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Abstract

The present article aims at a comparative analysis amongst four legends constructed around the same myth i.e. the myth of construction that requires a sacrifice: the Romanian ballad about the construction of the monastery in Argeș, Wallachia; the Hungarian ballad about the construction of the fortress of Deva in Transylvania, Romania; the Welsh legend of Dynas Emrys; and the Georgian legend about the construction of the Surami fortress. The legends represent the sacrifice in different ways. In the Romanian ballad, a woman and her child are walled in a church; in the Hungarian version, a woman is burnt, and her ashes are walled in; in the Welsh legend, the sacrifice is avoided, and in the Georgian one, it is transformed into self-sacrifice. Moreover, through a comparative analysis of different versions of the Bible, we shall emphasise the importance of the building of the city of Jericho, the significance of curse and sacrifice in both the beginning and the proliferation of the myth. For our research, we shall use the methodology devised by Mircea Eliade in his book about the myth of sacrifice (*Meșterul Manole. Studii de Etnologie și Mitologie*), as well as the works of Professor Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant* and *The Blood Covenant*. One of the main conclusions of our article is that nothing that is human-made has a soul, and it can only last if it only acquires a soul. Hence the need for sacrifice that has been part of human history since times immemorial. Any revisitation of this myth can only bring people together and thus emphasise the things people and peoples have in common, and that can only lead to a better understanding of the Other.

Key-words: myth of construction, sacrifice, ballads, Argeș, Deva, Dinas Emrys, Surami, Eliade, Trumbull, the blood covenant, the threshold covenant

Four Spaces, Four Stories, One Myth

In his book on the myth of construction, the historian of religions Mircea Eliade claims that each and every item of folklore – legend, spell narrative, proverb, etc. – carries in itself the mental universe which gave birth to it just in the same way a mirror shard preserves in itself the same world of the entire mirror it came off (145). We have thus chosen several legends and ballads from different cultural spaces, mainly Europe and Caucasia, with the purpose of comparative analysis, all having as core the myth of construction that depends on human sacrifice. Yet the purpose of our analysis will not be that of researching the history of these ballads or legends, their variants or trajectory,

but rather of researching the worlds each of them encompasses in itself, thus trying to understand the *actants* of these worlds better, and the mechanisms and meanings of both myth and sacrifice in each of the cultural spaces which produced them, and last but not least the many possible shapes that the myth of construction that requires a sacrifice can take. We shall analyse the following mythical legends and ballads: the Romanian legend of the monastery of Argeș in Romania; the Hungarian legend about the fortress Deva in Transylvania, Romania; the legend of the fortress Dinas Emrys in Wales; and last but not least the legend of Surami fortress in Georgia, Caucasia. We have chosen the Romanian ballad because of the unusual paradox held within: the sacrifice of the master builder's wife with child, both walled in the structure of a monastery; the Hungarian ballad which is very similar to the Romanian ballad, except for the way the master builder's wife is sacrificed, the Welsh ballad because it brings together two myths – that of the beasts lying under the foundation of a construction and that of sacrifice, which is, solely here, avoided in the end, and the Georgian ballad where the sacrifice required by the construction to stand turns into a self-sacrifice – another unusual situation. Consequently, when approaching these ballads, we shall treat them as if they were shards from a mirror, and thus we shall analyse the world each of them expresses. An extensive initial part of our research will be dedicated to the way the Biblical text (the Old Testament) reflects and preserves the human sacrifice at the same time through different forms of threshold and blood covenants, the most important of which being that of the city of Jericho, and, how these they have been modified through translation, and thus obliterated from the contemporary mind.

We shall start our analysis with the status and role of sacrifice in the world's cosmogonies, in human relation to divinity, in human perception of the world he inhabits, and the way the meaning and form of sacrifice have changed in time since ancient times to contemporaneity. Yet, in order to approach the topic of sacrifice, here are two elements that predefine it, analysed by the 19th century researcher H. Tray Trumbull in two of his books: firstly, the threshold which functioned as altar in primitive tents or caves, while later on its sacred functions were transferred to the hearth, and then also, in some cases, to the cornerstone of a construction (*The Threshold Covenant* 22–23), thus being even identified with the latter; secondly, the general conviction that:

> Blood is life, that the heart, as the blood-fountain, is the very soul of every personality; that blood-transfer is soul-transfer; that blood-sharing, human, or divine human, secures an inter-union of natures; and that a union of the human nature with the divine is the highest ultimate attainment reached out after by the most primitive, as well as by the most enlightened, mind of humanity. (*The Blood Covenant* v)

Consequently, the sacrifice in human history cannot be approached or finally understood without the help of these two elements, the blood covenant and the threshold covenant, either applied separately or together. They defined both man's relation to the Other and implicitly with God, and their reflection is visible even in today's religions, even in Christianity, where the symbolism remained the same, even though apparently in a world devoid of ancient myths, a world which has paradoxically preserved a myth-like mechanism of functionality, whose rituals remind us, in their essence, of ancient times.

