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SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL BASIS OF ARTISTIC PRACTICE: THE MERRY CEMETERY, SĂPÂNȚA (MARAMUREȘ)

Abstract. This paper aims at showing the strong relationship between tradition and innovation in the so called Merry Cemetery (Săpânța, Maramureș, Romania). The cemetery contains many ranks of richly decorated blue crosses showing, in verses and images, episodes of the villagers' lives. The Merry Cemetery is the fruit of Romanian traditional culture (born at the crossroads of multiple influences, pre-roman, roman, Slavic, Hungarian and so on) and shows a dialectic fusion between tradition and originality, which I intended to analyze briefly. The artist who created this unique graveyard, Ioan Stan Pătraș (1908-1977), took many elements from the popular tradition of Maramureș (typical versification, traditional colours, decorative motives), but was also very open to the innovations due to the contact with the urban world, or to the historical changes in Romanian society (the communist period). The synthesis between these elements marks the profound originality of Ioan Stan Pătraș's creation and the birth of a local "new tradition" continued even today.

Key words. Anthropological artistic practices, Săpânța cemetery, traditional culture, folklore.

Introduction

Tourists, anthropologists, curious people who take a trip in the historical Romanian region of Maramureș can't avoid a visit to the so called Merry Cemetery (situated in the village of Săpânța). There, long ranks of richly decorated blue crosses showing, in verses and images, episodes of the villagers' lives constitute a great artistic surprise. The emotion is strong, and several questions raise in the mind of the viewer... What is the cultural context which made the Săpânța phenomenon possible like? How come a peasant could imagine such a unique work of art? Which are the anthropological basis of his practice, how far is he gone from the specific artistic tradition of Romanian villages? This paper will try to offer some answers, in three steps. First, I will present some historical and ethnographical data related to Săpânța, useful to the comprehension of the complex culture elaborated in this villages from the 14th century. Then, I will

describe very briefly the life of the man who created the Merry Cemetery, Ioan Stan Pătraș (1908-1977). Finally, I will try to propose a comparative table meant to show the perfect equilibrium between tradition (anthropological basis of artistic practice) and innovation (essence of artistic practice).

Săpânța:

Historical and ethnographical data

The village, situated in the extreme north of Romania, near the Ukrainian border, in the heart of the great historical region called Maramureș, is attested for the first time the 30 October 1373 under the Slavic-Romanian name of Zapancha. The first documentary mention concerns a conflict between the Romanian noblemen of the village and the Hungarian and German colonists settled in Câmpulung la Tisa (village inhabited by a Hungarian majority still today) about some properties abusively attributed to the latter, in front of the authorities of the Hungarian Kingdom: “inter alios Iudex Iurati ac universi hospites de Huzyumezeu [Câmpulung], et nobiles de Zapancha nobis proposuerunt, ut quedam terra litigiosa inter ipsos existeret, que usualiter inter ipsos distingui deberet” (Ioan Mihaly de Apșa, *Diplome maramureșene din secolele XIV și XV*, Ediția a II-a, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Societății Culturale Pro Maramureș “Dragoș Vodă”, 2000, p. 69, diploma nr. 38).

The conflict was very long and the Romanian noblemen fought to keep their rights and privileges for several

decades like we are going to see. On the 6th of October 1383, in Sighet, there is a revocation of some ancient sentences concerning the frontier between the two villages. The family name Stan is mentioned here for the first time: “eisdem nobilibus predictis videlicet Magistro Stano ac Banko de Zarwazow [Sarasău, village near Săpânța and Câmpulung], nec non Lodomerio de Zaponchya, concessimus literas nostras patentis, id quod ipsi homines prephati de Longopratho cum literis nostris posterum procedure non valeant” (Ioan Mihaly de Apșa, 2000, p. 80, diploma nr. 48).

