SOUTH OF BALATON, NORTH OF ARTA. THE TOPOS OF THE WALLED-UP WOMAN IN THE CULTURES OF SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE AND HUNGARY



SERIA
IDEE WĘDROWNE NA SŁOWIAŃSKICH BAŁKANACH 11

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[MIGRATING IDEAS IN THE SLAVIC BALKANS]

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Edited by
Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa
and Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk

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Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk
[Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences]
ul. Jaracza 1, 00-378 Warszawa, tel. +48 510664062
wydawnictwo@ispan.edu.pl, www.ispan.waw.pl

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Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa

Introduction

The book that we are presenting to our readers was written as part of a research project titled "The topos of the immured woman in the cultures of South-Eastern Europe and Hungary", which was funded by the National Science Centre (2020/37/B/HS2/00152). We owe its realisation in Poland to this grant, but above all to the scientific community which has educated highly specialised staff capable of undertaking this conceptually, materially, and linguistically complex topic at an academic level. The research lasted four years and involved ten researchers representing various academic centres and specialisations (Albanian studies, Slavic studies, Romance studies, Hungarian studies, Modern Greek studies). The core group of project participants included Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolov (Jagiellonian University, holder of an ISS PAS fellowship), Rigels Halili (University of Warsaw), Leszek Hensel (ISS PAS), Kazimierz Jurczak (Jagiellonian University), Przemysław Kordos (University of Warsaw), Marzena Maciulewicz (ISS PAS), Maciej Olszewski (The Anthropos IPAS Doctoral School, holder of an ISS PAS fellowship), Sylwia Siedlecka (University of Warsaw) and Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk (ISS PAS). During the COVID-19 pandemic, when our mobility was restricted, some of the field research in Bulgaria was carried out by Zofia Kręc and Eliza Markiewicz, students at the Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies at the University of Warsaw, who were there in 2021 as part of the Erasmus programme. The originator and principal investigator of the project was Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa (ISS PAS), the author of this text. The research group's initial (and hopefully enduring) enthusiasm for this topic is demonstrated by the fact that it took merely 15 hours at the initial planning stage to bring together a team of competent specialists. To this day, I am grateful to my colleagues for their openness to embarking on this collaborative scientific adventure.

Our book is dedicated to the adaptation of the travelling topos of the walled-up woman, which has made its way from the multilingual oral tradition of South-Eastern European countries and Hungary into the modern and postmodern national cultures of this area. The boundaries of our explorations coincided with the boundaries of folk songs and legends about a sacrifice of a woman, whom – according to beliefs – builders would place in the foundations of

a bridge / fortress / public fountain (*češma*)[1] or an Orthodox church / Catholic church / monastery / mosque to prevent their work from falling apart and ensure its durability, prestige, and sometimes considerable profit for themselves. However, we were most interested in the transformations of this minute and seemingly marginal fragment of European folklore in modern national literatures and art of the 19th–21st centuries, in theatre, film, performance, etc.

It will be up to our readers to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts, but we are fully aware of a certain founding flaw in our research which has probably already been faced by those studying the "posthumous life" of myths. During our work, we were aware that while we can interpret modern, postmodern and (post)postmodern cultural texts, we do not fully understand the original message of folklore texts, and perhaps it will never be possible due to broken bonds, lost associations, and incomprehensible traces.

Archaeological work provides a wealth of data on foundation human sacrifices, especially of children (e.g., in Poland, see Wawrzeniuk, 2016). In the process of slow cultural changes, the sacrifice of living people was replaced first by the sacrifice of the bodies of people who had been slain earlier, then with their symbols (e.g., a shadow, which was considered a person's double and the abode of the soul, then a measuring tape as its equivalent, etc.), animals, and ultimately objects. The topos of the walled-up woman that interests us here was once known on many continents, as evidenced, among other things, by the anthology of scholarly texts *The walled-up wife. A casebook*, edited by Alan Dundes (1996b). An analysis of the current state of research has revealed that there are many scattered ("national") folkloristic and anthropological studies on this fascinating topic, a contextualised review of which is included in the later parts of the book. The most important research positions are presented in the aforementioned collection compiled by Alan Dundes (1996b). However, cognitively significant synthetic studies are not included there for a number of reasons: firstly, they were too extensive to fit into the limited volume of that compendium; secondly, over time, they have lost their methodological freshness and today remain sources of knowledge of a material and historical nature, such as the still-valuable study by Mikhail Arnaudov (Арнаудов, 1920), *Вградена невеста* [The walled-up woman], from 1920, which goes beyond the Bulgarian material, or the 1959 collection of all known versions of the ballad about the walled-up woman from South-Eastern Europe, published by the Hungarian ethnomusicologist Lajos Vargyas (1959), *Kutatások a népballada középkori történetében. III. A „Kőmüves Kelemen" eredete* [Research into the Medieval History of the Folk Ballad, Part III. The Origin of "Kelemen the Mason"]. Some of the articles in Dundes's (1996b) volume, on the other hand, have become the subject of research into modern myth-making rather than an unquestionable point of reference in our study, due to their ideological entanglement. This was

[1] In South-Eastern Europe, a type of water intake inside an enclosure, sometimes a very elaborate one.

the case with Mircea Eliade's (1955/1996) *Master Manole and the Monastery of Argeș*, which we are interested in as a source for our study.

Dundes's (1996b) study does not aspire to a systematic research approach; it is exemplary in nature but has contributed to the dissemination of knowledge about the topos of the walled-up woman in the folklore of South-Eastern Europe, Hungary, and India, and to the renewal of interest in this issue in scientific circles. In the French-speaking world, a similar function was fulfilled by the collection *Le lait de la mort. Anthologie et études réunies par Véronique Gély-Ghedira)* [The milk of death. Anthology and studies collected by Véronique Gély-Ghedira] (Gély-Ghedira, 1998).

As for the state of research on the issue of revitalising the topos of "the walled-up woman" in literature and art, it is incomparably more modest; in fact, there are only scattered micro-studies on the issues that are the main focus of this project. While valuable in terms of content, they usually focus on narrow literary or artistic topics. Therefore, our research was an independent exploration of cultural resources generated in South-Eastern Europe and Hungary from the 19th century to the present. Written texts, visual works, as well as popular culture and education were interpreted. The research covered the functionalisation and transformation of the topos, and strategies of its adaptation to the artistic, ideological, and mercantile needs of the following cultures: Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, Slovenian and Hungarian. We were guided by the principle of openness to any direction of exploration in which the sources led us, which allowed us to avoid the academic symbolic violence of attempting to unify the study within a single pattern.

The research team assumed that the study would answer the question of how each of the cultures investigated shaped and interpreted the itinerant topos of the walled-up woman in its specific manifestations – in literature, art, science, journalism – after a period of linguistic and cultural separation associated with the formation of modern national cultures and their canons, supported by systems of universal education (Gellner, 1991). We investigated whether and how this topos was incorporated into these canons and what transformations it had to undergo in order to become a flexible element of the national semiosphere. We traced how the topos changed in texts beyond the established national canons. By foregrounding these variations and the accompanying semantic evolution, our team expected to achieve a deeper understanding of the cultures under study and the explicit and implicit axiological choices inherent in them (those that change over time, but also those that show unyielding presence and strength in every historical era). An ethnoculturally centred approach (which was inevitably determined by the language of the sources) on the one hand, and on the other hand, taking into account the rules of research on cultural transfer, required us to break free not only from the pressure of local ideological perspectives, but also from our own meta-scientific prejudices, which are often much more insidious and internalised.

Although there have been many attempts in the past to scientifically investigate the archaic semantics of the ballads, songs and legends that interest us, none of them have yielded the expected results because, as I have already pointed out, the texts themselves do not provide enough clues to allow us to move in the realm of certainties when researching them; at most, we are left with partially validated assumptions. We will probably never be certain about the understanding of the narrative of a woman's walling up in indigenous cultures. Stripping these stories of all magical formulas or interpretable ritual gestures in favour of a cold description of the sequence of events leading to the murder does not make it easier to reconstruct the (religious/magical?) intentions of its perpetrators. Within the conceptual framework of the time, it was probably one thing to make a sacrifice to a deity/demon (which had to be the best in order to be accepted) (Roux, 2013, p. 301), but quite another to invoke the guardian spirit of a building (Арнаудов, 1920). In the first case, the sacrificial victim was placed at the mercy of a supernatural force that demanded her blood. In the second, she changed her mode of existence from human to non-human, and within her assigned place she posthumously gained relative autonomy and the gift of eternal life. In this case, echoes of the resurrective aspect of femininity, cultivated in the era of matriarchy, would come to the fore (Krzak, 2007, p. 150).

However, it must be emphasised that many 20th- and even 21st-century humanists have consciously or unconsciously sided with the scientistic prejudices of 19th-century folklore collectors, who perceived the topos of a walled-up woman preserved in the cultural memory of the people as an echo of "superstition" – a repercussion of archaic, long-dead practices. At the same time, in their role as collectors of oral folk literature, these ethnographers *de facto* contributed to the transfer of texts about the walling up of women from the oral to the written word, thus enriching the repertoire of collective and individual imagination. Since the 19th century, each generation of collectors and folklorists has interpreted this story in different ways, using different research methods, worldviews, and value frameworks, which we could call modalities. Readers who have the patience to familiarise themselves with the extensive material presented here will be able to perceive the dynamics but also the limitations of both scientific and artistic and literary inventiveness when it comes to (re) interpreting this topos. Without overwhelming the reader at this point with the vastness of the existing literature on the subject, which will be analysed on the following pages, I would like to draw attention to those aspects of the stories about the walled-up woman (I repeat: songs, ballads, and legends) which may be of interest to both today's consumers of culture and those who study it.

Does contemporary ontological sensitivity, resulting from the images of the world proposed by modern science in its current phase, allow a different perspective on the "barbaric" – as Goethe pronounced – practices of our ancestors? If we were to look at the act of the alleged transubstantiation of a walled-up woman from the perspective of contemporary (neo)animistic thought (Domańska, 2017) or, more broadly, of those currents of posthumanist philosophy that

are based on the achievements of quantum physics (Barad, 2018), we could experience the same *tremendum et fascinosum* that contemporary mankind experiences when looking at the stain of human existence in photographic materials from Hiroshima or Nagasaki, which are a stark manifestation of violent death and persistent posthumous presence (Rogowska-Stangret, 2021, pp. 63–66).

In the vernacular cultural imagination of a Westerner (if such a person even exists), raised on the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm and more or less successfully able to decipher their symbolic message, the correlation of woman–building–separation is most often illustrated in images of princesses preventively imprisoned in towers, or in images of unfaithful nuns or wives, or queens punished for their misdeeds by being walled up in towers/dungeons/cells[2]. These women belong to the generally accepted resources of cultural archaism. On the other hand, even a carefully aestheticised text about ritual murder encounters resistance:

> To the modern person, ritual murder is a denial of rationality and a sign of barbarism, but for *homo religiosus* of the past era, it did not bear the mark of irrationality, it did not stigmatise the sacral community as a criminal act. It was just one of the ways he knew how to act during the *sacrificium*, the purpose of which was to ensure the safety and integrity of the entire community. Jean-Paul Roux explains the behaviour of sacral communities as follows: "When making a sacrifice, a man does not cheat. He knows the importance of his act. Regardless of which animal he kills, he kills the best one, thus obeying the custom or ideology of the society in which he lives." For the religious community, the best or most valuable sacrifice, the one that most fully realises the purpose of the *sacrificium* it performs, is a member of this community, one of its own. In religious studies, the term used to denote this model of behaviour of a *homo religiosus* is a *pars pro toto* sacrifice or the designation of someone to the role of "scapegoat". (Kaczor, 2015, p. 54)[3]

The core of the story we are interested in here – the murder of a previously designated female victim by men – could rightly alert contemporary representatives of feminist and gender studies, who see structured and culturally validated violence as the primary issue here[4]. This can hardly be denied. Male

[2] In Poland, for example, there was a well-known Sandomierz legend about the self-sacrificing young widow Halina Krępianka, who let herself be walled up to save the city from the Tatars (see Urząd Miejski w Sandomierzu, 2021). The last record of walling up comes from 19th-century Krakow and refers to Barbara Ubryk, a nun who stripped in public and was thus excluded from social life (see Budzyńska, 2020). Is this a kind of continuation of the Roman custom of walling up wayward vestal virgins alive (Mossakowski, 1998, pp. 108–112)?

[3] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Maja Jaros either from the Polish translation by Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa or directly from the original Polish text.

[4] The archaic custom of sacrificing girls, who were buried alive in the ground in order to appease a deity in an important matter or to eliminate someone from the community under the pretence of a sacrificial gesture, especially if they were unbearably exception-

dominance seems obvious here, and the builders' decisions are accompanied by cold calculation and a revolting lie resulting from economics (Bourdieu, 2009). When we try to generate an invariant of this constantly reworked story from thousands of multilingual records, its journalistic and documentary character is striking. In this respect, the poetic Romanian variant differs from the others, but in terms of the sequence of events leading to the walling up of the woman, the record remains identical in the most important points. This narrative (set in the world of folk magic, which is now illegible to us, but also in the disturbingly familiar world of economic and professional competition) seems poignant because, among other things, it suggests that it can be seen as a fragile testimony to the ambiguous attitudes of so-called folk artists towards the prevailing habitus. Although the stories verbalise an awareness of women's subordinate position – one shaped by the practical rationality attributed to men (Bourdieu, 2008), the pursuit of prestige (Burkert, 1987), and demonstrative behaviour (Baudler, 1995, pp. 59–70) – this awareness remains only indirectly articulated in folklore. The topos of the walled-up woman seems to express content that demands expression at the level of folk art, as is made particularly plausible by those narratives that end with a subversive condemnation of the man who is accused by the storyteller of thoughtlessly taking an oath that was disadvantageous to himself and his wife. However, it seems that this is rather a manifestation of belated moralising that completely inverts the meaning of the story.

So let us look at the main sequences of the story.

Men erect a public building on behalf of a powerful person, who is sometimes not mentioned at all, but when he does appear, he embodies external pressure and threat (in the case of failure) and the promise of a generous reward (in the case of success). The builders are either a group of relatives who are professionals (three or nine master builders) or just professionals. Using the most durable material, stone, they erect a vertical (fortress, temple, minaret) or horizontal (bridge) structure which has specific symbolic connotations, analysed in depth by folklorists and cultural anthropologists. The men work with dedication and do not give up after a series of failures. When the structure collapses again and again, they start over. Although an isolated group, but they are not entirely self-sufficient. Their wives come to the construction site every day with baskets to fulfil their role as nurturers, generally recognised in a patriarchal world (Yalom, 2012, pp. 23–67).

Only when the builders realise that they are unable to prevent the recurrent disaster with their own strength do they decide (inspired by a mysterious

al, had a different character (Bourdieu, 2004). Georg Baudler finds examples of this in places as far apart as the Mediterranean and Indonesia (Baudler, 1995, pp. 128–134). These practices had a magical character and served to maintain the well-being and unity of the community; they remain a testimony of approval for collective violence against women in many cultures. However, they did not serve as construction magic, but rather as a solution to other social crises.

messenger from the spirit world – a talking bird/old man/old woman/dream or *vila*) to bury one of their wives alive in the foundations of the building. This decision is based on the belief that the male endeavour needs to be strengthened by incorporating female power. Within the context of magical thinking, this behaviour appears rational (Burkert, 1987) and pragmatic (Bourdieu, 2008). They swear an oath not to warn any of the women of the impending danger. However, only one of them – the main character – keeps his word. Is this because he is a man of honour, or rather because he chooses "impressive behaviour" regardless of the cost? (Baudler, 1995, pp. 43–70) Or is it simply that he lacks moral competence in the "interval between moral dullness and moral edification" (Pleşu, 2019, p. 8)? Is it his painful path to moral maturity, or perhaps a way to gain a strong social position? The other men break their word and are, therefore, loyal to their wives. At the same time, by sharing the secret with them, they involve them in the crime. As beneficiaries of the conspiracy, the women do not show compassion for their sister-in-law; instead, they remain faithful to the ethical code, which is geared towards the welfare of the majority. As is well known:

> The *pars pro toto* calculus is highly rational […]. It repeats at the intellectual level what biology has long taught before […]. The sacrifice of one for the sake of all […] is a motif dominating […] strange rituals. The pattern transcends what seems reasonable and functional and leaves a purely symbolic message […]. (Burkert, 1996, pp. 52–53)

Perhaps the women are guided by the principle discussed above by Burkert, or perhaps their actions take place in conditions of mimetic rivalry (Girard, 1993) and are underpinned by a growing desire to get rid of the "best one" – the most devoted, hard-working, naive, and defenceless (Agoston-Nikolova, 1994).

The bricklayer, while loyal to the male community, also wants to keep his beloved alive[5] and tries to save her in another way. Unaware that they have both been betrayed, he gives his wife so many time-consuming household and field chores (threshing, sowing, washing, cooking, whitewashing the house, bathing the child, cooking, feeding, searching for a calf that was lost a few years ago, etc.) that she has no chance of being the first to arrive at the construction site. However, the woman fulfils her tasks in an exemplary manner and – as expected by most – arrives at the construction site with a meal. The husband sheds a tear or two when he sees her, but when asked by his wife why he is sad, he says he is crying because he has lost his wedding ring in the foundations. He knows how devoted she is to him. He knows that she will go down into the foundations to look for the lost ring and wipe away his tear. What is this tear? An anticipation of the funeral loss, an expression of sympathy for his wife, his own powerlessness, moral confusion, the painfully felt cynicism of his fellow men? Is it a tear for lost innocence (Pleşu, 2019, pp. 123–132)?

[5] This is not the case in the Greek variants; he chooses to kill his wife because she is "replaceable", unlike his sister or mother.

In the current situation, the woman's behaviour is governed by the values prescribed for her by the patriarchal system – submissiveness towards a man and a servile (maternal?) attitude towards him. This is in line with a specific affordance (Klawiter, 2012) on the part of the stone foundation, whose form seems to invite the woman to descend. The heroine assesses the narrow passage in the wall as accessible to her – as a place to slip through. Slim and agile, she is ready to respond with her body to the possibilities it creates.

When the girl descends into the building's foundation to look for the ring, the builders join in the action. What follows is a quick walling up of the victim, a cold crime, without solemn staffage, prayers, spells, witnesses. At first, the woman does not believe that this is the end. When the horror of the situation finally dawns on her, she makes an unsuccessful attempt at negotiation. Her arguments are weighty – a child in her womb (Romanian version), a breastfed baby at home (Bulgarian, Albanian, Serbian, Macedonian, Croatian versions, etc.), a curse (Greek version). Yet none of this is enough to change the decision. The builders show some mercy by leaving a gap in the wall so that she can breastfeed her child (always a boy) or look at people. Is this a perverse way of paying tribute to the nurturing role of the *kourotrophos* [she who feeds the boys] (Yalom, 2012, p. 30), or to the all-seeing and gracious eye of the goddess? Or do they succumb to cultural gender prejudices about women's natural predisposition to be used? If we relate the psychological category of affordances (Gibson, 1977; Dotov, 2012) to utilitarian human relationships, we can understand the mechanism and logic of male violence against women. Just as a chair invites a person to sit on it, in the situation described here the woman seems to "invite" being used as a source of food, building material, "connective tissue".

In the depicted world, the crack that provides access to the air prolongs the woman's agony. As she fades away, she laments the fate of her child until she finally falls silent. After her death, the orphaned offspring licks the mother's milk that runs down the wall of the building. Over time, it becomes an easily accessible remedy for lactation-deprived women, and at the same time a testimony to the resurrective presence of the necroperson, who through her gift keeps a living relationship with the outside world (cf. Domańska, 2017, pp. 57–59).

In the folk art analysed here, the worlds of men and women are separate realities. Men perform work that is useful to the community and enjoys social prestige, and their craft is considered to require great competence. They are perceived as chosen ones endowed with exceptional intellect and manual and magical skills who have mastered the secrets of a good beginning and a happy ending to their endeavours (Бонева, 1980, pp. 48–49; Николов, 2008, p. 345). By occupying a dominant position in society, they implement the patriarchal principle of full control (Krzak, 2007, p. 195). Women, on the other hand, take care of the household, the field, and the children, maintaining a relative, individually conditioned autonomy in this sphere. They live in a state of subordination, which they themselves accept as the "natural" state of affairs. They unconsciously cultivate the relics of matriarchy, as the keepers and "priestess-

es" of the hearth (Krzak, 2007). Their womb is home, home is womb, which is spectacularly illustrated by, among others, the famous Neolithic figurine of the Great Mother from the Archaeological Museum in Skopje (Figure 1). I will refer to this artefact later.



Figure 1. Figurine of the Great Mother from the Archaeological Museum in Skopje. Photo by G. Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2023

The authority of fathers and husbands is the norm for them – a source of suffering, but also of possible benefits that make survival easier. The construction crisis, which first affects men, gradually spreads to the entire community. Irritation, fear, and distrust emerge in the previously consolidated male group. As Girard has shown, the emergence of a scapegoat was sometimes an effective way to restore social order in such situations in archaic societies; as a rule, the victim was then placed at the axiological centre of the social order – as a post-mortem figure subjected to sacralisation (Girard, 1987). Did this happen at the "X place" of the ballad as well?

The stone structure erected by the men symbolises the creation of a new order in the depicted world. The material itself is important here:

> In the symbolism of all peoples, stone – durable, heavy, solid, indivisible – has always been a sign of strength, stability and security, and a source of life and fertility. Philo even spoke of stones as "endowed with a soul". In Egypt, it was a symbol of eternity. When a human body decomposed, the image of the person preserved in stone and the engraved name could continue to live. It was believed that stones store heat, cold, water and light (as jewels). (Heflik et al., p. 23)

However, craftsmen build with hewn stone, which changes the nature of this material. In ancient Jewish times, rough stone was considered to be androgynous, while processed stone was considered to be masculine (in the form of a cone) or feminine (in the form of a cuboid) (Kopaliński, 1990, p. 140). In the Old Testament, unlike a precious unworked stone, which was suitable for an altar, a stone that had been worked by human hands was considered defiled, and a broken boulder became a symbol of slavery and darkness, chaos, decay, anarchy, mental breakdown, and death (Kopaliński, 1990, pp. 139–143).

The construction disaster sung about in the song can therefore be interpreted as the result of unfortunate male creationism, which is doomed to failure without the female substrate. Alan Dundes interprets this aspect of the narrative of the walled-up woman from the perspective of psychoanalysis, extracting the symbolism of the crumbling building as a conceptualisation of the trauma of the sterile male "womb" (Dundes, 1996a). In this view, the walling up of a woman means her introduction into an artificial pseudo-womb, ineptly imitating maternal functions, and in fact deadly (Dundes, 1996a, pp. 200–201). According to Dundes, these builders' activities – imitating biological processes, accompanied by their aspirations to impress the world with a "permanent erection" – are underpinned by complexes about women and a sense of powerlessness, which give rise to violence against their bodies (Dundes, 1996a, p. 201).

So, can the mentioned folklore texts be interpreted as an illustration of some distant transitional stage between a still weak patriarchy and an already weak matriarchy, when the former suffers from competence anxiety and a lack of life energy flow, and the latter has lost itself in the service of life?

This interpretation could be supported by the symbolism of stone as the primordial source of femininity[6] (Kopaliński, 1990, p. 139). In many variants of the ballad in question, the woman descends into the underground of the building, where natural ground meets a stone creation of human hands. The protagonist thus finds herself in a cave-like space, situated at the interface of the natural and the cultural world. This is a different place from a prison in a tower or an isolated fortress on an island, where women from the world of fairy tales are stuck high up and doomed to separation. In archaic cultures, the cave in question remained an ambiguous symbol: "the abode of wind and rain, the symbol of the temple; the grave, (the descent into) the underworld; resurrection, […] the illusions of this world, mystery, mother, womb, vulva, sexual love, fertility, birth, the birthplace of gods and heroes, immortality"[7] (Kopaliński, 1990, p. 117). It is a place of mysterious flows, transformations, metamorphoses, and transubstantiations that can be interpreted in many ways (Krzak, 2007, pp. 78–79). We are dealing with this tangle of meanings in the case of artefacts from the

[6] Imagery of stones as the bones of the Great Mother Earth brings to mind associations with the matriarchal era (Krzak, 2007, p. 78).

[7] "The Great Mother of Gods Cybele descends in the spring into a cave to walk out her son and lover Attis from the underworld. Demeter does the same […]" (Kopaliński, 1990, p. 119). (All translations of quotations from Polish by Maja Jaros).

farthest corners of the world. For example, Krzak writes about the megalithic dolmens of the Caucasus, which he interprets as follows:

> These are symbolic representations of the sexual act. Dolmens were constructed at the end of the Neolithic period. In world folklore, they represented the female and femininity. In addition, on the front slabs of these tombs there was a pair of protrusions depicting female breasts. In such a slab, there was also a small hole, the so-called skylight, which was plugged with a tenon, often in the shape of a phallus. (Krzak, 2007, p. 95)

The stone protrusions and skylight symbolising sexual characteristics in dolmens indicate the biological and impersonal attributes of femininity. In the songs of South-Eastern Europe, the face of the walled-up woman, which is a sign of a specific person, is also invisible, obscured by a wall, and the gap that is left only shows the breasts, sometimes the eyes. An interesting coincidence is that in Christian cultures in the Middle Ages (the entire area we are studying formally belonged to this realm until the Ottoman expansion), the gap symbolised the life-giving wound of Christ. Is this similarity enough to allow us to assume that the walled-up girl, the personification of those feminine virtues that patriarchy inherited from matriarchy, could be considered a Christ-like figure? Is the posthumous transformation of her body into a healing liquid a folk paraphrase of the sacrament of the Eucharist? Is it a pauperised, gynocentric response to the new model of humanity offered by Pauline Christianity? Or is it rather a critique of the imagined female affordance that rationalises the misfortune inflicted on her? Does the symbolism evoked in ballads and legends bear witness to the vitality of the matriarchal message (Krzak, 2007, pp. 124–131), invariably accompanied by a sense of the fatalism of women's fate? How come the culture-forming power of this topos has not yet faded away?

* * *

Of course, there is no room here to prove the influence of the topos of the walled-up woman on the work of artists who do not belong to the European region of interest; this would require separate in-depth studies, which might not be unjustified. At the risk of being accused of associative thinking, I would like to use two examples of what I find to be a fascinating convergence of artistic ideas.

In 20th-century art, the feminist response to the above (anachronistic, it would seem) intuitions about the complexity of the female condition could be the paintings and sculptures of the French artist Louise Bourgeois, author of, among others, a series of works titled *Femme maison* [Women's house] (1946–1947) that show naked female figures whose body parts have been mounted in large houses. These buildings take the place of their wombs, which brings to mind the aforementioned clay figurine of the Great Mother. Sometimes a residential block appears in the place of the heart, and sometimes the head (see https://cdn.ca.emap.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2022/03/ar-

chitectural-review-reputations-louise-bourgeois-6.jpgCredit), which is also illustrated by the artist's sculptures, including the famous *Femme maison* from 1994.

Mieke Bal gives a daring interpretation of these paintings and sculptures in her book *Travelling concepts in the humanities* (2002). This researcher, using the method of slow intellectual approximations, revolves around the metaphorical message of the works of Louise Bourgeois, which translate "the melancholia of the trapped woman from the realm of feeling, a sense of lifestyle, to the realms of the senses, of visibility" (Bal, 2002, p. 71). As Bal writes:

> For there are at least two translations, and they are both necessary and incompatible at the same time. One translation moves from feeling, melancholia or frustration, to visibility, through concretisation: the trapped falling into a trap, into a visible, deforming prison; but also, within the language of the title *maîtresse de la maison*, she also becomes *femme-maison* – a literal translation of the English "housewife". Another retranslates what we see into language: the woman whose head gets lost in the house because, in a moment of Bovaresque stupidity, she lost her head, she became a woman without a head. This visual pun is a linguistic pun, but also a metaphoring, a transferring from the realm of "words" and "images" to the domain of historicist linearity. **But the metaphor works only because the literal meaning of the expression "to lose one's head" continues to hold up**. (Bal, 2002, p. 72; emphasis added by G.S.-G.)

The metaphor therefore works in the works of Bourgeois discussed by Bal thanks to a kind of aporia. Without losing its ambiguity, it also does not cease to be a blunt, obvious allegory. This specific fragmentary allegorical nature of the metaphor constitutes a kind of axis around which our tangled thoughts and feelings revolve in a sense of cognitive error when we try to decipher the message of an artistic work that is unclear to us. In her search for the right words to describe this state, Bal uses the category of "unthought knowledge" coined by the British psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas, which "refers to what we have a sense of, but around which a radical thought can only circulate, but not assign an individual meaning to" (Bal, 2002, p. 92), and which consists of a kind of suspension between active rationality and affectivity, with barely audible and secularised, but still understandable reverberations of ancient metaphysics. Thus, in searching for the meaning of the ambiguity we sense, we recognise in this metaphor-image our present as the one the image was about (Bal, 2002, p. 91). In this illumination, the female fate reveals its ambiguous (including self-destructive) conditions.

