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Translated by Ágnes Korondi

**For a History of Death in the Romanian Historiographic Landscape
– the Presentation of Some Recent Collective Contributions**

***Religiosity and Attitudes before Death in Transylvania from Early
Modernity to the 20th Century*, ed. Mihaela Grancea, 2005 and
Discourses on Death in Transylvania in the 16–20th Centuries, eds.
Mihaela Grancea and Ana Dumitran, 2006**

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Death is a constant in the history of mankind, anonymous or famous, individual or collective, this always produced intense reactions; it inspired theologians, philosophers, artist and scientists alike. Death is a phenomenon which raised numerous questions to every civilization, the imaginary of death being richly represented in the mythologies of every antique people and in the case of each later religion.² The drama of this phenomenon was visibly diminished when man realized that he is mortal and began to leave “traces” of his passing to the future generations. The history of death, recovering and analyzing these traces, revealed another face of the history of life.³ Nevertheless, the beginnings of the history of death were rather difficult since it was a taboo for a long time, death being banished beyond death, an attitude which changed only when the Christian sensibility of the Middle Ages occurred.⁴ Merely in the 1950–60s did the French historians gathered around the journal *Annales* recover this extremely fascinating territory. In the course of time,

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² See Mircea Eliade, *Istoria religiilor și a credințelor religioase* (The History of Religious Ideas), 2 vol., Bucharest, Editura Științifică, 1991, 2nd edition.

³ See Philippe Ariès, *Omul în fața morții* (Western Attitudes toward Death), 2 volumes, Bucharest, Editura Meridiane, 1996, passim.

⁴ See Johann Huizinga, *Amurgul evului mediu* (The Waning of the Middle Ages), Bucharest, Ed. Meridiane, 1993, passim.

thanatology became a separate scientific domain, no longer being a branch historical investigation, developing themes, research methods and specific interpretation patterns. Thus, three interpretation levels have been outlined: death as a phenomenon in its quantitative aspect, death experienced with reference to the attitudes, sentiments and reactions provoked by death in collective sensibility and the discourse on death¹ elaborated by each society. The problem of death turned out to be difficult to discuss by traditional ways also because of the unconventional sources it uses: testaments, graveyards, tombstones, crematories, funeral orations, funeral sermons, representations of death and of the otherworld, etc. As one can see in the present case, the source dictates the method and not vice versa. The great variety of sources, their exhaustive character and the complexity of the problem made necessary an interdisciplinary approach, death attracting the interest of scholars specialised in various domains such as: the history of collective mentalities and of the imaginary, history of religions and art history, anthropology and historical psychology, demography and ethnography, sociology and philosophy. Historians recuperated step by step a series of themes extremely varied – from the specific attitudes towards death in the representations of death, from the factual in the imaginary of death and of the otherworld, from funeral orations and sermons to the destiny of the soul and of the body after death – depending on the characteristics of the discussed historical period.

As we have been accustomed so far by the most acknowledged historians of thanatology, the historical interrogation focusing on death starts almost as a rule with the axiom: “nothing is more certain than death and nothing is more uncertain than the hour when it comes”. Leaving behind the “fatalism” of the above mentioned statement we must elucidate where from originates the motivation of the historian of death and his ontological condition. There are at least two explanations to this interest: on the one hand, death can be a subject as any other for the historical research interested in everything which is human, in every aspect and moment of life; on the other hand, there may be a particular interest in death by which the historian as a man becomes aware of his ephemeral condition and this gave birth to the unconscious interrogation regarding the origin of historicity. Moreover, this “history of silences”,

¹ See Toader Nicoară, *Clio în orizontul mileniului trei. Explorări în istoriografia contemporană* (Clio in the Horizon of the Third Millennium. Explorations in Contemporary Historiography), Cluj-Napoca, Editura Accent, 2002, p.149, apud Michel Vovelle, Sur la Mort in *Ideologie et mentalités*, Paris, 1982, pp. 101–103.

become fashionable, may raise the interest of any historian preferring innovative technical approaches.

Trying to conform to the international historiographic tendencies, the problem of death aroused the interest of Romanian historians in the last few years, this theme being considered “classical” from now on in the history of collective mentalities and of the social imaginary. Nevertheless, at us it is discussed only tangentially, unsystematically and sporadically. Scrutinizing the Romanian historiographic writings referring to the history of death enables us to discover the lacks and the achievements of this domain at present. We can thus discover some happy exceptions, the most representative being the case of a young historian, Marius Rotar who wrote maybe the most elaborate Romanian history of death. A series of other historians, more or less known, published numerous studies with different subjects and approach in thematic journals¹ and collective volumes. In the present stage of research, the collective volumes dedicated to the problem of death have the merit of gathering the contributions of historians with different interests filling thus some “gaps” of the Romanian historiography.

