

Life and Death Mirrored on Funerary Inscriptions in Moldavia before 1859

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Abstract: Medieval inscriptions, in their great majority, were of religious character. They were written in the cultural languages of the time, in prose or in verse, and they reflect certain mentalities and prove the education of the people who ordered them. The funerary inscriptions do not reveal data which could be compared in importance to those offered by the narrative and diplomatic documents of the time, but the precision of the biographical and genealogical details is greater. According to these, the child and juvenile mortality was higher, but there were also examples of uncommon vitality, some persons lived even for 100 years. Even more, the funerary texts illustrate special circumstances in which the protagonists were the lost ones due to the consideration they received in the community.

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The medieval inscriptions, in their great majority, were of religious character. It was the natural result of a spiritual life founded on Christian dogmas and this characteristic was determined by the function they fulfilled. The epitaphs on tombs, remembrance lists and stone crosses, as well as the writings on numerous objects used in the sermon, demanded divine help for the people mentioned in them, either dead or alive. Even more, what we generically call tomb stones represent an evidence of decorative art, they reflect the development of certain crafts and the economic situation of the society exponents who could afford to show them.¹

Written in Slavonic, Latin, Romanian, Greek and Armenian, in prose or in verse, on tomb stones, funerary or commemorative crosses in stone or marble, the inscriptions reflect mentalities and show the degree of education of the people who ordered them. Many of them are real cultural pieces, being written as a dialogue between a passer-by and the tomb. Others include moralising statements and phrases of biblical inspiration. Obviously, the texts in verses were created by learned people of some culture, but it is difficult to establish today how much of the contents of these species is literature and how much it became oral creation. It was not by chance that the subject

¹ Alexandru Elian, Introductory note to *Inscripțiile medievale ale României* (Medieval Inscriptions from Romania), vol. I. *Orașul București* (The Town of Bucharest) (Bucharest: Academiei, 1965), 13–14.

was investigated over time by historians, specialists in philology, theologians, art historians and their contributions are numerous and various.

As far as we are concerned, we have investigated the funerary inscriptions in two previous studies. The first one concentrated on the relationship between the epitaphs and the inscriptions carved in the tomb stones. The matter gains importance from the perspective of piecing together a *Corpus* of medieval inscriptions from the church objects, as the texts reproduced in certain studies as tomb inscriptions must be closely analyzed in order to highlight the ones which deserve to be part of the historical circuit as epigraphic sources, and take them apart from the mere epigrams which are meant only to be read, but which had never been carved in stone¹. In the second study we examined the funerary inscriptions from the perspective of the relationship between the living and the dead, how passing away was understood, the formulas of invoking divine help for the deceased whose tombs are embellished with stones and crosses².

In what follows we shall examine the funerary inscriptions from a different point of view, namely that of underlining their characteristic as resources for historical demography. Hence, we shall follow the life span of the people from the last centuries, showing the ages up to which they lived and the ways of keeping track of the personal data; we shall give examples of longevity, but we shall also illustrate mortality for the following demographic categories: small children, teenagers and young women. In relation to these matters, we shall present in short a few special circumstances with protagonists evoked in the funerary texts, showing the consideration they received in the middle of their community and the conditions under which they lost their lives.

As in the case of the two studies mentioned above, the documentary ground is largely formed by unpublished texts but maybe not necessarily unknown to the researchers of old Romanian culture. This is possible as the interest for gathering medieval inscriptions manifested itself ever since the 19th century; at the time the inscriptions included also the notes on books. During the second half of the 19th century, Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu gathered many medieval inscriptions, out of which he published a part, but his archive, kept at Mihai Eminescu Central University Library in Iași includes quite a few unpublished inscriptions; ever since the first years of the 20th century, in 1902, N. G. Dossios published a few *Inscripții grecești din capitala Moldovei*, text original cu traducere în limba română (*Greek inscriptions kept in the capital of Moldavia, original texts with a translation into Romanian*), in fascicle II of *Studii Greco – române (Greek and Romanian Studies)* and between 1905 and 1908, Nicolae Iorga published two volumes of *Inscripții din bisericile României (Inscriptions from Churches in Romania)*. In 1909, Alexandru Lapedatu published *Antichitățile de la Baia (Antiques from Baia)*, in *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*” (*Bulletin of the Committee of Historical Monuments*) /, year II (1909), completed by Nicolae Iorga

¹ Elena Chiaburu, “Considerații privitoare la raportul dintre epitafe și inscripțiile săpate pe lespezile funerare” (Considerations regarding the relationship between the epitaphs and the inscriptions carved on funerary stones), *Text și discurs religios (Religious texts and discourse)*, 3 (2011): 101–110; (see also: <http://www.cntdr.ro/volumul3>).

² Elena Chiaburu, *Lumea de aici și lumea de dincolo reflectată în inscripțiile funerare din Moldova (The world from here and the world from beyond reflected in the funerary inscriptions from Moldavia)*, *Anuarul muzeului etnografic al Moldovei*, XI (2011).

in 1931 by the description of the Pietrele de mormînt ale saşilor din Baia (*Tomb stones of the Transylvanian Saxons from Baia*) in the same *Bulletin of the Committee of Historical Monuments*, year XXIV. Between the two world wars, Dimitrie Balaur researched the churches from the county of Lăpuşna, the result being Manuscript VI-74 (Dimitrie Balaur, ms. *Bisericile din Ținutul Lăpuşnei. Materiale istorice și bisericești* (*Churches from the county of Lăpuşna. Historical and Church Materials*) [Râzeni – Lăpuşna, 1928], 10 + 776 p., from the Central University Library in Iași. The scholar published a part of this work in 1934, namely the part with the notes on the books in the book entitled *Biserici din Moldova de Răsărit: Cărți românești de slujbă bisericească care au trecut Prutul* (sec. XVIII – XIX). *Ținutul Lăpuşna* (*Churches from Eastern Moldavia: Romanian Books of Church Sermons which Crossed the River Prut* [18th – 19th century]. *The county of Lăpuşna*), Bucharest, Printing House of Church Books. Finally, around and during the Second World War, Constantin Bobulescu undertook epigraphic surveys in the churches and monasteries from the valley of river Trotuș and from the town of Iași and afterwards he completed two manuscripts which are nowadays kept at the Library of the Academy from Bucharest: BAR, A 1610 (ms. C. Bobulescu, *Valea Trotușului* (*Valley of the Trotus River*), volumes I and II) and BAR, A 1580 *Inscripțiile bisericilor din orașul Iași* (*Inscriptions from the churches in the town of Iasi*). Occasionally, priest Bobulescu used certain inscriptions in his works, but most part did not have the luck to be published.

This study is based on the documentary sources mentioned above, out of which the most representative texts will be chosen as examples. With the purpose of attaining the coherence necessary for the analysis, studies have been also consulted in the fields of history of the church, historical demography, history of mentalities, history as such and also dictionaries which will be mentioned at the right time. The geographical area under scrutiny is the Principality of Moldavia, the research is done chronologically, until 1859, which means as long as this state organisation existed. From the confessional point of view, the analysed funerary stones belong to the Orthodox rite, predominantly from Moldavia, to the Catholic and Protestant rites (from the boroughs of Cotnari and Baia) and to the Armenian rite (from the town of Botoșani). For the easiness of the reading, in case of the texts written in Slavonic, Latin, Greek and Armenian we shall provide only the Romanian translation, respectively the English one, with a mention in the footnotes to the original form it had in the sources.

