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PHD THESIS SUMMARY

**THE ROLE OF NON-FUNERARY STONE CROSSES
FROM THE FIELD OF BĂRĂGAN.
HISTORY, LOCATION, RELOCATION**

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Keywords

The nonfuneral stone cross, the Bărăgan Plain, the fair, the transhumance, village hearths, the 19th century, the 18th century, the purposes of the nonfuneral crosses, motives and symbols, types of crosses, the stone of Albești, the stone of Năeni, Istrița Hills, Ialomița, Călărași, Brăila, Buzău, Wallachia, Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Empire, archeometric study.

Theme - Research of the location of nonfuneral lithic crosses dating from the end of the 19th century, from the area of the Bărăgan Plain, identification of purposes, history, transliteration, transcription.

The general objective - Knowing the role, image and content of nonfuneral crosses in a defined geographical area, based on a field investigation, within certain chronological limits.

PhD thesis summary

The present study came from the need to make known a heritage that, due to historical reasons, has been neglected: the cross on a lithic support, in general, the road cross, in particular. Reflecting on this type of monuments, on the characteristics of the payers, the places where they were raised, the historical period in which they were commissioned and, above all, the style of sculpture approached, I came to the conclusion that these crosses are works of popular art, raised with great financial efforts, that reveal the thinking of the community and the payers. They are genuine written documents that attest the language, communication systems, education, culture and historical moments of the area where they are raised. I believe that the votive monument, the stone cross, has a real heritage value proven by the information it holds. Following the start of research campaigns on stone crosses, starting in 2017, we found that in Romanian historiography, is not subject to a general analysis. Studying the published and unpublished paperworks, I came to the conclusion that it is necessary to deepen the research on the stone cross, which contains an analysis of the manner and reasons for its erection, respectively the initial roles and those acquired along the way, as well as the definition of a historical course in which the monument was involved. Another observation was the fact that, in Romania, there is no general study on the history of stone crosses, nor on the history of the way of carving these monuments. Considering these aspects, I considered it necessary to analyze the stone cross at a general level, a fact achievable only by accumulating historical information and

technical data at the zonal level. For this reason, I started a research to lay the foundations of what the stone cross means, defines and transmits, in a little researched space, the south-eastern area of Muntenia, the Bărăgan Plain. The choice of the geographical area was based on the need to research monuments with lithic support in a space that, for several centuries, was considered to be underdeveloped from a demographic and financial point of view. Another reason was given by the information regarding the use of space in the transhumance phenomenon and the presence in this territory of the end points in the seasonal movements of the herds: Balta Ialomița and Balta Brăila. The Bărăgan Plain includes, in geographical terms, the Southern Bărăgan and a small part of the central Bărăgan¹. From an administrative point of view, the area currently belongs to Ialomița, Călărași and Brăila counties. In the 19th century, the vilages in the research area were within the Ialomița county and a small part were under the administration of Brăila county. The characteristic of the area is the steppe climate, and the predominant form of relief is flatness. In this area, there is no stone source. However, during the 19th century, the use of a rich lithic material of small or large sizes is observed, which, it seems, covered the need for stability and durability. I started this research knowing about the existence of a number of three nonfuneral crosses in different places of Ialomița county. During the three years, I supplemented with information, locations and history a number of 196 nonfuneral crosses raised in Bărăgan. The monuments identified and used in this study are the first time researched and published with such an input of data from the historical, geographical, administrative, epigraphic and ethnographic fields. The present study identifies the multiple roles of the crosses raised in the Bărăganu Plain, the initial ones, from the time they were raised, as well as the secondary ones acquired along the way. I bring an important contribution of information regarding the presence of them in the territory. In order to understand the context of raised the monuments, it was necessary to describe some landmarks regarding the geographical and social environment and a European and a Walachian historical context. On the same basis, were identified aspects that helped to understand the anthropological purpose of the cross in a specific space and its use as a means of communication. In order to reveal the importance of this object in a specific territory and to find out its material value, it was necessary to report some information regarding the type of stone used, the way of carving, the way of transport, the mounting of the cross as well as the way of sale. At the same time, in order to form a complete and objective image, the monuments

