

“ET MORIEMUR”
THE POSITION OF THE OBSERVER AND OBSERVED THROUGH THE
REPRESENTATION OF THE FUNERAL ORATION IN THE 18TH AND 19TH
CENTURIES

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A deceased person's status, social position and role determined the ritual surrounding death and the funeral service. It was a well-constructed ritual, such that during the choreographed, solemn farewell the aristocracy projected and represented its status in front of the masses in order to strengthen the position of the family, including that of the spouse and the children. At the same time it set an example to the lower classes.

The farewell was fully planned and executed, and the funeral orations and laudations were all part of this representation. Applying Jonathan Crary's concept¹, a new kind of 'observer' emerges who becomes an important participant in the ritual. On the other hand, the planners of the ceremony also rely on the observer, in fact, interdependence occurs: the deceased assumes the role of the observed even in his lifetime, thereby maintaining the balance between observed and observer, whereas the observer now assumes his position, is present at the ceremony not only physically, but also perceives it, experiences it and becomes a participant, playing a key role. Crary sees a clear distinction between the observer and the spectator: he is of the opinion that the observer performs, adapts, takes into account, maintains – in my view this is an important feature, since the ceremony, the representative customs become pointless without the interpreter-observer. The observer is embedded in the system of conventions and limitations, perceived within a set of previously defined possibilities. The observer does not only look, he also sees. In contrast with the observer is the spectator, who is the passive viewer of a spectacle.

This again suggests that the death and the funeral ceremony belonged to clearly visible social rites to be observed and interpreted, and these social events played a major role in defining the rank and status of a particular social group.

In my case the "oppressors" in the feudal society become visible and observable, the oppressed do not appear, as no funeral orations are produced for them. Their lives and passing away were kept alive only in the memory of their families and relatives.

In this study I focus on the aristocracy. However, I do not distinguish between the nobility and the gentry. I examine how the funeral speeches in

¹ Crary 1992.

relation to counts, barons and those of their spouses are constructed, what these had to include in order to affect the listeners. It is also interesting to examine the purpose of subsequently publishing the texts delivered at the ceremonies. What effect might they have had on the listeners and readers, on the recipients? This raises a number of additional questions. It is worth considering what the function of this solemn farewell within the social stratum is. Can it be explained merely by religion or is it more likely a mandatory representation, the attribute of status?

My sources are from the stock of the Teleki Library in TârguMureş. The collection consists of the original fond and the collection of the former TârguMureş Calvinist College Library. In addition, there is a fond called mixed, consisting of several former private collections and the remains of libraries from former denominational schools and a Franciscan monastery.

I conducted my research based on the existing 363 funeral speeches from the 18th and the 19th century, obtaining data about the deceased person's name and title, the person who gave the speech and his profession, the time of death compared to the time when the speech was delivered and the time of its printing. The overwhelming majority of the funeral orations were delivered at the funerals of members of the Transylvanian aristocracy, and even the remaining 8% were given to honour outstanding personalities, such as church leaders, preachers, obituary writers, college professors, to a small extent lawyers and to an even lesser extent citizens, clerks and craftsmen. I do not emphasise the individual traits, on the contrary, because of the subject of my investigation I focus on the recurring phrases, gestures, deeds, actions and words referring to the rituals. Funeral orations contain numerous elements which provide relevant information about the families, their titles, religion, profession, cause of death, lifespan, social life and customs.

A great number of obituaries according to the catalogue descriptions contain invaluable biographical introductions, thereby supplying the researcher with important information. They also contain ceremonial instructions concerning the proceedings of the sermons, revealing the rhetorical structure of these speeches, which enables us to gain some knowledge about the nature of homilies.

According to the reference material on the subject, 17th-18th century Hungarian culture was a religious one and, studying the Transylvanian-Hungarian funeral speeches written at the beginning of the 19th century, we can state that the typical genre of the period was still the sermon. Religious rhetoric constituted the background of the Sunday and holy day sermons, as well as that of the funeral orations. The 19th-century speeches were without exception delivered and published in Hungarian, whereas those from the 17th-18th centuries were often written in Latin or, to a lesser extent, in German.

