



fig. 01

**on novohrad cemeteries
between 1870 - 1910:
the value of symbolism**

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introduction:

The Novohrad cemeteries are a unique peculiarity in the context of cemeteries in Slovakia. Among other tombstones, they stand out for their unusual, very rich ornamentation and colourfulness, set in spaces reminiscent of groves or meadows. Above all, however, they stand out for their use of visual and spatial elements that were no longer common in late 19th-century Christian Slovakia and often belonged to archaisms, seemingly stemming from pre-Christian times¹. In addition, they also stand out for their very characteristic folk tomb poetics, which in places speak very emotionally about the deceased and the circumstances of his death. However, beyond this physical form, these cemeteries also have an intangible dimension, which stems from their testimonial value about the society of the time and its life within the north-western Novohrad region. It was the circumstances of its historical development and everyday realities that had a significant influence on the creation of these tombstones, as well as on their unusual ornamental decoration, which has already been mentioned².

As Vladimír Polívka mentions, Novohrad was a relatively backward part of Slovakia, where a very strong conservatism persisted in both economic and socio-cultural areas, as a result of which the local people still adhered to customs and superstitions, which is precisely a manifestation of this backwardness.³ As Ján Aláč writes, these superstitions were simultaneously perceived as both a consequence and a cause⁴. According to Ján Botík, it is economic activity that is the major factor influencing the development of society⁵, but as Martuliak mentions, the north-western part of Novohrad remained without economic progress⁶. Sharra and Nissens define the impetus for social progress primarily in terms of two incentives: necessity or aspiration⁷. However, as Aláč writes, the great specificity of the northwestern Novohrad was the fact that people here lived the way their ancestors had lived, cultivating their land as their ancestors had cultivated their land, which they did not question⁸; and, as he continues, they had no vision of a different future before them, since they did not know it at all⁹.

¹ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972), p. 26.

² Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021), p. 110

³ Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský* (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928).

⁴ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 85.

⁵ Ján Botík, *Ludová architektúra a urbanizmus vidieckych sídiel na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 1998) p.68.

⁶ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrčbársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 22.

⁷ Sharra, Rómeo, Nyssens, Marthe, *Social Innovation: An Interdisciplinary and Critical Review of the Concept* (Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium, 2010) p. 10.

⁸ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021)

⁹ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021)



fig. 02 - one of the most decorated tombstones in Horný Tisovník

As ethnologist Rudolf Bednárík has suggested, however, folk tombstones are not an isolated manifestation within the culture of a society, and in examining them it is necessary to look at their wider context¹⁰, as mentioned above. According to Ľubica Chorváth, the area around burials is characterised by distinctive manifestations of folk psychology, mentality, beliefs and also magical thinking¹¹. As Bednárík continues, no folk manifestation arose for no reason; on the contrary, it was largely based on a specific need at a given time¹², which, according to him, for the context of funerals is primarily a material need¹³. In searching for a reason for the archaic nature of this manifestation, one can finally turn to Chorváth's texts, according to whom the very nature of funerals could have been the reason, since this area is very resistant to rationalisation and has been accumulating archaisms for a very long time¹⁴, or, as Bednárík writes, the cause of this phenomenon can most likely be attributed to the degree of development within the society of the Novohrad and the Horný Tisovník region¹⁵.

Despite the fact that this is an isolated phenomenon, and this topic has received quite a lot of attention in terms of filmmaking or photography. However, as far as the published literature is concerned, that which is directly devoted to Novohrad cemeteries is very limited. The literature dealing with cemeteries is mostly focused on the wider context within the whole of Slovakia, or it also deals with their ethnographic context. A valuable source are the works of the ethnologist Rudolf Bednárík, dating back to the first half of the 20th century, which contain very valuable ethnological knowledge gathered from all over Slovakia. Ján Aláč tried to change this situation by publishing a book on Novohrad cemeteries, *Here lies the flower that left the world*, first in 2015, followed by a revised and supplemented version in 2021. This publication provides the reader with an introduction and description of these cemeteries with a clearly narrower spatial and content delimitation exclusively to the Novohrad region, since until its publication there was virtually no comprehensive work with this focus. As a native and enthusiast himself, he is also dedicated to their restoration and promotion, but despite this, they remain virtually completely unknown to the public cultural heritage and the tombstones continue to be degraded.

¹⁰ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 9.

¹¹ Ľubica Chorváthová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku* ed. Ján Botík (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 33.

¹² Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 36.

¹³ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 36.

¹⁴ Ľubica Chorváthová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku* ed. Ján Botík (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 33.

¹⁵ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 35



fig. 03 - tombstone with rosette symbols in Horný Tisovník

The methodology of the present thesis is primarily literature supplemented by archival research, although the availability of archival materials is very limited and direct records telling directly about the tombstones have never been created, the reasons for which arise from their status at the time. The thesis is divided into seven chapters, which are arranged from the more general historical context to chapters on questions of belief and the meaning of the symbolism used on the New Hrad tombstones. The extensive chapters setting the cemetery in a broader context are present because of their necessity for clarifying the development of the symbolism under study and subsequently answering the research question: *how does the preservation of archaic elements of expression and meaning in the cemetery in Horní Tisovník from the period 1870 - 1910 shape the socio-cultural value of this cemetery?* It thus sets itself the task of grasping the context of the cemetery and explaining what the symbolism derives from and what is its meaning and value.

To clarify this question, it should be noted that although the thesis focuses at the end on a specific cemetery in Horní Tisovník, most of its content sticks to the overall territory of the north-western Novohrad, as it cannot be excluded from this context. It is the territory of the "highland" region, isolated from the rest of the Novohrad region and the rest of the surrounding area as well. Therefore, the north-western Novohrad will be discussed in general, and when listing the database of symbols, the work will focus on Horní Tisovník for greater specificity, but then it will be zoomed out again and re-connected to the context of the area, as the meaning of the cemeteries is complex and talking about only one part taken out of the whole would not provide a complete answer.

history of the novohrad region:

The Novohrad region, situated in the south of central Slovakia and currently spread over the territories of 4 different districts, is understood as the area of the former Novohrad county¹⁶. It is situated in a mountainous area, in the area of the Krupinská planina and Slovenské Rudohorie¹⁷. The thesis deals with the north-western part of the region, characterised by more difficult natural conditions, which is one of the factors that influenced its isolation, manifested by its difference from the surrounding areas both in material and spiritual character of the population¹⁸. Throughout its history, the region has gone through many very difficult periods over the centuries, be it invasions by the Turks, various uprisings or religious oppression of the population. All these events, together with the difficult natural conditions and the very poor status of the population (serfdom), have had a very significant impact on the development of the area over the centuries, which has in turn greatly determined its character.