Sacrifice

According to Mircea Eliade, the myth of construction which requires a human sacrifice belongs to the array of cosmogonic myths because the human sacrifice is an imitation of the primordial act of creating the world (169). The cosmogonic myths in themselves create order out of chaos and very many times this order is created though the (self-) sacrifice (i.e. a violent death) of a god or a saint or an animal, for example the sacrificing of Purusha, the one thousand hands and one thousand legs giant sacrificed by the gods in order to create the earth. In Northern mythology, the primordial giant, Ymir, was sacrificed by the three brothers Odhin, Vili and Ve, who created the earth out of his body, the sea out of his blood, the stones out of his bones, the woods out of his hair, the sky out of his skull, and out of his brain the clouds (Eliade 192).[1] Romanian folk legends about the creation of the world are very interesting in what regards the juxtaposition of pagan and Christian elements or, to put it differently, they preserve the pagan core and fold it in Christian elements. Some very relevant examples would be found in the creation of different healing plants, according to folk legends, either from the blood of Jesus Christ, which dropped while he was on the cross, as in the case of the vine being born out of Christ's blood (Eliade 328–29), or the way the guilder rose was born out of the blood of Noah who, while he was building his ark, cut his finger, and drops of blood fell on the ground and there rose the tree (Oisteanu 111). Both Mircea Eliade and Andrei Oisteanu give numerous examples of such legends all from many different spaces, not only European, of the plants or flowers which were born out of the blood of a god, saint or of a hero/heroine who found a tragic death (Eliade 323–48; Oisteanu 111–15). Probably the most recent example in the history of mankind is Jesus Christ's sacrifice for the renewal of the world and for the salvation of the people; Christianity is thus the new world born out of the sacrifice of God's son, the chaos pre-existing it being restored to order.

Curse and Sacrifice in the Old Testament

The Bible contains at least two motifs that recall the legend of blood covenant. Actually, these two motifs, put together, form the nucleus of the legend. Taken separately, as they appear in the Bible, they belong to different stories, which differ also in the form of narration.

The first motif is hardly sketched. In the original Hebrew text, the whole story was summarized in two passages, put in two different books of the Bible (Josh. 6.26; 1 Kings 16.34). The presentation of the story is not only brief, but also enigmatic, allowing several different interpretations. The most common and, apparently, the most natural one says that after conquering and destroying the city, Joshua (or Jahveh who speaks by him) curses him who will dare rebuild Jericho, so that he will lose his sons, at the beginning and at the end of the building process. After four centuries, during

1 For more examples, see the entire chapter in Eliade, "Mitul Cosmogonic, Model Archetipal."

the reign of Ahab, presented as a period of moral decay, Hiel the Bethelite accepts the challenge. He succeeds in rebuilding the city, but two of his sons die, and the new Jericho becomes their symbolic grave. This interpretation suits the general understanding of the biblical message imposed by Judaism and Christianity: he who does not obey God will be punished.

The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, presents a larger version of the passage from the Book of Joshua, containing the statement "So did Hozan (sic, instead of Hiel)" (Brenton), although we would expect a different wording, e.g. "That happened to Hozan" or "It was fulfilled when Hozan". The rebuilder of Jericho is not punished by the death of his sons; he seems to kill them himself when rebuilding the city. Aware of the curse, he sacrifices his sons instead of trying to rebuild the city without losing them. He lays the foundations on his firstborn son, and sets up the gates on the youngest one, according to Jahveh's words, uttered by Joshua. He seems to have outwitted Jahveh, making use of his commandment in a devious way, in order to make sure that the city will be rebuilt successfully. However, Hiel or Hozan having deceived Jahveh would still be acceptable for the traditional exegesis of the Bible. This interpretation even emphasizes the depravity of the people who lived in the time of Ahab, described as Jahveh's enemy (1 Kings 16.30, 33).

