

Ballad and its Connection to the Myth

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Abstract: Ballads are defined as a literary genre in Albanian studies, thus their connection with music seems rather vague. In this treat we will show a typological subdivision of the ballad in Albanian culture and its connection with the myth. More specifically, this connection is seen in the ballad of walled up wife. The motif of the sacrifice in construction, as opposed to that of the dead brother or that of the husband coming home, is unknown to the other part of Europe folklore. On the other hand, the rite of the sacrifice in construction has been and continues to be widely known in many countries all over the world. In this study we try to clear the presence of the walled up wife motif in Balkan and Albania and also the situation of this motif's blending in the fund of the ballads.

Key words: ballad, legend, myth, sacrifice, walled up wife

Ballads are a very important part of the spiritual life and cultural legacy of Albanians. Some of them are of mythic origin. The connection between ballad and myth is obvious in the case of the ballad of the walled up wife. In the forthcoming approach we talk about the definition of the Albanian ballad and the mythic ballad.

1. Ballad and its definition

In the Albanian Dictionary ballad is equivalent with "a little poem or rhyme in regular verses, of narrative character, usually with popular and lyrical feel, giving a historical, legendary or heroic event". The fact that the Dictionary gives us only the definition of it as a sort of the oral poetry makes us be reserved upon the explanation this book gives. That's because ballad, as a term, is not original to Albanian language, and its primary meaning is to dance. Folklore researcher Zheji (1994) gives this expression on ballads: "Legendary songs, as the word itself says it, are songs written around legends. In legends there's a real or historical fact which is becoming a legend, or a fairytale. In fairytales there's no real grounding". Some researchers have claimed legendary songs to be also ballads. In fact, identifying legendary songs with ballads is a suspicious thing regarding to Zheji, as it's not complete. The ballad, more than a literary genre, is primarily a musical one. Born in the Middle Ages, it was a song for dancing, with a defined structure, and with a chorus sung by the people. In the beginning it had a rather mysterious narration in epic lyrics, full of mythological beings and rather dark, which pleased the romantics, who on the other hand grasped this medieval genre and made it their thing, writing famous ballads based on the popular motifs, like the Germans did, for instance. Albanian legendary songs, like every other song in Albanian folklore, are sung parts, which are not recited, and neither danced, besides they do not have specific verse structure or chorus. However, there have been certain cases where the songs were also danced. This is mentioned by Arapi (1986) when he says about the Song of Dhoqina: "It's a perfect dance-ballad, starting whenever and wherever with a prelude verse: "The day of the Easter Sunday... ". The song is thus involved in the songs about Easter. Even the villagers say it: They used to start playing it since three days before Easter. The song is danced even among the Italy *arbëresh* during the Easter celebrations in all of the Calabria villages (Catapano 1943). Is of relevant interest mentioning a definition of the ballad made by researcher A. Çetta(1974) in the collection of the Albanology Institute of Prishtinë called "Ballads and Legends": "Ballads, epic lyrical songs with an accented dramatic tone, with themes from mediocre life, from the family life and romantic relationships, in which, from time to time, surreal and marvelous elements play an episodic role.

According to the researcher Shaplo (1978) the definition is: "Popular ballad is a genre described as an epic poem which starts from a tragic or dramatic event in a visible moral background is such a genre in which, along with the touching and melancholic events, is showed attention to the destiny of the individual, of mankind. Often the definitions among the people for this genre are: ancient songs, painful songs, melancholic songs".

In Russia the ballad is contained in the bylina, which are also heroic songs, often very long. In other places ballads have emerged in the same time with the epic. Is believed also that in some cases ballads come from the disintegration of the legendary epic.

As for the Swedish researcher Jonson (1978), in his "Medieval Swedish ballads" he says: "To date, among the Scandinavian researchers the term "medieval ballads" is used to denote the epic song, which we'll find in a visible way in Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish languages". Thus, a parallel is drawn between these and the English, Scottish and German ballads. It is defined as a stanzaic epic song that was sung during the dance and focused on the most dramatic points of the chorus by using the specific formulas with stylistic details. Later the researcher speaks about the formal subdivision of the ballad. This ballad is divided into six categories:

1. ballads with supernatural elements
2. legendary ballads, i.e. ballads around the Christian saints and martyrs
3. historical ballads
4. chivalrous ballads
5. heroic ballads (strongly attached to popular fairytales)
6. humorous ballads

While referring to the Albanian researchers the typological subdivision of the ballad is as follows:

1. legendary walled up wife songs.
2. legendary youngest brother songs.
3. legendary songs of reconnection (husband and wife, brother and sister, brother and brother).
4. legendary songs of brother murder.
5. other legendary songs.

