

INTRODUCTION

The significant development of science has inevitably led to increasing segmentation or hyper-specialization. Therefore, when tackling a topic which may be covered by several science domains, it is only natural for someone attempting to write an introduction to a studies volume to approach the topic mainly from his/her own angle. Moreover, that person should try to articulate his/her own domain, which in this case is history, with the others. History as a science cannot remain indifferent to the obvious increased interest of the scientific world in death, questioning the existence nowadays of taboos relating to death.¹ This situation is somewhat inevitable given the special relation between this discipline and death.²

The historical analysis of the reality of death is a direction that has been developing within modern historiography for some decades now. Countless books, syntheses, doctoral theses, articles and so on have been written, and numerous conferences, congresses, symposiums etc. have been organised on the topic, thus giving full validation to the analytical dimension of the phenomenon of dying and the event of death enshrined by historians. We are talking about a distinct phenomenon of historical research which demands multidimensional analysis, since the situations connected with death may be multiple: from the circumstances of death to how the body is treated. Research on death thus refers to a specific kind of investigation which, given the complex nature of the topic, may proceed in a number of possible directions, bringing together various branches of the classical fields of history: social history, economic history, political history and cultural history. Therefore the historian must grasp the whole image and explain certain customs or behavioural peculiarities in connection with death. Hence what the French historian Michel Vovelle was emphasizing two decades ago remains valid from the perspective of the link between history as a science and death as a reality: death is an essential test to assess the attitudes, behaviours and collective representations of people throughout history. This is due to the fact that death is a continuous event but people's attitudes towards it change with time.³

One must add that as far as Romanian studies on death are concerned, the first really meaningful observations were arguably those of Gheorghe

¹ Tony Walter, "Modern Death: Taboo or not Taboo?" *Sociology* 25, 2 (1991): 292-301.

² Marius Rotar, "The Historian and the Death: A Dim Equation," *Philobiblon* XIII (2008): 329-350.

³ "La mort dans l'histoire. Entretien avec Michel Vovelle," in *Aujourd'hui, la Mort*, ed. Serge Bureau (Quebec: Radio Canada, Chaîne culturelle FM, 1996): 10-12.

Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Historica 19, II (2015): 5-10

Bezviconi (1910-1966).⁴ With an interesting life story of his own,⁵ Bezviconi published the first comprehensive study on the theme of Romanian cemeteries. Although quite a few decades old, his study remains a model for Romanian historiography both in terms of the analysis of funerary architecture and in terms of the focus on or decoding of the biographic connections of certain public figures of Romania who were buried or cremated in Bucharest. Of course, when he drafted his paper Bezviconi did not know that other western historians were tentatively beginning to cover the same subject. It is not that Bezviconi was ignorant, simply that in those days Romanian historians were quite isolated. However, now, so many decades later, Bezviconi has emerged as a visionary and we should once again emphasize his incontestable merits.

From this perspective, the topic of this edition of the *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Historica* review should not come as a surprise. It aligns with the current interests of historical research and world science. On the other hand, there is another central element supporting the selected topic: one may already speak of a tradition of the historical study of death at the “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia. This is reflected by in-depth studies⁶ and largescale academic events such as the annual conference on dying and death, which has been running since 2007. In time, this conference has brought together about 700 scholars from over 45 countries worldwide, putting the University of Alba Iulia on the world map of Death Studies. The concrete results of these conferences materialised through the publication of several volumes of studies.⁷ In recognition of its founder’s efforts, this year (2015) Alba Iulia hosted the 12th international conference on “Death, Dying and the Disposal of the Body” (DDD12) which is in essence the most important European conference on the matter, bringing together 136 scholars from 32

⁴ Gheorghe Bezviconi, *Necropola Capitalei* [Necropolis of Bucharest] (Bucharest: N. Iorga Institute of History, 1972). The book was published six years after his death thanks to his wife, Tatiana Bezviconi.

⁵ Dismissed from the Institute for the Study of Universal History, after an unsuccessful suicide attempt Bezviconi took a job as a doorman at the Bellu Cemetery in Bucharest. He began inventorying the individuals buried there and became interested in funerary arts. Iurie Colesnic, *Basarabia necunoscută* [The Unknown Bessarabia], vol. 2 (Chişinău: Museum, 1993), 220-222.

⁶ Marius Rotar, *Moartea în Transilvania în secolul al XIX-lea*, vol. I: *Zece ani de concubinaj cu moartea. Dimensiuni istorice și perspective contemporane asupra morții* [Death in 19th Century Transylvania. 10 years of Concubinage with Death. Historical Dimensions and Contemporary Perspective upon Death] [Biblioteca de Antropologie Istorică 2]; vol. II: *11 ipostaze asupra morții* [11 Aspects of Death] [Biblioteca de Antropologie Istorică 5] (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2006).