Practically, the beginning of settlement in the Middle Ages was already related to these circumstances. Novohrad as such came into being at the end of the 10th century¹⁹, but the settlement of the area under study apparently did not increase until the 13th century, as a result of the Mongol-Turkish raids into the area and the subsequent flight of the affected population to the mountainous environment, which provided protection from the immediate danger²⁰. The first difficult period for the region came as early as the 16th century, when, after the lost Battle of Mohács, Novohrad was occupied by the Turks until the end of the century. During this period, the area was plundered, many people were taken prisoner and a new tax burden was introduced. Similar waves of raids were practically repeated throughout the following century²¹, despite the fact that the territory was no longer under occupation. Even after their cessation in the 18th century, however, there was no complete cessation of the turbulence. Novohrad became an insurgent territory involved in the anti-Habsburg uprising, which for a time meant a further burden for the region in terms of forced contributions to the rebel army²². In the middle of the 19th century, in addition to the turbulent events affecting the whole of Hungary, cholera spread in the area, which had fatal consequences for several villages in the north-western Novohrad²³. These turbulent factors also resulted in

¹⁶ Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský* (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 110.

¹⁷ Zuzana Beňušková, *Tradičná kultúra regiónov Slovenska* (Bratislava: Veda, 1998) p. 169

¹⁸ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 8.

¹⁹ Zuzana Beňušková, *Tradičná kultúra regiónov Slovenska* (Bratislava: Veda, 1998). p. 169

²⁰ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 13.

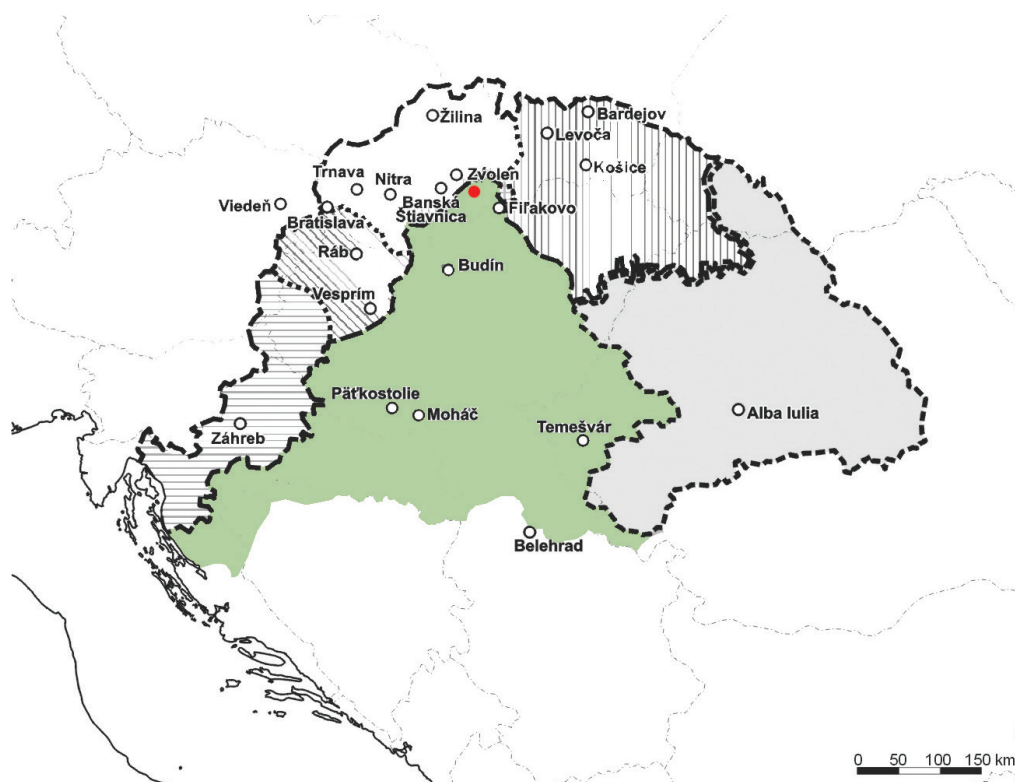
²¹ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 16.

²² Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 20.

²³ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 59.



fig. 04 - division of regions and marking of Novohrad in south-central Slovakia
fig. 05 - marking the territory occupied by the Turks until the end of the 16th century



several waves of migration, with the inhabitants fleeing in search of better living conditions²⁴. One-child marriage in the area, which was intended to prevent the division of property²⁵, was also a significant problem, but it resulted in a severe demographic crisis and loss of women's lives²⁶ and the combination of these factors led to a significant depopulation of the area during the 19th century.

In addition to these numerous events, the region was also plagued by the Estates and their duties. Since the Middle Ages, the majority of the local people belonged to the serfdom, and the environment of Novohrad in the middle of nature was from the beginning a place with a peasant population²⁷. In addition to the problems arising from the nature of the place and the way of making a living, this was also linked to the many obligations of paying taxes, in kind and working in the fields belonging to the nobility²⁸, which were often very difficult to fulfil, as the area under study had a rather stony and not very fertile soil²⁹. Efforts to alleviate these difficult living conditions for serfs came only under Maria Theresa and then under Joseph II in the 18th century, but real change did not come until the abolition of serfdom in the mid-19th century³⁰.

An extremely important factor, both for the historical development of the area and for the cemeteries themselves, was the denominational character of the territory. The belonging of the population to the Slovak Evangelical ethnic group had a significant influence on the delimitation of the territory of the Novohrad Hills, situated in the north-western part of Novohrad, as Roman Catholicism prevailed in the surrounding area. This was particularly reflected in the imaginary perception of the area and its character, which prevailed over its geographical delimitation.³¹

The beginnings of evangelicalism are connected with the Hussite tradition, which took hold in the region as early as the 15th century³², but the establishment of the

²⁴ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 19.