What are funeral orations?

The orations were delivered during the funerals of the most distinguished people. According to my observations, the orations in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the written and printed sermons and orations were the "privilege" of only a narrow social stratum. The delivered speech and then printed obituary depended on the deceased person's financial status, education and social role. They mostly concerned outstanding male members of the community. However, as might be expected, there were speeches mourning not only men but also women, the latter constituting 37% of the speeches, according to data based on my sources. This result might be significant in view of the fact that the results of the systematic research done on funeral speeches in Germany is similar. The research there was started in the 1970s and is at present conducted within the framework of an independent institution in Marburg. According to the final data presented by their research group, 34% of the deceased in the funeral speeches are women².

The circulation of the funeral speeches and obituaries in writing and in printing throughout Europe had already become fashionable in the Middle Ages. In Hungary this spread in Protestant circles following the German model. The practice of the sermon itself, on the other hand, has its roots in ancient culture when people were already familiar with its rhetorical structure. The genre of the funeral speech became customary only in the 18th century; however, its fashion in the eastern regions, as in Transylvania, lasted until the 1860s. According to my sources, only four or five funeral sermons can be found after that and these are simply tradition followers, written and delivered in connection with an esteemed college professor or senior member of the clergy. After the last third of the 19th century one-page, shorter obituaries became widespread; however, they constitute the subject matter of another study.

The eulogies can usually be divided into two parts, the first, longer one is closest to an academic treatise, primarily theological, but also containing philosophical, philological and psychological elements³. These are usually 40-50-page treatises full of rhetorical questions, flowing in complex-compound Baroque sentences crowded with symbolic images. The complex-compound sentence is the elevated form of expression of sublime content and passionate feelings, clearly suitable for conveying the mental processes, being an almost endless flow of thoughts and emotions. The author of the eulogy discusses issues of life and death, trying to comfort the audience in the closing pages of the first section. The topic of the so-called scientific treatise depends on the appointed speaker's, i.e. speech-writer's profession. According to our

² Kecskeméti 1998, p. 10.

³ Bellághné 2006, p. 94.

sources, most of them were priests, preachers and pastors, but quite a few college professors delivered speeches about noted members of the Transylvanian nobility. They mainly taught theology and rhetorics; however, as college students they had often written poems to test their talent and aptitude.

The second part, which is much shorter, is the so-called application, dealing with the deceased, his/her biographical data, family members, friends and acquaintances. Nevertheless, we cannot obtain a full biography from them, so we must also seek other sources in order to be able to identify a family tree. We can find instances of speeches where the author does not consider it necessary to itemise the genealogy of the deceased, as this is well-known to the audience. This observation is also supported by several items in our data base, where we can read explanations as to why the presentation of the genealogy was not required, e.g. it had all been revealed in detail at one or several recent funerals. This also indicates that the writer of the funeral speech expected a participant who was conversant with the web of family ties; he relied on an observer not on a mere spectator.

According to other distinctions, the first part of the funeral speech is a sermon, whereas the second part is called *oratio* or *laudatio*. The sermons might have been based and in all likelihood were based on Gáspár Heltai's ceremonial manual, which states that the funeral does not serve the deceased, but provides an opportunity for the living members of the congregation to demonstrate their mercy and Christian love, to remind them of the Lord's judgement and the enormity of sin, to pray for their delivery from sin and to contemplate resurrection⁴. Heltai wrote his work in 1559, yet the sermons my study is based on also stress these admonitions, emphasising that the only comfort to be gained comes from God. This fact supports the theory that the rhetoric of the funeral speeches was handed down through the centuries and the authors followed the prevailing fashion of their time only in the use of certain elements. In fact, the only difference between these two distinctions are in labelling as they are similar in content, although there may be some differences due to religion and era.