⁷ *Murire și moarte în România secolelor XIX-XX. Lucrările conferinței naționale, Alba Iulia, 11-12 octombrie 2007* [Dying and Death in 19th-21st Century Romania], ed. Marius Rotar and Corina Rotar (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2007); *Dying and Death in 18th-21st Century Europe*, vol. 1, ed. Marius Rotar and Adriana Teodorescu (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011); *Dying and Death in 18th-21st Century Europe*, vol. 2, ed. Marius Rotar, Adriana Teodorescu, and Corina Rotar (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

countries.⁸

However the abovementioned initiatives were not the first attempts to breathe life, as it were, into a virgin historiographic field. A previous research project dedicated to religion and attitudes when dealing with death in Transylvania from premodern times to contemporaneity has led to the publication of two interesting volumes of studies. The first deals with representations of death, mainly through historical analysis restricted to the Transylvanian space plus a review of the thanatology-related preoccupations of Romanian historiography.⁹ The second one, dedicated to discourses about death, performs a spatial methodological extension of the problematics, including by interpreting the cemetery as a cultural objective (making use of the funerary heritage or as an element of the system of assumed mourning customs).¹⁰ Exciting contributions regarding the representations of death and a section dedicated to funerary locations (cemeteries and crematoriums) are to be found in the volume of the 14th International Congress of Studies on Macabre Dances.¹¹

With no intention to carry out a selective presentation of the studies dedicated to cemeteries in Romanian historiography,¹² one may easily notice that the topics initially suggested to contributors making up the four sections of this volume are topics currently in the course of investigation or even neglected subjects rather than achieved investigations. Thus, the delineation of funerary locations is still difficult to achieve in the absence of in-depth studies on the creation, development and transformation of cemeteries, even though timely contributions do exist; on the other hand, the topic of crematoriums has recently started to become one of interest.¹³ The studies selected for the first

⁸ “Death, Dying and the Disposal of the Body. Eastern and Western Ways of Dying and Death,” “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, 2th to 6th September 2015.

⁹ *Reprezentări ale morții în Transilvania secolelor XVI-XX* [Death Representation in 16th-20th Century Transylvania], ed. Mihaela Grancea (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2005), 5-16, for the historiographic presentation.

¹⁰ *Discursuri despre moarte în Transilvania secolelor XVI-XX* [Discourses upon Death in 16th-20th Century Transylvania], ed. Mihaela Grancea and Ana Dumitran (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006), contributions signed by Angela Dobrescu and Philippe Bachelor, 175-200, for the abovementioned aspects.

¹¹ *Actes du XIV^{ème} Congrès International d'Études sur les danses macabres et l'art macabre en général*, ed. Cristina Bogdan and Silvia Marin-Barutcieff (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2010), 273-314, for the abovementioned section.

¹² Preoccupations concerning the body with reference to cemeteries, crematoriums and relics are analysed by Rotar, *Moartea în Transilvania în secolul al XIX-lea*, vol. II, 504-590. Please see also the comments from Daniel Dumitran's study in this volume.

¹³ Please see *Encyclopedia of Cremation*, ed. Douglas J. Davies and Lewis H. Mates (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). For the history of modern cremation in Romania, please see Marius Rotar, *History of Modern Cremation in Romania* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

section of our volume do not cover all the proposed matters, but they do approach suggestive aspects from an inter-disciplinarian perspective, including the identification of easterners buried in the Roman province of Liburnia (based on anthroponomy, funeral practices, typology and grave inventories of cemetery chapels within the Russian orthodox space); an analysis of the symbolism of great commemorative monuments such as the India Gate which represent the sovereignty of the modern Indian state but are also used as “amphitheaters of protest” by the masses; and an investigation of the diverse purposes funerary spaces serve today, as in the case of Geneva’s *Cimitière des Rois* which simultaneously represents a tourist objective, a place of pilgrimage, a park and, of course, a cemetery.

The second section is dedicated to funerary practices, which can also be understood as actions against death.¹⁴ With the exception of a study on the reuse of graves, the aspects suggested therein – legal regulations, the heritage value of tombstones, and old funerary practices – are to be found among the themes of the annual conference organised in Alba Iulia.¹⁵ In this case, our selection was intended to cover the diversity of funerary practices, including documentation of finds dating from the fifth millennium BC unearthed during rescue excavations in Alba Iulia-*Lumea Nouă* (2015 campaign), examples of ceremonial and sepulchral art typical of the Hungarian aristocracy from seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Transylvania and Hungary, the funeral rites specific to Chinese emigrants from a British colonial territory (Australia) in the nineteenth century, and an investigation of the funerary industry in twentieth century Poland from an economic and legislative perspective.

The third section refers to concrete memorialisation modalities as formulas chosen to stabilise memory in the face of the dissolutive power of death. Here we might also recall other contributions, such as those from the volume coordinated by Jack Santino,¹⁶ while for the Romanian space it is worth mentioning writings dedicated to the Central Cemetery of Cluj, the Bellu Cemetery in Bucharest, and the Romanian epitaph from the times of the communist regime,¹⁷ as well as other methods of marking the place or the event of death.¹⁸

¹⁴ Tara Bailey and Tony Walter, “Funerals against Death,” *Mortality* 21, 2 (2016): 149-166.