²⁵ Sudor, Karol. "Ako Evanjelici Sami Seba Na Juhu Stredného Slovenska Takmer Vyhubili." *Denník N*. *Denník N*, August 22, 2022. <https://dennikn.sk/953687/ako-evanjelici-sami-seba-na-juhu-stredneho-slovenska-takmer-vyhubili/>.

²⁶ Krivošík, Lukáš. "Najprv Teliatko, Potom Dieťatko." *Najprv teliatko, potom dieťatko*, Konzervatívny denník. Accessed April 20, 2023. <https://www.postoj.sk/30892/najprv-teliatko-potom-dietatko>.

²⁷ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 46.

²⁸ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 46.

²⁹ Zápisnice z 12.10.1924, Zápisnice obecného zastupiteľstva v Hornom Tisovníku 1902 - 1933, pracovisko Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej Bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

³⁰ Rudolf Bednárík, *Slovenská vlastiveda II* (Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied, 1943) p. 10.

³¹ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočívá kvet, čo zanechal svet*. (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 23.

³² Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský*. (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 127.

Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession itself can be traced back to Martin Luther. From the 16th century onwards, the faith was propagated by the local nobility³³, and its spread and maintenance was paradoxically aided by the then 17th century Turkish occupation, whose lack of interest in the faith of its citizens encouraged isolation from the Roman Catholic Church.

At the same time, however, it was confessionalism that brought multiple violent events to Novohrad over the centuries. The repressions that accompanied Novohrad were the result of the unequal status of the churches and the Counter-Reformation in the 17th century, the consequences of which persisted practically until the equalisation in 1848³⁴. After the expulsion of the Turks in the 17th century, there was a harsh process of recatholization - it was the first wave when the higher nobility returned to the Roman Catholic Church; however, the lower nobility, and especially the serfs, failed to change their beliefs³⁵ - as evidenced by the records of church visitations³⁶. The most difficult period of religious oppression for Novohrad came at the end of the century, when several churches were forcibly taken away and the evangelical priests in particular faced very violent persecution. Similar processes followed in the 18th century, when a certain part of the population converted. It was not until the Toleration Patent of Joseph II in 1781 that brought an end to this violence³⁷. Despite these events, the vast majority of the population never renounced their faith. It was the religious question that had a very significant influence on the development of the cemeteries under study - rituals are a prominent site for the manifestation of differences in confessionalism.

³³ Pavol Martuliak, *Cez Tisovník vybijaný chodník* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2006) p. 69.

³⁴ "História." *Evanjelická cirkev a.v. na Slovensku*. Accessed April 20, 2023. <https://www.ecav.sk/ecav/historia>.

³⁵ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 18.

³⁶ K. Tóth, *Zápisnice z vizitácií katolíckych cirkví v 17. storočí vo Veľkonovohradskom hlavnom senioráte* (Szécsény, 2004) p. 121.

³⁷ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 20.

socio-economic context of the Novohrad region:

Even at the beginning of the 20th century, the north-west of Novohrad was still characterised by the preservation of folk customs and the people's still strong belief in superstitions, to which they generally attached immense importance, even outside of funeral rituals. The reasons for this phenomenon, even in such an advanced period, can be found in the economic and socio-cultural development of the area under study; as Ján Botík writes, it is economic activity that is the major factor influencing the development of society³⁸.

Although Novohrad as such was not a completely undeveloped region, differences between the eastern and western parts can be recognised. In the eastern part, there were several industries, mostly related to the natural timber wealth, such as glassworks (which disappeared in the 19th century), sawmills linked to them, or a sheep cheese factory which was in operation in the 19th century³⁹. The associated infrastructure, especially road and rail links, was a significant part of this. However, the north-western part of the Novohrad region, informally known as the 'Highlands', remained without these advances⁴⁰. As late as 1927, the communication infrastructure of the region was very uneven; the worst position was occupied by the west of Novohrad and its Modrý Kameň district, which had no railway at all⁴¹. For its villages this meant 50 kilometres to the nearest connection⁴², for the village of Horný Tisovník even 94 kilometres⁴³. One of the reasons for the systematic neglect was the fact that the local population stuck very strongly to their Slovak nation, despite the strong pressure of Hungarianization, which certainly did not make the area a government priority⁴⁴. In general, and even in the village of Horný Tisovník, there were no roads, no railways, and no properly functioning school⁴⁵. The existing roads were waterlogged in inclement weather, and the totality of these conditions made contact with the outside world virtually impossible⁴⁶.

³⁸ Ján Botík, *Ludová architektúra a urbanizmus vidieckych sídiel na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 1998) p.68.

³⁹ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 22.

⁴⁰ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočívá kvet, čo zanechal svet*. (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 18.

⁴¹ Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský*. (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 132.

⁴² Karel Plicka, "Primitivizmus novohradských vrchu," *Výtvarné snahy* 9 no. 4 (1927) p. 66 - 69.

⁴³ Zápisnice z 12.10.1924. p.5. , Zápisnice obecného zastupiteľstva v Hornom Tisovníku 1902 - 1933, pracovisko Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

⁴⁴ Zápisnice z 12.10.1924. p.5. , Zápisnice obecného zastupiteľstva v Hornom Tisovníku 1902 - 1933, pracovisko Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

⁴⁵ Zápisnice z 12.10.1924. p.5. , Zápisnice obecného zastupiteľstva v Hornom Tisovníku 1902 - 1933, pracovisko Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

⁴⁶ Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský*. (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 132.



fig. 06 - map showing part of Novohrad, Horný Tisovník and its distance from the railway in the XIX. century (with the Third Military Survey)

This contributed greatly to the multiply lower frequency of modernization impacts and also to the considerably greater homogeneity in the context of its population, creating an ideal environment for maintaining the enclosure of the area⁴⁷.