All in all, the common items recurring in the sermons were as follows: death is inevitable, no emperor, king, prince, bishop, priest, count, nobleman, learned scientist, rich, poor, old, young, man or woman can escape it; no prayer, gifts or wailing is to any purpose against it. In summary our life is but a mist, a shadow, a bubble, a ship, a bird, a wild flower, which all vanish, disappear, die, sink, fly away or wither. The task of the funeral sermon is to edify, it should be a "wise reflection", an opportunity to gain knowledge about salvation and comfort. Yet the orator must adapt to the knowledge and spiritual needs of his audience in order that he should touch their hearts and impress them, in order that his

⁴ Kecskeméti 1998, p. 143.

message should reach them and in order that the participant should be able to fulfil their role as observer. Therefore, the encouragement to persevere in their faith is concise and straight to the point, whereas the consolidation section is longer, in places filled with platitudes, which are, however, theologically established truths. Funeral sermons become similar to disputes or theological treatises because of simplification. The first part of the funeral speech was delivered for all the members of the congregation, whereas the *oratio* or *laudatio*, the laical part of the funeral speech, was only held for noblemen. The *oratio* had to be adapted to a whole representation of the family or to a secular ideology of power. It is important to point out that the funeral orator's creative room for manoeuvre was usually quite restricted. The deceased person's family kept the content of the oration under strong surveillance and it frequently occurred that the delivery of the prepared speech also depended on the preliminary decision or discretion of the relatives. The orator's speech had to meet all the representational needs of the family: he had to consult the genealogy and had to present the deceased person's life, his renowned actions and charitable deeds. Therefore, it was mainly the priest or the teacher closest to the family, who became the orator, since he knew the family well; however, there were often several orators who shared the different roles during the ceremony, one delivering the sermon, the other the laudation, and a third one writing a farewell poem. In this way the family pastor and/or the teacher and the pastor of the nearby village and the pastor of the settlement where the tomb or grave was located could all play an important role in the burial ceremony.

The most significant consideration was that the oration should achieve its main aim, that is, the orator should present the deceased person's laudation. All the earlier and contemporary rhetorics textbooks available to the Hungarian author-orators emphasised that the laudation or incidental condemnation should always be done according to local customs. This must have been helpful guidance for the orators of those times, who had to be familiar with the general rhetoric of both the religious and funeral sermons.

Obviously, we can find less clearly divided funeral speeches in my data base. In numerous speeches the orator integrates the laudatory segment edited according to the representational demand into the body of the sermon itself. This is mainly illustrated by quotes from the Bible. He supports his main topic with these quotations, thus incorporating the personality of the deceased into the 'teachings'. The orators often opt for the solution of drawing a parallel between biblical personalities and their contemporaries⁵.

However, the orator had to comply with the demands of the commissioning party, he had to accommodate their wishes, which implied

⁵ Kecskeméti 1998, p. 162-198.

certain restrictions. At the memorial service he had to deliver what he had been asked to, and had to do it in the way the family demanded. Actually, it was in the preacher's best interest to please the family, as in this way he could play an important role, his name appeared in print and his thoughts spread. Otherwise, the pastors had no opportunity for achieving this⁶. It was imperative to gain the goodwill of the audience, because every speech meant a potential new referral, which in turn meant that the writer could earn a good living. However, higher-ranking clergy often undertook preaching at dignitaries' funerals, being motivated by the fact that by doing so their influence increased and their positions became stronger. Thus, the interment of the nobility was a public event, both on the part of the family and that of the speaker. The fee of a well-paid commission is due to the influence exerted on the content of the speech, as the topic was often denoted by relatives or even indicated in the deceased person's will⁷.

An interesting story concerns a female writer belonging to a noted 18th-century Transylvanian noble family, one of the earliest writers of memoirs in Hungarian, Kata Bethlen, who challenged the skill of her nephew, Sámuel Bethlen, in rhetoric by making him write a funeral oration for herself. Although the "final rehearsal" of the oration was fully appreciated, the "actual delivery" could not be performed because Kata Bethlen outlived her nephew by eight years.