In this sense the historian Mihaela Grancea’s initiative is salutary; she edited two volumes in two years time within the project launched in 2005 and entitled: *Religiosity and Attitudes before Death in Transylvania from Early Modernity to the 20th Century*. The first volume – *Reprezentări ale morții în Transilvania secolelor XVI–XIX* (Representations of Death in Transylvania in the 16–19th Centuries) – is practically followed by the volume *Discursuri despre moarte în Transilvania secolelor XVI–XIX* (Discourses on Death in Transylvania in the 16–20th Centuries) which was co-edited by Ana Dumitran. Because of this we are going to discuss these two volumes together.

The volume *Reprezentări ale morții în Transilvania secolelor XVI–XIX* is the first collective contribution which contains thirteen inciting studies – coincidentally or willingly? – representing as many methodological contributions with a vast area of investigations. The volume begins with the editor’s foreword intended to be an exhaustive analysis of the historiography regarding the problem of death. As the

¹ See *Oamenii și moartea în societatea românească* (Men and Death in Romanian Society), no. 1–2 (5–6)/2004 of the *Caiete de Antropologie Istorică* (Bulletin of Historical Anthropology), edited by Toader Nicoară.

continuation of this argumentation, Marius Rotar's study¹ gives a general view on the Romanian historiographic works dedicated to death. Remarking the increase in the number of studies and articles on this theme after 1989, as well as the diversification and the specialization of the theme in the last few years (from subjects such as wills and their practices to the problems of the corpse and suicide, and even the issue of the spaces delimited by death or the problem of the imaginary of death) the author detects that recent research focuses on the period between the second half of the 17th century and the beginning of the 19th century, as well as a gradual filling in of the gaps in the investigation of the 20th century. As a conclusion, the historian pleads for a Romanian history of death in a wider sense as it is successfully practiced in other countries.

The next study is written by Carmen Florea,² and it focuses on the functionality of the social and ecclesiastical discipline at the level of the early modern urban solidarities taking on to analyze the modalities in which the solidarity lines functioned in relationship with the moment of death. The study investigates the Corpus Christy confraternities represented by the fraternitas exulum and craftsmen's associations in Cluj, Sibiu, Braşov in the Middle Ages. The article written by Edith Szegedi³ is a similar one, it tries to present the way in which death was integrated in protestant ecclesiastical and social discipline in Transylvania in the 17–18th centuries functioning first of all through exclusion and the functions of death are reflected in these disciplines mainly by the measures referring to funerals and cemeteries.

¹ Marius Rotar, *Istoriografia românească asupra morţii: modele şi contra-modele. O lume încă deschisă* (The Romanian Historiography of Death: Models and Counter-Models. A World Still Open), in *Reprezentări ale morţii în Transilvania secolelor XVI–XIX*, Mihaela Grancea (ed.), Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2005, pp. 17–50.

² Carmen Florea, *Despre tensiunea unei solidarităţi în evul mediu târziu: exemplul unor oraşe transilvane* (On the Tension of a Solidarity in the Late Middle Ages: The Example of Some Transylvanian Towns), in *op. cit.*, pp. 51–70.

³ Edith Szegedi, *Moartea, disciplina ecleziastică şi socială în mediile protestante din Transilvania (secolele XVII–XVIII)* [Death, Ecclesiastical and Social Discipline in Protestant Communities in Transylvania (17–18th Century)], in *op. cit.*, pp. 71–85.

Ana Dumitran's paper ¹ is also among the studies focusing on the discourse on death as the manifestation of official and popular culture, which shape specific sensibilities. The author identifies some of the leitmotifs of the funerary sermons in Transylvania in the 17th century: the relationship between death and the original sin; the *memento mori* motif; the equality before death and the Dance of Death; the equality before the Last Judgement; the possibility of helping the dead excluding crying and protests against death which cannot help the dead person's soul and which anger God; death as a return to God for the just; the so called apologies by which the dead person asks the forgiveness of those with whom he lived by means of the priest. Laura Stanciu's study² belongs to the same category. It refers to the structure, content and signification of the content and signification of Petru Maior's sermons conceived, written and said at the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries. The author observes that the basic themes of these sermons – sin, death and the self-reflection caused by it – served the enlightened programme of educating and emancipating man.

Mihaela Grancea and Emőke Csapó³ wrote a case study applied on the Hungarian cemetery of Cluj in the 19th century. Starting with the ways of representing and assuming death the two authors classify the studied funerary inscriptions in the following way: equalizing death, saviour death, desired death, romantic death, and death seen as a sleep. The epitaphs are structured in three parts: first of all the existence of the deceased is localized in the terrestrial space and time, this is followed by the presentation of the bibliographical data and the finishing formula. A special category of epitaphs investigated by the authors are those which condemn the unjust death which cuts the thread of life, or make ironic remarks on the person's rather difficult character in a humorous tone.

¹ Ana Dumitran, Constante ale discursului în omiletica funeabră a românilor transilvăneni din secolul al XVII-lea (Constants of the Discourse in the Funerary Homiletics of the Romanians in Transylvania in the 17th Century), in *op. cit.*, pp. 86–129.

² Laura Stanciu, Omiletica lui Petru Maior ca oportunitate de armonizare a Reformei catolice cu Iozefinismul (Petru Maior's Homiletics as a Possibility to Harmonize the Catholic Reform with Josephinism), in *op. cit.*, pp. 130–146.

