motifs and logic, was aggressively and unfairly interrupted by an unexpected ending.

In this context, while natural death appears as “rest”, “ease”, “falling asleep” (a less employed meaning in the funeral texts from Săpânța),¹ brutal death (accidental, early death, murder) is an unnatural act, provoked by “the ugly death”, “death with an ugly name”, “ruthless”,

¹ In the New Testament it is said that people “sleep” instead of “dying”: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (1 Thes. 4, 14).

“tyrannous”, “terrible” (see also the representations on the large crosses at the entrance of the two Orthodox cemeteries of Săpânța,¹ as well as the adjectives describing episodes of brutal death in the presentation for “passers-by”). They generally believe in their access to Life after Death, as a belief specific to popular religion, and in this respect the crosses from Săpânța (almost) fulfill an ontological function. And still, in the cemetery itself – apart from the large crosses which are raised in order to

¹ At the basis of the crosses placed at the entrance of the “Merry Cemetery” and the former Greek Catholic one, death appears with a hybrid face, having a humanoid, demonic aspect, but also traits of a black and hideous monkey which threateningly shakes about a black sickle to the “passer-by”; it resembles the mural paintings of churches from Muntenia, such as the “wild death”, an intermediary being between a human and a devil, a black monster, as well as the “devil death” seen in the iconographic material from the same cultural area. Under the face of such a painted death there is a warning which commences with the words: “I am stronger than you / Look well you Christian / Because I am the ugly death / I will take everybody one by one”. A different kind of script is used here than in the two cemeteries and the rules of Romanian grammar are ignored here as well. This representation of death is traditional. The figure of death was seen for centuries in an artistic and literary representation, under various forms: as a knight of the Apocalypse passing over a pile of dead bodies; or as Megaera, descending from the air with a bat’s wings, as a skeleton with a sickle or a bow and an arrow, sometimes sitting in a wagon pulled by oxen, or riding an ox or a cow. References on the personification of Death in: Konrad Burdach, *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen*, pp. 243-249, *VOm Mittelalter zur Reformation*, III, 1, 1917. (I think this is the first piece of work which analyses the iconographic and literary material on the subject of death). The representations of death in Săpânța are much like those in Orthodox churches – see Cristina Dobre-Bogdan, *Imago Mortis în cultura română veche (secolele XVII-XIX)* (Imago mortis in early Romanian culture, 17th-19th century), Bucharest, Editura Universității din Bucharest, 2002. Funeral orations, homiletics, memorial / commemorative speeches, the “verses” of the dead, the iconography of religious monuments of Romanian Orthodoxy imagine death in various forms of presentation: riding, winged, skeleton with a scythe, woman with a scythe, skeleton with an axe and haversack, old man with a scythe. The requisites of death are the aforementioned weapons and the sack, in which it is said to collect the souls it mowed. Sometimes it appears carrying the scythe in one hand, and the “glass of death” in the other. It is clear thus that the model of death has crystallized in the imagination of village people. Death appeared under the same forms and figures also in medieval iconography and the imagination of that period; by contamination and cultural degradation, the elements of the medieval *danse macabre* probably began to represent death all over Europe, as a transconfessional subject.

remind one of the Savior and the heroes (see the large cross in front of the entrance of the former Greek Catholic cemetery) – death is not presented in an artistic way. Even those who violated the axiology of the community by alcoholism,¹ family irresponsibility followed by divorce and estrangement,² excessive sensuality and adultery,³ violence⁴ and meanness,⁵ or even suicide,¹ being sanctioned by the (sometimes

¹ See the warning of the alcoholic about death as an effect of excess (the religious perspective, the idea that death is the consequence of sin, does not appear here): „*Țuica e adevărat venin /Ea aduce plîns și chin /Că și mie mi-o adus /Moartea sub picior m-a pus /Cu-i îi place țuica bine /Va pății așa ca mine /Că eu țuică am iubit /Cu ea-n mână am murit /Aici odihnește /Dumitru Holdiș /A trăit 45 de ani /Mort de moarte /Forțată la 1958*”; „*Aici eu mă odihnesc /Stan Ion ... mă numesc /Din a mea copilărie/Casa mia plăcut mie /Și mia mai plăcut una /Țuica din sticlă a bea /Tudosie soția mia/Tei griji cît îi putea/Că eu lumea o lăsa/La 62 de ai./Mr. 1973*”; „*Am fost om în vremea mea /Pînă m-am luat a be /Dacă femeile ma lăsat, /De băut m-am apucat /Uitați-vă prieteni bine, /Ca să nu pățiți ca mine /Că țuica și țigările / Mi-au îngreunat zilele /... /Că așa mi-a fost soarta...*”(text written on several graves, even after 1989). [Verses about the effects of excessive drinking: brandy is poison; whoever drinks too much, will end up like me].

² See: „*Până am fost fecior în sat /Tot sub ceteră am jucat /După ce m-am înșurat /Nevasta nu ma lăsat /Și un copil eu am avut /Cu drag mare l-am crescut /Sorinel al meu fecior /Mult ți-am așteptat cu dor /Și să vii la patul meu /Cînd mi-a fost ceasu mai greu /Dar mama ta nu tealăsat /Șiam murit eu supărat /Că eu viața o lăsa /La 38 de ai Mr. 1985*” (The name of the deceased is illegible). [Verses referring to the family problems of a man dying at age 38, whose separated wife did not leave their child attend the man when in need.]

³ See: „*Pînă pã lume am trăit /Toaderu Ioanii mă numit /Din a mea copilărie /Caii mult mia plăcut mie /Și nea mai plăcut una /La bufet la masă asta /Cu nevasta alțuia /După lume îmi pare rău /Că prea iute am murit eu /Viața o părăsai la 52 de ai./1973*”. [Verses about an adulterous man].

⁴ See: „*Cît în lume am trăit /Turda Ion Bilta mam numit /.../Am fost și primar la sat /La toți nu lam fost pe plac /O zis căs om rău în sat /.../ Și să vă mai spun că ... /Am avut două femei /Amîn două o fost Anuță /Șio fost tare drăguță /Pe amîndouă leam iubit /Da vă spun leam stîlcit /Dar acum imi cer ertare /De la mic și de la mare /Trăit 66 ai. Mort la 1979*”. [Verses about a man who was violent with women].

⁵ See: „*Sub această cruce grea /Zace biată soacră mea / Trei zile de mai trăia / Zăceam eu și citea ea / Voi care treceți pe aici /Încercați să no treziți /Că acasă dacă vine /Iară cu gura pe mine /dar așa eu moi purta /Că-napoi nu o înturna*”; „*în cimitir sunt câteva cruci cu inscripții asemenea sau cu o variantă mai scurtă: „Dacă un an mai traia, zaceam eu in locul ei”* [Verses about a man’s shrewd mother-in-law].

satirical) epitaph with a “normative” function, do not seem deprived of the possibility of salvation, because the community is saved by, and together with, all its members!² This social fact is natural, the village is a microcosm. The man builds for himself a familiar, seen and unseen cosmos, in which every being or thing has its own role (place, function, purpose). Its fundamental characteristic is, at least according to the analysis of anthropologists and sociologists, duality: the world of the living / the world of the dead; humans / other life forms; the earth / the sky. At Săpânța, however, this ancestral microcosm seems less divided, at least at the level of the first dual relation, because the epitaphs of the dead speak about the good which is always concrete, diminish the evil which is always difficult to define, try to suggest the acceptance of death, celebrate the life of the individual in the village, and celebrate a nice life. The epitaph is what offers information about the moral norm, occupations and passions, common sins, about family and community “customs and senses”. Just like some decades ago, when analyzing the phenomenon of Săpânța, Romanian ethnologists (professionals as well as amateurs) were seduced by an ethnological *Vulgata* which seems to discover and explain the social and axiological source of the imaginary and the discourse expressed in the texts of the epitaphs of Săpânța by the so-called “hearth” continuity of the Dacians. These theoreticians have advanced the theory that the people of Săpânța, due to the conservation

¹ This is a somewhat unclear epitaph: „Aici eu mă odihnesc /Gogea George mă numesc / Foaie verde singurel / Fostam fecior tinerel /Din a mea copilărie /Biciclet am plăcut mie /Iată ce sa întâmplat /Cu cuțitu mam tăiat /Și pe loc am reposat /Tu moarte cu urât nume / Că tânăr mam dus din lume /Că viața mio luai / La 22 de ai la 1949” [Verses about a young man who died in an unclear accident/suicide (?), cutting his hand (while riding a bicycle ?)]