In her book *Błony umysłu* [Membranes of the mind], Jolanta Brach-Czaina (2022) refers to the sexist work of the German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948), which seems to highlight another aspect of this female fate. Between 1920 and 1936, in his house in Hanover, he constructed the "MERZbau", a work that was destroyed during the Allied air raids in 1943 (see *Der MERZbau von Kurt Schwitters*, n.d.). It was a colossal collage-based project in which the artist constructed geometric solids (assemblages) and filled them with seemingly random objects, claiming that his constructions contained everything that was

meaningful to him. Although he was a pacifist and deliberately used artistic provocation, today's audience, using mediated descriptions of his works, is confronted with artistic concepts not devoid of violence:

> Kurt Schwitters built a hidden space in his house in Hanover. Over the years, he constructed a mysterious architectural structure out of pieces of iron, wood, and plaster. It was a kind of large labyrinth that extended over several storeys of the house. The compulsion to erect a complex internal structure obsessively accompanied Schwitters for many years. He called the structure the Cathedral of Erotic Sculpture or the Merz Column. The erotic sculpture hidden in this cathedral was a broken cast of a woman's body smeared with red lipstick. The artist showed this part of the structure only to those in the know. In this way, he presented to his friends the serious task of building the hidden interior, which he had been working on for years, as a carnival joke steeped in an erotic and sadistic atmosphere. (Brach-Czaina, 2022, p. 133)

It is difficult to say whether this surprising treasure hidden in the depths of the labyrinth – a strange figurine depicting a defragmented, tacky-looking female body trapped in an elaborate architectural structure – is simply the object of a perverse erotic game or rather a symbol of the cult of the fragile and easily destructible. Walter Benjamin's concept of the post-auratic world may shed some light on this problem. For researchers of his philosophy, the concept of aura is most often identified with the way a work of art exists. We read that "the aura, derived from the non-autonomous existence of art, remaining at the service of worship or ritual, is understood as a factor determining the authenticity and originality of the work" (Frydryczak, 2002). The concept of aura (associated with the mystical aura of a work) is accompanied by Benjamin's antithetical concept of the trace; the German philosopher defines their relationship as follows: "Trace and aura. The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us." (Benjamin, 2005, p. 493)

As Frydryczak notes:

> The dialectical tension that arises between the two terms takes on additional meaning when we consider that in the conditions of the post-auratic world, the search for traces takes the place of the lost (auratic) experience. It can therefore be assumed that the post-auratic world requires one particular activity: the search for and discovery of "traces" in order to preserve them, and thus to regain the aura, even if in a residual or "trace" form. (Frydryczak, 2002, p. 32)

Does the topos of the walled-up woman remain a trace of the ancient auratic experience, which – although deformed – has not been lost and retains its power to organise human affairs according to some enslaving pattern that makes women (as in Szymborska's poem) powerless strongwomen? I am aware that Benjamin's concepts can only be used metaphorically here, but they seem

functional in our attempts to approximate the specificity of the cognitive dissonance experienced by researchers (ourselves and our predecessors), which results from the tension between the topos's "aura", which is unattainable for us, and the visible cultural "trace" of the walling up of women, bearing attributes of ancient sacredness and thus forgotten "collective wisdom". Is this why it is still the subject of interest for writers and artists? Are the achievements of 19th and 20th century artists reminiscent of the "*Étuis*, covers and cases that enveloped the equipment in the bourgeois house of the last century", which, as Benjamin writes, "were also tools for capturing and storing traces" (Benjamin, 2005, p. 256). Why does this topos disturb, irritate, amuse, and arouse feelings of shame and pride in some people? Our approach is perfectly illustrated by the words of Andrzej Zawadzki:

> The clash between philosophical concepts of traceability with its literary approaches shows that a trace can be considered either as a "condensed presence" – which, paradoxically, becomes more fully and intensely present precisely through remoteness, distance, and concealment – or as a form of its unconcealment, to refer to Heidegger's discourse. This is not only a "specialised" philosophical experience, but also a common existential experience in which the traces left by a deceased loved one give the impression of a particularly "strong" presence. One can also consider the trace as an "empty" presence, a product of difference that inevitably erases and blurs any form of presence that is only a "side effect" of the trace. These two dimensions and their dynamic coexistence, attested to in both contemporary philosophy and modern literature, determine, I believe, the attractiveness of the concept of trace. (Zawadzki, 2014, p. 213)

We do not know the "auratic" meaning of the topos of the walling up of women, but the reality evoked in reference to it in visual works or created by words does not become any less real (Steiner, 2023, pp. 101–169). Let us therefore take a look at these evocations.

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Rigels Halili

Albania and the Albanians Outside Its Borders. A Living Wall[1]

To Begin With, the Fortress

There is basically only one way to get to the Shkodër fortress[2]. When you leave today's centre of Shkodër, the city becomes less dense after passing the Xhabiaj district, transforming into a chaotic suburb. This impression is reinforced by several abandoned buildings and warehouses standing in a row on one side of the road. The former district of Pazari i Vjetër [Old Bazaar] fell into disrepair after World War II. However, plans are already in place for its thorough revitalisation, which will include the construction of a yacht marina on the other side of the road, on the shores of Lake Scutari. It is here that Rruga e Qafës turns off to the left from the main road. It first winds its way uphill, leading to the Qafë [Pass] district, and then descends the other side of the hill, leading to two small districts: Ajasem and Tepe. On both sides of Rruga e Qafës, the road is lined with small houses surrounded by yards and fences, mostly made of dry-stone walls built from stones taken from the nearby hill. Well-kept vegetable gardens, grapevines, numerous fruit trees, domestic animals (mainly chickens, but also sheep in one yard), wooden barns, sounds and smells – all this gives the impression of being not so much on the city's outskirts, but in the countryside. Yet it was here that modern Shkodër was born.

Rruga e Qafës peaks at the saddle point of the pass, between the majestic hill to the southwest, on which the fortress stands, and the much smaller hill to the northeast, covered with stones and bushes. A small stone bridge over a now-defunct stream remains in this place, and from it begins the winding Rruga e Kalasë, which you could poetically translate as "Road to the Fortress".

[1] I would like to thank Monika Sikorska for her invaluable help in editing this piece.

[2] These preliminary anthropological and historical remarks were made based on observations during field research conducted in September 2022, together with Dr. Marzena Maciulewicz, whom I hereby sincerely thank.

After the Ottomans conquered the Shkodër fortress in 1479[3], the first buildings began to appear on this slope, giving rise to a town. This is evidenced by the censuses conducted at the end of the 15th century. The town's flourishing on this part of the hill during the Ottoman period is illustrated by the Xhamia e Plumbit [The Lead Mosque][4], built in 1773–1774, which owes its name to its roof being covered with lead sheets. Although this process began earlier, with the settlement of highlanders descending from the surrounding mountains in the north of Lake Scutari, it was not until the mid-19th century that the town finally moved to its present location. This was due to a change in the course of the Drin River in 1858, which until then had flowed much farther south, resulting in recurring cyclical floods and the relocation of the entire Ottoman administration from the fortress to new buildings in the city in 1865 (see Figure 1 and 2).

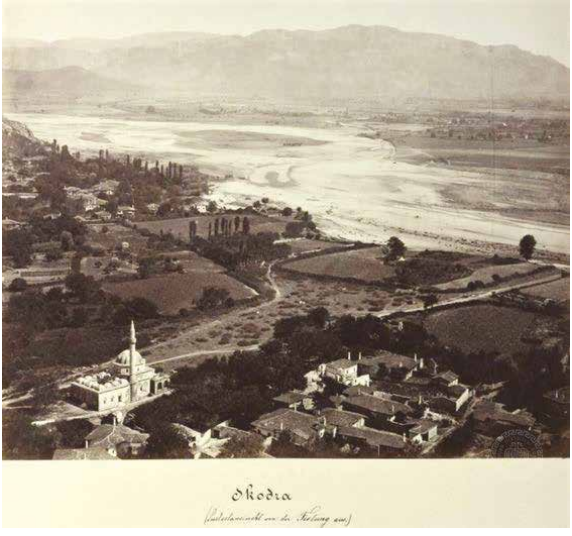


Figure 1. View from the fortress of the former Shkodër with Xhamia e Plumbit (in the lower left corner) in a photograph by Josef Székely from 1863.
Source: http://www.albanianphotography.net/szekely/szekely_files/vlb_images1/vues_iv41059.jpg, retrieved August 9, 2026

[3] It can be assumed that the street was built during the Ottoman period as its name contains the word kala, which is borrowed from the Ottoman kale (قلعه), which in turn is borrowed from the Arabic qalʕa (قلعة) and Persian qal'e (قلعه), meaning a fortress, castle, or hill.

[4] The Lead Mosque is undoubtedly one of the most important monuments of Islamic culture and art in Albania. Until 1995, it was the largest city mosque in the country. Currently located on the outskirts, the monument is threatened by the nearby Drin River. Its waters are already washing away the foundations, and in recent years the mosque has been flooded almost halfway several times. Extensive conservation work has been undertaken and have improved the situation.



Figure 2a. Xhamia e Plumbit before the renovation (note the absence of the minaret, which was destroyed by lightning in 1967).
Photo by Rigels Halili, 2022



Figure 2b. Xhamia e Plumbit after renovation.
Photo by Rigels Halili, 2026

Winding sharply, Rruga e Kalasë rises from about 10 to 130 metres above sea level, making the climb to the fortress quite a feat. In 1936, the municipal authorities covered the road with gravel, and stone paving was laid and railings were added after World War II. A few years ago, the road was renovated, and a parking lot for small cars was built near the fortress walls. However, buses and vans must park at the foot of the hill, at the beginning of Rruga e Qafës. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for the care and supervision of the nearly

nine-hectare fortress area. However, the Rozafa Fortress Museum, located in the so-called Kapiteneria, in the third and highest courtyard, is a branch of the Historical Museum in Shkodër and was established as a municipal institution. Therefore, visitors need two tickets, and a short conversation with the sellers is enough to see how unnatural this division is and what jurisdictional animosities it leads to. As you climb, you pass several stands selling souvenirs. Most of them are plastic and metal badges made in China with the inscription "Shkodra" or with the outlines of the fortress, as well as ceramic plates made in Turkey. However, alongside these dust-gatherers, some handicrafts generally refer to the aesthetics and symbolism of Albanian folk culture, as is evident in the prevalence of black and red. This is the first place where visitors encounter an image of a young woman breastfeeding a child, accompanied by the inscription "Rozafa" underneath (Figure 3). When confronted with the image of a walled-up woman, they rarely notice that this souvenir also bears the inscription "Made in China".



Figure 3. Souvenir featuring Rozafa.
Source: Souvenir Shop Avenue. (2019, July 31). #rozafati #legjendaerozafes Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2606976342666233&id=1526031387427406&set=a.1529090477121497, retrieved August 9, 2026

As there is no sign informing visitors of the name of the street, they are unaware that as soon as they pass through the first gate of the fortress, they are walking on a cobbled path called Rruga Rozafa [Rozafa Street]. Further on, I will discuss several issues related to this name, so at this point I will only mention its presence at the entrance to the fortress. Albanian ethnographer

Hamdi Bushati, the author of a monumental work on Shkodër, points out that above the gate there are the remains of a relief, most likely of St. Mark's lion, testifying to Venetian rule over the city and the entire region in the years 1396–1479 (Bushati, 2015, p. 162). Just behind the gate, on the north side, there are several cannon emplacements, most likely built during the reign of the Bushati family (also known by the Turkish name Bushatlli) in the Shkodër pashalik between 1753 and 1831. These large Ottoman cannons, like nearly all the property located within the fortress, were taken by the Montenegrin army in 1913, when – forced by the great powers to leave Shkodër, which they had occupied for a few months – they withdrew from the city, having previously burned down the Shkodër bazaar (Bushati, 2015, p. 162). This was the last battle in a long rivalry between the Montenegrins and Albanians for the city. Incidentally, one of the most prominent members of the Bushati family, Kara Mahmud Pasha, was killed during the Battle of Krusy on 22 September 1796, which his army lost while attempting to subjugate the Bjelopavlici and Piperi tribes and open the way to conquer Cetinje.

Hardly anyone notices the lily symbol in the frame above the second gate (Figure 4). Bushati mentions it as a painted flower but does not dwell on its meaning. It is clearly a fleur-de-lis, and considering that this part of the fortress, i.e., the barbican, was expanded by the Venetians (mainly between 1407 and 1414, although the work was completed in 1468), this symbol can be considered a reference to the Venetian cross or the Venetian lily. For the Venetians, it symbolised loyalty, power, and wisdom. Despite the similarity, it is undoubtedly not the fleur-de-lis that appears on the coat of arms of Charles I of Anjou, King of Sicily (1265–1285) and proclaimed King of Albania (1272–1274). Nor is it the fleur-de-lis found in the coat of arms referring to the Anjou heritage of the Albanian aristocratic Topia family (from 1329), which cannot be linked to Shkodër as they never ruled the city. However, visitors and their guides are not very interested in these historical curiosities. They quickly move towards the second gate and the gallery that begins just behind it, stopping at the first recess on the left. It is difficult to determine its original function clearly. It certainly did not serve as a guard post, as its height at the highest point does not exceed 120 cm, and its depth is 70 cm. Moreover, on the other side of the gallery, there are three more similar recesses in the outer wall.

It can be assumed that the recesses were used to collect water dripping from higher decks, as evidenced by traces of streams at the height of all walls and a row of holes in them (Figure 5). This could have been a system for collecting rainwater, which was extremely valuable in the case of the Shkodër fortress, as it lacked wells. However, it is difficult to say for sure. The entire gallery must have once been painted white, probably with slaked lime, which has since faded. Yet slightly whiter streaks running from the ceiling through the plastered wall of the recess to the cobbled path are immediately noticeable. It is also impossible not to notice the traces of paraffin on the smooth mortar base of the recess, meaning that candles have been burning there for a long time.



Figure 4. *Fleur-de-lis* over the second gate to the Shkodër fortress.
Photo by Rigels Halili, 2022

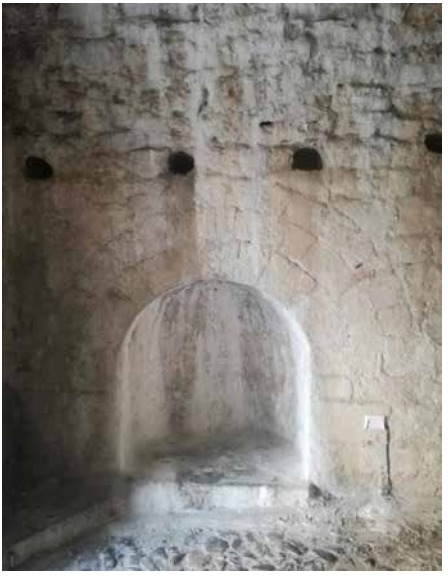


Figure 5. Recess behind the second gate of the Shkodër fortress.
Photo by Rigels Halili, 2022

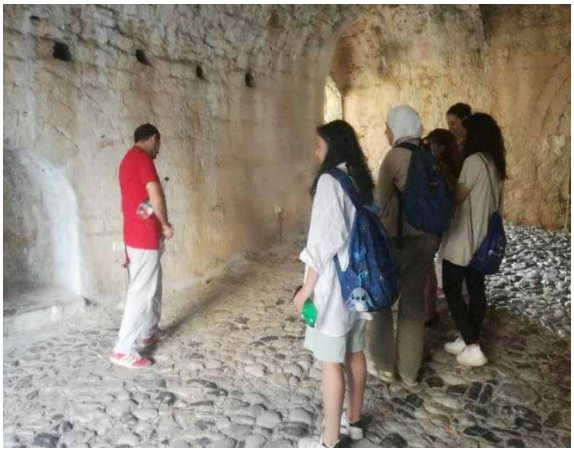


Figure 6. A group listening to the story about the walling up.
Photo by Rigels Halili, 2022

Not every visitor stops in front of the recess, but organised groups with a guide almost always do. For them, it is the first stop on the tour of the fortress, and this is undoubtedly a conscious choice on the part of the guides. Usually, the guide stops right next to the recess, allows the group to take a break after the climb and to arrange themselves in a semicircle, and then begins to tell the story (Figure 6). For those in the group who know the song from school readings, this is just a refresher. Those less familiar with the story are told the course of events described in it. So, the guides start by mentioning the three builder brothers and their three-year struggle to build the walls. Then the guide quotes their oath, digressing to explain what *besa* meant in ancient Albanian culture[5], and finally focuses the audience's attention on the last request of the young mother and wife of the third brother just before she is walled up. The story's climax is not the sacrifice of the young woman but what happened afterwards, which is contained in the last verses of several song variants: a spring appeared

[5] *Besa* was one of the most important mechanisms regulating social life among Albanians, and to this day it is still treated with respect and an aura of importance. It could be the domain of an individual, a family, a clan, a village, an entire region, or even an association of clans. It is often emphasised that it was a key element in cases of murder and subsequent clan revenge; however, in reality it was an institution regulating many dimensions of social life. It was a combination of a spoken word, an oath, a ritual, and an appeal to God, the Bible, or the Qur'an, though it did not always involve a religious appeal and an honourable commitment by an individual or social group. This concept is most often translated as "given word", sometimes as "oath", and sometimes as "swearing by God" or "swearing on God". Unfortunately, none of these fully captures the essence of this social practice, which has been institutionalised by custom. For this reason, I have decided to keep the word in its original form and thus use terms such as to make/enter into/keep or break a *besa*.

at the place of burial, from which tears flowed like white milk from the buried woman. It was believed, and many still believe, that this liquid has life-giving and healing powers. It is at this recess that white water constantly drips down the wall, which people then collect. Often, in a gesture of supplication, they burn candles there, the remains of which are visible to the naked eye. Thus, the guide performs a kind of show in which the old song about the walling up is reduced to a tourist curiosity.

This peculiar spectacle, repeated almost ritually with each group of visitors, is a clear testimony to the process by which cultural heritage becomes an attractive product for mass tourism. Travel, which until recently was the domain of only a select few and was undertaken primarily for educational reasons or as an essential tool of cultural initiation, is now viewed in terms of trips, getaways or escapes, the purpose of which is pleasure. To use Thorstein Veblen's classic category, this mass filling of leisure time is often accompanied by the commodification of culture and exoticisation. Objects, cultural goods, and spiritual experiences can not only be explored and studied, but also acquired, bought, sold, or collected. Reducing the song about the walling up, i.e., the legend of the fortress's creation, to the sight of a few trickles of water in a recess in a wall is nothing more than an example of such commodification combined with exoticisation. Thus, the song becomes enjoyable, and its message is communicated in a clear and accessible way. What is missing here is reflection on the tragic fate of the young woman, and on the legitimacy of her sacrifice. More significant is looking at the recess, and even more important is taking photos against its backdrop, an action which Susan Sontag long ago described as "a social ritual, a protection against fear and a tool of power"[6] (Sontag, 2009, p. 15).

However, many people in Shkodër are critical of these practices. When asked about the recess and its use in the tourism industry, the curator of the Rozafa Fortress Museum spoke quite categorically. For the fortress staff, dealing with the regular appearance of candles, especially during the holiday season at the end of the calendar year, is a real hassle. For the curator, a professional historian and archivist, turning the recess into a place for magical rituals distorts the historical significance of a monument as important as the Shkodër fortress. The rich history and significance of this place, the key role it played in the history of the city, the country, and the region, boils down to a legend about walling up and a recess in the wall. Teaching and historical education have thus been replaced by a simple story and "ritual superstitions and tourist fantasies". This distorts the history and image of the fortress, "and culture becomes trivialised". Yes, the curator recognises the song as an essential element of the culture of this place, but "legend cannot replace history, because it has little to do with it" (N. Mlika, personal communication, September, 2022).

[6] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Agnieszka Piskozub-Piwosz either from the Polish translation by Rigels Halili or directly from the original Polish text.

Should the fusion of songs about walling up, magical practices and mass tourism be so unequivocally condemned? The phenomenon is certainly worth exploring. The curator's statement, clearly made from an educator's perspective, is also part of the cultural mosaic of social attitudes and practices. As he pointed out, his opinion is based solely on educational motives and is driven by concern for the city's common good and cultural development. Its scope, however, is limited to a social diagnosis; it will not change reality or make people stop lighting candles in the recess.

Anyway, these are not the only magical practices taking place in or near the fortress. The curator expressed similar disapproval of another custom, namely tying knots made of strips or threads of white fabric, usually cotton, on the branches of trees on the slope where Rruga e Kalasë, the road leading to the fortress gate, winds. While collecting water in the recess and burning candles is supposed to help women get pregnant, tying a knot on a tree is supposed to bring good luck in marriage and household matters. The aforementioned Hamdi Bushati wrote about the old custom of tying white threads on the metal spans of the fence around the tomb of Kaja Hanem. Although there is no certainty about this, Bushati hypothesises, based on indirect evidence, that Kaja Hanem was the mother of Mustafa Pasha Bushatli, the last of the Bushatli dynasty to rule the Shkodër pashalik. Carved from white marble and surrounded by a metal fence shaped like a house, the tomb was located near the fortress gate on the right side of Rruga e Kalasë. It was destroyed in 1967 during the communist authorities' campaign against all manifestations of religion. Reconstruction took place after the fall of communism, although its craftsmanship differs significantly from the original. Bushati also translated the inscription on the tomb, according to which Gjyslim Kaja Hanem died in 1828 (Bushati, 2015, p. 161)[7].

The purpose and intentions of practitioners of both rituals are clear: they are supplications. Furthermore, it is significant that the threads tied to the fence of Kaja Hanem's grave in the past and those appearing on trees today are white. This colour symbolises innocence and purity, so its presence in these rituals seems obvious when we consider that the requests are made by young women (or on their behalf) who want to become mothers. However, it can be assumed that they refer to the white milk of the walled-up woman, as does the colour of the recess and even the colour of the candles. The rituals are performed for women who want to have children and ensure the well-being of the family – three characteristics that are personified in the mother figure. It is therefore not surprising that the supplications are addressed to both the walled-up woman and Kaja Hanem. Both were mothers. Therefore, within the framework of these

[7] Just around the last bend, where the road leads straight to the fortress gate, the ruins of the tomb (a so-called *turbe* or *tyrbe* in Albanian) of Mujo Baba has also survived to this day. Mujo Baba was a dervish renowned for his piety and the miraculous healing of people. He gathered stones for his *turbe* himself, which after his death became a place of pilgrimage. According to Bushati, the tomb was destroyed in 1914 by Italian soldiers encouraged to do so by several Shkodran (but non-Muslim) thugs.

rituals and practices, they both become patronesses of the renewal of life, figures of symbolic help where all other earthly means have failed. However, their role is not limited to guaranteeing the rituals' effectiveness. These practices can also be interpreted as an expression of appreciation and trust towards these two patron mothers. They are both a supplication, supported by faith in its effectiveness, and an expression of gratitude and testimony to the high position of these two women in the local sacred landscape.

Shkodër is home to representatives of all religious denominations in Albania. Still, it is impossible to say conclusively whether the religious affiliation of practitioners influences the use of the rituals and practices discussed here. Field research suggests a different dividing line between those who practise them and those who reject them. This is determined by social status, level of education, and age. There is no doubt, however, that they are practised primarily by older women, which seems understandable given their focus on the link between fertility and family well-being.

There is a parallel with another magical activity commonly encountered in Albania and throughout the Balkans that can also be classified as a supplication. This is the so-called *kurban*, or animal sacrifice, usually of a rooster or a ram, whose blood is poured over the foundations of a house to be built, and whose meat is consumed during a communal feast. Although the custom is occasionally condemned by clergy or other secular figures, and modern house-building techniques have little in common with the old ways, many people, regardless of their religion, still hold this ceremony. However, its framework is not rigid or sanctioned; it is more of a loose celebration based on the principle that this is how it was done in the past, so it must be done this way today. However, the presence of animal blood is necessary.

Researchers argue that in the case of this ceremony, the social aspect outweighs the magical element. Rather than protecting the future of the house from unknown and potentially harmful forces, it is more about demonstrating the seriousness of one's intentions and, not insignificantly, appeasing the builders (Sikimić & Hristov, 2007). This is undoubtedly a significant shift in meaning. However, it does not imply the disappearance of thought processes and behaviours that link the sphere of building with the realm of supernatural forces. Otherwise, the act of *kurban* would lose its social significance. Indeed, it undergoes changes and manifests itself, for example, in the form of a ram's horns attached to the gate of a house, or it takes the form of a teddy bear stuck on the iron bars or concrete columns of a house under construction. The durability of this practice clearly proves the immutability of the belief in the necessity of protecting the household.

Apparently, the same applies to the practices and rituals performed in and around the fortress of Shkodër. This echoes the covenant established by the ancient act of walling up. The ritual of kurban is also a legacy of this covenant, except that an animal has replaced a human being. The walling up of a woman in the foundations of the fortress established a covenant between two worlds:

the one here, being built and permanent, and the hidden one, full of threatening forces and supernatural powers. The belief in this covenant continues unabated, as supplications are addressed to the woman walled up in the foundation. The belief in her miraculous power persists. Moreover, although subjected to various cultural transpositions and reconfigurations of meaning, the song reminds us of this covenant.

The intertwining of songs, legends, and related social practices is part of another long-standing process, namely the shaping of social memory around the Shkodër fortress. Of course, this happens primarily at the local level, as it is a key element of the memory landscape of Shkodër itself. However, it is quite easy to see the prominent place that the fortress and the city occupy in the context of Albanian culture. Using the now classic typology, the Shkodra fortress is undoubtedly one of the most famous carriers of historical memory in Albania (cf. Kula, 2002, pp. 7–32). In this context, it can be studied as a semiofor, i.e., as Krzysztof Pomian once suggested: using both a pragmatic and a semiotic approach. In other words, as an organically durable concrete object created by historical processes, and as a cultural entity embodying and materialising meanings and representations (Pomian, 1995). One of the integral components of this cultural constellation is the legend of the fortress's construction – the song about walling up.

For this reason, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the inhabitants of Shkodra (and not only them) associate the recess in the wall with this legend, regardless of whether they are tourists, for whom it is just a curiosity, or people who – believing in the miraculous power of this place – light candles. This is a culturally important place, as it combines song, legend, and material objects, which many consider to be a kind of material evidence in the matter. For this reason, it seems right to start our exploration of the topos of walling up in Albanian culture exactly here.

The History of Song Collection: From Oral Tradition to Literacy

Since the mid-20th century, when the problem of genre classification of folklore became one of the most important issues in Albanian folklore studies[8],

[8] Distancing myself firmly from any essentialism so often encountered in academic discourse, in this study the adjective "Albanian" should be understood as a reference to the cultural area in which the Albanian language plays a dominant role. Therefore, when I add the term "Albanian" to songs, legends, or ballads, it means works created, performed, or narrated in oral tradition in the Albanian language. The transcription and recording of these texts is a process of incorporating these works of oral culture into the written tradition defined in terms of Albanianness, i.e., belonging to Albanians as an ethnic group or nation.

songs about walling up have been classified as ballads (Haxhihasani, 1982). The reason lies not in their performative form – combining song and dance – but in strictly literary factors, belonging entirely to the realm of literature. Of the songs I have come across, all the recordings dating from the second half of the 20th century contain a cappella singing in a similar key to laments. However, Ismail Doda, an Albanian folklore researcher from the town of Ulcinj (Albanian: Ulqin) in Montenegro, cites very interesting data about the singing of the song *I ra mjegulla Buenas*[9] [Fog enveloped the Buna River] in a dance that was performed until the 1970s in the Šestani region (Albanian: Shestan), inhabited mainly by Albanians, as well as in the vicinity of the cities of Bar (Albanian: Tivar) and Ulcinj. The person leading the dance would start singing a song, and then others would join in, forming a circle that spun quickly. In the past, only men performed the dance, but in the second half of the 20th century, mixed groups (half of the participants were men, and the other half women) began to dance and sing together. Doda points out that this dance song, with multiple voices, was fast, which meant that it was performed in an incomplete manner (Albanian: shkurta-shkurt). However, during recitation, the singers recited complete verses (Doda, 2013, p. 512). Albanian folklorist Ramazan Sokoli also cites data that in the Kolonjë region in south-eastern Albania, the song about walling up was sung by women while dancing (Sokoli, 1965, as cited in Doda, 2013). However, during my field research in this region, I could not confirm whether this is still the case today. Indeed, other songs considered ballads have been performed in this way. One example is the song about Ymer Ago, a husband who returns from prison just before his wife remarries. Another example is the song about Kostandini and Dhoqina/Doruntina, which concerns a deceased brother who, to keep his word to his mother, rises from the dead and leads his married sister from afar to her family home. This tradition is still alive among the Arbëreshë[10], i.e., the Albanian diaspora in southern Italy. Until recently, people sang and danced this way in southern Albania, mainly in the Labëria region[11] and the Dropull Valley, inhabited by Greeks. It is polyphonic singing, called *me iso* in Albanian, and is performed by men, women, or mixed groups. Such singing recalls Plato's definition of choreia, i.e., ensuring "the harmony of body movement and voice movement as a reflection of the movements of the soul" (Zwolski, 1978, p. 11)[12].

[9] *Buenas* is a dialect word referring to the river Buna.

[10] They are mainly descendants of two large waves of refugees, as well as several smaller ones, who left the areas of present-day Albania and the Peloponnese during the Ottoman conquest in the 15th and 16th centuries and moved to the Kingdom of Naples, settling mainly in villages in Calabria, Basilicata, and Sicily (Nasse, 1964).

