

On Cremation in Nowadays Romania*

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Abstract: In Romania, the topic of cremation copes with several distinctive issues compared to western states (e.g. existence of a sole crematorium which operates for 20 million inhabitants). On the contrary, the most critical problem of the Romanian Death System is given by the crisis of the resting places in urban area that could be resolved by accepting and developing the cremation as an alternative solution. The article's goal is to analyze different attitudes towards death in Romanian space, having as a reference point the issue of cremation. The issue of cremation is also analyzed from the historical and social point of view. The main conclusion is that the Orthodox Church's position and its influence in Romanian society represent the most natural justification of the presented situation. The paper reveals a lesser degree of secularization in Romanian society compared to other European countries, a simple fact that could explain the specificity of the Romanian practice regarding death issues and cremation.

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Introduction

In recent decades, the growing popularity of cremation throughout the world has led to an increase in scientific interest surrounding the topic. Research has highlighted, for example, the historical factors that have supported the development of this practice in certain contexts.¹ On the other hand, the implications and significance of the expansion of the cremation movement, both in society and on an individual level, have also been emphasized (such as modernization, professionalism, medicalization, individualism and choice, pluralism, and globalization).²

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¹ Stephen Prothero, *Purified by Fire. A History of Cremation in America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Serenna Nonnis Vigilante, "Pour une histoire de la cremation en Italie XIX-XXe siecle", *Etudes sur la mort* 125 (2004), 79–90; Brian Parsons, *Committed to the Cleansing Flame: The Development of Cremation in Nineteenth Century England* (Reading: Spire Books, 2006); Peter C. Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes. Cremation and the British Way of Death* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Simone Ameskamp, *On fire – Cremation in Germany, 1870s – 1934* (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2006); Robert Nicol, *This Grave and Burning Question: A Centenary History of Cremation in Australia*, (Adelaide Cemeteries Authority, Adelaide, 2003) and so on.

² Douglas J. Davies, "Introduction" In Davies DJ, Mates H., eds., *Encyclopedia of Cremation*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 1–8.

The development of cremation has not followed the same path in all European countries. In this context, Romania has several specific characteristics in terms of cremation. For example, with a population of 20 million, Romania only has one functional crematorium, despite the fact that the Romanian funeral system faces many problems which could be solved by expanding this practice. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine attitudes towards cremation in contemporary Romania as an element of more general attitudes towards death.

Historical overview of cremation in modern Romania¹

Cremationist ideas entered Romania in the second half of the nineteenth century due to the efforts of members of the Romanian elite, represented mostly by doctors. They supported the cremation of corpses based on utilitarian grounds, the miasmatic theory being one of the strongest arguments in favour of cremation. Medical doctors like Dr. C.I. Istrati, Dr. Gheorghe Vuia, Dr. Athanasie Economu, Dr. Constantin Thiron, Dr. Nicolae Minovici or Romanian cultural personalities of the time (like Mihail Codreanu or Radu D. Rosetti), were some of those who supported cremationist ideas based on utilitarian considerations.

One example here: Constantin I. Istrati may be positively considered as a pioneer of the cremationist movement in Romania. Istrati, who died in Paris on 17th January 1918, positively supported cremation² and in 1928 his ashes were returned to Romania and deposited in the Bellu cemetery in Bucharest, where they remain to this day. A leading figure in Romanian public life, as President of the Romanian Academy from 1913 to 1916, chemist, physician, and also minister, Istrati was however not so well known as an advocate of cremation. His personality was typical of the nineteenth century cremationists: educated and combative. However, his status as an authentic cremationist is open to debate, since his pro-cremation activities ceased following the publication of his doctoral thesis, after which he was preoccupied with his research in the field of chemistry. Furthermore, although Istrati held high public and political offices³ he did not use this influence to further the cremationist cause. However, before his death Istrati repeatedly expressed a wish to be cremated, a wish which was granted.

The fullest expression of Istrati's adherence to cremationist ideas may be found in his M.D. thesis from 1877, which was on methods of disposing of corpses. In terms of his personal beliefs, Istrati experienced several stages. He battled agnosticism, was for some time an advocate of atheism, and then became a Fideist⁴ (He was also familiar with Spiritualism, which was fashionable at the time).

¹ Marius Rotar, *Eternitate prin cenușă. O istorie a crematoriilor și incinerărilor umane în România secolelor XIX–XXI* (Eternity through Ashes. A History of Cremation in 19th–21st Century Romania) (Iași: Institutul European, 2011).

² Constantin Kirițescu, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României: 1916–1919*, ed. Marin N. Popa, vol. 2, (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989).

³ Ion Jianu, George Vasiliu, *dr. C. I. Istrati* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1964).

⁴ Nicolae Gogoneață, *Istoria Filozofiei Românești*, vol. 2, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1980), 153, 155, 158.



Șerban Savu, *Procession II*, 2012, 30 x 40 cm, oil on canvas

However, this was not Istrati's first piece of writing on cremation. A year before he had published a long article dedicated to the subject¹ and given lectures (Radu Rosetti observed that at Istrati's first pro cremation lecture in Bucharest, most of the audience booed). The 1876 article raises some additional points, emphasizing, for instance, the danger posed by graveyard miasma as an argument in favour of cremation. To support this claim, Istrati cited instances of grave-diggers who had died following the exercise of their profession, from inhaling hazardous, disease-bearing germs. Another argument in favour of cremation, which he went on to develop further in his dissertation, was the popular perception of the corpse as invidious to health: according to Istrati the level of decomposition which was achieved in a cemetery over seven years, to reach the point where the menacing odours were neutralized, could be produced by cremation in only a few minutes, and he catalogued a series of experiments aimed at proving the validity of miasmatic theory. Perhaps the most pertinent evidence he presented was the one showing the circulation of gases from atmosphere to corpse and back again. Istrati showed how the danger arose during the latter part of this cycle, from the gases generated by decomposition, and from a series of as yet poorly understood micro organisms, and he asserted that "small cadaver parts were blown up by the upward current."² In his opinion cemeteries where there was an excess of burials would

¹ Constantin I. Istrati, *Despre Depărtarea Cadavrelor. Studiu de Hygienă Publică* (Bucharest: tip. Al. A. Grecescu, 1877), 388–418.