Various researchers, with Albanian ones among them, connect the origin of the ballad nearly to the XII century and on. They see it cultivated in the epic, or even as a part of it, and also after the great medieval epics in the world were created. As for the Albanian ballad, it is very early. The *arbëresh* ballads tell us about an ancient origin of this way of thinking of the life events. Their mythological and legendary character, the describing of the ancient rituals and customs testify in favor of their early origins.

As we see the problems start with the term, to the concept for the ballad, and extend to its self-blending with other popular culture compositions, and even to the myth.

2. The mythical genesis of the ballad

Regarding the genesis of the ballad, is the common researchers' opinion that the ballad as a genre appears in very early times and has been transmitted orally since then, incurring a light transformation process, which is reflected in the actual diversity among the national repertoire (Arapi, 1983). Nevertheless this definition is unclear; it is referred to ancient times without giving a source, leaving its origin rather vague and showing us the ballad only as a genre.

We face another problem here, the same that we mentioned above about the term "ballad", what kind of composition it is, is it unique in per se, or is it a transformation of some other preliterary matter, which has been domineering in the dusky times of human history and is the very foundation of every genre. It becomes necessary to review another time the myth. Let us sort out a few definitions about myth and mythology.

Malinowski (1926): "The myth in a primitive society, meaning in its vital form, is not just a narration, but an experienced event. Its very nature is not fiction, as it is, for instance, today's novels; the myth is a vivid reality which is believed to have happened a long time ago and continues to have a constant effect on people and their destinies".

Neumann: "The myth is an unconscious self-reflection of crucial situations in mankind history".

Eliade: "Among the most important characteristics of the myth is that some primary events that are considered to be sacred are not seen as past events brought back to memory, or imitated, but as an eternal present or at least as something that is repeated in identical way".

Fromm(1993): "In the symbolic language, inner experiences, feelings and thoughts, are expressed as experiences from the senses, events of the outer world. Driven towards a different logic from the usual one we use in everyday life, a logic in which the main categories are not space and time, but intensity and associations, it is maybe the only universal language created by man, which has remained the same for every civilization and spanning in all history. Is a language with its own grammar and syntax, which is to be learned, if we want to grasp the meaning of myths, fairytales and dreams."

In this approach Fromm speaks about the mechanism of exploring the myths and about the myths themselves, however is important to underline that intensity and association are truly the main characteristics of the myth. In the same book Fromm extends: "The myth, along with the dream, depicts an event which takes place in space and time and

through symbolic language expresses religious and philosophical concepts, the experience of the soul, where the true meaning of the myth lies”.

However, it is clear that the myth is the oldest and most universal creation. Regarding the genesis of the ballad, we can affirm that the important thing is that the concept of the myth be distinguished from the notion of the legend (the saga, the fantastic narration). The legend is an oral narration about sacred events or a historical but distorted and unverifiable event or an unbelievable story. A legend or a saga, along with the ballad, may as well have mythical content, but this does not mean they are the myth itself. The myths always tell about the creation of the world, of gods and demons, cosmic powers, chthonic or Olympic, all of these connected with each other; they not only narrate, but are also experiences, thing to be deducted from the rituals that always accompany them. In this experiencing the whole being is involved (according to Eliade), as for the legends, sagas, ballads etc., they always move around fantasy and creation.

If we were to imagine mythology as a whole piece, in which myth and ritual live as indivisible from each other, many legends can be viewed as remote memories about myths, as some customs are remote memories of old rituals. Wellek and Warren (1993) point: “The antonym and counterpoint of the word myth is the word *logos*. “The myth” is a narration, as opposed to the dialectic consideration; the myth is also irrational and intuitive, as opposed to the systematic philosophy; is the tragedy of Aeschylus facing the Socrates’ dialectic”.

“The myth”, a preferred term in today’s critic, aims and stands over that important part of understanding and reasoning, in which interact religion, folklore, anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis and art.

Historically the myth comes after the ritual and it’s connected to it. “The myth is the speaking part of the ritual, the event happening during the ritual”. In the same place, the ritual is executed for the people by a pagan priest to prevent danger, to bring success; it is an *agendum*, an eternal and restless need, like the harvest and the reproduction of the family, like the youngsters’ preparation to life in society and the inevitable preparation for after death. To a larger extent, the myth usually has the meaning of an anonymous narration about origins and fate: the society explains to the young ones where this world came from and where we are going and with teaching figures depicts the picture of the world and human destiny.

There are endless problems which tend to move us far from the distinction between myth and ballad. At last, it is clear that the mythical ballad, along with the non-mythical, both exist. Since mythic ballads (if we are to accept this term) are surely older and since their tie to the myth is an interesting fact, the initial interest of the researchers towards ballads is justified.