Mention must be made, even from the beginning: due to the rough materials the funerary monuments were made of (stone, grit stone, marble), the carved texts were almost all the time short (the words were often abbreviated). Consequently, unlike the rest of the categories of historical sources, the funerary inscriptions are poor in economical, military, cultural news and so on. For this reason, the data regarding the ages up to which people used to live in different eras, offered by the tomb texts are numerous, but of different values, hence the conclusions should be drawn with care and combined with other information sources. Some inscriptions offer only general information, while others are precise and even rich in details. The inscriptions of general character hint to the life stages of the deceased. For example, a deteriorated tomb stone, measuring 149 / 50–60 cm, with carved letters of 6,5 cm and decorated parts with vegetal and ornamental motifs, kept until today at the National Art Museum from Bucharest, inventory number 4388, coming from the Catholic church in Cotnari (county

of Iași), was set in the middle of the 17th century for the “*young and honest* Valentin Darvaș”¹. Similarly, on a marble tomb from the monastery Bogdana, county of Bacău there was an epitaph carved for Ioan Cantacuzino, passed away on 1 September 1691, from which we find out that:

”Under this marble I lie *since my very youth*

Which the terrible death destroyed”, caused probably by the plague which haunted Moldavia between 1690–1698, with short interruptions. At Saint Dimitrie (Baș) Church from Iași was buried “Elena, daughter of Gheorghe Baș; and the wise and righteous wife of Răducanu Roșeti. She was kidnapped by fate *at middle age*”, on 13 September 1798. In the collective tomb which belonged to the family of the high official Vasile Coroi from Saint Ilie Church in Iași (destroyed during the Second World War – nowadays on Vasile Alecsandri street), the epitaph in verse since 18 October 1832 announces that there was also

“*young* Maranda, whose man was

Small Cerchez, who was *also buried while young* “².

Out of an incomplete inscription from Saint Ioan Zlataust Church also from Iași we understand that “Manolachi Ioan, *bachelor*, ended his life” between the years 1840 and 1849, he was also young when he died. Still there, a certain person

“Temistochi

Dead *when his life was in blossom*

... He also lived as a flower

... And death in their *youth*

Cut out their days”. We know how long he lived, the inscription says that “he was born in the year 1835, 1st of March, died in 1852, 13th of October”³: consequently, he was 17.

Yet, we cannot be sure how much these appreciations meant in years, as the perception on age was relative. Thus, while Elena, wife of protopope Gavril Ciupercovici “died on the 10th of April, year 1824, *at 60 years old*”, but “Ștefan Balasan, a tradesman from a good family, fair churchwarden of the Holy Trinity Church” (Armenian, from Botoșani), was “*his life was in blossom, at 58 years old*”, when he died, in 1832. As for Alexandru Anastasă, buried in the stoop of Talpalari church from Iași, in “1769 born and in 1815 dead”, it was considered that only “lived in a *small*

¹ *Orașul București*, 530, no 650 (text in Latin and translation).

² BAR, Archive 1580 *Inscripțiile bisericilor din orașul Iași* (*The Inscriptions from Churches in the Town of Iași*), I, gathered by C. Bobulescu (Bucharest, 1943), 346.

³ N. G., Dossios, *Studii greco-române* (*Greek-Romanian Studies*), Fasc. III: *Manuscrisele grecești din Biblioteca Centrală din Iași* (*Greek Manuscripts in the Central University Library*) (Iași, H. Goldner, 1902), 68; Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Biserica Sf. Dimitrie Baș*. *Predică ținută la 26 octombrie 1933* (*Saint Dimitrie (Baș) Church. (Sermon from the 26th of October 1933)*), (Iași: Presa bună, 1934), 28; Grigore Tăbăcaru, *Bisericele Bacăului* (*The Churches from Bacău*) (Bacău, Gutenberg Printing House, 1932), 11; BAR, A 1610 (ms. Bobulescu, *Valea Trotușului*, I), 177–178; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 391, 402; Paul Cernovodeanu, Paul Binder, *Cavalerii Apocalipsului: Calamitățile naturale din trecutul României pînă la 1800* (*The Apocalypse Knights: Natural calamities from the Romanian Past until 1800*) (Bucharest, Silex, 1993), 95–99.

century”. Much more dramatic, for Teodora, wife of Anastasi Brudea, dead on the 11th of March 1854, “*the whole of my life seemed a minute.*”¹

In a few situations, the family of the deceased engraved on the funerary tomb not only the exact date of his disappearance, but also the exact time when the painful event took place. For example, at Saints Athanasius and Kiril Church from Iași it was buried a woman, Maria, the wife of a priest and on her cross it was written that she died “in 1843, June 2nd, *Wednesday, 10 o'clock in the morning*”. In Pomârla village (county of Botoșani), chancellor Anastasie Bașotă demanded there should be written on a collective tomb stone which belonged to his family, from the church with the patron of all saints” in the year of 1846, November 26th to 27th, *at 4 o'clock in the night, after midnight* “, his ancestor Ioan Bașotă² died.

Going on with our analysis, we notice that many funerary inscriptions include the exact date of the deceased, so that we know how long people used to live during the period of time under study. Unique, up to now, from all the material under study, due to its precision, we consider the stone for “Magdalina Vasâliu, who died in 1856 October 27th, former wife of ikonomus Ioan Vasiliu, administrator, aged 47 years and 4 months”³. The great majority of the texts only give the rounded age of the deceased. The oldest funerary inscription which mentions the age of the deceased is from Baia (county of Suceava) and it belonged to monk “Ambrosius from Kecemet [...who] in the year of Redemption one thousand 600 and 18, on the 3rd of October his soul was taken for the holy, when he *was in his thirty fifth year*”. If we take a time leap to 24th of January 1791, at Saint Friday Church from Iași (demolished at the end of the 19th century), it is where Visarion was buried, who lived for “*forty years, being righteous, liked by God*”. A tomb stone which is found at the History Museum was set at the head of “Teodor Petrovici, who died on the 23rd of March 1800, *aged 54, in Iași*”. On the 4th of November 1819, at the Metropolitan Church from Iasi there was also buried “Neculai Strătulati ... also called Mironescu [...who] *in kindness had lived for 55 years*”. “Court man and registrar Alexandru son of Nicolae Greculov ... he died on 13th of March 1828, *in his 44th year after birth*” and he was buried at Saints Mihail and Gavril Church in Roșcani village, county of Lăpușna (today in the Republic of Moldavia), while “Boghos Iacubent..., *aged 44, ... left to the eternal life ... in 1828 March 25th*” and was put in a tomb at Holy Trinity Armenian Church from Botosani. “nun Elisaveta ... Brăiasca, mother of cupbearer Ioan Brăiescu [died] *aged 31*”, on the 21st of September 1828 and was buried in the village of Grozești (county of Bacău). At Saint Mary Armenian church from Botoșani there was buried the body of the righteous daughter of Iodia Trancu and

¹ Nicolae Iorga, *Inscripții din bisericile României (Inscriptions from the Churches in Romania)*, vol. I (Bucharest, Socec, 1905), 234–235, issue 531/32 (translation from Armenian); Gheorghe Bratiloveanu, Mihai Spănu, *Monumente arhitecturale din lemn în orașul Suceava (Wooden Architectural Monuments in the County of Suceava)* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1985), 111; Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Biserica Talpalari cu hramul Nașterea Maicii Domnului. Talpalari. Predică ținută la 8 septembrie 1933 (Church with The Holy Virgin's Birth as Patron. Sermon from the 8th of September 1933)* (Iași: Presa Bună, 1934), 48–49 (text in Cyrillic letters); BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 247, 303.

² BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), p. 568; Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Bașoteștii și Iașii (Family of Basotesti and Iasi)*, Ioan Neculce, 8 (1930), 146.

³ BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 345–346.

good wife of Hagi Garabet Aburel, [...who] *turned 70 years old*, then left this world; 1832 August 15th. “Gheorghii Muste, *20 years old*, died, year 1831 September 25th”. “Iosip, sergeant ... *aged 45* left to the Lord on 17th of March 1837”. “Maria Grigoriadi, wife of a high official, born Roset, ... died in the year 1838, on 17th of August, *aged 37*”. On the 4th of April 1840, there was buried “Captain Văsili Simionuvici, *at the age of 40*”. Panaioti Spartali komis, administrator of the White Church in Iași, he died in September 1841, “being *sixty years old*”. In a tomb from St Pantelimon Church in Iași there were laid together “Necula Dimitriu, *aged 36*. Unhappy was he in the world; his life ended on 6th of May 1842” and “Costachi, younger brother, *aged 18*, died in 1829 December 30th”. “Boyar Vasile Portas, owner of Cănești estate from the region of Tutova, *aged 28* ... died in the year 1842 June 26th”. “Luca Ianaghii died on the 27th of February, year 1844, *aged 38*”. In the month of August of the same year, “boyar Dumitriță Steriu *aged 56* died”. Ioan Bașotă, mentioned above, was “84 years old” when he was buried on his family’s estate, Pomârla. “Administrator Ioan Pavlu ... ended his life in 1848 July 29th, *being 57 years old*”. “Teodosi sân hagi Dimitri, *aged 66* died in the year 1850 April 4th”. “Court man Gheorghe, son of Alexandru Greculov” mentioned above, died on the 3rd of June, 1851, *in the 25th year after his birth*”. Tax-collector Costandin Bobălescul died “*aged 30*” on the 8th of March 1852, and was buried in Saint John Chrisostom Church (Zlataust) from Iași. After only a week, “administrator Constantin Bălan, *aged 64*, ended his life in the year 1852 March 15th”, he was buried at St Nicholas Church - Socola (on the big road). A month later, on the 14th of April, at Curelari Church, with Pentecost as patron, there was buried “Săndulachi Voiță, he died when he was *55 years old*”. “Panaiti Pișmiși from Zagori, village of Anasudena, died in the 19th of March 1853, *aged 56*”. “Ana Boian, wife of court marshal ... daughter of high official Iordachi Ciriac-Siloviharnu, ended life on 21st of July 1853 and buried on the 23rd of the same month [...was] *in her 38th year of life and 22nd of marriage*” with seneschal Iordachi Boian. “Costaki Adam, who died in 1854 May 1st [was] *37 years old*”. “Young military administrator Vasile Barnovschi, who had spent his life until *33 years old*, in the year 1855 February 29th passed away from this life to an endless life”. “Spatharios Iancu Talpeș, *aged 36*, ended his life [...on] 20th of May 1856”. “Rarița, wife of Penu Predu Rizu, *aged 30*, [was buried] together with her two children: Paraschiva and Mihail and died the year 1858 July 19th”. Ștefan, son of Vasili Vârcolici ended his life in 1858 October 22nd, *aged 22*”. On a funerary stone from St Nicholas Church - Ciurchi from Iași, there was engraved on 29th of March 1859 “for the knowledge of the followers: son of God Zavu Moscu and his wife Tudura died and rest *Zavu aged 50*”. Finally, “hieromonk Calinic Bibiri ended his life on the 12th of August 1859, *in the fortieth year of his life*”.¹

¹ *Orașul București*, 522–523, issue 637 (text in Latin and translation); Iorga, *Pietrele de mormânt ale sașilor*, 3 (text) and fig. 12, on 6; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 17, 174–175, 279, 302–304, 371, 390–391, 471–472, 498, 572, 599, 646 (with differences of reading), 749, 773, 783, 841, 881, 896–897, 928, 954; BAR A 1610 (ms. Bobulescu, *Valea Trotușului*), 307; Balaur, *Bisericile din Lăpușna*, 454; Iorga, *Inscripții*, II, 126–127, nr. 345 / 10, 132–133, nr. 368/3, 200; *ibid.*, I, 230, nr. 511/12 și 233, nr. 526/27 (trad. din lb. armeană); Ghibănescu, *Bașoteștii și Iași*, 146.



Teodora Cosman, *Untitled (Triptych)*, from the series „Photograms”,
70 x 50 cm, acrylic on synthetic tissue, 2007

Since the end of the 17th century, people started to keep better records of their personal data, a fact which can also be seen on the funerary inscriptions which record both the date of birth and death. Thus, “Lupul Balș who was a chancellor, son of Ioan Balș steward ... *was born in the year 1691 April 28th and died in the year 1782 March 16th*”. Three centuries later, on his son’s tomb “Iordache Balș great treasurer, [...it was written that] *he was born in the year 7250 [1742] February 12th from the creation of the world and died in the year 7320 [1812] March 23rd*”. On the tomb stone belonging to Alexandru Anastasă from the stoop of Talpalari Church in Iași there was engraved in verse:

“... here lies

That born in 1769 and died in 1815,

Alexandru Anastas called”.

At the same Talpalari Church there was a tomb stone which no longer exists today, according to which:

“Here in death bosom

Lies aga Alecu Roset;

... Born in 1795 January 19th,

Ended in 1837 June 10th”, left from the living people at 42 years old. “State councillor in activity Teodor Ioan Nedoba, who was born in 1770, died on the 25th of July, year 1846” and was buried in the church of Lohănești village, region of Lăpușna (today, Republic of Moldavia), on the right of the nave. In the church called Vulpe from Iași there was buried “Marghioara, born in 1816, married to tax-collector Gherasăm Hâncu in 1832 and left for the eternal life on the 20th of February 1849”, a young woman of only 33 years old. “To Sandu son of Ștefan Sturza, important boyar and treasurer of Moldavia, born in 1758, gone to God on the 7th of June 1831; to Ecaterina Sturza, daughter of Constantin Moruzi, Prince of MoldoWallachia born in the year 1767, gone to God on the 25th of February 1835, the son, high official Constantin Sturza, for eternal remembrance and gratitude, built this monument [in which also lies] Alexandru Mihail Sturza, born in 1794, died in 1849”¹.

At the time, especially due to the great number of illnesses which were not known, child mortality was high, but the proving funerary inscriptions were known late, at the beginning of the 19th century. A great number of children did not survive early days, a tomb from Armenian St. Mary Church in Botoșani was made for “handsome Garabet, ... *innocent child*, ... son of master Cristea Balasan His life from God has set; his soul has flown to the children from heavens”. “Nephews and nieces” of nun Atanasia lived as follows: “Olga, born in 1834 November 19th and died in 1835 August 10th; Costachi, born in 1839 July 12th and died in 1840 September 23rd”. Unnamed daughter of “m(ister) Ioan Cuza and m(iss) Victoria Cuza, born Rosăt, was born in the year 1839 September 23rd, on a Saturday, at around 10 o’clock in the morning, but ... ended his life in the year 1840 December 30th and the second day, on St Vasile’s day, was already buried at St George church” from Fichitești village (Podu-Turcului parish, Bacău county). At Vulpe church from Iași, “by Aga Procopie Florescu and his wife Efrosina, born Cavacu, this stone was set on the tomb of their daughter, Ecaterina, born on the 10th of April 1837 and gone to eternal rest on the 2nd of January 1843”. “Aglaida, daughter of high official Ilii Pisovsche, born in 1845 March 9th and dead in 1846 May 16th” was buried at St Sava Church from Iași. One tomb from Evangelical Church in Iasi kept “Ioan, Mihail, Aglaida, children of spatharios Mihăiță Dano, born: the first one on the 21st of March 1846 and died on the 21st of July 1848; the second, born on the 17th of April 1847, died on the 28th of August 1848, and the third, born on the 12th of March 1848, left this life on the 20th of August 1848”, all three dead, as it could be seen, only along a few weeks. During the same year, on a tomb stone from John Chrysostom (Zlataust) Church from Iași there was engraved a touching epitaph:

¹ Ghibănescu, *Biserica Sf. Dimitrie (Balș)*, 26–27; idem, *Biserica Talpalari*, 48–49 and 52 – 53; idem, *Din traista cu vorbe (Out of the Bag with Words)* (Iași, 1916), 368; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 144, 247–248, 401, 403 and 647; Iorga, *Inscripții*, II, 186, nr. 9; Balaur, *Biserici din Lăpușna*, 306.

