



THE JUSTIFICATION OF MYTHS IN RITUAL CALENDAR SONGS AMONGST ALBANIANS

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ABSTRACT

Humans learned to celebrate religious rituals, celebrations for hunting or for the beginning of seasons, and accompanied them with ritual songs, which can still be found in regions that haven't been influenced by 'modernity' yet. However, it is difficult to imagine a dumb civilization, unable to sing in order to express its feelings. The song has often given voice to collective passions during important moments of work, faith (ideality) and pleasure.

Keyword: Ritual songs, celebrations, myths, faith, mystical etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mythology, as an ancient mentality phenomenon, has been subject to historical requirements of different eras, in which it has lived. Thus, mythology has undergone changes not only in the informative and storyteller aspect of subjects, but also in the conceptual content. Therefore, much care must be taken to distinguish the initial primitive stage of myths and the changes that they have undergone with time. Mythological stories, processed through imagination, were born as a reflex of some kind of empirical experience which humans had from observations full of amazement regarding various phenomena of the world that surrounded them, and from the instinctive desire to find their meaning. In these stories, there was nothing mystical nor religious, in the meaning in which (Tirta, M. 2004) these terms are used today, contrariwise, they are distinguished by their profane character (Tirta, M. 2004). The concourses between myths and ritual songs do not surprise anyone; they were cooked in the same bowl and from the same hand; they swirl around the same figures by disclosing the inability of the primitive human to understand the nature and society, and also the unconditional submission towards their laws, although this kind of submission is more visible in ritual songs. Many rites have to do with the protections of humans, livestock and harvest from the "anger" of nature forces. Hence, the changes under which the myths have gone through centuries, are normal and inevitable, or even justified, because they prove that mythology is a specific ideology, the same way it is poetry, art, upon which eras have put their stamp. The weakness of humans against nature and vain beliefs were the reason for a number of rites to be born, through which the human tried to affect the mysterious forces, in order for them to make his work go well during the year. Therefore, all their rites and songs are related to the interests of farmers for the increase of livestock and good harvest, and for the good health of people and their increase in number, i.e. for the increase of labor force in the family.

However, cases where the content of ritual songs is used as a key to understand the myth are not less impressive (Tirta, M. 2004). In Greek mythology the role of Apollo is without doubt one of the most complex ones. Regarding his origin, we have now overcome the old thesis of Vilamovič-Melendorf according to which he was a god of Middle East in origin and was later Hellenized (D'Anna, N. 1996). In an article of 1975 Valter Burkert noticed the philological adjacency of god's name with Apéllai, the annual holidays of Dorians, during which young boys were accepted amongst men, thus they entered puberty (D'Anna, N. 2004). This is an important fact, not only because it justifies one of the main attributions of Apollo, as protector of youth, but also because in the Dorian world this role is accompanied with a special moment of adolescence, by performing the initial rites that converted the guy into a man. In Athens, this aspect of spiritual life became especially clear during the ritual of ephebe, where ephebe were accepted amongst the grown-ups, and the polis started a "new year", to enter another stage of the community life. In this way Apollo became one of the protagonists of the life of polis, because it protected the real wealth of the people, its youth. Even from a panoramic perspective upon the studies of Albanian verbal literature, especially in the epos of warriors, it can be clearly seen that scholars were interested to find and determine the motives and parallel figures of this big corpus of traditional national values with Greek and roman antique art, as classical forms of modeling of esthetical mythological thought. However, this study will also deal with an issue which for known reasons has been excluded from the object of folkloric studies, the one of connections, similarities, parallels and impacts between the biblical literature and Albanian verbal literature, with a special focus on annual ritual songs. Of course, that we do not intend to either to evangelize ritual songs, nor secularize the Bible, but to merely find the possible concourses between their figures and motives, as the first step towards a deeper critical review of the relations between these two worlds. The motives and figures that will be used here for the illustration of cultural parallels, are not only found in the secular Albanian tradition; they are spread more widely. Some of them are inter-balkan motives, while some are European. But what interests us here is firstly their mutual impact in Albanian developments. In most cases, the biblical literature to which we refer for the withdrawal of parallels with annual ritual songs, "is a medium, an 'intermediate' of an older subject, pre-biblical, mythological, pagan". However, we have to say that some of the main heredities of this subject in their biblical modeling, in the way they were profited in this literature, change contents. The main motive which will be reviewed here as an inevitable cultural parallel, is without doubt the resurrection, in its three stages: pagan resurrection (Sinani, Sh. 2000), can also be considered as a renewal of nature, the non-evangelized biblical resurrection and the evangelized resurrection. What should be emphasized from the beginning is the triple relation: mythology – biblical literature – folkloric literature, where it is difficult to distinguish the giving role of one from the receiving role of the other and vice-versa. According to Tvrtko Ćubeliq, "ritual songs are the oldest creations, which accompanied a certain ritual in ancient times, by expressing a magical collective action and by giving special characteristics to some important moments of social life" (Ćubeliq, T. 1988). Oldest or not, ritual songs, especially the annual ones, due to their emphasized utilitarian character, were sometimes not accepted as a genuine part of verbal literature or literary folklore. According to Shaban Sinani, "literary folkloric tradition is represented by the open structure of standards and clichés preserved since a long time. These connections allowed esthetic functions to interfere in the pre-folkloric communication, which had a ritual and informative character in its initial phase" (Sinani, Sh. 2000). Some thoughts appeared even earlier, according to which "annual songs in Albanian folkloric literature in most of the cases were only partly written, since also the rituals have been perverted..." (Shala, D. 1968). In the same piece, the same author writes that "however, over time, with the cultural development of society, the songs with magical character, just like the rites themselves, lost their initial character and meaning, and slowly came to being extinguished, or ended up in children