The feudal conflicts were very frequent: a document emitted on the 5th of November 1419 in Buda speaks about a crime committed by Naan and Ioan, sons of Ladomer of Săpânța, who killed a member of a royal commission and stole from him 100 florins gold (Ioan Mihaly de Apșa, 2000, p. 241, diploma nr. 138). The noblemen of Săpânța (the sons of Ladomer) and Sarasău address the king Sigismund against Paul, the prior of Holly Mary Convent from Remeți, who abusively occupied a part of their possessions. This conflict also lasted for many years, strongly related to the other one, between Săpânța and Câmpulung (1426-1430, 17th of October 1459, the 23th of April 1465, Ioan Mihaly de Apșa, 2000, pp. 268-269, 428-431, 465-469, diplomas nr. 156, 250, 272).

On the 5th of April 1456, the frontiers of the town Câmpulung la Tisa were resettled, but there was a strong contestation emanating from Petru

Gherheș of Sarasău, Luca of Săpânța and the monk Simon from the holly monastery of St Michael, Peri: “In personalem praesentiam domini Regis pro iudice et juratis ac universes civibus et inhabitatoribus civitatis Hozzumezew contra Petrum Gerhes de Zarvazo ac Lucam de Zapponcza, et alium intronominatum, super reambulatione metarum praedictae civitatis Hozzumezew ac terrarium, sylvarum, pratorum, et aliarum utilitatum ejusdem a partibus possessionum intronominatarum modo introscripto facta, ad octavas festi beati Iabobi apostoli.” (Ioan Mihaly de Apșa, 2000, pp. 376-379, diploma nr. 222). On the 10th of June 1456, the 12th of February 1457, the 9th of November 1457 and the 28th of February 1458, even the supreme authorities of the Kingdom gave some mandates for the protection of the inhabitants of Săpânța, Sarasău and Peri against the colonists of Câmpulung, which abusively occupied two monasteries, some cultivated lands, pastures and forests. The royal commissions obliged the Hungarians to give back the possessions to Romanian noblemen (Ioan Mihaly de Apșa, 2000, pp. 393-395, 402-404, 406-407, 437-439, diplomas nr. 230, 231, 236, 238, 255).

More than a century after the first mention of the village, in 1492, the Romanian protested at Cluj against the attribution by the Hungarian crown to Bartolomeu Dragffy (Hungarian nobleman of Romanian origin) of several villages. Săpânța was attributed to Dragffy, so the inhabitants lost their ancient autonomies

(Marius Diaconescu, “Răscoala nobililor maramureșeni din 1492”, in *Nobilimea românească din Transilvania*, Satu Mare, Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, 1997, pp. 195-196). Two documents emitted at Sighet the 15th of October 1499 and the 7th of April 1500 show that the mountains where the Romanian shepherds from Săpânța went with their animals were abusively occupied, so they ask for a restitution: “Quare per presentes vestram humillime precamur maiestatem, quatenus easdem staciones pecorum in alpibus prenominatis dictorum nobelium vestra maiestas graciosae remittens, reddere et reddifacere dignetur.” (Ioan Mihaly de Apșa, 2000, p. 628, diploma nr. 362, for the citation, and pp. 629-630, diploma nr. 363, for the year 1500).

With the passage of time, the noblemen who didn't accept the magyarization and the switch to Catholicism became simple peasants in the Romanian villages of Maramureș, but they kept some records of their prestigious origin. The documents of the 14th-15th centuries mention many noble families whose names survive in Săpânța even today: Stan, Gherheș, Tivadar, Boșa, Finta, Giurgi, Nan, Pop, Stețca, Săpânțan, Tite, Hondiș / Holdiș, Turda, Banc. If we take a look at some historical notes of the 18th-19th centuries, we notice the same names which appear very frequently (cf. I. Bârlea, *Însemnări din bisericile Maramureșului*, Bucharest, Atelierele grafice Soccec & comp., 1909, pp. 169-175).