² “Each village considers itself, in the collective consciousness of its sons, a kind of centre of the world, just as each person places him/herself as the centre of the world...” (See the theory of cosmo-centrism in Lucian Blaga, *Elogiul satului românesc* (The elogium of the Romanian village), Bucharest, 1937, p.8. “In the rural community, every individual plays a part. When he or she cannot fulfil any more that function, someone else will replace him/her. Thus, by the behaviour of the people, by direct participation to the life of the community, the tradition of the village, the collective work, lives by everybody, and his/her true sense of specific creation can only be understood at this monumental and mobile dimension” . H. H. Stahl, cited by Petru Ursache, *Prolegomene la o estetică a folclorului*, (Prolegomenae for the aesthetics of folklore), Bucharest, Cartea Românească, 1980, p. 31.

and (still) application of Dacian pre-Christian traditions by their funeral texts, “laugh in the face of death”, defeating it in the end.

Thus, the album *Săpânța - leagăn al artei și spiritualității tradiționale* (Săpânța – Cradle of traditional art and spirituality)¹ claims that in this approach to death “perambulates an echo of the religion of the Dacian ancestors”, who faced with gaiety, “with a mad laughter” the death of the body and the end of life’s tribulations. However, from the perspective of universal morality and as a reflex of being aware of the presence of the sacred, the epitaphs as an essential part of the Orthodox cross, are much rather monologues on the finiteness of human life, autobiographies,² syncretic texts which combine autobiographic information with testament indications³ or epistolary formulae,¹ by

¹ Pamfil Bîlțiu, Grigore Luțai, *Săpânța - leagăn al artei și spiritualității tradiționale* (Săpânța – Cradle of traditional art and spirituality), Sighetu Marmației, 2004, p.3.

² See: „De cu tânăr copilaș /Io am fost Stan I. Pătraș / Ce voi spune nu-s minciuni /Cîte zile am trăit /Rău la nime n-am dorit /Dar bine că am putut /Orișicine mi-a cerut /A fost om bun la viața lui /Vai săraca lumea mea /Că greu am trăit în ea /De la paisprezece ani /Trebuia să cîștig bani /La lucru greu de pădure /Cu țapini șicu secure /Tata în război a plecat /Înapoi n-a înturnat /Trei copii mici am rămas /În lume de greu necaz /Vrutaș fi să mai trăiesc /Și planul să mi-l împlinesc / Vrutaș fi să mai trăiesc / Și să mai îmbătrănesc / Canceru nu m-a lăsat /Batăr că am fost tratat /Aș fi fost mulțumit /Ziceam că mult am trăit /Dar grea boală m-a lovit /Sângele mi s-a oprit /Cu mulți am stat de vorbă /Peste douăzeci de mii /La toți le-a plăcut de mine /I-am primit pe toți cu bine /Din șaptezeci și două de țări /Din conducători de stat /Foarte mulți m-au vizitat /Că eu viața o lăsa / La 69 de ai”. [Epitaph of Ion Stan Pătraș; verses present autobiographical details of the deceased.]

³ See: „Cît în lume am trăit /Pop Ion Spănu m-am numit /Oile mult liam iubit /Și bine am gazdăluit / Anuță soție dragă /Tu ai rămas amu de gazdă /Cu lucru nu m-am gătat /Feciorii trăbă însuraș /Cinci copii noi am avut /De omenie i-am crescut /De amu soție dragă /Dacă ți-am greșit mă iartă /Trăit 87 ai /Murit la anu 1982 /Odihnească în pace” ; „Pop Grigore a Tomi / Am avut o viață lungă /Cu necazuri și furtună /Am fost vesel și cu voe bună /Lucrînd mult timp la pădure /Cu țupin și cu săcure /Doctori lingă mine a stat /Ș-am murit ne împăcat /Amărit și supărat /De copii nemîngîiat /Nu vă plîngeți voi urmași /Cuconi de nepot și frați /Care-n lume ați rămas /Ci uniți-vă ca frați /Ca să fiți înalți ca brazi /1889-1973”; „Cît am fost pe lume vie /IrinaTurdi îmi zică mie /Și dacă mam măritat /Mihalcă Irina mo chemat /**Tu moarte fără dreptate /Ce nai mărș în sus păsate /Unde babe supărate** /La mine dece ai venit /Am doi copii de grijit /Măi Toader bărbatu meu./Văduari țiamlăsat eu /Și dacă ti însura /De copii tu nu uita /Îi crești și binei învață /Și le dă bună povață /.../ Eu viața olăsai la 26 de ai

which the deceased parts from his/her beloved, hoping for a future reunion in post-existence. Besides the iconographical representation, the language of these epitaphs becomes a possibility of intercultural communication. Whoever is interested in finding the syncretic folkloric source of Ion Stan Pătraș' invention, the cultural origins of his art, may study the (earlier or more recent) approaches of Romanian ethnology to the specificities of the traditional culture of Maramureș.²

/Moartă 1984". [Verses on last wills of the deceased, mostly addressed to the spouse with reference to their children].

¹ See: „Parem rău după viață / Misa topit ca o ghiață /Tu moarte cu urît nume / Tînără mai dus din lume /Pă altu pămînt străin /Înapoi să nu mai vin /Săraci părinți mei /Supărați o rămas ei / Mai diochia fratele meu / După mine îți pare rău / Și tu sora Anuță / Pă mine numi uita /Și acum la încheiere /Io vă zic la revedere / Io viața olăsai la 16 ai / Moartă la anul 1985"; „Aici eu mă odihnesc /Stan Ioana mă numesc /Trag din caer și din fes /Ca să fac avere deajuns /Doi feciori eu am avut /Ca doi brazi ca de pe Prut /Iam crescut făcut, i-am făcut mari /Să fie fălăși și tari /Cei ce vați gîndit la mine /Dumnezeu să deie bine /La nepoți și strănepoți /Vă doresc noroc la toți / Să aveți noroc în viață /.../Eu vă zic la revedere / Ne-om vedea la Înviere.(1901-1987).” [Verses ending with formulae reminiscent of the closing part of letters].

² Maramureș: a territory and county in the north of Transylvania; Săpânța is situated in that territory. See the studies of the folklorist, priest, and historian Ion Bîrlea, *Baladele, colinde și bocete din Maramureș* (Balads, Christmas carols, and laments from Maramureș), Bucharest, Casa Școalelor, 1924; I. Bîrlea, *Literatură populară din Maramureș*, vol.I-II, Bucharest, Editura pentru Literatură, 1968; Bîrlea collected an anthology of 1200 folk poems which offer data about the traditional prosody at the basis of the epitaphs from Săpânța; Tache Papahagi, *Graiul și folklorul Maramureșului* (The speech and folklore of Maramureș), Bucharest, Academia Română, 1925; Constantin Brăiloiu, *Bocete din Oaș* (Laments from Oaș), Bucharest, Socec, 1938; D. Pop, *Folcloristica Maramureșului* (The folklore of Maramureș), Bucharest, Ed. Minerva, 1971; Gail Kligman, *Nunta mortului* (The wedding of the dead), Iași, Polirom, 1998; see the approaches of Gheorghe Dăncuș, Petre Lenghel-Izanu, Traian Bîlțiu - Dăncuș, Mihai Marina, Mihail Bologa, Mihai Tăut, Ion Stan și Emil Forna, intellectuals from Maramureș who, by the periodicals of the region, especially by the *Graiul Maramureșului* (The voice of Maramureș) first published on March 1, 1932, and by collecting folklore in the villages of Maramureș tried to evaluate the inheritance of local popular culture; thus, Petre Lenghel-Izanu publishes in the *Graiul Maramureșului* a series about “Obiceiuri de Crăciun și colinde din Maramureș” (Christmas customs and carols from Maramureș); Traian Bîlțiu-Dăncuș publishes the book *Arta țărănească din Maramureș* (1935) (The art of peasants from Maramureș), in which he emphasizes the outstanding value and skill of the masters of the north; Gheorghe Dăncuș in his *Ion Hotico Herenta. Un*