¹ Grigore Posea et alii/aliae, *Geography of Romania* volume V.

from the Bărăgan area were researched, analyzed and compared with other monuments from adjacent areas. Reason was to find out the similarities and differences between the types of inscriptions, motifs, sizes as well as between the different types of rocks used to the support. The present work is not a repertoire of crosses, it is a research on the identification of the main and secondary purposes of the monuments. To achieve this, different methods were used to retrieve and to confirm the data necessary for the topic addressed. There is no general study on the history of the raised and use of stone crosses in the Romanian space, as well as on the history of the way these monuments were sculpted, although in the field, approximately 800 examples of nonfuneral crosses were identified until the year 2024². In order to lay the foundations for such a study, I considered it necessary to report the conclusions of a research carried out in an area that has not been researched until now, with the aim that, in the future, the data obtained will be part of a study that will include the current territory of the country.

The present study was based on information retrieval, analysis, comparison and reporting. The use of sources from different research areas brought an important volume of information that was analyzed, compared and filtered, both through published and unpublished historical sources, as well as through data obtained from different adjacent areas. To retrieve information, I used different research methods that, through the data provided, highlighted the most complete picture of the environment in which the stone crosses were raised. The first stage of the research was dedicated to the study of published and unpublished historical sources on various topics including publications, maps, from the 18th-19th centuries. The second stage consisted in taking technical data from the field that helped to identify the crosses and implicitly describe them. This was carried out by traveling in the field, to the place where the monuments were raised, by identifying the location and recording other data such as dimensions, transliteration of inscriptions, photography, identification of visible degradation etc. The results of these two approached methods led to the conclusion that a completion of the obtained data is necessary. The solution was the application of the third research method, the anthropo-ethnographic type: the interview with the aim of recording historical and anthropological data. The data obtained completed the information held, especially regarding the historical reality in

² Until 2024, the following have been identified: 250 specimens in Prahova County, 196 in the Bărăganu Plain, approximately 200 in Muscel and Bârsa, approximately 19 in the Sebeş Mountains, approximately 38 specimens in Năeni Buzău, and in various localities in the county approximately 260 were identified, in the city of Bucharest more than 30 were identified and in Dâmbovița county we identified approximately 50; Şandric *et alii*, *Heritage at the Crossroads.*; Research 2021-2024; Teodor *et alii*, *Stone crosses from Albești*; Totoianu, Anghel (coord.), *Repertoire: Troițe and cemeteries with funerary pillars.*; Buiumaci, Panait, *Messages carved in stone.*

the territory of the communities. This approach resulted in the recording of new information regarding the purpose of the raised of the crosses, the phenomenon of transhumance and its ways, the location of the old village hearths, the processing of the stone, the transport of the cross as well as its commercialization as a finished product. In this way, the elements, motives, roles and structure of the crosses in the area of the Bărăgan Plain were compared and analyzed with those from the adjacent areas: Buzău and Prahova County and Bulgaria. In analyzing the data, a double perspective was taken into account: historical and anthropological. The anthropological perspective helped to understand the way to distinguish and interpret time, space and place by the man in the targeted area, the characteristics of the client and the stonemason alike, thus helping to highlight the elements of *civilization* that led to the choice of the support, the structure and of the image of the cross. It was necessary to combine the ethnological, anthro-ethnographic and anthro-geographic perspectives, along with the historical and geographical ones. In addition to these, were used the results of the petrographic samples taken from the crosses of Bărăgan. The samples were analyzed macroscopically and microscopically and the results confirm that the monuments in Bărăgan were made of Năeni stone, during the 17th century the 18th and 19th centuries³. For the present study, I used various types of unpublished and published sources that include manuscript documents, cartographic documents, photographic documents, video interviews, conference presentations, various research papers or publications. A starting point of the research was the use of informations from the archival sources of The County Service of the Ialomița National Archives and The County Service of the Călărași National Archives, from the Funds of the Ialomița Prefecture and from the Civil Status Collection⁴. In addition to these, the photo-video archive of the National Museum of Agriculture, as well as the archives of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, the Ialomița County Museum and the Ethnographic Museum "Anton Badea", Reghin, were studied. At the same time, for this study, information was used as a source of museum objects from the Collections of the National Museum of Agriculture and the Ialomița County Museum. The next step was to study some general publications that provided a seedbed for interdisciplinary perspectives such as the geographic environment⁵, the society⁶, religiosity⁷, art history, transhumance⁸, epigraphy,

³ According to the Archeometric Study carried out by Terra Analitic SRL, between April and May 2024; Research 2021-2024.