“Brothers of an early age, ruthless death took us,
One aged one year and a month, another three.
We left parents on this world, seven brothers, two sisters.
If you want to know our names: Andronachi, Encuşor.
We both ended our life the year written here.
Our family’s name is Holban. 1848”¹.

Although the inscriptions don’t mention this fact, it would not be impossible that these children died because of the plague which affected Moldavia in 1848. Actually, the note related to the children’s death is rarely part of the funerary inscriptions. In the same year 1848, on 30th of March, the funerary stone belonging to Ioan Adamachi from Bărboi church informs only that during his life, “there was a number of eight boys who died, of unknown age”. From another inscription we understand that a mother outlived her children: Marioara, wife of tax gatherer Gherasim Hâncu died on the 20th of February 1849, “and along her [there were buried] her children, passed away before her, namely: Alexandru, Elena and Mihail”. As we get closer to the chronological period settled as limit for our research, we shall end the enumeration with “Iacov Dabija [who was] 3 years old [when] he died in 1853 April 17th”.² The funerary tombs witness the deaths of many people who were still in their young days. On a tomb stone from Golia monastery it was engraved on the 30th of January 1782 that “Maria at her maiden age was buried in this tomb, / *Who left this life at fourteen years old*”, while on the 28th of April 1804, “from the family of Kicazi, a princess Zoi, daughter of Zmaragda, died at the age of *seventeen*”. After one century and a half, “Alexandra Cerchiză, who died at the *age of 16*, in 1820 October 11th”, being buried at St Dimitrie Church from Bujorovca village, region of Soroca (today Republic of Moldova), “*in her young age*”. At the Armenian St Maria Church from Botoşani on the 20th of December 1821 there was buried “David by the name, wise in words, son of Hagi Grigore Caracaş, of good family, from Rusciuc, adorned in unseen gifts, beautiful face as a rose, *at thirteen years old* he left his parents in grief before time”. On the 15th of June 1831, in the cemetery of the same church it was made a “grave for the boy called Sahag Bolfosul, who died *aged 12*. The age when you were hardly blossoming, sweet Sahag!,” exclaimed the grieving parents. A tomb stone from Banu church from Iaşi announces that “the one who receives help from above, from the arms of my poor parents, *in no time was taken*, child of Priest Posa, administrator and of Maria Morozan. I was called Mihail, only child of my willing parents, *I lived for 12 years and 3 months on earth*. In the year 1843 January 14th, I ended my temporary life”³.

As it is known, in the previous centuries, the girls married very young. We only give the example of Maria, wife of Sahag Bolfosul from Botoşani, dead on the 8th of

¹ Iorga, *Inscripții*, I, p. 233, nr. 524/25 (translation from Armenian); BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), p. 6, 146–147, 390, 472, 647; Dorinel Ichim, *Monumente de arhitectură populară din județul Bacău. Bisericile de lemn (Monuments of Country Architecture in Bacau County* (Bacău, s. a.), 102, col. II–103, col. I.

² BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), p. 145 (Greek text and translation), 543 and 647.

³ Dossios, *Studii greco-române*, II, 56; Iorga, *Inscripții*, I, 233, issue 525/26 and 235, issue 534/35 (translation from Armenian); idem, *Inscripții*, II, 166–167, issue 447/14 (Greek text and translation); BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 96, 471.

September 1841 and on whose tomb it was written that “at 16 she got engaged to Sahag Bolfosul”.¹

Unfortunately, mortality for young women was high, many of them often died at birth. The oldest news known by us about a wife gone to heavens while very young is from the 1st of March 1603, on a tomb stone of 78 / 49 cm (broken today in three pieces), engraved in a 6 cm letter and adorned with floral motifs, kept at the Romanian National Art Museum in Bucharest, inventory 4459: “in this tomb was buried an honest woman, Ana, daughter of Antonie, wife of master George, *aged 20*.”² The funerary monuments were also a symbol of the social status, so the text engraved after three quarters of a century, on the 3rd of October 1677, for the daughter of a prince is more expressive and rich in information. On the mentioned date, at Bârnova monastery near Iasi, under a marble funerary stone, was buried “Maria, daughter of the famous Prince of Moldavia, [Eustratie] Dabija, as his only child, *and in no time, death kidnapped her in her youth, finished at 15 years old. She lived for a short while with Gheorghe, important man, from the princely family of Rusetesti, and left him a widower*”. Moving to the middle class of the society, we can say that their funerary stones were simpler and if we take one leap for one century and a half we discover “Zahara, wife of Vasile, presbytery and administrator [of the long gone St Ilie Church, still from Iasi], *aged 17 years*, ended her life on 1833, August 5th”. During the same year, wife of a high official, dead on the 2nd of May and buried at St Ioan Zlataust, “life left me behind early, in a blossoming age [but you] proved yourself an example of the most fair life, although you lived as a woman for *only 25 years*”. Rucsanda, daughter of Ioan Pavlu, the administrator from Banu Church in Iași, wife of Chiriac Tufăscu, “ended her life in 1844, June 13th, *aged 15*”, while “Maria Apasi ended her life in the year 1848, *24 years old*,”³ buried at St Pantelimon Church in Iași. For the people living in the period under scrutiny, death was part of every day life, even “familiar”,⁴ as Toader Nicoară said. Nevertheless, even if for the people who reached adulthood and especially old age, the physical disappearance was integrated in the normal path of life, the children’s and young people’s death was always perceived as unfair, or even a punishment for the sins of their parents.

Until the middle of the 19th century, in Moldavia there were people who lived to old age as well. Pandeli Gheorghiu “ended his life in 1850 March 15th, *aged 100*”, the same as “nun Atanasia, *aged 100*, dead in 1852 January 7th, mother in law of high official Gheorghii Alhazi”, living in sin, as could be seen above, for the sad events in which she buried her grandchildren. “Vasăli Gheorghiu ended his life *at the age of 90*, in the year

¹ Iorga, *Inscripții*, I, 231, issue 513 / 14 (translation from Armenian).

² *Orașul București*, 522, issue 636 (Greek text and translation); Iorga, *Pietrele de mormânt ale sașilor*, 2 (text) and fig. 6, on 3.

³ Melchisedec, Bishop of Roman, *Notițe istorice și arheologice adunate de la 48 de mănăstiri și biserici din Moldova (Historical and Archaeological Notes Gathered from 48 Old Monasteries and Churches in Moldavia)* (Bucharest: Tipografia cărților bisericești, 1885), 283–284 (Greek text and translation, with some mistakes); Dossios, *Studii Greco - române*, II, 85; Iorga, *Inscripții*, II, 214, nr. 6102 (Greek text and translation and a short commentary); BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 345, 389 r.–v. and two pages interleaved without number, 471, 750.

⁴ Toader Nicoară, *Transilvania la începutul timpurilor moderne (1680–1800): Societate rurală și mentalități colective (Transylvania at the Beginning of Modern Times (1680–1800): A Rural Society and Collective Mentalities)* (Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 2001), 180 f.

1858 July 22nd, together with his son, Ioan, dead in the same year, October 30th”. “Anchorite Marta, wife of deceased Petru Ciclazar, who fought in the army ... died in the year 1841 July 26th, *aged 86*”. At the Armenian St Maria Church from Botoșani “sleeps an important man, Sahag Bolfosul. ... *At 79 years old* he came to the end of his life, in the year 1830 from Redemption, July 15th”. Necolae Zagură was a great military camp administrator, “he ended his life on the 28th of October 1838, *in his 78th year of life*” and he was buried together with a grandson, “Petro Zagură, born on the 29th of June and passed away on the 3rd of July 1841”, who lived only for a few days. “Hagi Teodor Tomovici, who died in 1854, November 1st [was] *75 years old*”. “Eufrosina, wife of Negri, of Constantin, / Born Mavrogheni, sleeps her sleep. / *having lived for two years and seventy others more...* Born in the year 1778 and died on the 5th of May 1850 in Iași”. “High Official Iordachi Costachi Epureanu who died in 1859 September 25th, [was also] *72 years old*”. “Aga Ion Milasciuc, a doctor from Bucovina, *was 65 years old* [when] he died in 1859, on the 23rd of December”. Finally, “Mihalachi Maneta, founder of this holy church [St. Paraschiva from Iași], moved out of life in 1859 April 13th, *aged 60*”¹.

