

FROM JERICHO TO ARGEȘ, DEVA, DYNAS EMRYS, AND SURAMI: THE MYTH OF CONSTRUCTION BETWEEN CURSE AND SACRIFICE

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De la Jericho la Argeș, Deva, Dynas Emrys și Surami: Mitul creației între blestem și sacrificiu

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. Each of the four versions brings forth a certain particularity: the paradox of walling in a woman and her child for a church in the Romanian ballad, the burning of the woman, and then her ashes walled in in the Hungarian version, the avoiding of the sacrifice in the Welsh legend, and the transformation of the sacrifice into self-sacrifice in the Georgian one. 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 relevance of curse and sacrifice around it as both a source and a propagation 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, 2007), as well as the works of Professor Trumbull, The Threshold Covenant (1896) and The Blood Covenant (1898). One of the main conclusions of our article is that nothing built by man has a soul, and that can only last if it only acquires a soul. Hence the sacrifice that has been part of man's 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 of 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, the same myth

In his book on the myth of construction, the historian of religions Mircea Eliade says 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 (Eliade, 2007: 145). We have thus chosen several legends and ballads from different cultural spaces, mainly Europe and Caucasia, all

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having as core the myth of construction that depends on human sacrifice in order to analyse them comparatively. Yet the purpose of our analysis will not be that of researching the history of these ballads or legends, but rather of researching the worlds each of them encompasses in themselves, 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. The mythical legends and ballads we shall analyse are the following: the Romanian legend of the monastery of Argeş 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 that are 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 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 worlds 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 different translations, 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 man's relation to divinity, in man's 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, and analysed by the 19th century researcher H. Tray Trumbull in two of his books: one of them is the threshold which functioned as an altar in primitive tents or caves, while later on its sacred functions being transferred to the hearth, and then also, in some cases to the cornerstone of a

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construction (Trumbull, 1896: 22-23) 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. (Trumbull, 1898: V)

Consequently, the sacrifice in human history cannot but be approached, and finally hopefully be understood with the help of these two elements, which, i.e. each one of them, separately, and sometimes with the help of both covenants: the blood covenant, and the threshold covenant. They defined both man's relation to the other and implicitly with God, and their reflection is utterly to be seen even in today's religions, even in Christianity, where the symbolism remained the same, apparently in a world devoid of ancient myths, a world which whatsoever has paradoxically preserved a myth-like mechanism of functionality, whose rituals remind us, in their essence of ancient times.

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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 (Eliade, 20017: 169). The cosmogonic myths in themselves create order out of chaos and very many times this order is created through 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, 2007: 192)¹Romanian 192)¹Romanian 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, which preserve the pagan core and rather fold it in Christian elements. Some very relevant examples would be here the creation of different healing plants

¹For more examples, see the entire chapter "The cosmogonic myth – an archetypal archetypal model".

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which, 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, 2007: 328-329) 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, 2004: 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 are born out of the blood of a god, saint or of a hero/heroine who found a tragic death (Eliade, 2007: 323-348; Oisteanu, 2004: 111-115). 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 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.

A literal translation runs as follows:

“And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.” (Joshua 6, 26; King James Bible)

“In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.” (1 Kings 16, 34; King James Bible)

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 the reign of Ahab, presented as a period of moral

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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.

However, the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, contains an additional passage that follows the first one and anticipates the second one from the Book of Kings. Perhaps the whole account was initially found in the Book of Joshua. When the Hebrew Old Testament was definitively redacted, the second part could have been moved to the Book of Kings, in order to show depravity and disobedience against Jahveh in the days of Ahab. The Septuagint version would have merged both versions, the old and the new one, which resulted in unnecessary repetition and incoherence (different names). The passage in question runs as follows:

“And so did Hozan of Baethel; he laid the foundation in Abiron his first-born, and set up the gates of it in his youngest surviving son.” (Brenton Septuagint Translation)

The text does not say: “That happened to Hozan” nor “It was fulfilled when Hozan”, but “So did 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, “Jahveh’s enemy”.

However, 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 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

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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” (the same term is used in the Book of Genesis for Cain). 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.

The possibility of different interpretations is reflected in translations, cf. a sentence from 1 Kings 16, 34: “ba'Ābîrām bākōrōw yissəḏāh, ūbîSġîb [or: ūbîSġūb] ṣə'irōw hiṣṣîb dālātehā” (Hebrew: Westminster Leningrad Codex) – “he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub”.

Some translations, especially the oldest of them, are very literal:

“ἐν τῷ Ἀβιρῶν πρῶτον ὅρα αὐτοῦ ἐθεμελίωσεν αὐτὴν καὶ τῷ Σεγούβτῳ νεωτέρῳ αὐτοῦ ἐπέστησεν θύρας αὐτῆς” (Greek: Septuagint).