² *Ibid.*, 390.

eventually reach saturation point, which would arrest the decomposition process to a significant degree. The result was a “corpse wax”, which was extremely harmful and had the potential to cause epidemics. In a similar way Istrati explained the process by which drinking water became infected, comparing the current situation to the barbarian practice of anthropophagy.¹

Another advantage of introducing cremation was aesthetic: it would prevent the cemeteries becoming places of disgust and fear for the relatives of the deceased. Through cremation, Istrati believed that all superstitions about ghosts would disappear, all the “fears and dreams” engendered by the phosphine flames which emanated from the decaying bodies in the cemeteries, would be laid to rest. Istrati therefore sought to strengthen the arguments for cremation, in the belief that it would prove eminently acceptable to contemporary Romanian sensibilities. In his opinion, although historically burning was restricted to heretics in the cause of faith during the Inquisition, in his own time the burning of corpses should be permitted as the norm. Cremation was but a means of public utility and interest, scientifically validated, rational and, most of all, negated any imputation of ignorance or stupidity.² Istrati considered himself a proponent of cremation, as he openly testified in his dissertation: *“Through fire, hygiene will not only have to make bodies of any kind disappear; of any earthly nature capable of decay and to bring in the evils of putrefaction; [...] the subject is of most utility for everybody. I think I have done my best to do my duty. The reward will be the day when my remains, purified by Cremation, will not be allowed to infect the living!”*³ According to Istrati, openness to cremation was in direct proportion to the amount of culture a person possessed, as such a person would realize the dangers posed by burial. Cremation was closely related to personal morality, since by choosing cremation over burial for deceased loved ones, one was saving them from being desecrated through the latter. Last but not least, Istrati perceived a connection between strong adherence to religious ideas and the rejection of cremation. However Istrati did not believe that religion and cremation were necessarily antithetical, for not the soul but only the body of the deceased was destroyed through cremation, which did not contradict religious dogma in any way. According to Istrati, cremation was a Janus with multiple faces, all of them bright, one following another in order to present its benefits in the most diverse and even unexpected ways: scientifically, emotionally, aesthetically and, last but not least, poetically. With this in mind, Istrati was optimistic, especially since the subject was increasingly being discussed in different milieux, from the everyday to the most prominent ones: family, scientific and academic, local authorities and medical and sanitation congresses. His definition established cremation as benevolent, rational, scientific, moral and, especially, in the spirit of a modern society).⁴

Since cremation was by then such a topical issue, Istrati’s thesis could hardly avoid it. But as the author himself highlighted, the thesis was also a piece of cremationist propaganda.⁵ In this respect, it is notable that Istrati did indeed pay considerable

¹ Ibid, 391.

² Ibid., 417–418.

³ Ibid., 5.

⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁵ Ibid., 123.

attention to cremation throughout his work.¹ The pages dedicated to the burning of the dead were part of his broader theory on the ways that a corpse might be managed. Therefore, references to cremation topic may be found throughout his work from the opening pages, in which the putrefaction of corpses is classified.² This section detailed the actual process of decay: in open air and in water, decomposition and usage of the body in industry, and putrefaction through burial. However, the process of putrefaction depends on various factors – some of which Istrati was the first Romanian to catalogue – such as the clothes in which the deceased was buried, and how these influence decomposition. But the great danger, according to Istrati, was burial in damp clay or loamy soil. This caused cracks which could easily allow, in many cemeteries, direct contact between the corpse and the atmosphere. Similarly important was the depth at which the corpse should be buried, and the weather conditions could facilitate or impede decomposition.

Therefore, in Istrati's opinion, cremation constituted man's direct action upon the body, and the passages of his dissertation which are dedicated to this idea can be considered as the most extensively worked case for cremation in Romania in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the same time Istrati produced an inventory of Romanian pro-cremation literature, which reveals something of their social context. So for instance Istrati clearly stated that, up to 1877, several articles on cremation had been published, in various newspapers, with the intention of informing the Romanian public about developments from abroad. It was in this context that the particularly early debut of cremationism in Romania was mentioned: Istrati identified 1857 as the starting point, albeit without references or explanatory notes.³ Istrati referred to the *Scientific Magazine* and the *Contemporary Magazine* as publications that had popularized the subject, but emphasized that, unfortunately in his view, Romanian medical and scientific journals had hardly even begun to discuss cremation yet.

Istrati also emphasized how some of the (few) lectures on cremation which were being delivered at this time had enjoyed great success, referring to the lecture he himself had delivered on 28th March 1877. Istrati declared that it was the duty of the press and of the Romanian scientists to keep the public informed about worldwide developments in the field, so that the clergy, the government and all Romanians might be convinced of the utility of cremation and use it themselves when needed.

Istrati's analysis must be understood in the context of his own opinions on, and investigations into, burial. Thus, his plea in favour of cremation was articulated through an exposure of the evils which he believed resulted from the prevailing custom of burial. In his opinion, the miasma emanating from cadavers was responsible for diseases such as cholera, typhoid fever, plague, diphtheria, dysentery and typhus, and he again cited the experiments conducted by Selmi of Mantua⁴ (Istrati, 1877, 90-91). The arguments he brings do not carry the utmost importance for this argumentation, as fundamental are the specific references to some realities existent in the Romanian territories of that time. For example, in exposing the danger from cadaverous miasma entering the walls of

¹ Ibid., 123–152.

² Ibid., 54–55.

³ Ibid., 150

⁴ Ibid., 90–91.

cemetery buildings, Istrati showed that this problem was also occurring in Bucharest. Moreover he asserted that the sub-zero temperatures which pertain to most of Romania for a large part of the year, prevented the decomposition from taking place under optimal conditions, thus encouraging the spread of miasma.¹ In order to demonstrate the superiority of cremation in this respect, Istrati enjoined his readers to imagine cutting a Bucharest cemetery in a vertical section. Three distinct layers of earth would be observed, a black one, the second of clayey sand and finally a layer composed of clay. According to Istrati the effluvia from the decomposition of corpses within the first two layers affected and penetrated the third level, thus contaminating the underground wells and springs.² This was extremely dangerous, since much of the population was supplied with drinking water from wells which were located near the cemeteries, and Istrati particularly cited the work of the English doctor John Snow, on the spreading of cholera through infected drinking water.

In a closely related vein are Istrati's comments concerning the capacity of the cemeteries in Bucharest to absorb the effluvia generated by the putrefaction of the corpses over longer periods of time. Istrati showed that a city such as Bucharest averaged around 5000 deaths annually which, taking into account the eight years required for complete decomposition, meant the level of contamination associated with 40000 corpses in a state of putrefaction at any one time. If the proposal to make coffins of cement were to be adopted, the period required for decomposition would be extended to fifteen years, meaning 75000 corpses in the process of putrefaction and the associated contamination of soil and of the water supply at any one time³.

Istrati also made reference to the history of cremation, as well as to its occurrence in his own time. He confirmed the existence of the practice from old times, dating from the Bronze Age, but more important to his argument was the fact that it had been used by almost all ancient peoples: by the Hebrews, Etruscans, Greeks, Romans, Dacians and others. The reference to cremation rites as practiced by the Dacians was especially important: Istrati cited Cezar Bolliac's research in this respect and, moreover, expressed a desire that the Dacian urns be a source of inspiration for his contemporaries. Istrati was careful to distinguish between the practice of cremation in ancient times, and in its modern form: in ancient times, the burning of the corpse in the open air left the transformation into ashes incomplete. Moreover, historically cremation had been expensive because of the quantity of firewood required. In Istrati's opinion, there were two reasons for the disappearance of the practice. The first was that "the wood was dear" – an incoherent argument, and the second was the spread of Christianity. Secondly, Istrati eloquently opined that human selfishness and entrepreneurship, together with the hope for resurrection, had led man to attempt to preserve his "little bones" in anticipation of the Resurrection, although in the meantime he surrendered voluntarily to worms and constituted a menace to public health.