The situation of the names is not very different on the crosses painted by

Ion Stan Pătraș: these facts confirm the stability of the population, reinforced over the years by local marriages, very usual in the communities of Transylvanian Romanians. If one takes a look at the painted crosses in the cemetery, one can see that the most frequent names are Stan and Pop (Mazzoni, 1999, p. 70). The second name in rural communities respects two main criteria: it belongs to the Christian tradition; it has to be used systematically in the historical evolution of the same family (the grandchild is usually baptized with the name of the grand-father or grand-mother). But when the family name is Pop or Stan and the second name Ion (John) or Ana (Anuța)¹ some differences have to be made. Very often, in Romanian villages, the difference between people is given by the surnames, much more important than the names (used more in official context, not in everyday life). The surnames in Săpânța have various sources: ethnical origins (Frâncu = French, Talianu = Italian, Muscaliu = Russian), place of birth (Iepanu = from the village of Iapa, situated nearby in the Maramureș), profession (Cantor, Diacu, Moraru), physical characteristics (Știopu = Rickety, Bătrânu = Old, Surdu = Deaf), culinary terms (Pogace) (Mazzoni, 1999, p. 71).

The individualization process on the crosses in the Săpânța cemetery is very

complex: the family name is followed by the second name, then by the surname, eventually by the mention of the place in the village where the dead person lived, then by a story based on the main occupation of the deceased: “Aici eu mă odihnesc / Pop Anuța mă numesc / A lu Ionu Iepanului / Din capătu satului. / Cât în lume am trăit / De-acasă n-am prea eșit / Că mâncare-am pregătit / Și am pus în farfurii / La ce zece-a mei copii.” (Mazzoni, 1999, p. 91, epitaph nr. 18).

This scheme is sometimes inverted: some epitaphs begin with the surname, followed by the family name + second name and by the main occupation. Few epitaphs begin with the main occupation and leave the biographical notes at the end. In the epitaph nr. 269 (Mazzoni, pp. 275-276), the names of the deceased person are not even mentioned: the main occupation and the social network suffice for the identification: “În viața ce-am avut / Meseria mi-a plăcut / Și vâltoare am făcut / S-aducă lumea din sat / Cergile la vâltoare. / Casă mare mi-am făcut / Ca să fiu un om avut / Când or veni-ai mei la mine / Să am pe toți unde-i pune. / Dar pe când am terminat-o / Moartea viața mi-a luat-o / Și m-a strâns într-un timp scurt / Fără ca să fi zăcut. / Măi Gheorghe, fecioru meu, / Cântă-mă-n cântecul tău / Tu Grigore și Anuța / Grijiți pe-a voastră măicuță, / Când veți putea v-adunați / Și pe mine mă cântați / Că ieu iute vă lăsați / La 63 de ai.”

Official statistics of the years 1839, 1863, 1873, 1910, 1930, show that the great majority of the inhabitants of

¹ For example, in the cemetery, we find at least seven women called Pop Ana / Anuța and many more called Stan Ana / Anuța.

Săpânța were Romanians, like in the middle ages. However, since the 18th-19th centuries, the Jewish community of Săpânța was very important and gave birth to a Hasidic dynasty (Spinka, which is the Yidish name of the village). Mixed in Romanian communities, the Jews became sometimes shepherds, crafting shepherds clubs with traditional Romanian models, and preparing casher food². Some statistical data show the evolution of the population among the 20th century: 3727 inhabitants in 1930 (2668 Romanians, 998 Jews, 1 Hungarian, 42 Other ethnic groups³), 3.318 inhabitants in 1992 (3312 Romanians, 1 Hungarian, 3 Ukrainians, 2 Serbians; the Jews disappeared after the deportation by the Hungarians during the Horthyst occupation of Northern

Transylvania). The villages near Săpânța are characteristic for this region with a multicultural tradition. Săpânța is situated at an equal distance between Remeți at the west (2384 Ukrainians, 187 Romanians in 1992) and Câmpulung la Tisa at the east (2047 Hungarians, 360 Romanians in 1992). Săpânța is also closed to Sarasău and Iapa (absolute Romanian majority).

Despite the cultural changes among the different ethnic groups in the region, each of them kept its own traditions, cultural practices and mentalities. This situation appears very clearly in the epitaph of Roman Ion: “Vaci frumoase am crescut / Și mult lapte am vândut / La unguri în Câmpulung.” (Mazzoni, 1999, pp. 264-265, epitaph nr. 255). Here, we can see the opposition – largely debated in cultural anthropology studies – between a people of farmers (Romanians) and a people of craftsmen (Hungarians), which transform the goods bought before selling them in a larger commercial process. Despite civil peace between the different ethnic groups, some forms of racism can be observed. It is obvious in the story of a horrible crime told by the cross of Saulic [Sauliuc] Ion: “Vai eu rău mă odihnesc, / Saulic Ion mă numesc. / La grădină în Belmezău / De oi am socotit eu, / Ne-a vent un ungur rău, / Ne-a pușcat în capul meu / Capul de trup l-a tăiat / Și așa m-au îngropat / Fie în veci blăstămat.” (Mazzoni, 1999, p. 295, epitaph 299).