The image of the society of the then north-western Novohrad can be traced, for example, in Timrava's novel *Ľapákovci*. This very critical form of his has been etched in the memory of many generations, as the work became compulsory schoolboy literature for many years. In it, Timrava, a native of Polichno near Horní Tisovník, described a family from the Novohrad region in a realistic yet highly critical manner, inspired by real observations of her immediate surroundings. It is above all a critique of the way of life, the inability, but also the unwillingness, to change its beaten path⁴⁸. This is illustrated quite vividly in the passage where the Ľapák family does not understand why they should add a new part of the house when their ancestors also managed to live in the existing house, even though there are fourteen of them in the room; why they should change their ancestors' habits and customs⁴⁹. It is true of the folk environment that what has been tried and tested from one generation to the next is passed on⁵⁰, and this was also true of the way of life in many respects⁵¹.

Although Timrava's work is a work of fiction, it presents a realistic picture of the environment of Novohrad, although its criticality can be slightly relativized with the hindsight of time, looking at the living conditions of the local population. In his 1927 monograph of Lučenec, the educator and publicist Vladimír Polívka describes these stagnant and unfavourable living conditions and attributes them to the considerable strength of conservatism, which the local population found it difficult to give up⁵². Its source can be defined as the struggle to survive in the difficult conditions, which they tried to resist, above all through hard work, but also through their belief in various supernatural things. With a very critical eye, he attributed the ever-persistent surrender to a fate that could not be changed, but also to superstition, above all to the lack of education, in which he saw both the spiritual and material liberation of the people⁵³.

⁴⁷ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet*. (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 18.

⁴⁸ Božena Slančíková-Timrava, *Novohradská dedina - Ľapákovci* (Turčiansky Svätý Martin: Živena vydavateľské družstvo, 1937) p. 48.

⁴⁹ Božena Slančíková-Timrava, *Novohradská dedina - Ľapákovci* (Turčiansky Svätý Martin: Živena vydavateľské družstvo, 1937) p. 48.

⁵⁰ Jozef Vydra, *Ludová architektúra na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1958) p.12.

⁵¹ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 62

⁵² Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský* (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 214.

⁵³ Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský* (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 214.

This is also supported in the theory dealing with superstition. In general, superstition is based largely on intuitive thinking, the latter outweighing analytical thinking⁵⁴, and it can be confirmed that education has an impact on its degree, as well as the individual's life circumstances. For people with higher levels of educational attainment, belief in superstition decreases significantly; according to empirical data, it can be argued that difficult life circumstances also contribute to an increase in the degree of belief in superstition, as people find in it a kind of "higher help"⁵⁵.

The development of education was generally quite problematic for Novohrad, often encountering a lack of space and teachers, and a significant complication was also the issue of denominational fragmentation of church schools, as schools were attended according to religion. Moreover, education for the peasant society, which generally prevailed in Slovakia at that time⁵⁶, was not very virtuous⁵⁷. As Aláč mentions, people here lacked a vision for the future, as their daily reality consisted only of physically demanding work in the fields, where space for intellectual upliftment was virtually completely absent⁵⁸. However, the aversion to education was also, in places, artificially fostered by the spread of various rumours about its harmfulness, for example, because of the alleged increase in taxes and so on⁵⁹.

There was a school in Horní Tisovník already in the 18th century, but it was not suitable for its function and was in a desolate condition⁶⁰. Due to the lack of funds⁶¹, a new evangelical school was built in 1907⁶²; a municipal school was also built⁶³, as the evangelical school continued to teach in very desperate conditions⁶⁴.

⁵⁴ Lindeman, Marjaana, and Kia Aarnio. "Superstitious, Magical, and Paranormal Beliefs: An Integrative Model." *Journal of Research in Personality* 41, no. 4 (August 1, 2007): 731–44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrjp.2006.06.009>.

⁵⁵ Torgler, Benno, "Determinants of superstition," *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 36, no. 5 (2007): 141, accessed March 4, 2023, DOI: 10.1016/j.jsocec.2007.01.007, p. 728.

⁵⁶ Ján Michálek, *Tradícia a inovácia* (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 2001) p. 8.

⁵⁷ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočívá kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 62.

⁵⁸ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočívá kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 62.

⁵⁹ Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský* (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 231.

⁶⁰ *Pamätná kniha Horný Tisovník*, 1936, p. 16. Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

⁶¹ *Pamätná kniha Horný Tisovník*, 1936, p. 16. Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

⁶² *Pamätná kniha Horný Tisovník*, 1936, p. 17. Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

⁶³ *Pamätná kniha Horný Tisovník*, 1936, p. 18. Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

⁶⁴ *Školská kronika, 1920, pracovisko* Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

However, the low level of education persisted, as it was almost impossible for the children from the Lazi to commute every day⁶⁵ and the overall situation was made more difficult by the Hungarianisation of 1860-1918⁶⁶, when Hungarian was introduced as an official language and was enforced in education, but the Slovak population did not understand it.

As defined by Sharra and Nissens, social progress can be prompted by a variety of causes, but in defining its initiation, two stimuli in particular can be named: namely, necessity or aspiration⁶⁷. It cannot be said that for the north-western part of Novohrad for a long period of time practically neither of these states occurred, as Aláč writes, the people here lived in the way their ancestors had lived⁶⁸; cultivating their land as their ancestors had done; they had no vision of a different future, since they practically did not know it at all⁶⁹ and the work of the peasant was so difficult that there was no room left to know it.

All these factors, together with historical events and the natural features of the north-west of the region, the isolation of the Novohradské Hills from cultural and social centres⁷⁰, had a significant impact on the nature of the way of life and the overall slowdown of its development, which was also very strongly reflected in the form of the Novohradské cemeteries. This began to disappear only with the gradual detachment from the natural environment and the inevitable dependence on it, as well as with the gradual increase in education and mobility⁷¹; however, this did not occur in the study area until after 1910. It was, after all, the economic and social boom that marked the end of the era of the production of these folk tombstones⁷².

⁶⁵ Zázpisnice z 21.05.1926. p.4. , Zázpisnice obecného zastupitelstva v Hornom Tisovníku 1902 - 1933, pracovisko Archív Veľký Krtíš, Archívny fond obvodný notársky úrad v Hornom Tisovníku, Štátny archív v Banskej bystrici, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky.