³ Mihaela Grancea and Emőke Csapó, Poarta „Marii Treceeri” sau perspective asupra morții reflectate de epitaful maghiar din Cimitirul Házsongárd în Clujul secolului al XIX-lea (The Gate of the ‘Great Passage’ or the Perspectives on Death Reflected by the Hungarian Epitaphs of the Házsongárd Cemetery in Cluj in the 19th Century), in *op. cit.*, pp. 147–166.

The historian Corneliu Pădurean's study¹ identifies in the wills of the citizens of Arad in the 19th century the sincerest expectations and fears before the implacability of death. On the basis of his analysis the historian observes two kinds of attitudes before approaching death in the wills: a series of testators were preoccupied mainly with the fate of the fortune they gathered throughout their life, while others seemed to be preoccupied rather by the lot of their soul after death preparing in detail their funeral and the later remembrance masses. The author considers that these are men with a powerful personality and this is why they need to impose their wishes even before death.

Valeria Soroștineanu's study² traces the relationship between the religiosity of Transylvanian communities and the phenomenon of dying. The author tried to present the specific way in which different types of discourse intermingle: the discourse of the Church built also by means of Church Directories and Calendars edited by the Orthodox Archiepiscopacy of Transylvania with the medical discourse based on the development of the Romanian state around World War I. In the respective period priests and village teachers played the role of catalyzing elements. The above mentioned calendars represent a rich source of historical information, similar to the literature popularizing modern medicine focusing on the familiarity with and application of the basic hygiene notions or to the advertisements of different medicines. Another source of the study is the funerary orations, singular in an Orthodox environment and which can explain the development of the sermon or of its components in time.

The following study of the anthology written by Ada Grenner³ is a comparative analysis based on another specific source of the history of death, the funerary monuments, choosing for representative samples the Evangelical and Orthodox cemeteries in Agnita. Taking into consideration the cause of the death and the age of the deceased, the

¹ Corneliu Pădurean, *Testamente ale unor locuitori din Arad de la începutul secolului al XIX-lea* (The Wills of Some Citizens of Arad at the Beginning of the 19th Century), in *op. cit.*, pp. 167–173.

² Valeria Soroștineanu, *Religiozitate și atitudini în fața morții la românii ortodocși din Transilvania. Considerații generale (1899–1916)* [The Orthodox Romanians' Religiosity and Attitudes before Death in Transylvania. General Ideas (1899–1916)], in *op. cit.*, pp. 174–197.

³ Ada Grenner, *Comunitate bisericească, religiozitate și atitudini în fața morții în Agnita secolelor XIX–XX* (Ecclesiastical Community, Religiosity and Attitudes before Death in Agnita in the 19–20th Centuries), in *op. cit.*, pp. 198–212.

author distinguishes the following three perceptions of death on the Evangelical funerary monuments: natural death as accepted death; “cruel” death, unaccepted; heroized death in the case of the soldiers killed in the two world wars. The dominant iconographic motifs of the Evangelical cemetery were: the angel, the willow, the crucifix, the torch and the rose. On the other hand, the epitaphs of the Ortodox church can be classified in two categories: simple epitaphs which contain only some traditional formulas such as “Rest in Peace” („Să-i fie țărâna ușoară”) and complex epitaphs dedicated to children, to those who died of sickness, to those who died by accident, to suicides, having themes of original reflection or dedicated by the deceased one to those who remained in life. The article concludes with the observation on the iconography of the Orthodox funerary monuments having far less decorative motifs compared with the German ones in the same locality.

The study by Andrei Terian¹ focusing on literary sources stands apart in this volume. It investigates the representations of death present in the works of some famous Romanian poets such as Octavian Goga, Lucian Blaga, Ioan Alexandru, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Ion Mureșan and Dan Coman. In this analysis the author discovers three models of representing death: the ethnic model specific to Goga for whom the perspective of death remains a collective one; the metaphysical model characteristic to Blaga in which the poetic imaginary has a folkloric and religious basis and the corporeal model of some less known poets, Ion Mureșan and Dan Coman, a model which preserves a perspective focused on corporeal and physiological self-perception.

Sultana Anca Avram² makes an anthropological analysis focusing on traditional Romanian customs related to funerals, namely the “operations” the body of the deceased is subjected to in order to prepare it for the Great Passage. During the vigil for example two types of plays can be observed: the vivification of the dead (or the wedding of the dead) and funerary ceremonials. The author observes the replacement in the course of time of the traditional plays occasioned by the vigil with new games especially cards and backgammon or with lament, with the

¹ Andrei Terian, *Modele de reprezentare a morții în poezia ardeleană din secolul al XX-lea* (Models of Representing Death in Transylvanian Poetry in the 20th Century), in *op. cit.*, pp. 213–228.

² Sultana Anca Avram, *Aspecte privind trupul și moartea în tradiția populară românească* (Aspects Regarding the Body and Death in Romanian Popular Tradition), in *op. cit.*, pp. 229–238.

evocation of some events from the deceased one's life, with the reading of prayers.