⁴ Fund Ialomița Prefecture no. 87; S.C.C. no. 83, SJANIL.

⁵ Morariu, Conea, Călinescu, "Physical-geographical districting of Balta Ialomița" etc.

⁶ Stahl, *Tribes and Villages of Southeast Europe*.

geology⁹, motives and non-verbal language¹⁰, along with information from some projects that had as their theme the study of stone crosses in Romania¹¹ and Bulgaria¹².

This work is structured in 4 chapters with an introduction, conclusions, list of figures, bibliography and three appendices. The introduction includes a brief history of the nonfuneral stone crosses raised on the current territory of Romania until the 20th century, the methodology approached, the research methods applied, the unpublished and published sources used and the problems encountered. The appendices contain information that had an essential role in the conduct of the present research.

Chapter I have informations of the historical, socio-economic and geographical environment of the Bărăgan Plain aspects in the 19th century regarding the raised of stone crosses. The Bărăgan Plain, for centuries, was a transit area, on whose territory there were numerous commercial and transhumance roads from Transylvania to Balta Ialomiței. Nonfuneral stone crosses have been identified along such routes. Taking into account the information from the unpublished and published sources, the primary sources and the data of the identifications on the ground, the role of the crosses as landmarks on the roads of transhumance is distinguished, being part of a rudimentary and customary infrastructure marking the directions to and from Transylvania, the Bărăgan Plain, Balta Ialomița and Balta Brăila. In the 19th century, Walachia was marked by contrasts. One can observe the use of its territories as a theater of war, the attempt to organize an agrarian strategy, the issuing of laws of enfranchisement, respectively of appropriation, along with a flimsy administrative reorganization. The period is characterized by the presence of banditry and high taxes as well as periods of unfavorable climate. However, an evolution of culture can be distinguished, through the adoption and acceptance of Western fashion, through the construction of brick churches and by raising stone crosses of a high artistic quality. In the present chapter I will present aspects that influenced the location of the monuments, identifying the reasons that led to the choice of these actions. In order to understand this, it was necessary to relate the geographical framework, the fauna and flora, the European and Wallachia historical context, the social environment of the area where the crosses are located

⁷ Certeau, *The practise of everyday life*.

⁸ David *et alii*, "National inventory of living elements of intangible cultural heritage – extracted".

⁹ "Stratigraphic Nomenclature" etc.

¹⁰ Stahl, *Romanian folklore and popular art*; Dunăre, *Comparative Traditional Ornamentation* etc.

¹¹ Șandric *et alii*, *Heritage at the Crossroads.*; Teodor *et alii*, *Stone crosses from Albești*; Buiumaci, Panait, *Messages carved in stone*.

¹²Pavel Pronin "Meals and Votive Crosses of the Iskar Gorge" etc.

alongside the beliefs, customs, calendars respected and, as well, the aspects of the development of the transhumance phenomenon on the territory of the Bărăgan Plain. For the latter, I used as sources and data, both from the current environmental and from the reports of specialists in the field of fauna and flora who studied the animals and plants specific to the area in the mentioned historical period. Only elements of the natural environment that affected the wintering of small cattle in the cold season, in the Bărăgan Plain and in the Balta Ialomiței, are described.