Since the end of the 14th century, the Romanians in northern Maramureș saw their civil rights restricted by the

2 See, on the Jews in Maramureș, Victor Neumann, *Istoria evreilor din România*, Editura Amarcord, Timișoara, 1996, pp. 42-43. The author states that the pastoral practices in Maramureș show “a remarkable Romanian-Jew coexistence”. See also Andrei Oișteanu, *Imaginea evreului în cultura română*, 2nd edition, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2001, pp. 209-214, Tiberiu Morariu, *Câteva contribuții la oieritul evreilor maramureșeni*, Cluj, 1930, and Nicolae Dunăre, “Fromagers juifs dans les Carpates nordiques de la Roumanie (1860-1940)”, in *Folklore Research Center Studies*, Jerusalem, III, 1972, pp. 231-243.

3 See Vasile T. Ciubăncan, “Învățămintul de stat în Județul Maramureș pentru minoritățile nemaghiare sub ocupația Ungariei 5 septembrie 1940-13 octombrie 1944”, in *Maramureș, vatră de istorie milenară*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dragoș Vodă, 1997, p. 313.



Hungarian occupants of Transylvania, so that they were very attached to the Church as the main institution which helped them to preserve their identity. Near Săpânța, at Peri (now Grushevo, in Ukraine), a monastery founded by Romanian noblemen gained in 1391 the status of a bishopric residence in direct dependence of the Patriarchy of Constantinople. Its importance for the cultural life of the region, between the foundation in 1368 and the destruction in 1703, was great mainly due to the school (see Alexandru Filipașcu, *Istoria Maramureșului* [1940], Baia Mare, Editura Gutinul, 1997, pp. 56-62, 99-104).

A particularity of the zone is that – since the union with the Catholic Church signed by a Romanian bishop, Atanasie Anghel, in 1697-1700 – the great majority of the population in Săpânța belongs to the Greek-Catholic Church, which kept the Orthodox rites but accepted papal supremacy. During the communist period, when the Greek-

Catholic Church was forbidden by law, things have changed so that one can find today Orthodox Christians in Săpânța. The crosses in the cemetery keep the memory of the communist prosecution against the Greek-Catholic Church. Pop Gheorghe was condemned by the communist regime for supporting the Greek-Catholic priests refugees in the woods of this hilly country; his place is not in the Săpânța cemetery but in one of the most horrible communist prisons: “Eu Pop Gheorghe mă numesc / Nu aici mă odihnesc, / Mormântu meu e în Gherla / Dacă îți mergie l-îți afla / Prin pădure merg pe cărare / Să duc la preoți mâncare. / Eu am crezut că fac bine / La ciei flămânzi să duc pâine. / Iată ce mi s-a întâmplat / Pentru aceiè-s condamnat.” (Mazzoni, 1999, p. 257, epitaph nr. 244; see also the epitaph nr. 203).

Since the middle ages, Săpânța had a good economic potential: we saw the enumeration of forests, lands and mountains belonging to the local community. A document dating from 1404, written in old Slavonic (cultural language of the Romanians by their belonging to the Byzantine Church), speaks about a mill situated on the homonym river⁴. The main occupations of the inhabitants were the agriculture (cultivating wheat, then corn etc.) and animal breeding, especially of cows and sheep. The wool was

4 See Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Instituții medievale românești. Adunările cneziale și nobiliare (boierești) în secolele XIV-XVI*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, p. 184.

