

PEOPLE AND DEATH IN THE COUNTY OF ARAD (1850-1918)

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Arad County, quantitative death, infant mortality, alcoholism, World War I, attitudes toward death, resignation, acceptance, funeral rite, epitaph, wills, cemetery, homiletics.

Argument

The work is part of the so called "new history" paradigm, which brought death to the attention of historians, as well as the attitudes, sensibilities and collective mentalities, history associated with attitudes towards life: family, child, sentimentality.

The sources used for our approach were: parish registers of civil status, statistical sources, local press and literature, homiletics, wills and burial inscriptions.

Regarding the method, we resorted to the one proposed by Michel Vovelle. First we tried to capture the demographical, quantitative dimension of death, followed by revealing attitudes to it. We also had in mind the different types of speech about death: religious, civic, literary.

The Historiography and the Methodology of the Problem

The first chapter provides an overview of universal and Romanian historiography as well as the sources and methods that can be used, trying to actually plead once again for a death history in the Romanian historical space.

Thus, introducing the issue of death in historical research links to the name of the French historian Lucien Febvre, who advocated a history of death theme, hitherto condemned as unworthy of interest macabre and historians.

The first form in which death entered the sphere of interest of historians has been the quantitative dimension promoted by the demographic historians. The affirmation of collective sensitivities and attitudes domain followed, which actually meant "great career" of death in historiography, and the issue taken Anglo-Saxon historiography.

In the Romanian historiography we can recall as foregoing the works of Simeon Florea Marian (*Înmormântarea la români*), Nicolae Iorga (*Mormintele domnilor noștri*), Alexandru Dușu or Ștefan Lemny (*Sensibilitate și istorie în secolul al XVIII-lea românesc*), but most studies upon death were published after 1990, in the elimination of communist censorship on investigating issues of spirituality. The majority of them are centered on offering data on the death installment, on seasons, on age groups and on the infantile death, insisting on the quantitative dimension of death, but lately have begun to be addressed as well other issues, more related to a history of attitudes, representations and behaviors towards death, such as analysis of different types of speech about death (religious, legal, medical, journalistic, literary), the suicide, funeral epitaphs, the will as a source for an history of sensitiveness in front of death, the juridical aspects of death.

Concerning the historical epochs analyzed from the perspective of death, although there is a predominance of studies focusing on modern history, the subject has been retaken into consideration lately by the historians of the Antiquity. At the opposite pole are situated the studies centered on the problem of death in the Contemporary epoch, especially those aimed at observing the change of rituals and attitudes towards death at the beginnings of the Romanian communism and Stalinism who tried occultation death.

Death may be revealed in a series of specific sources such as tomb inscriptions, paintings or sculptures in cemeteries representations, testimonies collected by ethnographers and folklorists from the 19th century, funeral sermons, Artes moriendi, prayers, wills. To address these complex issues it can successfully be used the method proposed by Michel Vovelle, consisting of a survey on three levels: death in its quantitative dimension, second - living death, and the third level - discourse on death. Another paradigm to address the topic of attitudes towards death is the one proposed by Philippe Aries, four-stroke, which define each basic attitude toward death: death domesticated, ego death, death of the other and death prohibited.

The Geographical and the Historical Dimension

Arad is an ancient hearth of Romanian culture and civilization, providing favorable conditions for human communities living in geographical configuration, climatic factors, rich hydrographic network and underground resources.

The historical evolution was influenced by the Hungarian, Turkish and Austrian, occupation which Arad has known also centuries. Also, this development was largely determined by the fortress of Arad with its military roles and comitatus center.

Gradually, around the fortress was born the "military city," populated mostly by Serbs, and a civilian town called "civitas gumanica", inhabited by German, Romanian and Hungarian. In addition to the new town have been civil and small agricultural communities, where the population was mostly Romanian and Serbian Orthodox religion and the main occupation was farming.

The fortress was also a factor in brake on the development of urban and economic development of the city, due to lift ban on building within the civil city, or the threat spectrum of displacement the civilians in a city other hand, based on strategic-military considerations.

But soon, Arad became a city of craftsmen and traders, who will have to play a beneficial role in its economic development, development increased by the elevation to the rank of free royal town in 1832. In addition, the threat of displacement termination meant for Arad beginning the upward evolution in all fields of human activity and the process of urbanization.

This development led to population growth in the city and county of Arad. In the first half of the 19th century, the city's population tripled, while in the second half of that century urban number doubled.

The Quantitative Dimension of Death

Chapter three follows the structure and dynamics of Arad population County in the 19th century, suggesting a demographic analysis based on the following structures: age, sex, ethnicity and religious, occupation, level of education.

