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# DOCTORAL THESIS

Urban cemeteries of modern and contemporary  
Romania (1850-1950). Historical and urban aspects

## Summary

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Christian cemeteries of the main urban centres in Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia represent an area of study which enjoys an advantage, but which has been neglected in Romanian historiographical studies. Apart from the framework of argumentative rationality, we identify a symbolic level of identity, which thoroughly illustrates history and ethnic specificity within burial spaces.

The cemeteries' premises are the proof of the changes undergone due to the precaution-related decisions that were imposed and made public by the means of various legislative and medical discourses issued after the year 1860. These discourses pinpointed the elements of utmost importance for the development of modernizing mechanisms and projects. Therefore, we try to determine the main legal precautions through which morphological and systematic evolution of the new cemeteries was imposed and managed. We are also interested in the whole process of building up cemeteries – necropolises, which were located, on the basis of a very strict legal system regarding hygiene and sanitation, outside the cities, as far as possible from the inhabited urban space.

The fact that necropolises also emerged in Romanian political regions with the status of institutionalised concrete objects was made possible since these burial places were secularly administered. Due to administrative changes, the status and the appearance of the burial place involved different secular criterion of setting up the cemetery and new normative legal documents which imposed the building up of the new necropolises.

Starting with the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the top priority was the protection of the world of the living against the danger of epidemics originated from the world of the dead, which was likely to occur. Besides the whole process of modernising and restructuring the urban space, a complex process of integrating the world of the dead into the social organising of the living took place.

Therefore, on the basis of the inquiry into the matter, of the secular discourse imposed under a scientific and civic form and of the analysis of the sources derived from the medical discourse of those times, we got an excellent documentary material. It is useful for the understanding of the discourse established measures regarding civic cemeteries, and for the various sanitary normative

elements that impose an indisputable attitude of submission. The sanitary normative perspective is investigated separately for each historical region, following at the same time the implications and divisions of the cemeteries' issue in the society between 1860-1914.

We can gain perception of the projects through a comparative perspective, in order to understand the stages of setting up and consolidating an expanded civic necropolis, to be more specific: *Șerban Vodă Cemetery* in Bucharest, *Eternitatea Cemetery* in Iași, *The Evangelical Cemetery* in Bistrița-Năsăud and *The Cemetery of the Municipality* in Sibiu will be tackled in detail in Chapter III. The whole content of Chapter III marks the limits of the two distinct areas: Transylvania and The Romanian Old Kingdom. The purpose of the whole approach is to understand and to describe the mental and technical concept consolidated in the time's discourse.

The pre- and interwar periods, but especially the former, represent the actual moment when urban systematization processes were launched, which naturally included optimum official architectural projects and last, but not least, solved the problem of the new peripheral burial grounds. The primary documents gave also prominence to the local authority, namely the Town Hall and the Local Council; they both did not cease to be the institutions which conditioned the identification and solving of the pressing problems of the communities through their attributions. But after 1918, for the authorities of the unified Romania, Transylvania remained an endless battlefield for solving the pending problems of the cemeteries and of the dispute between the Greek-Catholic and Orthodox confessions.

In order to identify other special references regarding the disputes over the foundation or systematization of the cemeteries' enclosure, we will list various secondary documents which can be grouped into two major categories: ecclesiastical and secular documents. The ecclesiastical documents are kept in the funds of the Metropolitan See, of the Vicariate and of the Archpriestship; they point out the multitude of meanings that the socio-cultural attitudes of a community possess. A content analysis of these documents conveys a moral and social

framework through which the entire issued discourse solves a variety of problems regarding the good administration and organizing of the cemeteries.

Beyond the inevitable flaws of the analytic paradigm of consulting the sources and those of the methods necessary for scanning the issue of urban Christian cemeteries, this type of research is placed at its height. The absence of studies or surveys focused on this subject make it difficult to state all the general and specific frameworks that are able to express the status and real influence of the cemetery in the pre-war civic space.

The subjects that we tackle are structured in four chapters: 1. A short review of the historiography of the problem; 2. Civic urban cemeteries – an inquest which aims at seizing the changes of sensitivity; 3. The modern and contemporary cemetery – sources and methods of investigation (1850-1950); 4. The monumental dimension of the necropolises and the diversification of funerary art (1850-1950). Through all these aspects, the present paper considerably contributes to the conceptual knowledge of the whole process of European urban modernization, applied within the main urban centres of both Transylvania and The Romanian Old Kingdom. More specifically, the paper provides an overview of the history of both great modern European necropolises of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and of minor autochthonous necropolises that were built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The research involved consulting not only traditional literature, but also modern documentary sources (on-line sources). The thematic approach encompassed the need for photographic documentation, undertaken in almost all Romanian urban cemeteries and the need for travelling to other countries, such as: The Moldavian Republic (Chişinău), Italy (Sicily), Austria (Vienne) and Germany (München, Ravensburg, Ulm and Stuttgart).