⁶⁶ Torgler, Benno, "Determinants of superstition," *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 36, no. 5 (2007): 141, accessed March 4, 2023, DOI: 10.1016/j.socec.2007.01.007, p. 728.

⁶⁷ Sharra, Rómeo, Nyssens, Marthe, *Social Innovation: An Interdisciplinary and Critical Review of the Concept* (Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium, 2010) p. 10

⁶⁸ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 32.

⁶⁹ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 41.

⁷⁰ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 30.

⁷¹ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 59.

⁷² Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 37.

religion, customs, superstitions:

The cemeteries of Novohrad, and thus also the cemetery in Horní Tisovník, are very characteristic for their unusual expression, characterised by ornamentation, formerly colourful, the use of archaic symbols and also folk poetics carved directly on the tombstones. At first sight, some of the signs used are already reminiscent of archaisms, which, taking into account the time of their creation, i.e. the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, invites at least a reflection on their use. The cause of this phenomenon, even on a more general and broader scale outside the cemeteries, can most likely be attributed to the degree of development within the society of Novohrad and Horný Tisovník.⁷³

The customs and the belief in them were based on magical thinking, which is the belief that thoughts, actions or symbolism can influence how the world around us works⁷⁴. A constant and persistent trust in established traditions that provide protection from adverse circumstances was generally an essential part of the life of a person dependent on the natural environment, since his or her survival depended on the hard work necessary for survival⁷⁵. This stemmed from a constant fear potentially giving way to a threat to existence, as the soil in the study area was infertile and any fluctuation in the weather could have devastating consequences⁷⁶. This was also the basis of the people's faith, to which many of them resorted for help⁷⁷. In this belief, specific acts and customs were intended to ensure protection, survival and material prosperity⁷⁸; in the context of funerary ritual, it was primarily the escorting of the soul of the dead from the world of the living and honouring it, which was carried out for identical purposes⁷⁹. Their exact observance was essential⁸⁰ and the inhabitants of the 'hill' area practically did not go out of the cycle of mutually interdependent customs at all during the course of the year⁸¹. Their importance can be traced in the importance they attached to them - when examined, they could only be observed, and the inhabitants responded to direct questions with great distrust, as they regarded them as highly confidential information⁸². Some people also saw the superstitions and customs as a reflection of

⁷³ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 35.

⁷⁴ "Magical Thinking." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. Accessed April 20, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/science/magical-thinking>.

⁷⁵ Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský* (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 126.

⁷⁶ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 62

⁷⁷ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 61.

⁷⁸ Rudolf Bednárík, *Slovenská vlastiveda II* (Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied, 1943) p. 12.

⁷⁹ Lubica Chorváthová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku ed. Ján Botík* (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 34.

⁸⁰ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 56.

⁸¹ Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský* (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 126.

⁸² Vladimír Polívka, *Lučenec a kraj novohradský* (Bratislava: Sokol, 1928) p. 214.

their religious beliefs, which was also evident in the cemeteries of Novohrad. The origin of the form of cemeteries and tombstones is a manifestation of these ideas, the way of thinking and the beliefs of the population. Thus, they can be primarily linked to this lineage, since, as Lubica Chorváth mentions, the area around burials is characterised by a strong manifestation of folk psychology, mentality, beliefs and also magical thinking⁸³.

As already mentioned, the north-western part of Novohrad belonged to the Evangelical Church of Augsburg, which is a Christian Protestant church, the origin of which is related to the Reformation of Martin Luther⁸⁴. In addition, there was also a small proportion of Catholic Christians in the area (whose arrival was mainly related to the migration of the population⁸⁵), which can be seen, for example, in the division of the cemeteries into Protestant and Catholic. But also from the differences in their form, as discussed in the next chapter. Although this evangelical religion was the official trend in the area (this is also true for the rest of Slovakia, where Catholicism prevailed), it was interfered with by the aforementioned folk customs, which often did not derive from this belief, and quite often it is possible to trace in them a source from the pre-Christian period⁸⁶ (which must not be overestimated, however⁸⁷), in spite of the ecclesiastical prohibitions that sought to restrict these customs⁸⁸. This spill-over has its origins in the introduction of Christianity itself, which failed to completely eradicate the original faith, and throughout Slovakia it was transformed from a religion into customs that people retained, primarily for the material reason of securing their prosperity⁸⁹.

After the introduction of Christianity, it was natural that the transition to the new religion was very slow; but even later, in spite of the strong efforts of the Church, several phenomena and customs derived from paganism persisted⁹⁰. Rather than their complete elimination, even if they were sometimes mutually exclusive, there was a "fusion" of them, a so-called pagan-Christian syncretism⁹¹. Such a fusion can

⁸³ Lubica Chorváthová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku* ed. Ján Botík (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 33.

⁸⁴ "História." Evanjelická cirkev a.v. na Slovensku. Accessed April 20, 2023. <https://www.ecav.sk/ecav/historia>.

⁸⁵ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 55.

⁸⁶ Rudolf Bednárík, *Slovenská vlastiveda II.* (Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied, 1943) p. 11.

⁸⁷ Rudolf Bednárík, *Slovenská vlastiveda II.* (Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied, 1943) p. 11.

⁸⁸ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoriny na Slovensku.* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 8.

⁸⁹ Rudolf Bednárík, *Slovenská vlastiveda II.* (Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied, 1943) p. 12.

⁹⁰ Margita Jágerová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku* ed. Ján Botík (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 13.