The chapter II contain informations about nonfuneral stone crosses, history, types, signs and purposes. Here are presented the roles of the stone cross in a particular century. A consistent contribution of technical, ethnographic and historical data is brought regarding: the role of the stone monuments in the Bărăgan Plain, in the 19th century, the integration of its general characteristics in the geographical space of Muntenia and the comparison of the area with different adjacent areas that own such lithic monuments. The research perspectives are approached from the point of view: historical, geographical, religious and anthropological. Starting from the premise that there are two large categories of crosses raised in a space, it was necessary to explain the characteristics that determined their choice. Depending on their significance in the territory, on the place where they are located, as well as depending on the text on their surface, two types of crosses are distinguished: funeral - grave and cenotaph, and nonfuneral - *troițe*, road crosses, of the crossroads, of appointment, of well, of disease and of hearth. Crosses that do not have a funerary character can be found in documents and specialized literature with the names of memorial monuments, road crosses, *troițe*, votive crosses or votive monuments¹³. These designations do not cover the full variety of lifting purposes. It was necessary to separate all the crosses whose purpose is commemoration, investiture, oath, remembrance, healing, road marking, replacing some sacerdotal or ecclesiastical functions, from those related to the rite of passage to the afterlife. We have separated the stone crosses into two broad categories: funerary, which belong to a deceased person or group of people, and nonfuneral, those who are raised by individuals or a group of people.

The research for the present study was carried out on the borders of the old Ialomița county, between October 2021 and June 2024. Were covered 1900 km of roads and side roads, without taking into account the distance to the place where the crosses are raised: in the ploughing, in the field or on top of the mounds. The data regarding the identification, location,

¹³ Argeșeanul, Constantinescu, *Memorial monuments from Argeș county*; File 28/1834, SJANIL, f. 10; Totoianu, Anghel, *Repertoire: Troițe and cemeteries with funerary pillars*; Chintăuan, Etnopetrography.

shapes, reasons, sizes, inscriptions and purposes of the nonfuneral crosses were taken by carrying out a field trip and through ethnographic research, respectively through the interview method. The objectives of the trip were visual identification, photography, text retrieval through transliteration¹⁴ and establishing the location by retrieving GPS points. The identification of the location or the place of replacement, as well as the relief forms in the area of each monument, was also taken into account: water sources, grazing places, old courses of the river or river, the presence of mounds in the area. In addition to these, the routes to Balta Ialomița and to the areas of Buzău or Prahova practiced in transhumance were also identified, as well as the distance between the raised cross and the other monuments in the vicinity. For comparison and analysis, information taken from stone crosses raised up to the middle of the 20th century was used. For the existing percentages in this study, the crosses physically identified in the researched area were used. The monuments, whose dating is missing, were placed in different centuries, depending on the existing symbols on their surface, the type, wording of the text and the way of carving the support. A basis for starting the research was the information from the List of Historical Monuments, related to Ialomița, Călărași and Brăila counties, where 16 specimens were identified. Some information about the stone crosses in the Bărăgan Plain area can be found in the monument files of the National Heritage Institute. Considering these aspects, I believe that it is necessary to record information about the crosses in the area of the Bărăgan Plain, analyze them, compare them with other areas possessing such monuments and publish them in order to present their memorial and material value, both to specialists and to the general public. In this chapter I also present aspects of the history of the raising of crosses during the 18th and 19th centuries, of the post-raised period. In the present study, the evolution of the cross after the moment of raised, the demolition period who have the beginning in the second half of the 20th century, an inauspicious period is unfolding for nonfuneral monuments and the reality in the territory was also taken into account. From the 196 nonfuneral crosses, I identified: one cross raised in 1695, 15 crosses from the 18th century, 24 crosses raised between 1800 - 1820, 48 crosses between 1821 - 1848, 23 crosses between 1849 - 1877, 41 crosses in 1878 - 1908 and 14 were raised in 1909 - 1938. In addition to these, 30 crosses were identified as being raised in the 18th and 19th centuries, according to their shape, elements and inscription, the year of raised not being visible. In subchapter 2, The Anthropological Research Perspectives, in order to

¹⁴ For this, non-invasive and reversible intervention on the support was necessary, which was carried out by wetting the surface with water and cleaning, if necessary, with a slightly abrasive tool, 80 specimens; Research 2021-2024.