[11] For instance, a male group from the village of Vranisht (Vlora district) performed the song *Prapa më vjen historia* [History Follows Me] in this manner. See Grupi i Vranishtit (2012).

[12] It is fascinating that singers such as Nazif Çela and the prematurely deceased Hyso Xhaferraj, with whom I spoke, described the polyphonic southern Albanian *choreia* in

As Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord showed in their research, under conditions of complete or dominant orality, a song is created each time it is performed (Lord, 2010). This, in fact, was the basic context of the social functioning of songs (Foley, 1995). First, writing down a song and then recording it using various audiovisual devices preserves the moment, making it the beginning of the song's functioning within a new medium. Literacy transforms a song into a written text, which is then reproduced and multiplied in this form and within this framework. Thus, the unique cultural act that was the one-time performance of a song began to function in completely new cultural and social conditions, becoming a repeatable element. The same thing happened with the song about the walling up.

There is no direct evidence of the song about the walling up being performed earlier than the period when its lyrics began to be written down. The first indirect evidence of its existence comes from the words of Marin Barleti (Albanian: Marin Barleci, Latin: Marinus Barletius, Italian: Marino Barlezio, 1460–1512?), a priest from Shkodër, who, in his book published in 1504 about the siege and capture of Shkodër by the Ottoman army in 1479, mentions that he had in his possession some notes, "more fragments than actual chronicles", which "spoke more about the repairs of the city by our great-grandfathers than about its foundation". There, Barleti continued, "it was recorded in the vernacular that a certain Roza and her sister Fa were the first founders of Shkodra, and for this reason the fortress is called Rozafa. They ruled the city honestly, honourably, and peacefully for a long time" (Barleti, 1504/1982, p. 38). Later, as the Albanian humanist adds, the city was ruled by a certain Nemanjani, "whose rule – being in recent history – is still remembered by people. Nemanjani ruled over Epirus, Macedonia, Dalmatia, the two Moesias, and all of Rumelia" (Barleti, 1504/1982, p. 38). Next, this ruler's blind son Urosz ruled, then his son Stefan, and then another Urosz, who had no descendants. At that point, the magnates divided the land among themselves (Barleti, 1504/1982, p. 38)[13].

This testimony becomes significant when compared with the account of Louis Hyacinthe Hecquard (1814–1866) – a traveller, explorer and, from 1854, French consul in Shkodër. In his book about what is now northern Albania, then known as Upper Albania, Hecquard quotes a song sung by the local community about the construction of the Shkodër fortress by the region's administrator, Roza. Roza decided to build a fortress on a hill opposite Mount Tarabosh to protect the city, but what was built during the day collapsed at night. Faced with failure, Roza decided to abandon the construction, but an old man known for his wisdom told him that the building could survive if a sacrifice was made. Meanwhile, Roza's sister, Fa, arrived at the construction site to see how the work

almost the exact words. A prominent advocate and practitioner of this subgenre was Arap Çeloleskaj, one of the leading singers in the whole of Labëria and founder of a band from the village of Vranisht.

[13] Barleti recalls the successive reigns of the Nemanich dynasty over Shkodër, although historically this description is inaccurate.

was progressing and to cheer up the builders. They decided to wall her up alive, and she begged them to leave a small crack in the wall so that she could feed her son. A spring gushed at this spot, which is still visible today (Hecquard, 1858, pp. 17–18). Unlike in Barleti's version, Roza is a man in this version; however, it is significant that the names Roza and Fa appear in the two accounts, 350 years apart. Another important difference is that Barleti writes about recorded fragments of the legend of the fortress's founding, while Hecquard clearly states that he is quoting a folk song from Shkodër.

The same legend, albeit with one small but significant difference, is also recounted by Lovro Mihačević (1856–1920) in his book *Po Albaniji. Dojmovi s puta* [Through Albania. Journey Impressions], published by Matica hrvatska in 1911. The biography and works of this Franciscan priest, teacher, manager of educational institutions, scholar, and also the first provincial of the renewed Franciscan Province in Albania in 1906–1912, have not yet been thoroughly analysed. Mihačević spoke Albanian fluently, knew northern Albania very well, and, as a provincial, he also became familiar with the southern and eastern regions. It is therefore not surprising that his book is much more interesting than the typical travel accounts of Albania, which were numerous at the time. Describing Shkodër, the Franciscan also recounts the legend of the fortress city's construction by Roza and Fa. However, unlike in Hecquard's version, in the one recounted by Mihačević, Fa volunteers to be walled up, having heard about the advice given to Roza by the old man. She only asks that a hole be left in the wall through which she could feed her small child as long as she is alive. As the Franciscan points out, there is a place in the fortress wall where white lines bear witness to this event. He concludes: "Thus, the motif celebrated in our folk song *The Building of Skadar* about the founding of this city has survived to this day also among the Albanians" (Mihačević, 1911, pp. 66–67).

Several conclusions can be drawn from these testimonies. Indeed, the fact that someone wrote down in vernacular an old legend about the founding of the city deserves attention. However, Barleti does not specify which vernacular it was. The ethnic composition of medieval Shkodër underwent constant change. It can be assumed that under the rule of the Dukas and Nemanjić dynasties, Serbian was the dominant language there. When the Venetians took control of the city for the first time in 1396, the Venetian language may have come to the fore with the arrival of people from Dalmatia. The Statuti di Scutari [Statutes of Shkodër] were written in this language, most likely at the beginning of the 14th century. This document mentions the presence of Albanians and Slavs, but it was only because of the plague (i.e., the Black Death), which decimated the city's population at the time, that they moved en masse to Shkodër, once again changing its ethnic composition. The legend could have been written in any of these languages. However, there is no doubt that the presence of the same names – Roza and Fa – proves the existence of a lasting tradition of singing songs about walling up.

The echoes of this tradition are still felt and visible today. Proof of this is the version sung by the outstanding Shkodër singer Bik Ndoja (born Ludovik Ndoj Gjergji, 1925–2015). The song belongs to the so-called *jare*, a genre of urban songs typical of Shkodër, far removed from ballads and the cheerful songs often sung at Shkodër weddings. Admittedly, it is only a fragment of the song, as Ndoja sings only two stanzas – the first about three builder brothers, and the second about an old man who advises them to perform the walling up. However, it is precisely this understatement and the suspension of the continuation of events, which are well known, as well as Ndoja's voice, filled with melancholy and lyricism, that make this performance unparalleled[14].

It seems important to note that neither songs with this motif nor the practice of walling up have been recorded among the Albanian diaspora in southern Italy. However, other customs, ceremonies and rituals related to the world of magic do exist there (Quave & Pieroni, 2005). This fact was noticed long ago and has given rise to various interpretations. For many scholars, this is nothing unusual. At most, it proves that songs about walling up must have functioned locally for a long time, in close connection with the Shkodër fortress. On this basis, however, Panajot Barka, professor of literature at the Eqrem Çabej University in Gjirokastër and one of the leading intellectuals of the Greek minority in Albania, put forward an intriguing hypothesis. He saw the absence of this song motif among the Arbëreshë as proof that it was not sung by their ancestors after they left what is now Albania. In his opinion, the motif of walling up in the bridge spans came first, and the walling up in the fortress came later. In other words, the song about the bridge construction in Arta would be older than the song about the construction of the fortress in Shkodër. Barka found evidence to support this hypothesis in the history of the regions of Epirus and Toskëria, in the metaphorical interpretation of the thread of Moira as a cosmological bridge, and in the presence of 139 stone bridges of various sizes in this area (Barka & Boboli, 2013). Regarding the first argument, Barka refers to Greek geographical nomenclature, which associates the first region with Greece and the second with Albania. Epirus is not only a province located in the north-west of Greece, but also an area north of the Greek-Albanian border, including the so-called Northern Epirus, which, according to this interpretation, is predominantly populated by Greeks. Toskëria, on the other hand, is an Albanian region – even further north, up to the Shkumbin River – mainly inhabited by Albanians. However, due to the presence of Orthodox Christianity, strong Greek influences

[14] The song has been recorded several times. The first recording took place in the 1970s in Tirana and can be found on the album *Albanian Popular Songs. vol 2*. (see OfficialShkoderzemer, 2011). A slightly different recording was made at the Radio and Television studio in Prishtina in September 1980, during a concert tour of Kosovo by the Shkodra Folk Orchestra conducted by the outstanding violinist Luan Borova (LULZIM PREVALLA, 2020). This was the peak of cultural cooperation between Albania and Kosovo, initiated by political changes in Yugoslavia in 1966 and ended after the suppression of student demonstrations in the spring of 1981.

are also felt here. Barka does not state this explicitly, but it can be clearly felt in the subtext of his argument. With subtle nuances, he refers to old and new discussions about the course of the border between Greece and Albania, clearly implying that the geographical border differs from the cultural border.

After all, there is no shortage of supporters of this idea today, on both the Greek and Albanian sides. According to Barka, the ancient thread of Moira and the strong presence of stone bridges only confirm that it was in this area that the motif of the song about walling up must have originated, and from there it spread to other areas. Taking this position, he embarks on a discussion with Albanian folklorists, among whom the issue of the autochthonous nature of this song and other works of folk culture was dominant in the second half of the 20th century. This clearly shows that, apart from mythological, anthropological, folkloristic, and literary aspects, discussions about the motif of walling up are also a political issue – one which I will return to later. However, to conclude this digression, it is worth noting that Barka's hypothesis can be refuted with a simple argument. Songs with the motif of walling up are also absent among Greek communities living in southern Italy, mainly in the province of Salento. These are the descendants of both former settlements and refugees who left the areas of present-day northern Greece at the same time as their Albanian neighbours, during the advance of Ottoman rule in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Almost all known Albanian variants of songs about walling up were transcribed or recorded in the 20th century. It is often emphasised that, in the case of Albanians living in the Balkans, efforts to collect, systematise, and museumise folk art in general (i.e., not only folklore, but also material culture) only gained momentum at the end of the 19th century, i.e., at a time when neighbouring countries already had institutions established specifically for this purpose and well-established methodological traditions. This was certainly the case with Serbs and Greeks, and to some extent also with Bulgarians and Romanians. However, if we broaden our perspective to include other Balkan nations, then the Albanian case does not seem so "delayed". Moreover, a critical analysis would show that the development of Serbian, Greek, Romanian, and Bulgarian folklore studies, as well as ethnology and ethnography, was not without its nuances, which would lead to a new perspective on the well-established and almost automatically repeated textbook approaches to the history of these disciplines in each of these cases (see Cocchiara, 1971, pp. 292–295).

The first published version of the Albanian walling up song dates to Efthimi (Thimi) Mitko (1820–1890), one of the pioneers of Albanian folklore collection. An excerpt from the song about walling up in the foundations of a bridge under construction appeared in *Alvanikē melissa* [Albanian Bee], his 1878 Greek-language collection of songs. Mitko was born into an Orthodox family in Korçë and, in accordance with the practice of the time, was educated in Greek. After a short period of working as a craftsman, he started trading in clothes imported from Vienna, Venice, and Trieste. His numerous travels allowed him to meet in person and correspond extensively with the most important figures of the

nascent Albanian national movement in Istanbul, Bucharest, and Egypt. He finally settled in Egypt in 1865. In 1857, he began working with Anastas Byku, publisher of the newspaper Pelazg, considered the first Albanian periodical. Mitko published his first articles in 1859 in Greek in the Athenian newspaper Pandora (Clayer, 2018, p. 198). Although he considered himself Albanian and used Albanian in everyday life, he treated Greek as an expression of high culture and as his language of writing. It was not until the second half of the 1860s that his ideas began to evolve, leading to a radical break with Hellenism during the Eastern Crisis[15] and the proclamation of the need to develop a written culture in the Albanian language (Mitko, 1981, pp. 17–30). Thus, he followed a similar ideological path to many early activists of national movements in the Balkans, i.e., from initially writing in a language other than his native tongue to becoming convinced of and working towards making his native language (Albanian) the language of writing as a marker of national identity.

Mitko became interested in collecting songs, stories, tales, and legends in his youth, but his letters show that he only began taking it seriously in 1866. He first began to write down songs from his hometown and the surrounding area, and then from Albanians living in Egypt, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Catholics. He undoubtedly deserves to be called the first Albanian folklorist, because he not only collected source material but also undertook its interpretation in the spirit of the research practice of the time, which considered the spiritual creativity of the community to be the essence of national culture. He transcribed the song about walling up in Albanian, translated it into Greek and published it in this form in his volume. Thus, an Albanian version also appeared alongside the existing and already known song versions in other Balkan languages. This version was used by scholars, such as Mikhail Arnaudov, who began to analyse this motif in the cultures of individual Balkan nations at the turn of the 20th century. However, Mitko's contemporary activists of the Albanian national movement did not take a deeper interest in it, probably because it was published in Greek.

It was not until 1924 that Gjergj Pekmezi (1872–1938), a prominent Albanian philologist, long-time head of the Department of Albanian Studies at the University of Vienna and one of the creators of the grammar of the modern Albanian language, reworked the text based on Mitko's notes, translated it into Albanian, and published it in Vienna. From that moment on, the collection became a permanent part of the canon of early works by Albanian folklorists. The variant published by Mitko describes the embedding of a ring in the foun-

[15] The name, as is well known, covers the events of 1875–1878, which began with the uprising in Herzegovina and ended with the convening of the Congress of Berlin, which prevented war between European powers. However, in the case of the Albanian national movement, the Treaty of San Stefano and the Treaty of Berlin marked the beginning rather than the end of the crisis. The threat of Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece seizing the lands inhabited by Albanians led to the creation of the League of Prizren – the first mass uprising of a clearly national character among Albanians on such a scale.

dations of a bridge (a motif also present in the song about the construction of a bridge in Arta), followed by the motif of deceiving the intended victim of the walling up (Mitko, 1981, p. 243). In the 20th century, this variant was repeatedly transcribed and recorded in various parts of southern and central Albania. This source material became the foundation for the later classification by Albanian folklorists of a separate group of songs about walling up during the construction of a bridge.

By analogy, the first complete version of the song about the construction of the Shkodër fortress was published by Kasem Taipi (1893–1935) in the collection *Zâna Popullore* [Folk Water Nymph] in 1933 in Shkodër (Taipi, 1933). His biography is known from the writings of Hamdi Bushati. Taipi was born into a family of craftsmen but quickly lost both parents. This meant that he had to start working at a young age, trying his hand at various professions, such as sailor and tailor, but he spent most of his life working as a tax collector at the Shkodër Chamber of Commerce. He did not receive a proper education; he was self-taught, played the clarinet in the city orchestra, and wrote poems, of which only a handful have survived. However, the most important thing in his life was folk songs. He sang them himself and, as he wrote in the preface to his collection, he also began collecting them in 1915. He organised them into three groups and intended to publish them in three volumes containing, respectively 1) war and heroic songs (Alb. *kangë luftash e trimnije*); 2) women's love songs (Alb. *kangë dashurije e femnash*), dances and games (Alb. *valle e argtime*); and 3) wedding songs (Alb. *kangë ehengu*) and fairy tales recorded from the storyteller Oso Falltore (Alb. Prrallat e Oso Falltores)[16] (Taipi, 1933, p. iv). The collection was published with the help of various friends, whom Taipi thanks by name in the introduction. The premature death of the collector prevented him from realising his plan to publish three volumes. The remains of these materials are currently in the archives of the Institute of Anthropology of the Albanian Academy of Sciences[17], where they were deposited by Bushati, to whom the author entrusted them before his death (Bushati, 1999, pp. 395–397).

[16] Hamdi Bushati defined this third category differently than Tapi in the aforementioned preface to his volume, as *bejte e frazeologji* (Bushati, 1999, p. 395). In Albanian, *bejte* means both a humorous story ending with a witty punchline and a conversation consisting of witty exchanges of sharp remarks. Hence the choice of the term "humoresque". On the other hand, I translate the term *frazeologji* as "short stories", as the literal "phraseologies" could lead to terminological misunderstandings. I want to thank Prof. Sylwia Nowak-Bajcar for pointing out these translational nuances.

[17] In 1946, drawing on the experience of the Institute of Albanian Studies (Instituti i Studimeve Shqiptare), which operated between 1940 and 1944, the new authorities established the Institute of Studies (Instituti i Studimeve), which was renamed the Institute of Sciences (Instituti i Shkencave). It included a folklore research department, which became the basis for the Institute of Folklore (Instituti i Folklorit), established in 1960. This institution became part of the Albanian Academy of Sciences (Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë), established in 1972. In 1979, the institute was renamed the Institute of Folk Culture (Instituti i Kulturës Popullore). In 2008, as part of the ANA re-

Taipi does not say from whom he got the song, and only through Bushati's testimony can we guess that he learned it from one of the well-known singers in the city, such as Sait Hoxha or Kolë Gurashi. It was certainly the collector who titled the song *Kânga e Kalás së Shkodrës në kohna të vjetra* [Song of the Shkodër Fortress in Ancient Times]. The rapid pace of the action, the focus on narration rather than analysis of events, the far-reaching formulaic nature, and the lack of literary nuances prove that this is indeed a folk song, and that Taipi did not interfere with it editorially.

The story follows the familiar narrative line of all variants with the motif of walling up, but there are also several specific features. Thus, after agreeing to bring lunch to the three builders, the youngest wife bids her son a very affectionate farewell and kisses him, saying: "May we see each other in this life or the next". Probably aware that the listener is familiar with the legend, the singer uses antecedence here and, with the help of a formula with such strong emotional connotations, not only foreshadows the coming events but also introduces a lyrical note that precedes the tragedy at the end of the song. Another specific feature is the husband's use of a trick with a ring to "force" her to go down into the pit under the foundations. Something very rare in other variants is the interchangeable use of the terms "city wall" (Alb. *muri i qytetit*) and "fortress" (Alb. *kala*), which refers to the period when the Shkodër fortress was a fortified city. Finally, although the variant contains the last word and request of the walled-up woman, there is no formula expressing wishes for the future fate of her son, nor any mention of the appearance of a spring with magical powers (Taipi, 1933, pp. 16–19).

In his book, Hamdi Bushati mentions that in 1937 he proposed that the Commission for the Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Albanian Independence publish the remaining material collected in Shkodër by Kasem Taipi in the series *Visaret e Kombit* [Treasures of the Nation]. That request went unheeded for reasons unknown to him, and today it is impossible to determine why. In retrospect, unlike Kasem Taipi, who acted mainly out of the goodness of his heart and cared above all for the accuracy of the song lyrics, the Franciscans and the intellectuals of Shkodër – mostly Catholics, who prepared the first volumes of the series – adopted different methodological principles. Their leading model was the folklore series prepared by Matica hrvatska (English: Croatian Queen Bee / Latin: Matrix Croatica), so they sought to include in the volumes a carefully selected corpus of the most valuable and purest examples of folk culture, which could then become the building blocks for developing national culture. Today, it is impossible to assess whether – and if so, to what extent – the editors of these volumes interfered with the collected source material. Moreover, we

form, the institute was renamed the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Arts (Instituti i Antropologjisë Kulturore dhe Arteve) and incorporated into the Academy of Albanological Studies (Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike). In 2023, as part of a new reform, the institute was renamed the Institute of Anthropology (Instituti i Antropologjisë) and incorporated into the Albanian Academy of Sciences.

sometimes do not know where the material came from, where it was collected, or by whom. The manuscripts of the songs have not been preserved, and few other notes and records have survived[18]. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that something unprecedented in Albanian literature has been created, a series that continues to serve as an important reference point.

It was in the second volume of the collection, compiled by Franciscan friars Bernardin Palaj and Donat Kurti, that *Rozafat* – the most complete text of the song about the walling up during the construction of the fortress – appeared (Palaj & Kurti, 1937, pp. 243–245). The editors did not provide any information about the circumstances of the song's recording, who recorded it, and from whom. However, considering the presence of strong local toponymy (Buna, Valdanuz, Kazena), it can be assumed that it was a song sung either in Shkodër itself or in the vicinity of the city. Due to the place of publication, and undoubtedly also thanks to its abundance of elements and high literary value, it is considered a canonical text. All variants recorded or transcribed later have been compared to it, and it is also usually analysed when someone deals with the issue of ballads in general, and songs about walling up in particular. After World War II, this text found its way into school textbooks, where it remains to this day. Therefore, to a greater or lesser extent, every child and student of philology in Albania and Kosovo is familiar with it. It is therefore not surprising that this text forms the basis for various configurations, transpositions, and incarnations of the walled-up topos in contemporary Albanian culture.

Also in 1937, another noteworthy event occurred regarding the creation of a corpus of songs about walling up in the Albanian language. Continuing his earlier research, Serbian scholar Gliša Elezović published three variants of the song: two recorded in the city of Peći (Albanian: Peja) and the third in his hometown of Vučitrn (Albanian: Vushtri) (Белић, 1937, pp. 391–398). This publication significantly expanded what was then known about the occurrence of songs with a walling-up motif in areas inhabited by Albanians. In addition, introducing new source material into academic circulation led to further discussions about the points of contact and mutual relations between Albanian traditions and those of other nations in the Balkans. Comparative research in this field dates to the second half of the 19th century, beginning with the work of Gyula Sarudy (1899). In his classic study, Mikhail Arnaudov analysed mainly Bulgarian and Greek material (Арнаудов, 1920). On the other hand, Serbian journalist and scholar Svetislav Stefanović focused primarily on analysing songs about the construction of the Shkodër fortress (Стефановић,

[18] Most of these documents, records, and notes, along with a rich library, were confiscated by the newly established communist authorities in 1945–1946, when the activities of the Jesuit and Franciscan orders in Albania were significantly restricted. Today, it is difficult to determine how much of this corpus ended up in the National Library and Central Archives in Tirana, and how much was lost or destroyed during those repressions. Currently, the Franciscan library contains literally a few files with records and notes from the field research of Franciscans.

1933, pp. 245–314). The dominant issue in all these works was the question of the origin of this primary variant. Nevertheless, thanks to the efforts of many collectors in the first half of the 20th century, a substantial set of source material was formed. Although the Albanian variants were still few, they allowed for preliminary analysis and reflection on various aspects of the functioning of songs with the motif of walling up.

A systematic and institutionalised effort to collect folklore began in Albania only after World War II. For the new communist authorities, who derived their legitimacy from the claim that they represented the will of the people, concern for folk culture seemed to be a priority. Of course, there was a clear political gain behind this. The former romantic postulate to collect, study, preserve and refer to folk culture began to be implemented for an entirely different purpose. Instead of searching for what was hidden, almost forgotten, and considered the essence of the nation's soul, concern for folk culture was now primarily intended to separate the "healthy tissue" – the truly "folk" – from the "corrupt", that is the "reactionary" forms of folk culture. Like every other aspect of social life in a communist totalitarian state, folklore also became a field in which class struggle was waged. Like art, folk art was also supposed to serve the construction of a new socialist man and bear witness to it. Any assessment of this period must consider that academia in general, and the humanities and social sciences in particular, functioned within the rigid framework of ideological schematism and dogmatism until the end of the communist regime. However, the achievements of many scholars and researchers – some of whom began their work in the interwar period and who, from the late 1940s onwards, meticulously and systematically organised numerous research expeditions, taking advantage of both the opportunities offered by the system and its loopholes – should not be dismissed entirely. As a result, they collected a considerable amount of source material, which today is of inestimable academic, artistic, and cultural value. These studies led to a significant expansion of knowledge about variants of songs about walling up in Albania and beyond its borders. A direct consequence of these efforts was a gradual increase in various analyses and even theoretical reflection. A similar process took place among Albanians living in Yugoslavia[19], where it developed along similar lines. In Yugoslavia, the guidelines and ideological framework were different and certainly not as rigid as in Albania. There, too, it began with systematic expeditions, which became increasingly widespread over time, aimed at collecting source material, which was then analysed mainly by folklorists.

One of the leading folklorists of the second half of the 20th century in Albania, Qemal Haxhihasani (1916–1991), compiled and published an anthology

[19] I use this name for brevity. It obviously refers to the successive Kingdoms of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918–1929) and Yugoslavia (1929–1941) in the interwar period, and after World War II, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1963), the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963–1991), and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1991–2003).

of legendary songs, titled *Këngë popullore legjendare* [Legendary Folk Songs], in 1955 (Haxhihasani, 1955). It contains texts that had either been previously published in various magazines and in the series *Visaret e Kombit* or were the result of research conducted during the early post-war years. The collection included a complete academic apparatus, footnotes, a glossary of rare words, and short explanatory texts by the editor. These explanatory texts had already been used before the war, although not always and not everywhere consistently, even in the series *Visaret e Kombit*; however, Haxhihasani used them more carefully, at least concerning newer texts, providing complete details of where and from whom a given variant was recorded.

Notably, the volume opens with songs about walling up, and although they are classified as "legends and ballads", it is clear that Haxhihasani emphasises their legendary aspect above all else. A short introduction precedes the texts, summarising the knowledge of the time about the geographical occurrence of the motif of walling up in Albania, the Balkans, and the world, as well as basic information about various Albanian and Balkan variants. It is worth noting that Haxhihasani does not recognise the voluntary aspect of the sacrifice at all. This element was highlighted and emphasised much more strongly later, becoming one of the fundamental pillars of the interpretation of the attitude of the walled-up woman and functioning in this way to this day. Meanwhile, for this researcher, the act of walling up is the result of either deception, as the woman is lied to and jumps down into the foundations in search of a lost ring, or violence, as the builders force her there (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 3). The researcher points out that the custom of placing a human sacrifice in the foundations of a building occurred in different periods and places, and only over time was the human being replaced by a symbolic object or a thread equal in length to the height of the master builder. To illustrate this change, Haxhihasani gives the example of a human-like wooden figure found during the renovation of the foundations of a bridge over the Osum River in Berat in 1922 (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 3). In the spirit of dialectical materialism and using its typical historical terminology, Haxhihasani described this moment in history as a period of "decomposition of the clan system and the emergence of class society" (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 3). The songs began to be composed around the time when the fortress was being built. The sacrifice of a woman reflects her low social status at the time, while the fact that she was the wife of the youngest of the brothers should be seen as reflecting a hierarchy among the sons within the family structure (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 4). The song, as the scholar emphasises, evokes powerful emotions among listeners. At the same time, it indirectly criticises "the savage custom of human sacrifice, the subordinate position of women and the betrayal of the younger brother by his older brothers" (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 4).

However, the information in the introduction about the existence of different variants of songs about walling up in both Albania and the Balkans has the greatest value. In a concise yet well-organised form, the reader gains extensive knowledge of the differences and similarities between the Albanian and Balkan

variants, the characters appearing in them, and the compositional and stylistic differences. Haxhihasani was the first in the field of Albanian folklore studies to territorialise the occurrence of the walling-up motif in Albanian folklore. He decided that this material should be organised based on thematic and geographical criteria. In his opinion, songs about building a fortress are most common in the north, north-west, and central Albania. In eastern and southern Albania, as well as in Kosovo and the Dibër region (Macedonian: Debar), songs about the construction of bridges were more prevalent. However, several variants go beyond the scope of this typology. A song recorded in the village of Lin on Lake Ohrid tells of the walling up in a local Orthodox church located right next to the village. In two other cases in the villages of Dardhë and Sinnicë in the Korçë region, the songs tell of the simultaneous construction of a fortress and a bridge. Haxhihasani also notes a similar division in the Balkans. In the west and central part of the peninsula, the construction of a fortress dominates; in the south, songs are sung about the construction of a bridge. In contrast, the construction of a church/monastery occurs in the eastern borderlands (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 4). This essentially successful classification still bears the hallmarks of an interpretative paradigm in Albanian folklore studies.

The cycle of songs about the walling up opens with the aforementioned *Rozafat*, a text published in the Visaret e Kombit series, but other variants are equally interesting. For example, in a song recorded in the Krajë region (on the Albanian-Montenegrin border), which shows a far-reaching similarity to the variants of Taipi, Palaj, and Kurti, there is an episode of a meeting between a son and his mother after a walling up. The child wakes up at noon and asks about his mother but hears from his grandmother that she has been walled up under the city walls. As in the variant recorded by Taipie, the singer used the word "city", which can be considered either a distant echo of the times when the fortress was a city, or that the two concepts were synonymous for him. The distraught child is led to a recess left in the wall, but his mother no longer responds. Only his crying, which causes "the mountains and stones to be enveloped in pain", causes a spring of water to gush out of the recess and the breast of the walled-up woman. Furthermore, it is fascinating that in this song all three brothers share the same name – Gjon [English: John] (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 10).