The form itself of the account, brief and enigmatic, shows an attempt of camouflage. Its author seems to feel obliged to relate the story, but he relates it in a cryptic way, especially when the role of divinity is concerned. This permits a third interpretation, a non-religious one, which takes into account the historical and social circumstances. Judaism has evolved from primitive beliefs similar to the other religious cults of that area, combatted later by Judaism itself and presented as barbaric. Further redactions of the Old Testament tried to hide these shameful similarities, but some traces of them are still to be found in the text. From this point of view, Joshua's statement can be understood not as a curse meant to discourage a potential daredevil from rebuilding the city, but an offer of blood covenant. Jahveh accepts a possible rebuilding of the city, but requires a sacrifice in return, according to an old custom. Hiel or Hozan accomplishes his will and sacrifices his sons, but he sacrifices himself as well, as he will be *'ārūr* – 'cursed' (Josh. 6.26, Westminster Leningrad Codex); the same term is used in the Book of Genesis for Cain (Gen. 4.11, Westminster Leningrad Codex). He reaches his goal, but he has to shoulder the blame. Of course, such interpretation is unacceptable for the traditional exegesis, because it makes Jahveh a cruel god of a primitive religion.

While the first story recalls the legend of blood covenant by the fact of building that involves a sacrifice, the second one resembles it in the way of choosing the victim. Compared to the first account, the second one, found in the Book of Judges (11.29–40), is fully dramatized, but even so it remains enigmatic as well. Before a battle with Ammonites, a Jewish chieftain, Jephthah, makes a vow: if he wins, he will sacrifice the first living thing from his house coming to meet him upon his return. It turns out to be his only child. Seeing her, Jephthah tears his clothes and begins to lament. Surprisingly, his daughter accepts that she will be sacrificed. She only asks him to let her go to the mountains for two months. When she came back, the father "did with her according to his vow" (Judg. 11.39, King James Bible). It is not clearly stated that he kills the girl.

However, the form of sacrifice is clearly defined in the vow: this living thing would be the Lord's and would be offered up for a burnt offering (Judg. 11.31). It is obvious that this had to be a blood sacrifice – a ritual slaughtering and burning. Some translators of the Bible modify this passage (Judg. 11.31) by changing the preposition "and" to "or" (even some literal translations):

> If Thou dost at all give the Bene-Ammon into my hand — then it hath been, that which at all cometh out from the doors of my house to meet me in my turning back in peace from the Bene-Ammon — it hath been to Jehovah, or I have offered up for it — a burnt-offering. (Young)

It permits an alternative to the blood covenant: either the first living thing would be sacrificed, or it would be replaced by a burnt offering (of an animal). In other words, according to the rabbis Kimhi and Gershom, Jephthah would have resorted to this solution, saving his daughter by keeping her in seclusion, and making a burnt offering instead (Hirsch et al.). However, the original text and also the Septuagint version use "and," not "or."

Besides, Jephthah's vow is usually considered as an abnormal, desperate move. The Bible does not contain any mention regarding the reason of rebuilding Jericho by Hiel-Hozan – whether it was the desire for fame or richness, his king's order or something else, but as far as Jephthah is concerned, he was determined to defeat the enemy, because his whole future depended on this. A victory over Ammonites represented for him, as an illegitimate son exiled by his half-brothers, the only chance to come back to his land and, moreover, to rule there, according to the promise made by the elders. Therefore he was ready to sacrifice whatever he had. But actually this vow was not anything unusual and could be inspired by Jahveh himself, whose spirit had come upon Jephthah (Judg. 11.29), as such sacrifices were foreseen by law (cf. Lev. 27).

Argeș – the Romanian Ballad

The creation of the world through sacrifice being a generally accepted archetype, folk legends and ballads in which man, through a mimetic act of creation, repeats the initial godly creation results as a consequence. Moreover, according to Eliade, the folk mentality retains the individual only to the extent to which this is integrated into an impersonal category, as long as it loses its authenticity, and reintegrates into the archetype form; moreover, an event can give birth to a certain folk creation, ballad or legend, only to the extent to which it integrates perfectly into an archetypal frame (Eliade 150–51), and thus satisfies the need for the absolute. Moreover, man cannot create anything fully accomplished but with his life. Unlike God, who is the only one who can create without diminishing his own being, according to Eliade, human beings have to give their creations a soul with their own hands, with the price of their own life, or of another's (163). That is why anything that is newly created is dangerous because it is dead, it does not have a life, and it hungers for one. It will become harmless only when

it has acquired a life and a soul. This explains the numerous sacrificial rites required for different constructions all over the world or for various creations, starting with the religious sacrifices, probably most large in number to the blood covenant that aims at establishing an indestructible relation between two people (either chieftains or two people about to get married) to various other forms of sacrifice – some more literal, some more metaphorical.[2] It is not surprising that the constructing ritual would have included a sacrificial rite almost everywhere, especially in the European space, whether it was about building bridges (the Balkan version of the myth, and probably the most productive) or castles in the German, Scandinavian and Welsh spaces or in Georgia, a town in Lithuania, a monastery/church in Southern Romania, the latter being singular in the paradoxical meeting between the idea of human sacrifice and a Christian building i.e. a church.