understand the anthropo-ethnographic purpose, the analysis, narration and explanation of the meaning of the terms: symbol, image, place, space, road and religiosity, in the mentality of the communities, was undertaken. In subchapter 3, Elements and symbols on the stone crosses from Bărăgan I explain that the existing elements transmit and are utilitarian being perfected by artistic valences. These, along with the motifs, are structured on standard shapes of the objects, the stone crosses in the present case. In order to understand the utilitarian purposes, it was necessary to present the types of crosses, the component parts, the constitutive elements as well as the motifs found on the monuments in the Bărăgan Plain. Symbols have prerogatives related to ethnography, being ordered by communities and payers with a certain social education, who were part of a group. The signs on the crosses communicate and convey to the viewer a message that, in this case, identifies borders and paths, roads and their owners. The sun it is the most important motif existing on the Baragăn crosses. The sign can be found on both nonfuneral and funerary crosses. It is the distinctive sign of the area. Fir. Tree. Sacred tree are identified on the stone cross. The tree in the form of a fir or tree has the meaning of the tree of life, the Tree of Heaven. However, its meanings are much older than Christianity having prerogatives of god in different civilizations. The cult of trees and dendrolatry evolves to the symbol of the cross¹⁵. *Troița* it is on some large crosses, on the front surface of the upper arm, in the upper part, it can see a building with a roof, in different geometrically stylized shapes: a square with an isosceles triangle positioned above, with the base down, which has at its top. After studying the history of the cross and the place where it was raised, I found that it represents a three-story building. The representation conveys the fact that the monument is a *troița*, a place of worship for travelers on the road. The religious scene considered to be represented only on icons and in churches is also found on nonfuneral crosses. In the researched area, religious scenes representing Saint Demetrius were identified on two nonfuneral crosses located in different areas and raised in different centuries. The crucifix is a religious sign represented simply: by a Greek or Latin cross or complex: a Latin type cross on which Christ is crucified, typical. The motive was identified at the crossroads of the arms or on the roof, frontally. The 4 subchapter, The text of the crosses. The system of writing names in general, contain the explanations of the type of cross according to the letter, the evolution of the text and the names of the payers. In subchapter 5, The purposes of the nonfuneral stone crosses from the Bărăgan Plain, I explain anthropological

¹⁵ Vulcănescu, *Column of Heaven*, p. 10.

purpose of the cross and the importance of this purpose given by the presence of the legends of the foundation of the crosses. For the correct understanding of the term, it was necessary to reproduce the analysis of the records made for the present research. An unexpected thing for me was to collect fragments of legends about the crosses in the Bărăgan area. We have identified accounts, regarding these monuments, which rank in the category of etiological legends¹⁶. The cross had a number of useful roles, which are primary, predestined from its conception, and secondary, acquired during the post-raised process. One of these was the purpose of dividing the road into various distances, through stops. In the places where the votive monuments were raised, travelers stopped and worshiped¹⁷, they rested, served the meal. If we take into account the vast space of the Bărăgan Plain and the fact that the number of crosses was much higher than those identified in the present research, measuring the distance between the road crosses left in the initial lifting places, we can observe a period of time necessary to travel a routes between two monuments that fall between two and eight hours, the distance varying between 10 and 40 km.

In chapter III, Places with nonfuneral crosses in the researched area, in order to understand the structure and importance of the monuments raised in the area of the Bărăgan Plain, I relate information about the historical context of some localities, within the area of which nonfuneral stone crosses were identified. At the same time, I analyze the geographical-historical context in relation to the monuments in each individual area. This information is structured by places and grouped according to the current county administrations.

Chapter IV, The fairs with stonemasons from the Bărăgan Plain. Stone quarries, craftsmen and payers, contain the answer of a pertinent question observed after analyzing the data from the territory under investigation: What it was the way in which the stone cross came to be raised in an area located at a distance of more than 100 km away from a lithic source. In order to complete the identified data, I started an ethnographic research in the Năeni area, Buzău County, based on the reports recorded in the communities of the Bărăgan Plain area. Its purpose was to record information on stone sources and to identify old stone quarries. The obtained data were also confirmed by the results of some petrographic samples taken from the crosses in the Bărăgan Plain. Following the trip to the field and the anthropo-ethnographic research, it was

¹⁶ This includes: the legend of the cross from Coşlogeni, the legend fragment of the cross from the crossroads, Cosâmbeşti and that of the cross from Cioranii de Sus, Prahova; Research 2021-2024.

