

„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF POPULATION STUDIES AND
MINORITY HISTORY

ABSTRACT DOCTORAL THESIS

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CLUJ-NAPOCA

2023

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**VISUAL AND NARRATIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF LIFE
AND DEATH IN THE „CIMITIRUL VESEL” AT SĂPÂNȚA:
AN EXPLORATION OF MARAMUREȘ FUNERAL
CULTURE**



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SUMMARY

This work originated from the desire to highlight the way in which the current social mechanism works in the relationship between modernism and the unique cultural values of our country. The "Cimitirul Vesel" from Săpânța, is such a very great value in Romania. It is a significant tourist objective that has not received the attention due until now. Its value is given not only by its importance as a tourist attraction, but also by the importance of the ethnographic and anthropological treasure that this cemetery represents. The "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery is listed on the list of historical monuments in Maramureș County, as a monument of national and universal importance certified since 1935. The "Cimitirul Vesel" is not a simple place of eternity, but a link that connects the world here with the world of beyond and not anyway, but through illustrations with a special chromaticism and representative epitaphs for the deceased.

One of the reasons why we chose this place with significance is the analysis of which we present, represented by the fact that in the last decades it has not been in the light of a maximum point of interest for researchers. Although behind the blue crosses there is a continuous source of undiscovered art and sociological, ethnographic and anthropological research material.

Among the shortcomings that prevented a more thorough knowledge of this sacred space, we list the lack of modern infrastructure, the lack of interest of the local authorities with competences in the cultural area, the lack of funds necessary for the specific arrangements of a cultural objective and the lack of involvement of the local community in the promotion of this unique tourist objective. In completing my studies, I chose to research how this place was formed, its cultural significance, but also how it became the "Cimitirul Vesel" in Săpânța.

In 2015, the British publication *The Huffington Post* ranked the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery as one of the most beautiful cemeteries in the world and it is at the top of the most visited, along with the Canadian "Fairview" cemetery, the resting place of 121 victims of the Titanic.

It was circulated not only nationally but also abroad that the craftsman Stan Ioan Pătraș, the creator of these *merry* crosses, used the Dacian culture as a reference point. It is known that the Dacians considered death as an event of passing into a better world, that of the ancestors, representing a new beginning, this information being enough to present the location as a very attractive one even for history lovers.

Another hypothesis we started from and which deserves to be shared from the beginning is that the citizens of our country generally barely know information about the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery. The locals were the only ones who could give us more information about this wonderful place.

The actual work is structured in six chapters. Chapter I, entitled *Research Methodology*, establishes the theoretical analysis of research methods. In addition to the aspects related to theory, in the research part we focused more on the aspects related to the analysis of the interviews taken with the locals of Săpânța in order to form an overall, enlivened image of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery. The textual and graphic information on the crosses in the two cemeteries from Săpânța constitutes an inexhaustible mine of meanings for the simple tourist or for the anthropologist undertaking systematic research. During the entire research, after synthesizing some fundamental aspects of the theory, I chose a series of generic, then specific objectives that I wanted to achieve through the research report. Later, we focused on the selection of people who live in Săpânța and who were either born there or were quickly adopted by the Maramureș community. I formulated a series of questions that I addressed to them. I have previously chosen a specific research method on the basis of which I created this analysis part of the research, namely the direct interview. The interviews presented in the pages of this work briefly describe the perception of the residents of Săpânța on their cemetery, and their analysis will illustrate in more detail the art of Stan Ioan Pătraș and his inventive spirit reflected in the lives of the Săpânța residents who also inspired him. The importance of choosing the theme therefore exists in the ethnic specificity of the crosses and the cemetery, but also in the reasoning and spirit of the people who live with it.

The study carried out through the prism of observations and objectives, but also field documentation and their processing, helped us to make a good visual and narrative interpretation of the crosses in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery. The present chapter comes with a more detailed description of the proposed theme and includes information of a geographical, historical, ethnographic and sociological nature.

In addition to the brief description of the history of this cemetery, through this work we want to find out how much the language of the epitaphs in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery fits into the Maramuresian dialect. So, crossing the history of this unique place, we will discover the narrative of the life of the man from Săpânța with personal stories, with collective events, but also with tragedies that remain as an echo on all those who step into the yard of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery, the incomparable place created by Stan Ioan Pătraș.

The collection of data from May 2018 was carried out through a trip to Săpânța in Maramureș county, taking a sequence of photos with crosses and epitaphs from the "Merry Cemetery". The photographs were taken in both the old and the new cemetery, and at the time of the survey we had taken approximately 2500 photographs, identifying over 900 crosses. In June 2018, we organized a meeting at the "Stan Ioan Pătraș" Memorial House with the craftsman Dumitru Pop Tincu, successor of the "Merry Cemetery". I had an interview about his beginnings in the art of woodworking with his mentor Stan Ioan Pătraș, but also about his evolution in this activity, and in May 2018, I made an interview about the naive painting and the crosses from the "Merry Cemetery". In May 2020, I conducted several interviews with the locals of Săpânța, from which I selected a number of 30 interviews to analyze them and find out their personal opinion about the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery. The interviews were with open-ended questions and their answers were tape-recorded and analyzed in our research paper. Among the locals, there is also one of the daughters of the craftsman Dumitru Pop Tincu, Nicoleta Pop, who gave us more clear answers and a personal opinion on the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery. This data collection through the interview method helped us foreground the voice of the community, which is our main theme in this paper. The photographed crosses were selected and organized into sections, some of them to be analyzed separately. For each section I also created a title.

