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**TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT**

**Rituri funebre în Podgoria Aradului**

**–Summary–**

**PH.D DISSERTATION  
Funeral Rites in Arad Vineyard**

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Key-words: funeral ceremony, ritual, myth, separation, transition, aggregation, wake, grieving, mourning, religious procession, burial, funeral feasts, ghosts, ancestor.

### Summary

The common perception assigns death a negative representation, identifying it with the end of existence or with the tragic glide through nothingness. Secularized society of the third millennium can not overcome anxieties on this issue because it has lost the contact with "the other world" and because it exaggerates the values of "the real world" in a desperate attempt to forget itself and his ground. The impossibility of total knowledge makes the men of this century a fragile shipwrecked on his own fragile realm of weaknesses.

In this context, writing about the theme of death in a PHD dissertation is difficult and apparently unnatural, taking into consideration that most people feel much more tempted to expose the “bright” aspects of existence, as birth and marriage. Contrary to prejudice, death, far from being an endpoint, reveals itself as a great pass to light, an essential event in the "journey" of the man on earth. Death is seen as a threshold, as a crossroads at which the human being rejects his passing side, preparing thus for *True Life*.

The intention of the performed research was not to discover or to update beliefs and mythical representations about the death, but to emphasise the functionality of these acts of ritual and ceremony, which are nothing but part of a complex system of specific spiritual life of traditional man.

The purpose of our investigation is to describe funeral rites circumscribed to Arad Vineyard. The attempt to reconstruct scattered and fragmentary cult practices, to compatibilize beliefs, sometimes heterogeneous, and to outline an unified picture of the burial customs has the target to highlight their deep structure, which subsequently could lead to the revelation of new spiritual dimensions of traditional communities from Arad.

Generally, the Romanian people render positive importance to death, being convinced that it is only a moment of transition into another life. When people from Arad Vineyard prepare the body and the soul for "The Great Journey", they believe the same. The fact that they dole in the memory of the defunct strenghtens this matter.

This paper demonstrates the conservation of ancient beliefs and practices, (re) discovered by us in Arad Vineyard area. Most important parts of Romanian funerary beliefs refer to the "immortality of soul", on the strength of prayer and alms that may change fate; the respect for the dead by mourning; the cross placed at the tomb is the proof for Christian hypostasis and so on. These customs are found in Arad Vineyard, with original notes, with changes more or less important, but which underline the unity of our national soul.

Ritual events, accompanying, in general, the main events of human life: birth, wedding, funeral, were named in our domain with the syntagm "rites of passage". Any translation from an ancient life form to a new human status involves three basic steps: separation from the old state, the actual transition and integration into the new form of existence. When the individual begins his travel to the everlasting rest - with all the isolation that involves - loses for a time his balance and traditional-folk community will undertake, through the various ceremonial - ritual acts, to help him to take apart life and to join the new existence.

Among the three most important events of human life, the most conservative is the funeral ceremony, also the reason of the investigation undertaken in this research paper. In traditional-folkloric Arad, all ceremonys carry on specific rules handed down. All rites, gestures, customs about the Great Journey, show their true meaning only related to a metaphysical reality. In this context, they show their polyvalent functions: provide the perfect separation and movement of the deceased to the other realm, and also re-balance the family, community and nation.

In the first chapter of the work, our interest was focused on ritual communication mechanisms, which conducted the entire approach to investigate human predispositions to communicate under the influence of traditional culture. In fact, the rites of passage are formed as ritual communication, their main line being the (re) updating of a myth. This ritual involves the junction of two planes, vertical, transcendental model with horizontal, social model, involving a symbolic transfer between them.

In the approach, we used the dichotomy advanced by the author Delia Suiogan, that *direct communication* refers to interpersonal relations, while *indirect communication* involves a complex form of communication taking place between the individual and the universe. Just by virtue of the latter, traditional community, implicitly places covered by this research, aimed at preserving the individual's relationship with the Cosmos, through mediation conducted by rites. The interception of messages from beyond the profane reality, described by Mircea Eliade as being contaminated with sacred intrusions, it is allowed due to language and ritual that offers potentiality accession to the transcendent. So, the theory formulated by Aurel Codoban according to the fact that the religious symbol gives continuity to hierophanies, unifying the man with the sacred in everyday plan of life is being checked.

Our reasoning wouldn't have been completed unless we analyzed the evolution of symbolism, so that I constantly pointed throughout the paper, secular effects it had on the individual and the community of traditional type, the modern mentality. In other words - as we demonstrated in the chapter *Ritual manifestations – guiding acts of existence-* we are witnessing a symbolic language resizing, under the pressure of cultural phenomenon.

