

## THE GRAVE-POSTS FROM THE Calvinist CEMETERY IN SZATMÁRCSEKE

The village *Szatmárcseke* lies in the eastern part of the county Szabolcs-Szatmár. Its area: 6241 cadastral yoke (= 8862) acres. Number of inhabitants: 2173. They all are Hungarian. The majority of them belongs to the Reformed-Presbyterian-Church.

In the churchyard of this denomination there are peculiar wooden grave-posts to see. They catch the eye even by their mere thickness, yet much more by their bizarre shapes.

It was in the years 1956 and 1958 that the author visited the churchyard. He did not do trying to solve the peculiarity of the grave-posts there without much ado that is on the strength of his impressions then and there. He put inquiries to the population of the village about the strange objects. He was asking for analogies too, in the neighbouring villages and putting inquiries also to them. He made all this even in some villages moreout of the way. On the other hand, also libraries was he seeing about the grave-posts.

The research of him resulted as follows:

1. The grave-posts in the churchyard of Szatmárcseke were not conform in all to one another. The greater part of them was one metre and a half long. There occurred, however, such ones too, the length of which did not touch even one metre, respectively, surpassed two metres too. The ones of one metre as well as of one and a half, as to their shapes, were congruent on the whole. The morner ones—*i.e.* those of one metre — were likewise of one and a half originally. When, however, their feet became mouldy, the caretakers of them (that is of the graves) disjoined the rotten parts and did not replace to the graves but the intact rests.

In detail, the posts were carved in their parts above the surface of the earth. Their tops were sharpcut. Their edges ran from the front backwards. Trough a deep indent on the front-stretch — the so-called „cut of eaves” — there was every of them divided in two parts. In the part above the eaves there ran six edges and in the part below the eaves five ones along. One of the edges on the upper part ran in the middle of the front to the eaves and there were cuts in file on it. On the face of post below the eaves there were particulars of the dead person cut in.

From the front-indent of the grave-posts (- and it is just they I was allowed and compelled to call the posts selves bizarre for -) I had instantly to imagine two human tongues in contrasting position or, with regard to the rises separating such two tongues, the remains of two petals of pistil, similarly in contrasting position, of a plucked flower. The lowest indent of edge at the same time, I could have compared to a pendulous human lip.

Occurring, however, such grave-posts, the edges of which are missing these lower (liplike?) indents, having found cenversely also such one, on which, above the cut of edge compared to tongues and petals, there is an indent suggesting of the lower (liplike) indent: I was allowed to be sure of saying that the number and form of cuts can't be held as invariable in Szatmárcseke.

Putting aside this extremely difficult question for the present, I did not want more to determine but the forms of the grave-posts.

They were a little like to the prow of a boat. Their perpendicular back-edges and horizontal top-edges ran counter to such a supposition that the postcarver of Szatmárcseke would have intended to imitate by them the prow and the bottom of some fishing boat. Such a kind of fishing boats there did not exist either in this village or in other Hungarian settlings. Further, since among the mouldy posts there occurred such a one too, whose top had to be sheltered from rain and snow by tin, I was compelled to regard the wedge-shaped tops of the grave-posts as an important structural element for carrying off any water and defence from mouldering.

The mode of carving on the posts of about 2 m. was by and large concordant with that on the 1,5 m long ones. On the big posts, however, we find occasionally a rhymed epitaph too, fit to case and person.

The posts of small size were made in the years 1900—1950 and the big ones in the years 1920—1958.

In those earlier parts of the churchyard, however, which again are now put to use for burying, I found posts of other kinds of carving too.

There occurred among them such a one whose frontedge was not indented. Another had five edges also on the flat above the eaves. (The front face of this was missing any edge.) Its top was spiked. This posts were of newer making.

In the same place I found three posts quite old without any date of year. They probably date from the end of the 19-th century. They had again six edges above their eaves and five ones below them. In other respect, however, they were very different from the newer posts.

