

Funerary Monuments of Members of the Greek Company of Sibiu

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Abstract:

Until they established their own cemetery, Levantine merchants residing in Sibiu who chose not to retire to their native places or who happened to die unexpectedly while in the city were buried near the churches in the surrounding Romanian suburbs or villages, the construction of which some of them had contributed to. But the cemetery that officially served the community of non-Uniate merchants was the one next to the patronal church, in the village of Bungard. Here, over the course of about a century, starting from 1695, a fairly large number of Sibiu companists were buried, during a period when the most intense activity in the history of the association took place.

The Orthodox cemetery is another historical one, found in the Sibiu neighborhood of Iosefin. Founded together with the church there, in 1789, it served as a necropolis for the founders of the Hagi Constantin Pop family, the company merchants and their relatives, and other people with whom the Company or the founders' family had connections. It operated as an Orthodox confessional cemetery until 1916, when the authorities banned burials in the old cemeteries within the city.

The oldest of the sepulchral monuments of the Sibiu company merchants still preserved today is located near the church in Bungard and dates from 1763. The next one is from 1796 and is found in Iosefin cemetery, where there are still a few from the first decade of the nineteenth century. It was also here that the last of the former members of the Greek Company was buried, in 1890.

On crosses or tombstones, epitaphs written in Greek and, only after the mid-nineteenth century, in Romanian generally follow a standardised formula, recalling the person's faith, name, age, place and date of death and, in a few cases, the locality or region of origin. The merchants whose graves can still be seen today came from the lands inhabited by the Vlachs in the Balkans, such as Macedonia (Kastoria, Plika), Epirus (Ioanina, Negades, Melenik), Pindus (Agrafa) and Morea. Others, but also these Aromanians, were born in Transylvania or in Wallachia.

Even though only very few of the funerary monuments that once existed in the cemeteries of the Levantine merchant communities have been preserved, they are representative in the way they correspond to a diversity of morphological types such as crosses, tombstones, funerary steles in the form of a plate or obelisk, aedicules; they are often enriched with figurative decorations; and the early ones are reminiscent of the stone carving of Brâncoven, while the later ones employ a Baroque and neoclassical expression. Analysed from an artistic point of view, they reveal similarities with monuments in cemeteries of Orthodox "brotherhoods" in which non-companion (i.e., non company-member) merchants were buried, such as

those from Alba Iulia, Orăștie, Făgăraș or Brașov.

Keywords: *Sibiu, Bungard, Greek Company, Orthodox cemetery, epitaphs, funerary monuments*