songs, just like a good part of rites ended up in children toys” (Shala, D. 1968). And, since we are talking about the utilitarian character of ritual songs, let’s refer to a quite eloquent case. Levi-Shtraus has defined his theory of symbolic efficiency based on a ritual song which is sung by the shamanic Cuna (shamanic Cuna is an Indian tribe that lives in an autonomous region in Panama, famous among anthropologists for their rich mythological and ritual heredity), to ease childbirth pain. The song in question refers to a myth, according to which Muu, the goddess who is responsible for the formation of fetus and childbirth, has put in her hand the purba, a part of the soul of the woman who is giving birth. The song describes this difficult aberration? by following a classic scheme: we get sick because we lose a part of our soul; then the shaman goes on a journey in the supernatural world to find and re-establish the equilibrium between life forces. According to Levi-Shtraus, the value of the text lies in the discovery that the mythical journey is realized inside the woman who is giving birth, inside all purba-s, the ones of heart, bones, teeth and hair. The road of goddess Muu is the vagina; her home, ‘the deep, the dark she’ is the womb, while the penetration done by the shaman and the protecting souls is similar to a sexual intercourse. To Levi-Shtraus, the song is a psychological therapy directed to the sick organ, the body. “The shaman feeds its patient with a language, in which many unformulated conditions can be immediately expressed, conditions which cannot be formulated otherwise. It is exactly the transition to this form of expression which (enables at the same time a normal experiencing of a situation which would have otherwise been rather chaotic and inexpressible) unblocks the physiological process, or reorganizes the process in the right direction during which the maternity undergoes the intervention” (Strauss, C.L. 1966). Levi Shtraus compares the shaman cure with the psychoanalytic one; both of them try to make unconscious conflicts and attitudes conscious. The shaman and the psychoanalyst, the first only by talking and the second one by remaining silent, put a direct connection of indirect consciousness with the unconsciousness of the sick person. Shemery of these two figures enables us to overlive today an early experience, scientifically non-articulated (Severi, C. 1998). As has been known for quite some time, similar to other fields of national culture, the verbal literature started to be written late as well. Said more precisely, it was collected and studied late. The Albanian National Awakening is known to be the period of Albanian national culture where spiritual values of nation’s heredity have been put to the service of history and life of this nation, and started to become property of the cultural goods with European dimensions. Here it is merely enough to mention only the studies of Elena Gjika, or the translation of the major work of De Rada, Rhapsody of an Arbëresh poem (1866) in the five main European languages, to have a clear view on this extension and interest. It is historically known that the verbal creations of the Albanian people were also collected by creators of ancient literature (Budi, Bardhi and others), as it has until now been called in the Albanian literature, but it has been also collected and studied by foreigners, whether as travelers in Albania, as diplomatic personnel, or as members of various study expeditions. Regardless, like it was said, the National Awakening was the one to put the basis of the systematic collection and studies of the verbal literature of the Albanian people. Furthermore, through the creators of the National Awakening, these values became also known to the European cultural opinion and broader. Here we should to mention the most knowns of this period, starting from the father of Jeronim de Rada, Mikel de Rada, to further continue with Thimi Mitko and Zef Jubani, and to Prenushi with his friends. Problems of this nature also arise when calendar songs and rites are subject to studies. Each season had its celebrations, with similar and special rituals. Humans learned to celebrate religious rituals, celebrations for hunting or for the beginning of seasons and accompanied them with ritual songs, which can still be found in regions that haven’t been influenced by ‘modernity’ yet. However, it is difficult to imagine a dumb civilization, unable to sing in order to express its feelings. The song has often given voice to collective passions during important moments of work, faith (ideality) and pleasure. But the rituals themselves are nothing more but an expression of humans’ incapability to