In turn, the variant from Malësi e Madhe district, a mountainous region north of Shkodër, features several characteristic compositional elements. The father is absent, a typical feature of Albanian legendary songs, especially those featuring heroes such as the brothers Gjeto Basho Muji and Sokol Halili and their team of fighters. It is the mother who decides on the marriage of each of her sons when they turn twenty. Soon, the brothers set about building a fortress, but they also invite a hundred other builders. It is not an "old man with white hair" or a "saint" who tells them about the necessity of the walling up, but a "wise man" (Albanian: i dijshmi). In this case, the brothers also make a *besa* not to tell their wives about it, but they do reveal the plan to their mother, who encourages them and promises not to reveal the secret. Only the third brother,

named Baca Gjergj in this variant, and the mother keep their *besa*. In northern Albania and Kosovo, the nickname Bac/Baca has a truly positive connotation and refers to a widely respected and righteous, albeit slightly older man. Therefore, its use in relation to the third brother should be seen as an expression of respect for him by both the singer and the audience. Unlike in many other variants, the moment when the youngest wife leaves the house with lunch for the builders is described with a strong lyrical and tragic note. Here, the singer uses a prophecy, anticipating the further course of events, which, as one might guess, is well known to the listeners. The young mother tenderly feeds her son, announcing at the same time that she will never feed him again and that no one will calm his crying. She cries and "washes him with her tears". When she leaves the house, she bids farewell to the house, the household, her family and friends, the hills and mountains, the fields and rivers, the streams and springs, the pastures and meadows, which she will never see again. Finally, she says goodbye to her son once again. The singer leaves no doubt about one important fact: when Baca Gjergj sees his wife, he sighs not only because of this, but also because he knows that he has been deceived by his brothers (Alb. *ia kan ba me hile*). No other Albanian variant of the song known to me contains such a clear message about the breaking of a *besa* and the brotherly bond (Haxhihasani, 1955, pp. 12–13).

A similar foreshadowing of impending tragedy, though not as elaborate as in the variant described above, is found in this volume's first song about walling up in a bridge. It was recorded in the village of Shoshan, located near the town of Bajram Curri in northern Albania. However, it describes the construction of a bridge located south of the town of Gjakovë (Serbian: Đakovica) in Kosovo, over the White Drin River (Albanian: Drini i Bardhë). Before establishing Albania's national borders in 1913, it was the closest town to the Tropoja plateau and the surrounding mountains, a market for agricultural products and a true regional centre. To this day, the area is still referred to by its inhabitants, especially the older ones, as *Malësi e Gjakovës* [the Mountains of Gjakovë]. It is therefore not surprising that the song was recorded in Albania, although other variants have also been recorded in Kosovo. The bridge itself is called *Ura e Fshâjt*[20] [the Fshajt Bridge]. Referring to local tradition, Haxhihasani derives it from the word *ofshamë/a*, meaning sigh. These were supposed to be the sighs of a woman walled up in the bridge. However, the translation is most likely much simpler, and the name refers to the village located next to it, which is called Fshaj, simply meaning village. However, the bridge also has a second name – *Ura e Shenjt* [Sacred Bridge] – and Haxhihasani points out that this is

[20] The bridge is located at the end of a very picturesque canyon carved out by the Drin River. The first Ottoman bridge was built in the 18th century but was destroyed during World War I. In 1943, the Albanian–Italian authorities built a new bridge on its spans, strengthened with concrete. It remains unchanged to this day and is still used by pedestrians and vehicles. An interesting fact is that diving competitions have been held on it since 1954. Interrupted during the armed conflict in 1999, they resumed in 2014.

the name used by residents of other regions who have used it for centuries on their way to Gjakovë or Prizren (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 12). The eminent French geographer and cartographer Guillaume Lejean, who passed through there in 1869, wrote that the bridge was called *Ura e Shenjt* even then, but that this name was not about a woman being walled up. He heard a legend from the locals that St. Nicholas had cut through a narrow canyon where the bridge stood to make way for the Drin River and dry up the lake that once covered the entire Gjakovë Valley, hence the term "Saint" in the name of the bridge (Lejean, 2011).

This song also contains elements characteristic of the variant about the walling up in the foundation of the fortress. Here, the brothers are identified as Hasjans, i.e., originating from the Has region[21], and they work on the bridge's construction for three months, not three years. The son's attempt to turn his mother back from the road leading to the bridge is an unprecedented element. The singer takes on the role of the mother and tells her son that he will soon be an orphan. Another unusual feature is that instead of "walling up" the singer uses the word "burying" and refers to the bridge as a grave. This time, the woman does not protest because "God has decreed it and such is her fate". The woman makes her last request to leave her breasts outside and bring her son to her so that she can feed him, and the builders wall her up in a "marble tomb". When they finish their work, they hear a loud noise, and then milk begins to drip from the bridge's stones (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 13).

The next two texts in this section come from Elbasan and Bellovodë, respectively, in the Vithkuq region of south-eastern Albania. It is immediately apparent that they are much shorter than the songs recorded in northern Albania. There are no elaborate introductions, and the action is dynamic and quickly leads to the climax. The act of walling up comes quickly, but in both cases it is the result of deceit involving a ring. It is significant that in both variants the woman does not care about herself but expresses regret to her husband that their son will be orphaned, which is what motivates her last request. Until the very last moment, she remains first and foremost a mother. There are a few more interesting nuances to note. In the Elbasan variant, the third wife agrees to bring bread to the builders because "it is a shame that there are three young married women in the house and the masters have nothing to eat". Her last words are not a request, as in the northern variants, but a lament over her fate and that of her son, mixed with a complaint against the foundations, the wall, and the earth (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 15). These words of the woman have a stronger impact on the listener/reader than the request to leave the breast outside the wall. In the Bellovodë variant, the action is even more dynamic. The act of walling up is the result of a double deception: first by the older brothers, who break their word, and then by the youngest, who deceives his wife by losing his ring in the river. There is no elaborate lamentation by the young wife, but the song ends

[21] This region stretches south-east of Tropoja, historically on both sides of the former Albanian–Yugoslav border, which is now the border between Albania and Kosovo.

with a phrase characteristic of southern Albanian variants: "just as I tremble now, may this bridge tremble forever" (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 17).

The only song about the construction of an Orthodox church[22] recorded in the village of Lin on Lake Ohrid seems very interesting. Composed of only 36 verses, it begins with an old man meeting three church builders. He calls them "my sons", and they address him as "our father". To my knowledge, this is the only occasion in Albanian tradition when a man who advises the brothers to perform a walling up is referred to in this way. The only mother in this song is the wife of the third brother, while the absence of the builders' mother, the wives of the two older brothers, and the episode in which the one who is to bring dinner is chosen are noteworthy. The builders first try to deceive the young wife with a supposedly lost ring, but she replies that she has nine brothers who would certainly compensate her husband for the loss. Only then does the eldest of the builder brothers reveal their intention to her, and the final dialogue occurs between them. The young woman tries to talk him out of walling her up, explaining that she left bread in the oven, a butter churn, and her sleeping son at home. However, she hears that "the bread will bake and be eaten, the butter will be made and eaten, and the son will be rocked and will grow up". Only then does the woman ask to be walled up leaving her breast outside the wall so that she can feed her son (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 19).

An important addition to the group of songs about the construction of a bridge is a variant originating in Chameria (Albanian: *Çamëria*; Greek: *Τσαμουριά*), a region stretching along the Albanian-Greek border on the Ionian Sea. Historically, many of its inhabitants were Albanians, mostly Muslims, but also Orthodox Christians. However, in the winter of 1944 and 1945, they were expelled to Albania by the troops of General Napoleon Zervas' National Democratic League of Greece (Baltsiotis, 2011; Elsie et al., 2013). It was among their descendants, now living in Albania, that Haxhihasani recorded a variant, which he published in his collection *Balada popullore shqiptare* [Albanian Folk Ballads], published in Tirana in 1982 (Haxhihasani, 1982). Unlike other variants with the motif of bridge building from southern Albania, it is very elaborate and has a number of distinctive features. The three brothers are identified here as residents of the town of Llur (Greek: *Λούρος*, Louros), near present-day Preveza, and are named Pano, Mihal Guri, and Kiço. It is immediately apparent that the singer cherishes Kiço, as at the very beginning of the song he refers to him as *Kiço i vogël si nuri* [Little Kiço like a ray of light/purity]. The brothers have been unsuccessful in building the Narta bridge for three years, which is clearly associated with the city of Arta. Unlike in other variants, the singer addresses the bridge directly, calling it cursed. In accordance with the usual structure of the song, an old man passing by advises the brothers to make a sacrifice in the

[22] The original text contains the word *kishë*, which in Albanian means 'church' both for Catholics and Orthodox Christians. Considering that Orthodox Christians live in the area, I decided to translate it as Orthodox church.

bridge's foundations consisting of a black bull, a black ram, and a wife who is to bring dinner the next day. This elaborate sacrifice is a peculiar feature in the context of Albanian tradition and serves a retarding function, reminiscent of other Balkan variants where a similar situation occurs. Only in this way will the bridge remain, says the old man, and "Turks and giaours, sick and healthy" will walk across it (Haxhihasani, 1982, p. 24). Of course, in accordance with the typical structure, only Kiço keeps his word. It is significant that the word *besa* also appears in this variant, as in the aforementioned North Albanian variants, where it undoubtedly has a constitutive function. The action then follows the typical and familiar structure of the song, but the act of walling up has a slightly different dynamic here, and the singer uses several characteristic phrases and compositional devices. The young wife, bringing lunch, greets the builders with the traditional phrase *puna mbarë* [may your work be good], and Pano and Mihal respond with the traditional reply *mbarë paç* [may good be with you]. This is only seemingly an ordinary exchange, because the brothers know perfectly well what is about to happen, and this device further reinforces the listener's dislike of them. From then on, the song focuses exclusively on the relationship between Kiço and his wife. He explains to her, crying, that the world went dark before his eyes when he saw her, that they have been building this bridge for three years, and all for nothing. His concerned wife asks him why he is crying, to which Kiço replies that he dropped his ring into a hole buried at the bottom of the river. His wife goes down to get it and, as if sensing what awaits her, admonishes her husband that she has never been ill, she is healthy, and yet she will be walled up. As soon as she goes down to the river, the builders begin to cover her with stones. Then she is sure of what is happening and utters her last words. First, she tells her husband that woe betide him for making her a pillar of the bridge. Then she turns to the bridge itself, predicting and wishing it will tremble as she trembles when the Turks and giaours walk across it. She tells her husband that in the place of her walling up, a fig tree bearing white figs will grow, and asks that its first fruit be given to her son. Finally, she asks her brothers-in-law to leave her breast outside, which they do. There, a silver spring gushes forth, whose water heals people and makes her son grow healthy (Haxhihasani, 1982, pp. 24–26).

The first anthology compiled by Qemal Haxhihasani in 1955 did not include songs collected in Kosovo and other areas inhabited by Albanians in Yugoslavia. This gap was filled in later publications, first by the Institute of Folklore and then by the Institute of Folk Culture (see Haxhihasani & Xhagolli, 1985). The process of collecting and subsequently interpreting songs about walling up in Kosovo followed a different path as it took place within a different ideological framework and academic background. The oral creativity of Albanians began to be collected there as early as the beginning of the 19th century. The Albanian songs in Vuk Stefanović Karadžić's collection came from Kosovo. The volume *Kângë Popullore Gegnishte* [Gheg Folk Songs], prepared by Vinçenc Prennushi and published in Sarajevo in 1911, which was the first volume of the then-an-

nounced series *Visari Komtar* [National Treasure] (i.e., with a singular name, unlike the 1937 edition), was the result of research conducted by a young Franciscan monk in northern Albania and western Kosovo. In the 1920s and 1930s, Gliša Elezović recorded in Kosovo and published the first complete Albanian song about the Battle of Kosovo Field and the aforementioned variants of the song about walling up. Finally, the tenth volume of the *Visaret e Kombit* series, titled *Lahuta e Kosovës* [Kosovo Lute], contained lullabies, riddles, stories, epic songs, and legends collected there by the teacher Myrteza Roka (1944).

However, it was only after World War II that Albanian folklore began to be systematically collected and analysed in Kosovo. The earliest post-war collection was prepared by Zekeria Rexha, a member of the first generation of Albanian scholars in Yugoslavia; it was then published under the title *Kangë popullore shqiptare të Kosovës dhe Metohis* [Albanian folk songs from Kosovo and Metohija][23]. However, the authorities decided that the collection contained songs with nationalistic overtones, so the entire 3,000-copy print run was sent to be pulped. Given the tense political situation in Kosovo at the time and the open hostility between Yugoslavia and Albania, it is not surprising that songs praising the battles of Albanians against Serbian and Montenegrin troops during the Prizren League (1878–1881) and the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) were considered nationalistic. Rexha himself was imprisoned and then deported to Albania on the pretext of having taken Albanian citizenship while studying in Tirana before World War II. However, to avoid an outbreak of discontent, the authorities seized his manuscript, removed songs considered harmful, added new material, and this new collection was prepared for printing by Belgrade philology professor Vojislav Dancetović and his Albanian students Anton Çetta

[23] As with the name *Yugoslavia*, I use the name *Kosovo* as a kind of shorthand. Within the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the official name from 1945 to 1963 was the Autonomous Region of Kosovo and Metohija, which was part of the People's Republic of Serbia. In 1963, with the change of the country's name, the region was renamed the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, and in 1968 the word "Metohija" was removed from the name. The province was part of the Socialist Republic of Serbia (SR). Under the 1974 constitution, the Autonomous Province of Kosovo was granted the status of a federal unit, while remaining part of the SR. As part of the 1990 amendment to the SR constitution, the name Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija was restored and the status of a federal unit was abolished, restoring full control to the republican authorities. The 2006 Constitution of the Republic of Serbia recognises the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija as an integral part of the state. In 2008, Kosovo declared its independence as the Republic of Kosovo. The term *Metohija*, referring to the western part of the country, comes from Greek (singular: μετόχιον) and means monastery property, referring to the fact that many villages in this region were owned by monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Mount Athos in the Middle Ages. The Albanian population uses the name *Rrafshi and Dukagjinit* [Dukagjin Plain], which is associated with the rule of the Albanian noble family Dukagjin over this region just before the Ottomans occupied these lands. Hence, the first name of the region in the Ottoman administrative structure was Sanjak of Dukagjin.

and Kadri Halimi. It was published in three volumes under virtually the same title in 1952 and 1953, but only the name of the Serbian professor appeared in the editorial footer. I deliberately provide a supplemented bibliographic entry in the bibliography that differs from the one found in the catalogues of many libraries. It is not only a matter of restoring memory, but also of maintaining ethical standards in science.

Contemporary Kosovar folklorist Arbnora Dushi calls Anton Çetta the founding father of modern folklore studies in Kosovo (Dushi, 2019, p. 79). Moreover, Halimi, although he quickly fell victim to political repression by the Yugoslav authorities, laid the foundations for the development of Kosovar ethnography and ethnology. Among other things, as director of the folklore department at the Albanological Institute in Pristina, which reopened in 1968, Çetta initiated a major scientific project aimed at collecting as much Albanian source material as possible. Of the nearly thirty volumes that have been published to date, the 1974 volume *Balada dhe legjenda* [Ballads and Legends], edited by Çetta himself, is of particular importance for our discussion here. It contains three songs sung in Albanian and recorded in Kosovo about walling up in the foundation of a bridge (Çetta, 1975, pp. 7–8, 13).

In conclusion, I want to draw attention to another fascinating case of a song about walling up[24]. In 2013, a bilingual collection by Nazif Dokle (2013), titled *Goranske narodne balade/Balada popullore gorane* [Gorani folk ballads], was published in Prizren. Dokle is considered a leading ethnographer specialising in the history and culture of Gora and the Gorani/Torbeši, as evidenced by a long list of his publications on the subject. He hypothesised that the Gorani are descendants of Bogomils who hid in mountainous regions to escape persecution (Mindak-Zawadzka, 2020). Regarding the discussion on Gorani identity, it is worth noting that the songs have been translated into Bosnian, as stated on the inside cover. As the author points out in the preface, the publication contains the folk art of the Gorani (Dokle uses the term *Torbeší*) from three previously published collections: in Kosovo (Хасани, 1987), North Macedonia (Докле, 2000), and Albania (M. Hoxha, 2002). Thus, it is an anthology of 84 songs, rather than a publication of truly new source material. However, given Dokle's high standing among intellectuals from Gora and those studying the region, this volume can be considered highly authoritative.

The anthology is illustrated with numerous drawings by Dokle. The songs are organised thematically according to thirteen leading motifs, one of which is walling up. Given that the songs have been published bilingually in both Gorani and Albanian, it is worth examining how the Gorani variant compares to the Albanian variants from Kosovo and Albania. In the preface, Dokle first presents the history of the region, its social structure, everyday life, and the geography of the songs and their relationship to the socio-cultural realities of Gora. He

[24] I would like to thank Dr Marzena Maciulewicz for drawing my attention to this area of research.

then discusses the specific compositional features of Goran songs and their distinctiveness from the singing traditions of other ethnic groups and nations neighbouring the Gorani. He meticulously highlights the lexical richness of the songs' language, pointing out both archaic local elements and newer words and forms of expression resulting from political and social changes. Dokle does the same when discussing the motifs in the songs. He not only shows their diversity and compositional richness, but also illustrates this analysis with numerous examples, relating almost every one of these motifs to the realities of Gorani life. All this makes Dokle's text one of the most detailed analyses of Gorani ballads in the field of Albanian and Balkan folklore studies.

The song contains some specific features that distinguish it from other Albanian and Balkan variants. The first such element appears at the very beginning, as the brothers build not a fortress or a bridge, but a *kulla*. In the Gheg dialect of Albanian, the word *kulla* primarily meant a large stone house of a defensive nature. In the past, however, this term also referred to fortified towers, and today it refers to the skyscrapers springing up like weeds in Tirana. Therefore, if the singer used this name to refer to a house, and I am inclined to believe this interpretation, then it would be the only such case not only in Albanian tradition, but also more broadly. However, if it was meant to refer to a tower, then this song should be classified as a ballad about the construction of a fortress, although in the neighbouring regions of Kosovo and Albania, as I have already pointed out, the motif of walling up in the foundations of a bridge dominates.

Another characteristic element is the appearance of the third brother, Hasan-aga, which causes the singer to call his wife Hasanaginovica in Albanian and Asanađinica[25] in Gorani. This immediately brings to mind the Bosnian ballad *The Sad Song of Hasan Aga's Noble Wife*, recorded and published by Abbot Alberto Fortis in Viaggio in Dalmazia in 1774. Translated into German by Goethe and into English by Scott, and then by many others, including Pushkin, Mérimée, and Mickiewicz, this ballad laid the foundations for the Romantics' interest in folk art and certainly paved the way for the creation of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić's collection and other great collections of folk songs in the Balkans. This is the only such instance in the rich tradition of ballads about walling up, so I am inclined to assume that the appearance of this name in the Gorani variant is not a coincidence. However, it is hard to trace this name's path to the song sung in Gora. There is no doubt that the heroines of both songs share a sad fate and death despite their innocence and purity. I acknowledge this fact and note that both bear the same name, which may have been the result of some transposition, but this may not necessarily be the case.

Hasan-aga/Asan Aga, the husband of the woman who has been walled up, expresses regret for what is about to happen to his wife, because "it is a great oath", which is another unique feature of this version. The husband is touched by his wife's fate and calls her Vatimo/Fatima several times. This opens an-

[25] These are the notation forms used by Dokle.

other interesting field of interpretation. In Muslim tradition, the name Fatima (Arabic: فاطمة, Fāṭimah) is primarily associated with the beloved daughter of Muhammad and Khadija, although other members of the family or the prophet's close circle also bore this name. The name means "she who restrains herself"[26], but also, interestingly, "she who weans her child". Thus, on the one hand, the husband calls his wife, who is about to be walled up, by the name of one of the most important women in Islam; on the other hand, this name encapsulates the most important characteristics of the walled-up woman. Indeed, Hasanaginica/Asanađinica does not protest; on the contrary, she accepts her fate with extraordinary serenity, since "it is a great oath". Only at the end does she express her last word, a request to leave her right breast and right hand outside the wall so that she can feed and caress her child (Dokle, 2013, pp. 91–92).

The textualisation of the tradition of songs about walling up, as described above, is far from complete. Zihni Sako, a leading Albanian folklorist who was the first to address this issue thoroughly, noted that by 1965, texts had been recorded in 150 localities, and 22 variants had been recorded, 19 of which described the construction of a fortress and 13 the construction of a bridge (Sako, 1967, pp. 87–92; 1981, p. 140). A printing error must have occurred here, as mathematically it turns out that 32 variants were recorded. Following Sako, Shaban Sinani (1997, pp. 80–87) and Arbnora Dushi (2018, pp. 30–31) cite the number of 150 Albanian variants of this song, noting that 90 of them refer to the construction of a fortress. It seems that the number of localities cited by Sako was transformed into the number of variants by the two later scholars. Meanwhile, the current Institute of Cultural Anthropology archives contain 187 variants of songs about walling up, both in written form and as voice recordings. In addition, the archives of the Albanological Institute in Pristina contain about 90 more variants collected in Kosovo after World War II[27]. These songs largely await detailed study, and I am convinced that they contain many interesting compositional, lexicographical, and semantic nuances. Finally, an important element in the processes of textualisation and canonisation of songs about the walling up is their publication in various later anthologies and collections. Often, such publications lack editorial care and scientific supervision, which leads to errors. This phenomenon occurs exclusively in the context of writing, and I will discuss it in the next subchapter. Here, I will limit myself to emphasising that such publications – once in print, and now on social media – have a significant impact on maintaining and spreading knowledge about the topos of the walled-up woman.

[26] In the Shiite world, because of her marriage to Ali, Fatima bears the following epithets: truthful, blessed, pure, immaculate, virtuous, content, shining, source of light, the one through whom angels speak, leader of women of different worlds, mother of imams. See "Fāṭimah" (n.d.).

[27] I am grateful to Abnora Dushi for this information.

Folklore Interpretations – Towards a Historiosophy of Song

Before the Fall of Communist Regimes

Albania

Albanian folklore studies lacked theoretical reflection until after World War II. They were dominated by a descriptive approach, as evident in various introductions to songs and folk art collections, while textual and structural analysis were limited to poetics. The only exception is Ernest Koliqi's doctoral thesis, *Epica popolare albanese* [Albanian Folk Epic], defended at the University of Padua in 1937. However, its influence on the development of this discipline in the country was negligible because it was not published at that time. Moreover, although Koliqi was educated in the culture of writing and considered himself a writer and poet, he maintained close contact with the song tradition and approached it in a more literary than folkloric way, treating songs primarily as literary works. This methodological approach was not unusual at the time. Still, it is worth noting here that it dominated Albanian folklore studies for a long time and, with a few exceptions, continues to do so.

The situation changed radically after World War II, when communists came to power in Albania. The development of science was under the general supervision of the state, resulting in the progressive institutionalisation of scientific research, combined with the expansion of the education system over time. However, the authorities assumed special care of the humanities and social sciences, subjecting them to vigilant ideological and political supervision. Folklore studies played a vital role in this process. Its primary task remained the collection, recording, cataloguing, and study of folk art, but it was also to become the guardian of its purity. The old Romantic postulate to protect and study folk culture as the most archaic and authentic repository of national culture, which was at the heart of the activities undertaken in the interwar period, has now become the methodological paradigm for the entire discipline. However, this was an activity of a political and utilitarian nature. As in the case of other arts, songs, dances, and other areas of oral creativity, which were increasingly referred to as *folklore*, were no longer intended for entertainment and aesthetic purposes, as had been the case in the past, but primarily for didactic and educational purposes. Folklore was considered the work of the people, or, to use a term from that era, "the working masses of the countryside and cities". Concern for the latter was the basis for the social legitimacy of the communist authorities in Albania, so the emphasis on caring for folk culture was one of the fundamental elements of the country's cultural policy. This reveals a significant duality that should be considered when discussing not only folklore studies, but also social studies and humanities in general in Albania during this period. Alongside the far-reaching ideologisation inspired and sustained by the communist authori-

ties, which ultimately led to stereotyping and dogmatism, it is also important to note and appreciate the genuine concern and achievements of many scientists, scholars, and cultural activists in pursuing the fundamental goal of the Albanian national movement: the development of the native Albanian national culture.

Introductions to song collections were usually also the first attempts at interpreting them. The aforementioned preface to the collection of Albanian ballads prepared by Qemal Haxhihasani is an excellent example. However, it is also important to note what is missing from this text. Haxhihasani did not address the issue of the origin of the songs at all and did not attempt to prove the autochthonous nature of the Albanian variants at all costs. This issue began to dominate the works of folklorists and discussions among various writers only later, as will be further discussed below. Meanwhile, Haxhihasani noticed common elements and folkloric motifs among the Balkan peoples and simply considered this a consequence and sign of their centuries-long coexistence (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 4). I can only guess that Haxhihasani decided to discuss solely the basic issues, i.e., the structure of the songs, their geographical distribution, the multitude of variants, and the characteristics of the central motifs. However, he was certainly also aware of this issue, as he presented a hypothesis about the historical moment when the songs about walling up were created.

The issue of the song's origin was first systematically addressed by Zihni Sako, another leading folklorist of the second half of the 20th century, founder and long-time director of the Folklore Institute. After completing his philological studies at the National Kapodistrian University of Athens, Sako began his teaching career in interwar Albania. During World War II, he joined the communist guerrilla movement, and after the war he became a leading writer, journalist, and scholar in the field of folklore. It is noteworthy that the issue of the origin of the song about walling up was addressed by a leading folklorist and one of the most prominent figures in Albania's cultural life at the time, rather than a novice scholar. Perhaps for this reason, his text became canonical and influenced the thinking of many successors who returned to this issue. Sako's article appeared in *Studime Filologjike* [Philological Studies], the most important scientific journal devoted to linguistic and literary matters in communist Albania. Its content convinces us that, despite its modest size (approximately a dozen pages), it was the fruit of many years of research and reflection. The importance of this text is evidenced by its republication in the first volume of the influential series *Çështje të folklorit shqiptar* [Issues of Albanian Folklore] in the early 1980s. In this article, I use this version.

As a scholar closely affiliated with the establishment, Sako was undoubtedly aware that presenting the thesis of the Albanian origin of songs with a motif of walling up had not only scientific but also political implications. This was not the first such case in the Balkans, as discussions on this topic had been going on for a long time. It should also be noted that this was not a period of revolutionary beginnings, but a stage of mature development of the humanities and social studies in communist Albania. First of all, there were already well-function-

ing scientific institutions, and Sako was not a scientist just discovering a field of research – as Haxhihasani had been ten years earlier – but the director of a leading institute and a scholar who, through his work, defined this field of research and set its boundaries. Moreover, in general terms, this was a period in which the Albanian communist regime began to shift increasingly towards national communism in ideological terms. After the USSR broke with Albania and relations with the rest of the Eastern Bloc cooled, Albania's only ally on the international stage was the People's Republic of China. One of the consequences of this was the cultural revolution that swept the country in the second half of the 1960s. For the social studies and humanities, this meant entering a period of ideological stagnation marked by total top-down ideological control. In addition to the dogmas of dialectical materialism and ubiquitous quotations from Enver Hoxha's articles, speeches, and works, nationalist accents also began to resound increasingly strongly. It is in this context that Sako's article should be positioned.

Sako opened the article with a brief discussion of the motif of walling up in folk cultures in the Balkans and then presented the results of research conducted in Albania until 1965. As I have mentioned, Sako stated that texts had been recorded in 150 locations, which is not equivalent to the number of existing variants. He clarified that the variants concerning the construction of a fortress refer not only to the Shkodër fortress, but also to the castle in Turrë, in central Albania (between Kavajë and Divjakë), the castle of Petro Petroshi in Lleshan (in the Shkumbin River valley), and the castle in the city of Elbasan (Sako, 1981, p. 140). He also pointed out that the main characters are named in several Albanian songs, as in other Balkan variants, and unlike the canonical variant of the construction of the Shkodër fortress. In particular, in the Elbasan variant, the third wife is named Zarë; in the song recorded in the Mirditë region, her name is Gjina Vida; and, as I have already mentioned, in the Malësia e Madhe variant, the third of the builder brothers is named Baca Gjergj. It is rare, not only in Albanian songs, to give the name of a son of a walled-up woman. This makes it all the more critical for an Albanian folklorist to draw attention to this fact. He also pointed out that in the variant recorded in the Dukagjin region (unfortunately, he did not specify exactly where, and this is a fairly large region in northern Albania), the son is called "Miri", and in another variant from the Opar region, in the south-eastern part of the country, he is given a Muslim name, "Tefik" (Sako, 1981, p. 141). It is worth making a slight digression on this issue. Considering that most Albanian variants emphasise that the son of the walled-up woman grows up to be a good and just man, the choice of such a name appears not to be a coincidence. The name "Miri" derives from the adjective *mirë*, which means good and kind. The etymological root of the name "Tefik" (Arabic: Tawfik) means a man with the ability or opportunity to succeed. Thus, the very choice of these names determines, in a way, the future of the son of the walled-up woman as a good, capable man who is destined to have a successful life.

As with other Balkan variants, Sako continued, in Albanian songs the idea of performing the act of walling up usually comes from an old man, a saint, or

a bird. In the variant from Prilepnica (in Kosovo), the third wife has a prophetic dream in which her future is revealed. Still, she brings dinner to the master builders, thus sacrificing herself. In all Albanian variants, the third builder brother keeps his oath, which Sako considered a constitutive feature, as it refers to the institution of *besa* (Sako, 1981, p. 141). Like Haxhihasani, when writing about the period when the ballad was created, Sako referred to the chronology typical of historical materialism and situated this moment at the intersection of the decline of clan and tribal institutions and the emergence of feudal structures. The scholar pointed out the cruelty of the act of sacrifice and noted that singers are also aware of this, as they often refer to the walled-up woman as unfortunate (Sako, 1981, p. 142). Following this line of thought, like Haxhihasani, Sako pointed to rituals that replaced human sacrifice. He mentioned placing a rope of the same length as the height of the chief master builder in the foundations, giving the example of constructing a stone bridge over the Drino River in Gjirokastër at the end of the 19th century. This piece of rope was called *hije e njeriut* [the shadow of a man]. To conclude, Sako also recalled a wooden sculpture of a girl found during the repair of one of the spans of the bridge over the Osum River in Berat.