This paradoxical aspect might be explained through the juxtaposition between the idea of the temple and building and that between the threshold as archaic altar and temple/building. In short, the monastery in the Romanian ballad might be just a continuation of the old religious and Biblical temple, hence the contradiction might be eliminated in this way.

The Balkan narrative runs as follows: a group of masons decide to build either a bridge or a monastery, but whatever they build during the day crumbles, and is undone during the night. The only solution seems to be a human sacrifice, more specifically the walling in of one of the masons' wives or sisters in the stonework of the building. The woman whose sacrifice helps the construction of the bridge, or of the monastery of Argeș, Walachia in the Romanian version, is the wife of the master mason, who is also carrying his unborn baby:

> Up he raised the wall
> To gird her withal;
> Up the wall did rise
> To her ankles nice,
> To her bonny thighs.
> While she, wellaway,
> Creased her laugh so gay,
> And would pray and say,
> 'Manole, Manole,
> Good master Manole!
> Have done with your jest,
> 'Tis not for the best.
> Manole, Manole,
> Good Master Manole,
> The wall squeezes hard,
> My frail flesh is marred.'
> (Dumitrescu-Bușulenga)

2 Very numerous examples are given both by H. Tray Trumbull in his two extensive books *The Blood Covenant* and *The Threshold Covenant* and by Mircea Eliade in *Mesterul Manole*.

Thus, the ongoing built monastery, dead in its essence because it is the result of the work accomplished by the hands of man, could stand only through what Trumbull calls the "soul-transmigration" (*The Blood Covenant* 305). Thus the soul of the sacrificed woman and unborn child would be transferred into the body of the construction, the monastery, and it could live having now a life of its own. This can only happen as the death of the sacrificed person is a sudden one, which prevents life from being fulfilled at an earthly level, while it triggers off, through the force of its death, the force of creation, defined, above all, by meaning. Moreover, changing the perspective, we can also state that the sacrificed woman continues to live on a different level in perfect accord with what Mircea Eliade calls "the ethics of reintegration" (210), i.e. while she leaves behind the human body and receives an architectonic body, she stays in the same spiritual horizon of the cosmogonic myths and the metaphysics they imply:

> Manole, Manole,
> Good master Manole!
> The wall squeezes hard,
> Crushed is now my heart,
> With my life I part!
> (Dumitrescu-Buşulenga)

On the other hand, Master Mason Manole cannot integrate himself in the same cosmic order as his wife or child unless he himself dies violently. As it often happens in folkloric literature, myths as well as archetypes and symbols are syncretic. The Romanian ballad is relevant in this case. The myth of construction which requires a human sacrifice meets with the Icarian myth. The prince who orders the construction of the monastery asks the masons whether they could ever build another one just as beautiful. When he receives a positive answer from them, he decides to take away the scaffolding and leave them to rot under the sun on the roof of their own creation. They decide to make wooden wings and fly down from the top. Just when he is about to fly down, Manole hears his wife's voice crying from within the walls, and then jumps down and meets his death in a violent way as well. The violence of his death gives birth to a well – the sign that his life has also been made meaningful. As Mircea Eliade puts it, "each and every death represents a modality of reintegration" (194), moreover, each violent death represents a form of creation. Thus, only through a similar violent death could Manole be reintegrated into the anthropo-cosmos with his wife:

> 'Manole, Manole,
> Good master Manole,
> The wall weighs like lead,
> Tears my teats still shed,
> My babe is crushed dead,
> Away my life's fled!'
> As Manole heard
> His life-blood did curd,
> And his eyesight blurred,
> And the high clouds whirled,
> And the whole earth swirled;

And from near the sky,
From the roof on high,
Down he fell to die!
And, lo, where he fell
There sprang up a well,
A fountain so tiny
Of scant water, briny,
So gentle to hear,
Wet with many a tear!
(Dumitrescu-Buşulenga)

One important element of the myth is the curse which, as we have seen earlier, is present also in the foundation of the city of Jericho. In the case of the Romanian ballad, the curse is represented by the very place chosen by the prince to build up his monastery. What is peculiar is that the prince searches for a doomed and cursed location, as if to tame it. Here it is what the prince asks a young shepherd whom he meets:

Didst thou hap to see
Somewhere down the lea
An old wall all rotten,
Unfinished, forgotten,
On a green slope lush,
Near a hazel brush?
(Dumitrescu-Buşulenga)

Consequently, in such a situation we have an explanation for the crumbling of the walls every night and for the need of the construction for a human sacrifice. Interestingly, a similar motif of a cursed place is to be found in a romantic work by the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady*, translated into English as *Forefathers' Eve*. In this case, even if we no longer have an anonymous text, the influence of folk literature upon the Romantic writers, and implicitly on Mickiewicz is already well-known, so we can assume its folkloric source. The narrative in the Polish text (given here in our translation) refers to the construction of Saint Petersburg under Peter the Great:

The soil here does not produce fruit nor bread,
Winds bring only snow and rain;
The sky here is either too hot or too cold,
Harsh and changeable as the mood of a despot.
People did not want to live here, but the tsar
Liked this muddy place and ordered to build there,
Instead of a city for people, a capital for him,
Thus showing his omnipotence.