Incidentally, in the funerary inscriptions there can be found short stories about different events in the lives of the deceased, the positions they had or circumstances in which they lost their life: an accident, sudden illness or epidemic, facts which impressed their contemporaries. The oldest funerary inscription which talks about the circumstances of a person’s death, known by us in this stage of the research, dates from the 23rd of April 1684 and is found on a tomb from Bogdana monastery (county of Bacău), belonging to “captain Matei, also called Lepădatul”, coming from Wallachia to Moldavia and “killed by the thieves”. After a few months, on the 20th of December 1584, at Bistrița Monastery (county of Neamț), in the ante-temple (on the right) there was made “the tomb of Ivașco, great official from Wallachia. *He happened to wander in the Hungarian country and to pass through Moldavia. When he was in the mountains, he was struck by a terrible death in the village of Bălătești.* And Prince Petru (The lame) took his body and buried him at Bistrița monastery”, during the times of Anastasie Father Superior. Consequently, it was about an illness which evolved very quickly and irreversibly². We do not know the illness which defeated the official, but we could suppose it was the plague, as during the years 1584 and 1588, Wallachia and the Balkan Peninsula suffered from one of the greatest ecological disasters from the 16th century, a terrible famine mixed with a destructive pest which led to the loss of an important number of lives and huge migrations³.

A tomb stone of 150 / 58 cm, broken in two parts, with engraved letters of 7 cm on which there is drawn a monk holding a cross in his right hand, surrounded by floral motifs, kept until today at the Romanian National Museum of Art from Bucharest, inventory number 4417, proves the presence of the Franciscan monks in Moldavia, at the beginning of the 17th century, in Baia (county of Suceava): “Ambrosius from Kecemet, holy father and *priest of The Order of Saint Francis*, he was merciful, faithful

¹ BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 6, 98, 146–147, 174–175, 280, 302–303, 374, 783; Dossios, *Studii greco – române*, II, 58; Iorga, *Inscripții*, II, 170, nr. 458/34).

² Iorga, *Inscripții*, I, 39–40, issue 87/5 (Slavonic text and translation); Melchisedec, *Notițe istorice și arheologice*, 62–63, issue 3 (Slavonic text and translation).

³ Cernovodeanu, Binder, *Cavalerii Apocalipsului*, 54.

and kind, was wise and only a little below the saints due to his inborn kindness”¹, but he died in 1618, on the 3rd of October.

Other two tomb stones found by the researchers during the first years of the 20th century, one of them at the Catholic church from Cotnari, the other one at the Orthodox church in the village tell a story from the religious context marked by intra-confessional conflicts between the Catholics from Cotnari (county of Iași). Without getting into the details of another discussion, we only want to mention that only until the end of the 17th century, the mentioned village was inhabited by an important Catholic community, which included Germans, Hungarians and Romanians who converted to the ideas of Jan Hus and then to the Reform (Lutheran) and then they went back to Catholicism in 1631, but they did not accept the Jesuits, whom they blamed for greed and immorality². Under these agitated confessional circumstances, a Catholic from Cotnari, Iacob, son of Dominic, put a stone engraved with a text in Latin (today at the Romanian Museum of Art from Bucharest, inventory number 4368) in the cemetery of the Catholic church where his brother had been buried: “master Iacob, son of Dominic, took care that this stone was set, as here lie the remains of his brother to be piously remembered, mister Iokosch, who died in the year of the Lord 1631, the 18th day of December”³. But, a century later, in 7150 [1641 September 1st – 1642 August 31st] Iacob prepared his own tomb stone in the Orthodox church, with a Romanian text: “this stone was made and adorned by Iacobu, district chief magistrate, son of Dumenică, when he was alive and should he want, put it on his tomb, so as to be known; and the year was 7150”⁴. During the reign of Vasile Lupu there was a significant change in the demographic-confessional percentage, in favour of the Orthodox, and these two tombs suggest that Iacob had abandoned the Catholic religion and adopted the Orthodox one.

During a period of time of religious hesitations, it was important to prove devotion to faith, a reason why, on a tomb stone of 157 / 66 - 59 cm, engraved with letters of 7 cm, kept nowadays at the same Romanian Museum of Art from Bucharest, inventory no 4380, it was certified for the posterity that “mister Valentin Alstner [who] died on the 4th of January, year of the Lord 1647 [was a real] *father of the priests, patron of the churches, an example of Catholic faith*”. Another example of fidelity to faith can be found on a tomb from the 27th of May 1631: “father of pious remembrance, Gabriel Drotherma ... *ended twenty five years leading this church*” (the Catholic church from Cotnari). The situation was similar in several other places in Moldavia. Thus, on the tomb stone of 132 / 59 cm, engraved with letters of 7 cm and adorned with vegetal motifs, today at the Romanian National Museum of Art from Bucharest, inventory no 4379, set for “mister Ioan Kotta, of German origin, from Suceava”, who “died in 1648, on the 14th of March”, it was engraved that “*he was a noble in faith, due to his virtue and ancestors*”⁵.

¹ *Orașul București*, 522–523, issue 637 (Latin text, translation and photo – fig. 101); Iorga, *Pietrele de mormânt ale sașilor*, 3 (text) and fig. 12, on 6 (photo).

² Valeriu D. Cotea (coord.), *Podgoria Cotnari (Cotnari Vineyard)* (Iași, TipoMoldova, 2010), 67.

³ *Orașul București*, 524, issue 640 (Latin text and translation).

⁴ Iorga, *Inscripții*, I, 12, issue VI/29; Mircea Ciubotaru, the author of the chapter on the history of Cotnari village, volume *Podgoria Cotnari*, 65, footnote 2, mentions a wrong date (7155 instead of 7150).

⁵ *Orașul București*, 523–524, issue 639, 528, issue 646 and 528–529, issue 647 (Latin text and translation); Alexandru Lapedatu, *Antichitățile de la Baia (Antiquities from Baia)*, BCMI, II (1909), 61.

The presence of the Jesuits at Cotnari is also proved by a funerary tomb dating from the middle of the 17th century (today at the Romanian National Museum from Bucharest, inventory no 4389): “Andrei, *a man known in the gathering of Jesus for the ardour of his faith*, for the praise of the Catholic religion, for his piety, he rests here in the ground”¹.

