



License applied: [CC-BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

DOI: 10.38173/RST.2024.27.1.7:81-87

Title:	<i>RITES AND RITUALS IN THE BURIAL TRADITION IN OLTENIA BELOW THE MOUNTAIN</i>
Author:	Costina Vergina SFINTEȘ

Section: Social Sciences

Issue: 1(27)/2024

Received: 7 December 2023	Revised: 4 February 2024
Accepted: 16 February 2024	Available Online: 15 March 2024

Paper available online [HERE](#)

rites and rituals in the burial tradition in Oltenia below the mountain

Costina Vergina SFINTEȘ¹

ABSTRACT:

THE ONLY CERTAINTY IN LIFE IS DEATH. WHATEVER THE DEFINITION OF DEATH, DEATH IS A UNIVERSAL PHENOMENON THAT CANNOT BE AVOIDED AND THAT CHARACTERIZES ALL LIVING THINGS. THIS PHENOMENON HAS RAISED MANY QUESTIONS IN ALL CULTURES AND IN ALL SUCCESSIVE PERIODS OF TIME. DEPENDING ON THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIETY AND THE PERIOD OF THE ERA WE ARE DISCUSSING, SOME OF THE TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS THAT HAVE BEEN PASSED DOWN BY WORD OF MOUTH, FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION, ARE ON THE WAY TO EXTINCTION, AND THUS THEIR CONVERGENCE IS REQUIRED AS THEY ARE PART OF THE CULTURE OF EVERY PEOPLE . THUS, WE AS ROMANIAN PEOPLE ALSO HAVE SPECIAL CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS THAT MUST BE PRESERVED IN THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AS THEY CONTRIBUTE TO DEFINING OUR IDENTITY. WE EXEMPLIFY IN THIS SENSE, AT FUNERAL CEREMONIES, THE "DAWN" RITUAL.

KEY WORDS: LIFE, DEATH, RITE, RITUALS, FUNERAL, TRADITION, CUSTOM

"Life can only be understood by looking back, but it must be lived only by looking forward"[1], and we must, rather, become people of value, than people of success, so that change will come through us.

To the question, how can human life be defined, the Larouse Medical Dictionary shows that "life is characterized by permanent bio-physico-chemical reactions, which take place inside the cells, and the constant balance of the internal environment of the cells and its exchanges with the environment externally they are ensured by the existence of the cell envelope, with variable and selective permeability".

The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language defines life as "the synthesis of biological, physical, chemical, mechanical processes that characterize organisms." [2]

For the common man, life is the interval between birth and death, and the only certainty of life is death. According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, death represents "the cessation of life, the cessation of all vital functions, the end of life"[3], without distinguishing between declared death and physical death. In legal medicine brain death is sometimes used as a legal definition[4].

¹Scientific researcher PhD, Innovation and Development Research Institute, Constantin Brancusi University of Târgu Jiu

Whatever the definition of death, death is a universal phenomenon that cannot be avoided and that characterizes all living things. This phenomenon has raised many questions in all cultures and in all successive periods of time.

In traditional Romanian culture, a person's life goes through several important stages: birth, baptism, wedding and death. Regarding what happens to the soul after death, several ideas have emerged. One of these refers to the fact that the soul separates from the body. From here several branches appeared: he goes to judgment, integrates himself with the cosmos and unites with nature forming another whole, reincarnates, death ends everything, begins another life that would be a continuation of the earthly one.

Although death is not the end of the soul[5], of the being, but a continuation in other forms of its existence, death is seen as a tragic event. Man separates from what was familiar to him, becomes something else, is no longer with his loved ones.

Death is accepted in the Romanian conception as a human condition from which no one can escape. The tragedy of death is amplified by the situation in which the deceased is. If a person commits suicide, he is not received in the church, and the funeral service is short and is performed outside the church, being buried at the edge of the cemetery as a punishment for having ended his own life.

If the deceased person, girl or boy, was of marriageable age and they were not married, the clothes they were dressed in to be buried were wedding clothes, and the funeral rituals were intertwined with the wedding ones, so that those young people also went through that stage of life that has been completed.

In the case of unenlightened youths there is a ceremonial during the funeral, in which the wedding of nature and death is celebrated, in an attempt to confer eternal peace on the dead.