He ordered to throw one hundred thousand poles
And one hundred corpses of peasants
In shifting sands and marshes.
And after laying the foundation
On poles and bodies of Russians,
He yoked the others to wheelbarrows, carts and ships,

Making them to bring wood and stone
From distant lands and the depths of the sea.[3]

As the place chosen by the tsar for his future capital was very marshy and muddy, it had to be consolidated. During the building process tens of thousands of serfs died. Of course, they were not killed on purpose, but their corpses were left there serving as foundations. However, the literal reading of this passage still gives a shivering impression, and evokes the motif of life sacrifice securing the durability of the construction.

Deva – the Hungarian Ballad

The Hungarian ballad, on the other hand, very similar to the Romanian and Balkan ones, tells the foundation legend of the fortress in Deva, Transylvania, Romania. Circulated under one of the two titles *Mason Clement's Wife* or the *The Walled-In Wife*,[4] beyond specific small differences (there are 12 masons, not 10, the presence of the servant who is trying to prevent the wife from going to the building site as she can foretell an unfortunate event) registers a very specific peculiarity unknown in the other versions of the myth and deviating from the established pattern: the wife to be sacrificed will not be walled-in alive, but first burnt, while afterwards her ashes will be mixed with the mortar, and used for the sustainability and durability of the walls. The verses (in our translation) run as follows:

Because we made an oath, an oath that we'll build up
The first wife who will arrive
We shall catch her and we shall throw her into the fire

3 Tu grunt nie daje owoców ni chleba,
Wiatry przynoszą tylko śnieg i słoty;
Tu zbyt gorące lub zbyt zimne nieba,
Srogie i zmienne jak humor despoty.
Nie chcieli ludzie; — błotne okolice
Car upodobał, i stawić rozkazał,
Nie miasto ludziom, lecz sobie stolicę:
Car tu wszechmocność woli swej pokazał.
W głąb ciekłych piasków i błotnych zatopów
Rozkazał wpędzić sto tysięcy palów
I wdeptać ciała stu tysięcy chłopów.
Potem na palach i ciałach Moskalów
Grunt założywszy, inne pokolenia
Zaprzągł do taczek, do wozów, okrętów,
Sprowadzać drzewa i sztuki kamienia
Z dalekich lądów i z morskich odmętów. (246–47)

4 We have used the Romanian translation of the Hungarian ballad used in the article "Mitul Jertfei Zidirii" by Maria-Nicoleta Ciocian. This seems to be the only academic text approaching both the Romanian and Hungarian versions, but beyond a simple bringing together of the texts and their symbols and motifs, it does not offer any interpretation or integration of the two versions into a larger context.

And we shall mix her ashes into the mortar
And only this way will the walls stand
And we shall receive our reward of gold and silver.[5]

An English translation of the text is to be found in the book *Hungarian Classical Ballads and Their Folklore*, written by Ninon A.M. Leader. Yet it seems to be from a different version than the one used by Maria-Nicoleta Ciocian. The version in Leader's book brings together two contrasting elements: the burning of the body of Clement's wife, which is very archaic, and the presence of a coach pulled by horses, and a coachman, which is quite modern if we think in mythical terms:

My coachman, my coachman, my big coachman,
It would be a wish to go to my husband!
Place the horses between the shafts, let us take the road,
Let us take to the road, to the tall castle of Deva!
(Leader 20)

On the other hand, if the coach is an element belonging to aristocracy and modernity, the coachman is a correspondent of the Greek Charon, who transported the souls of the dead across the rivers Styx and Acheron.

Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that Leader analyses different versions of the Hungarian ballad, and tries to identify the source for the Hungarian and Balkan versions, unfortunately his perspective remains limited (he does not manage to place the Hungarian ballad and the myth of the sacrifice within a larger perspective), and sadly he even makes remarks that would seem unnecessary and improper for an academic, scientific perspective: "W. J. Entwistle considers the Romanian versions as the best of the international variants. The Hungarian versions, I believe, are as good as the Romanian ones" (42). Starting from comparing *the better aspect* (sic) of a ballad as compared to another one rather than focusing on the common elements and the universalisation of the human needs and practices does nothing but isolate the ballad itself, creating a prejudice against it, and against the critic himself.