In the last part of the volume we have two studies focusing on the more recent history of death, namely Mihaela Grancea's study¹ centred on the investigation of the attitudes referring to death in the totalitarian period during which it was attempted to "purify" death from spirituality and to vulgarize the discourse on death. The author based her argumentation on the funerary inscriptions which she divided in five categories: simple funerary inscriptions with a short, laic text, with references to the basic biography of the dead; funerary inscriptions edifying for the survival of the Christian eschatological message, containing biblical quotations and invocations of divine protection in order to attain eternal life; funerary inscriptions expressing popular Christianity; funerary inscriptions with synthetic formulas and "metaphysical" themes of meditation; funerary inscriptions with ethical and patriotic message. The author's reflection regarding the text of the epitaph is very interesting; it is regarded as the reflection of a complex register of sensibilities, the discourse on death being at the same time a discourse on life for recent history. Cristina Dogot's paper² belongs to the same category of studies dedicated to the recent Romanian history of death. She tried to discover in a series of journals and cultural weekly periodicals published in Cluj in the period 1989–2004 – *Echinox*, *Apostrof*, *ABC*, *Analiză*, *Bilanț*, *Comentariu*, *Tribuna*, *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, *Clujul liber*, *Adevărul de Cluj*, *Mesagerul transilvan* – the way in which the problem of liquidating dictatorship by the physical elimination of the Ceaușescu couple was presented and how this presentation evolved. The author also tried to discover how the public perceived these events, making a public opinion poll in Cluj with 35 questionnaires applied to 17 women and 18 men. The analysis of newspaper articles reveals two main directions of approaching the events of December 1989: the articles referring to the revolutionary phenomenon aimed usually at the street actions and the articles regarding the former presidential couple. These latter are constructed in several

¹ Mihaela Grancea, *Epitaful românesc în perioada regimului totalitar*, sursă pentru investigarea atitudinilor referitoare la moarte, (Romanian Epitaphs in the Period of the Totalitarian Regime, a Source for the Investigation of the Attitudes Referring to Death) in *op. cit.*, pp. 239–303.

² Cristina Dogot, *Percepții asupra morții soților Ceaușescu în opinia publică și presa clujeană* (Views on the Death of the Ceaușescu Couple in the Public Opinion and the Press of Cluj), in *op. cit.*, pp. 304–330.

stages such as: the stage of considering the execution of the Ceaușescu couple as a natural event; the stage in which the physical elimination begins to be demystified and perceived in its real, political and human dimension with its moral and legislative connotations; the stage in which the Ceaușescus' elimination is recognized and assumed as ethically immoral and legislatively erroneous. It can be remarked that the public opinion did not depend on the local information sources, and it had access to varied information sources which reflect elements not to be found at the level of local press. The volume concludes with an appendix containing over twenty photographs of funerary monuments in different localities in the country which constituted the geographic subject of some studies discussed afore.

The issues of the collective volume referred to above was continued and developed a year later in the monographic volume *Discursuri despre moarte în Transilvania secolelor XVI–XIX*, edited by Mihaela Grance and Ana Dumitran, a volume which mainly focuses on transdisciplinarity. The sixteen studies are divided in two big categories, the first one dedicated to methodological, historiographic, sociological-epistemological and anthropological contributions to the study of death and the phenomenon of dying, and the second one having studies belonging to confessional history, official and popular discourses on death and dying, and studies offering analyses of political and historical anthropology, and of literary history and criticism. Among the authors of this volume we may remark a series of names familiar from the previous volume and also other historians such as Alexandru Sonoc, Georg Weber, Ciprian Bogdan, Angela Dobrescu, Philippe Bachelor, Lucian Robu, Rodica Grigore and Marian Coman.

The archaeologist Alexandru Sonoc observed in a consistent study¹ the way in which the issue of a certain community's defining funerary practices have been discussed by traditional historiography, highlighting the idea that the continuity of some traditions, including funerary ones, in a region during a long historical period does not necessarily imply an ethical continuity or that the community had to live

¹ Alexandru Sonoc, Problema perpetuării unor tradiții funerare precreștine în cultura populară românească, între realitatea arheologică și „folclorul științific” mitologizant (The Problem of the Perpetuation of Some Pre-Christian Funerary Traditions in the Romanian Popular Culture, between Archaeological Reality and Mythologizing “Scientific Folklore”), in *Discursuri despre moarte în Transilvania secolelor XVI–XX*, . Mihaela Grancea, Ana Dumitran (eds.), Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006, pp. 19–115.

in the same locality, some funerary traditions being transmitted to another community which institutionalized them. The author repudiated the temptation of the forced reconstitution of some Dacian and Dacian-Roman funerary traditions, perpetuated by some ethnologists since the age of the political-ideological propaganda of the national-communist regime.