Thus we face dual representation. On the one hand, the deceased person or his relatives determine the course of the ceremony, on the other hand, the orator often polishes his words for the printed version to improve the treatise, he clarifies the genealogy, etc. There are plenty of printed speeches, in which the author indicates that he has revised the text. The speaker often apologizes, because, due to the short time between the death and the funeral service – usually only a day and a half in summer – he did not have the chance to refine the text, which was to appear in print later, so he wishes to add to it details he was unable to remember at the funeral, as he had no time at all to write down the oration. Another orator refers to a similar instance when he had to contemplate his speech while on horseback on his way to the funeral, adding the relevant exact quotations only subsequently. Sometimes the title itself alludes to such changes: the printed version gives "a much improved" version of the oration for its readers, as is the case of the funeral address delivered for Count Ferenc Rhédei⁸. There are numerous printed versions of funeral speeches in the Teleki Library, whose authors openly admit to having perfected their actual speeches.

⁶ Kosáry 1980, p. 87.

⁷ Kecskeméti 1998, p. 171.

⁸ Kecskeméti 1998, p. 159-160.

It is obvious from the above that in fact we encounter an institutionalized ritual here. Nonetheless, we also need to explore the issues of death, the funeral ceremony and remembrance.

Death, funeral, remembrance

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the concepts in this section in great detail. However, I deem it necessary to mention certain significant ideas in order to be able to draw appropriate conclusions and to enable the reader to comprehend the remarks in relation to my hypothesis.

As Hanák formulates it, in those times death was an inherent and accepted part of the natural cycle, the separation of the mortal flesh from the immortal soul⁹.

The funeral speeches also reveal that death was present in the daily life of the community, its members lived in the presence of death, as members of the family or community lay dying in front of their eyes, then were laid out in state, then finally slept their eternal sleep among them, in the village cemetery. Everyone participated at the funeral, the whole community shared the family's grief.

One of the most comprehensive thanatological models of Western civilization, was created by Philippe Ariès, a French historian, whose most prominent works studied the changes in western attitudes to death. In his view, the perception of death appeared to be static through centuries. However, changes started occurring, almost imperceptibly at first, slowly, then gradually faster from the 18th century. In the 18th century, death brought a new meaning, a different one, for the members of Western civilization. Men were preoccupied by the issue of death; however, the concept of natural demise was replaced by a view exalting and dramatising death. The people of the Enlightenment were concerned about death on account of their avarice. There is a change in the relationship between the family and the dying person; people are overwhelmed by grief and mourning. "La mort de soi" turns into "la mort de toi", i.e. while previously for centuries death was an individual problem, in the 18th century it became the problem of the community, Ariès remarks¹⁰.

In his philosophical approach Dezső Csejtei draws the same conclusion. He claims that death can be regarded as a universal phenomenon defining existence, which affects each and every individual indiscriminately and equally; nevertheless, it can also be regarded as an absolutely concrete occurrence, which affects each and every individual dissimilarly. From the beginning of the 20th century, philosophical and existentialist ideas had a significant impact on modern man's attitude towards death. Up to the present an enlightened approach

⁹ Hanák 1988, p. 63.

¹⁰ Ariès 1983, p. 55-56, 63.

to death has been unable to prevail. It is remarkable that the 'alienation' of death (Ariès: 'invisible' and 'hidden') takes place in the age of increasing rationality, scientific discoveries and their technological application¹¹. Péter Szabó discusses the views about death in great detail, yet what is of interest to us in his book is the description of the funeral ceremony of the aristocrats, which differs significantly from the rites dedicated to members of the lower classes. Szabó examines Hungarian aristocratic culture in the 17th century. Yet the researcher seems to discover numerous common features between the descriptions in his book and the burial ceremonies of the Transylvanian aristocrats in the 18th and 19th centuries. In his point of view the spectacular elements of the ceremony were often borrowed from the traditions of the centralized power, the so-called elite culture. The funeral ceremony of the nobility was organised by a secular body with the collaboration of the clergy. In the case when the nobleman left a will, this secular body executed the wishes expressed therein. However, the elements of the ceremony had to be reconciled with the prevailing tradition, the deceased person's wishes and the demands of the relatives. It was a frequent occurrence that the writer of the will included precise instructions concerning the collective planning of the ceremony¹². The Baroque ceremonial pomp is a continually changing stage set. The ceremonial manual is literally the script of the funeral, which had to be blended with the will and the demands of the family¹³.