However, the cemetery owes its fame to the unity of the manner in which the inhabitants of the village, by Pătraș' art, relate to the analysis of life and definition of physical death. The discourse of the epitaphs is austere, summarizing, and ironic, based on some (stereotypical) models of autobiography and a chronicle of events which lead to "bad death" (too early and unnatural). The epitaph lends more significance to an exemplary or immoral life than to death, because from the perspective of traditional community the life of the individual, and his/her assessable social manifestation of the moral norm is more important. Even the Otherworld, of which we are offered little information, seems similar to the material world, as it has the same social particularities, presenting the continuation of society structure made up of clans, families, classes, and crafts, securing thus the union of the soul,

poet al țăranimii maramureșene (Ion Hotico Herenta. A peasant poet from Maramureș) presents Herenta's popular poetry created at about the same time when Stan Pătraș started to paint his first crosses at Săpânța. According to the aforementioned approaches, as well as to recent funeral practices, the deceased (called "dalbul de pribeag" (the wandering spirit) sets out on a difficult journey, must pay at the customs, must pass them (helped by the prayers of the priest and his/her loved ones, and by funeral practices); during the three days while the dead body is exposed in the house and at the funeral, it is wailed by the women of his/her family; these wailings, improvised "songs" are meant to express feelings of regret for the deceased, but also forms of support for the person who accomplishes the "great passage" (the wailing is addressed to the deceased). Even the funeral service implies lyrism. After the traditional church songs required by the Orthodox burial ritual, the *diac* (choir leader) sings the *versș* that he composed in the name of the deceased, addressed to the surviving family and the community (remembering his/her life, thanking those who supported and cared for him/her during his/her illness, express their "disconsolateness" on their having left too early, or the feeling of a completed destiny, giving advice for the survivors). Finally, by the voice of the same *diac* the deceased asks for the forgiveness of those who were close to him/her while still alive (family, relatives, friends, neighbours), and also from acquaintances (in certain villages in Maramures, peasants order they "versș" from the *diac* in their lifetime). Ion Stan Pătraș may have been inspired when writing his epitaphs by these instances of the funeral event as well (in his time the "versș"-es were composed by Pop Toader a Diacului). On the custom of three-day wailing at the head of the exposed deceased see also Vasile Popp, *Despre înmormântările comune la daco-români*, (On common burials at the Daco-Romans), translated by Andreea Mârza, Alba Iulia, Aeternitas, 2004, p. 161. The "versș"-es published by Gail Kligman in *Nunta mortului*, p. 213-216, stand as evidence that these were the most important sources inspiring Pătraș' creation.

salvation, and community reunion. All humans move to the Otherworld! Physical separation is thus temporary (in most epitaphs the deceased separates from the survivors with the conviction that after the Resurrection the Reunion awaits them,¹ and that salvation is unquestionable.) However, life does not seem too joyful either. The ethos of work oscillates between traditional norm and torment, as the texts of the epitaphs are dominated by the medieval *contemptu mundi*: “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Pop Grigore mă numesc /Cît pe lume am trăit /Caii tare i-am iubit /Am arat, am semănat /Și-n Gutin am lucrat /La Gutin m-am îmbolnăvit /Și acasă am venit /Ani cîți i-am mai trăit /Cu boala m-am chinuit /La cîți medici am umblat /Dar de boală n-am scăpat /Atîta ma chinuit /Pînă ma pus în pămînt /A trăit 59 de ani /1931-1990” [Here I rest / My name is Pop Grigore / While I lived in the world / I loved horses / I ploughed and sowed / And worked on the Gutin [a mountain] / And got ill on the Gutin / And came home / And all the years I lived / I struggled with illness / I have seen many doctors / But never got rid of the disease / It tormented me / Until it put me into the grave / He lived for 59 years / 1931-1990.] The people of Săpânța seem thus, in this epitaph, as well as through many others which repeat the formulae of death as an end to a tormenting disease,² far from the superficial analysis of ethnologists who

¹ The iconography of the painted crosses represents those who are buried in the same grave as being “hand in hand” or sitting around a table: the mother with one of her children; the mother and her children; husband and wife; grandparent with grandchildren. In connection with this perception of reunion in the Otherworld, see: „Ios Mihaiu Braicului /Și nepotul Băsului /Am venit și eu moșule /Și să dau mîna cu tine /Pînă pe lume am trăit /Cînd am fost tînăr fecior /Mi-a pușcat rusun picior /După ce m-am însurat /Femeia neo accidentat /Tînăr văduv am rămas /Șam trăit tot cu necaz. /1968”; „Aici eu mă odih-/nesc Gheorghe lui Gavrilă mă /numesc 69 de /ani am trăit la /Biserică am slujit /Și 3 copii m-/au murit /Lîngă ei am venit”(no mention of year of death; the cross is degraded, the grave is in the former Greek Catholic cemetery; „Am venit sub nuc la umbră /La mămuca mea cea scumpă /Am venit mamă la tine /Să văd cît ție de bine /Să te ajut și eu pă tine /Cît mai ajutat pă mine /Fieți sufletul ertat /Tare mult m-ai ajutat /Că nu mia lăsat să mor /Să fiu mamă la cuconii /Anuți și lui Ion /Și ne duc mult a nost dor /Că lumea asta o lăsa /La de ai Mr. 1”(illegible numbers). (The quotations all refer to members of the same family buried together: grandson and grandfather; father and his three children; daughter and her mother.)

² The cliché of “common” death, as a result of torturing and lethal disease, gives birth to standardized epitaphs: „Avionu mau adus /Dela spital dela Cluj /Eu aici mă odihnesc /Stan Anuța mă numesc /Cîte zile leam avut /Grea viața-m petrecut /Și grea boală am avut /Doctori mult mau tratat /În zadar au încercat /Că moarte

claim that the people of Maramureș live in a certain kind of familiarity or even complicity with death. If not ignoring it, the people of Săpânța see physical death as an effect of disease, accident, or murder; the illness itself always has a real, natural cause, and not an obscure or supernatural one (even “lightning” is not seen as a punishment). Such a death has an almost physical presence, maybe partly also due to the fact that it determines definitive transformations; just like, from this perspective, an angel of Change. In the texts from Săpânța death is only discussed briefly, in a sketchy and artistic way, following which they speak in more details about the worldly role of the deceased. Somewhat more space is dedicated to death as an effect of a brutal reality (accident, murder), or a violent natural event (death by lightning).