As a result of our research we discovered several imperfections and damage to the inscriptions on the crosses. Some epitaphs are incomplete, the paintings are blurred because of the times that have passed over them, and some of the crosses are destroyed by moisture, that's why I couldn't decipher all the epitaphs.

From the interview with the craftsman Dumitru Pop Tincu, I learned that some villagers order their cross during their lifetime, but, thus the accuracy of the date when it was created is lost and their evolution can not be clear. There are crosses with an epitaph written on both sides of the wood, the epitaphs being unique. Double-sided crosses have different characteristics. There are double painted crosses, where two people are buried in the same grave, offering a painted part of the cross to each deceased. But there are also those double crosses, where only one person is buried, with the biographical data on one side of the wood, and the circumstances of death on the other. After 25 years, another person from the deceased's family can be buried in the same place. The cross is renewed and thus the story becomes double. On the front of the cross is written the epitaph for the recently deceased, and on the back for the one buried 25 years ago.

As for the epitaphs, they include a number of words and expressions characteristic of the area. The language is community-specific and without grammatical rules. Most of the problems in deciphering the epitaphs on the crosses are encountered around the diacritical marks. Following our field analysis, we noticed that the diacritical marks specific to the following letters ă, â, î, ș, ț, are not always carved directly on the cross, but only added through paint after its completion, or sometimes they are not present at all. The chisel intervenes only where the space allows, where the space does not allow, diacritical marks are made with the brush. For example, certain terms such as Anuța/Anuță, sora/soră, stam/stăm, cate/câte etc., make it impossible for us to understand exactly the text and what the author was referring to. Punctuation marks are not very present in the epitaphs on the crosses. Of all the existing punctuation marks, the period is the most commonly used. Sometimes at the end of the epitaph, sometimes in the middle of the epitaph.

All inscribed epitaphs are written in capital letters. Small letters are used only in some signatures of the craftsmen on the sides of the crosses, by choosing the model of the handwriting. For a better understanding of the text, we chose to write the epitaphs with lowercase letters, keeping the capital letters at the beginning of the line and with proper names.

After analyzing the epitaphs from an orthographic point of view, we find that many signs are completely missing. Analyzing these peculiarities, we could notice in the creator's epitaphs many grammatical mistakes. The craftsman emphasized the rhymes that are written in the Maramureșan dialect and the story itself, the rhyme being kept the same as in the folk songs.

Achieving the overall objectives was not possible without a careful selection of the people who were interviewed. In making this selection, indices and variables were used. The indices related to sex, age and social category and the variables influenced subjective aspects, such as belonging to the founding family of the cemetery and the exercise of certain functions. Among the inhabitants, I chose to interview several people of different ages, without a specific connection between them, from which, for this research, I selected a number of thirty interviews. Thus, we chose one representative from each age group, from each social stratum without omitting to include both women and men in the study. We also chose villagers from families who laid the foundations of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery and the village, but also villagers who recently moved to the famous commune, being quickly adopted by the traditional families from Maramures. Specific objectives, as opposed to generic ones, allowed us to choose a wide range of specific issues as well as a deep analysis of them down to the smallest details.

The specific objectives were formulated as questions to ease our expectation and allow the villagers to be as authentic as possible in their answers. Some questions are strictly subjective, while other questions aim to capture the involvement of the villagers in the evolution of the cemetery. The interview design was one with free questions, directly, moving to the households of the people interviewed. Finally, the interview was followed by an analysis, i.e. a research report, in which I briefly analyzed the results obtained.

The voice of the community best expresses the uniqueness of this cemetery. The connection with nature and household chores set them apart from other places, and the strong connection with God makes them different, which is easily noticeable in this picturesque area loaded with history, traditions and humor. This way we can find out first hand what the people here want, what their grievances are and what they are willing to do to improve things. The voice of the community is and will remain a primary source of information for us throughout this work.

Through this interview I learned about the value of epitaphs, the importance of colors and the meaning of crosses. Separate from the standard questions above, the interview given to Dumitru Pop Tincu had a series of questions adapted to the importance of the character. In his regard, it was necessary to transgress the usual approach and limitation to the chosen objectives.