**Chapter I**, which is dedicated to historiography, presents the most relevant studies belonging to French historians: Pierre Chaunu, Philippe Ariès, Francois Lebrun, Gaby and Michell Vovelle, Jean Delumeau, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Michel Bée. Along the evolution of French historiography, they introduced the concept of *cemetery – necropolis* and discussed all the concrete implications of this

institutionalised space in the magazine „Annales” and in several thematic volumes which focus on the changes brought about by the cemetery – necropolis.

Throughout the chapter arguments for the main methodological guidelines can be found. They represent a door opened to offering new chances of adequate restoration, of understanding the past, but also an opportunity to connect our historiographical discourse to the French one, by the means of the thematic models proposed by Michell Vovelle, Jean-Didier Urbain and Michel Bée. These thematic volumes establish the Southern model of cemeteries – necropolises and determine the reconceiving of the urban European modernization project.

Another aspect debated along the chapter is the perspective of Romanian historiography, which does not offer thorough studies; there are only a few chapters from historical scientific papers which focus on cemeteries. Another perspective hard to deal with is the research on the attitudes towards cemeteries – necropolises in Romanian historical regions and the actual difficulties that may arise at the reading level and in the way of extracting the main data.

The studies published and selectively presented in *The Historical Bibliography of Romania, Vol. VI – VII – IX*, helped us to go deeply into and to discover the new historiographical dimension. The list of the historians that marked historiographical investigation and the investigation of formerly human attitudes and behaviours, through restoration and reconstruction comprises the following researchers: Lucian Boia, Simona Nicoară, Ștefan Lemny, Alexandru Zub, Alexandru Duțu, Toader Nicoară, Mihaela Grancea, Adela Toplean, Marius Rotar, Violeta Barbu, Ionel Bota, Dan Lăzărescu, Dan Berindei, Alina Branda and Iolanda Țighiliu.

In conclusion, the approach to the topic of cemeteries – necropolises from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, determines us to focus our research on the investigation of the behaviours and attitudes that used to exist towards urban cemeteries between 1850–1950. The whole perspective of our topic intends to be a restoration of the place and of the role played by the cemeteries before the wars, more specifically, the whole process of setting up modern cemeteries – necropolises.

**Chapter II**, which is dedicated to thorough research, is based upon several materials that bring forward again the complex thematic debate. These documentary materials lead to different answers regarding the status and the role of modern cemeteries.

Besides the actual status of land earmarked for burying the dead, the cemeteries themselves mean much more than the land where non-living bodies are placed. The fact of going deeper into the notion of cemetery recalls the experiences of a specific human society with its history, literature and human behaviour nourished by a complex religious system and by undoubted aspects of religiosity, which still validates the cemetery at the present time.

*How can we define the cemetery?* Conceptually speaking, the cemetery is the bridge from earthly life towards eternal life where everyone is given a place; also, death determines the passing to another life through ceremonies and customs. From the point of view of the passing to a new world, from the state of being into the one of non-being, the grave replaces *the emotional and social space of the deceased* and transforms the cemetery into a private space, a substitute for a *home place*.

The enclosed space may be labelled as such on the basis of external elements that represent the infrastructure from both an aesthetic and emotional point of view on the one hand, and from a cultural, religious, ethnical or social point of view, on the other hand. Big and small modern necropolises that are sanctified become holy places which require pure, dead-orientated thoughts and prayers from the persons entering the burial places, since they also symbolise the spiritual connection with the deceased. In this way, cemeteries are not only burial places that abolish the body; they become graves that bear cultural signs, which are representative for the contemporary civilization of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Modern cemeteries become communities of the dead and, at the same time, the enclosed space becomes a meeting place of some individuals from the living community, who meet at specific intervals (on commemorative days), around the graves, in remembrance of the deceased relatives.

The history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European cemeteries mark the process of urban modernising that imposed, on the basis of the systematization norms of the entire urban space, the almost complete abolishment of the urban cemeteries located in the vicinity of churches in order to relocate them or to undergo the process of exhumation – inhumation. The process of urban modernising implies building up ex-urban huge cemeteries, among which we mention: *Il Cimiterio Monumentale di Staglieno* (Genoa, Italy); *The Cemetery Père Lachaise* (Paris, France); *Zentralfriedhof in Wien* (*The Central Cemetery* in Vienne, Austria); *Il Gran Camposanto di Messina* (Sicily, Italy) and *Il Cimiterio Monumentale di Milano* (Italy); *Cemetery of Poblenou* (Barcelona, Spain); *Cemetery of Montjuïc* (Barcelona, Spain); *The Non-Catholic Cemetery* (Rome, Italy); *Il cimitero del Verano* (Rome, Italy); *Ohlsdorf Cemetery* (Hamburg, Germany) and *Kerepesi úti temető* (Budapest, Hungary).