3. The ballad of the walled up wife

The immurement legend, commonly referred to as the legend of the woman blended into wall, is a mythic ballad. It is important to make the distinction with the today’s altered version, as it is important view clearly its core, its mythical basis. A relevant consideration is made by researcher Klosi (1991), who denotes: “Avoiding the possible misunderstandings: we’re not talking about the legend’s actual age, the important thing the presence or absence of myth figures in legends”. So the historical age of the ballad is not important, only the considerations in this case. After this necessary division of the time of the creation as independent from the presence or absence of mythical traces in ballads, we may proceed referring to the ballad itself.

After a factual analysis of the walled up case, which itself is derived from the sacrifice ritual, the real facts surrounding this problem are: the motif of the sacrifice in construction, differently from the dead brother motif or that of the husband coming home, is unknown to the folklore of the other part of Europe. As for the sacrifice in construction ritual, it has been and continues to be widely known in many places in the world to date.

The song about the walled up wife is known among the people of the Balkan, but the hues it takes in the folklore of each nation has brought discussions on the origins priority and the artistic values.

The discussion takes place in two different directions: the native origin of the ballad and the circulation of the main motif, that of the sacrifice, in different versions on a larger extent. The myth is widely spread and the sacrifice for the construction’s stability has been practiced in ancient times, from the Scandinavian to the Phoenician, to the Latvian and the Estonian, to the Russian and Ukrainian people..., in Germany, France, England, Spain, till the Oceania, Polynesia, then in Asia (especially in China and Japan).

Many researchers have shared opinions about the evolution of the sacrifice through time, but it is ver important to distinguish the pagan times from the ones after the birth of religions. “The order in communities is established through sacrifice as an irreversible act: “religion” blends with ordinary life in such a natural way, that every community, every order, should be conceived upon sacrifice”, according to V. Burket. Chthonic powers face against Olympic ones. Many

researchers concord regarding the cults of the gods. They believe that the first cults belonged to the earth and not the sky.

J. J. Bachofen (1977), who has been studying matriarchy and ancient mythology, was the first to analyze the difference between chthonic and Olympic gods. According to him, the earliest experience of mankind was the consideration of the earth as the Great Mother, who conceives life and then takes it back to its womb. Thus, the cult of the mother is not different from that of the dead. The world of the images was the chthonic world. The dark in mother earth's womb, the underground world where everything comes from and returns back into. The cults and rites of this epoch are mainly referred to the night. In the same domination of night over day goes the other stream of thought, that of the presence of the dead in the life of the living. The interference of the dead into the life of the living is not just an interference, but often this life was ruled by that life and the dead "govern" from there.

After a spontaneous development, the myth was transformed over time from chthonic myth to Olympic, Homeric myth. In a parallel way, life went from the dark to the light, from material to words. We can see Christianity as the conclusion of this development, where god became definitely only spiritual.

The animal sacrificed for the Olympic gods needed to be white, as for the heroes and chthonic powers, black. The type of the altar for the Olympic gods was the classical temple, risen above the ground, sometimes at a certain height, while the heroes and the chthonic powers, the altar was a low placed hearth, an underground cave or an adytum (a place from where you could enter), which should be similar to a tomb. Sacrifices for the Olympic gods needed to be made on sunny afternoons, as for the heroes and chthonic gods, in the evening or in midnight (Klosi, 1991).

Through blood sacrifices, and even non-blood ones, the connection between the people and the powers of the earth, chthonic powers, seemed to occur. Thus the man seems to open his way to good luck, birth, fertility, growth. Most often we run into sacrifices and death rituals in agricultural nations. A communication similar to the sacrifices for fertility or return to the womb of earth is to be found in the sacrifice in construction. The perception of walls as being alive is interesting. Like humans and plants, walls also come from the earth's womb. Walls belong to the kingdom of the sacred and should be unrepeatable and stable. In the mythical understanding the walls are born from earth and there's an ordered chain that constitutes the closed circle from man to the sacrifice, to chthonic powers, to the constructions of the mythical man (Klosi, 1991).

We run into the motif of the immurement victims in texts with mythical, legendary content, maybe from the suggestions of some "primordial events", in the Carpathian-Balkan space; we see it again in ballads, mainly in northern and southern parts of the Danube. The ballad exists in many Balkan versions: Macedonian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, Greek, Hungarian etc.

There are important differences and similarities regarding narration and symbols between ballads of different places especially those between the ballad about the Rozafa Castle in Albanians, that of the monastery of Arxhesh and that of the Manole master in Romanians. There is, however, still a discussion which remains open to date: that of the localization, which is observed in nearly all of the studies in Balkan regarding the ballad of the walled up wife and the rite of the sacrifice which is its basis.

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