“in Abiram primitivo suo fundavit eam et in Segub novissimo suo posuit portas eius” (Latin: Biblia Sacra Vulgata).

“he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub” (English: King James Bible).

Other translations often introduce paraphrases such as “on the grave of”, “with the death of”, “with the loss of”, “at the cost of” or even “with the sacrifice of” instead of “in” or “on”. Actually, it does not elucidate the text:

“temelia i-a pus-o pe [mormântul lui] Abiron, întâiul său-născut, iar porțile i le-a așezat pe [mormântul lui] Segub, fiul său mai mic” (Romanian: Anania)

“тури основите му със [смъртта на] първородния си [син] Авирон, и постави вратите му със [смъртта на] най-младия си син” (Bulgarian)

“he laid the foundation thereof with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof with the loss of his youngest son Segub” (American Standard Version)

“He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub” (English Standard Version)

“il en jeta les fondements au prix d'Abiram, son premier-né, et il en posa les portes au prix de Segub, son plus jeune fils” (French: Louis Segond)

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“Dhíol sé a chéadghin, Aibíorám, mar cháin ag leagan a mháithreacha, agus Sagúb, am mac ab óige leis, ag tógáil a gheataí.” (Irish: An Bíobla Naofa)

“uz žrtvu svoga prvorodenca Abirama podigao je temelje, a uz žrtvu svoga mezimca Seguba postavio je gradska vrata” (Croatian Bible)

Some translations, however, clearly argue for one of the possible interpretations, usually the first one: “while rebuilding the city, Hiel was punished by the death of his sons”:

“He laid its foundations just as his firstborn son Abiram was dying, and he erected its gates while his youngest son Segub was dying” (International Standard Version)

“Quando lançou os seus alicerces, morreu-lhe Abirão, seu primogênito; e quando colocou as suas portas, morreu-lhe Segube, seu filho mais moço” (Portuguese Bible)

The original wording is avoided, because it could mean that Hiel's son were killed and put in the foundation or even laid there alive, in order to make a threshold covenant, suggested by God.

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:

“29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon. 30 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, 31 Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. 32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. 33 And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. 36 And she said unto

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him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon. 37 And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. 38 And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. 39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, 40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.” (King James Bible)

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 comes back, the father “did with her according to his vow” (v. 39). 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 (v. 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 (v. 31) by changing the preposition “and” to “or” (even some literal translations):

“If Thou dost at all give the Bene-Ammon into my hand — 31 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’s Literal Translation)

It permits an alternative to the blood covenant: or 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 (Hirsch E.H. et al., 1906) Jephthah would have resorted to this solution, saving his daughter by keeping her in seclusion, and making a burnt offering instead. 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

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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 (v. 29), as such sacrifices were foreseen by law (cf. Leviticus 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 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, 2007: 150-151), 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, man has to give his creation a soul with his own hands, with the price of his own life, or of another's (Eliade, 2007: 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 metaphorical¹). 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,

¹ 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*.

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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 Balkannarrative 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 Argeş, 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-Buşulenga, 1976)

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 (Trumbull, 1898: 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

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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 reintegration¹, i.e. while she leaves behind the humanly body and receiving 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-Bușulenga, 1976)

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, when asking the masons whether they could ever build another one just as beautiful, when he receives a positive answer from them, 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 was 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 (Eliade, 2007: 194), moreover, each violent death represents a form of creation. Thus only through just a similar violent death could Manole be reintegrated into the Anthro-po-cosmos with his wife:

"Manole, Manole,
Good master Manole,
The wall weighs like lead,
Tears my teats still shed,

¹ Eliade, p. 210.

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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-Bușulenga, 1976)

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-Bușulenga, 1976)

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 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 refers to the construction of Saint Petersburg under Peter the Great:

"Tu grunt nie daje owoców ni chleba,
Wiatry przynoszą tylko śnieg i sloty;

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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 pałów
I wdeptać ciała stu tysięcy chłopów.
Potem na palach i ciałach Moskałów
Grunt założywszy, inne pokolenia
Zaprzągl do taczek, do wozów, okrętów,
Sprowadzać drzewa i sztuki kamienia
Z dalekich łądów i z morskich odmętów.”(Mickiewicz, 1860)

[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.]¹

As the place chosen by the tsar for his future capital was very marshy and muddy, it had to be consolidated. During building 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

¹ Adam Mickiewicz, fragment above, our translation.