Speaking of the particularity in the Hungarian version, the violence of the wife's death is obvious as well as the particularity of the sacrifice. Hence the question regarding its origins and meaning. According to Morris Jastrow et al., the burnt offering was the highest form of immolation because "the Deity, being invisible, would be most suitably entertained by a more ethereal form of nourishment than solid food" (Jastrow et al.). Consequently, the burning of the wife's body at the construction site emphasizes even more the identification of the cornerstone with the altar. This is thus only the

5 The Romanian text:
Că noi lege pus-am, lege c-om zidi
Prima soţioară care va veni.
Frumuşel om prinde-o-n foc o vom zvârli
Şi cu var cenuşa i-om învălui,
Numai astfel zidul nu s-a prăbuşi
Şi-n argint şi aur plata vom primi. (Ciocian 115)

first stage of the sacrifice process, the second being mixing her ashes with the mortar which would enable the soul transmigration from one material form to another, from the ashes to the building.

One common feature for all versions in the Balkans and in the Hungarian one is the person sacrificed i.e. the woman, in most of them the woman being with child. The presence of the child is more often met in the Balkan and Romanian versions, while in the Hungarian one the child is born and the mother, when being told her fate, pleads with the masons to let her see the child again, while the child himself, when the mother does not return home, asks the father rather suspiciously about what has happened to her. An interesting and relevant point regarding the sacrifice of a woman for the construction to sustain is made by Trumbull in *The Threshold Covenant*: "In different languages and among various peoples there is, as already suggested, an apparent connection between the terms, and the corresponding ideas, of 'woman' and 'door,' that would seem to be a confirmation of the fact that the earliest altar was at the threshold of the woman, and of the door." Apparently, the juxtaposition results from the semantic area in Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit, German or Chinese that connects the similarity between the womb of a woman and the door of a building (252–56). An interesting and relevant example, given by Trumbull, is a fragment from *Song of Songs*, where the reference is illuminating:

> We have a little sister,
> And she hath no breasts:
> What shall we do for our sister
> In the day when she shall be spoken for?
> If she be a wall,
> We will build upon her a turret of silver:
> And if she be a door
> We will enclose her with boards of cedar.
> (252)

The overlapping of symbolism between a woman and building seems to be relevant for the myth of construction as met in the Balkan and Hungarian versions, because it is the woman who ensures the creation and meaning to the building, and also gives it her soul. The woman identifies with the solidity, wonder, creation and purpose that a building can have so it is the woman who is needed for sacrifice. An important aspect is also that it cannot be any woman, but a related person to one of the masons, because the sacrifice is also a self-sacrifice. It is the creator who must give life to its creation, and if it cannot be his, it must be someone's related to him:

> In my sleep meseemed
> A whisper from high,
> A voice from the ski,
> Told me verily
> That whatever we
> In daytime have wrought
> Shall nights come to naught,
> Crumble down like rot;

Till we, one and all,
Make an oath to wall
Whose bonny wife erst,
Whose dear sister first,
Haps to come this way
At the break of day,
Bringing meat and drink
To husband or kin.
(Dumitrescu-Busulenga)

Dinas Emrys – the Welsh Legend

If the Balkan and Hungarian versions require a woman to be sacrificed, in the West European versions of the construction myth, it is normally a child, an orphan to be walled-in. According to Mircea Eliade, especially for the Germanic spaces, the sacrifice of a child on the foundation of a castle, tower or fortress might have been not only an abstract mythological notion but a reality as skeletons of children were often discovered inside these foundations (165).[6] One case where the child that is to be sacrificed in order for the walls of a fortress to remain standing is to be found in the legend of the fortress of Dinas Emrys in Northern Wales. The legend, as it often happens, is syncretic as it brings in its frame two ancient foundation myths: the sacrificial myth required by the crumbling walls, and the myth of the dragon (or great snake) moving under the foundation, and causing for the construction to fall during the night. Out of this syncretism the latter comes out as victorious. The legend is first mentioned in *Historia Brittonum,* as Vermaat illustrates it, and it tells how King Vortingen, who was on the run from his enemies, found a suitable place that would ensure him both visibility upon the surrounding areas and shelter somewhere in Guenet. So the building of a fortress began, but surprisingly, all that was built during one day simply disappeared during the night. This happening several times, Vortingen asked his wise men what to do, and here is what answer he received: "They replied, 'You must find a child born without a father, put him to death, and sprinkle with his blood the ground on which the citadel is to be built, or you will never accomplish your purpose'" (Vermaat).[7]