The analyzed qualitative data refer to the information that the citizens of the commune have regarding the foundation of the cemetery, their attachment to this place, the interaction with the church and the local authorities. Regarding their manner of reporting towards the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery, we were guided by qualitative variables related to the impact of the cemetery on their families, the image of their own death, the attitude of those close to them and the way society perceives this objective. Last but not least, we turned to a series of variables whose purpose was to present a series of potential overall changes that would be welcome regarding the cemetery. Here, the element of surprise was big enough to surprise. In addition to these, I realized two interviews with Dumitru Pop Tincu and an interview with his youngest daughter Nicoleta Pop. The interview with a predetermined structure, however, was completed by a series of free questions that are specific to the free interview. During our work we also collaborated with the eldest daughter of the craftsman Dumitru Pop Tincu, Anamaria Stan, who helped us with information necessary for our research.

Also, the sub-chapter *Specialized works with relevance regarding the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery* constituted a good landmark in our research and led us to a qualitative analysis. There are a number of specialist papers on the subject of our research, from which we have

selected a few to contribute to the quality of this study. In an attempt to analyze man's position in the face of death, I went through a series of works that basically address issues related to religious life. I did this analysis to be able to better understand these conservative practices but also to learn about the beliefs and symbols that came together with this custom. From the chapters written up to this point in the specialized literature regarding the right to the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery, we managed to capture and understand the way the cemetery was built, how it was born from an idea and how the painted crosses arrived to be promoted to the rank of art.

As for Chapter II, it comes with a small history of the Săpânța commune followed by the presentation of the place and the craft that made Stan Ioan Pătraș stand out during his life. We learn important data about the craftsman's childhood and the carver's secret, but also about those who were his apprentices in the years of glory in this art of wood carving. The chapter ends with the story of the most famous apprentice, *Dumitru Pop Tincu - the successor and custodian of the "Stan Ioan Pătraș" Memorial House*, a special character in the lives of the locals of Săpânța, who, during his lifetime, following interviews, revealed to us new information about Pătraș's working technique, how he ended up living in the craftsman's house and how Săpânța is seen today through the eyes of tourists. Known both nationally and internationally for the place full of history and for the promotion of customs and traditions, the commune of Săpânța today enjoys great appreciation from visitors. Only during his lifetime, Stan Ioan Pătraș was visited for his fame, by tourists from over 62 countries, as can be seen from the epitaph written on his cross: "From sixty-two countries/I was visited until yesterday/From state leaders/Many have visited me".

In the sub-chapter *The secret of the carver and the childhood of the craftsman Stan Ioan Pătraș*, we learn about Pătraș that he was born in a peasant family, in 1908, on June 26. He only attended primary school. Orphaned at an early age, he had to work alongside his brothers to support his family. With an inventive spirit and a developed artistic sense, Stan Ioan Pătraș was guided by his teacher, Mihai Șerban, who saw in him a special talent during his school years. In Săpânța there are over 1,000 people named Stan. That's why the people of the village nicknamed him Pătraș, so that he could be more easily recognized. The craftsman had a strong imprint on the cemetery in Săpânța, managing to put it on the map of the most famous places in the world, through its uniqueness. Attracted to wood carving from an early age, Stan Ioan Pătraș started carving oak crosses at the age of 14. He was also passionate about naive painting, and in his youth he also discovered his talent for poetry. So, from 1934-1935, as a self-taught artist, he began to place short poems-epitaphs on crosses.

The craftsman composed his own funeral verse, which is usually done by the deacon of the church, which he left as a manuscript to his disciple, Dumitru Pop Tincu. He also decided to compose his own epitaph two days before dies, the epitaph he dictated, from which it appears that his family was left with many troubles and needs: "Dad went to war/He did not return/Three small children remained/In a world of great trouble". At first, the crosses were made without poetry. Later the idea came to him to compose poems for the deceased and to paint them. Thus began the famous story of the epitaphs in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery from Săpânța.

Stan Ioan Pătraș had the privilege of training many craftsmen in the art of wood. Of all the disciples he had, very few stayed on. Due to the notoriety of the craftsman and the increase in the number of visitors, the local party activists from that time decided to transform the workshop of Stan Ioan Pătraș into a school workshop. All the carpenters and carpenters in the village became apprentices here, among whom Dumitru Pop Tincu, Turda Toader, Stan Vasile and Stan Toader stood out the best. Pătraș gathered 53 apprentices over time, most of whom left the workshop.

For all these original ideas, throughout his life, Stan Ioan Pătraș received several awards and distinctions. Some of them can be seen and admired at the "Stan Ioan Pătraș" Memorial House in Săpânța, Maramureș. These were exhibited and taken care of by his successor Dumitru Pop Tincu. After writing the testament in verse, on March 25, 1977, he passed to the Lord. Before he died he asked his disciples for their support in carving his own cross.