Istrati perceived modern cremation as a natural step in human evolution, as utilitarian as burial had once appeared.⁴ However his paper clearly emphasized the

¹ Ibid., 99–100

² Ibid., 103

³ Ibid., 108.

⁴ Ibid, 128.

developments which had taken place in the second half of the nineteenth century; he therefore expressed his approval of developments in Italy, which he perceived as an exemplar for modern cremation. In support of this theme he enlisted the main Italian cremationists of the time, beginning with the writings of Professor Coletti, published in 1857 and considered to be the first real Italian cremationist propaganda.¹ Istrati also wrote in general terms about the first cremation performed in Italy, even illustrating it with a drawing of the crematorium.² Istrati also discussed the extent of cremation in Italy, with particular reference to the Milanese Cremation Society, whose objectives he presented as a template for the Romanian cremationists.³

In Istrati's view the Italian model was transferable to Romania, especially since both countries possessed a strong religious and artistic tradition. Cremation-related developments in England were also noted, the role played by the surgeon Henry Thompson receiving particular mention, and also those in France (here a certain lagging behind was emphasized, but also some achievements – Victor Hugo was presented as a cremationist), in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, in the United States and in Austria. The spread of cremation ideas in Tsarist Russia was also mentioned. According to Istrati the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 represented a milestone in the evolution of modern cremation, since the danger posed by large numbers of accumulated corpses, the consequence of military conflict, was all too obvious.

Istrati provides some highly eloquent commentary on the relationship between religion and cremation, which arose for two reasons: firstly, Istrati's own involvement in the cremation-related disputes of his time and secondly the fact that this was the first attempt to implement, by means of argument, a model that opposed traditional religious practices.

Istrati's main argument with regard to the agreement between religion and cremation focused upon the assumption that the only role of Christianity was to protect the dead from profanation, which infringed upon popular morality. If, in his opinion, the main quality of Christianity was that it did not turn the body into a superstitious cult, cremation could perfectly fulfil this purpose. Thus, only by burning the corpses, the risk of turning the cemeteries into markets would disappear, and the remains of the dead would be treated responsibly. Naively, Istrati expressed his hope that the Romanian clergy would be open to the idea of cremation: "I think that the Romanian clergy, who have never parted with the Jewish hydra, nor the Inquisitional tyranny, who have always been ruling on the vital issues of our country, will rise to the challenge and certainly he will agree this time to believe that the urn is a more poetic symbol than the grave and the mausoleum. Religion should be above all a poem."⁴

More important than this rhetoric were Istrati's concrete proposals, intended to further not only the introduction of cremation into the Romanian territories, but its full implementation as a mainstream practice. He therefore believed that cremation was only necessary in the big cities, highlighting the fact that he had designed a number of small furnaces to be built to the right hand side of rural churches (the left side would use the

¹ Ibid., 129.

² Ibid., 144.

³ Ibid., 147.

⁴ Ibid., 148.

gas produced in the furnace to light schools and local authority offices). Istrati urged scientists and the people to provide suggestions to the government for how his idea might be implemented. He did not see the cremation as a practical alternative for rural areas, because the cost of building a crematorium would be too high, and the relatively low death rate would affect profitability. Cremation was only a solution for rural areas in exceptional conditions of epidemic disease, when mobile cremation devices, which were cheap to manufacture, would have been applicable. However this latter was not Istrati's own original idea, since it was also being circulated in other European countries.

Istrati found another argument in support of the dissemination of cremation in Romania, while attempting to counter the arguments brought by opponents that it was too costly. After specifying the modern cremation methods proposed by Brunetti and Thompson, he asserted that the price would be lower in Romania than in other countries, because oil was cheaper – only 2 or 3 francs, compared to the 6 or 7 francs that it cost abroad).¹

Istrati believed that cremation should be a personal choice, with the exception of the corpses of unidentified persons or, as he put it, those for whom society has no control upon (suicide for instance), and who had not expressed their choice. His other proposals dealt with the retention of ashes in columbaria for a specified number of years. Istrati advanced a proposal for the ashes to be spread in various localities, every decade, on which occasion the divine service was to be said, except in cases of complaint. If the family of the deceased wished, the ashes could be kept in an urn at home. Suggestions included cultivating flowers in the urns, and even using the ashes to make a bust of the deceased. This solution, although naïve, appeared valid to him, especially since it seemed to him that the remains of the dead would thus be kept with a dignity similar to that of the cemetery.²

In order to fully understand Istrati's perspective on cremation, we should also note the wider context of the War of Independence. Realizing that the war presented an opportunity to further the cremationist message, he advanced the idea of cremating the bodies of the soldiers killed on the front, and using their ashes as the foundation of a memorial that would be built in central Bucharest. Istrati considered the clean dignity of cremation, in contrast to the desecrations of putrefaction and rats, as a means of repaying the debt of honour to those who had died for their country.

Istrati concluded on an optimistic note, confident that in the future cremation would be successfully implemented in Romania: "I am convinced *that cremation, introduced in our country, will be the most obvious proof of the morality Romanians have and of the high degree of culture they have reached. I cannot believe that this noble people, which has the most liberal institutions in Europe, would not assert, on this occasion as well, its lofty spirit in order to have access to whatever can lead it to a happy future.*"³ Regrettably, Istrati's absolute confidence in the triumph of the cremationist cause in Romania was, and remains, far from being fulfilled.

¹ Ibid., 148

² Ibid., 150–151.

³ Ibid., 152.

After World War I,¹ the founding of the *Nirvana* society in 1923 (later renamed *Cenușa*) marked the real birth of the cremationist movement in Romania. With the help of Bucharest City Hall, the *Cenușa* society managed to build a crematorium bearing the same name, which opened on January 26, 1928. Thus, Romania was the first of the Balkan states and the first among its neighbouring countries to open a crematorium. At the same time, Romania was the first Orthodox country in the world where such a building was opened because of efforts from within society. The Soviet example, where the first crematorium was inaugurated in Moscow in 1927, is not comparable as in the Soviet case the introduction of cremation was a “top-down” process representing a deliberate imposition of Soviet power to remove certain behaviours considered as traditional and retrogressive, and also to undermine the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The opening of the Romanian crematorium provoked a vehement rejection by the Romanian Orthodox Church which, after two synods in 1928 and 1933, prohibited any Christian burial for those who chose cremation (a decision which is still valid). On the other hand, following the introduction of regulations in the interwar period, cremation has gained an equal status with burial (also valid today).

The number of cremations at the *Cenușa* Crematorium increased during the interwar period. According to *Flacăra Sacră*, the Romanian cremationist magazine, from 1928 to 1934 84% of those cremated were Romanian Orthodox believers and some of the cremation costs were covered by the Bucharest City Hall. Also, despite the interdictions of the Romanian Orthodox Church upon cremation, a religious service was still performed for 75% of the cremation cases.