Numerous funeral speeches in my data bank allude to the fact that the rite began in the abode or on the estate of the deceased person, usually with a prayer or funeral speech. From there the mourners proceeded to the church where the funeral ceremony was performed, which meant the first part of the address, the sermon. Then the column of mourners walked to the grave or tomb and the *oratio* or *laudatio* was delivered. The structured festive farewell concluded with the coffin being put into the final resting place.

Consequently, a large number of similar elements can be detected in the funeral ceremonies of the aristocrats in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries according to the information found in the funeral speeches. The similarity of the rites and their transmission as tradition is clearly visible, yet there are differences to be found and, obviously, simpler models. Sometimes the funeral rite was a lengthy 'process', starting a few days after the death with placing the corpse into the coffin, which was followed by the burial as such only months later. Funeral speeches were delivered at each stage of the process; it

¹¹ Csejtei 2002, p. 15, 469.

¹² Szabó 1989a, p. 7-19.

¹³ Szabó 1989, p. 12-13.

even happened that the same orator delivered several speeches over the same deceased.

Once the ceremony was over, the curtain fell in "the mournful theatre of public grieving"¹⁴; the stage sets, however, lived on indelibly in the memory of the participants.

The representative public sphere in the funeral speeches

On the grounds of the rituals outlined formerly, we can affirm that the secular part of the funeral speeches, i.e. the funeral *oratio* as part of the burial ceremony, practically conveys the representative public sphere. Habermas's public sphere model has become well-known, thus I intend merely to discuss the relevant ideas, as they constitute the starting point of my interpretation.

According to the Habermas's much criticised model, after the public sphere existing in the Greek city-states, the so-called representative public sphere came into existence in feudal society in the Middle Ages, which can be regarded as the second stage of the development of a European public sphere. It is characterised by the fact that the private and the public sphere are not sharply separated. The representative public sphere is not a social category, but a status symbol with the function of enabling the privileged social groups and the ruler to demonstrate their power over their subjects¹⁵. The Baroque royal court and its grandiose festivities can be regarded as the most eloquent manifestations of the representative public sphere.

Devotional rituals can also be deemed as representations in front of the believers. Church rituals are typical manifestations and the longest preserved forms of public sphere in the feudal system¹⁶. Consequently, the well-structured funeral ceremony of the members of the nobility can be viewed as representative, given the fact that it was not held *for* the public, but it represents the power of the nobleman's family and that of his offspring *in front of* the public. In the funeral speeches studied, the title of count mentioned is a hereditary aristocratic denomination conferred by the ruler, thus the role of the descendant was decidedly determined by the 'taking over' ceremony¹⁷.

The nascent culture in the aristocratic courts, with the funeral ceremony as part of it, presented different forms of the public sphere. In addition, the rites of

¹⁴ Szabó 1989, p. 13.

¹⁵ Habermas 1991.

¹⁶ Gáspár 2002, p. 7.