The study written by theologian and sociologist Georg Weber¹ discusses the problem of the repression of death from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge and the German system theory by means of which he demonstrates that this is a structural characteristic of Modernity. The author investigates the relationship between the structure according to which death is interpreted and the structure of modern societies in six parts: 1.) the presentation of sociological research regarding the problem of death; 2.) the problem of the place of death in the structure of modern social realities; 3.) the formulation of a concept from the perspective of social sciences through a formal, functional, structural argumentation and the explanation from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge; 4.) on the basis of the research results an existential memento mori will be formulated; 5.) the theoretical results will be confronted with the modern forms of mourning and the modern funerary rites; 6.) the answer to the question formulated in the title. The conclusion of the study consists in the affirmation that the social repression of death is a structural characteristic of Modernity which cannot be eliminated only its external symptoms can be moderated.

The theme of the repression of death as an aspect of modernity is also discussed by Ciprian Bogdan² in the following article centred on the evolution of the relationship between identity and change characteristic to Modernity. The author also presupposes an analytical-critical perspective besides social theories exemplified by the theoretical contributions which study the awareness of death and the phenomenon of dying. His investigation aims at the relationship between identity and the horizon of death: in what measure the identity configuration is affected by the fact that death is not given any sense or whether a certain identity

¹ Georg Weber, Reprimarea morții – o caracteristică structurală a modernității? Aspecte din perspectiva teoriei sistemelor și a sociologiei cunoașterii (The Repression of Death – A Structural Characteristics of Modernity? Aspects from the Perspective of the Systems Theory of and of the Sociology of Knowledge), in *op. cit.*, pp. 116–145.

² Ciprian Bogdan, Identitatea modernă și orizontul morții (Modern Identity and the Horizon of Death), in *op. cit.*, pp. 146–174.

typology can influence our perspective on death. The phenomenon of death is approached in the context in which modernity eliminates the traditional idea of death as “transition” towards another life, death being reinterpreted from the perspective of life as pure biological disappearance. This interpretation of the imaginary of death determines the unprecedented overvaluation of life, which finds expression in the justification of the freedom and uniqueness attached to individual existence. Unlike Georg Weber, the Romanian philosopher considers the structural repression of death to be the result of Modernity and mainly of secularization imposed by this.

Angela Dobrescu¹ wrote an original study having for a subject the modification of the relationship with death from the perspective of specific institutional practices as well as young people’s attitude towards. She analyzes the Bellu Cemetery in Bucharest because this offers the interpenetration of several social functions. The investigation is based on forty-five semi-structured sociological interviews applied to the cemetery managers, to some plot holders, as well as to some visitors of the cemetery. The field research can reveal the elements of a process of secularization, but not necessarily of desacralization. After presenting the spatial arrangement of the Bellu Cemetery, the paper continues with the investigation of the way in which different types of funerary enterprise function in the administration policy of the cemetery. The function of the cemetery as a space where social dynamics in different historical periods can be studied may transform the cemetery in a cultural attraction by making known the cemeteries in which famous personalities were interred and popularizing the stories about graves, different funerary monuments or the incidents which happened in this place. Regarding the “authenticity” of funerary tradition, the author concludes that at present there are several sets of rules with respect to the “survivors” attitude towards the deceased and the assuming of responsibility for the funerary monuments, and each one can be considered valid. As a conclusion it is demonstrated that the present tendency of secularization results in a new status of cemeteries as places of memory, and also a place where cultural and economic consuetudes are practiced.

¹ Angela Dobrescu, „Bocetul pop”, sau despre resemnificarea patrimoniului funerar. Studiu de caz: Cimitirul Bellu din Bucureşti (The “Pop Lamentation” or on the New Significations of the Funerary Heritage. A Case Study: the Bellu Cemetery in Bucharest), in *op. cit.*, pp. 175–192.

Philippe Bachelor,¹ psychologist and manager of the Fawkner Crematory and Memorial Park in Melbourne, Australia discusses the visits to the cemetery as an element of the system of habits presupposed by the period of mourning from an anthropological point of view. His study explores the place of the cemetery in the ritual of mourning from the perspective of the concept of suffering. Thus, the author identified different values of the visit for the mourners belonging to different social and cultural environments and highlighted three main motives for which the mourners visit the graves: to fulfil an obligation or duty; to maintain a constant relationship with the deceased; to try to appease one's grief, and implicitly, to free oneself from the sentiment of guilt. The main emotions identified in the cemetery visitors are divided by the author in two big categories: regret and consolation. Other emotions are guilt, respect, loneliness, fear and anger. The cemetery offers in this way consolation and some personal comfort for the visitor. Visiting cemeteries is an activity full with values – different according to the deceased person's emotional importance, the family's ethnicity, the visitor's sex, the method of burial, the visitor's view on the afterlife – presupposing an intensive emotional and spiritual participation.

The second part of the volume starts with the study written by historian Carmen Florea² who analyzes the essential relationship between devotion and the wish for salvation focusing on the role of confession. After a short introduction to the history of mendicant orders, the greatest part of the paper is dedicated to the analysis of the *imitation Christi* practice specific to Catholicism. These practices have a strong penitential character which valorises physical suffering during life as an everyday devotional exercise which makes accessible the ideal of eternal salvation. Another aspect discussed by this study is the attitude towards the corpse, its interment in a sacred space being an obligatory condition of salvation.