Another key moment in the development of the Romanian cremationist movement was the publication of the *Flacăra Sacră* magazine which represented the views of Romanian cremationists. Through this magazine they tried to popularize cremation and to defend it from criticism from the Orthodox perspective. It is important to understand here that the interwar Romanian cremationists repeatedly declared themselves as Orthodox Christians who did not wish to overthrow traditions or national identity.

The “Foreword”² from the first issue of *Flacăra Sacră*, published in December 1934, explained the aims and the novelty represented by the publication. The practical sides and the need for cremation in the Romanian territory were emphasized: “*The publication of the first issue of Flacăra Sacră marks the beginning of a new ideological action in our country, of what cremation is, of getting to know its goals and the reasons that makes it the most perfect means of dissolution of the dead human matter, without any involvement or any influence on religious beliefs*” (Cuvânt Înainte, 1934, 1). The publication was also intended as a forum to debate the practice of cremation. The support given to the practice was based on six reasons, summarizing older and newer ideas:

1. *“the idea of cremation and its implementation has supporters from all social strata and categories, without any distinction;*
2. *because it better reconciles the superior man’s ethical and aesthetic sense;*
3. *because it enhances the grandeur of the cult of the dead;*
4. *because it raises the level of religious mysticism, drawing the*

¹ Rotar, *Eternitate prin cenușă*, 109–359.

² “Cuvânt Înainte”, *Flacăra Sacră* 1 (1934), 1–2..

earthlings' attention to the inward and spiritual life, definitely showing that the body is nothing but a handful of ashes and only the soul is the survivor;

5. *because it satisfies in an ideal way, the "must do" requirements of hygiene;*

6. *because it occasions great economic and social advantages".*¹

However, a special feature of the cremation movement was highlighted, namely that "the existence of *cremation* and its evolution is independent of religious or political trends, having no connection with any religion or political party". The ultimate goal highlighted the path of a future struggle, given the Romanian Orthodox Church's opposition: we aim for "*cremation to be considered equal, as utility and purpose, to inhumation, to enjoy without restriction the performance of the entire religious ceremony.*"²

Table 1. The number of cremations done at Cenușa Crematorium between 1928 and 1947³

Year	Number
1928	262
1929	266
1930	297
1931	332
1932	470
1933	602
1934	580
1935	480
1936	364
1937	581
1938	230
1939	216
1940	243
1941	198
1942	221
1943	213
1944	440
1945	504
1946	Unknown
1947	552

¹ Ibid, 2.

² Ibid.

³ Rotar, *Eternitate prin cenușă*, 240.

However, in 1948, due to the introduction of the laws governing nationalization, the *Cenușa* society was dissolved and the Crematorium became the property of Bucharest City Hall. This meant not just the ending of the Romanian cremationist movement, but also the interruption of links with the International Cremation Federation (the body governing the global cremationist movement founded in 1938 after a congress in London).

During the communist period,¹ despite the proclaimed atheist character of the Romanian regime, no new crematoria were built. An important influence seems to have been the degree of tacit acceptance by the communist authorities of the Romanian Orthodox Church's position on cremation, and in this period the Romanian Orthodox Church was the only functioning religious body. It was only in the 1980s that the rate of cremation in Romania began to increase significantly, at one point reaching a historical peak of 1,000 cremations/year.

It was not until 1994 that the second crematorium in Romania, designed years before, in 1988, was inaugurated at Vitan Bârzești. In 2002, the *Cenușa* Crematorium was closed, the official reason being pollution, but the building will be turned into a museum.

Cremation in today's Romania

Statistics		
Country	No. of crematoria	% of Deaths
Japan	1545	99.94
USA (2009)	2113	40.62
Switzerland	28	85.18
Czech Republic	27	80.87
Sweden	66	76.86
UK	260	73.15
Hungary (2004)	12	36.25
Bulgaria (2007)	1	5.08
Serbia	2	-
Romania	1	0.33

Table 2. Cremation's proportion worldwide (selective)²

2008	2009	2010
778	787	852

Table 3. Number of cremations at Vitan-Bârzești crematorium, 1994-2010³

¹ Ibid., 359–489.

² "International Cremation Statistics – Miscellaneous Listing", *Pharos* 4 (2010), 24–40.

³ Rotar, 2011, 490–493.

Cremation, the Romanian Orthodox Church and post-communist Romanian society

According to the 2002 census, over 86% of Romania's population is of Orthodox confession.¹ As such, the Romanian Orthodox Church is fundamental in shaping the attitudes of the majority of the Romanian population in religious matters, and thus it is important to understand its position on cremation.

Some Romanian researchers identify a resurgence in and saturation of the religious in Romanian society in the last two decades.² However, this situation is a paradoxical one given that the key ideal of contemporary Romanian society is modernization. The cause of this resurgence lies in the rise of religious practice in Romanian society following the collapse of communism in 1989, a regime which had promoted atheism. However, the Romanian communist regime only marginalized the Romanian Orthodox Church rather than destroying it. Consequently, today there are some elements that powerfully support the position of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The most important of these elements, vigorously invoked by its representatives, is the symbiosis between Church, Orthodoxy and the Romanian nation.³ The argument is constantly conveyed to the Romanian public and is accepted by part of it. Thus, when debate arises about secularization or any other trends in Romanian society which do not please the Romanian Orthodox Church (such as the issue of homosexuality, for instance), it reacts as if it represents Romanian attitudes. Its stance is informed by the assumption that being Romanian means, first and foremost, to be Orthodox, as Gabriel Andreescu emphasized (as cited in Stan & Turcescu, 2010). However, the case is different for cremation because, as we have already mentioned, the practice has had a legal status equal with the practice of burial since the interwar period. Thus, criticism by the Romanian Orthodox Church towards cremation as a practice and its followers has only a limited effect but it is still important given the influence of the Orthodox Church on contemporary Romanian society and specifically regarding the possibility of opening new crematoria as a solution for the lack of burial places in urban space.

The rejection of cremation by the Romanian Orthodox Church began in the second half of the 19th century. However, opposition reached its peak in the interwar period when the *Cenușa* Crematorium was opened in Bucharest in 1928. Opposition was not so intense at the beginning of the Second World War and only sporadic during the communist period. After 1990, as the atheist propaganda disappeared and the religious element (mainly Orthodox) was revitalized, the anti-cremationist Orthodox position was restated.

The rejection of cremation by the Romanian Orthodox Church is based on simple ideas. However, as acknowledged by some of the Romanian Orthodox Church representatives since the interwar period, there is no dogmatic or canonical argument to

¹ Recensământul, "Recensământul populației" (2002), <http://recensamant.referinte.transindex.ro/?pg=8>

² Sandu Frunză, Mihaela Frunză. "Etică, superstiție și laicizarea spațiului public" (Ethics Superstitions and the Secularization of Public Space), *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 23 (2009), 13–35.