In light of these considerations, I went then to (re) defining the concepts of myth and ritual, as forms of ancient and modern community culture. I insisted on the fact that the myth mainly focuses on mind, while rite focuses on the practical test. Next, we tried to prove that cultural events exercises on the individual a double influence: external, on the one hand, because they require the adoption of certain rules or unwritten laws, and internal, on the other hand, because they allow innovation, partly constrained by inherited behavioral compliance.

We also investigated the festive side of ritual events, which for funeral rites, foster direct communication between the actors and the world of ancestors. Next, I highlighted the symbolism of mask, indispensable item for funerary rite, assuming a higher level of knowledge.

The study of customs, in the present piece of work, showed the permanence of custom, whether it was investigated in comparison with the idea of tradition or habit, so that, this can be classified as a phenomenon of collective habit, a traditional rule of behavior, a social act that gives life and maintains traditions.

Then, our study focused on the funeral ceremony, the ritual involving a series of ritual events performed within traditional community, one of them is the agony of the invalid, succeeded with "the dissolution of the soul", which occurs forty days after the funerals. I must point out that after that, the premise of research, formed into the idea that the funeral ceremony, in traditional communities of Arad vineyard, would require the compliance of some rigorous principles, including performing the three essential categories of rites: *of separation, passing and aggregation*. The ritual events subsumed to the categories set out above drawn from the very structure of the funeral ritual were actually the subject of this paper.

The preamble of the chapter *Rites of separation*, which delineate the time between the agony, dominated by deadly predictions, and the moment of departure on the last road, I insisted on the idea that certain practices and rites are being imperative for the family and village community to be performed, because the deceased is in a *special/ uncertain* "dead-alive" condition, standing at the confluence of the two worlds, one from Here and Beyond.

The chapter *Rites of separation* contains the range of signs which foretell death, of the practices which facilitate perish, signs of mourning and wake - as a matter of community solidarity. In the first part of the chapter, I deliberately exposed some fatal predictions, highlighting the interplay of several factors: the domain of manifestation, the nature, the time, the identity of the recipient and those who decoded them, also the receiver attitude. Basically, the persons who were interviewed referred to the presence of predictive signs which mark the house and the household, to the occurrence of death, to the oppressive atmosphere felt by wild birds (owl, cuckoo, sometimes, woodpecker) and domestic animals, respectively, in some houses, objects that can send the same fatal message, and besides all this, to the unusual behavior of the person in agony. We also detected the oneiric repertoire.

We also catalogued a series of magical practices, designed to decide the fate of ailing: healing or relief of death. Among these we mention: confession and eucharist, forgiveness, Holy Unction, the settlement of the dying on ground, "untying knots" etc. The inhabitants from Arad are cautious on making all ritual acts, with apotropaic functions, established by tradition, to meet the moment when death occurs to a person, mentioning now, at least, the importance to fire a candle. After decease, the role of rites concern the two elements: the body and soul and the care to the alone soul, exposed to various kinds of danger: by opening the windows and doors, closing the eyes, bathing, dressing, according to the new state. All these are revealed in this chapter.

Another very important segment, in the present research, is the wake which in Arad Vineyard is a sacred duty, involving a complex of rites, beliefs and ceremonial practices, to

preserve normality, both in the mourning house which has become impure space, exposed to threats of all kinds, preventing the deceased becoming ghost.

In Arad Vineyard the wake is preceded by some necessary actions performed by the family. These actions absolve the family from malicious comments from participants who are interested in particular to examine how family separates from the dead - namely: cleaning the house, decorating it with everything family has "more impressive", placing the coffin in the middle of the room, the decoration of the coffin.

The arrival of participants to the wake which takes place in the evenings before burial is marked, generally, by gesture of approaching next to the coffin and saying: "God forgive him and rest him," then, the audience answers: "God rests him". After this the new arrived adapt to the theme initiated by those who came earlier. Usually these discussions refer in particular to the existence of the dead and human perishability, but can also degenerate into incompatible themes with the situation.

We also analysed the phenomenon of solidarity with the mourning family. The participants, may, sometimes, transform their words into lamentations, accompanied by an unusual gesture or overwhelming outbursts.

During the wake evenings, I must mention the withdrawal of some participants in the yard, where they are able to discuss various aspects of everyday life or to tell jokes, and also to start some games (playing cards and backgammon), meant to annihilate the state of deep sadness that was installed in the perimeter of the mourning house.

In the area investigated, we noted that throughout wake, participants are served by the bereaved family with (juice, coffee, wine, liquor) and a snack consisting of sandwiches, cookies, cakes, candies. Those present are aware of the purpose of this practice, so, they answer approvingly "God receive them".

On another perspective, we noted that the wake may represent an opportunity for a psychological analysis of the participants and of the bereaved family. We stopped also on a particularly sensitive issue, contrasting the afore mentioned: the wake can be a good opportunity to restore relationships.