On the front-edge of one kind of the old posts I did not found but altogether three „lace“-indents (vvv). (Table XII 1.) On the front-edge of the other one — going to fall out at that time — there was an indent similar to a bracket (Picture 59,2) and as above as below it an indent each, both like to a lace-indent (v). Table XII. 2.) The third kind of posts strikingly differed from the others. Though its top likewise edged but this edge ran through between the two sides of it. There was a front-edge on it but the indents did not take place on this but on the two side—edges of its front. And as to these indents they were not similar to a single bracket but a series of brackets (Picture 59,4).

Further, on the eaves there was a series of lace-indents. (Tabl. XV. 1.)

2. Of the inhabitants of Szatmárceke too, I was inquiring about the posts. The most interesting of the informations was I got from Joseph Bóné, one of the post-carvers.

As he said the posts for people of the community were made by carpenters and wheelers of this place. It was he who began to make the large-sized posts (with verses on them) in 1920. He explained the mode of post-making. The most interesting of his explaining for me, was they called the indents on front-edge „hungarian moustache“. This stands for the simple indents of the three old posts (Pict. 59,2) as well as for the longer complex ones (Pict. 59,1) of the rest. He showed me also a rack with a like indent (of „hungarian moustache“).

He mentioned that too, that the post-carvers of Szatmárceke made grave-posts of their special form also for other villages.

A middle peasant — Sigismund Kajdi by name — said me that people like he entrusted post-making to artisans.

Old Frank Borbély, a poor of 95, told that in his childhood not everybody got at such a „flowery“ (i.e. „hungarian moustache“-adorned) grave-posts. It was later too, that the artisan did not make such a one but for that by whose family he got a splendid board or who was a dear chum of him.

3. Hereupon I was visiting the reformed churchyards of several villages in the county Szabolcs-Szatmár.

I really found in Fehérgyarmat a 2 m. high gravepost of the Szatmárceke type. And near to it, much to my surprise, I found also a copy of the post with three lace-indents from the old part of the churchyard of Szatmárceke (cp., Table XII. 1.)

In Penyige I found again a post similar to the second old post from the churchyard of Szatmárceke, which did not differ but in depth and definiteness from its prototype of Szatmárceke (cp., Table XIII. 2, XII. 2).

In Mátészalka I found posts, with several indents similar to those on the third old post from the old part of the churchyard of Szatmárceke and with a middle-cut decoration of „hungarian moustache“, running through the two side-edges of them (cp., Table XIII. 1).

In Vámosoroszi I had already to observe that there was not necessary but succeeding of two or three generations to enable the changing of the four-sided-log-shaped grave-posts into six-sided ones with „flowery“, i.e. ornamented front-edge. For all that, on the front-edges of the posts of this village did not run but the short line of the „hungarian moustache“. (Cp., Table XVII.)

On the faces of the grave-posts in the churchyard of Tiszadob I came to see already such a short „hungarian moustache“, wich reminded me of the „voluta“ (snail-shaped ornament) of Baroque. (Picture 4,1)

Beside the top-parts of two four-sided grave-posts, one — as I was told — from Apagy, the other from Paszab, there was the short „hungarian moustache“ carved out horizontally. (Table XVIII, 1,2).

4. It is strange but a fact that I found these post-ornaments of „hungarian moustache“ on utensils too. From these I want to mention here the following ones:

They were present on cart-ladders (so-called „bürfa“), stake-braces, and gang-ladders („ferhéc“) of carts made in Szatmárnémeti about 1914.

They were likewise present on the same parts of carts from Szabolcs.

One has to see them also on beetles and yokes in the *Jósa András Museum* of Nyiregyháza. (Table XIX, 1 and 2.)

A joiner of Nyiregyháza, while wandering in Transsylvania, found the moustache on shelves for dishes („tálas”), cradles, bed-heads and shelves in libraries. Further, on yokes too. Yet there, the ornament was called *ox-horn* (ökörzarv”).

Dezsó Malonyay and George Ráth also mention these ornaments, again and again.

5. My further researches yielded anew interesting results. In the town of Békéscsaba, for instance, short and complicated ornaments concordant with the ornaments of the edges of grave-posts of Szatmárcseke are similarly called „hungarian moustache”.

