Categories of death in Romanian rural world of the late 19th – early 20th century after parish registers in several villages from Mureş County

Abstract:

To understand the cultural meaning of death, criteria must set for classification of different types of death. There are two major sources for decoding the cultural categories of death: official documents, like testaments, parish registers and burial customs, rarely recorded on writing but preserved in practice until today. For Mureş County, the first secular writing on burial habits dated since early nineteenth century, the famous medical work of Vasile Popp about Transylvanian Romanian burial customs is almost contemporary with the first parish registers of the dead in the Romanian villages. We want to unravel not only the cultural types of death, according to parish registers, but their enrollment in either category. After written sources there are two types of death: ordinary and unusual, but what is the understanding of these categories? What influences have the circumstances of death on the cultural understanding of death? It is not as important the numbers of the death categories, as their components and the burial rites that must prevent or nullifying the negative impact of some death. In this perspective the most important kind of death is the "unusual death", because it is more dangerous for living, but what the meaning of the unusual death is and what additional rites should be done?

Keywords: *history of death, cultural death, church records, burial customs, folk mentality.*