Among indispensable traditional acts link to the funeral ceremony, is also "the songs for the dead" or the wails, which were collected - and inventoried in the Annex. The repertoire of wails involves, in addition to certain structural rules and stereotypes, a dose of improvisation, inspired, in general, from the circumstances in which death occurred or from the relationship of the deceased with the mourner, and with the community. The themes reflected in the text of mourning, I wrote about, some redundant elements in the whole funeral ritual: dead indifference to the repeated calls of the relatives left behind; house-coffin/ house-



grave, the deceased's refusal to the conversation initiated by the mourners; the bitter craving after previously deceased; meeting other dead; the incurable disease; the irreversible death.

The folk artifices manage to focus the idea of a secular cosmogony of the word Beyond, where it is assumed to be a hierarchical ordering of relations, which gives the dead the opportunity to join the family of origin. Moreover, the wails describe the way to the new residence, containing important recommendations with guiding value for the soul, and also messages transmitted beyond to the humanity beyond. An inherent accessory is the tissue ("cotuțul"), in which the mourner carefully gathers her tears, which are not allowed to touch the dead. If so, it could drown or burn the soul. The tears are required to pay "customs".

*The phase of translation* involves isolating the dead from the community whereas he enters in a process of transformation - going through the "last journey", with bridges - community assuming the daunting task to ensure adequate destiny in the Afterlife. As we noted in the chapter on rites of separation, *The journey to the Afterlife* involve that the dead must have some symbolic objects: resistant footwear, stick, candle, water, food supplies, an animal "guide" etc. At the same purpose, tradition provides a series of preparatory moments circumscribed to burial day: digging and monitoring the pit, it is also requested church counsel for using the flags, the children leading wreaths, preparing the distribution of coils, towels and handkerchiefs, inviting the orchestra / choir or musicians, the preparation of food for alms.

The rites performed at this moment focus on two seemingly contradictory trends, on the one hand, sending the deceased to the other realm of death and destruction of signs installed at the family level, and on the other hand, keeping the dead in the memory of the family.

I also reproduced some lamentations, wails and burial songs which are meant to guide the dead, so I analyzed some performed at the funeral of a mother and a father, of neighbors, a husband, the exemplification being completed in the Annex.

The participants at the funeral pay one's last respect to the dead bringing flowers/wreaths, symbols of purity and renewal.

Religious ceremony in Arad Vineyard, begins with taking the coffin out of the house, with a series of ritualic gestures. Outside, there is a religious service in which the priest utters "the forgiveness". This is a special and important moment both for the deceased and for people alive, then knock-shaped bread are being shared. Then the funeral procession is formed, in front there are those who carry the flags, a child carry the cross, wreaths, the priest, choristers. Immediately after the coffin is placed the family and close friends, and behind them all those who wish to accompany the deceased.

In this paper, we showed that the road from home to the cemetery, rebuilt, symbolically the initiatory journey of the dead to the world of the ancestors, and the rigorous practices related to the halts to cemetery, corresponding to Customs, is critical to posthumous fate of the deceased, reflected by acquiring superior knowledge, allowing him to become a father.

We considered relevant a burial practice radiography in Arad Vineyard, with a diachronic and synchronic extension of the landscape, especially because this theme inspired us, mainly symbolically, because the pit is the equivalent with the initiative grotto. In the same vein, posthumous "journey" requires, symbolically, reaching superhuman state, the transition from contingency to immortality. I highlighted the most suggestive symbols, mythological ideas, funeral actions, all demonstrating their ability to reveal the community mentality that we dealt.

The moment of burial is certainly the most tense interval, the mourning family and those present, aware the final separation. The dramatism of the sequence is also underlined by religious songs.

Tangentially, in section for rites performed in special circumstances, I referred to the situation of suicide, whom I analyzed from two perspectives: one related to the lack of repair practices, as their destiny, the very gesture was sealed in hell, therefore, they do not have either a celebration of religious ceremonies or burial in the cemetery area, possibly, in an peripheral area; and the second is the contempt that the community shows to suicidal acts, classifying such act as deviant.

In this section, of rites performed in special conditions, we recorded the situation of young dead who haven't been married. According to people from Arad vineyard, during the funerals, there is the possibility to celebrate a "symbolic wedding", which would prevent the intrusion of evil.

The last chapter, *Rites of aggregation*, reveals traditional prescriptions which require mourning, and other external signs, accompanied by a restrictive behavioral pattern. I also referred to funeral feasts in the range of forty days after, as well as moments of honoring the ancestors set in the popular calendar.