Moving to another religious register, that of the Armenians from Botoșani, grouped around St Mary and Trinity Church, the distinctive feature we have noticed at the funerary texts, in comparison to those of Orthodox origin, lies in the praise of the moral character of the deceased. Having reached this point in our analysis, mention must be made regarding all the funerary monuments, regardless of religion. The marble or grit stones, with rich sculptural ornaments were expensive products and the workers in stone who were able to do them were rare. It was often the case that the craftsmen as well as the stones were coming from abroad, a reason why the ones who could afford to embellish their tombs with sumptuous stones were coming from the well-off families at the time: princes and their families, boyars of all ranks, priests, craftsmen and traders of a certain condition. Consequently, the tomb stones were a symbol of the social and economical status of the deceased and of his family. The tombs of normal people, small craftsmen, traders and people from the church were marked with simple and inexpensive crosses or stones, out of which there have been kept only a few, if they have been kept, the texts are very brief. Hence, undoubtedly, all the people who will be mentioned in what follows were coming from the rich families of Armenian origin from Botoșani. Thus, “Iacov, son of Hagi Oxindie, churchwarden of [St. Mary] church from the small church of Botoșani, in Moldavia”, dead on the 2nd of October 1775, “*was virtuos in behaviour*”. Marta, wife of Boghos Lelenț, passed to the eternal life on the 10th of September 1782, had been “*the kind and famous one*”. “Mistress Sarica”, dead on the 3rd of May 1799, “*was doing only good things, did not keep them away*”. “Cristea Bolfosul, his son Ioan”, dead on the 2nd of May 1802, “*princely tradesman*”, that is, a cattle seller for the Ottoman Empire), was “*righteous*”, “*wise and kind, of good family, always generous to the poor*”. “Priest Avedis, which was also called Barhudar”, a “*holy worker for Lord Jesus was he*”, “*he lived a clean and fulfilled life*” until the 14th of February 1814 when “*his life ended, moved to the eternal one.*” David Goilav, son of Luca Goilav, who passed away on the 21st of June 1826, he had been a “*virtuous and lover of good person*”. “Master Boghos Iacubentț” mentioned in another place, “*who was aged 44, on Easter day [1828], left to the eternal life*”, he had been, not more, not less “*the pride of his country, the most famous in the family of Iacubenti, known by all the people*”. [His contemporaries did not have any doubt that] “*although death took his body, his good name did not know death.*” Although unnamed, on the funerary stone it was written about “*the good wife of Hagi Garabet Aburel*”, dead on the 15th of August 1832, and also said that “*the one filled with parently warmth*”. Surely a relative of Sahag Bolfosul, dead on the 15th of July 1830, was “*an important man*”, “*famous tradesman, of good family and always doing good for the poor*, he beautifully renewed the iconostasis of this church”. His wife, Maria, buried next to him, lived until the 8th of September 1841 and “*was a righteous and praised woman, her man’s wreath, mother who raised well her children and took care of her daughters and gave good advice to everybody*”. As regards “Ștefan Balasan, merchant from a good family, fair administrator of Holy

¹ Orașul București, 529–530, issue 649 (Latin text and translation).

Trinity church”, dead in 1832, the ones who ordered his funerary stone knew that he had been “*from a good family, the pride of his ancestors, a wreath of good deeds in his name. He overpassed most of the virtuous people*”. If “fair” Sahag Şahanian, dead on the 2nd of March 1837, “*he dedicated his life to the pride of his people*” but his wife, Hripsima, “*spent her whole life in respect and peace and her century having passed, she got rest in death*”. It was still in 1837, on the 17th of August, that “moved to her desired” place, “Hagica Varteni, *a dear name, having love and mercy for the poor*”, she lay by her husband’s side, “*well-behaved, well-chosen and worthy of honour, Nicolae, from the family of Trancu, who was the pride of his people due to his kindness: but he left this place without heirs on earth*”, before the 20th of February 1804.¹ Even if the ones mentioned herein did not come from the wealthy class and despite the fact that we are talking about the end of the 18th century already and the first half of the 19th century, times when the elements of the secular thinking were prominently present, we still have to mention the different mentality of the Armenians, in comparison to the Orthodox people, as for the latter, the compulsory religious behaviour supposed being humble and acquiescent. The funerary texts of Orthodox origin analysed by us which included praising and even eulogistic elements are in a few number.

Another aspect regarding the life of certain individuals mentioned in the funerary inscriptions is that of their origin, belonging to different parts of the Christian world at the time. In Moldavia, as well as all around Europe, migration was present in great numbers, people who left their native places to settle in villages and towns, structures which offered protection and several possibilities to earn money. The data regarding this issue are offered by several statistics from the first half of the 19th century², but they are not the topic of our study, so that we shall support our arguments by examples taken from the funerary inscriptions as well. For example, on the 6th of October 1797 there was created an “Epitaph to the memory of a person who was still young *when he passed away, here in Moldavia, ... a noble boyar ... Alexandru Callimachi, who still acted as seneschal. The Byzanthion, the famous fortress brought you to light, having ancestors of good families, and the land of Moldavia receives you now here, among the deceased*”. A prose narrative by a Greek who settled in Iaşi was engraved on the tomb stone of komis Ioniţă Spartali from White Church in September 1841, where he was an administrator: “*I was born in Byzanthion, my parents were born in Hios. I honestly lived in Iaşi for a long while as a tradesman... I did not reach the happiness of having children to ease my wife’s pain and to cry on their shoulder. But now, having lived for sixty years in these parts, it is here that I’m buried*”³.

As another example, a good part of the Armenian community had migrated to Botoşani. More precisely, “*from the region of Păstunic*” in Armenia were coming

¹ Iorga, *Inscriptii*, I, 229, issue 506/7; 230, issue 508/9 and issue 511/12; 231, issue 512/13 and 513/14, issue 515/16; 231–232, issue 516/17; 232, issue 520/21; 232–233, issue 522/23; 233, issue 523/24 and issue 526/27; 234–235, issue 531/32 (translation from Armenian).

² See Gheorghe Platon, *Populația orașului Iași de la jumătatea secolului al XVIII-lea până la 1859 (Population of Iasi Town at the Half of the 18th Century Until 1859)*, in *Populație și economie. Studii de demografie istorică (Population and Economy. Studies of Historical Demography)*, vol. I, published by Ștefan Pascu (Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1972), 259–344.

³ Iorga, *Inscriptii*, II, 173, issue 463/4 and 374–375 (Greek text and translation); BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscriptii Iași*, I), 771 (day date: 3).

people such as “Hagi Mihail, son of tradesman Marcar”, dead “in the Armenian year 1240 [1790] January 14th” and “mistress Sarica, ... daughter of Boghos” and Boghos Lelenț, dead on the 10th of September 1782; the latter, once settled in Botoșani, he married “mistress Marta, ... daughter of Șisman Bedros, *who came from Smil*” [Ismail town, today in the Republic of Moldavia]. “Khatuna, a good soul, wife of Moise from Erzerum”, died on the 10th of December 1799, was “daughter of Măgârdum *from the Eastern parts*”. Hariton Aghababian, son of Ioan, dead on the 23rd of January 1797 had also come “*from the Eastern parts*”. “Priest Avedis, also called Barhudar”, was “born in the town of Smil. He lived an honest and fulfilled life, he then came to Botoșani, where his life ended, on the 14th of February 1814¹”.

The funerary inscriptions offer other kinds of biographical information as well. For example, about Manoil Balș, son of chancellor Lupu Balș, we find out from the tomb stone that “he was *first spatharus, later he moved to Rosia and as he was enrolled, he was made polkovnik and knight și fiind în slujba oștenească s-au făcut polcovnic și cavaleriu*”, and after that, he came back to Moldavia, where “his life ended in 1812, January 19th, in Iași”. Dead on the 4th of November 1818, Neculai Strătuț, also called Mironescu, already mentioned here, in his life was “*ruling Hetman for the people, / Chancellor without any meanness, the poor found their justice*”. As regards priest Grigorie, son of Neculai Melintii, dead on the 9th of June 1831, “*he served in this church [Vulpe Church from Iași, patron Saint Anthony and Virgin Mary] even from his childhood*”².