rightly understand the phenomena of nature and society, and the desire to impact them. Whenever we talk about rituals, it is impossible to avoid the so-called animism? The psychological matrix of this conception of primitive people is closely related to the oneiric activity of humans, with the fear from illnesses and death, but also to every other situation where the soul seemed to be disconnected from the body. These experiences would push the primitive human to believe that he had an alter ego, a second-self, with a parallel existence much different from the every-day one. By carrying forward, the primitive human would unfold this feature, not only to other living creatures (animals, plants) but also to items. The value that the term has today, as a spiritualization of ‘things’ that don’t have a spirit, an account from which the human is excluded, is in reality a reflex of our religious culture. In these conditions, “the creation of a second reality through fantasy was an objective need, because through myths and legends humans tried to not only explain the phenomena of nature, but to also find the key to dismantle, even if only in fantasies, these hidden forces that behaved in such an incomprehensible way in the life surrounding them” (Xhaxhiu, M. 1997). The dream to understand and rule nature gave birth to verbal literature, in its preliminary form, poetry. Later on, this verbal literature started to formulate rather shortly stories in prose, especially the forms of anecdotes and stories, since it either didn’t have the courage, or it didn’t want to express certain thoughts and experiences more widely. The transition of stories from a certain expression form to another remains poorly explained, just like the poorly review of the conditions that had a bigger impact in this process, the economic and social ones, or the ones of cultural life. On the other hand, 12 nights of December and January are mentioned in Albanian mythology, which means from 25th of December until 25th of January. These are the 12 nights in which according to the belief, wolf-people go out on the streets. These devils go after women, disturb the livestock, and according to beliefs their breath brings death. But, from its very nature this belief does not belong to these days at all. Because *buzma* has more of a spirit of resurrection and happiness, and doesn’t have to do with wolves and devils, let alone the spirit of death and fear. It seems like here as well we had a displacement of this date. In its beginnings, mythology was simpler and more rudimental. It was mostly dominated by the figures of animals and less by those of plants. “In the initial phases the gods had the shape of wild animals and woods. It is known that gods with a shape of humans are of a later stage in the history of religions. Zeus, for example, before becoming the king of Olympus, was an eagle in some tribes, while in other it was a woodpecker; Hera was a cow; Athena – an owl and *Arthemida* – a bear. It would be, however, a mistake to think that this was an immediate and sudden transition. It is more of a very slow and gradual transition. Many left elements later show us in most cases the theomorphic and dendromorphic experience that has preceded anthropomorphic religions”. Sometimes the animal, once the god himself, becomes a faithful friend, for example the eagle of Zeus, the owl of Athena, the snake of *Demetra* etc. Behind every fantastic vision, a real phenomenon was hidden. The lightning that came out from the collision of clouds loaded with opposite electricity was attributed to Zeus that blew lightning thunders from the top of Olympus; the storm as a natural phenomenon was attributed to Poseidon, whom, angry, stirred the bottom of the sea with his fork. There is no phenomena of nature, but neither of spiritual world and of relations between people, that hasn’t been caught and conceptualized with such poetry and imagination from the consciousness of the ancient primitive human. With time, gods that were initially only an abstract personification of the good and bad, became real, living creatures in the fantasy of people, similar to humans. Akin to them, gods were also worn with all good and bad attributes, with all human passions, with all virtues and immoralities, only in larger proportions. The gods living in Olympus, similar to humans on Earth, eat, drink, sleep, hate and love, argue and fight with each-other, make plots and traps, violate marital relations, and these are done with an even bigger cynicism and violence than in the human society.

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