Referring to the issue of mourning, we noted the distinction between external gestures and individual experience, between mourning as institution and mourning as a condition of the person affected by the lost of a beloved person. I noticed that the community from Arad know their duties towards the dead, their family relationship with the deceased being decisive in determining the interval of wearing mourning badges. It should be noted that the mourning period imposed by Christian laws is one year. In Arad, during this period, there is the interdiction for the family of the deceased to participate at community life and the obligation

of alms organization, memorial services and performing of some customs. The end of mourning period coincides with the integration of the deceased in the Afterlife, becoming an idolized ancestor, and with reintegration of the family in the community.

The problem of ghost was also treated in my paper, fact that led us to the "abnormality", forcing us to watch exceptional situations aimed posthumous destiny of the body. Morbidity, as a presence which affect family and then the whole community must be neutralized by performing some specific rites able to remove the evil aspects and propel the good one. The influence of evil is unstoppable, as House, and the whole community whose boundaries are sensitive realities between Here and Beyond is marked by passages which, in critical moments, become vulnerable. According to the type of death (suicide, accident), arise the need to secure the alive, but also the status and "quality" of fellow (those who during the life held evil or had transgressed moral behavior, are prone to posthumous demonization). Equally, however, when the rites are not fulfilled completely, the funeral can generate a phenomenon called "anxiety of dead", their discontent may materializes in vindictive attitude, reflected on the living. What defines the abnormality of these cases is the extinction of the period that places the individual between the two worlds.

It is noteworthy the undeniable contribution of Pamfile Tudor concerning the problems of ghosts. He synthesized information from the main ethnographic and folklore collections, in the first volume of *Romanian Mythology* are references to the mandatory rites, performed to avoid deads becoming ghosts.

In this context, we emphasize that, in Romania the belief in ghosts derives from the fate in the immortality of the soul, and the terminology related to the phenomenon of ghosts is varied, showing a fluctuation of its semantics, depending on region of origin. We notice different words and etymologies for this word, deriving from Latin, Slavic language, in Hungarian, there is the term *frog* and, compared to French where we have *vampire*. In Arad Vineyard, the most used term is *ghost* (*strigoi, priculici*), referring to evil creatures due to the occurrence of errors / gaps in the performance of funeral ceremony or due to flagrant violation of traditional ethical prescriptions.

According to the folklorists Ion Muşlea and Ovidiu Bârlea, it is necessar a distinction between *alive ghosts* and *dead ghosts*, first designate the evil spirits of people who left their souls at night, and the the second category, the most dangerous, who may capture the souls of close relatives and draw a series of catastrophic events, in addition to the many physical and mental suffering they cause.

Another approach to the issues concerning ghosts gave us a Belgian researcher Marianne Mesnil, who replaces the classical opposition between *alive ghosts* and *dead ghosts*,

creating a system of four terms, taking into consideration the traditional conceptions about the relationship between life and death, respectively, between body and soul. In Arad Vineyard, burial habits claim to observe with strictness stringency the traditional norms, regarding the passage from Here to The Next World and, equally, those which assure the separation between those alive and those dead. Contrary, after the process of inhumation a malefic metamorphosis happens when the dead turns into ghost.

Mythological terminology regarding the problem of ghost and of this phenomenon carries multiple aspects and requires a variety of unforeseeable etymological lineage, also uncertain.

Bad embodiments often show during the night, causing the so called Thanatophobia among those *considered* to be responsible to the soul wandering between the two words.

The community reacts in case of souls turning to ghosts – it performs some anticipatory rite, so called exorcism.

During field research, I could record some impressive stories about ghost phenomenon, respondents giving us a series of assumptions regarding the causes of evil intrusion, but also various forms of evil, but also the liberation.

The causes previously mentioned, of the dead who return from the Other world as an enemy in the world here, may be caused by the type of death, and by the status of individual during life. Most subjects referred to the former wizards, people who committed suicide, people who have died in horrific circumstances (eg, drowning), but also to some deemed victims of curses. The subjects also remembered the superficial oversight in the three days from death or the failure of funeral. In all localities investigated, subjects claimed to be as dangerous for those who die with irreconcilable heart, because they have not fulfilled the last wishes of the dead. Villagers also talked about the spirit of justice who must be adopted for those who were killed, finding the assassin, amplifying remorse and punishing him. Unwanted babies can also become threats. According to villagers, the ghost may take human or animal appearance, but none have seen such creatures. It is said that these creatures appear beside their houses, on cemetery, bridges or isolate places. They ask for food, they make damages, frighten people and relatives.

At the end of our approach, we explored the imagology of the world beyond. Most funeral rites analyzed in this paper is practiced today in Arad Vineyard, proving the continuity of Romanian folk culture. Finally, we hope that we have achieved through this study, a return to origins, beliefs in the funeral, according to which death from any point of view I see it, is a joy.