At Saint Haralambie church from Iași, on a “Tuesday, 27th of August 1835”, there was buried “*a son of the Epir, the one who built this monastery in endless effort, Gheorghe was his name, son of Leontarios, college assessor, righteous by the will of God*”. This character’s biography could also be summed up from an inscription, engraved on some bells, this time, bells he had offered to the church, together with a cup: “*Gheorghe, son of Liontari, from Ianina, who was also an officer serving the princes, he also raised these three bells out of his money, in the church he worked for with warm effort, for the love of God, so that all these bells will ring, all people, big and small, should say: God forgive him! And then his soul, due to these chimes, should rest in the tents of the holy and the righteous*”³. The local tradition says that the same officer George was also a captain serving Constantin Ipsilanti, Prince of Moldavia between the 8th of March 1799 and the 4th of July 1801, a position in which he had to chase the head of a posse, who was no other than his brother, Haralambie and he shot him with his own hand. He was very troubled and brought Haralambie’s head to Iași, presented it to the Prince and said: “Your highness, I fulfilled my duty, I calmed the country, but it was my parents’ blood”. After that, he left his brother’s head on the ground, burst into tears and left the Court. The Prince rewarded Gheorghe Leondari with an estate for having proved his devotion and a short time after that, he built a church with Saint Haralambie as patron, in the remembrance of the brother he killed.⁴

¹ Iorga, *Inscripții*, I, 230, issue 509/10; 231, issue 514/15; 231–232, issue 516/17; 232, issue 519/20; 233, issue 523/24 (translation from Armenian).

² *Ibidem*, II, 127, nr. 345/11; Ghibănescu, *Biserica Sf. Dimitrie (Balș)*, 29; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 402.

³ BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), p. 860–861 (Greek text and translation).

⁴ Dan Bădăraș, Ioan Caproșu, *Iașii vechilor zidiri: pînă la 1821 (Iași – A Town of Old Buildings: Until 1821)* (Iași, Demiurg, 2007), 383, footnote 100.

The whole course of the life of the mandarin Panaioti Spartali, was engraved on September 1841 on the tomb stone from White Church in Iași where he was an administrator: “I was born in Byzanthion, my parents were born in Hios. I lived honestly many years, as a tradesman. I finally served my country for long [deteriorated stone, text missing]. I did not have the happiness to have children who could comfort my wife and cry with her. But now, after being for sixty years on this land, I am also buried here”¹.

On the tomb stone of prince Ioan Sandu Sturza, which is found on the left side at the entrance of Bărboi Church from Iași, an epitaph in verse was written in Greek, a meditation on the passing fate of man:

“Among the mortals of this world was I once,
Gave advice, orders for every judgement.
Noble from my origin and finally a prince
I stood as support for the rights and the people.
I saw fame and honesty around me, sceptre for the master,
But in the end suffered the fate’s persecution.
And now, here I lie under this stone, a mortal,
As life is a sorrowful, cloudy desert.

He ended his life on the 2nd of February 1842, after having reigned in Moldavia since the 1st of July 1822 till the 23rd of April 1828.”²

“Teodor Ioan Nedoba, who was born in 1770, died on the 25th of July, year 1846”, was “a state chancellor in activity” when death came to him and he was buried in the church from Lohănești village, county of Lăpușna (today the Republic of Moldavia), on the right hand of the nave, under a marble stone. After the 27th of November 1846, when Ioan Bașotă died, on the collective tomb of his family from Pomârla village, it was mentioned that he was “brigade leader and Russian knight [and that he received] Saint Anna’s Cross around his neck”. It was also at Bărboi church that a wife who does not mention her name asked that it should be written, on the 23rd of January 1850 on the stone of that one who “has the name Filaret Atanasie, my fair and faithful husband, with an aga title, born in Byzanthion in a good family, having a deep knowledge and generous ideas, he lived for 54 years, in honour, as a real Christian, he died humbly, leaving uncomforted sadness in my soul”. About “princess Efrosini, wife [of] C(onstantin) Negre, who was a seneschal and the daughter of prince Neculai Mavrogheni, who reigned in both principalities with honour”, we find from the tomb stone ordered by his daughter at Golia monastery from Iași on the 5th of May 1850 that “she was daughter and wife, she was a very kind mother, in all circumstances a pious Christian”. Finally, about “tax-collector Costandin Bobălescul”, mentioned above and buried on the 8th of March 1852 at John Chrisostom Church (Zlataust) also from Iași, we are told only that he was “husband of mistress Marghoalei (*sic!*)”³.

¹ BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscriptii Iași*, I), p. 374–375 (Greek text and translation).

² Melchisedec, *Notițe istorice și arheologice*, 268–269; Iorga, *Inscriptii*, II, 144, issue 397/8; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscriptii Iași*, I), 144.

³ Balaur, *Bisericile din Lăpușna*, 306 (text in Russian); Ghibănescu, *Bașoteștii și Iașii*, 146; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscriptii Iași*, I), 98, 146 (Greek text and translation) and 391.

A few funerary stones mention a series of causes which led to the death of certain persons. Thus, on a tomb stone from a small sanctum on the left side, from the entrance of Frumoasa monastery in Iași, there was engraved an epitaph in verse, in Greek, for princess Ruxandra Ghica, dead in February 1780:

„... oh Roxandra, you cry for the cruel death took you

And brought you down, oh the tumour which destroys the bones of the body”¹.

At the church from the Bishopric of Huși, a marble stone tells the story of a soldier who died in the Russian-Austrian-Turkish war from 1787-1792: “Alexiu Srebiacov, commander of the troops on Don, who was killed on the 11th of December at the siege of Ismail town, when the Russian armies were commanded by Count Suvorov Rimniski, was buried by the Bishop of Huși [Iacov Stamati] in the year 1790 from the birth of Christ”. It was on an unknown date, but obviously not very distant that two brothers of the deceased, also military men, Major Vasilie and Lieutenant Ștefan, made a silver tabernacle for the holy remains of Saint Chiriachi’s hand kept at the Bishopric of Huși, for the remembrance of commander Alexei, and we reproduce the story: “for the honour, gift and fame of the unchanged remains of Martyr Saint Chiriachi’s hand, this tabernacle was made with the efforts of two brothers, Major Vasilie and deputy lieutenant Ștefan Srebiacovi, to the remembrance of their brother, lieutenant in the army on the Don, Alexi Srebiacov, who was killed in the year 1790, December 11th, at the siege of Ismail fortress, by the Russian armies and he was buried by the holy priest Iacov, Bishop of Huși, in the temple of Apostles Peter and Paul, in the holy church of the Bishopric of Huși, in Moldavia, in the town of Huși”².

About “boyar Vasile Portas, owner of Cănești estate from the county of Tutova, aged 28 years old, [...we find that] in the year 1842, on the 26th of June he met *his merciful death* had found in Iași”, without explaining what caused the death. But, we know that on the 1st of July 1847 “to Iordache Nedelcu ... *came death unexpectedly, losing breath in the ground*”³, a landslide, we suppose, probably while he was doing some digging works.

A real biography in verse engraved on Ioan Adamachi’s funerary stone from Bărboi Church makes known the end of his life due to an epidemic:

“Commercial life lived in honesty,

Life in no less piousness, prudence and fear of God.

... Was wasted due to illness, leaving family and friends

But leaving especially six children and wife in sorrow.

*... This is the well-known Adamachi Ioan. 1848, March 30th”*⁴.

The illness which brought Ioan Adamachi down was cholera, around and during 1848, the population of Iași, as well as of other Moldavian towns, suffered badly

¹ BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 117–118 (Greek text and translation); *Dicționar explicativ ilustrat al limbii române (Illustrated Romanian Dictionary)*, coord. by Eugenia Dima (Chișinău, Arc, Gunivas, 2007), 1744.

² Melchisedec Ștefănescu, *Cronica Hușilor și a Episcopiei cu asemenea numire (Chronicles of Husi Town and of the Bishopric with the Same Name)* (Bucharest, 1869), 367–368.

³ Iorga, *Inscripții*, II, 127, issue 345 / 11; Ghibănescu, *Biserica Sf. Dimitrie (Balș)*, 29; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 145, 390, 542–543, 773.

⁴ BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 145 (Greek text and translation).

from this terrible plague which also defeated Panaioti Pandeli, who “ended his life *due to cholera*, in 1848 June 20th, aged 50. And next to him, on the left, rests his brother, Alecu Pandeli, who ended his life *due to the same illness*, in 1848 July 2nd, aged 30”¹.