For the people of Săpânța, death means the abandonment of life with all its “roles” and the “moving” to an Otherworld, which is presented, however, as “resting” (I noticed that there are few funeral texts which use the motif of sleeping or falling asleep, so popular in urban epitaphs ever since the beginning of the 19th century); in other, rarer cases death is imagined as a “shadowing of the road”¹ or as

nu mau lăsat /Pinăn pămînt mau băgat / La vo patruzeci de ai /Viață o părăsai. /Mr. 1960”; „În lume cât am trăit / Pop Marie mam numit /Fostam de triababoreasă /Găzdoaie bună la casă /Am cumpărat și am vândut /Am trăit cum am putut /La copii sa strâng mai mult /Și văduvă am rămas /Am petrecut mult năcaz /Doi copioam avut /De omenie iam crescut /Pa Grigore și Marie /Dumnezeu Sfântusație / O grea boală am căpătat /Și de E nu am scăpat /Și amu vă zic cu bine /Mă pomeniț și pa mine /Io viața o lăasai la 79 ai / Moartă la anu 1985”; „Din a mea copilărie /Ionu Olechi mi-o zis mie /Tînăr la mină am plecat /Gre boală a căpătat /Zeci de ani m-ai îngrijit /Boala mult m-o chinuit /Mă gîndesc la voi la toți /Și la drajii mei nepoți /Pe lume cît vor trăi /De mine vor pomeni /Scumpii mei nepoți Ion și Ileană /După mie dați pomană 1934-1997”; „Hai Ilea nevasta /Mea D-zeu să-ți daie bine cai avut /grija de mine c-am căzut pe pat betag /Tu mi-ai umblatdupă /Leac leacu nu / S-o găsit șapte /inimi am rănit v-am /Lăsat cu mult /năcaz și cu lacri-/mi pe obraz / 1925...”; „ Aici eu mă odihnesc /Dumitru Holdiș mă numesc /Vai săraca lume a mea /Puțin am trăit în ea /Căci grea boală saubăgat /În trupul meu la ficat /Cînd de la Cluj am plecat /Mama în brață mau luat /Și în mașină mau băgat /Cînd acasă am sosit /Zilele ni sau sfișit” (epitaph of a young man; the cross contains the deceased’s portrait made probably by a photograph, guarded by two angels). (All quotations refer to cases of serious illness which caused the person’s death).

¹ „Eu aici mă odihnesc /Gheorghe Moldovan mă numesc /Cît în lume mi-am trăit /Cu caii mult am muncit /Și acum vin pe cal călare /Aduc lemne de vînzare /La omu care nu are /Iar drumu mi-sa umbrit / Că iute eu l-am părăsit /Am venit la hodinit /Aș fi vrut să mai trăiesc /Nu să vin să putrezesc /Lumea asta o lăasai / La

“leaving”,¹ as a mysterious and implacable law (“tyrannous”)² about which peasants prefer not to think too much.

59 de ai Mr. 1986”. (Death represented as a shadow that falls on the person’s way).

¹ The woman Anuța Turca had a complex epitaph, almost like an autobiography, who, after working hard and suffering, left this world leaving behind almost testamentary indications: : “Cît am fost pã lume vie /Anuța Piștii îmi zica mie /Și dacă mam măritat /Turca Anuța mo chemat /Multa lñă io am tors /Boriasă ... am fost /Multe cerji eu am făcut /Și turiști liam vîndut /Două fete am avut /Mărie o mårs în lut /Numai Ileana trăiește /Pe mine mă pomenește /Și tu Dioca jinere /Domnu vă daie bine /Și văduvă am rămas /**Și amu io am plecat** /Aici lîngă a meu bărbat /Că aici a fi mai bun /Nu mia traje cîte un pumn /Și viața o lăsai /La 63 de ai /Moartă 1983”; or another autobiography: “Din a me copilărie /Ileana Nevesti mio zis mie /Mult mio fost dragă lumea /Mîncare bună a fa / Să servesc tată lumea /Mîncare mi pregătita / Eu o gust dei rînduită /S-apoi să fie servită /Mîncare altu noi fa /Nici vineri nici sîmbăta /**Dacă așa mio fost soarta /Dintre voi a pleca /Că lumea asta o lăsai** / La 63 de ai Mr. 1986” (this epitaph employs the motif of physical death as a “departure” and the “abandonment” of life at the same time, as a final result of one’s “ordained fate”); some further details about the iconographical execution of this cross should also be added, in order to disprove the claim of complete laicization of the crosses in the cemetery of Săpânța in the years of communism: the deceased is painted in a dynamic scene, cooking at a stove covered with pots; the upper part of the scene represents the divine eye framed by two angels).

² See the frequency of the formula: “...și a fost musai ca să mor” (and I had to die), especially when it is about accidental or premature deaths: “.../Din mica mea copilărie /.../ Eram micuță fetiță /Eu umblam la grădiniță /**Iată moartea rea tirană /Nu ma lăsat să plec la școală / Ca venit cu mare zor /Și a fost musai ca să mor** /Lovită de un motor /ieșind din al meu ocol /Să las părinții cu dor /Și bunicii îndoliați /În veci vor fi supărați /Că moarte ma luat pe mine / La trei anișori de zile / 1978 făcută de Mitică Pop.” (the epitaph of a little girl who died at age three because of an accident); but also in cases of “common”, or “good” death: “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Stan Onac mă numesc /Dragi mia fost oițele /Colea primăverile /Cînd lea crescut laptele /Șiam umplut gălețile /Haida oaie haida he /Dragă vă fie lumea /Nu ca mie sărace /**Căi musai a vă lăsa / Și viața a morții /54 ai. 1949.**” or “Cum mă vedeți în portret Ionu lui Floare mă numesc /Eu în pensie am ieșit /Mam prins de găzduit /Și vă uitați la mine /Cu se tirguiesc oile bine /Măi Danciu, cioban de frunte, /Sa-mi dai oi de rasă bună /Și tu oile mi leai dat /Și cu ele am umblat /**O grea boală am căpătat /De ea nam putut să scap /Că a fost musai a pleca** /Găzdăluitul al lăsa /Că viața o lăsai la 64 de ai /Mr. 1978”. (References to death as tyrannical and unavoidable).

The “pedagogy” of the epitaph

While “merry” epitaphs are relatively recent developments in Romania (existing since around 1934), the traditional funeral rite has not suffered any significant modifications, besides those due to the social dynamics of the time (the de-ritualization of the funeral event, cultural contaminations, the confusion of funeral symbolism, etc.). However, all these happened in an urban environment, while the rural world of Maramureş remained attached to its archaic identity manifested at the borderlines of Romanian territories, in a world which is otherwise multicultural, comprising compact rural communities of Ukrainians, Rutens, Hungarians, and even Jews prior to the Holocaust; however, without presenting too many interpersonal interferences. The funeral inscriptions from Săpânța have been considered, at least by public opinion, by present-day cultural orality, as expressions of lay, even socialist morals, “a sacred space of the Ethos”.¹ The epitaphs which ironize excessive labour and the accumulation of “wealth”² are (however) the manifestation of faith in the futility of such endeavours

¹ Religiousness is also present in funeral inscriptions of the communist period: in closing formulae of the epitaphs in which the deceased entrusts his/her family to divine mercy, and in the iconography which depict women praying with rosaries in their hands, or men who devotedly attend the church. See as examples: “Aci eu mă odihnesc / îmi plăcea /A lucra nu a şedea /Zupa de curcan a fă /Să mănînce George al meu /Să-l trăiască Dumnezeu /Mai mult cît am trăit eu /Că la şaptezeci de ai /Ieu viaţa o lăşai. 1956”; “Eu aici mă odihnesc /Stan Ion Petrenjel mă numesc /Am trăit mulţi ani frumos /Şam fost tata lui Ianoş /Sfînt locaş din lemn durat /Ars au fost şi io am lucrat /Cu mult cumpăt şi cu rost /La acest sfînt adăpost /A trăit 87 de ai mr. 1959”; “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Şi Pop Gheorghe mă numesc /Pe pămînt cît am trăit /Lui Dumnezeu eu iam slujit /Dar aşa eu mam rugat /Mîndră viaţă el mio dat /Fie bine cuvîntat /Şi cinci copii am avut /Dar pe doi iam pus în lut /Dar aici eu vă lăşai /Că viaţa o părăseai /La 91 de ai Mr. 1981”. (Epitaphs expressing a religious life conduct). A unique epitaph shows the peasants’ strong relationship with the animals as essential aids in agricultural works: “Pe lume cît trăit eu /Mă rugam lui Dumnezeu /Să trăiască calu meu /Şi să ne fere de rău. /Aici se odihne răposatul /Stan Grigore lu Ionu Diacului /A trăit 64 de ani /Mr. La 1959”. (A man praying for his horse and God’s forgiveness).