The inferior infrastructure of cemeteries shows special spatial planning; however, the 19<sup>th</sup> century remains the most realistic and palpable century from the point of view of organizing and developing great modern necropolises. The external infrastructure of modern necropolises distinguishes itself through the imposing gate-fence of demarcation and through various elements of composition of the enclosed space, unsophisticated monuments, crosses, burial vaults, chapels or cemetery churches; each of them defines itself through the specificity of religious identity. Modern cemeteries – necropolises did not cease to be a pile of graves with an identity status.

In most situations, the decoration of the enclosed spaces was made according to Italian or British tendencies towards parks or gardens. Enclosed spaces are marked by the same system of identifying signs and symbols; at the same time, distinct infrastructure elements were developed, with the possibility of architectural and monumental quantification. The whole group of symbols that we found during the selective inquiry shows suggestive contextual elements which interfere with the decoration of the graves or with the sculptures; their contents may be thematic, particular or allegorical.

At the time being, the existence of great modern necropolises which are located in two distinct spaces (Western and Eastern Europe) projects the existence of postmodern human typologies; identity burial spaces are perceived according to identity patterns that undergo a change through the imaginarium. In the Western space, necropolises are accepted and regarded as a historical space of motivating collective and personal cultural existence, more specifically, a living museum in which cultural heritage and the tangible perspective of the imaginary dynamism are exhibited. In this way, community constraints and past social structures are overcome.

**Chapter III** facilitates the understanding of the theoretical and practical ways in which the two major directions of civic and religious discourse were meant to solve the same problem of setting up an expanded peripheral enclosed space. The majority of confessional urban cemeteries that were located within the cities and that were sometimes grouped around the church were closed. As a consequence of issuing strict legislative acts, cemeteries were located on the new expanded peripheral premises; these acts were applied by all the three major institutions: the State, the Church and the General Sanitation System.

In the case of Transylvania, the legislative documents were issued by the Imperial power throughout certain ministerial decrees or law codes. These legal steps have followed a strict system of mediatisation undertaken by the Committee, the Praetura, the Prefecture and the Town Hall. In a similar way, an identical path had the ecclesiastic institutions through their own system of transmission of circular orders, issued and sent from the Metropolitan Church to the Bishopric and Vicariate. Still, at the ecclesiastic level we find another manner of orders circulation from the Archpriestship to the Parish.

In the case of The Romanian Old Kingdom, the informing and appliance of law from the legislative perspective was realized much more easily, through the appliance of the ministerial decrees by the authority of the Town Council.

In Transylvania, the Austro-Hungarian Empire imposed the observance of the two major laws issued with the purpose of regulating the existing premises. We start with *8<sup>th</sup> Law from 1868 regarding the reciprocity of accepted Christian*

*religion/ confessions*; according to its content, this law should have easily solved the problem of the right of every citizen to be buried in the common cemetery, irrespective of his confessional membership. *Law 14<sup>th</sup> from 1876 regarding public health*, which followed this law, focused more thoroughly on the issue of death, burial and cemeteries. The law was improved by two other ministerial decrees: *The Decree no. 19172 issued by the Minister of Internal Affairs in 1889* and *The Decree no. 54919 issued by the Minister of Internal Affairs in 1895*. In 1908, the first chapter from the second part of *Law 14<sup>th</sup> from 1876* was modified. The new *Law 38<sup>th</sup>* regulates public health issues in particular.

Unfortunately, it was impossible for these state laws to be applied and obeyed according to the imposed requirements. Due to this impediment, the Greek-Catholics and the Orthodox from the multiethnic and multiconfessional Transylvanian towns claimed the right for a distinct burial space both during the pre-war and interwar periods.

The truthful nature of the above-mentioned information and the difficult functionality of the imposed measures could be verified in the national archives from Bistrița-Năsăud, Alba, Cluj and Sibiu. Their content shows the difficult path and the actual impediments which hardened the pragmatic undertaking of the measures at the Parish and at the Local Council levels.

Between 1880-1918, the attitude towards cemeteries shows a complex process of disputes between disfavoured confessions over the claim of burial spaces from the main Transylvanian urban centres; here, modern peripheral premises were administered by Roman Catholics and Protestants. Despite the legal provisions from the year 1868, minor confessions (the Greek Catholics and the Orthodox) did not cease to tenaciously fight for solving the problem and for the claimed land to be accepted by their parishes.