Also on the peasant-houses of Baroquing types in Szatmárcseke one can find ornaments of „hungarian moustache” as well as „lace”-indents. Yet here they are not present but on the side-faces of the posts. (Table XX, 1 and 2, Table XXI. 1.)

In Fülesd I found such an ornament also on the edge of a post of a house. (Table XXI, 2.)

As a carpenter — namely Lewis Jakab — said, the shorter „hungarian moustache” was used for decorating shorter objects, and the long and complex one — for longer ones. On the other hand, both were used by carpenters more on faces and by wheelers more on edges.

For controlling the results till now, I chose Napkor, such a village, the inhabitants of which, in their overwhelming majority, are of Roman or Greek Catholic religion. Both denominations are now, as to their mother tongue, represented by Hungarian, the former by ones of German origine, respectively, the latter ones of Ruthenian origine.

In this village there appear as forming places for the „Hungarian moustache” the lintels („szemöldökfa”) in the wicket-doors as well as the veranda-posts („tor-nácoszlop”) of the houses. I came to see on them carving similar to those of Baroque consoles.

In a garden and court-yard of the Kossuth Street there were the doorpests of the wicket-door adorned not only with „doubled hungarian moustache” but also with orbs (Table XXII, 2).

The ornament is called „hungarian moustache” in Napkor too. And it is used also for other objects. *E.g.* for the „dents” — segments divided by denting — of racks of carts. In the churchyards of the village, however, they can't be found anywhere! Not even in the churchyards of reformed people immigrated-into later.

Consequently it's impossible that in Napkor the „hungarian moustache” ornaments would have been copied from the churchyards.

Trustworthy people of the village told that these ornaments were made by local carpenters having been apprenticed by certain artisans of a town.

6. There were other ethnograph hers too, dealing with the origine of the grave-posts in the reformed churchyard of Szatmárcseke. In 1930. by an article of him in the Hungarian Journal *Ethnographia*, A. Solymossy compared them with the ancient relics of the Vogule (chanty) and Ostyak (manysy) people and declared the graveposts of Szatmárcseke to be of human face and the memory of the ancient use of Hungarian people to bury in boat.

Solymossy's conception was disbelieved already by S. Bátky. As to an ancient Hungarian burying in boat he demanded archeological, traditional, and linguistic facts of him! At the same time, he recommended to his colleague to look for a Hungarian boat similar to the grave-posts of Szatmárcseke because such a one ought to be regarded — as anything entirely new.

These objections of Bátky were published in another journal and became well-known only for people of the line, however, not for all even of them. (For instance, not for G. Lükő.)

I don't think as needless, to publish this paper of mine, all the more because — as I know — neither Solymossy nor Bátky have ever seen the grave-posts of the reformed churchyard of Szatmárcseke.

Solymossy's work is full with contradictions in other respects too.

From my objections of eight point in all, I mention here only so much that he wrote about as if the dolls of Voguls and Ostyaks deads would have been of boat-shape — without having it documented; moreover, he did not document also that the dolls of dead were of grave-post character; on the contrary, 80 pieces of such idols standing closely near each other in a park, are in themselves enough to clash with that the Ugrian idols would have been used for marking any grave.

My comments can be concluded as follows:

The grave-posts of Szatmárcseke are not uniform either for their shapes or for their ornaments.

This anomaly could not be brought to an end even by the artisans (carpenters and wheelers) though being set on to preserve the matter of the posts. On the contrary, by steadily intending to make them more and more decorative, they just prevented the course of becoming uniform.

Needless, perhaps, to say that all forms of ornamentation on the grave-posts of Szatmárcseke are forms of trade. They were taken over by the Hungarian carpenters and wheelers from the formmaterial of Renaissance and Baroque. The artisans of Szatmárcseke transplanted these forms to grave-posts of remarkable people died in the village, merely for ornamenting and they made and copied these fundamental patterns of grave-post as long as some of them did not create a new getting to higher estimation in general taste.

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