Three years after his death, his wife also died, following which his apprentice, Dumitru Pop Tincu, lived in the yard of the creator Stan Ioan Pătraș. He was the custodian of the Memorial House for 40 years. The craftsman Dumitru Pop Tincu was one of Stan Ioan Pătraș's favorite apprentices. He was born on August 25, 1955 and left this world on December 15, 2022, at the age of only 67 years. Throughout his life he was a crusader, sculptor, painter and poet. The year 2021 brought the craftsman the title of Living Human Treasure, but throughout his life he also received other distinctions and awards. He continued the work of Stan Ioan Pătraș by keeping the tradition of crosses as it was taught to him by his mentor, being named the successor of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery. The talented craftsman Dumitru Pop Tincu left this job to his son-in-law who bears the same name as the creator of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery, Stan Ioan Pătraș, who also learned to carve wood. The craftsman, like Stan Ioan Pătraș, did not manage to see his cross carved, painted and with the epitaph written on it. The cross will be made by his son-in-law, and when it is ready it will be displayed in the

cemetery at the grave of the one who once was, Dumitru Pop Tincu. He died unreconciled due to the fact that his work was not appreciated at its true value, which also happens to other Romanian artists and craftsmen. "Everything about my father is special, because he achieved something great for those of us who are left," says his daughter, Nicoleta Pop.

Chapter III, called "*Cimitirul Vesel*" - *Establishment, evolution and artistic techniques*, includes a whole series of aspects that describe in detail the beginnings of this atypical place. We learn how these crosses were born, how they were processed and how the epitaphs became the main attraction on the wood painted in blue, a color with many meanings. It is said that the name of this cemetery was given by a French visitor who one summer day was walking among the crosses in the cemetery. He would have asked the guide what the name of the cemetery was. The answer received from the guide, as if it had no name, made the Frenchman think of one himself, more precisely the "Cimitirul Vesel" translated "The Merry Cemetery" which has remained to this day. Since it is not known exactly who named the cemetery that way, we have decided to put in quotation marks every time we write about the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery.

Dumitru Pop Tincu also has a story about the craftsman's beginnings: The first cross made by Stan Ioan Pătraș was for Zapca Gheorghe's family. He had drowned in the Tisa river. The cross was a very simple one, with few flowers on the sides, and the image of the deceased was not painted on the cross. It only had "here he rests" and his name and the year he died written.

The sub-chapters entitled *Ethnographic, anthropomorphic and heraldic symbols found on funerary monuments*, as well as *Social Representations of religiosity*, helped us to see how much tradition is still preserved here, but most importantly, how much of the idea of Pătraș and if today's crosses coincide with those during the creator's lifetime. Even if modernism makes its presence felt day by day, through these beliefs and decisions to preserve the teachings of the ancestors, it denotes a model of fidelity on the part of the disciples and the locals. Over time a relationship is created between people and symbols, these being preserved in their activities as well as in the culture they come from. The main motifs that make up the frame of the crosses are geometric: rhombus, triangle, broken line, semicircle, wave, but there is also the rosette of flower petals, the star rosette and the rosette of crossed circles. There is also the wolf tooth, the star and the heart. In the upper register, in addition to geometric motifs, the craftsman also uses plant motifs such as the flower pot, leaf garland, simple leaves, the tulip or flower petals. In addition to the cosmogonic elements, the sun and the moon, we also find anthropomorphized motifs such as the angel and the seraphim. The butterfly that symbolizes

the incarnation of the soul of the deceased appears very rarely. The craftsman also used the polka dot, the braided rope, the clover flower, the jasmine flower, the poppy flower, the heart with two swords, a symbol of sin, the candlestick, a symbol of enlightenment and spirit, the dove, a symbol of love and harmony in family life and the tree of life.

The posture most often represented on the "Cimitirul Vesel" crosses from Săpânda is that of a woman praying before God who is kneeling, usually next to an icon or with a rosary in her hand. The images of these women represent the strong attachment to the church and religious life. In most of the paintings, men appear engaged in an activity that involves physical labor. We can see them in occupations such as driving a tractor, mining, in an ox cart, as a forester or carpenter, mowing, making hay, fishing or in the pulpit, etc., or performing administrative functions: cantor, priest, bell ringer, teacher, all represented on the crosses in the cemetery.

A special topic in our work is constituted by the sub-chapter *Artistic Techniques. Inks, paints and coloring in the decoration of funerary monuments and epitaphs*, on which occasion I learned particularly important things about the theory of colors, how they are placed on the crosses, in what order and what meanings they have. The painting of the crosses in this way has ranked the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery as one of the most special places in the world. One of the oldest pictorial techniques is that on a wooden support.

The sub-chapter *Appreciation and recognition of the "Cimitirul Vesel" on a local and international level* highlights the importance of the unique place. The process of making a cross includes several stages carefully followed by the craftsman. The ornamentation of the crosses is made on two or three registers. The upper one is represented by the cross. The central register has two parts: one is reserved for the scene from the life of the deceased, and the lower part is reserved for the epitaph. The lower register includes various decoration elements, most often geometric, placed in bands.