employed for the confection of tissues (blankets-*cergi*, shirts, jackets, trousers) which make even today the national reputation of Săpânța. The occupations are very present in the epitaphs and in the images painted on the crosses of the blue cemetery, in scenes of a naive realism: millers, butchers, miners (Maramureș is a region with ancient traditions in mining), teachers, doctors, cops, firemen, dress makers, priests, but mostly shepherds and breeders. By the crosses, one can have various other informations, about the longevity of the inhabitants of the village (from a few days to 108 years old, with an average of 70 years old), about the diseases which threaten the people's life (cancers, alcoholism, heart diseases), about the car accidents and natural catastrophes, about the voyages (the peasants travel mostly for health problems to important cities like Cluj and Bucharest, or for commerce to little towns situated nearby – Sighet etc.), about the social network. Indeed, in the cemetery, the spectator may see the same groups of families as in the real life, and the social ties seem even stronger after the death. The tragedies and joys⁵ of an entire village are carved and painted in

wood in a unique place, which is still a traditional cemetery, but profoundly transformed by the genius of an artist.

**The creator of the Merry Cemetery:
Ioan Stan Pătraș and his relations to
the local community**

The family of Ion Stan Pătraș (1908-1977) is a noble one. Stan of Sarasău, mentioned in the diploma dating from 6th of October 1383 (see *supra*) had a daughter, Magdalena. She married Stan, son of Gherheș of Sarasău, so that in 1401 a new noble family was born, settled in its lands of Săpânța. Over the years, the family ramified a lot: in 1861, in Săpânța there were 81 families descending from the ancestors here mentioned (Alexandru Filipașcu, *Enciclopedia familiilor nobile maramureșene de origine română*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 2006, pp. 237-238). Even if the family was noble, with the passage of time, the social status had no longer a concretization in land possession, heraldry, wealth etc. Most of the descendants of the noblemen lived like peasants, under foreign rule (Hungarian, Austrian-Habsburg, then again Hungarian), before the creation of Great Romania in 1918.

Ion Stan Pătraș is one of these noblemen who had a peasant's life. His father, soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army, died in Italy in 1915, leaving an ill wife and three children with little possibilities of having a quiet life: "Am fost Stan Mihai Pătraș / Și v-oi spune mintenaș, / În anu patrusprezece / S-acceptat un război rece, / Eu de-acasă am

5 The humour is quite rare on the crosses in the Săpânța cemetery, despite the very widespread idea; we have an example in the epitaph of Stețca Ion al lui Mihai: "Până când m-am însurat / Și de dracu eu am dat. / Feciori când vă însurați / Tare bine vă uitați / Că trei femei am avut, / Nici una nu mi-o plăcut." (Mazzoni, epitaph nr. 144, p. 180).



plecat / Și trei copii am lăsat, / Ion, Toader
și Ileană / Și femeia rău bolnavă. / Că pe
front eu am plecat, / Dujmani m-au și
pușcat, / Acolo m-au îngropat / În Italia
lângă-on brad. / Scurtă viață aveai, / 28 de
ai. / Mort 1915.” (Mazzoni, p. 197, epitaph
nr. 167). Pătraș’s mother lived a long life,
despite the illness of her young age: “Aici
eu mă odihnesc / Stan Mărie mă numesc
/ Ș-am fost mama lu Pătraș / Mult am tors
din căeraș. / Săracă viața mea, / C-am trăit
can greu în ia, / Că văduvă am rămas /
Cu trei copii mititelaș, / Soțu în război
a plecat / Și înapoi nu a înturnat. Am
trăit 83 de ani. 1968” (Mazzoni, p. 120,
epitaph nr. 63).

Ion Stan Pătraș wasn’t very educated,
he studied a little bit at the village school
(3 years), hardly enough to be able to write
the epitaphs on the crosses. Despite the
deficiency of his scholar education, Ion
Stan Pătraș had some very profound roots
in the soil of traditional Romanian culture,
he knew well the arts, crafts and rituals of
his region and he was full of talent, so that
he could have an exceptional destiny. He