We noticed earlier that in 1848 many children died, too, mowed down by the same frightening plague for which no cure was known. The mention of an illness which caused death to a child was made on the funerary stone belonging to an unnamed daughter of Ioan and Victoria Cuza, mentioned already, who “*got ill with an apostima and the innocent child suffered from pain* and ended her life ... in the year 1840 December 30th and on the second day, Saint Vasile’s day, she was buried at Saint Martyr George”². According to the *Illustrated Romanian Dictionary*, *apostima* is an old medical term from Greek (απόστημα) which means an abscess as well as a tumour. In this case, considering the girl’s very small age, we could suppose it was rather an abscess, an infection from microbial agents for which there was no cure in the 19th century and which can have a quick evolution, accompanied by throbbing pain and fever.³

Texts including expressions such as: “rests” or “sleeps” suggest that going to the other realm was serenely accepted as it was probably about the so-called “good” deaths, consequences of old age in Christians who lived their life in faith and without sins. The winning perception provides an optimistic support which makes the fatality of death to be accepted as found in the text engraved on the 16th of June 1831 on “the tomb of rest belonging to fair Avedic Sahag Bolfosul and his wife Flora”, who died, it seemed, a day one after the other. “As I was like a beautiful tree and rare beauty embellished me, a mean and bitter pain interrupted the course of my life. Oh! How many tears and how much pain, how many of my lovers will not open their hearts! *But who knew, who could sham the shadow of death: as old or young, she chose us and struck us with her arrow*. Year 1831 from Redemption, June 15th. Still I wonder, will my life in this world turn sweeter? As what could be bitterer than living without you? *You were for my soul a flower of pleasure, never withered; but leaving me, you went far away; still, it will not be long before I come as well*. Let our beloved parents weep, as well as our sweet children whom we leave in sorrow”⁴. We are not sure, but it would not be impossible that these two husbands both died due to the great plague which struck Moldavia in 1831, having killed 7% of the town population of the country, in Botoșani town there had been 710 deaths.⁵

In spite of a real pedagogy of death, we can find in many inscriptions the evocation of sufferance given by the death of someone dear, either in verse or in short stories. In times when child mortality was higher, Costin Carp’s parents, mentioned above, depicted the pain coming from the loss of their son in an epitaph in verse:

“Costin Carp was my name

¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

² Ichim, *Monumente de arhitectură populară din județul Bacău*, 102, col. II – 103, col. I.

³ *Dicționar explicativ ilustrat al limbii române*, 2 and 106.

⁴ Iorga, *Inscripții*, I, 235, issue 533/34 (translation from Armenian). Related to the stages of the Christian death, see more details in Toader Nicoară, *op. cit.*, 178–216.

⁵ Ecaterina Negruți-Munteanu, *Date noi privind structura demografică a ȋrgurilor și orașelor moldovenești la 1832 (New Data on the Demographic Structure of Moldavian Villages and Towns in 1832)*, in *Populație și economie*, vol. I, 225 and Addendum no VII.

During the few years I lived.
My parents loved me,
I was their comfort,
Hoping to see me
An offspring with sweet fruit.
See where I lie now
And what a long way I have ahead
*Leaving my parents
Deeply grieved and bitter.
The land covered me,
The tomb is my home,
Since childish age,
All my people weep for me
And pray God
Have mercy on my soul*¹.

Dead on the 30th of January 1782 and kept before burial at Golia Monastery from Iasi, “maiden-like Maria” mentioned above as having died at 14 years old, “left this life / But she rejoices now among the happy,

*Leaving to her parents grief and weeping,
As she was the eye of the house, covered in goodness and virtue,
From youth beauty and old age habits*².

In an epitaph in less inspired verses written on the 10th of June 1837 for Aga Alecu Roset, buried at Talpalari church in Iași,

*”Here the weeping relatives
Take their grieving,
Here the stone cries
That in holy rest / His cold heart lies*³.

Nevertheless, on the 27th of February 1841, when there was engraved in a marble stone, with the Moldavian Coat of Arms, in a framing of tulips for the grave of Ioan and Victoria Cuza’s daughter, mentioned above, placed in front of the porch of Saint George wooden church from the village of Fichitești (Podu–Turcului region, Bacău county), obviously impressed by the parents’ grief, the engraver explained in prose “how much sorrow this child’s parents felt, weeping uncomforted as Rahil cried for his sons and there was no other weeping as for this innocent child, so we pray Jesus Christ to rest her eternally.”⁴

¹ Ghibănescu, *Biserica Talpalari*, 53; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 246–247.

² Dossios, *Studii greco-române*, II, 56; Iorga, *Inscripții*, I, 166–167, nr. 447/14 (Greek text and translation).

³ Ghibănescu, *Din traista cu vorbe*, p. 368; idem, *Biserica Talpalari*, 52–53; Iorga, *op. cit.*, p. 186, issue 9; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 248, mentioned.

⁴ Ichim, *Monumente de arhitectură populară din județul Bacău*, 102, col. II – 103, col. I.

Some other times, the people in grief expressed their suffering for the loss of a dear one in simple phrases: “Elena, daughter of Gheorghe Balș, wise and honest wife of Răducanu Roșeti”, dead “in her middle age”, as we saw, “*left uncomforted sorrow for her husband as well as for all her children, especially her beloved daughters*”, on the 13th of September 1798. Ana, wife of seneschal Iordachi Boian, also mentioned before, died on the 21st of July 1853 “*leaving her husband and two sons in grief*”. On the 20th of May 1856, when “spatharios Iancu Talpeș, aged 36 ended his life” and was buried at St Atanasie and Chiril Church from Iași, the tomb stone said “it was made by the *mother of the deceased, Iliana Talpeș, who was deeply moved by bitter sorrow*”¹.

Considering what has been shown so far, it results that out of all the historical sources, the inscriptions are the most widely spread ones and the most difficult to gather and even though they do not provide news as important as the ones from the narrative and diplomatic sources from the times under study, the precision of the biographical and genealogical details is greater and the provided data is safer than the ones coming from other contemporary sources. In their form which is more often stereotype, in a dry enumeration of names and dates, the funerary inscriptions talk about contemporary facts in their limited and strict material character and unlike certain chronicles, for instance, they are not aimed to be presented in certain circumstances or to bring any benefit to their authors. This is a reason why the trustworthy character of the news they include cannot be doubted.

Considering the point of view which is of interest in this paper, due to the information taken from the analysed funerary inscriptions, we conclude that the life time spent by the people from the previous centuries varied, being influenced in a great measure by the natural calamities (famine, different illnesses, especially epidemics) and wars. Mortality was high for the demographic categories which had not reached their maturity: children, teenagers, young women, but there had also been long-lived people, some of them (undoubtedly, exceptions) who lived for 100 years. Still, the conclusions should be carefully drawn, on one hand due to the nature of these inscriptions, written on rough materials which impose a limit on the length of the texts and on the other hand, due to the fact that after the town systematization during the last century, many churches lost their graveyards almost completely, or even being demolished, so that in their vast majority, the tomb stones disappeared or were destroyed. Consequently, in a compulsory way, the data from the funerary inscriptions should be added up to other sources of information.

On the other hand, considering the details they include, the funerary texts are an irreplaceable source for the local history of towns and villages, they allow the discovery of certain special circumstances having as protagonists the deceased persons they mention, they confirm the consideration they enjoyed among the community but also the unexpected and impressive circumstances for their contemporaries, situations in which they lost their lives (different accidents, unexpected illness, so on). Last but not least, the richness of names they include represents a valuable source for anthropological and toponomastic studies.

¹ Ghibănescu, *Biserica Sf. Dimitrie (Balș)*, 28; idem, *Biserica Talpalari*, 53; BAR, A 1580 (ms. Bobulescu, *Inscripții Iași*, I), 246–247, 401, 402 (Greek text and translation), 472 and 498.