It is worth noting and critically analysing a particular intriguing interpretative device used by Sako. He considered the constitutive feature of the Albanian version of the ballad about the walled-up Sako to be that the third wife is neither deceived with the ring, as in the Greek version, nor does she curse the builders, as in several other Balkan versions. The scholar must have been familiar with at least the texts published by Haxhihasani, not to mention the archives, so he must have been aware that he was mistaken, as this motif also appears in the Albanian variants. Nevertheless, he focused exclusively on the attitude of the young wife, emphasising her stoicism and acceptance of the act of sacrifice. Her last words give the song a distinct elegiac and lyrical tone. Still, her self-sacrifice naturally complements the epic background and "is entirely in keeping with the patriotic feelings of the people" (Sako, 1981, p. 143). He went on to write: "Although we feel regret because she falls victim to an extremely cruel custom, we also see before our eyes the fortress that was built on her body" (Sako, 1981, p. 143). I draw attention to Sako's reasoning because this interpretation of the young wife's act of sacrifice has become established in Albanian folklore studies, taking on a paradigmatic form. From there, it has also spread to other areas and fields, first to literature, the arts, and audiovisual media, then naturally to the sphere of school education, and now also to social media and other corners of mass culture.

Sako's interpretative stance should come as no surprise. He wrote his text not only as a leading folklorist, but also as a writer belonging to the intellectual elite of the era, a former partisan, a member of the Albanian Labour Party and, finally, a supporter of socialist realism in Albanian literature and art. It is precisely the echoes of the basic dogmas of this creative method that resound in his interpretation of the walling up. This is where the emphasis on the pri-

macy of the common good over the individual's life and the highlighting of the heroic aspect of the young woman's sacrifice originate. Sako's interpretation also fully realised the postulate of emphasising the educational function of literature, arts, and folklore. However, one can go further and note another aspect. Although Sako's literary work and public activity made him the epitome of a writer of the new era, as a scholar and folklorist he belonged to a generation still shaped by the spirit of the national revival. These ideas were still alive in the interwar period, when he was taking his first steps as a writer, and they certainly influenced his thinking and that of many like him in the first decades after the Second World War. Under these ideas, Sako viewed Albanian folk art as a whole which contains the basic components of national culture. This holistic approach acknowledges folklore as an expression of the nation's past, a chronicle of its history, a kind of encyclopaedia, a source of knowledge and centuries of experience. Socialist realism added a powerful class component to this constellation, making it the basic criterion for distinguishing between "good" and "bad" folklore. The former was promoted and institutionally supported by the state, while the latter was condemned to oblivion and constantly suppressed. This is precisely what Sako did. From a cruel act of sacrifice, he extracted positive aspects, prioritising them, and distanced himself from the entire custom. Although the scholar was aware of the existence of variants that contradicted his thesis, his didactic and educational spirit prevailed, and, relying solely on the canonical text about the construction of the Rozafat fortress, he drew conclusions about the entire tradition of songs about walling up in the Albanian language.

That said, it is also important to note the ethnographic dimension of Sako's paper. He was one of the first scholars to point out that the performance of songs about walling up was celebratory and ceremonial, and it was held in great esteem among listeners. Although he did not explain when and where it was recorded, the healing ritual he described is very interesting. When young mothers lost their milk, they first ate bread with onions and then dripped the lime water dripping from the arches or ceilings of the fortress onto their nipples. Naturally, it was believed that the white water was the milk of a walled-up woman. Sako interpreted this ritual as an expression of a strong belief in the life-giving power of water, because it is thanks to water that new life begins in the form of milk from nursing mothers (Sako, 1981, p. 143). However, the scholar halted at this level of analysis, without attempting to objectify the ritual and situate it within a broader framework of magical social practices.

Finally, Sako devoted the last part of his article to discussing the origins of the song about the walling up. It is in this section of his argument that the references to interwar literature and the pursuit of the same interpretative path are most evident, albeit with a different methodological key. This continuity, not only in Sako's thinking and work, should be noted both in the context of the discussion regarding the song about the walling up and in the broader context of other historical, literary, and cultural issues. Although the new communist

authorities declared a complete break with the old world, attention should also be paid to various more or less explicit references to intellectual and ideological continuity. An example of such continuity is precisely this fragment of Sako's article. He divided his argument into three stages. In the first, he drew attention to the lack of knowledge of Albanian songs among foreign scholars, emphasising several features that, in his opinion, define the Albanian tradition. In the second, he cited a list of archaeological and historical evidence. Finally, using the arguments presented earlier, in the third stage of his analysis Sako postulated that Albanian variants should be recognised as the source of the entire tradition of walling up songs in the Balkans.

Sako pointed out that the academic world first learned about the Serbian version of the construction of the Shkodër fortress published by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, then the Romanian version about the construction of the monastery in Curtea de Argeş, and finally the Greek version about the construction of the bridge in Arta, while the Albanian songs, quite common in Albania and Kosovo, remained unknown for many years. Therefore, Sako acknowledged that scholars' conclusions regarding the motif's origin were at least incomplete if not erroneous. Furthermore, he continued, the Shkodër fortress is one of the oldest in the Balkans, dating back to the 3rd century BC, thus predating the construction of the bridge in Adana (525–565), where, according to legend, a man was walled up, and even more so the construction of the bridge in Arta (1602–1606). It therefore seems logical to conclude that since the building was constructed earlier, the legend about it must also be prior. The Slavic (a term used by Sako) origin of the song can be easily refuted, as the main characters of the song, the Mrnjavčević brothers, are historical figures who never ruled Shkodër. As he pointed out, "it is understandable that the Slavic invaders, in order to strengthen and perpetuate their rule and influence, paid special attention to Shkodër and its fortress, making up the story that it was built by the brothers Vukašin, Gojko and Uglješa […]. Undoubtedly, the ballad is an expression of poetic creativity, but the source of the story it contains is much older because, as we have already said, it refers to the ancient practice of human sacrifice" (Sako, 1981, p. 145).

To reinforce this line of argument, the scholar cited archaeological research from Gajtan, an Illyrian settlement that was founded at the end of the 2nd millennium BC and flourished from the 8th century BC until its destruction by the Romans in the 2nd century BC. The fall of Gajtan and the expulsion of its inhabitants made Shkodër one of the most important urban centres in the area. Archaeological research conducted in Gajtan between 1962 and 1965 revealed megalithic defensive walls and, on the outside, just in front of them, circles filled with stones, symbolising the sun god. Alongside the cult of the snake, the Sun occupied a very special and important place in the beliefs of the Illyrians. However, Sako drew attention to another find. Clay pots containing children's bones were discovered at this former place of worship. Archaeologists interpreted this find as evidence of human sacrifice to the Sun god for defensive purposes. Ac-

cording to Sako, this proves that human sacrifice was practised among the Illyrians, and the traces of its presence in a town near Shkodër should undoubtedly be taken into account when considering the origin of the ballad about walling up in the foundations of this fortress (Sako, 1981, p. 145).

However, the scholar did not limit himself to the history of the area around ancient Shkodër. Taking the location of the city of Arta in Epirus as his starting point, he noted that in ancient times this geographical region was dominated by a confederation of Illyrian tribes: the Amantes, Bylliones, Chaonians, and Molossians. They did not speak Greek, so the ancient Greeks referred to them as barbarians. For several centuries, long before the construction of the bridge in Arta, the city and the surrounding region were the subject of rivalry and disputes between various Albanian magnates, among whom the most prominent and longest-reigning was Gjin Bua Shpata (?–1399). Sako considered the significant presence of Albanians throughout Epirus just before the Ottoman invasion to be an important factor in evaluating the origin of the ballad about the walling up in the bridge. This whole series of arguments led him to the conclusion: "Due to the numerous variants of the Albanian ballad which are widely spread in our country, both about fortresses and bridges, due to the number of fortresses sung about in these ballads, due to arguments of a historical nature, and because the ballad tells of the fortress of an Illyrian city and a bridge in a city inhabited in the 14th century predominantly by Albanians, it seems to us that the source of the ballad's origin is Illyria, i.e., Albania" (Sako, 1981, p. 146). Thus, he formulated a thesis that laid the foundation for the interpretation of the song about the walling up by later folklorists, literary scholars, historians, and publicists.

This can be illustrated by the *Epika Heroike Shqiptare* [Albanian Heroic Epic] symposium that took place in Tirana on 20–22 October 1983 and which, due to its importance, is considered one of the most significant events for the development of Albanian folklore studies in the second half of the 20th century. At this event, in a paper titled *The Legend of the Shkodër Fortress as a Manifestation of the Ancient Tradition of Albanian Legendary Epic*, Vili Kamsi, then director of the library of the Luigj Gurakuqi University in Shkodër, referred to Sako's thesis but developed it creatively. Kamsi's starting point was Barleti's testimony mentioned earlier. He unequivocally rejected the position of Dhimitër Shuteriqi, a leading writer of the era and long-time president of the Union of Writers and Artists, who believed that the legend had nothing to do with the ballad about the walling up (Shuteriqi, 1977, p. 36). Supplementing it with information provided by Hecquard, Kamsi pointed out that there was much more to it than Shuteriqi thought. His line of argument was quite straightforward. The starting point was the claim that the ballad about the construction of the Shkodër fortress was Albanian – more precisely, autochthonous to Shkodër itself. Having identified the symptomatic fact that this song exists only among Albanians and Serbs, the researcher undertook a comparative analysis of both canonical variants. Comparing the behaviour of the characters, the key role of the *besa* institution,

which in Albanian culture is something much more substantial than a simple promise, and the attitude of the youngest wife, he concluded that the Albanian version is older as it expresses a tribal mentality, while the Serbian song bears clear traces of medieval feudal psychology. His conclusion was even stronger than Sako's thesis: "The Albanian legend about the construction of the Shkodër fortress may be the prototype of all Balkan legends with the motif of walling up" (Kamsi, 1987, pp. 238–239). Against this background, a significant terminological shift in Kamsi's argument is also worth noting. Instead of the term "ballad", he consistently used the concept of legend. Thus, by shifting the song about walling up into the genre category of legendary epic, he emphasised its archaic nature even more strongly.

Among the symposium participants was Ismail Kadare, already renowned as the world's most famous Albanian writer. Although he only spoke during the discussions, his presence and participation should be interpreted as an expression of the importance attached to these issues not only by folklorists but also by Albanian intellectuals in general. However, it was also a consequence of the writer's literary and essayistic activity since the mid-1970s, which resulted in three novels directly referring to folk art: *Ura me tri harqe* [The Three Arched Bridge] (Kadare, 1978b), *Kush e solli Doruntinën* [Who Brought Doruntina] (Kadare, 1980b) and *Dosja H*. [The File on H.] (written in 1981 but not published until 1990) (Kadare, 1990). The first of these books will be discussed further below.

With regard to the issues discussed here, however, attention should be drawn to the collection of essays *Autobiografia e popullit në vargje* [Autobiography of the People in Verse] (Kadare, 1980a). Among many other issues, Kadare also devoted attention to songs about walling up. It is a half-folkloric, half-literary-poetic interpretation of Albanian oral creativity, and Kadare speaks as a writer who is not afraid to venture into the realm of science; an essay, as a genre that allows for many things and is free from the rigour of scientific argument, proved to be the ideal means of expression for this. In the fragment that interests me here, the writer discusses two songs: *Kostandin and Doruntina* and *Rozafat*. Undoubtedly, this choice was not accidental, as at the same time he wrote the first two of the three novels mentioned above based on them. The essay can therefore be considered a continuation and, simultaneously, a supplement to the reflections already undertaken in them. This time, however, Kadare focused primarily on the institution of *besa*, recognising it as the ideological core of both songs. Although this approach is quite valid, especially in the case of the ballad about *Kostandin and Doruntina*, there is no doubt that it was a conscious decision on the part of the writer. He aimed to prove the Albanian authorship of these two songs. When it comes to the first one, the task seems relatively easy. The ballad about Kostandin, who first gives his mother a *besa* that he will bring Doruntina, his sister who was married off to distant lands, back to her, and then rises from the dead to keep that promise, is still sung today among the Arbëreshë, the Albanian diaspora in southern Italy. However, the song about the

walling up is a different matter, and the writer first postulated the possibility of its Albanian origin, only to present arguments supporting this in later parts of his interpretation.

Kadare's starting point was not the text itself but its political implications. He began by examining European Romantics' interest in Balkan folklore and their efforts to learn about and understand this oral tradition. He pointed out that while Greek and Serbian traditions began to be explored quite early on, Albanian traditions remained on the margins for a long time, as evidenced by Prosper Mérimée's surprise at the lack of such knowledge, even though Albanians lived alongside Greeks and Serbs (Kadare, 1980a, p. 17). The writer directed the core of his criticism towards a Serbian doctor, scholar, mayor of Belgrade, minister, and finally prime minister of the country, namely (Hipolit) Vladan Đorđević. In 1913, already on the sidelines of political life but still immensely influential, he published a book in Serbian and German simultaneously: *Arnauti i velike sile; Albanesen und die Grossmachte* [Albanians and the Great Powers] (Ђорђевић, 1913). Today, this treatise is rightly considered a pamphlet full of distortions, manipulations, and, here and there, chauvinism[28]. Đorđević rejected everything Albanian, denying the achievements of several Serbian scholars and publicists of the time, in order to support Serbia's claim to the Adriatic Sea by seizing northern and central Albania. In the introduction, he pointed out that Albanians have no songs about the fortress of Shkodër or about Shkodër in general. As proof of the former presence and, by implication, of Serbian rights to the city and the entire region at that time, he quoted the song *Zidanje Skadra* [The Building of Skadar] from Vuk Karadžić's collection (Ђорђевић, 1913, pp. 20–25). It was precisely this attitude that Kadare opposed. He based his argument on the work of the aforementioned Albanian folklorists, whose works he undoubtedly knew, as he quoted their views and arguments, albeit without mentioning their names. Of course, he took advantage of the freedom of expression that an essay offers. This allowed him to combine historical knowledge with a certain amount of pathos and journalistic fervour.

According to Kadare, numerous arguments favour the possible Albanian authorship of the songs about the walling up. In both songs, he pointed out, the ideological core is *besa*, widely considered one of the most important social institutions in Albanian life, although its practice often had tragic consequences, as Kadare wrote in his novel *Prilli i thyer* [Broken April] (Kadare, 1978a). For Kadare, Barleti's testimony is the oldest written evidence of the legend's existence, and the fact that it originated in Shkodër makes it even more significant. Of course, the writer omitted a rather crucial detail: the Shkodran priest had a different legend in mind, not the canonical song about the walling up. Kadare drew another argument directly from Sako – the age of the fortress as proof of the song's autochthonous origin. Finally, resorting to rigorous and meticulous linguistic analysis, and again invoking already familiar arguments, he pointed

[28] See, for example, the analysis of this book in: Jezernik (2007).

out that the Serbian phrase *vjeru pogazio* [broke his faith] only makes sense if it is considered a calque of the Albanian *çarti besën* [broke his *besa*/faith], which he regarded as indirect evidence of the song's transition from Albanian to Serbian. For this reason, while the Albanian variant refers to a fortress (Rozafat), the Serbian variant refers to a city (Skadar) (Kadare, 1980a, pp. 25–27).

However, the writer did not stop there. Considering that the Greeks and Albanians are the two oldest nations in the Balkans, he pointed out that it is not surprising that "when it comes to ancient treasures, the first discussion about authorship takes place between them" (Kadare, 1980a, p. 27). Yes, the motif of sacrifice is often found in the literature and mythology of the ancient Greeks, he argued, but the legend of walling up is different: it is a legend of masons and master builders; it expresses their world and was created by them – they passed it on. For only builders could know about the slight movement of all stone buildings, including bridges, as evidenced by the above-quoted couplet at the end of the song: "Just as I tremble now, let this bridge tremble too". Thus, Kadare concluded, although not as emphatically as the comparison of variants about the construction of a fortress in the north, the comparison of variants about the construction of a bridge in the south also demonstrates the autochthonous nature of the Albanian song (Kadare, 1980a, pp. 28–29). His fame as a writer probably led other later folklorists, apart from scholars, to frequently quote Kadare (Zheji, 2004, p. 135). However, the forcefulness of his arguments – alongside his colourful and evocative literary language – meant that Kadare's views eventually spread beyond the field of folklore studies and ethnology to journalism in the broad sense and are now circulating in the audiovisual sphere and on social media networks.

Kosovo

During the same period, Albanians living in Yugoslavia underwent different political, socio-economic, and cultural processes than their compatriots in Albania. On the one hand, this was due to general changes in Yugoslavia itself and the country's transition from typical Stalinism (1940s) through authoritarianism (1950s) and controlled decentralisation (1960s) to federalisation (1970s) and the growing disintegration of the state (1980s). Thus, Albanians living in Yugoslavia experienced a completely different kind of oppression under the communist regime than their compatriots in Albania (Malcolm, 1998, pp. 314–333). On the other hand, the position, social status, and development opportunities of Albanians – both at the group and individual level – were significantly influenced by their belonging to the largest national minority in the country (Shoup, 1963). For quite a long time, until the early 1970s and then again from the mid-1980s, the affirmation of Albanian identity outside the framework set by the state authorities was treated as a hostile and counter-revolutionary ac-

tivity. It was therefore met with various forms of repression at the individual and group levels. Nevertheless, the modernisation efforts undertaken by the state, the relatively high degree of social mobility, economic emigration abroad, a reasonably wide range of free market mechanisms conducive to private enterprise and, finally, decentralisation and federalisation policies contributed to the enormous social advancement of many Albanians, mainly in Kosovo, somewhat less in the Republic of Montenegro, and least in the Republic of Macedonia. The extent of relations between Yugoslavia and Albania certainly had a significant impact on the position and situation of the Albanian minority. The correlation in this respect is evident. When these relations were correct, as in the second half of the 1960s, or even good, as in the 1970s, the situation of Albanians in Yugoslavia also improved. A significant deterioration took place in the second half of the 1980s.

In this context, the humanities and social studies in the Albanian language, focusing on Albanian issues, emerged and developed in Kosovo; folklore studies also developed, an important part of which was the collection and interpretation of folk songs. In general, but especially concerning ballad studies, the founder of Albanian folklore studies in Kosovo, Anton Çetta, played a key role here. The Kosovar folklorist presented a coherent concept of ballad research first in the introduction to the volume *Balada dhe legjenda* [Ballads and Legends] and later in a separate article. Incidentally, the article by the Kosovar scholar (Çetta, 1975), published in 1975 in the series *Folklor dhe Etnologji* [Folklore – Ethnology] of the journal *Gjurmime albanologjike* [Albanological Studies] by the Albanological Institute, was reprinted in Albania in the aforementioned first volume of the series *Çështje të folklorit* (Çetta, 1982). This testifies to the lively exchange of ideas and scientific achievements between Albania and Kosovo at the time and is evidence of the efforts made on both sides of the border to get to know each other and speak with one voice. Although these relations were severely limited with the deterioration of the political situation in Kosovo, they never ceased and returned with greater force in the following decades. For this reason, knowledge of the political context is also extremely important for the analysis of academic study.

Nevertheless, let us return to Çetta's paper. The Kosovar scholar defined the ballad as a separate genre of folk art, closely related to legend (hence the title of the collection), and was the first to undertake an analysis of Kosovar songs about walling up. Unlike Sako and other folklorists from Albania who focused primarily on the issue of the autochthonous nature of Albanian versions with this motif, Çetta addressed the historical development of the ballad as a genre, its structural and poetic analysis, and the systematisation of motifs in the variants already collected. The approach he proposed and firmly established eventually became the dominant model in Kosovo in the study of ballads in general, including songs about walling up. In Albania, scholars operated almost exclusively within a clearly defined and highly ideological framework, essentially repeating well-known content. In Kosovo, on the other hand, with an initially

small number of researchers, which only began to grow in the mid-1970s with the opening and strengthening of the University of Pristina, attempts were made to implement new research methods and analytical tools, enriching the existing body of work and, in a way, creating a model for scholars from Albania.

Anton Çetta's text is a striking example of this. Drawing on existing theoretical knowledge of folklore and painting a reasonably coherent picture of the tradition of ballad singing not only in Albania and Kosovo, but also of the songs of the Arbëreshë, the Kosovar scholar presented a coherent concept of the historical development of ballad-singing among Albanians. According to him, ballad-singing evolved from singing combined with dancing in the pre-Ottoman period, characterised by a strong lyrical tone, a high degree of ritualisation, and clear ceremonial functions. After a long decline caused by prolonged resistance to Ottoman invasion – remnants of which survived among the Arbëreshë – it re-emerged as a genre of sung legendary tales, no longer associated with dance, marked by a strong epic and epic-lyrical tone, an elaborate narrative, and a purely entertainment function rather than a ritual one (Çetta, 1982).

Exploring various songs, Çetta identified three constitutive features of Albanian ballads: legendary nature, elaborate narrative, and emphasis on didactic values. The Kosovar folklorist placed greater emphasis on the latter feature because it fit well with the concept underlying his approach to the historical development of the ballad. In his opinion, with the consolidation of Ottoman rule, part of the population emigrated to Italy, while another part moved to the mountains, where clan and tribal structures were re-established as the only real guarantee of security. Thus, the songs lost their gentleness and lightness and became harsh, epic, and rough in terms of artistic, narrative, and didactic means. With the progressive transition to Islam, a religious layer of ideology and customs began to dominate in later ballads (Çetta, 1982, p. 255). Finally, Çetta drew attention to another important element, namely the linguistic changes in the song lyrics resulting from replacing the single-stringed *lahuta* with the two-stringed *çifteli* or four-stringed *sharki* as the accompanying instrument. With its monotonous sound and slow tone, the *lahuta* gave singers time to choose and use phrases that determined the song's quality, the tonic's regularity, and the irregular syllabic structure – in short, their uniqueness. The fast-sounding *çifteli* and *sharki*, with their rhythm, no longer allow for such a treatment; the phrases recede into the background, and the structure of the eight-syllable verse, regulated by simple rhymes, comes to the fore, giving the songs a completely new sound. This is visible in the newer ballads about walling up, which are much shorter and more concise compared to older variants with the same theme (Çetta, 1982, p. 258). It should be noted that Çetta based his argument on Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord's theory of oral-formulaic style. Although folklorists in Albania were well acquainted with their concept, they could not use the works of American scholars, and over time even mentioning them could get researchers into trouble.

Çetta's legacy was developed by a generation of scholars who were, to some extent, his protégés, such as Zymer Neziri, Anton Nikë Berisha, Sadri Fetiu, and younger, like the already mentioned Arbnora Dushi. Although there were cases of studying at other academic centres, it became normal practice over time to complete a full academic cycle in Kosovo, partly thanks to Çetta himself, who was also known as an outstanding teacher and mentor to successive generations of folklorists and ethnologists. Regardless of their educational path, however, these younger scholars almost without exception focused exclusively on the work of Albanians in Kosovo, less frequently on those in the former Yugoslavia, thus creating a nationally oriented body of knowledge covering almost everything Albanian. The cultural and academic cooperation between Albania and Kosovo, which developed dynamically in the 1970s, played an important role in this process[29].

In the case of songs about walling up, a clear methodological leap can be seen in the works of younger scholars. They attempted to go beyond the framework of simple description, as had been done previously with few exceptions, reaching for new research concepts and untrodden paths of interpretation. They focused on specific problems, the analysis of the act of sacrifice and its moral and ethical elements, or on selected aspects of the textual layer of the song. For example, Sadri Fetiu, folklorist, philologist, and director of the Albanological Institute in Pristina from 1991 to 2007, prepared what is probably the most comprehensive literary study on Albanian ballads in general (Fetiu, 2000). I am deliberately using the adjective "literary" here. More than a work of folklore, this collection of previously published articles is primarily a literary study, although there are also references to mythological and historical aspects. Fetiu belongs fully to the second generation of Kosovar folklorists who, although they continued their field research and collected songs and stories, focused more on interpreting the previously collected source material and preparing it for publication. This is most clearly evidenced by his doctoral dissertation on the poetics of ballads. This trend dominated Yugoslav folklore studies at the time, so the case of Albanian researchers in Kosovo is no exception. It is worth remembering that Zymer Neziri, who later became known as one of the best experts on epic songs sung to the accompaniment of the *lahuta*, obtained his doctorate with a dissertation devoted to the poetics of folk lyrics.

However, let us return to Fetiu's book. The researcher approached the source material using patterns and categories typical of literature, or – in anthropological terms – he organised orality using categories typical of literacy. It was a comprehensive and systematic approach. Indeed, his argument was not lacking in folkloristic considerations; he wrote about the history of collecting the

[29] After the events of the Prague Spring, Albania and Yugoslavia, sharing a common sense of threat from the Soviet Union, entered a period of relative normalisation in their mutual relations. It lasted throughout the 1970s and ended quite decisively after mass demonstrations in Kosovo in the spring of 1981, leaving a lasting mark on both sides of the border.

variants and the circulation of the songs, although he devoted little space to aspects of their performance. However, the dissertation's core was a strictly literary analysis, and it is clear that this is where the author felt most comfortable, i.e., approaching the ballads as ordinary literary texts. Only at the very end did Fetiu address the issue of the authorship of the ballad about the walling up. He did so in a similar way to other earlier Albanian scholars, so it is not surprising that he came to similar conclusions. After presenting what could be called a traditional set of arguments, Fetiu concluded (like Zihni Sako and others) that since the city of Shkodër has existed since ancient times, it can be inferred that the version about the construction of the Shkodër fortress is the source of other variants in the Balkans. However, his argument lacked the probability assumptions evident in Sako's analysis or Kadare's essay. There is no longer any "it seems", but a final assessment is presented. In other words, the hypothesis has become a paradigmatic thesis. Thus, it can be concluded that all Albanian folklore studies at that time were fully immersed in historicism, which became the basic method of analysing oral creativity.

School Textbooks

Finally, it is important to note another very significant area, namely school textbooks. In Albania, the first attempts in this field were made in the interwar period, and the *Visaret e Kombit* series certainly played an essential role in this process. Still, the impact of these texts was limited due to the high illiteracy rate and, subsequently, the realities of wartime. After World War II, the new communist authorities launched a widely advertised programme to combat illiteracy. The education system was quickly rebuilt and school textbooks began to be published. At the same time, folklore became an important field of research. Zihni Sako, one of the founders of the Institute of Folklore, but also a lecturer at the Higher Pedagogical Institute in Tirana, wrote a programmatic article in which he argued that folklore was a key component of national culture and postulated the need for both scholarly inquiry and educational activities concerning folklore (Sako, 1948, pp. 3–8). The same scholar prepared the first school textbook for teaching folklore, titled *Folklori Shqiptar për kl. I dhe II të shkollave të mesme* [Albanian Folklore for Grades I and II of Secondary Schools], which the Ministry of Education and Culture published in 1953 (Sako, 1953). The textbook was reprinted in 1955, 1958, 1959 and 1960. Its first and second editions coincided with the publication of Haxhihasani's anthology and Sako's first analytical texts. It is therefore not difficult to guess that the school textbook contained the same ideas, arguments, and conclusions as the scientific dissertations of both folklorists. Thus, scientific content was integrated into the field of school education; as a result, it became part of the general consciousness of students and teachers throughout the country. Many of them had never seen

Shkodër or the Shkodër fortress, but knowledge about the songs about the walling up became widely available and thus also inspiring. Two collections containing fictionalised versions of folk songs, including songs about the walling up, found fertile ground in this environment. This will be discussed in more detail later, so here I only mention this connection between the fields of science, school education, and literature.

With the opening of the University of Tirana in 1957, Zihni Sako and Qemal Haxhihasani also prepared the first academic textbook for teaching folklore to students. This script proved to be one of the most influential school texts on folklore in the Albanian education system and remained in use until the end of the communist regime. Its last edition, co-authored by Agron Fico, a folklorist belonging to the younger generation, was published in 1989 and was also used for several years after the fall of the communist regime (Sako et al., 1989). All subsequent editions of the script included the canonical variant of the ballad about walling up, i.e., *Rozafat*. Based on this textbook, students learned about the motif of walling up in Albanian folklore. Of course, the explanatory notes essentially reflected the ideas that these scholars had included in the articles and academic dissertations mentioned earlier.

The situation was similar in Kosovo. In fact, as part of the thaw in Albanian–Yugoslav relations, almost all school textbooks from Albania began to appear in Pristina. They often found their way into the education system, especially in the case of literature and folklore. However, there was one fundamental difference. In Kosovo, the entire *Visaret e Kombit* series was published, while in Albania it was banned and only some of the materials were reprinted, appropriately edited. The same applies to the publication of *Kanuni and Lekë Dukagjinit*, the basic code of customary law collected and organised by Shtjefën Gjeçovi, a Franciscan born in Kosovo. In Albania, until the mid-1980s, when it was republished (but without the chapter on the position of the Church), it was basically impossible to deal with this subject, and if so, only in the context of criticising reactionary and oppressive customary norms. In Kosovo, the situation was quite the opposite. The works of the Franciscan fathers and other authors banned in Albania were published, analysed, and then introduced into the education system.