Following Pamfil Bilțiu's research regarding the articles written about Stan Ioan Pătraș, he states that most writers are only interested in the poetic side of the artist and less in the chromaticity of the crosses and about them in general. The writer does not consider Pătraș only a sculptor, but equally considers him to be a poet. Through this unique profession, Stan Ioan Pătraș managed to arouse many controversial discussions among researchers, because the work of the craftsman, although it has an original character, expresses a completely different vision of life and death, even out of the ordinary compared to how the church teaches us.

The subchapter devoted to the *Epitaphs from Săpânda* represents the brief narration of the entire life of man, both with its favorable and unfavorable aspects, all of which are

inspired by reality. Epitaphs take the form of folk poems, often naive and grammatically incorrect, that set forth important events and concerns during the dead person's life. It generally ends with the regret of leaving this world and loved ones. A specific and captivating element is the comic of the epitaphs, largely due to the popular speech of the Maramureş area, but it is also due to the comic of the situation through which the condition of each person is described. These epitaphs contain funny aspects, philosophical content, moralizing messages, etc., which manage to have an effect on those who read them, inviting both laughter and serious meditation. The causes of death are reduced to the main layer, the funny one, but the epitaphs contain multiple substrates. They have a profound moralizing role and draw attention to the frequent causes and effects of deaths: the consequences of alcohol, careless driving, the degradation of moral behavior and belief in God. In the end, *regret for the inexorable fate of death* is found in all.

The craftsman did not use the colors as he bought them, but combined the shades with each other. The chromatics of the craftsman had a connection with the environment. When he was asked where he got this blue from, the craftsman said that it comes to him from the sky, and the colors yellow, red, green, black are the colors that make up the four essential ages of the people of Maramureş, but also the four seasons in the space of life ours, blue being the fifth color.

The secret combination of the reproduction of this special blue on the crosses in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery remains a mystery even today. Dumitru Pop Tincu learned this harmonization between colors from Pătraş and, like his mentor, he refused to reveal the secret to us. This information will be divulged only to those craftsmen who will really want to carry on this craft and who in turn will also keep this secret.

In the sub-chapter "*Cimitirul Vesel*" seen through the eyes of the media in Romania - a brief analysis, we notice that the media plays an important role in any field, regardless of whether we are talking about culture or politics, it is omnipresent. After analyzing the information related to our topic, most of the articles found are written in a positive way and with more or less detailed information. This sub-chapter aims to highlight aspects related to the way in which the personality of the craftsman Stan Ioan Pătraş is reflected in the Romanian press articles, both during his life and after his death, as well as aspects related to the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery.

Being a graduate of journalism, I allowed myself to make a brief analysis of several articles from the Romanian press, with the main topic "Cimitirul Vesel" from Săpânţa. Curiosity lies in the degree of interest and in the way the media presents a subject in the sphere

of Romanian traditional and religious culture. We randomly selected ten articles from well-known Romanian newspapers with a rich activity in recent years.

Thus, four of the ten analyzed articles have an unsatisfactory content of texts addressed to the craftsman Stan Ioan Pătraș and the "Săpânța Cemetery". Most approached the news model as a journalistic style. The texts are short and do not present a note of their own. But, although not all of them are related to Stan Ioan Pătraș, the name of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery can be found in all the articles. The other six articles come with a more authentic and complex description of our subject of interest, and the original stories bring added value to the media in Romania. On the other hand, through the thorough study of this topic, I have reached some positive conclusions, namely that there is an influence of modernism that is extremely subtle, but present in the current context. Both Romanian and foreign newspapers, through the few articles they wrote, still show a special interest in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery from Săpânța, which is appreciated for the way in which the texts were written on these crosses but also for their aesthetics.

In 1998, foreigners ranked the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery in first place in Europe and second place in the world after the "Valley of the Kings" cemetery in Egypt, at the Symposium of Funeral Monuments, in America (Pennsylvania), which proves to us yet another given that the cemetery was recognized at its true value by foreigners and not by Romanian art critics.

Chapter IV opens with an analysis of the title *Man in the Face of Death. Collective mentalities and narrative biographies*. Death in Maramureș has a special character, and the community here gets involved and quickly adapts to the event itself. All the customs of the people of Maramureș are more conservative. That is why we consider it necessary to know these mentalities of the traditional village traced through several sub-chapters that illustrate experiences and offer help when man is put face to face with this solemn event and of great importance for the community and beyond.

The lyrics here open the doors to a horizon with different kinds of meanings that previous literature has accustomed the reader to: a mournful poem with traditional incursions, thus postulating a special rhythm and harmony. Therefore, most of Pătraș's texts contain a moral teaching, which the viewer/reader must reach for himself. Moreover, they expose the simple but profound philosophy of life of the Săpânța community, which organizes its life vertically, according to a spiritual conduct, subject to providence. The epitaphs inscribed on the crosses in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery also reveal the goals and objectives of the people, especially those who had important positions in the community, such as church members or teachers, the crosses thus becoming guiding directions for the other residents. In the case of the

deceased, it is believed that only those who died a good death find peace in the other world, while the young, because they did not fulfill everything they set out to do on earth and died prematurely, do not find peace too quick.