⁹¹ Margita Jágerová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku* ed. Ján Botík (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 13.

be seen especially in the context of funerary rituals, which are among the areas accumulating the most archaisms, since they are almost invariable due to their taboo nature⁹², and at the same time can be traced in the very form of tombstones and cemeteries, where they were materialised in expressive and spatial elements. A significant point of overlap was the persistence of the manifestations of Manichaeism, a cult based on the veneration of the souls of ancestors and the belief in their supernatural abilities⁹³, inherent in the pagan era, which is at the same time linked to the performance of rituals for the reconciliation of the dead⁹⁴, but which completely contradicts the official evangelical faith, to which the population of Novohrad simultaneously subscribed - but at the same time they believed in phenomena such as the apparition of the dead in the world of the living⁹⁵ and it can be stated that the survivals of Manism, even though they contradicted the official religion, were not eliminated by the church in Novohrad until the beginning of the 20th century.⁹⁶

There were many customs associated with death and coping with the death of a person, such as placing the dying person on the ground to facilitate his or her departure, stopping the clock at the time of death as a symbol of the soul's departure, covering mirrors (something with the soul), or carrying the dead person out of the house feet first so that he or she would not return to the homestead⁹⁷. In fact, funerary rituals immediately after a person's death were performed for the purpose of both honouring the dead and definitively severing ties with the world of the living, to prevent his return and to prevent him from harming the living⁹⁸. For humans, as mentioned above, it had a primary connection to their material world and to their own well-being; the erection of a tombstone was, on a symbolic level, the creation of a permanent seat for the soul and the permanent termination of this process of separation⁹⁹.

These ideas and beliefs were also translated into tombstone symbolism or spatial elements of cemeteries. The symbolism itself often materialised ideas about the

⁹² Lubica Chorváthová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku* ed. Ján Botík (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 34.

⁹³ "Kult Predkov." Centrum pre tradičnú ľudovú kultúru, Slovenský ľudový umelecký kolektív, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.ludovakultura.sk/polozka-encyklopedie/kult-predkov/>.

⁹⁴ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 26.

⁹⁵ Krištof Chorváth, "*Smrť, pohrab a mrtví v tradícii a zvykoch ľudových*" Slovenské pohľady ed. Jozef Škultéty no 15 (1895) p. 27.

⁹⁶ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 116.

⁹⁷ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 92.

⁹⁸ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 46.

⁹⁹ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 46.

departure of the soul from the body¹⁰⁰, reflected, for example, in the reverberating animistic ideas, to which the creators gave zoological forms, such as the form of a bird¹⁰¹. The precursor of this symbol can be traced in the pagan idea of the soul resting in the form of a bird in the trees. The solar and star symbols were also frequent, and in the past they most probably represented the materialisation of cosmological ideas related to the belief that everyone has a star at birth, but in the period 1870-1910 they were most probably a purely artistic manifestation¹⁰², which found its way onto tombstones through observation and incorporation, which is very much inherent in the nature of folk art.

To the spatial, but also to the signs within the symbolism, it is possible to assign, for example, a tree. The tree had a significant position outside the context of the Slavic population, which was true for the Slavs multifold, being one of the first forms of "tombstone" and at the same time it was believed that the souls of the ancestors rested on trees¹⁰³. Later, its meaning was transformed into a symbol, where it represented both a symbol of mourning - rewritten into the symbolism of tombstones in a more general context (willow, etc.); as well as, for example, as a symbol of eternal life, where the flora of cemeteries symbolises the connection between the world of the living and the dead¹⁰⁴. This was preserved in certain forms until the 20th century¹⁰⁵ - for Novohrad, the planting of trees on graves was frequent, even in Horní Tisovník - as Kalmán Mikszáth wrote in one of his texts, what was harvested on the grave was sent by the deceased to the family and the family divided the harvest¹⁰⁶, there are also testimonies of the importance of trees in folk folklore.

As Lubica Charváthová writes, the origin of the persistent syncretism, which is strongly manifested in the forms of folk traditions, although the meaning of individual elements has changed over time, may be precisely economic underdevelopment, low level of education, but also the distance from the centres of action¹⁰⁷. Consequently, what was once a religion gradually turned into a superstition, and this principle was translated into folk customs that were

¹⁰⁰ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 96.

¹⁰¹ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 96.

¹⁰² Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 96.

¹⁰³ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 27.

¹⁰⁴ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 23.

¹⁰⁶ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 208.

¹⁰⁷ Lubica Chorváthová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku ed. Ján Botík* (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 34.



fig. 07 - tree marking a grave in Lešt



fig. 8 - rosette symbolism

simultaneously seen as both a consequence and a cause of underdevelopment¹⁰⁸. It should be noted that the development in the field of burials was influenced by a very large number of factors besides those mentioned above, clashes with other ethnic groups, regulations of the church and the ruling class, and of course confessional affiliation¹⁰⁹. Ultimately, it is the faith and religious beliefs of the population that have had the greatest influence on the shape of the tombstones and from which the rituals that had to be performed to ensure the death of a relative were derived. This was the place where the old customs were collected and strictly observed, and this was very much the case with the use and decoration of tombstones¹¹⁰. It is the folk art, in this case the gravestones themselves, where the community's understanding of the world is manifested, as this manifestation is itself based on a collective acceptance and reflection of its perceptions and thinking¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁸ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočívá kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 85.

¹⁰⁹ Margita Jágerová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku* ed. Ján Botík (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 13.

¹¹⁰ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 116.

¹¹¹ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 116.

the form of the cemeteries and the gravestones:

The development of folk production in this region was related both to the natural character of the area, where a large part of it consisted of forests, but also to the cycle of economic activities¹¹² when work ceased during the winter and it was possible to devote oneself to crafts. Although there was an official ban on the sale of products in markets outside the guilds until the mid-19th century, folk production flourished within the villages, and practically every village had very skilled craftsmen whose work was much sought after in the area¹¹³. Such skill was inherent in the population at large. The development of stonemasonry in the Novohrad region was linked both to the geological conditions (the presence of tufo-andesite) and to economic and social developments, in particular glass production, which was directly dependent on the extraction of timber. Because of this, a ban on the use of timber for construction was introduced, and the use of stone increased from the 19th century onwards, although timber did not cease to be used despite the bans¹¹⁴. This increased the need for stonemasons¹¹⁵, after the construction of the tunnels in central Slovakia, experienced Italian stonemasons moved in, who later greatly influenced the appearance of the Novohrad region and the skills of the local population. This can be very clearly observed in the Novohrad cemeteries, as the decoration of tombstones probably began with the improvement of stone working techniques, the initial motivation being to create a tombstone form that would more closely match the shape and symbolism of the people's beliefs and religious convictions¹¹⁶.