This being said, a child was found and brought to the site to be immolated. Yet, the child spoke to the king, and revealed that the cause for the crumbling of the construction were the two dragons fighting under it, in a pool, a white one, and a red one, the former representing the enemies Vortingen was running from, and the latter Vortingen's army and people. Mircea Eliade states that the snake or the dragon which shakes the world, and thus the building sites is actually one ancient myth common to

6 Due to its symbolism of youth and return to the beginning of time, rejuvenation and regeneration, children, according to Eliade were sacrificed in different situations either when a king was sick or at time of drought. For all relevant examples, see the whole subchapter "'Copilul' și 'Orfanul'" (165–171).

7 "At illi responderunt: nisi infantem sine patre invenies et occidetur ille et arx a sanguine suo aspergatur, numquam aedificabitur in aeternum" (Vermaat).

many spaces, from the European to the Asian ones. Moreover, the snake or dragon lies exactly at the centre of the world, and thus each and every construction should be laid exactly on the head of this snake in order to sustain (Eliade 182–83). The child in the Welsh legend says the following to the King, when referring to the pool where the two dragons fight: "The pool is the emblem of this world, and the tent that of your kingdom: the two serpents are two dragons; the red serpent is your dragon, but the white serpent is the dragon of the people who occupy several provinces and districts of Britain, even almost from sea to sea" (Vermaat).[8]

Consequently, this idea is confirmed by the text itself which acknowledges the centre of the world to be guarded by the dragon. Also, the shaking of the world by the dragon (in this case the two dragons) represents an attempt to bring the world to its initial stage, to renew it through a stage of chaos that requires and brings order afterwards. The boy's words are confirmed, and thus the sacrifice is avoided in the Welsh legend, and the dragon myth wins either because of its stronger character or/ and because of a possible Christian influence that obliterated the sacrificial aspect. The boy who survives in the Welsh legend turns out to be the future legendary Myrddin or Myrddyn Emrys or Myrddyn Ambrosius, while Dinas Emrys would have become his fort. Also the potential sacrificial element in the legend seems to be totally neglected when approached by scholars who favour the emphasis of the symbol of the red dragon because its national value; for example, Jan Morris, one of the most important authors in Welsh culture today, in her book *Wales. Epic Views of a Small Country*, only focuses upon the matter of the two dragons, the red one and the white one, without actually even mentioning the potential human sacrifice of the legend (33). We do not know, in the case of the Welsh legend, whether avoiding the matter is a Christian influence or just an emphasis of the national elements, the sacrifice elements not having any relevance in this sense.

Surami – the Georgian Legend

If in the Welsh legend the sacrifice is eliminated in favour of another myth, the Georgian legend about the Surami fortress causes another unusual change in the pattern, and that is the transformation of the sacrifice into a self-sacrifice. The Georgian legend, acknowledged to be very old, is mentioned only briefly by a German traveller in Georgia, Baron Haxthausen in his travelogue entitled: *Transcaucasia. Sketches of the Nations and Races between the Black Sea and the Caspian* (156). Here he mentions the fortress Suram (Surami), which, built by Pharnadjan two centuries before the birth of Christ, required a young man to be built in the walls of the construction as what had been built during the day kept on falling during the night. Baron Haxthausen mentions a Georgian folk song which he heard, and which recites the conversation between the

8 "regni tui figura tentorium est; duo uermes duo dracones sunt; uermis rufus draco tuus est et stagnum figura huius mundi est. at ille albus draco illius gentis, quae occupauit gentes et regiones plurimas in Brittannia, et paene a mari usque ad mare tenebunt" (Vermaat).

mother, who can still hear the cry of her son from within the walls, and other women from the village. There is no other recording of the legend except for the novel written by a Romantic writer in the 19th century Georgia, which recounts the legend of the Suram fortress because, unfortunately, in the case of a very rich pre-Christian Georgian literature, most of it "seems to have been destroyed as Georgia underwent major religious and cultural transformations following the spread of Christianity" (Mikaberidze). Daniel Chonkadze, in his novel *Suramis Tsikhe* ("The Surami Fortress") (1859–1860), tells the following story (taken from Kalandarishvili): Durmishkhan was a serf freed by his master. Then he had to buy the freedom of his lover Vardo to marry her. He leaves his land and encounters a merchant named Osman Agha who tells his story. He was born a serf named Nodar Zalikashvili. After he had lost his mother due to his master's cruelty, he killed his master, fled, and embraced Islam to avoid persecution. Durmishkhan then started to work for Osman Agha, and married another woman, who gave birth to a boy named Zurab. Meanwhile Vardo became a fortune teller. Osman Agha left his trade to Durmishkhan, and converts to Christianity. In a dream, a group of Muslims killed him for being a *murtad* (an apostate). Zurab grew up and started working with his father. Durmishkhan, having converted to Islam, became a stranger to his land and people. Georgia came under the threat of Muslim invaders, and the king gave him orders to bolster all fortresses in the country. However, the Suram Fortress continued to crumble. Durmishkhan returned to Muslim territory. King's men came to Vardo the fortune teller to have her solve the mystery of Suram Fortress. Vardo told that a blue-eyed young man of the country had to be bricked up alive in order for the fortress to stand. Zurab sacrificed himself to save his country and its Christian faith.