In the sub-chapter *The image-text relationship in the composition of the narrative biographies of the deceased*, we set out to analyze the importance of the image and the text on the crosses in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery from Săpânța. We were particularly interested in the relevance of biography in the conception of a unitary creation, as it was achieved by Stan Ioan Pătraș through the crafted crosses.

In this place, the image and the text receive equal attention, the two components being complementary, enhancing the comic and identity element of each individual cross. The visual element, however, is much easier to receive and helps cemetery visitors to create a broader picture of the life, death and transition between the two, of those buried in this community.

An important role is given to the sub-chapter *Dressing and social display in the world here and hereafter*, a current topic and for our days. Clothing can influence the course of life and death, say the people of Maramureș. This chapter is important to highlight how Romanians look at social status through clothing and how they communicate with divinity at the time of man's preparation to cross the threshold to the other world. So these garments represent a communion between man and divinity, an acceptance of entry into the world beyond. Observance of clothing shows the family's devotion to the deceased. In folk tradition it is said that we can tell by the expression on the face of the deceased if he is satisfied with how he was prepared.

An imported sub-chapter is represented by *Dirge and Verse – Funeral Rituals*. The scenario of this ritual involves special attention regarding the burial. In Maramureș every dead person is "bocit" (en. dirge, mourning - a lament for the dead, especially one forming part of a funeral rite) or "sung", and the mourners are not paid foreign women, but are part of the family. On a symbolic level, wailing has the value of a poem of unification, and on the secondary symbolic level, the same ritual act has the value of a poem of separation. It also has a social function: the louder the dead is mourned, the more it is considered that he was a prominent man in the village and loved by the family.

Wailing is an element of pre-Christian ritual that is not part of the order required by the church. However, mourning is seen as a natural act by both the community and the priest, but this is not the only special tribute to the deceased. In Maramureș, along with lamentation, we also find the verse also called "iertăciune" (en. forgiveness). Through the poem, the dead person says goodbye to his family and loved ones, spoken through the voice of the deacon.

In the *Moral Amplitude* subchapters. *Defects of the deceased captured on the monuments and the Qualities of the deceased and their role as community "leaders"*, I tried an analysis to discover both the defects of the deceased and the qualities. The problem of death, in the present case, is manifested through the technique of life stories through epitaphs. As each of the subjects has gone through the experience of facing death, their moment of regret is felt most strongly.

In this research I noticed many epitaphs suggesting that the deceased was guilty of his own death, leaving his family in mourning, as some of them had a passion for alcohol, which hastened their end. The funerary poetics existing on the crosses in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery highlights a lot of defects of the deceased without trying to hide them. Therefore, a confrontation is observed between the death experienced and the death endured. Paintings that express disobedience to parents, inattention to the wheel, alcoholism, etc., illustrate defects stemming from the lack of life experience of some and the ignorance of others.

Chapter V, comes with a novelty regarding this subject. *Entitled Community Voices*. A sociological journey in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery from Săpâanta, this chapter aims to add value to the place of origin of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery, by conducting interviews with community representatives. We therefore considered it relevant to give voice to the community that carries on the story of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery. That is precisely why we chose to include in this research the answers of the locals from Săpâanta to a series of questions with and about the tourist attraction near which they grew up. In the present analysis, we were not only interested in the quantitative aspect, but also the qualitative one. Since it is difficult to make a qualitative comparison at the level of the entire population in a certain area, we limited ourselves to discussing only a part of the interviews taken with the locals of Săpâanta, more precisely 30 interviews that I personally carried out, we have analyzed and introduced them in the present research.

Through this method we allow citizens to contribute their information on the beginnings of this cemetery. We believe that the opinion of local residents is important because this study explores their real perception of the symbolic value that the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery represents. We decided to make the analysis and interpretation grid including the interviewee's first and last name, age, function and locality. All these factors helped us in the analysis applied to this matter, which made our work easier when we selected the answers given.

In the sub-chapter *Conclusions regarding the field research*, one of the main conclusions that emerges from the analysis of the answers to the interview, is the attachment

of the interviewees to the church. Among the thirty respondents, including the main character Dumitru Pop Tincu, all of them emphasized in one form or another the importance of the church in the formation and evolution of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery.

The cemetery has a different meaning for each person I interviewed. For some, this space represents a certain place, a space where only the deceased are buried. For others, the cemetery is a place full of sadness or, on the contrary, a place for silence and a meeting with the deceased.

However, we note that the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery is not only a reflection of the Orthodox religion to which it belongs. Usually, burial customs are carried out in the cemetery, customs that belong to the Romanian tradition. However, the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery departs from this pattern and amazes by the fact that it is not strictly limited to the tradition of the funeral ritual. The "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery creates a story beyond this pattern, a story in which the element of surprise is after death and burial. This element consists in the originality of the crosses on which unique epitaphs describing the life of the deceased are written. Going out of print, the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery continues to seek the validation of the church in whose tradition it originates. That is precisely why the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery is under the tutelage of the parish in Săpânța, even if this aspect is regarded by some with skepticism.