³ Iuliana Conovici, *Ortodoxia în România post comunistă. Reconstrucția unei identități publice*. (Orthodoxy in Post-communist Romania. Reconstruction of a public identity). (Cluj Napoca: Eikon, 2009).

reject cremation.¹ Therefore, the most important and most frequently argued reason for rejecting cremation in the Orthodox view is that of tradition based on the burial of Christ. In addition to this, there are others drawn from the Church's own interpretation of Christian teachings, i.e. the body is the shelter of the soul (the soul being a small part of the Holy Spirit) and the body-soul unity requires that, at least from a moral point of view, the Orthodox Christian shows respect for the body, thus accepting inhumation at the expense of incineration. The question of resurrection would also be affected if Christians chose cremation. Moreover, we should not forget that in the teachings of the Romanian Orthodox Church the connections between the living and the dead are much stronger than in other denominations. That is why after death a series of memorial services for the deceased are organized, repeated at regular intervals (3 days, 9 days, 40 days, 3 months, six months, 9 months, 1 year and 7 years).² Consequently, such a connection leads to a particular perception of the corpse in relation to burial in Orthodox Christianity. Along with these elements, the particular significance of graveyards for Romanian spirituality is also invoked. Incineration has also been argued to be a foreign practice for Romania, though this point has undergone some changes. The strongest argument here is that of calling cremation a pagan practice. However, this ignores the fact that many Christian beliefs accept cremation (including the Roman Catholic Church, for example), which makes this argument less valid. Also, the identification of cremation with freemasonry was a central argument against burning corpses assumed by Orthodoxy until the outbreak of the Second World War. After 1989, incineration was identified as being an atheistic and communist-inspired practice in Romanian Orthodox anti-cremationist discourse. The explanation given for this was that many of the civil funerals which began to be organized in the communist era resulted in incineration. However, statistically, the number of cremations declined after the installation of communism in Romania, and civil funerals were preferred only by a small minority of Romanian communists. More recently, secularization, seen as a direct threat to Romanian Orthodoxy, is interpreted by the Church as being the main process promoting cremation.

Additionally, the cult of relics is very strong among Orthodox Christians in Romania. Thus, cremation as a practice would affect their entire system of representing death. For example, when Saint Andrew's relics were brought to Bucharest in October 2011, more than 100,000 pilgrims came to worship them over five days, with 200 Orthodox priests serving continuously.³

However, although in Romania personal freedom, the right of association and opinion is guaranteed by law, the Romanian Orthodox Church has its own interpretations of them. Thus, one of the most important Romanian Orthodox theologians of today, Bartolomeu Anania⁴ (as cited in Conovici), said in an article that

¹ I. Popescu-Mălăiești, *Ardem sau îngropăm morții?* (Burial or Cremation?) (Bucharest: România Mare, 1932).

² Eugen Drăgoi, *Înmormântarea și pomenile după morți* (Funeral and Charity for Dead) (4th ed.) (Galați: Edit. Episcopiei Dunării de Jos, 2002).

³ *Peste 100000 de pelerini s-au închinat la moaște de sfântul Dimitrie* (Over 100000 pilgrims venerated the relics). Retrieved October 30, 2011 from <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/peste-100-000-de-pelerini-s-au-inchinat-la-moaste-de-sfantul-dimitrie-8912793/>

⁴ Iuliana Conovici, "Biserica Ortodoxă Română în postcomunism – între stat și democrație –. (Romanian Orthodox Church during the Post-communism – between State and Democracy). In *Religia în democrație. O dilema a mordernității*, ed. C. Ungureanu, (Iași: Polirom, 2011): 379–399.

theological freedom should be different from the moral, individual or ontological one, being the ultimate type of freedom. Therefore, theological freedom would mean a type of relational freedom (oriented essentially to God and to doing good deeds towards other people), which is gradually conquered through prayer and asceticism. Thus, according to Bartolomeu Anania, absolute freedom is reached through unification with the Divine which is threatened by nothing and which does not exercise any threat.

The relations between the Romanian state and the Romanian Orthodox Church are complex. Given that Orthodoxy is the main confession of Romanians, the Romanian state, secular by definition, exhibits a “favourable” neutrality towards this faith compared to others. On the other hand, the Romanian Orthodox Church has a “friendly” neutrality towards the state.¹ Thus, a series of repetitive and conciliatory discourses are strongly reiterated especially during elections. However, in some cases after 1989 the state overruled the adversity of the Romanian Orthodox Church to some issues, accepting homosexuality and legalizing abortion.²

According to Orthodoxy, personal freedoms and rights are also located in sin. Consistent with such an interpretation it is held that there cannot be rights and freedoms that would be translated as a person’s right or freedom to sin.³ This makes any kind of “freedom” assumed at a personal or collective level, but indicating sin (such as homosexuality or, in this case, incineration) condemnable. Consequently, in the Orthodox view, the freedom of choosing incineration cannot be held by a Christian, and even if they request to be cremated after death, their family should refuse such a wish.⁴

Although cremation could be a solution to the problems of the Romanian funeral system, because of the hegemony of the Orthodox view of death and thus the preference for burial, for a part of Romanian society the condemnation of cremation by the Church is accepted.

Attitudes towards cremation in Romanian society

Perhaps the most serious problem the Romanian funeral system faces today is the crisis of urban burial grounds. This crisis has been largely reported in Romanian society after 1990. Thus, the lack of grave sites in big cities has been emphasized, but also the fact that one of the most expensive burial sites in Romania is Bellu Cemetery in Bucharest, where a burial plot costs as much as a monthly pension, and also the conflict between the need for land for cemeteries and land for housing. Other aspects of this issue emphasized by the media were the origins and activities of the cemetery mafia, the fact that the economy of burial sites generates huge non-taxable profits, and other problems such as overcrowding in cemeteries which fails to respect the minimum criteria for hygiene and aesthetics. Here are some examples of this kind reported by the media.

¹ Ibid.

² Lavinia Stan, Lucian Turcescu, *Religie și politică în România postcomunistă* (Religion and Politics in post-communist Romania). (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2010).

³ Conovici, 2011.

⁴ Gabriel Militaru, *Incinerarea morților între dorința muribundului și învățătura Bisericii* (Cremation between one’s Wish and the Teaching of the Church). Retrieved 29 September 2010 from <http://prgabriel.wordpress.com/?s=incinerarea>

1. In 2005, the *Adevărul* newspaper published an article about the fact that in Bucharest only 5,000 grave sites were available but over 15,000 requests had been registered at the Cemeteries and Human Crematoria Administration.¹

2. In Pitești, the local media pointed out that in 2007 the municipality decided that a grave site could only be leased if the applicant could present proof of dying. Priority was given to the patients who had leukaemia, although the City Hall assured the population that no one would remain unburied.²

3. The appearance, in Craiova, of the “agrocemetery”, i.e. the situation in which some owners of agricultural land located near cemeteries sold their land at high prices, thus encouraging speculation.³

4. Botoșani – in early 2007 the media announced that the city had places for grave sites for only another 6 months and proposed alternative solutions including burial in cemeteries belonging to adjacent cities or building ossuaries.⁴

5. Cluj Napoca (the most important town in Transylvania) – in 2010 there was a rumour that a grave site could cost up to 8000 RON (about US\$2500)⁵; also, in a 2010 City Council meeting, the former mayor Sorin Apostu argued the need for a crematorium.