Analysis of the demographic quantitative aspects of death in the county of Arad at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century reveals a significant increase of Arad county population in the temporal segment in question. But the trend was interrupted by the periods (1851-1857, 1871-1880) when the population decreased due to various epidemics such as cholera, in the years 1872-1873. These negative values were not recorded in the city of Arad.

Also in the 9th decade of the 19th century specific elements of "demographic transition" have appeared in the Arad County, such as: decreasing mortality, followed by gradual reduction of birth and marriage. Data provided by parish registers enable and highlight the causes of death as well as demographic categories related to the structure by sex, age group, seasonality, infant mortality.

Thus, regarding causes of death, we can observe lower proportion of deaths due to epidemic diseases, diversification of causation of death, increase of suicides, accidental deaths and murders. Another novelty is the introduction by the physicians of the time of alcoholism among the causes of death. Also, World War I caused a large number of casualties, to those who died on the battlefield adding those missing or dead due to diseases acquired after the war, such as typhus, dysentery, smallpox, cholera.

Analyzing the sexual structure of mortality, we observe the majority of male both in births and in deaths, the over mortality of men men being explained by several factors such as difficult work program, the increased mobility of men, which were to come more frequently in contact with disease outbreaks.

By analyzing the seasonal movement stands higher mortality at the end of agricultural campaign, the number of deaths due to increased physical exhaustion associated with a less varied diet, rich in fat. Also, winter and early spring were generally characterized by high mortality associated with lung disease and the rigors of religious power fast of Easter and Christmas.

The age structure of mortality reveals higher death rate for infants (0-1) and children 1-14 years, followed by the age group between 31- 40, prone to heart disease. Moreover, infant mortality remained high, as determined by the epidemic, disease, poor diet, lack of personal hygiene and medical treatment based on empirical "remedies" popular.

In the health organization, in 1900, the county had 11 medical posts stable, 35 pharmacies, 97 epidemic hospitals, 45 doctors and 157 midwives. In the city of Arad were 3 hospitals with 383 beds and one epidemic hospital.

The Attitude towards Death

The last chapter proposes capturing attitudes towards death through the analysis of funeral ritual, the funeral sermons, funerary inscriptions, wills, and burial societies existing statutes.

Thus, the funeral ritual had the function to ensure the late the eternal rest and to avoid its transformation into the undead. Also in the coffin was placed a series of objects, once thought dead will need, which reveals a belief in the afterlife.

The funeral sermons stand attention to "survivors", attitude explained by changes in family issues and feelings. We can also observe the abundance of promises of revision with the loved ones in the afterlife.

Another problem is that of the requiem masses, convicted at the time because they degenerated into opportunities to consume alcohol in excess. Priests were advised not to take part in such events and to enlighten people about them. Equally thorny was the question of burial, left derelict, unimpeded and not having a plan for sharing graves.

In the funerary inscriptions examined, most are summarized as text, especially in the Orthodox cemetery in Pecica, while in the cemeteries of Arad inscriptions are more elaborate. The debut formula of these inscriptions ("Here rests" or "Here rests in the Lord") recalls the motif of death viewed as sleep. Among the symbols used in funerary inscriptions include bird (pigeon), cup, flowers (roses). Many epitaphs mention the name of the person who disposed the lift of the funeral monument and who also beard the costs of construction.

Most of the people who wrote a will were concerned about the future testamentary wealth accumulated, but there also were people concerned about their situation after death, leaving a clear indication on their burial. Wills are also a reflection of family relationships, providing information about relations between husband and wife or between parents and children.

Burial societies were to ensure members had departed a respectful burial and help the deceased family. The finance of such companies came from fees, funeral taxes, donations. In the county there were several funeral companies, such as that established in 1890 to Țiria, the one in Pănatul Nou, or the society "Providence" in the neighborhood Mureșel.

Thus, the dominant attitude towards death in Arad at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was the resignation and acceptance. However, fear of death is manifested by fear of contamination, a new fear about the dangers of body and is detectable in the funeral ritual, aiming to avoid a bad death, the deceased would have led to the transformation of the undead. In fact, these attitudes translated new attitudes towards life, like valuing health and care to children.

On the battlefield, the attitude to death was generally one of fear, only in moments of extreme emotional death experience is expected as an "ultimate liberation" coming to save the soldiers from the horrors of war.

This paper does not exhaust the vast and very difficult issues of death in the county of Arad, research can be extended to other original sources, addressing new issues from new perspectives and comparisons.