In spite of the possible Christian and national influences brought along by the religious and political development of Georgia, and due to the tensions caused by this, the change of the sacrifice into a self-sacrifice that occurs in this Georgian version is more than meaningful and interesting, in a way, adding a paradoxical aspect to the myth: self-sacrifice is thus both new and old. The legend which might have fit initially into the more general pattern of sacrifice, might have changed into self-sacrifice under the influence and model brought along by Christianity. This might add as a new development; on the other hand, as we have seen initially at the beginning of this article, in its newness the myth comes round back to its initial starting point, because Christ, through his sacrifice, repeats the cosmogonic myth in which the world is created through the sacrifice of a god or saint, and thus, the Georgian version rebuilds this archetypal structure of regenerating the world out of a primordial chaos. Additionally, as it might have been the case with the Romanian ballad, the Georgian might have retained the old Biblical identification between the building and the city that is valid in the case of the rebuilding of Jericho.

One of the most impressive and, at the same time, archaic forms that the Georgian myth took in contemporary art is a Sergei Parajanov's film *The Legend of the Surami Fortress* (1985), which qualifies the sacrificial myth of construction as a living myth, to use again Eliade's terminology, yet with a slightly different meaning, because he applied the term to archaic times. The approach in Parajanov's film echoes, through the archetypal vision of the director, an archaic world where each and every one of

its elements is carrying a deep symbolism, which render a world full of the primordial mystery. Moreover, in the Georgian legend there seems a double course to be folding and unfolding the narrative – a mysterious one which causes the walls to fall, and a second one arisen from the destiny of the sorcerer who is left behind by her lover, she being the one to announce the death of his son. Yet she is merely the voice of destiny, and she does not have a will of her own. So the reply in the film, at the end of the movie, is illuminating in this sense, because it shows both the way Zurab's soul is transmigrated into the stone body that will host him, and that his death means actually eternal life in another plan, the metaphysical, the cosmic one: "When you were a child, I made for you a small blue blanket because you were also my child. I sent you to death. Please forgive, me. But this was not revenge. You've become eternal, my child, my son!"

Contemporary Echoes

A living myth would definitely be a myth that is continually folding and unfolding, changing its complementary elements, but never its structure. In the case of the sacrificial construction myth, the mythical structure has smoothly entered and preserved itself by taking metaphysical forms in modern literature, and culture. Here are a few examples:

- Albania, Ismail Kadare, *The Three-Arched Bridge*, (1978), a novel
- Romania, Lucian Blaga, *Master Manole* (1927), a theatre play
- Georgia, Daniel Chonkadze, in his novel *Suramis Tsikhe* (1859–1860); the two films *Suram Fortress* (1922), director Ivane Perestiani, and *The Legend of the Suram Fotress* (1985), Sergei Parajanov
- Wales, Diarmuid Johnson, *Pont-ar-Daf* (*Bridge on the River Taf*) (2010), a poem

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn at the end of our analysis:

1. The human history, from its very early beginnings until today has been defined by sacrifice in all creating attempts. The development of sacrifice was from human sacrifice, then animal sacrifice, until very recently, then symbolical sacrifice which Christianity preserves in itself today.
2. The two covenants – the blood covenant and the threshold covenant – are defining for the development of the relation between man and the absolute, both edifying through the impact of their expression in the Old Testament, and its development in translations.
3. The need for man to adopt what Lucian Blaga has named in his philosophy "the creative destiny" (261–396) – the need for the absolute, inherent in man's life, and which will always find a form of expression, sometimes through myth, which, in its turn, will always find a self-renewing and meaning-producing mechanism.

4. In an apparently contemporary world, void of mystery, myth, and meaning, the research and revisitation of the different forms this myth has taken in time and in different spaces will not lead to finding possible answers for the myth itself (that is hardly recommendable because of its uselessness!), but to a better understanding of one another and one another's culture. And then we can, quoting a Scottish poet, "be content with silence."

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