Stones in Floors and Walls: Commemorating the Dead in the Transylvanian Principality

Abstract:

The term “epitaph” has been used by researchers and the broader public for a range of stone memorials installed within the territory of the Transylvanian Principality during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both in towns and at burial sites on the estates of the nobility. It is a challenge to find a clear definition of the genre called epitaph as used in international scholarship, especially if trying to cover the entirety of Europe in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. Some elements in the suggested definitions concern the form and iconography, while others refer to the spatial position and a certain type of commemorative function distinct from that of funeral monuments: epitaphs did not necessarily mark the actual place of burial but were installed somewhere else on the wall to evoke the memory of the deceased. The paper reflects on these interpretations, and examines whether traditions and practice in Transylvania corresponded to the trends in Central and Western Europe. It is considered whether and in what respect the category “epitaph” is useful when describing the commemorative objects of the Early Modern Transylvanian elite. The discussion is based on the author’s field survey, the first carried out, of the overwhelming majority of stone memorials that have survived from the territory and period of the Transylvanian Principality (1541-c. 1700).

Keywords: *epitaph, funeral monuments, memory, Transylvania, sixteenth and seventeenth century.*