The examples could continue with situations from Iași, Oradea, Sibiu, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Constanța, Arad, etc.

All these events suggest that cremation could be a viable solution to solve this crisis. Despite this, the Romanian media after 1989 has rarely emphasized this possibility, in most cases just highlighting the crisis but not offering any solutions. In addition, the delay in adopting the Law of Cemeteries, which has been discussed since 2003, also demonstrates the perpetuation of a negative state.

It should be noted that in Romania there has been no real debate regarding cremation after 1989.

In 2007 Romania became member of the European Union and the harmonization of Romanian legislation on funerals with European law was compulsory (eg. the ban on funeral processions in the streets, the interdiction against keeping the dead in their houses before burial (replaced by using chapels at the cemeteries), and the requirement to follow strict regulations for burials and cemeteries).⁶

¹ “Criza de locuri de veci în Capitală” (Crisis of the Burial Grounds in Bucharest), *Adevărul* 1244 (2005): 5.

² *Locurile de veci concesionate doar cu dovada de muribund* (Grave Sites Leased only with Proof of Dying). Retrieved 23 September 2011, from <http://stiri.acasa.ro/social/locuri-de-veci-concesionate-doar-cu-dovada-de-muribund-93476.html>.

³ Ion Voinea, “Oltenii au descoperit agrocimitirul” (Romanians in Oltenia have discovered the agrocemetery), *Național* 1700 (2002): 2.

⁴ R. Sauciuc R, “Criza de locuri în cimitire” (Crisis of the Burial Grounds), *Evenimentul de Botoșani*, Retrieved September 2008 from http://www.evenimentuldebotosani.ro/viewArticol.php?articol_id=27623&_showc=1.

⁵ A. Păcurar, De azi e mai scump să mori în Cluj (As of today it is more expensive to die in Cluj). Retrieved April 21, 2010 from, <http://www.citynews.ro/cluj/din-oras-10/de-astazi-este-mai-scamp-sa-mori-la-cluj-75357>.

⁶ *UE interzice bocitoarele și plimbatul mortului cu căruța* (European Union prohibits walking dead howler), Retrieved September 23 2011, from <http://www.ziare.com/social/capitala/ue->

However, these regulations are currently rarely respected and have generally not been imposed over traditional practices, many of which are influenced by the teachings of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

The contestation of cremation in contemporary Romania has taken place under the direct influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church's position. The situation is similar to the case in Greece,¹ but with a clear difference: in Romania, cremation has had an equal status from a legal point of view with burial since the interwar period, but in Greece this happened only recently.

Dargentas analyzed reactions in the Greek press over this issue, over a thirteen year period (1987–2000) in order to outline the discourses deployed by the key actors involved.² Of the anti-cremation arguments Dargentas identified, the most significant were: the opposition of religious institutions, particularly the invoking of religious texts against cremation; tradition and religious identity; the importance of burial for the dead soul; Greek identity; the Church and its enemies; and the importance of burial for the deceased's family. The pro-cremation arguments include: the issue of the lack of space; the religious position's relativity, freedom of conscience; the legislative and democratic dimension; issues related to hygiene and pollution; and society's modernization. Other arguments which are more rarely used include: the example of other countries practicing cremation; the social need for cremation; the importance of cremation for the "being" of the deceased; theological arguments; examples of famous people who were cremated; and the cost of burial. The overall conservative and liberal attitudes towards cremation in Greece are important in contemporary debates. These attitudes towards cremation can be found in Romania too.

The Serbian case is also very relevant because in this country Orthodoxy is also the religion of the majority of people. Aleksandra Pavicevic³ has outlined the history of cremation in Yugoslavia and Serbia revealing a number of similarities with Romania, particularly because of their majority Orthodoxy status. However, the key contrast between the two is the relatively short duration, for Romania, and long time-scale for Serbia, regarding the emergence of support for cremation and the date of crematoria opening (1923/1928 in Romania and 1904/1964 in Serbia). Again the position adopted by the Serbian Orthodox Church with regard to cremation is significant. The Serbian Orthodox Church adopted a process of selective permission for celebrating religious services for the cremated, but one in which the right to a religious service was available only in cases where the family opts for this practice and not where individuals choose cremation themselves⁴ (Pavicevic, 2006).

The contesting of cremation in Romania over the last two decades has been varied but has been dominated by institutions and individuals able to impose their views,

interzice-bocitoarele-si-plimbatul-mortului-in-caruta-974721

¹ Madglani Dargentas, *Le rapport à la mort et l'incinération: représentations sociales, pratiques et appartenances religieuses. Une étude auprès d'Orthodoxes et de Catholiques Grecs*, Thèse sous la direction de Denise Jodelet en psychologie sociale. (Paris: EHESS / LPS, 2005); Douglas J. Davies, *Theology of Death*. (London–NewYork: Continuum, 2008), 130–136.

² Dargentas, 2005.

³ Aleksandra Pavicevic, "Cremation as an Urban Phenomenon of the New Age: from Ideology and Ecology: the Serbian case", in *Ethologica Balkanica* 10 (2006): 251–262.

⁴ Ibid.

most notably those associated with the Romanian Orthodox Church. At the top of this hierarchy the Patriarch Teoctist, in his last sermon delivered on the night of the Resurrection in 2007, addressed 3,000 believers gathered at the Palace of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Bucharest in a speech which was also broadcast by radio and television. Patriarch Teoctist urged those of Romanian Orthodox faith to educate their children in the Christian spirit, and emphasized that young people should be very careful regarding the worship of the body. In this respect, the patriarch openly criticized those who, after death, treat their bodies disrespectfully: “*It’s a great sin to disrespect your body and give it to the crematorium to be burned.*”¹

Other representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church have openly adopted a vehement criticism of cremation in recent years in Romania. For example, Nicolae Necula, Professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest, considered cremation to be “*the grossest defiance and disregard*” of the cult of the deceased.² Necula also fiercely criticized former senator Gheorghe Dumitrașcu for his support for cremation.

A number of priests³ (some of whom are also involved in the Romanian academic system) have also expressed their disapproval towards cremation, speaking on behalf of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

The first notable reaction against cremation after 1989 was an article published in the *România Liberă* newspaper in 1994 which denounced the presence of an Orthodox priest performing religious services at *Cenușa Crematorium*⁴. In this case, several representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church and some public personalities criticized both that particular case and cremation in general. Following this scandal, the Patriarchate issued a statement in which it noted that any religious service for cremated people was prohibited, and also opened an investigation⁵.

What is important throughout this contestation of cremation after 1989 under the auspices of the Romanian Orthodox Church is that its representatives or allies did not offer solutions to the burial crisis, although many cemeteries in Romania are owned by other denominations and Orthodox parishes as well.