After the Fall of Communist Regimes

Even before the nominal fall of the communist regime in the spring of 1991, scholars in Albania began to pay attention to the mythical and anthropological aspects of songs about walling up, although historicism still dominated. This change was initiated by Ardian Klosi, an outstanding literary scholar who was one of the few to study outside Albania in the 1980s, as he obtained his doctorate in Innsbruck with a comparative dissertation on the works of Ivo Andrić, Nikos Kazantzakis, and Ismail Kadare. In January 1991, at a pivotal moment in history and in the country's most prominent literary magazine, the monthly

Nëntori published Klosi's article, *Mitologjia në veprën letrare* [Mythology in Literary Works]. In it, the researcher addressed, among other things, the song motif about walling up, proposing a new approach to it and focusing on the act of sacrifice. However, unlike earlier researchers who also drew attention to this issue, Klosi considered the usefulness of walling up to the general public to be a secondary factor. Instead, he argued that the song's vitality was due to its references to the entire sphere of myths, ancient rituals, and archetypes (Klosi, 1991, p. 134). This was a harbinger of a paradigm shift, evident in the works of both established researchers and those just beginning their scientific careers at the time.

Mark Tirta belonged to the first category. He was a leading ethnographer of his time, continuing the work of Rrok Zojzi, the leading scholar in this field after World War II, and a teacher of several generations of Albanian ethnographers and anthropologists. Earlier, in a veiled manner, and since the early 1990s openly, Tirta made a name for himself as a researcher of Albanian mythology. It can even be said that he created both the theoretical conceptualisation and the methodological foundations of this field. The crowning achievement and summary of his many years of work was the book *Mitologia ndër shqiptarë* [Mythology among Albanians]. In it, Tirta dealt, among other things, with the issue of songs about walling up. The scholar focused his research on two issues: the act of human sacrifice under a new building and the problem of the age and origin of the songs. In the case of the first issue, he significantly broadened the existing research perspective by drawing attention to the presence of this ritual practice across different times and cultures worldwide. He linked this practice to cosmogony, i.e., the myth of the creation of the universe, where the sacrifice of a higher being causes the beginning of life, and parts become the leaven of new wholes. Furthermore, for Tirta, the necessity of human sacrifice under various structures is an expression of animism, i.e., the spiritualisation of a given structure, which guarantees its survival (Tirta, 2004, p. 354). This view through the prism of myths and their realisation in social practices allowed Tirta to arrive at new conclusions, but ones that largely confirmed existing positions. By reviewing the existing and already mentioned literature on the subject and presenting several ancient testimonies, as well as more recent observations from his field trips, the scholar concluded that despite the Balkan parallels, which are natural due to the geographical proximity of the Balkan nations, songs about walling up are nevertheless based on rituals and symbolic practices present in the Illyrian period, in the Middle Ages, and among contemporary Albanians. In other words, Tirta shifted the emphasis from attributing the entire song about walling up to the Albanians to emphasising the ancient social and ritual practices present among their ancestors, and later also among the Albanians themselves, which the song evokes (Tirta, 2004, p. 357).

Gjergj Zheji, a folklorist and (mainly) a literary scholar who predominantly studied the metrics of epic and lyrical folk songs, underwent a similar evolution, albeit on a radically different scale. In 1998, he prepared a new textbook on

folklore for universities and secondary schools. The second edition was published in 2004 and continues to be used as a school textbook and university lecture notes. Thus, Zheji's textbook replaced the acclaimed textbook prepared by Zihni Sako, Qemal Haxhihasani, and Agron Fico. For the purposes of this text, I am using the 2004 edition. In terms of genre, Zheji classified the song about walling up as a legendary song, situating its moment of birth at a time when the custom had already significantly weakened. The brothers began construction without first making a sacrifice, even though they must have known from the very beginning what needed to be done (Zheji, 2004, p. 134). However, another assessment was equally important – one that was as affective as it was genre-based. Zheji described the song as tragic and considered the young mother to be the only actual victim. He justified this assessment with a quote from the final part of the Elbasan variant, in which the young wife laments her and her son's fate and then begs the earth not to accept her (Zheji, 2004, p. 134). A more significant shift occurred when the researcher addressed the issue of the song's origin. He unequivocally rejected the view that the central component of the Albanian variant of the song is *besa*. With a certain degree of irony, he noted that if this criterion were applied, it would be a song about two-thirds of Albanians breaking their word, as the two older brothers broke *besa* (Zheji, 2004, p. 135). Zheji pointed out that the layer with the *besa* motif must have been added later to the original version. Moreover, he finally concluded: "As can be seen, this song, widespread throughout the Balkans, actually drew on various legendary songs on the same theme that originated in different places, which is why it is very difficult today to stick to a given model" (Zheji, 2004, p. 135).

Shaban Sinani belongs to another category of researchers. He initiated and consistently continues interdisciplinary research, drawing on the achievements of folklore studies, anthropology, and religious studies. As I mentioned earlier, attempts to apply an interdisciplinary approach to oral creativity can be found as early as the interwar period, and Mark Tirta also referred to it. However, Sinani not only undertook a new systematisation of the research problem but also added research on myths, a religious studies approach, textual analysis, and a psychoanalytical perspective to this framework. The result was a very interesting methodological mix, but the goal remained the same. Sinani sought to create a comprehensive concept within which he acknowledges and analyses deeper mythical layers in Albanian folklore, identifies what he considers to be epiphanies or traces of the ancient beliefs of the Illyrians and Albanians, and then discusses their connections with other mythical systems in the region or more broadly (see Sinani, 1997, 2006). The song about the walling up was not the subject of analysis per se, but a tool for building this system, a kind of field where founding myths materialise. Situating himself on the borderline between mythology and belief studies, Sinani viewed the song about the walling up as a particular effect or reaction to the ritual and social practice of human sacrifice. It is precisely human sacrifice that becomes, for him, the key to understanding the power of this song and its enduring presence in Albanian culture and be-

yond. Nevertheless, although he undoubtedly used new and, in the Albanian context, innovative research methods and tools, Sinani did not ultimately break with historicism, as he continued to view the relationship between orality and literacy primarily through a temporal framework, in a linear, if not evolutionary, manner, rather than through the prism of the transformations and intersections of the two systems of interpersonal communication.

Olimbi Velaj represents a similar approach. In her book *Balada – nga oraliteti në letërsi: Një vështrim i baladës shqiptare në kontekst ndërballkanik* [Ballad – from orality to literature. A look at the Albanian ballad in the Balkan context] (Velaj, 2020), she analysed the entire body of Albanian folklore studies to date concerning the ballad as a folklore genre. The supervisor of the doctoral dissertation, which later became the basis for Velaj's book, was Shaban Sinani, so the researcher's work shows a similar focus on mythology and religious studies, as evident in the aforementioned works of the Albanian scholar. However, Velaj went further as she adopted a clearly critical stance towards the achievements of not only Albanian but also Balkan folklore studies. She first expressed this in several articles and ultimately in the book published in 2020. In her article *Balada e murimit në studimet shqiptare* [The Ballad about Walling up in Albanian Studies] (Velaj, 2012), Velaj systematised and summarised Albanian scholars' views on the ballad as a folklore genre and, more specifically, on walling-up songs. Starting from reflections on folklore in general in Europe and the Balkans, the researcher discussed the development of this research in Albania, pointing out the main trends, achievements, and shortcomings. Placing this achievement in the context of the work and ideas of scholars such as Mikhail Arnaudov in the Balkans and Alan Dundes on a general, global level, Velaj concluded that there is a general tendency to "privatise and nationalise" songs. At the same time, Albanian variants remain largely unexplored in comparison with the traditions of other Balkan nations. Pointing to the main achievements of Albanian folklorists, she drew attention to their research on human sacrifice and the practice of replacing it with other objects or symbolic rituals (Velaj, 2012).

However, Velaj presented a truly critical analysis of the works of her Albanian predecessors in her article *Folklori në Ballkan, subjektivizimi në studimet e shekullit të fundit, rasti i baladës së murimit* [Folklore in the Balkans, subjectivisation in studies of the last century, the example of the ballad about walling up] (Velaj, 2021). In this study, the researcher also used the same strategy to build her argument, first presenting the European context of the development of general folklore studies, and then summarising the history of research on the ballad of the walling up in the Balkans and among Albanians. Based on the theoretical concepts of Alan Dundes (1996), Michael Herzfeld (2003), and Benedict Anderson (1983), as well as on the historical analysis of Denis Hupchick (2002), Velaj showed how concern for folklore and folk art was a vital component of the development of modern nationalisms. Against this background, she briefly presented the process of collecting and publishing successive variants of songs about walling up in the Balkans, starting with Serbian, Bulgarian,

Macedonian, Romanian, Greek, and finally Albanian ones. At this point, Velaj criticised the process of nationalising the ballad, essentially by scholars from all Balkan countries. Although the researcher described Arnaudov as "relatively objective" (Velaj, 2021, p. 157), she criticised his concept of the migration of the walling up motif from Greece through Bulgaria and further towards Romania and Serbia, and his attribution of primacy to the Greek variant. The issue is not only that the scholar had only a superficial knowledge of the Albanian variants, but simply that the historical-comparative method fails in this case.

Velaj also criticised Roderick Beaton, who, in an article titled *The Greek Ballad "The Bridge of Arta" as Myth*, later included in the anthology edited by Dundes, argued that scholars such as Giōrgos Megas and Lajos Vargyas had not gone as far in their analysis of the myth of the Arta Bridge as Zihni Sako, who claimed that "even if this were not so and Arta were the 'original' location of the ballad, the region around Arta has belonged culturally to the Albanians (or Illyrians) since prehistoric times" (Beaton, 1996, p. 68). On the contrary, according to the Albanian researcher, Sako was no different from many other scholars who had the same goal and used the same method (Velaj, 2021, p. 160). Meanwhile, the researcher continued, there is no doubt that the motif of walling up is much older than all the songs collected in the Balkans and is likely to have originated from India (Velaj, 2021, p. 161). Where songs were collected and published earliest, the historical-comparative method was also first applied, although this was often an instrumental approach. Various scholars have put forward different a priori hypotheses, especially regarding the origin and authorship of songs. However, when the source material did not confirm these hypotheses, such elements were often rejected or ignored. According to Velaj, the song came to the Balkans with the migration of the Roma people, but ballads sung by this ethnic group were either collected very rarely or not at all in almost all Balkan countries (Velaj, 2021, pp. 163–164). Perhaps, she concluded, the solution to this problem is a radical change in method, and this has been happening recently, as evidenced by the transition from diachrony to synchrony. In the synchronic approach, the emphasis is on semantics and a deep understanding of the ballad, rather than on its origin. What is important is not where the first version was created or who created it, but how to interpret the song (Velaj, 2021, pp. 164–165).

It is impossible to pass by Velaj's interpretation indifferently because it represents a radical break with the previously dominant research and interpretative approach in Albanian folklore studies. The shift towards synchrony and the emphasis on constitutive features, the acknowledgement of an echo of the founding myth in the song motif about walling up, the realisation of rites of passage and the fulfilment of the life cycle, but also the cruel act testifying to the low social status of women, and finally, avoiding ideologised language – all this makes Velaj's thinking fully in line with the long-awaited and even necessary paradigm shifts mentioned above.

This was not the only such break. An article by Izaim Murtezani, an Albanian researcher from North Macedonia, was also an attempt to take a new look at

the existing scientific discourse. He based his analysis on the work of Bulgarian scholar Ljubomira Parpulova (see Парпулова, 1983), on a proposal by American researcher Ruth Mandel (to apply feminist concepts, see Mandel, 1983, pp. 173–183) and, more generally, on reception theory. First, following Parpulova, the researcher took a critical view of the nationalisation of oral tradition and reflection on monogenesis, i.e., efforts to find a source song for all other variants. Then, following Mandel, he proposed approaching the walled-up motif through the prism of Victor Turner's concept of liminality. At the same time, however, he emphasised the difference between the behaviour of the walled-up woman in Greek songs and in Albanian songs, especially in the semantic and semiological interpretation of them in Kosovo. Murtezani noted that in one of the variants published in Çetta's collection (see Çetta, 1974, p. 14), the young wife not only voluntarily agrees to be walled up but also suggests to her brothers-in-law and husband that the latter marry her seventeen-year-old sister (Murtezani, 2012, p. 668). The researcher compared this voluntary sacrifice of life to the courageous behaviour of Iphigenia just before the Achaean army set off for the Trojan War. Although, as he added, this fact could be considered proof of the archaic nature of the Albanian song, he left it in the realm of probability rather than certainty. Following this line of thought, Murtezani pointed to a number of liminal elements visible in Albanian songs from Kosovo, as he only worked with texts from Çetta's collection. He considered the crowing of the rooster at the dawn of a new day, the baking of bread by the young wife, the emphasis on her crossing the threshold of the house, the singing of birds and the woman's conversation with them, and, finally, the number three to be such elements. Although the researcher does not mention this, it is worth adding to his argument that the combination of the three social roles of the walled-up woman (woman, wife, and young mother) is liminal in general. Finally, drawing on two interpretative paths proposed by Alan Dundes, namely the feminist perspective, which focuses on the walled-up woman, and the psychoanalytical perspective, which focuses on her husband, Murtezani came to an important conclusion: there are many possible interpretations, and folklorists must learn that the multiplicity of variants is accompanied by a diversity of perspectives (Murtezani, 2012, p. 670).

At around the same time, i.e., at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, a similar paradigm shift took place in Kosovo. Folklorist Leontina Gega-Musa analysed the sacrifice of the woman through a combination of feminist and anthropological approaches. A significant novelty was the comparative approach, as the researcher drew on source material from various Balkan variants of the song. For her, the walled-up woman is primarily a victim of harsh and uncompromising social norms. The act of walling up, as the researcher emphasised, can be interpreted in various ways – as an expression and symbol of life, fertility or transition to a new dimension or state – but the starting point for this type of interpretation should be the social context to which these songs refer. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the presence of the motif of walling up in various

traditions in the Balkans, Gega-Musa clearly departed from the paradigm of the primacy of authorship, favouring instead the emphasis on congruence between these traditions in both time and space (Gega-Musa, 2014).

Arbnora Dushi, mentioned earlier, expressed a very similar opinion. The Kosovar folklorist undertook an analysis of the authorship of the ballad about walling up, reviewing old concepts and ideas as well as more recent reflections. She rightly pointed out that there are many interpretations of the song about walling up from various scholarly, conceptual, and ideological perspectives. Scholars still cannot agree on its meaning, although they all agree that the motif of walling up is highly prevalent in the Balkans. However, according to Dushi, the most critical issue that has occupied the attention of scholars both in the Balkan countries and beyond is the question of the song's origin. Reviewing the range of existing arguments, Dushi presented the various positions of Balkan scholars in considerable detail, significantly enriching the knowledge that, in Albania, had remained at the level of Sako's article mentioned above. Certainly, especially in the context of Kosovar folklore studies, a notable novelty was the attention paid to Alan Dundes's hypothesis regarding the Indian origin of the ballad about the walling up (Dundes, 2007). It is worth remembering that Velaj also referred to this hypothesis. The American folklorist put forward this assumption based on several comments by Francis Hindes Groome, who in 1899 included the fairy tale *Story of the Bridge*, recorded in Romania, in his collection *Gypsy Folktales*. Although fully aware that the story of Master Manole, his eleven builder brothers, the construction of a bridge over a wide river, and the murder of his wife Léngy is essentially a collection of various phrases and motifs present in Balkan and other folklore, Groome considered this text valuable because it refers to a song about walling up. Against this background, he linked the tradition of songs about sacrificing women under the foundations of buildings with an Indian fairy tale about seven brothers who sacrificed their sister to build a well (Groome, 1899, pp. 12–13). Although Groome based this assumption on completely erroneous arguments, such as the fact that most builders in the Balkans were Gypsies (the English collector used the term Gypsy, so I am retaining this form), Dundes considered this clue important and built his hypothesis on it. Dushi, in turn, contrasted the American folklorist's reasoning and argumentation with the whole spectrum of different views on the Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, and Serbian origins of this song. Thus, the Kosovar researcher concluded that the motif of walling up is the result of creative polygenesis, i.e., not of a single nation or culture, but of different socio-historical contexts, and not borrowings, as previously thought, but the result of long-term interaction and proximity (Dushi, 2018, pp. 40–41).

Finally, another Kosovar researcher, better known as a philologist and anthropologist than a folklorist, is worth mentioning. Anton Kolë Berishaj proposed a complete departure from the existing interpretation of walling up as an act based on a woman's voluntary sacrifice for the common good. Taking as his starting point the entire body of research on sacrifice in different periods and

cultural contexts, the researcher proposed a new perspective on the "legend of Rozafa". The latter phrase is essential for two reasons. Firstly, nowhere in Berishaj's article do the terms "song" and "ballad" appear, having been replaced by the term "legend". This methodological approach clearly links the topos of the walled-up woman with the realm of mythology, legend, and stories of a distinctly archaic nature. Secondly, the author uses the name Rozafa for the walled-up woman, first referring to Barleti's testimony mentioned above, and then, going further, making this name the eponym for the entire topos. I will return to the latter issue later in my analysis; therefore, I only mention it briefly here.

Drawing on classic and almost forgotten works, such as the extensive article by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (Hubert & Mauss, 1897–1898), Yugoslav research on matriarchy (Sklevicky, 1984), and, of course, referring to the work of Albanian researchers, Berishaj critically analysed the essence of the act of walling up, i.e., the sacrifice of a woman. Most importantly, however, he was one of the first Albanian researchers to filter the legend of walling up through the prism of gender theories, reaching crucial conclusions. The researcher noted that there is no doubt that, in oral tradition, women (with a few exceptions) typically appear as objects, with roles assigned to them rather than created by them (Berishaj, 2014, p. 114). He also considered the legend of Rozafa to be an expression of this tendency. Yes, it is true that men also give their lives for the community, often in battle, demonstrating heroism. However, their act is one of self-sacrifice, as "they sacrifice themselves, they are not sacrificed" (Berishaj, 2014, p. 115). It is a paradox that the third of the three builder brothers – the only one who remained loyal to his *besa* – lost the most; in other words, the noblest of virtues, honesty, was punished. "The legend shows the severity and intransigence of social norms towards the female victim, denying her (Rozafa) even the right to object or be persuaded" (Berishaj, 2014, p. 112). For him, even the woman's last words – her request to leave her breast outside the wall – which were considered a symbol of life-giving power, are also an expression of patriarchal domination. As he noted, even the child cared for by the walled-up mother is a son, not a daughter. The walled-up woman was sacrificed for the benefit of her husband and the community, not for her own sake. It was an act of real violence, which, yes, ensured her eternity, but only as a victim, not as a heroine consciously and voluntarily sacrificing herself for others, the scholar concluded (Berishaj, 2014, p. 115). It begs to be added to Berishaj's conclusion that the walled-up woman was subjected to double violence: first, real violence during the act of walling her up, and later, symbolic violence in the song.

This is undoubtedly an essential voice in discussions about the song/legend about the walled-up woman in Albanian humanities. The article was written by a scholar who was soon to become a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo (since 2019, Berishaj has been a full member of this institution) and appeared in the first issue of a periodical that was intended to be the leading social science journal in Kosovo. It was not, therefore, one of those publications that fill Sunday newspaper supplements or a simple post on

social media, but a text published in a journal issued by the most important scientific institution in the country. Although it has some shortcomings in terms of scientific apparatus and several stylistic and editorial or proofreading mistakes, Berishaj's use of new theoretical inspirations and methodological tools should be noted. The researcher broke with the previously dominant interpretation of the act of walling up as a voluntary self-sacrifice by the woman. By introducing a gender perspective and situating the act of walling up within the context of customary norms and patriarchal social relations, he has highlighted aspects of it that were previously only hinted at, as in Gega-Musa, or briefly described through the prism of Marxist social science in neighbouring Albania. Being walled up is not a voluntary act of self-sacrifice but an instance of being made a victim of violence.

Above, I have discussed attempts to interpret the songs about walling up undertaken mainly by folklorists, most of whom, I might add, had a clear philological bent. For a long time, they oscillated around a few unchanging issues, and only in recent years has a change in trends and research interests become apparent. There is still a shortage of perspectives on such important elements of the song's functioning as an act of performance, the singer–audience relationship, the impact of communication changes from orality through literacy to contemporary social media, musical aspects, and melodiousness, and finally, the ritual social practices that have arisen around or in connection with the song. Nevertheless, a substantial and valuable body of work has already been produced, making it an interesting subject for analysis.

The creation of this body of work was accompanied by two significant phenomena, which in turn had a major impact on the transposition of songs about walling up from the realm of oral tradition to the realm of written culture, or, in other words, determined the formation of the topos of walling up in Albanian culture. Firstly, the vast majority of analyses, interpretations, references, and allusions to the song in question are based on the variant involving the construction of a fortress rather than a bridge, except for Ismail Kadare's novel, which will be discussed later. Secondly, despite the relatively quick realisation after World War II that there are many variants about the construction of at least several fortresses, the semantic field has been dominated by the song about the construction of the Shkodër fortress, i.e., "Rozafat". This is not surprising, of course, as it was published first – as the opening volume of a series that aspired to set the standard – and is associated with a city that was important for Albanian culture and politics in the first half of the 20th century. It is worth noting, however, that its canonical position was determined not only by the circumstances of its publication but also by numerous subsequent references made by writers, artists, and other creators. The fact that it was the only song to be included in school textbooks, becoming the basis and exemplification of knowledge about the walled-up woman at the level of general knowledge, also had a significant impact on the process of its canonisation.

New Interpretations

However, the interpretations discussed above also have shortcomings, the causes of which were twofold: political, especially during the communist period, and methodological. It is therefore worth taking another in-depth look at the song's lyrics to highlight content that has been deliberately omitted or is entirely new. Due to its earlier reception and translations into other languages, not only in Poland but also more widely, the Serbian (although, due to the Kolašin origin of the singer Starac Raško, from whom Vuk Karadžić wrote down the lyrics, I would opt for the term: Montenegrin-Serbian) version of the song about the construction of the Shkodër fortress, i.e., *Zidanje Skadra*, is the better-known. Meanwhile, it is worth taking a closer look at the Albanian song *Rozafat* – not so much to undertake a comparative analysis, as such attempts have already been made, but above all to better understand its later cultural emanations. As I have already pointed out, Bernardin Palaj and Donat Kurti failed to provide any information about who wrote down the lyrics of the song *Rozafat* and where it was done. However, the three place names that appear in the song – Buna, Valdanuz, and Kazena – allow us to put forward an interesting hypothesis. The song begins with invoking the fog that for three days and three nights enveloped Buna and then rose towards Valdanuz. Buna is a river flowing from Lake Scutari to the Adriatic Sea, i.e., the Bojana River in the version of Starac Raško. Valdanuz, which is not mentioned in the Montenegrin-Serbian song, refers to the hill on which the Shkodër fortress stands. No one has yet noticed that when the youngest wife brings dinner to the three masters at work, she "goes down through Kazena". This name is none other than Casina, which appears in a report prepared by Mariano Bolizza, a Venetian official from Kotor, who visited the then Sanjak of Shkodër in 1614, leaving a very detailed description of almost all its localities. Casina/Kazena is a village located on the Tarabosh hill, above Lake Scutari; at that time it had 23 households, all Catholic, and 60 men under arms (Elsie, n.d.). Today, a road called Rruga e Kazenës, i.e. Kazena Road, runs along the eastern slope of Mount Tarabosh. Therefore, assuming that the singer set the events in an area he knew very well, and that the youngest of the wives "went down to the hill where the builders were building a fortress", it is highly possible that the song did not originate in Shkodër itself (because then the woman bringing lunch would have gone up towards Valdanuz), but in the villages on the other side of the Buna, perhaps in Shirokë or other villages located on Mount Tarabosh.

Seen as a whole, the song *Rozafat* does not differ from the structural framework of other stories about walling up in the Balkans. The differences are revealed in nuances and details, such as the place names discussed above. The singer emphasises that the three builder brothers are Christians (Alb. *të krishtênë*), but anyone familiar with the social realities of Shkodër and the surrounding area knows that this term refers to Catholics. The necessity of walling

up is brought about by a saint (Alb. *shênjt*), but the singer emphasises that this is a living person, not an apparition. Perhaps for this reason, when asked by the brothers to explain the nightly ruination of the walls, he replies that he knows how to remedy the situation but will not disclose it as he would be sinning. It is interesting, however, that the singer uses the word *gjynah* to refer to sin, a word typical of Muslims, rather than *mëkat*, used by the Christians (Palaj & Kurti, 1937, p. 243). The brothers ask him to transfer the burden of sin to them and advise them what to do. However, their answer still does not convince the saint, who asks if they are married. Only when he receives this assurance from them does he point out the need for the walling up; however, he also instructs them not to work on Sundays, which again refers to Catholic social practices and reveals a great deal about the provenance of the song. There is therefore no other option but to wall up one of their wives, which differs from the Montenegrin-Serbian variant, where an attempt is first made to wall up two twins. However, given the slim chance of finding twins named Stoja and Stojan, this condition seems to be a compositional device with a retardation function, which only slightly delays what is bound to happen, i.e., walling up one of the builders' wives. Perhaps both in the setting of a practically unfulfillable condition in a Montenegrin-Serbian song and in the saint's insistence on an answer as to whether the brothers are married, in the Albanian song one should see a concern not to enter into a spiral of "blood debt"[30]. According to the customary law of the Albanians and Montenegrins, this would happen if one of the builders' children or relatives were walled up. The saint demands that the builders "tie their word and faith" (Alb. *lidhni besë e lidhni fé*), which is another separate element of the Rozafat song, because in the Montenegrin-Serbian song, a *vila* demands that they respect the difficult divine faith. Thus, in the Albanian variant, a bond is formed by the word given and by invoking God on both earthly and heavenly levels of life. This makes the breaking of the word given by the two older brothers even more dramatic and reprehensible. The singer describes this act with the verb *çart* [to destroy, to tear out, to demolish], and not *shkel* [to trample], which is commonly used in colloquial Albanian. It is worth noting that Kadare, and many others who repeated his opinion after him, were mistaken in considering the term *pogazio vjeru* [trample on faith] (Kadare, 1980a, p. 27) in a Montenegrin-Serbian song recorded from the Starac Raško as a calque of the Albanian *çarti besë e çarti fé*. Both phrases have separate connotations and are very close to each other, but on an axiological level, not a lexicographical or etymological one.

[30] I am referring here to the obligation of blood revenge when a male member of a family is killed, even accidentally. In particular, Albanian and Montenegrin customary laws regulated the procedure for such cases with precision. It is often argued that this encouraged endless vendettas, sometimes leading to human tragedies, loss of property, abandonment of homes, and even the destruction of families. Meanwhile, the inevitability of blood debt served a particular regulatory and even preventive function, as can be seen, for example, in the Kanun of Leki Dukagjini.

All the brothers have young wives, and the singer emphasises this in two situations. When describing the brothers' conversation with the saint, their wives are referred to using the word *vashë*, which means a young girl, but also a young fiancée or wife. When the mother asks each of the women in turn to take dinner to the builders, she calls them using the word *gjelinë*, which, especially in the speech of Shkodër and the surrounding villages, means a young wife. Such nuances of meaning again suggest that the text comes from Shkodër or its surroundings. Of course, the sequence of events is similar to other Balkan variants. The listener/reader learns that the two older brothers could not resist and broke their word, whereas the younger brother kept his, which immediately arouses sympathy for him. However, the singer attempts to create a state of anticipation that prevails among all the brothers, juxtaposing the breaking of stones under the blows of hammers with the beating of their hearts. The scene of choosing the one who is to bring lunch to the builders also does not differ from the general Balkan pattern. The first wife explains that she woke up sick, however, it is worth noting the dialectalism again, as she uses the words *jam ndjehun sot e ligë* [weak, infirm], and not the general *e smut/e sëmurë* [sick]. The second wife explains that she is going to visit her relatives (Albanian gjini, also a dialectalism). These dialectalisms are further evidence of the origin of this variant of the song in Shkodër itself or its surroundings, as these are words belonging to the northern, i.e., Gheg, dialect of the Albanian language. The third wife, on the other hand, explains that although she needs to take care of her son, she is willing to bring lunch.

Two observations come to mind here. By constructing the song this way, the singer also contrasts the first two wives and the third. There is thus a parallel between the two older brothers and their wives, because the listener already knows that both they and their wives are lying, as they are aware of what awaits the one who brings lunch. This is the first moment when the former listener and the contemporary reader encounter the third brother's wife and see her as a good and devoted wife and mother. This moment in the song can be considered the first step towards the sanctification of women. The second observation that comes to mind is general. The brothers live together under one roof in a large, multi-generational family. The only thing missing is the father. He is nowhere to be found, and not only in Albanian songs with this theme. It is the mother who runs the household. She gives orders and also reassures the young wife that they would take care of her child, that they would not let it cry. The mother's use of the pronoun "we" indicates the existence of a family community and that she is clearly in charge of it.