participated directly to all the aspects of
everyday life in Săpânța: since fourteen,
he had worked in the forests so as to earn
money, then he had been a soldier for five
years and he saw the atrocities of War
World II, he worked as a sculptor and
as a painter, he taught some courses in
Popular Schools, he was member of the
C.A.P. council (Company of Agricultural
Production, a communist organization)
and of the church senate of the village,
he had daughters and grand-children.
In few words, he was very integrated
in the socio-cultural network of his
village, as we see in the long epitaph he
composed for himself, partially engraved
and painted on his cross. The signs of
his belonging to a cultural system are
evident, for example, in his asking for
funeral complaint, usually performed
at each Romanian burial: “Voi, femei,
vă doresc bine, / Tinere și mai bătrâne,
/ Când m-o scoate din ocol / Vă strângeți
cu mare dor. // Înainte vă înșirați / Și pe
mine mă cântați, / Din salaș v-oi mulțami
/ Cu toți sfinții îngerii.” (Mazzoni, p. 28).

Using some aspects of the traditional
culture like pieces of a puzzle game,
Ion Stan Pătraș created an original and
unique work (Golopenția, p. 1868). As a
sculptor in a Maramureșean community,
he had two main duties: to sculpt the
portals of the houses and the crosses
in the cemetery (Golopenția, p. 1864).
Little by little, he began to paint the
crosses in blue, so as to protect them
against bad weather. With the passage
of time, he developed an iconographical

program, based on traditional decorative motives and on a figuration of a scene in the life of the deceased people. He replaced the simple statement in prose informing about the name and profession of the dead by a versified epitaph first very short then longer and longer: “Îmi vin în minte pe când cioplesc și dau cu vâpșeaua. Cu ani în urmă scriam doar numele răposatului și data. Apoi am început și scrierea în cântec; întâi două rânduri, apoi patru, apoi patrusprezece. Acuma fac oricâte, douăzeci, sau peste douăzeci, după povestea pe care o torc.”, (*Cimitirul vesel*, monografie sentimentală de Pop Simion, cu 116 fotografii de Ion Miclea-Mihale, București, Editura pentru turism, 1972, p. 33).

The types of crosses are so complex, that it is difficult to set up a rule. It is evident Pătraș worked on a model very frequent in Romanian rural cemeteries developing the crosses in order to be able to include scenes, portraits, epitaphs etc. Most of the crosses are variations on a Greek-Byzantine-Russian model (that reminds us the geographical contact of the region of Maramureș with the Slavic world), but one can see also circular crosses.

Horia Mocanu, in an essay written back in 1985 (published in 2003, “Cimitirul de la Săpânța – cimitir de factură celtică?”), thinks that the Merry Cemetery is of Celtic origin. His main arguments in favor of this hypothesis are two: a. the Celts were very present in Maramureș from 300 b. C., and they were slowly assimilated

by the local Dacian population, which continued to live outside the borders of the Roman province called Dacia; b. one can find traces of Celtic attitude before death (unconcern, joy, humor, jokes) in the epitaphs written by Pătraș.

The hypothesis is interesting, but – unfortunately – the arguments are unconvincing. More than two thousand years separate the installation of Celtic populations and the creation of the Merry Cemetery: during this long period, cultural sources had the time to be assimilated, to change and to give different results in a mainly Christian culture. Celtic attitude before death (unconcern, joy, humor, jokes) is – on the other hand – not that uncommon. Without going this far, one can find such an attitude in some funeral games widespread in all Romanian cultural areas (mostly in Transylvania, but also in Moldavia and Wallachia), even where Celtic populations were not present in Antiquity. The night before burial, young people wearing masks gather at the dead people’s house, were they play something like a theatrical piece and make obscene jokes (see Ioanna Andreesco & Mihaela Bacou, *Mourir à l’ombre des Carpathes*, Paris, Payot, 1986; Ion Ghinoiu, *Lumea de aici, lumea de dincolo*, București, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1999, pp. 240-245). An element, not mentioned by Horia Mocanu, pleads in favor of Celtic (or indo-European) cultural background of the Merry Cemetery: it is the circular, solar, form of some crosses, which

reminds the form of crosses dating from 7th-8th centuries, frequent in Ireland⁶.