² On the passion for wealth see: “**Cine vre strînge avere /Crească vită cu plăcere** /Şi să scoale diminiată /Eu aşa am fost în viaţă / Aci se odihne batrîna /Stan Anuţa Deloai /A trăit 78 de ani /A dormit la anu 1958”. (Epitaph of an old woman too avid for wealth).

with an exclusively social and economical end (getting rich and showing off their “conceit”),¹ having even a biblical source for it, *Ecclesiastes*!

The custom of painting the crosses in a colourful and flowery way, and to introduce the medium-sized epitaph into the structure of the cross, is a part of the system of defensive aesthetic attitudes which value human life, of a community axiology which lasts even beyond death, since the world only “moves” Over There, and each individual, by his/her life summarized by their epitaphs for the passers-by, is part of the pedagogy of life and death. Could the epitaph celebrate life perhaps also because death in itself is a mystery? Funeral texts catch the rhythms of a certain social time, that of a traditional rural community. The existence of the people of Săpânța means work done with pleasure² or with toil,¹ or

¹ See: “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Ștețca Ion Frîncu mă numesc /Cîtam trăit în vecie /Lucru greu mia fost dat mie /La IFET am tot lucrat /Și vagoane am încărcat /**Bani ce am cîștigat /Tot pămînt am cumpărat /Și la colectiv le am dat /Că viața o lăsa la 70 de ai /Mr. La 1958**”; “Aici se odihnește Turda Marie lui Ion 1906-1960 /Pînam fost pe lume vie /Vă spun ce nea plăcut mie /A vinde șia cumpăra /Și cașu pe chilă a da /**Și bani ceam cîștigat /Tot grădini am cumpărat /Cînd am așteptat folosu /Moarte mau luat cu totul**”; “Aici eu hodinesc /Teodosie Holdiș mă numesc /**Nea plăcut la a me casă /A servi domni la masă /**Pe Toader căpitanu /Și nepotu doctoru / le dau o cafea turcească / La mulți ani să trăiască /Mare amar am avut / /Cînd pă Ion lam pus în lut /De năcazu celam tras /.../ Și viața o lăsa la 76 de ai”; “Holdiș Dumitru mă numesc /**Cîte zile am trăit /Mulți pomi eu am răsădit /Sub pădure ungurească /Iam grijit pomi să crească /Cînd am fost să iau folosu /Moartea miau luat cu totul /Că viața o lăsa la 78 de ai/1967**”. (Epitaphs about persons who did not live to see the results of their life-long struggles for fortune).

² See: “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Stan Dumitru mă numesc /Dam fost Tîhu cel Bătrîn /**Vara tot am făcut fîn /Și iarna am hodinit /Și oile leam hrănit /Coasa mie și cîinele /Acestea miau plăcut mie /Din a mea copilărie /**Toate aceste le lăsa /La 52 de ai /Mr. 1938”; “Mă odihnesc pe vecie /Baba lui Moșu Ilie /**Pînam trăit pe lume /Mult nea plăcut vacile /Să le mulgă laptele /Șiam hrăni fetele /Viața o lăsa /La 58 de ai. 1954.**”; “Aici ieu mă odihnesc /Pop Grigore mă numesc /.../Multe-m știut ca om drag /Și la lume am fost pe plac./Zilele ce le-am ajuns / Multe capuri eu am tuns / Ne-a plăcut o meserie /Ca să rung în frizerie / Toate aceste le lăsa /La 62 de ai / la anu 1965 mort.”; „Aici eu mă odihnesc /Ion Spănu mă numesc /**Pînam fost pe lume viu /Nea plăcut morar să fiu /Saci la coș am ridicat /Și făinam măcinat /**Puțină vamă am luat/ Tuma la 60 de ai. 1967”; “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Pop Anuță mă numesc /**Pe lume cît am trăit /A toarce mult am iubit /**Mă sculai de dimineață /Ș-am tors lână moale creță /Am făcut și ciorici noi /Să-i purtați măi oameni voi /Că ieu lume o lăsa /la 70 de ai. / Mr.1968”; “Eu aici mă odihnesc /Pop Gheorghe mă numesc / **Cît am trăit pe**

even the manifestation of the ethos of work,² the individual is appreciated on the basis of his/her attitude towards work, of the number of his/her offsprings (*coconi* [children]), and of his/her sociability. Many people of Săpânța offered such an image of exemplarity.³ Of the most

pămînt / Grădina mîndră am iubit /Și mi-o plăcut coasa nouă /Să cosăsc iarba pe rouă /La grădina în runcături /Printre meri și printre pruni”(1973, partially quoted epitaph); “Cît am trăit pă pămînt /Stan Gh. Sărdacu mam numit /Cît am trăit io în lume /**Mio plăcut vacile bune/lo am făcut fîn și otavă/Ca să am la vaci pă iarnă/lo deaceea liam ținut/Căm dădură lapte mult/...**./Așa după cum țam spus /Și viața o lăσαι la 88 de ai /Mort 1982.”; „Cît în lume am trăit /Pop Ion Spanu m-am numit /**Oile mult liam iubit /Și bine am gazdăluit** /Anuță soție dragă /Tu ai rămas amu de gazdă /Cu lucru nu m-am gătat /Feciorii trăbă însuraț /Cinci copii noi am avut /De omenie i-am crescut /De amu soție dragă /Dacă țam greșit mă iartă /Trăit 87 ai. /Murit la anu 1982 /Odihneascăse în pace”; „Aici eu mă odihnesc /Pop Ioană mă numesc /**Cît am fost pe lume vie /Meseria-mi plăcea mie /M-am făcut croitoreasă /Multă lume-am îmbrăcat /Cu lecrec și cu căbat /Și la noi și pe-alte sate /Am făcut multe căbate /O fată eu am avut /Și pe Gheorghe am crescut /Dar acestea le lăσαι La 69 de ai /1984.**” (Examples of epitaphs about people who enjoyed working and liked their profession/household work).

¹ See: “Aci ieu mă odihnesc /Stan Mărie mă numesc /Șam fost mama lu Pătraș /Mult am tors din căeraș /Săraca viața mea /Cam trăit cam greu în ia /Că văduvă am rămas / Cu trei copii mititelaș /Soțu în război a plecat / Și în năpoi nu a înturnat /1958”. (The epitaph of Ion Stan Pătraș’ mother – example of a life spent in hard and exhausting work).

² See: “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Stan Onac mă numesc /Dragi mia fost oițele /Colea primăverile /Cînd lea crescut laptele /Șiam umplut gălețile /Haida oaie haida he /Dragă vă fie lumea /Nu ca mie sărace /Căi musai a vă lăsa /Și viața 54 ani. 1949”; “Aci eu mă odihnesc /Pop Ion Osu mă numesc /Vedeț cîțis de bătrîn /Și mă duc în deal la fîn /Acolo dacoii ajunge /Mioi face tocană cu brînză /Șapoi dacă moi hrăni /Oî lua coasa șoi cosi /Că așa lură țărani /Am trăit 68 de ani./1958”; “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Stan Maria mă numesc /Cît am trăit pepămînt /Multă prescuram făcut /Aluat am frămîntat /Pîine am făcut la un sat /La patru mii de persoane /Să guste cînd lea fi foame /Vrutaș fi să mai trăiesc /Și sâmai îmbătrînesc /Dar viața olăσαι /La 76 de ai Mr. 1970”; “Cum mă vedeți în portret /Ionu lui Floare mă numesc /Eu în pensie am ieșit /Mam prins de găzduit /Și vă uitați la mine /Cu se tîrguiesc oile bine /Măi Danciu, cioban de frunte, /Sa-mi dai oi de rasă bună /Și tu oile mi leai dat /Și cu ele am umblat /O grea boală am căpătat /De ea nam putut să scap /Că a fost musai a pleca /Găzdăluitul al lăsa /Că viața o lăσαι la 64 de ai /Mr. 1978”. (Epitaphs about people who lived their lives in the spirit of the ethos of work).