The singer's artistry comes to the fore again with the description of the brothers meeting one of their wives bringing lunch, when "the hammers freeze in place and hearts stop beating". Seeing his wife, the youngest brother throws down his hammer and curses the fortress wall. When the woman asks him why he is doing this, he does not answer. However, the singer takes on the role of one of the brothers, perhaps the eldest, who tells her that misfortune will befall

her, as they have decided to wall her up. The singer uses the dialect word *rrezik* to denote this misfortune, rather than the more common *fatkeqësi*, which may confuse the modern reader, for whom the former word rather means "threat". The young wife does not protest; there is no conversation, no attempt to evade or change the situation. Therefore, when comparing this song with other Albanian or Balkan variants, a reasonable and straightforward question arises: Why? There has been talk of folklorists and writers who interpreted this silence as a voluntary sacrifice for the common good or as a sign of courage and bravery. They found confirmation for this interpretation in the following fragment of the song, in which the wife, who is about to be walled up, announces her last request. However, she begins this peculiar monologue by wishing her brothers-in-law good health. One might get the impression that she is doing this as a gesture of kindness, but it is equally possible to think that it is her protest or even a reproach. It is puzzling that she does not address her husband or include him in these wishes for good health, and, although she addresses her last words to the builders, she does not specify who she means.

However, there is one more element that is usually overlooked. It is the woman's *right* side that remains outside the wall. This opens up a field for reflection on the relationships between, on the one hand, cosmogony and the vertical axis of spatial organisation (top-bottom) and, on the other hand, axiology and the horizontal axis (right-left). In many ancient mythologies, the right side is clearly associated with the sacred sphere, as in the Egyptian cult of the Sun, or in the Greek right hand of Zeus or the sword held by Themis in her right hand. In the Christian world, the right side is clearly identified with the divine sphere of life, while the left side belongs to the world of evil, magic and demons. The right hand is important because it is used to perform sanctifying acts, such as saying goodbye or blessing. In this sense, leaving the right side outside the wall is the ultimate sanctification of the woman both as a mother (because she cares for her son) and as a chthonic deity (because her milk becomes a guarantee of fertility). Solely out of concern for her son, the woman accepts a slow rather than immediate death.

She also addresses her last wish to him: that her knee become a wall that will strengthen the fortress. In the 1937 edition quoted here, the word *gjûni* [knee] appears. In the first post-war edition of this song in Haxhihasani's anthology, it was replaced with the word *gjini* [breast], which seems to make more sense. However, could the singer really have meant the right knee on which the fortress will rest? We will probably never know. Among these editorial changes, one more deserves attention. Haxhihasani and Sako also changed the last line of the song from "U bâftë kralj e luftoftë!" [Let him become king and fight] to "U bâftë kralj e n'te luftoftë!" [Let him become king and fight in it (i.e., in the fortress)] (Haxhihasani, 1955, p. 8). This is a fundamental difference, as in the first version the son is to grow up to be a warrior, while in the other it is the fortress that is to be his, and he is to fight in it. Finally, one more element should be noted that indicates the local origin of the song. The singer uses the word

krajl, which originates from Slavic languages, to refer to the king. In northern Albania and Kosovo, this word is a dialectalism and is found in oral works. The word would be *mbret* in southern Albania and the Albanian diaspora.

I can only assume that the lack of a clearly marked object associated with the song and founding legend, such as the Shkodër fortress, meant that the song motif about the walling up in the bridge's foundation did not become part of the Albanian cultural canon. It is a much broader tradition, in geographical terms, encompassing variants sung in both the north and south of the country, as well as in Albania and beyond. Shaban Sianini writes that there are more recorded and transcribed variants about the construction of the fortress (90) than about the construction of the bridge (60) (Sinani, 1997, pp. 80–87), although – I would like to point out again – I counted 187 variants in the archives of the Institute of Cultural Anthropology, and these proportions seem more balanced.

Meanwhile, songs about the construction of the bridge also reveal fascinating nuances that have been barely explored or not explored at all to date. Let us return for a moment to the variant from Chameria mentioned here. What intrigues is the idea of dividing the act of sacrifice between three beings – a woman, a bull, and a ram – although ultimately this does not happen. Is this an echo or a foreshadowing of a change in the nature of the sacrifice? As we know, bulls were regularly sacrificed in ancient times, and rams are still sacrificed today. Finally, it is impossible not to notice that there is a connection between women and animals that are clearly associated with the masculine element.

A unique element is the growth of a fig tree bearing white fruit. This motif appears, for example, in Bulgarian songs collected in the region around Gjumjurdzhina (Greek: Komotini), as described by Bulgarian scholar Ljubomira Parpulova. There, however, just before the walling up, the husband comforts his wife, telling her that she will turn into a fig tree and her milk will feed their son (Parpulova, 1984, p. 429). In general, the growth of trees is a common element in oral tradition, especially in tragic love songs, where trees grow on lovers' graves. In Albanian tradition, this tree is typically a cypress, but a rose is also commonly used. These are symbols of Christian culture (especially in the south of the country) and Muslim culture (throughout the country), respectively. In this variant, however, a fig tree appears, whose first fruit is to be eaten by the son of the walled-up woman, and, to my knowledge, this is the only such case not only in Albanian songs about the walled-up woman, but in Albanian oral tradition in general.

This immediately brings to mind biblical symbolism. The fig tree is the third tree mentioned in the Bible after the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In total, the fig tree and figs are mentioned in the Bible more than fifty times (compared to only once in the Quran), and each time they are surrounded by symbolic power. Thus, a fig harvest is a sign of God's blessing (Isaiah 36:16; 2 Kings 18:31), while early figs are a symbol of the righteous (Micah 7:1–2; Hosea 9:10), and a growing fig tree together with a vine, another equally symbolic biblical plant, is a symbol of peace, security, and permanence

(1 Kings 5:5). Accordingly, a poor fig harvest is a harbinger of disaster and divine punishment, while rotten, i.e., worthless, figs are a symbol of evil people (Jer 24:8–10). It therefore seems extremely important that the act of human sacrifice functions in this song in close association with such strong symbolism. In other words, the sacrifice of a woman is not only meant to strengthen the bridge, but also to bring peace and prosperity, symbolised by the fig tree.

Of course, this may be a misinterpretation, and this detail in the song simply reflects reality, as fig trees, which benefit from sunlight and moisture, often grow on old walls of buildings and stone bridges in southern Albania and northern Greece. However, an additional argument for linking the song to biblical symbolism is the names of the three builder brothers. Pano is the Albanian equivalent of the Greek abbreviation *Panos* (Greek: Πάνος), derived from Panagiotis (Greek: Παναγιώτης), meaning "all-holy" and closely related to the epithet *Panagia*, which refers to Mary. Mihal is, of course, the Albanian form of St. Michael. Kiço, on the other hand, is the Albanian form of the Greek *Kitsos* (Greek: Κίτσος), which means "anointed" and derives directly from the name Christos/Christ. The brothers' surname is Guri, which means "stone" in Albanian and refers directly to their profession. Considering the dynamics of the formulaic style, these nuances of meaning are not accidental but are the result of a conscious choice by the singer. This is the only way to explain the phrase "Kiço i vogël si nuri" [little Kiço like splendour/light/purity]. This strong and multi-layered Christian symbolism can therefore be interpreted as an expression of the song's archaic nature. However, the fact that the song, in which the characters have distinctly Christian names, was sung by Muslims is indisputable proof of the long-standing tradition of singing in an environment that is a borderland of cultures, religions, and languages.

As Arbnora Dushi rightly pointed out in her article, a comprehensive analysis will only be possible once all Albanian variants of the song about walling up have been identified. Nevertheless, the themes mentioned above allow us to draw several conclusions. The interpretations of the walled-up topos by Albanian folklorists result from broader processes that Albanian folklore studies and other related disciplines underwent in the 20th and 21st centuries. I note three stages of development. The first step is to recognise and outline the field of research, establish boundaries, and expand the source material. For political and, consequently, socio-economic reasons, the second stage unfolded differently in Albania, the former Yugoslavia and more broadly, but its essence was the same everywhere: nationalising oral creativity and creating canonical interpretations in this spirit. A break from the ideological monophony typical of the communist period characterises the third stage. On the one hand, I have mentioned scholars who reproduce and continue the trends and views established in the previous era, albeit without the ideological trappings; on the other hand, I have also mentioned researchers who criticise or question them, proposing new research approaches and interpretative perspectives in their place. These debates and discussions, and the body of knowledge that has emerged in their

course, also constantly emanate into other intellectual and social life areas. Thus, how the topos of the walled-up woman functions in these areas will be the subject of analysis in the further parts of this study.

Back to Shkodër

Anyone visiting modern Shkodër will inevitably come across the name "Rozafa" at some point. The main hotel in the city remains the Hotel Rozafa[31], which has dominated the central Migjeni Square panorama since its opening in 1971. The hotel's café is considered a prestigious venue, and the banquet hall on the first floor hosts weddings throughout the summer. The Hotel Rozafa is undoubtedly a locus dignitatis for the city's residents.



Figure 7. Marubi postcard of 1915.
Source: author unknown (possibly Kolë Marubi), scan of the original postcard, from Rigels Halili's collection

Just a few steps away from the Rozafa Hotel is the Marubi National Museum of Photography, which, although only a fraction of the collection is on display, houses around half a million glass plates and negatives taken by three generations of the famous Marubi family: the founder, Italian Pietro Marubi (1834–1903), his Albanian apprentice Kel Kodheli (1870–1940), who changed his surname to Marubi after being adopted by the old master, and finally by Kel's son, Geg Marubi (1907–1984). In addition to beautiful photographs of the era, which are indeed of significant historical value, travellers can see a postcard from the early 20th century showing the Shkodra fortress with two inscriptions: on the left, "Souvenir from Shkodra", and on the right, "Rozafat Fortress" (Figure 7).

The name Rozafa can be found in various contexts. The largest fishing and fish product manufacturing company in Albania is called Rozafa. Shkodër is

[31] See Historia Shqiptare në Vite (2021).

home to the charming Oda Art Gallery, run by the well-known Shkodër poet, artist, and photographer Rozafa Shpuza. The names Rozafa (female) and Rozafat (male) are often found in Albania, Kosovo, and the Albanian diaspora. The International Animated Film Festival for Children, held in Shkodër since 2010 (although it has also taken place several times in Gjirokastër in southern Albania) is called "Anifest Rozafa". Furthermore, referring back to the beginning of my text, anyone searching the internet for information about Shkodër will undoubtedly come across a mention that the local castle is named after Rozafa. During their visit, they will hear the legend of a young mother named Rozafa (hence the name of the building) who was walled up in its foundations, see the famous recess, and take souvenir photos.

One could multiply these examples, but that is not the point. There is no doubt that the name Rozafa is ubiquitous – not only in Shkodër, but also much more broadly in Albania and Kosovo, and increasingly in the diaspora – in various contexts: as a place, a proper name, the name of companies, hotels, sports clubs, and even stables. Due to the castle, it is a key word for the tourism industry in Shkodër, as well as a constant point of cultural and social reference, and thus also economic and political at the local, national, and international levels. All these parallels come together in one point – the Shkodër castle and the walled-up woman. Before I move on to other issues, it is worth looking at how this came about.

To begin with, two simple questions arise: what is the origin of this name and why has it become so popular? In relation to present-day Shkodër, this name appears for the first time as "grad Rosafa" in the biography of Stefan Nemanja, written by his son and the first king of medieval Serbia, Stefan I the Crowned/ Stefan Nemanjić Prvovenčani) in 1215 (Thallóczy, 1916, p. 105; see also Skendi, 1954, p. 51). Barleti, already mentioned here, indirectly testified to this with his remark about the founding legend of the city, and Hecquard and Mihačević referred to his thoughts, explaining the origin of the name as a combination of Rosa and Fa. Nevertheless, the matter remained unclear for a long time, and for many it was inexplicable. For instance, in the mid-1930s, discussing *Zidanje Skadra* and the song's connections with other similar songs in the Balkans, while trying to prove that the Albanian version of Rozafat was a copy of the Serbian song, Svetislav Stefanović concluded that the name Rosafa was unidentifiable and had no historical sources (Стефановић, 1933, p. 312). Apparently, the Serbian writer did not conduct thorough research, as evidenced by the fact that, as early as 1914, the eminent Czech scholar and professor of Slavic philology at the University of Vienna (since 1893), Konstantin Jireček, presented a hypothesis about the origin of this name. In one of his lectures on the geography of the Balkan countries, Jireček devoted more attention to the city of Shkodër and its surroundings. This lecture was first published as an article in the journal *Glasnik Srpskog geografskog društva*, published by the Serbian Geographical Society (Јиречек, 1914), and then in German in the first volume of the collection *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*, edited by Ludwig von Thallóczy

(Thallóczy, 1916, pp. 94–124). I should add that the article was translated into Albanian and published only in 2011 (K. Jireček, 2011).

The Czech scholar rejected the explanation of the origin of the name Rosafa based on the legend of Rosa and Fa. He linked the name to the city of Resafa, located today in central modern Syria, in the Ar-Raqqah region, approximately 35 km south of Lake Assad and the Euphrates. I would like to add an important detail: according to the Greek text of *The Passion of Sergius and Bacchus*, this is the burial place of St. Sergius, a saint of the Catholic, Orthodox, Armenian, Coptic, and Syrian Churches. Jireček admitted that he was led to this clue by Ilarion Ruvarac, who was the first to draw attention to the connection between the name Rosafa and the church of St. Sergius and Bacchus located near the village of Shirgj, 13 km south of Shkodër, on the left bank of the Buna River (Thallóczy, 1916, p. 105; Руварац, 1881). Jireček developed this idea and constructed a hypothesis according to which such a transition could have taken place (C. Jireček, 1897, pp. 48–54). A key element in this process was the development of the cult of Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Shkodër and the surrounding area, as evidenced by the ruins of the church in Shirgj, which are still visible today. To honour the memory of these two saints and commemorate the place of their martyrdom, the hill on which the castle stood was named Rosafa (Thallóczy, 1916, p. 105). Over time, Jireček's hypothesis began to gain supporters, first among travellers and scholars from the German-speaking world, and then more widely. And, it must be added, in many respects, it is satisfactory; the hypothesis could indeed be true.

Until the end of the 19th century, "Rosafa" remained the dominant form in historical sources and written accounts. Many foreign travellers and scholars who had visited Shkodër, such as Amie Boué, Joseph Müller, and Johann Georg von Hahn, but also those who had never been there, such as Spiridon Gopčević, considered the legend of Rosa and Fa to be the source of the castle's name (G. Hoxha, 1995, p. 111). During Hahn's expedition in 1863 along the Drin River valley – from its mouth near Shkodër to its source in Struga on Lake Ohrid – one of the oldest photographs of the fortress was taken by the Viennese photographer Josef Székely, namely a view of it from the other bank of the Buna River (Figure 8).

When describing the fortress a few years earlier, Hecquard wrote that "the Serbian castle of Rosapha stands on the edge of the Tepé and Tarabos hills" (Hecquard, 1858, p. 17) and called the legend "Albanian". Other travellers and researchers did not mention it at all. For example, the French writer and diplomat Alexandre Degrand, who was the French consul in Shkodër from 1893 to 1899, considered *Zidanje Skadra* to be the legend explaining the origins of the fortress (Degrand, 1901, pp. 72–74).

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the name "Rozafat" has been increasingly used in various contexts, both within Shkodër itself and in connection with the city. Thus, although it may have happened earlier, it is certain that from 1915 onwards, Studio Marubi (Dritëshkonja Marubi) printed and sold

the postcard mentioned above with a photograph by Kel Kodheli/Marubi, bearing the inscription "Souvenir from Shkodër. Rozafat Fortress". In 1918, several artists from Shkodra founded a cultural organisation called "Rozafat". Until its closure by the fascist authorities in October 1939, the association operated very successfully in music and theatre, undoubtedly being the main secular cultural institution in the city. The first cinema, which opened in Shkodër in 1926, was called Kinema-Teatr Rozafat. A photograph of the castle taken and published by Kel Marubi, this time with only the caption "Rozafat", was published in 1925 by the Albanian Post Office as a 50-cent postage stamp (*1924. Triumf i legalitetit 1924. 50 QIND. (Michel: 109) – JF126373*, n.d.).



Figure 8. The Shkodër fortress in Josef Székely's photograph of 1863.
Source: Photographic collection of Robert Elsie http://www.albanianphotography.net/szekely/szekely_files/vlb_images1/vues_iv41056.jpg, retrieved August 9, 2026

Regardless of whether the text published by Palaj and Kurti came in its entirety from a single song performed by one person or was the result of compilation and editorial work by both editors of the volume, the fact that they titled it "Rozafat" testifies to the already established tradition of using this name in Shkodër. After World War II, when the song lyrics were incorporated into school and folklore studies textbooks, the scope of use of this name expanded significantly. Every pupil and student learned from the aforementioned folklore textbooks that the Shkodër fortress was called Rozafat. It is therefore no surprise that Rozafat Castle appeared once again on a postage stamp in 1950, this time with a value of 1 lek (*Douglas DC-3 over Rozafa Castle (Shkodër)*, n.d.). For the first time in 1964 and again in 1976, a new 1 lek paper banknote featured a fortress modelled on the Shkodër (*Albania 1 Lek 1976 – UNC*, n.d.), but this time without a name. In 1950, a factory in Shkodër began producing filterless "Rozafat" cigarettes, and the drawing appearing as an emblem on each pack was clearly associated with the fortress (Altina, n.d.).

The change from "s" to "z", i.e., from Rosafa to Rozafat, can be easily explained by the voicing of consonants, one of the rules of phonetic development in Albanian. However, it is impossible to determine when this change occurred. This cannot be captured in written sources as these are generally accounts of travellers and scholars who usually relied on other written sources, such as Barleti's testimony. On the other hand, Hamdi Bushati's remark that the inhabitants of Shkodër and the surrounding area did not use the name Rozafat because they referred to the fortress as Kala [fortress, castle, stronghold] (Bushati, 2015, pp. 166–167) suggests that the name "Rozafat" also derives from the world of literacy and must have been a creation of the city's enlightened intellectual circles.

However, another change, from Rozafat to Rozafa, was equally important, had more significant consequences, and could also be dated. The disappearance of the letter "t" at the end of the name must have occurred in the first half of the 20th century. Injać Zamputi, a writer from Shkodër and, after the war, a prominent expert and editor of Latin documents, titled his second literary work, a collection of short stories published in 1944, *Atje nën hijen e Rozafës* [There, in the shadow of Rozafa]. Nevertheless, this change did not become widespread and was not finally established until after World War II. For example, in 1960, the documentary film *Kënga e Rozafës* [The Song of Rozafa] was made as part of an Albanian–Bulgarian co-production. It was co-directed by Yuri Arnaudov and Ilo Pando, with a screenplay by Arnaudov and Cvetan Borisov, camerawork by Vasil Vasiliev and Hamdi Ferati, and music consultation by leading composers of the era, Avdulla Grimci and Frano Prendi. It is significant that the authors continued to refer to the fortress as Rozafat but used the name Rozafa to refer to the walled-up woman, whose lyrical song was the inspiration for the film's leitmotif.

Although Mitrush Kuteli retained the form "Rozafat" when preparing *Tregime të moçme shqiptare* [Old Albanian Tales] in 1964, his highly expressive collection of folk songs adapted for young people, the name "Rozafa" began to dominate at that time. For example, in the early 1970s, the brand of Shkodër cigarettes was renamed "Rozafa", and the municipal food production company was named "Rozafa". It was also then that the aforementioned Hotel Rozafa was built.

This somewhat lengthy explanation lays the groundwork for a crucial conclusion. The emergence and dominance of the name Rozafa in Albanian popular culture led to a significant semantic shift. While the name Rozafat clearly referred to the fortress, Rozafa began to be associated primarily with the walled-up young mother, whose death guaranteed the fortress's durability. The latter name became increasingly common, and the first slowly became forgotten. The song/ballad/legend/story began to be associated not with the construction of the castle, but primarily with the tragic fate and sacrifice of the walled-up young wife and mother. Thus, the fortress first became the "Fortress of Rozafat" and then, even though the heroine of the song never bore that name anywhere, it

was transformed into the "Fortress of Rozafa". Thus, the walled-up woman became Rozafa, she was given a name, and became an easily identifiable character, albeit legendary one, yet almost tangible and omnipresent.

Presence of the Topos in Contemporary Albanian Literature, Art, and Culture

The transfer of the motif of walling up from the realm of orality to that of literacy and audiovisual culture can be approached in two ways: by tracing its physical journey and signalling its presence in other texts and forms of artistic expression, or by analysing creative references to the song/legend or its separate elements. These valid research strategies have been used in historical, literary, and cultural studies. Although they can be pursued separately, I believe combining them is the most effective way. The presentation of a motif's journey makes more sense when accompanied by in-depth analysis, highlighting associations, focusing not only on intertextuality but also on intratextuality and capturing the whole, while also noticing the use of only some elements for entirely different purposes. This is an exercise in the archaeology of knowledge and the effect of understanding culture as a dynamic communication process rather than a static repository of creations and manifestations.

Until the Fall of Communism

The symbolism that accompanied the names Rozafat and then Rozafa paved the way for their inclusion in other areas of culture and artistic creation. The iconographic symbols shown earlier can be treated as examples of the process of spreading the topos, which took place in parallel with the canonisation of the song. And, of course, the more references, allusions, or signs there are, the greater the legitimacy of the canonical position of the song and the topos. The reasons for this popularity were varied, but I believe that one of the key factors was the inclusion of the Rozafat song in school textbooks and academic scripts.

An important role in this redefinition – not only of the song about the walling up, but of folk culture in general – was played by Mitrush Kuteli's book *Tregime të moçme shqiptare* [Old Albanian Tales] (Kuteli, 1965). Dhimitër Pasko (1903–1967), as the author was actually called, was driven by the need to convey the most important works of folk culture in prose and in contemporary language to younger and young readers, i.e., those born after the war. This was not the first such attempt. Arif Gjyli (1913–1989), a writer and educator from Shkodër, had previously compiled a collection of prose stories based on legendary songs titled *Trimat e Jutbinës (punue sipas motiveve popullore për pionerë dhe të rinj)* [The Warriors of Jutbina (based on folk motifs for pioneers and youngsters)].

These were legendary songs published by Palaj and Kurti about the so-called *kreshnikë*[32], the brothers Gjeto Basho Muji and Sokol Halili, as well as their 30 companions (Gjyli, 1959).

However, Kuteli went much further than the Shkodran writer. The first edition of his book, published in 1965, immediately became a classic and a must-read not only for students but also for a wider audience. The second edition was published in 1986, and the third, a revised and expanded edition free of censorship, in 2004. The author was aware of the difficulties involved in processing folk culture works expressed in dialects and translating them into contemporary language, the language of writing and prose, and, in addition, adapting them for children. He expressed this in the preface to the volume (Kuteli, 2004, p. 5). The writer was equally aware of the need (and this was his intention) to include the entire Albanian folk culture in the volume, which is why Kuteli collected songs and legends from Albania, those created and passed down by the Arbëreshë, as well as several from Albanians living in Yugoslavia at the time. In addition, he compiled a single corpus of stories based on songs and legends, as well as tales relating to more recent times, concluding with the deeds and era of George Kastrioti Skanderbeg. According to the chronology adopted by Albanian folklore studies during the interwar period, this marks the beginning of the historical song period. Thus, younger readers were given the most important works of folk culture in a single volume, but presented in a national context, both geographically and temporally. This is what made Kuteli's collection an instant classic. We now know that the preface, in which the author discussed drawing inspiration for the volume from conversations with his children, was censored. The second edition, published in 1986, featured a completely different text, with an essayistic and scientific tone as its preface. Nevertheless, the author addressed his readers with the hope that his work would inspire them to reach for the songs and legends themselves, learn about them, and experience their beauty.

It is certainly worth noting that in all these editions, the collection opens with the story of Rozafat (and not Rozafa, which I emphasise). The writer based the story on the version of the song published by Kurti and Palaj, later reprinted by Haxhihasani. However, before recounting the legend in prose, which he did very faithfully, Kuteli made one more important change. Noting that the date of the fortress's construction is unknown, he added that these areas were inhabited in ancient times by the Labeatae and Ardiaei, two important Illyrian tribes. He concluded: "Strangers came and went, but our people remained firmly and forever on this Illyrian land" (Kuteli, 2004, p. 33). In addition to focusing on the

[32] These are epic songs sung in ten-syllable verse accompanied by the lahutë/lahuta (lute), celebrating the heroic deeds of the so-called kreshnikë. Until the mid-20th century, they were sung mainly in northern Albania and by Albanians living in western Kosovo and southern Montenegro. Currently, due to the depopulation of mountainous areas, their range has changed radically. Many singers live in cities or the diaspora outside Albania and Kosovo.

motif of the broken *besa*, Kuteli's approach to the song and legend of the walling up through the lens of the history of the fortress and the people who inhabited the area around it is another fundamental component of the interpretation of the entire topos. However, Kuteli did not overlook other – one might say more lyrical and personal – aspects of the legend. He expressed regret at the necessity of the sacrifice, drew attention to the death of the mother and the orphaned child, and saw in the wet stones of the fortress primarily the tears of a woman mourning her son rather than life-giving and healing water (Kuteli, 2004, p. 36).

In this context, it is also worth paying attention to the illustrations accompanying the work in each edition as they testify to the artistic sensitivity of the creators, trends in Albanian painting and graphic art in the second half of the 20th century, and – what interests me particularly here – the iconography of the walled-up figure. The illustrations for the first edition were prepared by Agim Faja (1939–2017), a painter and graphic artist, illustrator of the children's magazine *Fatosi*, as well as of the Albanian text of the ABC book. Faja generally worked within the artistic principles of socialist realism, which was hardly surprising; however, in his illustrations for Kuteli's collection, he leaned more towards folk aesthetics. Each story was accompanied by a single graphic, which referred either to the leitmotif or one of the characters. In the graphic for the story about the construction of Rozafat, the artist captured the moment when the young wife arrived, bringing lunch. She was stylised as a country girl in folk costume, but without any explicit reference to any particular region of Albania. We cannot see her face, but her slightly bowed head can be interpreted as a sign of kindness and cheerfulness. It is probably intentional that the figures of the two older brothers are filled with black, while the third brother, holding a hammer in his hand, stands out with the light-coloured top of his outfit. The drama of the situation is heightened by the strong contrasts of black and white and the linocut character of the image (Figure 9).

In the second edition from 1986, Gazmend Leka, already known as an illustrator at the time and now a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana, was responsible for the graphics. As he recounted years later, he was familiar with the aforementioned Arif Gjyli's volume and Faja's illustrations, so he suggested to the editor of the new edition of Kuteli's collection that the same principle be applied, i.e., that each story be accompanied by one graphic. However, Leka took a different path, trying to go beyond the rigour of socialist realism aesthetics and move towards realistic graphics, but with strong hyperbole and even a certain mysticism, which, as he noted, was a dangerous word at the time that could have cost him his life (Loloci, 2020). The artist had already had a similar experience as, in 1982, he illustrated a collection of ballads prepared by Qemal Haxhihasani, *Balada popullore shqiptare* [Albanian Folk Ballads]. There, he visually elaborated on both variants of the song about the walling up, i.e., *Rozafat* (Figure 10) and the song about the construction of the Narta bridge (Figure 11). The first verses of both songs described both illustrations, namely: *I ra mjegulla Bunës* [Fog covered Buna] and *Tre vëllezër kaha Lluri* [Three



Figure 9. Illustration for the story about Rozafat by Agim Faja.
Source: Kuteli (2004, p. 35)

brothers from Lluri]. The aesthetics were stylised in a folk manner, which is particularly evident in the characters' costumes, but there are also references to ancient art and the aesthetics of Romanticism. Firm contours and contrasts, clear black lines and chiaroscuro modelling using dense, parallel lines make the characters, although simplified, interact dynamically. This approach is reminiscent of old folk art or Romantic historical illustrations. The images have a well-thought-out narrative composition, and through various details, such as headgear and other elements of clothing, the artist has situated both songs in time and space, contextualising them historically and geographically.

In the illustration for Kuteli's volume, Leka once again captured the moment when the wife and mother, who was soon to be walled up, met the builders, but – unlike in Faja's or Kuteli's previous composition – Leka reversed the figures' positioning. The woman, also dressed in folk costume, no longer looks down on the builders but lies down, almost in a supplicating pose, with three gloomy brothers standing over her, their faces hidden behind their thick arms. There is no longer the dignity of a village girl, as in Faja's picture, or the expectation on the part of the builders, as in Leka's previous illustration; here, the tone of the resentment of the mother, who is about to die, dominates. This is an apparent change in visual aesthetics, but also an attempt at a new interpretation, as the artist intended for us to focus on the tragedy of the young woman. At the same time, the surrealistic depiction of the three brothers clearly reflects their drama, as well as their full awareness of the tragic consequences of the act they are about to perform (Figure 12).



Figure 10. *I ra mjegulla Bunës* by Gazmend Leka.
Source: Leka (n.d.-a)



Figure 11. *Tre vëllezër kaha Lluri* by Gazmend Leka.
Source: Leka (n.d.-a).