Maria Crăciun's study,³ starting with the statement that there are few representations of "good death" in Transylvanian paintings, intends to reconstruction the existence of a coherent discourse on death, as well

¹ Philippe Bachelor, *Beyond the Funeral*, in *op. cit.*, pp. 193–202.

² Carmen Florea, *Instituționalizarea obținerii mântuirii între modelul intercesorial și inițiativa personală* (The Institutionalization of Salvation between the Intercessional Model and Personal Initiative), in *op. cit.*, pp. 203–226.

³ Maria Crăciun, „Moartea cea bună”: intercesori și protectori în pragul marii treceri. Între discursul clerical și pietatea populară (“Good Death”: Intercessors and Protectors at the Threshold of the Great Passage. Between the Clerical Discourse and Popular Piety), in *op. cit.*, pp. 226–269.

as the textual and visual means by which this is diffused towards the believers. The aim of the article is to demonstrate the efficacy of the clerical discourse, by analyzing the cult which developed consequently to the internalization of the ecclesiastical message. The sources on which the investigation is based are the images of the polyptychs made for rural communities – most of them owned now by the Bruckenthal Museum in Sibiu – which represent the stages of “good death” (death with sacrament) and “bad death” (death without divine protection). There are saints which occupy an important place in popular devotion because they protect against “bad death”, for example Saint Barbara who protects against sudden death, Saint Cristopher who offer protection against death far from home, on journeys and Saint Michael protector present at the believer’s deathbed to weigh the soul.

Ana Dumitran’s study¹ starts from the premise that the ritual of burial practiced by Romanians until the 20th century is a mixture of old pre-Christian practices and practices imposed by the Orthodox Prayer Book (Molitvenic). The object of this analysis is the lyrical genre of the verses composed to accompany or complete the burial ritual in the area of Zlatna in the 17–19th centuries. The author emphasizes the differences between lament and the song to the dead man, since while the former describes death as guilty for the cruelest reality, the verse (“versul”) represents death either as a punishment for sins, or as the happy meeting with God. There is a resemblance between the two elements of the analysis, as both categories are conceived according to age, sex and the grade of relationship with the deceased, the verse, however does not reach the complexity and variety of the lament. Born under the pressure or the stimulus of a foreign spiritual model with occidental origins, promoted more or less consciously by the Romanian Church of Transylvania as modalities of primary evangelization, these creations seemingly belonged to high literature, often simply reformulating in verse the message of funerary sermons, in fact transmitted stereotypes specific to pre-Christian laments. The coexistence with the lament caused contaminations without leading to the complete disappearance of the verse as an autonomous genre of funerary literature.

¹ Ana Dumitran, *Lirica funebră transilvăneană între profan și sacru* (Transylvanian Funerary Lyrics between Profane and Sacred), in *op. cit.*, pp. 270–302.

Edith Szegedi¹ analyzes in her paper the relationship between illness and death as revealed by the medical discourse of the 17th century, having for sources two medical-theological writings by Ferenc Pápai Páriz, namely: *Pax corporis* (1695) and *Pax sepulcri* (1698). The focal point of this work is the discussion of the causality of death. The evolution of the medical discourse on illness and death presupposes the redefining of death as a reality which cannot be “rationalized” in the way in which it was attempted in the 17th century by introducing the criterion of cerebral death. Analyzing Ferenc Pápai Páriz’s medical–theological activity the study concludes that he used, transmitted and synthesized not only academic medical knowledge but also his own experiences and the tradition of popular medicine. In this way he succeeded in making medicine intelligible for all, explaining diseases by natural factors without excluding the physician’s obligation to prepare the sick person to meet God.

Marius Rotar’s paper² proves pertinently the fact that in Transylvania in the 19th century the explanations of death depended on the people’s educational level. The first place in the system of interpretation and explanations is occupied by the religious discourse, emphasized by homiletics having a powerful influence upon Transylvanian society, followed by the legal discourse which tried to introduce a scientific explanation of death. The author identifies two new themes in the religious discourse of the age: the accentuated presentation of illnesses as explanations of death in the funerary sermon and an accentuated tendency to heroize the deceased on the occasion of death either as a personality or as a common man. Rotar observed that three situations were rejected by the religious discourse: suicide, the problem of crematories and incineration and the problem of spiritism. The increasing importance of the medical discourse shows the gradual medicalization of death which gave new values to life and stimulated preventive medical measures. The literary discourse on death is situated on the third level and it is revealed by the press of the age in the columns containing *fait divers*, daily information, necrologies, jokes, advertisements, in some published wills, telegrams and condolatory

¹ Edith Szegedi, Boală, moarte și medicină în secolul al XVII-lea (Illness, Death and Medicine in the 17th Century), in *op. cit.*, pp. 303–355.

² Marius Rotar, Discursuri, anotimpuri și explicații ale morții în Transilvania celei de a doua jumătăți a secolului al XIX (Discourses, Seasons and Explanations of Death in Transylvania in the Second Half of the 19th Century), in *op. cit.*, pp. 355–403.

letters, as well as charities on the occasion of funerals. Consequently, the explanations of death in Transylvania in the 19th century correspond to different social and cultural rhythms.