More than 80% of those interviewed mentioned the name of Pătraș in the answer to the question regarding the birth of the cemetery. The other respondents certainly heard of him but hesitated to mention his name either by mistake, or because they did not know him exactly, or the emotions during the interview were too high, plus the fear of giving the wrong answer. Therefore, beyond the church, whose contribution we cannot deny, the cheerfulness of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery is due to Stan Ioan Pătraș. Described with much love by Dumitru Pop Tincu, Stan Ioan Pătraș is certainly the name with which the image of the "Cimitirul Vesel" will be linked forever. The approximately 700 crosses made by Stan Ioan Pătraș until he died, made this cemetery known, under the name "Cimitirul Vesel".

In the end, the mission undertaken by us in the present study was to investigate as thoroughly as possible, but at the same time complex, the originality and originality of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery from Săpânța. From the perspective of cultural-religious heritage, the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery is and will be a representative sacred space for Romanians, and from the tourist perspective, the cemetery represents a good opportunity for the development of tourism through the prism of the originality built here through the crosses and epitaphs present, but also through the story to Stan Ioan Pătraș, the one who gave uniqueness to this place and the commune of Săpânța.

So, through Chapter VI, *A foray into the context of funerary aesthetics. Analyzing the colors, images and epitaphs in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery*, we discover a local culture where the Romanian peasant is raised from a young age with a conservative faith expressed through traditions and customs. This culture is based on three important moments of life: birth, marriage and death. Both in rural and urban communities, man has preserved these traditions according to the environment in which he grew up. The importance is the same, even if the space and place is different, man's tendency is to mark the essential points of life. The subsection *Analysis of crosses, images and epitaphs*, comes with an album of photos taken and selected by us, through which we wanted to express all the features that exist in the space of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery, seen through the circumstances of death: crosses, sculpture, painting, epitaphs, symbols. In simple and innocent verses, the crosses carved and painted by the craftsman Stan Ioan Pătraș and his apprentices bring to the fore the life of the deceased with all his achievements, as well as his habits, as a result giving him an original note on the world level. The cemetery currently has over 900 graves with an epitaph on each carved cross that gives the story of the deceased in a few lines.

The sub-chapter *Analysis of the crosses, images and epitaphs in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery from Săpânța*, could not start without the most important epitaph from the perspective of this unique creation from Maramureș in the world, represented by the text of the one who laid the foundations of this atypical cemetery: Stan Ioan Pătraș. At the beginning, Pătraș only carved crosses. After a long time the idea came to him to write lyrics on them as well. On Pătraș's cross there is an epitaph which, once analyzed, explains the foundation of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery. Like most epitaphs, Pătraș's epitaph is a complex one. On one side of the cross is written the story of his life and on the other side is written the reason for his death. The following epitaph is written on the cross of Stan Ioan Pătraș, on the front side: "Since I was a young child/I have been Stan Ion Pătraș/Listen to me, good people/What I will tell no lies/How many days I have lived/Evil to no one I wanted/But as good as I could/No matter what he asked of me/My poor world/How hard I lived in it". Each epitaph begins with an introduction, who is and what is the name of the deceased. Then follows a description of the character of the deceased. Good or bad, these words are written on crosses without hiding the experiences of life.

We can even claim that the image of Pătraș in the form of a bust commands respect, thus all subsequent visitors to the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery are called to join this mass appreciation suggested by the manner in which he was painted. The popular port is distinguished by a symmetry of the shapes and colors of the breastplate that encourages order

and rigor. The black hair and arched eyebrows present Pătraș at an age past his prime. On his forehead and at the corner of his mouth are deep wrinkles specially painted to emphasize once again the idea that the author did not have an easy life.

On the other side of the cross, however, the spectrum in which Pătraș is presented to us changes. We notice in the painting that Pătraș is accompanied by a fiddler playing the violin. He was playing in the presence of Pătraș who had a glass of wine in his hand, but to the right of the fiddler there is an unpainted cross that seems to be waiting for its craftsman. The following text relates the epitaph on the cross of Stan Ioan Pătraș: "From the age of fourteen/I had to earn money/For hard work in the forest/With goats and sacks/Dad went to war/He did not returned to us/Three small children he has left//In a world of hard trouble/I would like to live some more/And to fulfill my plan/From sixty-two countries/I have been visited until yesterday/From state leaders/Many have visited me/And from now when they will come/They won't find me/And I wish them all well/Who were with me/That I was leaving life/At 69/Mr 1977." The crosses made during his lifetime brought him fame and he is proud of the visits of the most important heads of state in the world. As it follows from the epitaph that summarizes his existence, Stan Ioan Pătraș died in 1977.