A very complex religious development and also the richness of religion in Novohrad had a significant influence on the appearance of symbolism¹¹⁷. At the same time, its widespread use within the study area and also in the Horní Tisovník region itself suggests that it was a collectively accepted expression, in accordance with its values and culture, which is an extremely important factor for folk art¹¹⁸.

The form and decoration of the tombstones of Novohrad and Horní Tisovník belonged to archaisms already at the time of their creation, i.e. in the period from 1870 to 1910. Much can be traced back to pre-Christian times, and the partial belief in magical-cult symbolism and associated ideas in this period can be assumed,

¹¹² Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 83.

¹¹³ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 83.

¹¹⁴ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 104.

¹¹⁵ Pavol Martuliak, *Vrchársky kraj Novohradu* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2023) p. 84.

¹¹⁶ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 68.

¹¹⁷ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 93.

¹¹⁸ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 35.

as its meaning was reduced by constant repetition¹¹⁹. An example of where the belief persisted may be the use of the bird symbol, the meaning of which is linked to ideas about the human soul, as mentioned in the previous chapter. For certain symbols, however, the aforementioned reduction of meaning applies, especially in the case of the rosette and star symbols. The adoption of seen signs or elements, adapted by the folk-maker to his taste, ability and, above all, to his degree of culture, has been a fairly common phenomenon¹²⁰, a large part of folk culture being both the giving and the taking over of cultural elements that are adapted to the people of a given community and its traditions and beliefs¹²¹. Nevertheless, this accumulation has a significant testimonial value about both the previous development and the then state of mind of the people of the north-western part of the Novohrad region, and they are also a manifestation of the people's ability to collect and use elements from their immediate surroundings and to apply them in new contexts¹²² thus creating new value through them.

The character of the Novohrad cemeteries and the appearance of the tombstones are very similar to each other, with small local differences (location within the village or decoration). This is also true for the one in Hornotisov. As in the others, there were both stone and wooden monuments, which are now replicas within the Horný Tisovník cemetery, as the cemetery has undergone a partial restoration¹²³. The uniformity of the gravestones in the older cemeteries stems from the nature of humanity, namely that only what is accepted by the collective living in the same conditions survives¹²⁴. This can be applied to both the ornamentation and the shapes of the gravestones. A distinctly connecting element of these cemeteries is also the content of the rather extensive inscriptions on tombstones in Novohrad, which can be classified as folk poetry. In most cases they express grief at the loss of the deceased¹²⁵, while, although in the base it is made up of more traditional sentences giving basic information, it gradually began to change into a longer, rather emotive and poetic text of sometimes considerable length; an atypical phenomenon for the context of Slovakia on such a scale. It represents a materialisation of emotionality, which in the end is inherent in the whole process of tombstone creation¹²⁶.

¹¹⁹ Ján Aláč, *“Kamenná databáza znakov a symbolov Novobrađu”* Zborník zo Stretnutia priateľov regionálnej histórie ed. Mišo Šesták (Hradište: Občianske združenie PreHradište, 2016) p. 98.

¹²⁰ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku*. (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 92.

¹²¹ Rudolf Bednárík, *Duchovná kultúra slovenského ľudu* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1943) p.9.

¹²² Ján Aláč, *Tu spočívá kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 106..

¹²³ Ján Aláč, *“Horný a Dolný Tisovník - 15 rokov záchrany a prezentácie kultúrneho dedičstva Novobrađu”* Zborník zo Stretnutia priateľov regionálnej histórie ed. Mišo Šesták (Hradište: Občianske združenie PreHradište, 2022) p. 461.

¹²⁴ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 35.

¹²⁵ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 105.

¹²⁶ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočívá kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 106..

the form of the cemeteries and the gravestones: horný tisovník

The cemetery in Horný Tisovník lies on the eastern slope of the Tisovník valley and currently consists of three parts - the oldest, already overgrown with trees, in the past also called the "cholera cemetery"¹²⁷ and with the earliest dating of a grave to the 1870s; the middle one, where the largest number of graves from the period under study is preserved; and the newest one, which forms a cemetery that is still in use. The cemetery is also one of those with the largest number of surviving gravestones today. Horný Tisovník used to be one of the largest villages in the north-western part of the Novohrad region, with a population of 1464 in 1910¹²⁸, by comparison, it had only 170 inhabitants according to the 2021 census¹²⁹.

Most of the preserved tombstones belong to the so-called altar shape, or a shape based on a human figure, which is the most common type for the evangelical cemeteries of the Novohrad region. These differ in the local Protestant cemeteries from the shapes of the tombstones of the Catholics, who mostly used a cross. There are two theories to explain its origin - according to Aláč, it is a type called altar type, based on a prefiguration of the altars of the evangelical churches of Novohrad from the times of the Renaissance or Neo-Renaissance¹³⁰, According to Bednárík's older texts, it is defined as based on the human form, whose origin can be sought in the sources of pre-Christianity and in the historical development of the villages of Novohrad - when the lack of interest in the faith until the Reformation created good conditions for the preservation of traditions, as exemplified by this tombstone shape¹³¹, which can also be found in archival documents¹³². Outside this type there are still obelisk-plate and slab tombstones¹³³, but to a much lesser extent.

There are several symbols in this cemetery, such as the symbol of the clock, trees, plant motifs, the not very usual figural representation, birds, but also the symbol of the beetle, whose meaning can again be linked to the idea of the soul leaving the body¹³⁴. Also very frequent are the aforementioned rosette and star motifs. According to Aláč, the individual layout of the decoration was based precisely on

¹²⁷ Ján Aláč, *"Horný a Dolný Tisovník - 15 rokov záchrany a prezentácie kultúrneho dedičstva Novobradu"* Zborník zo Stretnutia priateľov regionálnej histórie ed. Mišo Šesták (Hradišče: Občianske združenie PreHradišče, 2022) p. 460.

¹²⁸ Pavol Martuliak, *Cez Tisovník vybijaný chodník* (Banská Bystrica: Stredoslovenské múzeum, 2006) p. 59.

¹²⁹ "Horný Tisovník," Sčítanie, Štatistický úrad Slovenskej Republiky, accessed on April 10th 2023, <https://www.scitanie.sk/moja-obec/SK0324518450>.