¹⁵ For debates on incineration, please see Peter C. Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes: Cremation and the British Way of Death* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Stephen Prothero, *Purified by Fire. A History of Cremation in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). For disposal of the body, please see *Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Death, Dying and Disposal*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Glennys Howarth (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

¹⁶ *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death*, ed. Jack Santino (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹⁷ Mihaela Grancea and Emöke Csapo, “Poarta ‘Mării Treceeri’ sau perspective asupra morții reflectate de epitaful maghiar din Cimitirul *Házsongárd* în Clujul secolului al XIX-lea” [The Gate of ‘Great Passages’ or Perspectives on Death Reflected by the Hungarian Epitaphs from the

Our volume also includes a terminological debate about the designation of tombstones from premodern Transylvania (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries) especially with regards to the meaning of the notion of “epitaph” and the relation between commemorative stones and tombs; an interpretation of the symbolism of *stećak*-type medieval tombstones in Bosnia-Herzegovina from the perspective of their use as a source of inspiration by the contemporary Bosnian poet Mak Dizdar; and a study on the evolution of forms of remembrance, from those which use real relics (ossuaries) to virtual traces (dedicated memorial sites on Facebook and other online social media).

The issue of the methods used in the study and preservation of cemeteries as cultural landscapes is the least tackled topic of Romanian historiography. As a consequence, a lot (almost everything) remains to be done in this sector and it should be done as urgently as possible, given the risk of irremediable loss of the funerary heritage due to the legislative provisions in force.¹⁹ We also include here a study proposing a methodology to reconstruct the burial registers based on tombs identified in the Ironton Colored Cemetery in Missouri (USA), plus another illustrating the results of an ongoing investigation into the Jewish cemetery in Alba Iulia (Romania) which uses documentary sources (plans of the cemetery and burial registers) and tombstones preserved within.

The thirteen studies, of which six are reviewed versions of papers presented at the “Death, Dying and the Disposal of the Body” Conference in Alba Iulia, belong to authors from several countries spanning four continents (Romania, Poland, Hungary, Croatia, Switzerland, Russia, The United States of America, India and Australia) with a diverse cultural typology. On the other hand, they come from various branches of human knowledge (history, sociology, anthropology, arts history) and therefore suggest new methodologies and interpretations. This proves once again that nothing can be understood

Házsongárd Cemetery of 19th Century Cluj], in *Reprezentări ale morții în Transilvania secolelor XVI-XX*, 147-166; Angela Dobrescu, “‘Bocetul pop’ sau despre resemnificarea patrimoniului funerar. Studiu de caz: cimitirul *Bellu* din București” [The Pop Lament or about the Resignification of Funerary Heritage. Case Study: The *Bellu* Cemetery in Bucharest], in *Discursuri despre moarte în Transilvania secolelor XVI-XX*, 175-192; Mihaela Grancea, “Epitaful românesc din perioada regimului totalitar, sursă pentru investigarea atitudinilor referitoare la moarte” [The Romanian Epitaph from the Times of the Totalitarian Regime as a Source for the Investigation of Attitudes on Death], in *Reprezentări ale morții în Transilvania secolelor XVI-XX*, 239-303.

¹⁸ Irina Stahl, “Les croix de la ville de Bucarest. Problèmes de sociologie religieuse,” in *Dying and Death in 18th-21st Century Europe. International Conference, Third Edition, Alba Iulia, Romania, September 3-5, 2010* [*Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Historica*, Special Issue, 2010]: 387-411; Olga Nešporová, “New Phenomenon: Roadside Memorial,” *ibid.*: 423-439; Emiliya Karaboeva, “Death and Memory in the Context of the Contemporary Bulgarian Street Posted Obituary,” *ibid.*: 357-386.

¹⁹ For this matter please see Daniel Dumitran’s study in this volume, 237-238, footnote 17.

about death as an event and dying as a phenomenon by limiting oneself to a key of interpretation taken from one single scientific domain.

One of the most interesting ideas on death is that there is a parallel between the cultural construction of time and the cultural construction of death.²⁰ Thus, in the case of this volume, one may notice that there is no time limit – timewise, the studies cover assumed situations of death from the prehistoric era to the modern day. This is only natural and is due to the fact that those having contributed to it are not representatives of a single domain of science, such as history, whose fundamental investigatory element is time.

We would like to thank the authors and to express our hope that this volume will stand as an invitation for other Romanian and foreign scholars to familiarise themselves with the expanding field of Death Studies, whose fascination lies in its multitude of subjects, nuances and analytical juggles.

MARIUS ROTAR AND DANIEL DUMITRAN

²⁰ Paolo Palladino, “Caveat Emptor: On Time, Death and History in the Late Modernity,” *Rethinking History* 8, 3 (2004): 403-416.