¹⁷ According to the data of the 1787 census, there were 64,000 noblemen in the Transylvanian principality. However, the census referred only to the male members, thus it means the number of families rather than the number of persons. The number includes both noblemen and gentry. These families differed significantly as to their financial situation, political views and power. Later, the nobility did not give permission for a census, so we have only estimated data. In Transylvania at the time, the nobility constituted 3.3% of the population (Gáspár 2002, p. 15).

religious life also took place in public. Hence taking part in the church rites and funerals became part of the public sphere¹⁸. The ‘props’ of the representation can be traced back to antiquity, such attributes as prominent clan, commendable qualities, patriotism and dignity. The 18th-19th century sources draw the researcher’s attention to the phenomenon of rhetorical devices being handed down, as the main feature of the speeches remains a sophisticated style, replete with allegories and metaphors flattering the vanity of the nobility, fawning over the lords, ranks and titles. These traits can all be found in our sources, especially in the farewell speeches delivered for noblemen, who had participated in governing throughout their lifetime. Thus the orator could extol their deeds and patriotism in several pages. The deceased could be called ‘*a great statesman*’, ‘*the hope of our homeland*’, ‘*the light of Transylvania*’, ‘*the heart of our country*’, ‘*a rare light of Hungarians*’, ‘*the steadfast support of the country*’, ‘*the benefactor of our country*’ who ‘*toiled for the good of his homeland*’ and with whose death ‘*our country lost a pillar, a light and a hope*’, thus ‘*he is mourned by two Hungarian countries*’ who ‘*weave ivy wreaths for him*’. The enumeration of his positive traits of character does not fail to appear, either – the person lying in state was of noble spirit, intelligent, just, moderate, of good taste, diligent, mild, had vast knowledge, was ready for self-sacrifice, honest, benevolent, charitable, pious and patriotic. The orators also extol the virtues of the deceased women, who ‘*embody most of the major virtues*’ and these are then emphasised. However, owing to women’s roles in those times, they are mainly praised for having been good wives, ‘*wise*’ mothers and housewives, caring educators, who were ‘*humble, modest and dedicated to serving the community*’. Actually, funeral speeches can be considered to be democratic regarding gender, as women are also lauded for being patriotic when, on the one hand, they teach their sons to love their country and to be ready to make sacrifices for it; while on the other hand, they teach their daughters how to become wise wives and good mothers.

It has already been mentioned that the rhetorics textbooks classified the vocabulary and the techniques of praising under the heading of laudation, and these were often used by the writers of the ‘*oratiofunebris*’, i.e. funeral speeches.

The effect of the funeral speeches

The effect of the addresses delivered publicly at the funerals is difficult to assess, but we do know that the participating audience was heterogeneous with regard to age, gender and social status. Men, women, children, young and old, literate and illiterate, citizens and artisans, peasants, farmers together with the representatives of the noble family all listen to these speeches, whose purpose

¹⁸ Várkonyi 2007, p. 124-126.

was to persuade and influence the audience, as well as to commemorate the deceased person¹⁹. The "people" in this status, the 'viewers' at this stage witness this representation, like the splendour, the spectacular elements, yet in my interpretation, with the increase in popularity of the ritual, they became able to respond to these events, thus the passive viewer turns into an active observer. He sees and masters the elements of the farewell, which are based on a strict code of behaviour.

Therefore, perhaps it is no exaggeration to state that the memorial speech accomplished its role, because the aristocracy successfully represented themselves to the great masses in a well-choreographed, celebratory farewell, thus strengthening the position of their family, spouse and children and setting an example for the lower classes.

In my view this cannot be accounted for merely in terms of religious beliefs. It rather concerns a status symbol, the manifestation of a compulsory representation in which the enumerated elements of the ritual are indispensable, thus enabling the observer to become an essential element of the ceremony. The written and printed sermons, primarily the funeral speeches, were published in a number of copies and either distributed for free or sold by booksellers. The authors compiled anthologies of the funeral speeches, which could become sought-after resources for sermons or religious readings. In smaller settlements and estates the delivery and publishing of these speeches was frequently the sole forum of literary life, arousing keen interest. Through them the living commemorated those who had passed away, simultaneously giving the author of the speech the satisfaction of making a name for himself. It is generally considered that by printing the funeral speeches a commendable custom was established for posterity²⁰. Thus the purpose of the funeral speeches was both to laud the deceased person, to keep their memory alive and to serve the edification of the living.