The historian Corneliu Pădurean's study¹ investigates some aspects related to death as a biological and social phenomenon in the first half of the 20th century in Arad, the only urban centre of that area at that time. His research is aimed both at the statistical and demographical aspects and everyday events. Among the causes of death tuberculosis, diphtheria, typhoid fever, scarlet fever, as well as violent causes such as suicides and different accidents are enumerated. It is emphasized that the majority of deaths did not happen at home, but in hospitals such as: the County Hospital, Prince Mircea Children's Hospital, the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, the Military Hospital, or in the Poorhouse. Other deaths outside the domestic space happened in the street, in Ceala Forest, on the banks of the river Mureș, or in Neptune Bath.

The study written by Lucian Robu² analyzes some aspects connected with the pathology which determined morbidity and mortality in Romania in the interwar period, in the social, economic and cultural context after World War I. Thus, tuberculosis and syphilis, known as professional illnesses, eroded public health in Romania in this age due to exhaustive work and the lack of any medical assistance at the places of work, factories becoming thus real centres of contagion. The social inquests have shown the following factors which favoured the spreading of the syphilis bacillus and of tuberculosis: insufficient and often unhealthy living spaces, the common use of household objects, the sick and the healthy living side by side, the deficiencies of alimentations, the excessive consummation of a single type of food, the absence of milk and dairy products, prolonged physical efforts. Another cause of the deterioration of public health in the interwar period was cancer, a disease all the more spread as it can affect various parts of the organism. In the countryside the cancer of digestive organs was predominant, especially in the case of men, while in the case of women ovarian cancer was frequent, occurring more often at unmarried women. Among social evils alcoholism was foremost, its effects on the digestive, nervous and

¹ Corneliu Pădurean, *Decesele între statistică și eveniment familial în Aradul primei jumătăți a secolului XX* (Deaths between Statistics and Family Event in Arad in the First Half of the 20th Century), in *op. cit.*, pp. 404–417.

² Lucian Robu, *Boală și moarte în România interbelică. Considerații generale* (Illness and Death in Romania in the Interwar Period. General Ideas), in *op. cit.*, pp. 417–431.

circulatory systems could not be attenuated by a deficient alimentation. It was also alarming the ascending percentage of suicides, the most affected categories being: skilled workers (20.51%), clerks (12.6%), household workers (9.5%), and intellectuals (8%). The mentioned causes of suicide are among others: the difficulties to adapt to a new way of life when the rhythm of urbanization intensified, psychical diseases, chronic illnesses with small hopes for healing. Despite all the efforts of prevention, in the interwar period one cannot distinguish a consistent and coherent medical discourse with palpable results on a prophylactic level. However, we cannot disregard that the official discourse of the interwar period had some educative aspects.

Cristina Dogot¹ extends even more the area of the investigations aimed at the issue of death in the 20th century in a study which detects the place of suicide in the legionary doctrine and political practice. The paper starts with an introduction into the philosophical and concrete problems of suicide, after which continues with a survey of the persons who committed suicide in that period according to their participation in the political movement, their professional status and religious beliefs, and it ends with the analysis of the problem of death through the perspective of the legionary movement's message. The author considers that the legionary ideology does not propose altruistic suicide, only altruistic death, trying to impose a certain morality to its members by an appeal to heroes and the idea of a heroic death assumed deliberately. In these conditions suicidal behaviour was only a reaction of subordination to the external context and to the superiors' psychical structure, thus it can be said that the legionaries' attitude towards death is considered essentially an imitative one dictated by the wish to conform to the group whose recognition it was meant to obtain, but it was also a practice which perpetuated the sacrifice of Christ and the so called sacrifice of the Captain. Therefore, in the legionary ideology and mysticism heroic death was a premise of salvation, the suicidal act being motivated by moral, religious and even political precepts.

The anticommunist resistance constitutes the subject of the paper by the historian Marian Coman.² Legionaries, Peasants' Party

¹ Cristina Dogot, *Doctrina legionară și problema sinuciderii* (The Legionary Doctrine and the Problem of Suicide), in *op. cit.*, pp. 432–471.

² Marian Coman, *Fenomenul morții în contextul mișcării de rezistență anticomunistă din spațiul ardelean* (The Phenomenon of Death in the Context of the Anticommunist Resistance Movement in Transylvania), in *op. cit.*, pp. 472–483.

members, civil servants, students, peasants and soldiers were all people for whom death represented a permanent and inevitable presence during the communist regime. The sources of this study consisted in the survivor's memories and testimonies and the documents of the Securitate archives which had for an object "the terrorist bands". The frequency of cases of suicide among the partisans is explained by their choice to put an end to the humiliating prisoner life, voluntary death becoming thus the weapon of individual freedom against the collective tyranny of the state. Death no longer causes anxiety since not death, but freedom becomes impossible in a totalitarian state. Similarly, in the clashes between the fighters of the resistance and the Securitate forces the cornered persons' death was easy to anticipate, from this perspective, it was the solution chosen by those who refused to surrender, their case being similar to the suicides' case. The "partisan" who was caught alive could be a threat even for those who fought by his side, since there was a risk that being tortured he could give the Securitate the information they needed to arrest the others. In the case of resistance fighters the option of death represented an act of revolt and of defiance against the regime, and also a symbolic manifesto addressed to those who shared their political and identity choices.