The famous chronicler Dimitri Cantemir he states in his work *Descriptio Moldaviae* regarding the Romanians' belief about death: "almost all the common people believe that God decides the day of death for each person; and before that no one can die or perish in war..." That's why, most of the time, the soldiers threw themselves into dangers like crazy, being convinced that they wouldn't die. The same belief is found among the Scandinavian peoples: the supreme divinity fixed from the beginning the life line of each man. Even if he hid in the snake hole, he wouldn't win another moment. Fate being fixed, fear brings no personal gain[6]."

The traditions and teachings of the Church are of particular importance for Romanian culture, especially in the ceremonies and rituals that regulate important aspects of human life. Knowing these objects is an original way to honor the loved ones and to keep alive the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Romanian people.

There are many rituals that are held at a funeral and which people still preserve and pass on orally from generation to generation. It is true that many of these are on the way to extinction, as with the evolution of society and technological progress, people he moves away from that part of traditional culture with which he no longer identifies.

In the Orthodox tradition, life is viewed as a continuum, beginning at birth and continuing into eternity, through the transition from earthly life to the afterlife, with no separation between the two existences. This teaching offers another perspective on life, so that death represents only the passage to God, and the Christian community observes a number of customs and traditions, mediating this passage for the person who has died.

These observances and traditions begin with the moment when life draws to a close by the fulfillment of the holy mysteries of confession and communion, so that the deceased may step on the great passage to the world beyond without the weight of his sins. The Bible, in the

Gospel according to Matthew, in chapter 18, verse 18, states: "Truly I say to you: Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Also, another important thing is the time of lighting the candle. As the soul prepares to leave the body, close relatives must light a candle², which has the role of guiding the soul towards eternity.

In the situation where the person dies without this candle being lit or without being confessed and shared during the funeral service, through the prayers said, the priest refers to these aspects: "dead unconfessed and without a candle", asking for mercy and forgiveness for the one on the verge of passing.

These sacraments are particularly important in preparing the soul for its great journey to "eternal life" and representing the first step in the funeral rites.

After the person has passed away, it is customary to give them appropriate care. The body of the deceased is washed, cleaned and dressed in clean, new clothes.

Also, at the church in that locality, the bell was rung in the morning, at noon and in the evening, every day until the day of the burial, and at the gate of the house where the lifeless body was, a black flag was placed on which scenes from the Bible were painted.

After that, the casket was incensed, the coffin and the cross were sprinkled with aghiasma, and the priest recited the litany and other chants, after which the coffin was prepared as a bed. A sheet and a blanket were placed over it, and a pillow was placed at one end of the coffin.

Along with the evolution of society and economic development, many economic agents have appeared whose business is funeral services, and coffins in contemporary society are equipped with lace and other lining materials, so that in the present, this preparation of the throne no longer has the same role as in the past. Nowadays, after the body of the deceased is cleaned, it is dressed and placed on the throne.

Another ritual is the pillow of the dead, in the shape of a triangle. This is made of white cloth, which is cross-stitched on the edges with a red thread and a black thread. Buds from three non-fruiting trees - willow, alder and cork - are placed inside the pillow, and a footstool, a mirror and a knife are also placed, after which it is filled with moss from the forest. In each corner of the pillow a cross is sewn with red and black threads,

On the wooden cross, on which the name and surname of the deceased, the date of birth, the date of death, the age, and the inscriptions IC XC NI KA are inscribed, a "corner of the cross", made of white cloth, is attached to which a cross is sewn with red and black thread in each corner of the cloth triangle and fasten to the middle of the cloth at the top of the cross.

At the same time, a candle is made of wax and white hemp thread, the size of which is equal to the height of the dead, called the "light of the state" and four candles are placed in each corner of the coffin during the funeral service in the church and lit. From this candle, during the service, a piece of it is broken and the priest/logophat makes a cross on which he fixes a coin, representing the "priest's money", i.e. the last coin he will give. This cross is placed in the hands of the dead, which are folded on the chest.

In Oltenia below the mountain, there is another ritual, which must be preserved because it is on the way to extinction, called "Zorile". When a person dies, three women, who receive from the relatives of the deceased a candle, to which is attached a handkerchief (if the person who died is a woman) or a towel (if the person who died is a man) and a modest sum

² The candle was placed in the dead person's hand, kept on the dead person's chest or next to the bed, depending on local custom

of money, every morning, evening and on the day of the funeral I say certain incantations that have the role of universally preparing everything for the great transition to eternity of the deceased.

Thus, in the morning after a person dies, the women who sing Dawn, facing the east and with lit lights, begin to sing the following lines:

Dawn, sisters don't rush the dawn
Until (says the deceased person's first name) cook it,
 cook it, break it up,
 fire and his house,
fire and by his spouse,
 fire and his children,
 fire and his brothers,
 fire and his sisters,
 fire and by his parents.