The cross with the mother-in-law, perhaps the most publicized of the crosses in the cemetery, can also be found in the same comic book of the crosses in the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery. In this epitaph we can see a strong attitude of a son-in-law towards his mother-in-law who had a long life of 82 years. The satirical lyrics on the cross with the mother-in-law contributed to the notoriety of the "Cimitirul Vesel" cemetery from Săpânța and are known nationally, which brought a big plus to this concept: "Under this heavy cross/My poor mother-in-law lies/Three more days if she lived /She and I were lying down/You who pass by/Try not to wake her up/Like home if she comes/She will nag me again/But that's how I behaved/So she will turn back/Those who read here/Like me don't suffer/You find a good mother-in-law/With her good to live/She lived 82 years/Mr 1969".

The relationship between the son-in-law and the mother-in-law has always been a controversial one and such a conflict situation between the two characters existed in almost every traditional family in the 20th century. This aspect was primarily due to the fact that usually the newlyweds did not live alone, but together with the parents of one of the two spouses. Thus not infrequently the mother-in-law became a problematic character in the family. This is also the situation illustrated by the present epitaph, unique in its originality. Practically, this epitaph is not created in the first person but in the second person, the "author" being the son-in-law who buried his mother-in-law. The comic note saves the tragic situation brought

about by the woman's death and emphasizes the fact that any event, no matter how sad, allows for a dose of humor. The play on words "I lay and she read" adds to the humorous rhythm of the verse that features a son-in-law relieved by the woman's passing. The epitaph ends with an exhortation to the readers, an exhortation to choose a different mother-in-law than the one whose story this epitaph tells.

Following the analysis of crosses and epitaphs in Săpânța, we end the chapter with *Conclusions regarding the analysis of images and epitaphs* where we discovered people linked to tradition since adolescence. This led them to become more faithful and closer to the church. Man has always, but especially in the past, been in communion with divinity.

All the analogies found on the cemetery crosses only reinforce the idea that death is not only a passage to the eternal laden with drama, lamentation and mourning, but a transfer gate to another life at the opening of which the peasants smile optimistically, look resigned behind and are grateful for all that God has given them in their life on earth.

The relief of the tragic-comic relationships bring to the visitors' attention a past intertwined with the present, a sign that the Romanian mentality, despite the evolution of the entire society, persists in each of the generations. The typical relations between mother-in-law and son/daughter-in-law, respectively, are found in the same dimensions in everyday life. However, the humorous note in which the lyrics are conceived amuses the reader and at the same time awakens a detached and relaxed attitude vis-à-vis the situations encountered today.

The clothing of each person illustrated with so much care is representative for the whole of Maramureș, but even more so for the commune of Săpânța populated with people who keep traditions and customs with faith in God, workers, but who do not back down when it comes to play and good cheer. Whoever wants to create crosses for this cemetery is not allowed to deviate from the order. Everything must be preserved with sanctity precisely so as not to lose originality. His disciples were docile in fulfilling all these wishes, strictly respecting the creator's wishes.

Following this analysis we could observe a rather close connection between tradition and modernism. Even though we are in a world that is always in a hurry, eager for evolution and change, the people from Maramureș do not accept transformations easily. He is rooted from birth in the bosom of ancestral tradition, and this cannot change his perception of life, which he wishes to respect through all the dogmas learned in the family. From these teachings we can draw many conclusions, namely, that we must remain faithful to the area from which we come, to the traditions and customs that have been instilled in us, and to respect the place where we live every day.

The purpose of our study was to highlight the voice of the community and highlight the power and influence that the residents of this area have. In a democratic society, community voice is essential as it allows citizens to take an active role in the decision-making process to make a valuable contribution to their place of origin. Community voice can also be an effective way to solve local problems and bring significant improvements to citizens quality of life. Through our research, we gave the local residents of Săpânța the opportunity to make their voices heard, as they want to be actively involved in the development of their community and contribute to improving the quality of life of the citizens.

Stan Ioan Pătraș managed to attribute a deep meaning to the ephemeral moment. Through his dedication to local tradition and community, he gave purpose to this place that tells the story of man from birth to death. He understood his role and masterfully embodied this vocation, managing to transform this cemetery into a masterpiece, the funeral rites into dignified passages to death and the gloom of death, in accepting the natural cycle of life, predefined by providence. His vast knowledge established him as an artist, turning him into a role model. A model to which his apprentices aspired, wanting in turn to become as skilful and skilled in handling wood, in composing epitaphs and of course in knowing the use of colors to decorate the crosses in Pătraș's characteristic style. The authority, courage, talent and nonconformity of Stan Ioan Pătraș brought a new and original breath to the "Cimitirul Vesel " cemetery from Săpânța.

We therefore remain open to knowledge and to this place that has drawn us more and more into its midst to explore it, see it and bring to light untold stories. We wanted to capture a legendary world in a traditional space, as well as a meeting with those gone beyond, which would satisfy our desire for knowledge of a monograph loaded with symbolism, tradition and spirituality. For a complex experience in the territory of Maramureș, we recommend that you physically travel to enter into a direct relationship with the people here, to discover their kindness, beauty, speech and folk manner, which represent the essence of Maramureș.

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