¹ Teoctist *i-a îndemnat pe tineri să nu-și disprețuiască trupul* (Teoctist urged the youth not to despise their bodies). Retrieved April 10 from

http://www.ziare.com/Teoctist_i_a_indemnat_pe_tineri_sa_nu_si_disprețuiasca_trupul-80077.html.

² Nicolae D. Necula, *Tradiție și înnoire în Slujirea Liturgică* (Tradition and innovation in Church Ministry) (Galați: Editura Episcopiei Dunării de Jos, 1996), 266–269.

³ Vasile Gordon, “Scrisoare catehetică deschisă către enoriași” (Open Letter Catechetical to Parishioners), *Buletinul Parohiei Sf. Ilie Gorgani. Foaie pentru întărire sufletească, atitudini și comunicări*, X 5 79 (2008), 1–2; A. Stanciu, “Înhumare sau incinerare” (Burial or Cremation), *Apostolat în Țara Făgărașului. Publicație lunară editată de Protopopiatul Ortodox Făgăraș* 49 (2009), 8–9; I. Ionescu, “Doi termeni liturgici care se cer corecți” (Two liturgical terms that require correction) *Glasul Bisericii* 5–7 (1994), 93–9; Alexandru Ulea, “Incinerarea desconsideră demnitatea trupului” (Cremation disdains the dignity of the body). *Ziarul Lumina*. Retrieved August 2011 from <http://www.ziarullumina.ro/articole/1767;0;51577;0;Incinerarea-desconsidera-demnitatea-trupului.html>; Radu Petre Mureșan, “Anunțul morții și practicile funerare în societatea românească după 1990” (The announcement of death and burial practices in Romanian society after 1990) *Studia Universitatis Babeș Bolyai, Theologia Orthodoxa*, 56 (2011).

⁴ “Mântuirea prin Siemens Martin” (Redemption through Siemens Martin), *România Liberă* 1220 (1994): 2.

⁵ “Ecou la Patriarhie. Biserica Ortodoxă Română nu admite incinerarea” [Echo at the Patriarchy. Romanian Orthodox Church rejects Cremation], *România Liberă*, 1225 (1994), 4.

Also, it is significant that despite the prohibition of any religious service by the Romanian Orthodox Church for its believers who opt for cremation, Orthodox priests themselves do not respect this decision. For example, the obituaries in the local press announcing incinerations at Vitan Bârzești Crematorium show that the majority benefit from a religious service. However, the Orthodox priests who do this prefer not to perform the religious service in the Chapel of Vitan Bârzești Crematorium, but in other Orthodox churches in Bucharest.

Also, it is significant that between 2002-2004 the Director of the Administration of Crematoria and Cemeteries in Bucharest was a priest named Radu Dumitru¹ - an Orthodox priest was managing the crematoria in Bucharest.

However, cremation is currently more expensive than burial in Romania, if the deceased is not from Bucharest, as the cost of transporting the dead body to the Vitan Bârzești Crematorium is high. For this reason, some undertakers from Transylvania prefer to carry out incineration at Hungarian crematoria due to lower costs.

Nevertheless, it must be said that there are very few voices in contemporary Romania that see cremation as a solution to solving the problems of the Romanian funeral system. Perhaps the most significant voice in this field is the *Amurg* Romanian Cremation Association founded in 2010, which proclaims itself as the heir to the interwar cremationist movement and which openly campaigns for the support and development of cremation in Romania². The main argument they put forward is the legality of incineration in Romania and especially the freedom of choice. However, this association is small and it is hard to believe that it will have a major impact.

Other voices supporting cremation are sporadic and are relatively ineffective. In August 2011 the media announced that in Oșorhei, near the town of Oradea, the third crematorium in Romania would be opened as a private venture.³ However, due to irregularities, the implementation of this project was abandoned for a while. The most significant recent development is the joint venture by the City Council of Cluj Napoca (the most important town in Transylvania) with a private company RDK Cremation to build a crematorium in the Mănăștur cemetery.⁴ This action was criticized by the local

¹ M. Munteanu, V. Albușescu, Preot, director ACCU, student, membru PSD, consilier, karatist și președinte de fundație (Priest, Director of ACCU, Member of PSD, Councillor, Karate fighter and President of Foundation) *Gardianul*, Retrieved October 12, 2005 from <http://www.gardianul.ro/index.php?pag=nw&id=1576>.

² Amurg (2011). *Amurg. Romanian Cremation Association*. Retrieved September 23 2011, from www.incinerareamurg.ro

³ A. Tic. *Războiul cenușii: Construcția unui crematoriu uman în Oșorhei îi revoltă pe localnici* (War Ashes: The construction of crematorium revolts the people) Retrieved August 25, 2011 from http://www.oradea-online.ro/Razboiul+cenusii%3A+Constructia+unui+crematoriu+uman+in+Osoarei+ii_15570.html

⁴ Alexandra Păcurar, I. Oros, Clujul va avea crematoriu. Biserica nu este de acord. (The city of Cluj will have a crematorium. Church rejects this project) Retrieved November 15, 2011 from <http://www.citynews.ro/cluj/eveniment-29/clujul-va-avea-crematoriu-biserica-nu-e-de-acord-204306> ; C. Simina, Azi îți faci SRL, mâine te asociezi cu Primăria. Cazul firmei care vrea să ridice un crematoriu uman la Cluj (Today you organize a company, tomorrow you associate with the City Hall. The company which will build a crematorium in Cluj) , *Ora de Cluj*. Retrieved October 21, 2011 from <http://www.oradecluj.ro/azi-iti-faci-srl-maine-te-asociezi-cu-primaria-cazul-firmei-care-vrea-sa-ridice-un-crematoriu-uman-la-cluj/actualitate/2011/10/18/>

and central press and by the hierarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The most vehement Orthodox opposition was expressed by the Metropolitan of Cluj, Andrei Andreicuț, who in press releases and other events took a firm stand against building this crematorium.¹ The Romanian press took his statements literally, observing there were very few voices from within civil society to criticize his views. However, in both the Oradea and Cluj Napoca crematoria projects ecological reasons were invoked against their construction. In Oradea it was argued that the crematorium would have been located less than 200 meters from housing and in Cluj Napoca the fact that the crematorium would be built in the city centre posed a danger for the population.² These criticisms originated from journalists and even ordinary citizens.