¹³⁰ Ján Aláč, *"Kamenná databáza znakov a symbolov Novobradu"* Zborník zo Stretnutia priateľov regionálnej histórie ed. Mišo Šesták (Hradišče: Občianske združenie PreHradišče, 2016) p. 98.

¹³¹ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 48.

¹³² Ján Aláč, *"Kamenná databáza znakov a symbolov Novobradu"* Zborník zo Stretnutia priateľov regionálnej histórie ed. Mišo Šesták (Hradišče: Občianske združenie PreHradišče, 2016) p. 98.

¹³³ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočívá kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 217.

¹³⁴ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočívá kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 96.

the inspiration of the altars, and thus also on the layout of their decoration. At the same time, however, the fact of the simple need to fill space was also an influence, both in terms of decoration and text¹³⁵. The motifs were concentrated in symmetrical, harmonious combinations, with elements being combined in various ways.

¹³⁵ Ján Aláč, “*Kamenná databáza znakov a symbolov Novohradu*” Zborník zo Stretnutia priateľov regionálnej histórie ed. Mišo Šesták (Hradišče: Občianske združenie PreHradišče, 2016) p. 99.



fig. 09 - The symbol of the clock is typical of Novohrad and was very often found on tombstones, being associated with the moment of the last breath of the deceased, as it was believed that he and his soul would go with him, and this time was immortalised by the relatives stopping the running of the hands of the clock (Ján Aláč, Tu spočívaj, čo zanechal svet (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 92.)



fig. 10 - A relatively rare type of grave decoration with figural representation - an attempt to depict the deceased. Remnants of the original collation can still be seen in the picture. It is ingrained in the character of the folklore that the individual expressions are similar, there are occasional individual expressions that stand out, but the content is in line with the values and traditions of the community.

(Ján Aláč, “Kamenná databáza znakov a symbolov Novohradu” Zborník zo Stretnutia priateľov regionálnej histórie ed. Mišo Šesták (Hradišče: Občianske združenie PreHradišče, 2016) p. 99.; Rudolf Bednárík, Cintoríny na Slovensku (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 37.)



fig. 11 - The same monument as on above but photographed after the restoration of the cemetery, together with the restored coloration.



fig. 12 - In the past, Novohrad cemeteries were also part of tree cover, partly, as already mentioned, because of the belief in the connection between the tree and the resting place; but they also completed the uncomposed and very characteristic atmosphere of a “grove” combined with a meadow, which can be encountered several times in fiction or in the notes of authors, such as Karol Plicka.



fig. 13 - Altar type tombstone, with a depiction of a tree motif - willow.

conclusion - value:

The task of the preceding chapters was to show the complex development and subsequent influence of various factors that resulted in the final form that the New Towns, as well as the Upper Town, took during the years 1870-1910. As already mentioned, religion had a considerable influence on the appearance of symbolism, both of a surface and spatial nature¹³⁶, but the value of these cemeteries is not limited to this direction; on the contrary, it is considerably multifaceted, as are the causes of their creation.

The basic line of assessing their value was expressed by Jozef Vydra, who wrote about Slovak folk architecture and art that despite the fact that the inhabitants of the present-day territory of Slovakia were in the past considerably poor, often isolated due to non-existent infrastructure and with practically zero purchasing power for any products, they managed to create their own expressions of their artistic culture, later transformed into a collective and considerably harmonious tradition¹³⁷. even in such miserable conditions. Indeed, these very words can be applied to the cemeteries of Novohrad, including that of Horný Tisovec.

At the same time, it is possible to find connections between these cemeteries and the general character of Slovak folk art, even though they were created under even more difficult conditions, which can be applied to the field of this art in general - the people created out of that and what their natural conditions and stage of development gave and allowed them¹³⁸. Hand in hand with this definition is the value of craftsmanship, which is undoubtedly inherent in the stonework of the Novohrad cemeteries. It is also possible to use the characteristics of folk architecture and art to evaluate them, which include local tradition, collectivity and, above all, their ability to depict and materialise the life situation of the community¹³⁹.

The Slovak funeral ceremony is a very valuable source of what social and ethnic identification process that took place in Slovakia¹⁴⁰. However, the customs and traditions themselves, and by their subsequent transformation into the form of gravestones, are also a type of the wealth of a nation, they also tell about its past¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 93.

¹³⁷ Jozef Vydra, *Ludová architektúra na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1958) p.9.

¹³⁸ Jozef Vydra, *Ludová architektúra na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1958) p.12.

¹³⁹ Jozef Vydra, *Ludová architektúra na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1958) p.13.

¹⁴⁰ Lubica Chorváthová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku ed. Ján Botík* (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 40.

¹⁴¹ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 99.

and it can be argued that the funeral ceremony as such has a very strong identification function¹⁴².

Paradoxically, the preservation of symbolism was helped by both the very nature of funerary rituals, namely its resistance to change or rationalisation, and the slow socio-economic development of the area, which was perceived, especially by its contemporaries, in a very negative light, and this was a significant factor involved in the preservation of customs and traditions existing in superstition and outside the context of funerals and the cemetery. This represents another layer of accumulation with a very valuable testimonial value both about the previous development and the then state of mind of the people of the north-western part of Novohrad¹⁴³.

As ethnologist Rudolf Bednárík wrote, folk tombstones are not an isolated manifestation within the culture of a society; on the contrary, when studying them it is necessary to look at their wider context, i.e. to take into account the thinking of the people of a given community, their relationship to the dead, the degree of economic and social development, but also to take into account the geographical characteristics of the place¹⁴⁴. In fact, no folk expression was created without reason, on the contrary, it was based on a specific need at a given time¹⁴⁵ - and the symbolism of Novohrad is a projection of these.

¹⁴² Lubica Chorváthová, *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku* ed. Ján Botík (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2001) p. 38.

¹⁴³ Ján Aláč, *Tu spočíva kvet, čo zanechal svet* (Bratislava: Miloš Hric, 2021) p. 106.

¹⁴⁴ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 9.

¹⁴⁵ Rudolf Bednárík, *Cintoríny na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1972) p. 36.

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