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the two titles ‘Mason Kelemen’s Wife’ or the ‘The Walled-in Wife’¹, 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 run as follows:

“Că noi lege pus-am, lege c-om zidi

Prima soțioară care va veni.

Frumușel om prinde-o-n foc o vom zvârli

Și cu var cenușa i-om învâli,

Numai astfel zidul nu s-a prăbuși

Și-n argint și aur plata vom primi.”(Ciocian, 2010)

[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/ 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].

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., 1906) Consequently, the burning of the wife’s body onto the construction site emphasizes even more the identification of the cornerstone with the altar. This is thus only the 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.

¹ We have used the Romanian translation of the Hungarian ballad used in the article ‘Mitul jertfei zidirii’ by Maria-Nicoleta Ciocian (2010) (*Romanian Journal of Education*, Issue 1/3-4, pp. 109-120). 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.

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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 (1896) in his book "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 (Trumbull, 1896: 252-256). An interesting and relevant example, given by Trumbull, is a fragment from Song of Songs 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.' (Trumbull, 1896: 252.)

The overlapping of symbolism between 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 meaning 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,

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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, 1976)

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. (Eliade, 2007)¹ 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 comes out the victorious the latter. The legend, first mentioned in *Historia Brittonum* 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 was begun, but surprisingly, all that was built during one day simply disappeared during the night. This happening several

¹ Eliade, p. 165. 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', pp. 165-171.

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times, so Vortingen asked his wise men what to do, and here is what answer he received:

[...] at illi responderunt: nisi infantem sine patre invenies et occidetur ille et arx a sanguine suo aspergatur, numquam aedificabitur in aeternum.

“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, 1999-2008)

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 site is actually one ancient myth common to 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, 2007: 182-183) The child in the Welsh legend says the following to the King, when referring to the pool where the two dragons fight:

[...] 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 occupavit gentes et regiones plurimas in brittannia, et paene a mari usque ad mare tenebunt [...].

[...] 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, 1999-2008).

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

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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 (2000: 33), 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. 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* (1854: 156), mentions of 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 was built during the day kept on falling during the night. Baron Haxtan mentions a Georgian folk song which he heard which recites the conversation between the mother who can still hear the cry of her son from within the walls. 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, 2007) Daniel Chonkadze, in his novel *Suramis tsikhe* (1859-1860) (*The Surami Fortress*), tells the following story: Durmishkhan is a serf freed by his master. Now, he has 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

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avoid persecution. Durmishkhan now starts to work for Osman Agha and marries another woman, who gives birth to a boy named Zurab. Meanwhile Vardo becomes a fortune teller. Osman Agha leaves his trade to Durmishkhan and converts to Christianity. In a dream a group of Muslims kill him for being a *murtad*. Zurab grows up and starts to work with his father. Durmishkhan, having converted to Islam, has become a stranger to his land and people. Georgia comes under the threat of Muslim invaders and the king gives orders to bolster all fortresses in the country. However, Suram Fortress continues to crumble. Durmishkhan returns to Muslim territory. King's men come to Vardo the fortune teller to have her solve the mystery of Suram Fortress. Vardo tells that a blue-eyed young man of the country must be bricked up alive in order for the fortress to stand. Zurab sacrifices himself to save his country and its Christian faith (Kalandarishvili, (2012)). 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 fitted initially into the more general pattern of sacrifice, might have changed into self-sacrifice under the influence and model brought along by Jesus Christ. 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 Serghej 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 (Eliade, 2007), 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 element is carrying a deep symbolism, which render a world full of

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the primordial mystery. Moreover, even if 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 Zurabi's soul 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! (Parajanov, 1986)¹

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 myth has smoothly entered preserved itself taking metaphysical forms in modern literature, and culture.

Albania, Ismail Kadare, *The Three-Arched Bridge*, (1978), novel
Romania, Lucian Blaga, the play 'Master Manole' (1927) 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 Fortress*, Serghej Paradjanov (1985)

Wales – Diarmuid Johnson (2010), *Pont-ar-Daf* (Bridge on the River Taf)

CONCLUSIONS

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

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

¹ Parajanov, *Surami Fortress*, <http://www.trilululu.ro/video-film/legenda-fortaretei-suram-1986-2-2-ro-sub-paradjano>.

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very recently, the symbolical sacrifice which Christianity preserves in itself today.

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

The need for man to adopt what Lucian Blaga (1969: 261-396). has named in his philosophy ‘the creative destiny’ (is inherent in man’s life, and his need for the absolute will always find a form of expression, while the mythological one will always find a self-renewing and meaning-producing mechanism

In an apparently contemporary world, void of mystery, myth, and meaning, the research and revisitation of the different forms of 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, quoting a Scottish poet, ‘be content with silence’.

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