Much more than a Celtic inheritance, the Merry Cemetery is the fruit of Romanian traditional culture (born at the crossroads of multiple influences, pre-roman, roman, Slavic and so on) and shows a dialectics between tradition and originality, like one can see in the next contrastive table. What is the cultural context which made the Săpânța phenomenon possible like? If one looks closely to the artistic environment, one can see it is incredibly rich. The ornamental motives of the blankets (*cergi*) are full of inventiveness and we'll see their relation with the decorative motives on the crosses. The traditional costume is one of the most elaborated in the whole Romanian ethnographical area (cf. Ortansa Dogaru), and the folklore of this village is very complex as the researches of some folklorist showed (T. Papahagi, 1925; Pamfil Bilțiu & Maria Bilțiu, for the magical rites and incantations; Pop Miculi, for the wedding rituals).



6 For a typology of Romanian crosses, see I. Opreșan, *Troițe românești. Romanian troitsas*, Bucarest, Editura Vestala, 2003. On Celtic crosses, plate 44: examples from Urmeniș, Jud. Maramureș. See also p. XXX-VII.

Săpânța: a dialectics between tradition and originality

Traditional characters of Săpânța cemetery: the <i>anthropological basis</i> of Pătraș's work	Original characters of Săpânța cemetery: the essence of <i>artistic practice</i>
Crosses on tombs, with the traditional emplacement at the head of the deceased people.	
Wood as the main material for the crosses; few crosses are in concrete. The border of tombs is built in concrete.	
<p>Decorative motifs; abstract motives inspired by those one can see on the tissues (blankets) of the region, or on the portals of the houses.</p> <p>Solar motives are quite frequent. The sun, symbol of life, power, wellness, is figured at the centre of some crosses. The representation can be more or less realistic. In the abstract figuration of the sun, one can identify a symbol very widespread in the indo-European world. The more realistic representations are quite original. In one of them, the sun is like a wheel, where the rays are visible (this figuration is characteristic of the Pătraș and of the post-Pătraș period). In the other kind of realistic representation, on a complex cross realized in 1963, the sun has an anthropomorphic figure, and it is accompanied by the moon and one star. This cross has three horizontal braces, the one in the middle being longer than the two others: the sun is placed in the middle, in order to show that it is more important for the universal order than the moon and the stars.</p> <p>Floral motives are also realistic or abstract. Realistic flowers: tulips, roses are accompanied by abstract flowers a botanist couldn't identify.</p> <p>Zoomorphic motives are quite rare, if one doesn't take into account the two white doves, symbols of the peace of the soul, of purity, present on each cross painted in the post-Pătraș period. In the Pătraș period, one can find the two birds, but it's not an iconographical rule very well fixed.</p> <p>Religious motives are perfectly explainable in a Christian cemetery. The mother of God (present on crosses dating back from 1940, 1974), Angels (a cross dating from 1940, usually crosses realized for dead kids), Death personified like a dark skeleton (Dumitru Holdiș's cross, 1958). On the troitsa (votive cross) placed at the entrance of the ancient cemetery, one can see another incarnation of death and one of the Devil in the scene of the Last Judgement.</p>	<p>Painted crosses; blue is not a very strong color in the system of Romanian traditional culture (see Cuisenier).</p> <p>In the decorative system, there are motives taken from the culture specific to towns and cities: the red heart, symbol of love, the symbols used by the Communist Party, etc.</p>
Mentions of the name, age, occupation of the dead people.	Epitaphs in verses, written in capitals painted in white, at the first person, singular. The deceased address the living people in a kind of dialogue.