Thus the opposition to RDK Cremation has metamorphosed into anti-cremationist action, evidenced by the involvement of more Orthodox priests in the meeting held on 11th January 2012, and also by the memo submitted to Cluj Local Council by Dan Hognoni, the vicar of the Orthodox Parish of Mănăstur. This memo was packed with Orthodox anti-cremationist clichés.³ Moreover, the report on the basis of which Cluj Napoca City Council finally cancelled the contract with RDK Cremation Association was essentially motivated not by concerns about pollution, but by Orthodox morals and values.⁴ From this perspective it was again an unbalanced dispute, in which the opponents received support from local politicians, the Orthodox Metropolitan Church of Cluj, plus various associations, while, on the other side, there was only *Amurg. Romanian Cremation Association*. *Amurg* publicly declared its support for RDK Cremation, and also attempted to attract international support, but without any impact on the Cluj authorities. Anyhow, it is clear that the contract with RDK was revoked under the pressure of street protests, and politicians from Cluj who preferred not to risk electoral capital in a year of local and general elections, rather than on any scientific basis. However the most serious consequence of this episode seems to be that Cluj Napoca has become forbidden territory for cremationists, this according to the Interim Mayor Radu Moisin,⁵ with the promoters of the RDK project facing significant attacks from parts of the local mass media. In this way, the RDK shareholders and their proposals have been compared to Miklós Horthy, Joseph Mengele and even Auschwitz.⁶

¹ Mitropolitul Andrei Andreicuț (The Metropolitan Andrei Andreicuț). Retrieved October 29, 2011 from <http://www.ziarulfaclia.ro/mitropolitul-andrei-andreicut-biserica-ortodoxa-nu-a-fost-niciodata-de-acord-cu-incinerarea-defunctilor>

² L. Silea, Șocant. Crematoriu uman în mijlocul Clujului (Shocking: Crematorium in the Center of Cluj), *Ziua de Cluj*. Retrieved November 2011 from <http://ziuadeclj.realitatea.net/administratie/socant-crematoriu-uman-in-mijlocul-clujului--77801.html>

³ Memoriu, <http://adormireamaiciidomnului.wordpress.com/2012/01/17/memoriu-catre-primarie-al-parohiei-adormirea-maicii-domnului> accessed January 20, 2012.

⁴ Primăria (2011), <http://www.primariaclužnapoca.ro/userfiles/files/PH-uri%2019%20ianuarie%202012/1.PDF> accessed January 18, 2012.

⁵ G. Dragotă, “Crematoriu uman nu se mai construiește la Cluj” (Crematorium no longer built in Cluj), *Monitorul de Cluj*, 19 ianuarie 2012, <http://www.monitorulcj.ro/politica-administratie/10189-crematoriul-uman-nu-se-mai-construiete-in-mantur> accessed January 20, 2012.

⁶ R. Bogdan, “Crematoriu pentru ticăloși” (Crematorium for rogues) (<http://ziuadeclj.realitatea.net/editorial/crematoriu-pentru-ticalosi--81590.html>) accessed January 20, 2012; Ionut Țene, “De ce

In August 2012, the media announced that the first Transylvanian crematorium was opened in Oradea. It is about a private crematorium, owned by Phoenix Cremation Services. Few months before, the company has failed to open a crematorium in Oșorhei. This time, Dorin Gherghev, the owner of the company, has used a trick by installing an incinerator in a rented hall of the Oradea industrial area. By using this trick, the company avoided the environmental authorization as the incinerator was installed in the industrial part of the city.¹ Therefore, the project requires only the permission from the Oradea County Department of Public Health. Nevertheless, the Environmental Guard of Oradea rejected this idea.

On the other hand, the Oradea City Hall representatives complain that they found out about this project from the media. Therefore, the City Hall noticed that the Phoenix Cremation Services Company did not submit any application for changing the warehouse's purpose and committed an offence through this practice (the company was fined and ordered to obey the law).² Gherghev confessed that he invested 500,000 euros by purchasing two new generation incinerators from the Swedish company TABO. Also, Gherghev stated that the religious services will be performed by Reformed or Catholic priests, while the Orthodox rejected the incineration.³

In fact, we are not talking about the presence of a crematorium in Oradea, but rather the operation of an incinerator. A Crematorium requires a special building with several spaces that are equipped for cremation and other related services (columbarium, ceremony hall, administrative and technical offices, and so on). However, in Oradea, an innovation took place: the crematorium was reduced to a space for the operation of an incinerator. Given the attitude of a large section of the Romanian population against the cremation, such a fact can also be a disservice to the idea of burning the dead.

On the other hand, in Cluj Napoca, after the RDK Cremation scandal, the new mayor Emil Boc announced that the issue of opening a human crematorium in the city is permanently closed.⁴

As a consequence of the last events, recently the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church reconfirmed the rejection of cremation, as the practice of the disposal of the bodies of Orthodox believers⁵.

nu sunt de acord cu crematoriul” <http://www.napocanews.ro/2012/01/de-ce-nu-sunt-de-acord-cu-crematoriul-%E2%80%9Ehorthyist-din-cartierul-manastur.html>.

¹ C. Boanchiș, “Afacere: Bani din cenușă. Cel mai modern crematoriu a fost deschis la Oradea”, (Business: money from ashes. Most up-to-date crematorium opened at Oradea) *Adevărul*, 16 iulie 2012, http://www.adevarul.ro/locale/oradea/Afacere-Bani-cenusa_0_737926265.html accessed July 18, 2012.

² S. Chișbora, “Cenușă la negru. Dorin Gherghev și-a făcut crematoriu uman în Oradea, fără acte de la Primărie” (Ashes on the black market. Dorin Gherghev built a human crematorium at Oradea, without papers from the City Hall) *Bihoreanul* 17 July 2012, <http://www.ebihoreanul.ro/stiri/ultima-or-31-6/cenusa-la-negru-dorin-gherghev-si-a-facut-crematoriu-uman-in-oradea-fara-acte-de-la-primarie-102657.html>, accesed July 20, 2012.

³ Boanchiș, “Afacere”.

⁴ M. Prodan, “Boc nu vrea crematoriu uman în oraș” (Boc wants no human crematorium in the city) *Ziua de Cluj*, 18 iulie 2012, <http://ziuadecj.realitatea.net/administratie/boc-nu-vrea-crematoriu-uman-in-oras-video-94869.html> accessed July 20, 2012.

⁵ <http://www.ziuaaveche.ro/cultura-religie/religie-cultura-religie/incinerarea-mortilor-interzisa-de-sfantul-sinod-al-bisericii-ortodoxe-romane-109416.html>

Conclusions

In Romania the majority of the population is of the Orthodox faith and thus the prevailing attitudes towards death and the disposal of the dead body are the religious (Orthodox) ones. For the majority of Romanians there is an incompatibility between the contemporary Romanian funeral system and cremation due to strong stance taken against cremation by the majority Orthodox faith. The Romanian Orthodox Church assumes a role as the main voice of Romanian society, seeking to influence the population's attitudes on this issue. The aim is to preserve the position of the Romanian Orthodox Church in society. Nevertheless, the future may witness the development of cremation in Romania driven by the crisis of burial grounds in urban areas, a development which would be due mainly to private initiatives characterized by dynamism and pragmatism. In conclusion, it is noted that attitudes towards incineration in Romania are still influenced by traditional perspectives on death, shaped mainly by the attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church on this topic. The outcome is that for a large proportion of Romanian society incineration is unacceptable. Thus, in Romania, given the context of the importance and influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the level of secularization within society is different from the rest of Europe, which results in different attitudes towards death and, in this case, towards cremation. Therefore, while in Western Europe the debate on being for or against cremation has disappeared, in Romania it continues to exist and to be manifested intensely, illustrating the multiple problems and particularities of the funeral system there.