(verses beginning with the word fire are adapted according to living relatives or if he has such relatives).

School (say the first name of the deceased), school,
 Stand up a little
And he shouted once loudly
 To your people
Give your hand of forgiveness
 That you are ready to go.
 Pray to the holy sun
 To make your day bigger
 That it's departure day
And we leave on the road to the valley.

Again (the deceased person's first name is said) again,
 What a great news has arisen
 It's not a rain cloud, it's a dust cloud
 To break you.

This chant is also recited in the morning and in the evening, every day of the three days until the body of the deceased person is taken to the church and then to the cemetery.

On the morning of the funeral, a large Christmas tree is brought and decorated with tufts of wool, chains made of crepe paper, and tassels of red and black melamine. A tassel made of red and black thread and a handkerchief is attached to the top of the tree. The stem of the tree is peeled and decorated in two places with flowers, tied together with a twisted string specially made for this purpose, also in the colors of red and black.

On the day of the funeral, around noon, the priest or council of priests, depending on the material condition of the bereaved family, would begin the funeral service. Each of them received a towel and a candle that was lit. These were given for the soul of the dead.

During this time the women singing the Dawns recited other lines:

Do you (say the deceased person's first name), forgive him,
 from your house

From your brothers,
Pray to the holy sun
To make your day bigger
That you are ready to go.

You (the deceased person's first name is said), take forgiveness
From your children
To give you the hand of forgiveness
that you are ready to go.

You (the deceased person's first name is said), take forgiveness
From your husband
To give you the hand of forgiveness
that you are ready to go.

You (the deceased person's first name is said), take forgiveness
From your brothers
To give you the hand of forgiveness
that you are ready to go.

You (the deceased person's first name is said), take forgiveness
From your relatives
To give you the hand of forgiveness
that you are ready to go.

You (the deceased person's first name is said), take forgiveness
From your neighbors
To give you the hand of forgiveness
that you are ready to go.

During this time, the coffin is taken out of the house by four men, each of them carrying a towel on his arm in which money is placed. The coffin is placed on a special bed in the courtyard where the priest reads other chants.

A pagan custom has been passed down from generation to generation and before the deceased leaves the courtyard of the house, under the throne, a hen is given, with an earthen bowl full of water and a bushel of corn to a person of the same sex as the deceased. This ritual has a special meaning. It is said that the hen goes before the soul of the dead and calls to him as the hen calls to her chickens.

On the way to the church, the procession makes several stops where several prayers and chants are read. At three of these stops coins are tossed in front of the procession, behind the procession, to the right and to the left of it, making a cross. This ritual is said to be performed to help the soul of the dead to pass the nine customs to reach God.

Also at these stops, three rolls are distributed, each with a candle tied with white thread, a coin folded in a corner of a handkerchief and a collar made of white cloth, burned at one end. 44 such rolls are prepared, the rest being distributed in the church to those present at the funeral. These are part of the ritual of clearing the payment of the passage of the nine customs that the soul must pass.

When the procession reaches the gate of the church, the women performing the Dawn ritual sing the following lines:

Open yourself monastery
That beautiful cloud is coming to you,

He does not come to live,
But it comes to rot.
Here are pillars with graves
Where parents separate
Parents of children
And children of parents.

When the coffin arrives in the church, the women who perform the previously mentioned ritual go to the grave where the deceased will be buried and finish the ritual with the following verses:

Open up, heaven
shut the hell up
Open yourself monastery
That a big cloud is coming to you,
He does not come to live,
But it comes to rot.

After the funeral service is over, the coffin is taken out of the church and taken to the grave. The priest sings the last chants and sprinkles wine on the coffin and the pit where the lifeless body of the dead will be lowered. The coffin is lowered into the pit, the priest first throws a shovel of earth over the coffin and ends the burial ceremony, after which the others cover the whole pit with earth, fix the decorated tree and the cross.

REFERENCES

- [1] Soren Kierkegaard – www.citatcelebru.ro
- [2] <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/via%C8%9B%C4%83/826095>
- [3] <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/morte>
- [4] <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/brain-death>
- [5] See the Bible, the Talmud, the Koran, etc. – the holy books of the great civilizations
- [6] Dimitrie Cantemir, Description of Moldova, Tineretului Publishing House, Bucharest 1967 – Edition published under the supervision of Constantin Măciucă;