Traditional characters of Săpânța cemetery: the <i>anthropological basis</i> of Pătraș's work	Original characters of Săpânța cemetery: the <i>essence of artistic practice</i>
<p>The epitaphs are inspired by the <i>verșuri</i>, <i>bocete</i> and other funeral texts, common in Romanian traditional culture (see Mazzoni, 1999, pp. 21-23). The epitaphs nr. 174, p. 203 ("Tu moarte fără dreptate, / Ce n-ai mers în sus pă sate / Unde-s babe supărate, / La mine de ce ai venit / Am doi copii de grijit.") and 266, p. 273 ("Tu moarte fără dreptate, / Ce n-ai mers în sus pă sate / Unde-s babe supărate, / În tăt ciasu îș rogă moarte, / La mine de ce ai venit / Am avut mai de trăit, / În loc de căsătorie / lute m-ai băgat sub glie.") are very similar with funeral poems performed in ritual contexts (see, for the parallel, <i>Antologie de folclor din Județul Maramureș</i>, vol. I, Poezia, Asociația etnografilor și folcloriștilor din Județul Maramureș, Baia Mare, 1980, pp. 215, 216, 222).</p>	
	<p>Scenes of the everyday life, painted with naïve realism, with the use of strong colors. Every person is represented in a typical attitude: working, having fun. The working postures and the iconographical system are very influenced by the gender question (tasks specific for men and for women). The violent deaths appear very often on the Săpânța crosses: drowning, car accidents, thunderstruck.</p>
<p>In the work of Pătraș, there are only colours frequent in the system of Romanian traditional culture (red, yellow, green, black and white), but in the work of his successors, there are unusual colours (violet, pink, several nuances of green)⁷.</p>	
	<p>The portraits are frequent and their resemblance to the model is quite surprising. These images, always personalized, help an entire community to keep the memory of the dead people. Pătraș worked using photographs.</p>
<p>The style of the scenes can be compared to the one of the glass icons usual in Transylvania (Nicula school), cf. Golopenția, p. 1864.</p>	

7 Cf. Tudor Pamfile & Mihai Lupescu, *Cromatică poporului român*, Bucharest, Libraria Socec & C. Sfetea, col. Academiei Române, 1914.

Traditional characters of Săpânța cemetery: the <i>anthropological basis</i> of Pătraș's work	Original characters of Săpânța cemetery: the essence of <i>artistic practice</i>
<p>The inscriptions refer very often to traditional practices, so as to construct a strong local identity. Epitaph nr. 84, Husar Ileana: "Multe expoziții în țară / Le-am făcut de mare faimă, / La Craiova, -n București / Cu cergile săpânțenești." (Mazzoni, p. 134). Epitaph nr. 90, Moldovan Irina, dead in Constanța: "Cu cergi la Constanța am plecat, / Acolo moartia m-a aflat. / Mama când a auzit / După mine a venit / Și aici m-a îngropat / După datina din sat." (Mazzoni, p. 139).</p> <p>The reference to the dressing codes seems to be important in some epitaphs: nr. 151, Stesca – Stețca – Anuța ("Drag mi-a fost primăvara / Oilor să le tung lăna / Și să fac țoale din ea / Ca să le poarte lumea / Cum e portu-n Săpânța", Mazzoni, pp. 185-186).</p> <p>Reference to funeral practices: epitaph nr. 185 (Mazzoni, p. 211). Reference to feasts and rejoicing: epitaphs nr. 221 (Mazzoni, p. 239), nr. 247 (Mazzoni, p. 259).</p>	
	<p>The crosses serve as a repertoire of ethical standards and transmit a set of norms essential to cement the local community: honesty, sense of duty, hard work, respect, politeness, good education of children, faith. See the epitaph of Stan Grigore, Pătraș's uncle, full of moral commandments and values: "Aici eu mă odihnesc / Stan Grigore mă numesc. / Borcuțașu-mi zicea mie / C-am fost om de omenie, / Rele eu nu am făcut, / Numai bine de-am putut. / Am muncit și am chinuit / Cât am trăit pe pământ. / Copii i-am învățat / Să fie de cinste-n sat, / Să fie de omenie / Că așa mi-a plăcut mie. / Nepotul meu cel mai drag / Mi-a făcut cruce la cap / Dar eu mult l-am legănat, / Când a fost mic mi-a fost drag. / Să trăiți voi al meu trai / Aproape 80 de ai. / 1978." (Mazzoni, epitaph 117, pp. 157-158).</p>
<p>The inhabitants of Săpânța accepted very easily the innovation, so that the tradition initiated by Ioan Stan Pătraș had to be continued by his "students": the nephew Toader Turda, Toader Stan and his son Gheorghe, Dumitru Pop called Tincu (Mazzoni, p. 14).</p>	
	<p>The cemetery became a place for tourism, where different people come, who do not belong to the local community.</p>

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