³ See: „Aici eu mă odihnesc /Gheorghe Lazăr mă nu- /mesc fost-am miastăr ma - /re-n sat de oameni mult lă- /udat și pe mulți i-am învățat /Să fie maistări în sat

explicit funeral inscriptions, I wish to reproduce some: “Tr. 74 de ani Tr. 73 de ani /Ne odihnim pe vecie /George Holdiş cu soţie /Cît pă lume am trăit /În carte mult am cetit /Şi cu sipcă am dohănit /Dar copii buni am avut /Pe toţi bine iam crescut /Şi bine iam educat /Să fie de cinste în sat /Şi cît vă uitaţi la noi /Aci veţ veni şi voi./1951” (Lived 74 years Lived 73 years / We rest for ever / George Holdis with his wife / While we lived in the world / We read many books / And we smoked / But we had good children / And we raised them well / And educated them well / To make them honoured in the village / And while you look at us / You will come here too. / 1951) or “Eu aici mă odihnesc /Stan Anuţă mă numesc /Lumea-mi zicea Mogocioaie /Că le vindeam caş de oaie /Pe lume cît am trăit /Tot cu oi am găzdălit /Pe la mulsu măsurî /Iubeam amă veseli /Dar şi-a rîde şi-a glumi /Pe la nunţi cu oameni /Toate astea le lăsai /La 84 de ai. Mr. 1973” (Here I rest / My name is Stan Anuta / People call me Mogocioaie / Because I sold them sheep’s cheese / While I lived in the world / I bred sheep all the time / When milking the cow / I loved to merry / And to laugh and joke / At the weddings with people / I left all these behind / At age 84 Died 1973) or “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Şi Stan Ion mă numesc /Cît pe pămînt am trăit /La pădure am muncit /Şi-am muncit cu mare spor /Ca să-mi cresc şase cuconi /Şi cociş la cai am fost /Pînă la penzie ma scos / Şi multe glume am făcut / Pe la jocuri şi la nunţi /Şi la prieteni lea plăcut /Că tare mult mam distrat /Cît în lume mama flat” (died 1979). (Here I rest / And my name is Stan Ion / While I lived on this earth / I worked in the forest / And I worked hard / To raise my six children / And I was a coachman with horses / Until I retired / And many a joke I made / At dances and weddings / And my friends liked it / Because I had a great time / While I lived in the world). Perhaps the greatest diversity of images can be found in the epitaphs of women dedicated to the family and household, although we might expect that the social and family roles derived from the traditional division of the work

/Casuri multe-am ridicat /Patru copii am avut /Pe toţi mari mi-am crescut /Casuri la toţi le-am făcut /Şi eu viaţa o lăsai /La 82 de ai Mr. 1977”; „Cît am trăit pe pămînt /Pop Anuţa mam numit /Fostam de trabă boreasă /Găzdoie bună la casă /Hai Ion al meu bărbat /Bine noi niam ascultat /Am fost de omenie în sat /Doi copi noi am avut /Tare bine iam crescut /De Ion mam bucurat /Că de copil el o învăţat /Injiner la combină /Mărie nio supărat /Că văduvă o rămas /Nepoţei mei cei draji /Pe părinţi îi ascultaţi /Io viaţa o lăsai /La 77 de ai. /Moartă la ani 1984”; „Aici eu /Ceilalţi au rămas în sat /Unu din ei a murit /Şi tare m-am necăjit /Şi apoi am îmbătrînit /Sătul de zile am murit /Că viaţa o lăsai /La 89 de ai M. 1987”.

in a rural community may also bring about a certain degree of monotony and stereotypes.¹ A unique epitaph expresses the pride of a family with modern aspirations, who also considers itself quite exemplary: "...lăsat-am moștenire vie / La neam și la sat mîndrie /a noastră mare familie /pilda nepieritoare /Vlăstarele viitoare /Cine m-a grăit de rău /Să facă ce am făcut eu /Apoi la Dreapta Judecată, care /Nu se face-n șoaptă /Fiul vostru iubit"(Pop Grigore 1889-1973) (... I left pride as a living inheritance / To the family and the village / of our great family / the everlasting example / For future offsprings / Who spoke ill of me / Let him do what I did / Then at the Last Judgment, which / Does not happen in silence / Your beloved son); this laudatory funeral text is completed by a representation of the family tree of the Pop family, which contains seven persons with higher education.

As for its structure, the epitaph is a short poem written in a first person form,² loaded with archaisms and regionalisms, with many,

¹ See: "Cît am trăit în viață /**Mia plăcut mîncare a face /La oameni care lucrează /So mănînce cu dulceață**"(Stan Anuța lu Petru lu Ion, moartă în 1948 la 60 de ani); "Aici eu mă odihnesc /Turda Ileana mînu /mesc în lume **cît am trăit /Lucram orice cu plăcere /Să strâng la copii avere** /Și dacă iam înșurat /Cu lucru nam terminat /Mă vedeți și aici cu to /ții cum îmiîngrijeam ne /poții îi hrăneam și îi spă /lam caomamă le eram /Dar acestea le lăsa /La 77 de ai Mr. 1952." (In the iconography of the cross, the grandmother is represented while serving her six grandchildren at the table); "Aci eu mă odihnesc /Tite Anuța mă numesc /**Ieu pe lume cît trăia /Mie asta îmi plăcea /A lucra nu a ședea /Supa de curcan a fa** /Să mănînce George al meu /Să-l trăiască Dumnezeu /Mai mult cît am trăit eu /Că la șaptezeci de ai /Ieu viața o lăsa. 1956"; "Aici eu mă odihnesc /Pop Anuța mă numesc/ A lu Ion Spanului /Din capătul satului/ Pîn pe lume am trăit /**Din casă nam pre ieșit /De mîncaream pregătît /Și am pus în farfurii /La cei 10 ai mei copii** /Eu viața o lăsa /La 62 de ai 1966"; "Aci eu mă odihnesc /Gheorghe Anuța mă numesc /Straturile le pliveam /Și florile le udam /Pînă pă lume trăiam /Din a mea copilărie /**Tot asta îmi plăcea mie /Cîntece și horile /Și stratu cu florile /Toate astea le lăsa /La 71 de ai Mr. 1967**"; "Din a me copilărie /Ileana Nevesti mio zis mie /**Mult mio fost dragă lumea /Mîncare bună a fa / Să servesc tată lumea** /Mîncare mi pregătîtă / Eu o gust dei rînduită /S-apoi să fie servită /Mîncare altu noi fa /Nici vineri nici sîmbăta /Dacă așa mio fost soarta /Dintre voi a pleca /Că lumea asta o lăsa / La 63 de ai Mr. 1986". (Epitaphs of women as examples of the traditional division of work in a rural community – the major concern of women in this community is cooking and feeding their family).

² Petras abandoned the tradition of impersonal epitaphs which only contain the name, age, and date of death of the deceased; he used first person forms in order to present the person speaking in the epitaph in a more truthful way; he managed

sometimes inexplicable and generalized spelling mistakes, with words written together and lacking diacritical marks, so that these “aleatory” grammars seem almost natural. (Sometimes they seem to be determined by the narrow space on the cross, especially after the 1950s, when the epitaph becomes ampler. The funeral inscription is made with white capital letters against a blue background.)¹ The antithesis between the relativity of death and dynamism of life is certainly at work in the text. The characters, all having similar lives and the least individualized deaths, often as the result of “incurable diseases” which are beyond the competence of the “doctors” (always referred to in the plural, and being very rarely represented iconographically), are: shepherds, plowmen, vine-growers and fruit-growers, “distillers”², millers, foresters, butchers, and administrators, singers/fiddlers, spinners, and housewives, policemen, soldiers, and teachers; they all form a colloquial community (see the presence of the table, the merriness on the depicted faces, the images of animals and vegetation, the greenness of the domestic landscape).³ The Săpânța epitaphs illustrate the essence of human

to present in a somewhat curious synthesis to present the deceased by their official names, their pertinence to a certain family, by positioning them in the village topography, by their nicknames; women are identified by their “maiden names”, their names received in marriage, their nicknames. See as an example: “...Eu aici mă odihnesc /Mulg vaca și mă gândesc /Din a me copilărie /Pop Ioana mi-a zis mie /După ce m-am măritat /Stetca Ioana m-a chemat /A lu Ionu lu Mihai...”; and also most epitaphs quoted in this paper.