The literary critic Rodica Grigore wrote an interesting study¹ in which she analyzes the way in which Sorin Titel, a writer from Timișoara perceives death between the "fast moment" and the waning of a traditional world, being possible to consider the problem of death a central idea of this author's works. Thus, in *The Fast Moment*, Sorin Titel realizes "the writing of life towards death", the death of Romanian heroes being presented in the larger context of the spectacles of the world: death as a spectacle for life and life as a spectacle for death or life and death as metaphorical spectacles of immortality. Finally, everything represents in fact the disappearance of a world, the waning of traditional Romanian civilization, reflections assumed together when one becomes aware of the passing of the time.

The last word belongs to the editor, Mihaela Grancea² who proposes to the readers' attention a study on the reflection regarding the

¹ Rodica Grigore, Proza lui Sorin Titel între „clipa cea repede” și amurgul unei lumi (Sorin Titel's Prose between "the fast moment" and the Waning of a World), in *op. cit.*, pp. 484–501.

² Mihaela Grancea, Retorica despre moartea eroică în epitaful lui Decembrie '89 (The Rhetoric on Heroic Death in the Epitaph of December '89), in *op. cit.*, pp. 502–527.

assumption of the sacrifice of those who died in the revolt of December 1989, analyzing the way in which these victims were heroized by civil society and the survivors. The funerary monuments dedicated to these heroes, far from being artistic realizations, can be taken into consideration due to the funerary inscription which mentions in most cases only the victims' names. None of these monuments mark the triumph, all mention the martyrdom of the persons who fell and thus became in time the altars of patriotism which originate pilgrimages and collective prayers for the victims of the Revolution. In the configuration process of the revolutionary hero's image one can discern the archetype of the redeemer, an archetype which imposes the idea of sacrifice. Heroic death seems a defeat, it is however the gate through which the salvation of those was ensured who sacrificed themselves for Others in the fight against the Evil embodied in the anti-Christian dictator. Greatly personalized epitaphs are present mainly in the heroes' cemeteries and in the texts of the commemorative monuments and plaques in the "martyr cities" Timișoara and Bucharest, which have become real "places of memory". Many epitaphs evaluate the essence of the deceased's sacrifice and express the survivors' gratitude or pride, which surpass in this way grief. The most frequent epitaphs are those by which the survivors deplore the hero's death in the manner of the traditional lament, mentioning only tangentially the hero status of the dead. A separate category of funerary inscriptions, scarcely represented, however, is the "chronicle-epitaph" which narrates the hero's death, the atrocity of repression, the end of the world sentiment and the survivors' suffering. The commemorative epitaph in the respective age is the expression of a identity sensibility, but also a key for deciphering the way in which the survivors perceive the significance of heroic sacrifice.

Unlike the first volume of this series, this volume ends with an index of names and places extremely useful in the selective reading of the texts so varied with regard to their themes, sources, the historical period discussed and the methodology used. Both volumes represent important contributions to the Romanian history of death, a gain and a step forward which, we hope, will stimulate many such initiatives in the future and, why not, will provoke Romanian historians to step into a further stage of research by publishing syntheses which would trace definitively the issue of the attitudes towards, representations of and discourses on death specific to each denomination or ethnicity in the country.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

Mircea Popa: Andrei VERESS – a Hungarian bibliographer, friend of Romanians

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Mircea Popa's book introduces us to the fascinating historical and literary world of the late Hungarian historian, erudite and bibliographer, Andrei Veress, who "lived his entire life in the spirit of Romanian-Hungarian collaboration". It begins with a foreword – or as the author calls it: *Clarifying Foreword* –, which describes attractively the city of Budapest with its remarkable architecture and history, a place the author knew from his journeys and different writings. Budapest is a special location, ideal for study, meditation and writing, where the author spent some time as a recipient of a scholarship. He recalls that: here "I did not consider myself a stranger, on the contrary, I was accompanied by my ancestors, I invited them to take part, together with me, in their victory through time, due to that miraculous metempsychosis by which we can – at least in our imagination – live several lives at the same time". The discovery of Andrei Veress' manuscript and letter collection was a real revelation for the Romanian researcher, for the Hungarian historian was a man as close to Romanians as to his own nation. Surely you must be a well educated and intelligent person to be able to approach with such an open and generous heart your fellow creatures irrespective of nationality, religion or colour. Similarly, it is remarkable that Mircea Popa, following the footsteps of his predecessor, praises the good relationships – such as they ought to be – between different nations and ethnicities. These friendly relationships must be encouraged for they are the firm basis of collaboration, peaceful coexistence, understanding and progress. Without opening, without understanding other people's wishes and needs, without tolerance one cannot go on/towards the road of European culture.

The portrait of the Hungarian scholar holds the key to friendly relationships, profitable both for Romanians and Hungarians. This exemplary attitude is present in the entire book. We shall see Veress'

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