¹⁷ "That's where we are, up the valley (...) It's a cross. Up this valley, go to the hut. And at each valley, where the path starts, a cross is placed, so that people can worship, to say God-help when they go to work. And here is one that we put in the fall. (...) like this, so that people can worship when they go to work, to the hay and so on, to the sheep." Sadului River, Sibiu county; Jiga-Iliescu, *The church on the other side*, p. 109.

found that the stone crosses were purchased by order, and the sponsors contacted the craftsmen during the fairs. There is information about the fairs and the economic aspects of the communities of Bărăgan in the 19th century in publications that include data from today's Brăila county area and from the historical Ialomița county¹⁸. The fairs existing in the century mentioned above by foreign travelers who passed through Wallachia and Moldova¹⁹. The moment when a real export trade begins and internal trade develops more is after the signing of the Treaty of Adrianople, in 1829. Its content actually confirms the old rights of the Danubian Principality of Wallachia, such as practicing religion and having its own administration region, but also contained other new rights such as the freedom of export trade for this territory. The situation of economic relations, especially of the external trade of Romania, is changing due to the new rules adopted now²⁰. In subchapter 2, The stone of the crosses, contain informations about the manufacture of objects with various purposes who was carried out from a certain type of stone that allowed carving and ensured the high resistance of the objects, over a long period of time. Each individual area used rock types that provided these characteristics. Thus, taking as an example the crosses, in the area of Transylvania, they were made of sandstone and volcanic tuff. In the Bistrița-Năsăud, Argeș, Gorj, Tulcea and Buzău areas²¹ limestone was mainly used to make such monuments. Also contain informations about the stone sources for the Bărăgan crosses. The Bărăgan Plain area is dotted with a multitude of stone objects acquired over time. However, I noticed that the frequency of those dating from the 19th century is much higher than those dating from previous centuries. The Năeni Stone, the area of provenance of the stone of the nonfuneral crosses from the Bărăgan Plain was identified as the subcarpathian Buzău area, the Năeni stone hills²². The predominant rock type, in this area, is of a sedimentary nature with "remains of fossils trapped in a micritic matrix (microcrystalline calcium carbonate)"²³, known under a generalized name of fossiliferous limestone. Here there is lithic material datable from the Miocene period (5.333–23.03 million years) and Pliocene (2,588–5,333 million years ago)²⁴. Dealul Mare and Olarea hills are the places where most of the stone quarries used during the

¹⁸ Scarlătescu, Berbec, "Ialomița County in commune monographs 1915".

¹⁹ Cernovodeanu *et alii*, *Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries*, vol II, 2005.

²⁰ Diculescu *et alii*, *Commercial relations of Romania*, p. 6.

²¹ Chintăuan, *Raised Stones*, p. 52; Valentin, "Stone. Stonemason's tools and their traces in Daco-Roman antiquity", p. 16.

²² "Archaeometric study"; Research 2021-2024.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ "International Chronostratigraphic Chart".

19th century have been identified. Specialists classify the stone of Năeni in the type of sedimentary rocks of the fossiliferous limestone type. In the subchapter 3, Craftsmen and principals, I explain that between the two areas: Albești, Argeș and Năeni, Buzău, which dealt with the manufacture of stone crosses, there are certain similarities, especially regarding the way of extracting the stone block. In terms of the division of labor, there are clear differences. The stone craftsmen of Năeni area had their own organizational system, different from that of the guild of crosses from the Albești, Argeș area. I believe that the registration of popular names related to both the profession and the types of rock used can help those who will lean towards studying a little-addressed history, the history of popular art, of stone sculpture, in the Romanian space²⁵. It is known that, at the foot of the hills in the subcarpathian area, Buzău, located at the crossing point from the area of Transylvania and Moldova, to the one of Muntenia, there are a number of villages, which, in the 19th century, were engaged in the craft the stone. Communities with families of master stonemasons were organized in villages that had their hearth established at the base of the hills with a source of stone. Each village had its quarry, which was usually a whole hill. The mason did the whole job from quarrying to installation. Those from the villages of Năeni and Fântânele were more concerned with carving large crosses and only to order²⁶. Most stone quarries of the village of Năeni are on the place called by the locals "Dealul Olarea/Olarea Hill". Today, the village hearths remain, and the occupations of the inhabitants have reoriented towards agriculture, especially towards viticulture. The number of families dealing with stone processing is under 7. The work for a cross began with the selection of the stone block. It was chosen according to the sound and according to the dimensions of the ordered cross. To know whether or not the stone contained cracks and was a clean, unblemished block, as was necessary for the making of a cross, it used the skill of the craftsman and his fine hearing. Thus, by gently tapping the stone block with a metal hammer, you could hear the echo, the song of the stone. If the echo had no off-tone sounds: it rang continuously, as a bell rings without a crack or repair, then the block was suitable to be taken out and used for carving. If the sound was dissonant, slightly disturbing to the hearing, then the stone had cracks and was not suitable to be dislodged in order to carve a cross. The old stonemasons used to say that you have to feel the stone if you want a material without cracks²⁷. Apart from the work of extraction, for a stone to