¹ I have reproduced the funeral texts in their original forms with all their grammatical mistakes, in respect for the epitaphs as historical and imagistic sources, but also due to the wish to maintain their originality.

² See: “...Veniți cu toți eompreună /Să vă dau țuică de prună /Să beț din acest pahar /Să vă treacă de amar /Vă dau țuică din butoi /Și din unu îi videa doi /Pîn-am trăit în vecie /Am avut și pălincie /Toate acestea le lăsai /...” (This is the text to be found on the crosses of those who possessed a brandy distillery (palinca).

³ The household is detailed in the iconography of painted crosses, especially with respect to an “ideal-typical peasant household”: the house with all its annexes (stable, shed, hovel, coop, corn basket, apiary, garbage place), smoke house, garden, orchard, ploughland, well, gate; then the meadow, the hay field, the piece of forest, the sawmill, the sheep on the pasture – a world described as a cultural-symbolic geography by Claude Karnoouh in his „Case și grădini. Eseu asupra semnificației termenului de statut în graiul maramureșan” (Houses and gardens. An essay on the meaning of the term ‘statute’ in the Maramures dialect), In *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor*, nr. 25 (1), 1980, p. 77-86. Spring and summer landscapes dominate the funeral iconography of Săpânța, maybe due to the fact that nature is an environment of vitality for simple folks.

existence, sometimes picturing the confrontation of man with incontrollable forces, with unpredictable tragedy, or with implacable destiny. The episodes narrated in a sober and summarized manner end by the stereotypical reflection stating the death of the person in question. The language of the epitaph serves, first and foremost, a function of communication, the relation between the transmitter (who transmits the message, that is, the deceased), and the receiver (the survivors, the community, the “passer-by”). However, the poetical function, the beauty and empathy is obtained by the austere and traditional combinations of words and meanings; sometimes, terms with only a moral / axiological, and no lyrical, value become a source of poetic character, such as the formulations of early literature. The joining of archaisms and regionalisms with certain common words specific for a present-day life and social context create an impression of novelty, and offer the possibility of the transmission of the message / discourse. Even the size and shape of the cross seem subordinated in their function to the epitaph and the iconographic representation. By their form and height, the crosses reproduce the human being, the epitaph by its size and versification captures the attention and valorizes the monologue, the hieratic iconography is representative for everyday life, the social status and sex of the deceased (considered as the transmitter of the epitaph). The iconography also fulfils the role of a stage-like space (or even as a designed stage, because of the decorum, the elements of furniture, costume, the attitude of the painted characters, as if preparing themselves for their dialogues or performances), evading thus conventional time. The tragedy of disappearance, even in cases of violent death, is not apocalyptical, sometimes it is seemingly even dissolved, because death in all these epitaphs in only a “leaving of the world” for a different, superior order, which mortals dare not imagine. Death seems domesticated in a way, because individual failure is analyzed from a pedagogical perspective. As aforementioned, death as a supreme limit is not tragic in itself, at least as long as it serves as the opportunity to surpass one’ condition.¹ Such lucidity may produce a certain kind of hilarity or tragic-comical effects, such as in a recent epitaph: „Ardăte focu noroc /Că nu te-am avut deloc /Tînăr orfan am rămas /Și-am trăit tot cu năcaz /Dar dacă-m crescut mare /Alt năcaz mi-a dat în cale /O grea boală ma apăsât /Și-n pămînt ia ma băgat /Și-am băut cu prietenii /Că știam că noi trăii

¹ A subject discussed by Gabriel Liiceanu in his *Tragicul. O fenomenologie a limitei și depășirii* (The tragic. A phenomenology of limits and transgressions). Bucharest, Humanitas, 2005.

/Pop Gheorghe zis Bătrînu/1945-1994” (May fire burn you, luck / Because I had none of you / I remained an orphan at a young age / And I lived with troubles / But when I grew up / Other troubles came my way / A serious illness oppressed me / And put me in the ground / And I drank with my friends / Because I knew I wouldn’t live / Pop Gheorghe called Bătrînu / 1945-1994.”

The sources of “merriness” in the Săpânța cemetery

The normative function of the epitaph is the effect of irony and self-irony by which the texts of the epitaphs punish “human weaknesses” and the unfulfilment of the “roles” of cultivation of the family and the land, as the biblical qualities which made man the master of nature. It is especially the texts tolerantly¹ reminding of the behaviour of the “prodigals”, which make us smile. By familiar expressions and an apparent good temper, the characters (ordinary people) make up typologies constructed on the basis of characterological dominants, sometimes in a caricaturized form. These underline thus the limits of human condition (physical, moral, or spiritual), which the transmitter recognizes and treats with humour. Especially the older epitaphs are dominated by a humorous,² secondary comicality, but also by a satirical

¹ See epitaphs such as this: „ Am trăit /77 de ani /Bodnar /George /Aici ieu mă odihnesc /Miereşteanu mă numesc /Cît am trăit pe pămînt /Tot deauna mamgîndit /Casa lucru cît mai bine/Sisăi plăcă orila cine /Şi nemai plăcut una /La masa în cijma asta /Am băut mam veselit /Pînă pe lumeam trăit”(died 1967). (A permissive epitaph of a man who liked to enjoy himself in pubs)

² See as examples: “Aci odihne Pop Axenta, soția lui George Titru /A trăit 40 de ani /Cît pe lume am trăit /De găini bine am grijit /Şi mai mult am odihnit/1934” or “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Ion Griguță mă numesc /Pîn pe lume am trăit /Tot cu pipa am dohănit /De lucru mam ferit /Cu toate că mam grijit /Boală grea mo găsit /Şi nu mult am bătrînit /Că viața o lăsa La 57 de ai. 1942”; “Eu aici mă odihnesc /Şi Pop Toader mă numesc /Drag mia fost clănitaru /Şi țuca din paharu /Cît am trăit pe pămînt /Tot la asta mam gîndit /Să am ce bea și a mînca / Din clanitar acînta /Dar am avut și năcăz /Că văduv am rămas /Şi vă cînt de veselie /Nu vă cînt așa ca mie. 1949.”, or “Am trăit 82 de ani /Aci eu mă odihnesc /Măuris Ion mă numesc /Cîte zile am trăit /De lucru greu mam ferit /Miauenit on ginere /Şi ma fost tot binele /Alexandru cel vestit /De mine mult sangrijit /Să-l trăiască Dumnezeu / Mai mult cît am trăit eu./1964”. It is interesting that the few epitaphs of the indolent the same formula is used, emphasizing the basic trait of the character: “De lucru mam ferit”. (I bewared of work)“Aici eu mă odihnesc /Stan Ion ... mă numesc /Din a mea copilărie /Casa mia plăcut mie /Şi mia mai plăcut una /Țuca din sticlă a bea /Tudosie