As far as The Romanian Old Kingdom is concerned, the attempt of urban modernising was much easier to accomplish, since the issue was solved by the main responsible institutions: the State and the medical institution. The period between 1880-1914 represents the chronological sequence of planning the city in a complex way that would give life to the future modern cities.

The pre- and interwar periods, but especially the former, remain the actual moment when urban systematization processes were launched, which naturally included optimum official architectural projects, providing the optimum conditions for the water supply systems, for the sewerage system, electric lightening, tramways, parks and last, but not least solving the problem of the new peripheral burial grounds.

Another relevant issue identified in the urban space of The Romanian Old Kingdom is the way the community involved in solving the problems regarding the flaws of the imposed decisions. For example, the whole community involved in the natural process of relocating confessional cemeteries, i.e. the deceased that had been buried there, on the new civic premises that were inaugurated at the periphery of the city. Chapter III presents in detail the whole process of setting up the future urban necropolises that had been inaugurated both in Bucharest and Iași. The problem of the future urban necropolises was also solved with the help of donations taken from well-known personalities of the city. The fact that the problem of civic premises was solved at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shows real maturity and ability of the responsible urban institutions.

However, in December 1918, in the unified Romania, Transylvania remains an endless battlefield for solving the pending problems of the cemeteries and of the dispute between the Greek-Catholic and Orthodox confessions.

The problem of Transylvania was solved only in 1941, when *The Law no. 76.718, from the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1940, regarding cemetery organization and administration* was issued. Between 1944-1945, the necessary steps of systematizing Transylvanian civic cemeteries had already been taken and the whole process of national urban modernizing had finished. We would also like to mention that the other Transylvanian Christian confessions from the interwar period (Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and the Reformed Church) were not involved in any disputes over modern systematization of the premises.

**Chapter IV** outlines that symbolic themes were spread from the West to the East, from the major European centres to the small South-Eastern European nuclei. We can find within the necropolises a tendency towards individualism that

was implemented through the culture of the image, on the basis of a well-defined artistic language, which justifies the diversity of the images which are given the form of grandeur.

The new modern premises that were opened both in the Central and in the South-Eastern Europe include different areas that belong to the Protestant, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Orthodox or Armenian cults. Another general feature is the tendency of individualizing and personalizing the deceased by the means of special graves marked with epitaphs and distinct funerary themes. The enclosing fence also plays an important role in the spatial organization of the cemeteries.

Christian cemeteries become a space for prayer to which anyone has access anytime. According to these arguments, all the ways in which the sacred manifests itself is full of significations. Funerary monuments leave traces of the feature of strong individualism that unite the notions of being, signification and truth through their specificity. The 19<sup>th</sup> century continues to be a Christian temporal segment, which is, however, lead by human time. It is a time that presents the time of individual history of each and every being, in the way that it was felt under the threatening of death.

The deceased are located in the cemetery by the means of their funerary monument which is built up, more specifically in their own grave, which actually separates them from the community of the living and confers them a place in the community of those who “crossed the threshold before them”. Maybe this is the reason why modern necropolises are impressive through their amplexness, since they are seen as original spaces. From a semiotic point of view, it was necessary for the necropolises to function under the status of a space which sanctions and makes public the identity of the deceased.

We present briefly the main expanded pre-war premises, such as *Șerban Vodă Cemetery* and *The Roman Catholic Cemetery Bellu* in Bucharest, *The Eternitatea Cemetery* in Iași, *The Cemetery of the Municipality* in Sibiu, *The Evangelical Cemetery* in Bistrița-Năsăud, *The Evangelical Cemetery* in Sighișora, *Viișoara Cemetery* in Ploiești, *The Cemetery of the Municipality Kazimir Rulikowsky* in Oradea, *The Cemetery over the Hill* in Piatra-Neamț, *The Cemetery*

*Pomenirea* in Arad, *The Cemetery Pacea* in Suceava and *The Cemetery Eternitatea* in Botoşani. The above mentioned cemeteries are characterized by an emphasized image of identity both at a symbolic level and at ethnic affiliation. However, ethnic affiliation is intensely illustrated through the specificity of the existing funerary monuments.

The premises of the expanded cemeteries from the main Romanian urban centres remain the proof of the changes that occurred due to the decisions that were imposed and made public and due to the pre-war legal and medical discourses, which reinforced the project of safe civic urbanization.

### Key words:

- Modernization
- Modern state
- Modern cemeteries
- Legislative stipulations
- Issue of mortality
- Legislative and medical discourses
- The urban civic spaces
- The new norms and means of civic behavior
- Transylvania and the Old Kingdom