²⁵ Olteanu, *Stone in the Romanian heritage*, p. 25.

²⁶ Interview Marian Apostol, 2023; Research 2021-2024.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

become a useful object or a work of art, its processing was necessary. The place where the stone was processed was called by the craftsmen: workshop. From the information gathered from the research, we identified two such processing places, used by stonemasons. The first place was called the *quarry workshop* and the second was the *big workshop*. The names used in the work are: workshop no. 1, where the stone block was roughly carved and workshop no. 2, the master stonemason's house, where the work was finished, the work was done in thin.

Various tools were used to extract and process the raw material. All the old tools needed human power to work. Their names vary from one region to another. The tools used by stonemasons are divided into two large categories, depending on the area of use: tools used universally, for a variety of activities that also belong to other fields, and special tools.

Transport was carried out by oxcart on known roads, during dry periods. The unloading and mounting of the cross was done only by the craftsman's team, for reasons of protecting the quality of the work. The carriage, arrived at the location indicated by the client, was unloaded by human power, only after mounting the plinth. The unloading of the cross was done directly in the sheath.

A portrait of the payer, starting from the commissioned cross, would be dominated by the following characteristic: a man with a high material status, who could afford to spend on a product used outside the area of own consumption, the cross being among the things that the human need for spirituality and not the primary need for consumption and survival. He belonged to a certain community, which knew the writing and language of the respective community, reflected in the existing motifs on the crosses in the Bărăgan Plain and beyond. The principal had an aesthetic sense developed at a fairly high level, as can be seen from the motifs and shapes chosen, as well as from the options regarding a certain type of carving, respectively a certain craftsman. The sponsor had his own requirements regarding the type of motifs on the crosses. However, they were chosen from a track record accepted by the mason.

Conclusions

The stone cross is a monument of patrimonial value raised with great financial efforts, it is the work that represents a *popular school*, which influenced and reflected the thinking of entire communities and patrons alike. Its preciousness, its material value, increases proportionally with the measurement of the distance traveled by the monument, from the stone quarry to the place of raised. The stone cross, through its presence, motifs and text, conveys important information, which brings new perspectives regarding the understanding of local

heritage, implicitly integrating into Romania's heritage values and connecting the region to both the Balkan and European areas. During the period of time in which the research was carried out, I managed to bring a consistent input of data, both in terms of the purposes of the stone cross, and in terms of its history after its raise. The stone monument from the Bărăgan area, through analysis and comparison, was integrated into the area of Muntenia alongside other crosses with similar purposes. We found that these differences from other monuments in Romania, by the presence of particular signs, which define the uniqueness of the area, by the frequency of their use. The quantitative and qualitative data, from the present study, show the importance of the application of various methodological ways of taking over. The information was accumulated through the application of interdisciplinary methods and led to a volume of data, which are from the study area of the monuments subject to research, such as: the reason for their appearance, their history in the territory, the evolution of mentalities regarding the presence of the cross in the Bărăgan Plain, the way of understanding its goals as well as the way in which the communities in the researched area observed certain historical events that took place in the 19th and 20th centuries.

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