humour which sometimes even offers an almost acid approach towards deviation from the norm.¹ The epitaphs of local communist leaders possessed by power are presented with a kind of irony which also seems self-ironic because it is part of the deceased's monologue: „Aici eu mă odihnesc /Holdiş Ion mă numesc /Cît pe lume am trăit /Eu partidu lam iubit /Şi aista mam luptat /La popor să fac pe plac /.../ Şi gospodăria în sat /Foarte mult eu am ajutat / Tr. 72 de ani 1975” (Here I rest / My name is Holdiş Ion / While I lived in the world / I loved the [communist] party / And I strived / To please the people / ... / And farming in the village / I helped a lot / Lived for 72 years 1975”, or: „Cît în lume am trăit /Turda Ion Bilta mam numit /Multe service am avut /Pădurar şi agricultor /Şi am oltoit mulţipomi /Cooperativa de consum /De preşedinte ma pus /Am fost şi primar la sat /La toţi nu lam fost pe plac /O zis căs om rău în sat /Doră am făcut şi bine /La care o ținut cu mine/Şi trei copii am avut/Unu de mic o murit /Şi să vă mai spun că cei /Am avut două femei /Amîn două o fost Anuţă /Şio fost tare drăguţă /Pe amîndouă leam iubit /Da vă spun leam stlcit /Dar acum imi cer ertare /De la mic şi de la mare /Trăit 66 ai. Mort la 1979”. (While I lived in this world / I was called Turda Ion Bilta / I had many jobs / Forester and farmer / And I grafted many trees / And the consumers cooperation / Made me president / I also was the mayor of the village / Many people didn't like me / They said I was mean / But I also did good things / With those who liked me / And I had three children / And one died at a young age / And I also tell you / That I had two women / Both were called Anuţă / And both were very nice / I loved them both / But I tell you I beat them / But now I apologize / From the old and the young / Lived 66 years. Died in 1979).

soţia mia /Tei griji cît ii putea /Că eu lumea o lăsa /La 62 de ai /Mr. 1973” or: “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Stan Grigore mă numesc /Pe lume cît am trăit / De nimic nu m-am ferit /Miam făcut to t ce am dorit /**La stat mult am lucrat /Ma ştiut intergu sat /m-am făcut şi gestionar /Măsurat am pă cîntar /Ori si cine cio dorit /Pe toţi bine i-am servit** / Toate aceste le lăsa /La 67 de ai Mr. 1983”. (Epitaphs written in a permissive tone connected to human weaknesses such as sloth, excessive drinking or eating, etc.)

¹ See: “Pînă pă lume am trăit /Toaderu Ioanii mă numit /Din a mea copilărie /Caii mult mia plăcut mie /Şi nea mai plăcut una /La bufet la masă asta /Cu nevasta altuia /După lume îmi pare rău /Că prea iute am murit eu /Viaţa o părăsai la 52 de ai. /1973.”, or: “Aici eu mă odihnesc /Pop Toader Atomi mă numesc /Pă lume cît am trăit /Multe case am pregătît /Şi pe mulţi am învăţat /Să fie meşteri în sat /Am făcut gruduri şi şură /Nea plăcut şa mândrii gură /Si viaţa o lăsa /La 86 dă ai Mort la 1971”. (Epitaphs about persons who deviate from the norm by adultery or excessive pride)

Sometimes the iconography also creates comical situations (obviously in an involuntary way, by the manner in which naïve painting explicitly displays scenes from the lives of the deceased) and funny images, such as those which represent butchers while exercising their profession, that is, slaughtering animals, skinning the sheep, spading the meat concernedly, and also smoking their pipes,¹ or the housewives while milking the cow and ... think!² Normative tolerance, the stereotypization of biographic references, the normality with which they speak about death as “entering in the earth”, the lack of lament and the classical warning addressed to the “passer-by”, the portrait, often in a natural size, the frequent presence of the feast table surrounded by the deceased, are all elements which offer an impression of familiarity, a (passing) impression of an interactive space on the green field painted on the crosses of Săpânța as an expression of the promised paradise.

Seemingly lacking any connection with the troubles of the age, most of the peasants deceased and buried in the “Merry Cemetery” appear as the manifestations of humanity and fulfillment specific of the eternal axiology of one’s “role”.³ Furthermore, the systematic use of the

¹ See the “savory” epitaphs which stress the impressions by inserting anecdotes among them: “Am trăit 49 de ani/ Aiasta vreau să vă spun /Cam fost George Băsului /Cît pe lume am trăit /Multe oi am belit /Carne bunam pregătit /Carne bune nui poveste /Și să o mîncaț domnește /Vă dau carne grasă tare /Saveț poftă la mîncare /La 1939 adormit.”, or: “Toader Basu mă numesc /Pînă pe lume am trăit /Capre și oi am belit /Viței și mei mititei /Și carneam făcut din ei /Șam vînduto la femei /Că viața o lăsa /La 61 da ai. /M. 1958.”, or: “Eu aici mă odihnesc /Stan Gheorghe a lui Ion Petrenjel mă numesc /În viață cît am trăit /Oii multe am măcelărit /Făceam numa carne grasă /Să aibă oamenii la masă /Și le măsuram mai bine /Să cumpere de la mine /A trăit 60 de ani /Născut 1900/Mort 1960”. (Anecdotes inserted into the epitaphs).

² See: “...Eu aici mă odihnesc /Mulg vaca și mă gîndesc /Din a me copilărie /Pop Ioana mi-a zis mie ./După ce m-am măritat /Țetca Ioana m-a chemat /A lu Ionu lu Mihai...”(mr. 1985). (Epitaph of a woman depicted as milking her cow and thinking meanwhile).

³ See: “Mie asta mio plăcut /A lucra nu a ședea /Cu soție alătura /Copii ai educa /Să fie oameni de trabă /Orice lucru să priciapă /Toți să avă meserie /Că așa mio plăcut mie /Prietenii mă aștepta /Casăle mai spun ceva /La masă la băutura /Să le spun cîte o glumă /Și ne era lume dragă /Cînd eram lîngă.../Am mai tras cîte-un pahar /Cu prietenii al han /Dar acum vă zic cu bine /Mă pomeniți și pe mine./1980”, or: “Cît în lume am trăit /Pop Ion Spanu m-am numit /Oile mult liam iubit /Și bine am gazdăluit/ Anuță soție dragă /Tu ai rămas amu de gazdă /Cu lucru nu m-am gătat /Feciorii trăbă însuraț /Cinci copii noi am avut /De omenie i-am crescut /De amu soție dragă /Dacă țăm greșit mă iartă /Trăit 87 ai

present in the epitaphs offer to the addressee the perspective of a continuing existence, physical death being only a temporary interruption. However, the destiny of most people in Săpânța was similar to that of Anuța Pop (a very common name among the women buried in the cemetery), as a life full of labour: “Eu aici mă odihnesc / Pop Anuța mă numesc / Pe pământ cât am trăit / Tare mult eu am muncit / Șase copii am avut / Trebuia să lucru mult / Cît am trăit în viață / Mă sculam de dimineată / Făceam prânz, gustare, cină / Și lucram și în grădină / Și dacă am fost bătrînă / Dar Gheorghe feciorul meu / Mo ajutat cînd mia fost greu / Domnul Sfânt săi deie bine / Co avut grijă de mine.” (I rest here / My name is Anuța Pop / While I lived on this earth / I woke up in the morning / Made dinner, lunch, supper / And I worked in the garden / Even when I got old / But my son Gheorghe / Helped me when I had a hard time / May the Holy Lord treat him well / Because he cared for me.) Such an epitaph, just like many others with a similar content,¹ surely makes nobody smile!

The cemetery is “merry” nonetheless, because, according to the Funeral Service, only by dying “...may we move from sad things to better and happier things, and there is rest and joy!”

Translated by Emese G. Czintos

./Murit la anu 1982 /Odihneascăse în pace.” (Epitaphs of persons with a life conduct considered exemplary in their community – a good keeper of the household, a good spouse, raise and educate children, etc).

¹ See also: „, Aici eu mă odihnesc /Stan Irina mă numesc /Cît am trăit pe pământ /Tare mult eu am muncit /Șilafin și la săpat /Singură fără bărbat /Pe bărbat la împușcat /Cu doi copiii ma lă- /sat .../...eu viața o lăsai /La 88 de ani 1905-1988”. (Epitaph of a woman with a difficult fate, a widow with two children, working all her life).