This is a genre that yields itself to the study of the taste, expectations and social opinion and customs of that age, because every word the speaker uttered was approved by the relatives, friends and all those present at the occasion. It is also the genre that can be considered the most popular in that day and age, expressing the public taste by being under the control of the public and the family, even when it appeared in print. This genre conveys the mass culture of the period.

In the funeral speech the observed and the observer face each other. In this case the observed is not only the deceased, but their micro and macro environment, as family members, friends, relationships, positions, and the whole

¹⁹ Fehér 2006, p. 5.

²⁰ Nagy 2001, p. 23.

life of the deceased person becomes visible to the extent that we are allowed to take a look into their lives. The observed party thus expose themselves to be observed, agree to be observed, whereas the observers occupy their position by taking part in a ritual surrounding death and burial. With the printing of the funeral speech its reader becomes the second-level observer, whereas the researcher studying them becomes the third-level observer. Each of them employs a different method and sees a different aspect.

***"Et moriemur". Reprezentări ale observatorului și observatului
în discursurile funebre din sec. XVIII-XIX***
REZUMAT

Ritualurile legate de moarte în societățile antice sunt acte de o importanță deosebită, deoarece percepția asupra finalității vieții, conștiința morții și evocarea lumii următoare erau considerate a fi părți ale vieții de zi cu zi. Conștientizarea morții și tratarea acesteia a constituit un element mai esențial al vieții decât în secolul al XIX-lea, când imaginile care cauzează anxietate au dispărut din conștiința cotidiană. Potrivit antropologului Arnold van Gennep, funeraliile și doliul ca ritual de bază și tranzitoriu au câștigat un rol proeminent în viața socială. Studiile istorice din secolul al XX-lea au recunoscut semnificația ceremoniilor din jurul morții. În primul rând, cercetarea lui Philippe Ariès a atras atenția asupra importanței atitudinilor față de moarte. Începând cu anii 1960, numeroase lucrări sociale și cultural-istorice s-au axat pe studierea morții, a reprezentării morții și a amintirii.

Cercetarea istorică a descoperit și exploatat un număr de noi surse în acest domeniu. Testamentele s-au dovedit a fi de o importanță deosebită, întrucât istoricii le-au studiat atât ca decizii și documente individuale, cât și ca documente care reflectă relațiile și atitudinile din comunitate. Paradoxal, în timp ce testamentul a devenit punctul de plecare al nenumăratelor proiecte de cercetare internaționale, acesta nu este cazul discursului funerar, sursa care definește ritualurile de rămas bun. Analiza istorică a acestor documente din urmă este destul de nesemnificativă.

Prezentul studiu își propune să contribuie la explorarea unor astfel de predici, într-o intenție de examinare a slujbelor de pomenire ale membrilor aristocrației ardeleni din secolele al XVIII-lea și al XIX-lea și scopul acestor discursuri funerare. De asemenea, sunt în analiză problemele legate de autorii acestor discursuri, ale căror cuvinte au fost tipărite și pentru care scop și în ce sens a fost realizat tiparul.

Studiul, bazat pe fondurile Bibliotecii Teleki din Târgu Mureș, intenționează să demonstreze în ce măsură discursurile de înmormântare ale secolelor XVIII și XIX cu privire la membrii decedați ai aristocrației transilvănene sunt unice și în ce măsură sunt acte de vorbire formalizate, ce elemente conțin ele și scopul părții care ordona să le includă și ce explicație poate fi găsită pentru dispariția și pierderea semnificației acestei forme de comunicare.

Pe baza surselor din fondul Bibliotecii Teleki, putem afirma că discursurile sunt reprezentative pentru „elementele superioare”. 80% din discursuri au fost ținute în legătură cu aristocrații transilvăneni, mica aristocrație și intelectualitatea urbană. Se poate afirma că discursul funerar a fost un element esențial al cultului morții al aristocrației protestante transilvănene din secolele al XVIII-lea și al XIX-lea și se găsește în special în locuri în care colegiile protestante i-au conferit un cadru instituțional, iar tiparnițele acestor colegii au asigurat publicarea.

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