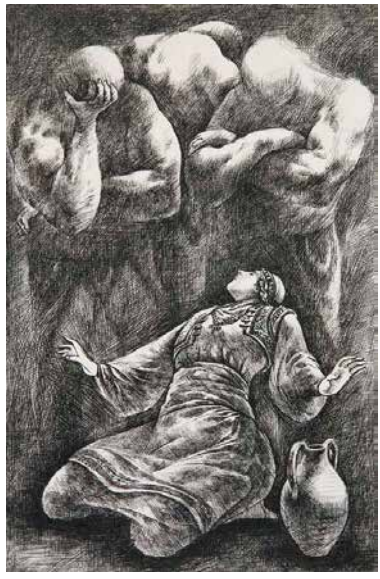


Figure 12. Illustration to the story of Rozafat by Gazmend Leka.
Source: Leka (n.d.-b).

By the 1950s, the Rozafat fortress and Rozafa were regular points of reference for writers, artists, journalists, and literary figures, as well as for schoolchildren and students. These were generally in the form of insertions – references to already widely known iconographic signs and symbols. However, the most excellent writer of the era, Ismail Kadare, undertook a thorough redefinition of the topos in his novel *Ura me tri harqe* [The Three-Arched Bridge]. The novel was published in 1978 and formed part of a triptych of the same title, comprising three novellas and one *intermezzo*. In the second half of the 1970s, the writer began exploring historical themes in his work, especially pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Albanian history. One such attempt is the short novel (or longer novella) discussed here. As with two other similar novels, *Who Brought Doruntina* and *The File on H.*, they form a whole. In them, Kadare refers to the most critical themes of Albanian oral tradition: ballads about walling up, ballads about a dead brother who rises from the dead to keep his word, and legendary epics and songs about *kreshnikë*. As I have already mentioned, in his essays Kadare gave these three categories of folk songs a prominent place not only in oral tradition, but also in Albanian culture in general. A comprehensive analysis of the circumstances surrounding the creation of these works and their subsequent reception requires a separate study; however, I am solely interested in the novel with the motif of walling up.

Contrary to various associations and critical deliberations (Thomasset, 2006), Kadare's novel has little in common with Ivo Andrić's *The Bridge on the*

Drina River, apart from the fact that both writers chose the topos of walling up during the construction of a bridge as the starting point for their plots. However, each explored this topos in a completely different way, guided by different motives and setting separate artistic goals. Kadare argued in his essays that both ballads – about the walling up and the resurrection of the deceased brother – share one common and central element: *besa*. As the writer clearly stated, this is a distinctive sign of their Albanian identity (Kadare, 1980a, pp. 22–25). Kadare referred to this idea in both novels based on these two songs, creatively expanding on it.

In *Who Brought Doruntina?*, he dealt with the situation immediately after Kostandin's deed, i.e., after Doruntina suddenly appeared at her family home, saying that she had been brought there by her brother, whom she had just learned had been dead for nine years. Thus, the narrative revolves around the investigation of this case, resembling a thriller novel. In *The Three-Arched Bridge*, however, the writer chose a completely different artistic solution, dealing with the situation both before and after the walling up. Written in the style of a medieval chronicle by the Albanian monk Gjon, son of Gjorg Ukcama, in 1377, or, as Kadare emphasises, at a turning point when the feudal Albanian states began to fall one after another under the pressure of the Ottomans, the novel is primarily the story of the construction of a bridge over a river with the symbolic name *Ujana e Keqe* [Deceptive Water]. It is significant that the writer, probably deliberately, uses names and surnames typical of the Gheg dialect, i.e., northern Albanian. However, he geographically situates the action in an unidentified region in the south-east, in a principality bordering the Ottoman Empire. Like Kadare's other works, this novel is multi-layered and invites a range of possible interpretations. It is both inter- and intratextual as it refers to historical events and figures, but also to the universe of places and events created by Kadare, which appear in several of his works. The novel features representatives of various Albanian noble families of the era, such as the Dukagjini, the Topia, and others. However, in Gjon's chamber another monk, named Brokhardt, stops on his return from Byzantium. He is immediately associated with the French Dominican monk Brocard, often identified with the Archbishop of Bar (Alb. *Tivar*) Guillaume Adam (Latin: Brocardus Monacus/Guillelmus Adam), who is considered the author of the *Directorium ad passagium faciendum*, written in 1332. There is a note there that Albanians use Latin letters in their books (cf. Sawicka & Sujecka, 2015, p. 37). Of course, Kadare distorts history by playing a game with the reader: this is fiction, but these associations come to mind immediately. Finally, a whole panorama of characters, geographical names, events, and institutions appears, filling the plot of the novel and giving it a peculiar aura of mystery. Such is the prince who rules the area on the border with the Ottoman Empire, and such are the two rival, semi-mysterious organisations – *Lundra dhe trape* [Boats and Rafts] and *Ura e xhade* [Bridges and Roads]. Finally, Kadare introduces historical figures into Gjon's story, whose fates are known to historians but who appear in this novel in entirely fictional situations, such

as the kidnapping of the daughter of the King of France, Helena of Anjou, by Tanush Topia (Kadare, 1978b, p. 35). This means that reading the work in question requires attention on multiple levels.

The topos of walling up appears in the book in two forms. Firstly, the entire plot of the novel resembles the general framework of a song about walling up, because here we have people, though unknown and shrouded in mystery, who want to build a bridge that does not stand and constantly collapses or is deliberately destroyed (as the narrator suggests, revealing a whole network of assumptions functioning in the world presented). The bridge finally stands as a result of a living person being walled up into its span. The idea of walling someone up appears out of nowhere, somewhat by accident, and there is no substantial justification for it, but the act of walling someone up seems necessary for the structure's survival. In songs, the need to make a sacrifice is announced by an otherworldly being or an old man, i.e., generally speaking, a being endowed with extraordinary power, whether due to its supernatural properties or many years of experience. In Kadare's novel, the direct stimulus is undefined, remaining in the realm of speculation and uncertainty, which the writer skilfully expands upon. At times, one gets the impression that it is the people and local voices, at other times that it is rumours spread by construction companies fighting for influence, and at still other times that the construction of the bridge, and thus also the act of walling up, is required by historical necessity – the advent of a new empire and new times. For this reason, it seems that one of the protagonists of this novel is the bridge itself.

Secondly, the song about the walling up appears as a story or legend told by the monk Gjon to a mysterious stranger who speaks Albanian and introduces himself as a collector of old legends and songs. In this way, Kadare synthesises the old legend about walling up during the construction of the fortress with the new legend of walling up in the foundations of the bridge, which is emerging before the eyes of the monk Gjon (and the readers), merging them into a single story about the relationship between myth and reality. One could say this is an invitation to relive the founding myth. Here, the new act of walling up brings to life the old legend, song, and practice of human sacrifice in the foundations of new buildings. Moreover, it is an experience that simultaneously updates, prolongs, perpetuates, and legitimises the power of myth.

An interesting character in the book is a stranger from afar, an unknown collector of songs and legends who prefers listening rather than talking about himself, resembling both a spy and an anthropologist. Kadare likens the conversation between him and the monk Gjon to a dialogue about influences, or rather, about who first invented the legend of the walling up. Listening to Gjon's story, the stranger completely loses his head and confidence and is clearly dissatisfied with the Albanian monk's arguments. The reader is left with the impression that nefarious intentions guide him and that he is more of a song transcriber than a collector, i.e., a thief, because he appropriates their authorship. In this way, Kadare weaves the legend and song about walling up into the sphere of

politics. This has often been the case because discussions about the original authorship and autochthonous nature of folk songs were (and still are) a political issue; they played an important role in building, sustaining, and legitimising contemporary nationalisms in the Balkans. Kadare is not alone in this; other writers and intellectuals have done the same. However, the metaphor of the thief collector also serves as a first step for the writer to show another process, namely the reincarnation of the topos of walling up in connection with the construction of a bridge. An old legend becomes the beginning of a new act, which is murder, or at least that is the reader's first impression. Here, an ordinary man agrees to be killed and walled up in exchange for privileges and material goods for his family. However, the writer also leaves the door open for another interpretation: the man who was walled up could have been killed because he sabotaged the construction of the bridge. As the monk Gjon explains, all this is important, but perhaps the most important thing is that the murder/walling up of Murrash Zenebisha becomes the beginning of a new song about walling up in a bridge. Only, this time it is a woman, not a man. It is not without reason that Kadare gives his novel the motto of the curse of the walled-up woman: that the bridge should tremble as she trembles.

The writer presents the bridge as a figure, motif and metaphor that can be interpreted in various ways. I see at least two points of view here. Through the words of the monk Gjon, Kadare says that many times in the history of Arbëria, or Albania, as soon as there was a little peace, the country began to develop, build bridges and roads, then war came and all that had been achieved was destroyed (Kadare, 1978b, p. 122). However, a second interpretation is also possible, albeit left implicit by the writer, but no less suggestive. The bridge, a structure serving human communication, also marks the beginning of misfortune as it facilitates what Kadare explicitly expresses in another novel published in the same volume: the arrival of the plague from the east. Contemporary critics have interpreted this as a metaphor for Ottoman rule, and today there is no shortage of such voices. However, it is equally possible to assume that this plague was communism. Finally, it is worth noting that this is the only literary work by Kadare that features an illustration depicting a bridge drawn by a child, with an arrow pointing to one of the spans where the poor Murrash Zenebisha was sacrificed.

In Albanian literature in Yugoslavia, the walled-up topos took a different form than in Albania. *Rozafat* became a symbol of not only a fortress that was supposed to guarantee defence against invaders, but also a witness to history and a bearer of memory about a difficult historical path. This is precisely how *Rozafat* was portrayed by Ali Podrimja, one of the leading Albanian poets of the second half of the 20th century, and arguably the greatest in Kosovo. In his 1971 poetry collection *Torzo* [Torso], Podrimja devoted a cycle of poems titled *Koha e Gurit* [Time of Stone] to the fortress. It opens with a poem titled *Rozafat*, which, together with the following poem, *Koha e Gurit*, forms a kind of diptych about the Rozafat fortress. Known for his modesty and precision in his use of

expression, Podrimja builds an image of a fortress created by people and for people. "Some left their names there, others their bones", writes the poet, "the enemy's path was strewn with the blood of our fallen", so the fortress could never be captured (Podrimja, 2013, p. 58). This view is understandable when one considers that for Podrimja and many others of his generation, being Albanian in Yugoslavia was fraught with all kinds of difficulties. Apart from the period between 1968 and 1981, the Albanian population in Kosovo was subjected to more or less overt repression by the Yugoslav authorities, which was visible and felt at various levels of social life. Recognised almost from the very beginning as a committed poet, Podrimja made the imaginary fortress of Rozafat a symbol of resistance, giving it the power of a leading sign. This was an expression of a defensive strategy which, at the time when he published his volume, was limited to the cultural sphere, but which in the 1980s and 1990s transformed into a strategy for survival. This context is essential to understanding the immense popularity of the names Rozafa for girls and Rozafat for boys in Kosovo.

Other visual arts followed literature. A similar interpretative path, i.e., linking and reconfiguring the topos of walling up with Albanian history, was also chosen by the authors of the aforementioned documentary film *Kënga e Rozafës*. The history of Albania was presented as a series of invasions, destruction, and constant sacrifices, but ultimately – overcoming and survival. On this challenging path, the film's authors argue, the Albanian nation was accompanied by Rozafa's sad lament, as if to remind us of the sacrifice she made so that the fortress would remain standing. I would like to add that it was an overt political act (which was the norm for documentary films at the time) to show the relics of St. Gorazd, a disciple of Cyril and Methodius, and apostle of Bulgaria. The authors emphasised that the cult of the saint was alive (this was 1960, so it took place before Albania was declared an atheist country) in Berat, in the south of the country, and considered this proof of the centuries-old ties between Albania and Bulgaria. As emphasised, in Voskopojë (Arom.: Moscopole; Greek: Μοσχόπολις), books were published in Bulgarian when "Bulgaria was suffering under the yoke of Turkish slavery". In other words, Rozafa became a pretext or a starting point for completely different narratives, a vehicle of memory used to maintain relations in the region.

The illustrations for the two editions of Kuteli's work discussed above can serve as a good introduction to discussing the topos of walling up in art. From Faja's illustration for the 1965 edition and then from Leka's illustration for Haxhihasani's 1982 collection, a strategy emerges of iconographically depicting the act of walling up as a form of devotion and self-sacrifice for the common good. Of course, this is not an idyll, but a distinctly folk tone prevails, directing the viewer's attention to this line of thinking. The folk element is meant to be old, authentic, lying at the foundations of our contemporary world. However, in his illustration for the second edition of Kuteli's collection, Leka also emphasised the pain and tragedy surrounding the climax of the song, i.e., the walling up, thus opening the way to thinking about the violence used against an innocent young

mother. As the artist confessed years later, this was a deliberate move because the builders consciously condemned the young woman to death.

The iconographic strategy outlined above undoubtedly dominated the works of art created until the end of the communist regime. However, in this context it is worth bearing in mind Leka's testimony about the search, even during the communist regime, for forms of expression that deviated even slightly from the dogmas of socialist realism. Through the prism of this duality, I propose looking at the most famous work of art of the time referring to the song Rozafat, namely the relief by Skënder Kraja. Since 1987, this work has been on display opposite the entrance to the Rozafa Fortress Museum, which opened that year in the third courtyard of the fortress (see Figure 13). The relief depicts a situation that could have occurred *after* the events described in the song. Here, an infant is suckling milk from the breast of his walled-up mother, and next to him is an inscription containing the words she spoke before being walled up. I guess that with this image, Kraja wanted to emphasise the permanence of life and justify the sacrifice of the young mother. Feeding the baby gives meaning to the woman's sacrifice, convincing her and us, the viewers, that her son will grow up and the fortress will survive. Her face, especially her closed eyes, expresses peace, a kind of resignation, almost sleepiness. If this was indeed the artist's intention, it prompts us to consider the primacy of the community and the self-sacrifice of the individual for the good of society. The meaning of the sacrifice lies primarily in the durability of the walls, which also protect the child, the son of the walled-up woman. However, one can also attempt a different interpretation. Kraja decided to depict the walled-up woman with her breast exposed. Of course, he followed the narrative line of the song. However, considering that the ideological constraints prevailing in Albanian art at the time excluded the depiction of nudity in public spaces, as the female and male bodies were to be used solely as tools of education and not as objects of aesthetic experience or food for the imagination, the artist may have had another purpose in mind. The moment of breastfeeding also prompts reflection on the sad fate of the mother and child, on the interrupted continuity of life, on the pain and desires visible above all in the child, who eagerly seeks and finds his mother's breast.

Similar creative meanderings can also be seen in another work found in Shkodër that refers to the song *Rozafat.* The authors of this relief were two sculptors from Shkodër, the brothers Hashim and Petrit Kruja. Like Kraja, with whom Hashim collaborated on other works, they also captured the situation after the act of walling up, albeit in a completely different composition. Here, a woman lies half walled up, and her husband kneels beside her, holding her hand and lifting a child to her breast. This is a peaceful, ordinary family scene, which is contradicted by the harshness of the large stones. However, the situation is understandable only to those who are familiar with the song. The nursing woman is resigned to her fate, almost asleep, as the child suckles her milk, and only the husband's face and posture reveal a slight tension. He kneels, support-

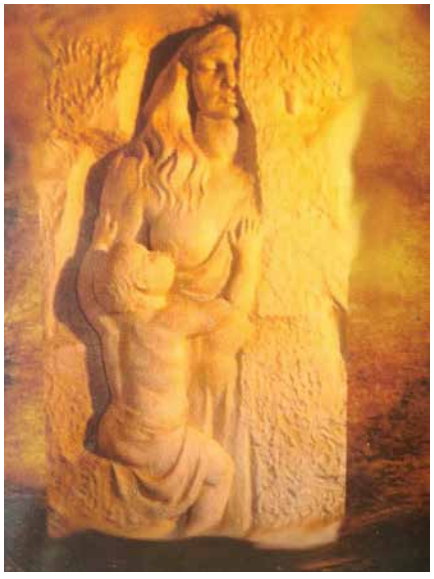


Figure 13. *Rozafa* relief by Skënder Kraja.
Photo: Rigels Halili, 2022

ing the child and thus facilitating its feeding. This gesture can be interpreted as both an expression of a father's concern and a tribute to his wife's sacrifice. The characters' clothing is undoubtedly very interesting as it differs from the folk-style costumes. The walled-up woman wears a tunic, which, I guess, was meant to emphasise the archaic nature of the song. The husband, on the other hand, wears a sheepskin vest with the wool preserved on the outside, very similar to the *xhamadan* worn by northern Albanian highlanders. However, this contrasts sharply with his leather sandals, which differ from the folk *opingë* (shoes similar to *opanci* in other parts of the Balkans) and are more reminiscent of Roman-Byzantine *socci*. Finally, as in the case of the Kraja family, the Kruja brothers also placed an inscription containing the last words of the walled-up woman, but under the work rather than next to it (Figure 14).

Finally, I would like to discuss one more work, a full-length film, *Muri i gjallë* [The Living Wall] from 1989, based on a screenplay by writer Natasha Lako and directed by Muharrem Fejzo. The authors adopted a historical approach to the events recounted in the song *Rozafat* and set them in a distant and unspecified past, implying to the viewer that it was either Illyrian or early medieval. The lack of Christian symbolism and explicit references to pagan beliefs in the Sun God and Mother Earth suggest that the authors had archaic Illyria in mind. On the other hand, the presence of horsemen clad in black armour, against whom the inhabitants of the land must defend themselves and whose advance becomes the direct impetus for the construction of the fortress, brings to mind



Figure 14. *Rozafa* by Hashim Kruja and Petrit Kruja.
Photo: Rigels Halili, 2022

either the migration of peoples or echoes of the presence of the Aragonese Almogavars in the Balkans in the 13th and 14th centuries, preserved in Balkan folklore in the form of Katalan. Either way, the authors consciously employed various archaic devices, both in the narrative layer and in presenting nuanced structural aspects. A fairly clear idea apparently guided them: since the fortress dates back to Illyrian times, the events that gave rise to the song about its creation must be equally archaic. Against this background, I would interpret the absence of Christian symbolism and the use of pagan beliefs as resulting from the archaic character of the song, rather than from the forced atheisation that dominated the public sphere from 1967 onwards. To this constellation of elements, the authors added several additional details derived from Albanian folk culture or reminiscent of it, especially concerning costumes and situations taken from everyday life, thus creating a kind of amalgam that combines the images of both these socio-historical dimensions into a single whole.

At the very beginning of the film, we meet Fata and her father, fleeing from black horsemen who are spreading destruction and death. Dying in battle, her father entrusts her to another old man he meets somewhere in the mountains, who, as it turns out, belongs to the same tribe. However, the black horsemen also attack that place. It seems that, for some unknown reason, Fata is of great importance to these invaders. She manages to escape and finds herself in the home of three brothers: Brenk, Kledi, and the youngest, Gjeto. Each of them wants to marry her, but Fata gives her love to the youngest. Life goes on; the older brothers also get married. One day, Gjet is visited by the ghost of his slain father, who orders him to begin building a fortress to defend against the invaders. Probably intentionally, in order to make the story more realistic and credible, and to add drama, the screenwriter introduced various episodic char-

acters and events. In doing so, we get to know each of the brothers closely: Brenk is somewhat aloof, yet balanced; Kledi is harsh and impetuous; and Gjeto is righteous and courageous. Each of the wives is also different. Delina, Brenk's wife, is perpetually weakened by a strange illness. Tuta, Kledi's wife, seems to be constantly scheming and playful. They contrast with Fata, who is entirely devoted and kind. These are not characters from legends, but flesh-and-blood people, full of emotions, desires, and good and evil thoughts. This is how we get to know them and see them acting in various situations.

The decision to build a wall comes easily to the brothers as they are guided by respect for their father's memory. It soon becomes apparent that the wall is not strong enough, as every evening the sound of falling stones can be heard in the background. Gjeto's trip to visit an old man, portrayed by the authors as a combination of a saint, a clairvoyant, and a shaman, does little to help. The answer, he warns, lies within them. Another character introduced into the story combines the traits of a recluse and a philosopher and warns that black horsemen specifically target builders. It is he who brings Gjeto home after he is wounded in a fight with them. The wives turn to the Sun and Mother Earth for protection of the wall, success in the builders' efforts, and perseverance. Meanwhile, Fata gives birth to a son, but she is constantly tormented by anxiety, a sense of danger and visions of death. Finally, Gjeto turns to his deceased father, and his apparition orders the walling-up sacrifice. "The bigger the building, the greater the sacrifice", comments Brenk, so the brothers decide among themselves, making a *besa* that the wife who brings them food the next day will be walled up.

Against the backdrop of narrative elements present in the canonical text of the song *Rozafat*, the authors also introduced episodes that appear in other variants of songs about walling up. For example, the motif of throwing a ring into the foundations appears as a vision of Brenk, who imagines that the builder brothers' father is doing this and that his wife is being walled up. Kledi falls into a delirious state, convinced that it was not the apparition of his deceased father who announced the necessity of walling up and sacrificing his wife to Mother Earth, but Gjeto, who wanted to protect his beloved, Fata. Finally, although the brothers live in the same house, the mother is absent from the film, which is a departure not only from the canonical text but also from most variants of the song. This is difficult to explain; perhaps the intention was to emphasise only one central female character, namely Fata.

The name Fata, especially its unarticulated form, Fatë, evokes associations with the abbreviation Rozafat. The viewer acknowledges this immediately, associating Fata with Rozafa. But there is also another possibility. Natasha Lako must have been aware of this correlation and perhaps for this reason coined a neologism, which is a feminative based on the word "fat" [fate, destiny]. Fata's fate is, in a sense, embedded in her name, which is also one of the most fundamental beliefs of paganism and later monotheistic religions. The young woman's struggle with different visions reinforces this expectation in

the viewer. And although the latter knows the song and waits for the moment when the two older brothers break the *besa*, the filmmakers decided not to use this element of the song. So we do not see the act of betrayal in the film, and we are not entirely sure whether or not Fata is betrayed. Certainly, Fata herself offers to bring dinner to the builders. On the way, she sees apparitions of both her own father and her husband's. This sign can be interpreted as an expression of the underworld's approval of such a great and pure sacrifice. There is another retarding episode in which Fata turns back to look at her son once more, which again suggests that when writing the script, Lako must have also used the South Albanian variant of the song. Meanwhile, the brothers wait in heavy silence for the one who will bring dinner. In the distance, as the rising sun illuminates the horizon, a female silhouette appears. We see the tension on each of the brothers' faces up close, until the climax, when Fata appears. As in Kuteli's story, it is the eldest brother, Brenk, who informs her of their decision, taken on their father's advice. There is no deception with the ring, nor is there a curse. Fata loves life, she makes this clear; she loves her son and being a mother, but she also knows that a fortress must be built, that they must defend themselves against invaders. She announces that she will sacrifice herself for the wall that will give rise to the fortress, accepting her fate and sacrificing herself voluntarily, also for her son. Invoking the sun, she asks that her eye, breast, and hand be left outside and that she not be killed, so that she may remain alive in the wall for as long as possible. A careful ear will pick up the use of the words *kurban* and *amanet*, which entered the Albanian language from Turkish, but in the scene of walling up the characters use the word *fli*, an archaic word meaning sacrifice. However, the film's message is clear: to build something great and lasting, one must sacrifice a great deal, including what is most important and dearest.

Years later, Muharrem Fejzo, one of the leading Albanian filmmakers of the 20th century, recalled the difficulties encountered during the filming. In his memoir, *Të pathënat* [The Unspoken], the artist, who died in 2020, wrote that Albania in the late 1980s lacked almost everything, so the crew had to use the same props in different scenes (in fact, all the characters wear the same clothes throughout the film); even so, there were many interventions during the final screening, and the censors removed parts of the film (Fejzo, 2015), but I have not been able to determine which scenes these were. However, leaving this issue aside, it should be noted that Fejzo's work is the only full-length film based on folk songs considered key to Albanian national culture. No other song, such as the ballad about Kostandina and Doruntina or the cycle of songs about the brothers Mujim and Halilim, has received such an honour. Undoubtedly, this simple fact testifies to the already established primacy of the song *Rozafat* and the topos of walling up against other archetypal Albanian cultural content.

After the Fall of Communism

The fate of the topos of walling up in literature, art, and the education system after the fall of communist regimes in the region largely resembles the process of song interpretation in folklore studies and the humanities analysed above. On the one hand, old ways of interpretation, presentation, and reference remained, while on the other, new, critical perspectives emerged. Against this background, it is impossible to overlook perhaps one of the most interesting Albanian poets of the second half of the 20th century, Frederik Rreshpja. He was born in Shkodër and remained closely connected to the city throughout his life. He debuted with a volume of poetry in 1968, followed by a novel, but his promising career was cut short by a neighbour's denunciation. Rreshpja was arrested and, under the ominous Article 55 of the Penal Code, sentenced to four years in prison for agitation and propaganda against the people's government. While in prison, he was sentenced several more times and was only released after seventeen years, in 1991, during the fall of the communist regime. After his release, he worked in various professions and began publishing his poems, which the literary public immediately received with enthusiasm. However, the years spent in prison and subsequent disappointments in the face of the difficulties of political transformation in Albania left a deep mark on the poet's life. He spent the last years of his life in ill health and loneliness in his hometown, in almost absolute poverty. It was only after the writer died in 2006, when several volumes of his lyrics were published, that the power and depth of his poetry began to be acknowledged. In Rreshpja's work, Shkodër, the fortress and the walled-up woman appear as a constellation of three inextricably intertwined elements. In the poem *Shkodrës* [To Shkodër], he writes about his hometown:

> This is my city, patched together with the fossils of myths,
> The seat of Illyrian kings,
> Built stone upon stone over the beautiful eyes of a woman. (Rreshpja, 2004, p. 109)

This "woman" in Rreshpja's poetry is sometimes a young mother, sometimes a beautiful girl, and sometimes a nursing mother who gives life not only to the fortress but to the entire city. In the poem *Rozafa e flijuar* [Rozafa sacrificed], the poet presents these three ways of looking at the walled-up woman: she is a mother talking to her son, a betrayed wife in a painful cry to her husband, and a life-giving parent and patroness to whom prayers for the city's prosperity are addressed:

> Drop this city off your shoulders, mother!
> This is how the child prayed to the tuft of stones.
> In the distance, behind the fog, the Illyrian gods
> listened to the torment of the stone: My lord
> How did you turn me into a city?
> You, who did not even exchange me for the deities?

O Medaurus, bless this city that was born of a woman
Now that the moon of my eyes is setting! (Rreshpja, 2004, p. 139)

The appearance of Medaurus, the Illyrian god of war and patron of the ancient city of Risan (Latin: Risinium), now located in Montenegro and discovered by Polish archaeologists (Dyczek et al., 2010), is no coincidence as he is a frequent character in other poems by Rreshpja. The poet combines the Illyrian past, the rich history of the city and the present day into a single entity. Thus, history and legend become one, and the walled-up woman and the fortress standing on her shoulders are the glue that binds them together.

The strong presence of the song about walling up in the cultural consciousness is evidenced by the release of four postage stamps titled *Rozafa* by the Albanian Post Office in 1991 as part of the *Albanian Folklore* series. They describe four key moments in the song. Unfortunately, I have not been able to identify the author, but the illustrations on the stamps are worth discussing. In terms of meaning, the artist referred to similar content underlying the old aesthetic, which I would call a "martyrdom and sacrifice" aesthetic. However, in terms of form, it was a revolutionary shift towards abstraction, moving away from Gazmend Leka, whose drawings adhered to realism. The intense colours make the message completely different, moving towards folk art, but at the same time towards abstraction and cubism (*Stamp-ID 3278*, n.d.). This can be seen on all the stamps, but perhaps most clearly on the fourth one, showing the walled up woman and her son drinking milk from her breast protruding from the wall. This was a reference to the dominant motif in Kraja and Kruja's works.

In the early 2000s, a sculpture of a young woman carrying water in a clay jug and food appeared in the Parrucë district park in the centre of Shkodër (Figure 15). This is Rozafa, a young wife carrying lunch to master builders, sculptured by Hashim Kruja.

Writing about this work in their album *Arti publik. Veprat e artit në qytetin e Shkodrës* [Public Art. Works of Art in the City of Shkodër], Julian Veleshnja and Joan Ikonomi pointed out that, given Rozafa's status as a representative figure of Shkodër, tourists visiting the city show more interest in seeing this work than local residents. For the latter, Rozafa is considered a symbol of Shkodër women, the personification of courage, spirit, and sacrifice, and the fortress is named after her. They praise Kruja's work and take pride in the name of this strong woman (Veleshnja et al., 2021, p. 61). Kruja referred to the aesthetics of his previous works, deliberately archaising the figure of Rozafa. The vessels in which the woman carries water and food, which are associated with everyday folk life, clearly contrast with her ancient-style tunic and the ancient-looking decorations on her right wrist and forehead.

Meanwhile, in 2011, a new sculpture, also titled *Rozafa*, by Montenegrin artist Zoran Obrenović, appeared in the park along the promenade by Lake Scutari, known as the Molo, not far from Pazari and Vjetër. Born in Kolašin in 1962 and educated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, he viewed Rozafa



Figure 15. Rozafa's sculpture in the City Park in Shkodër.
Photo by Rigels Halili, 2022

in a completely different light than the Shkodër sculptors discussed here. He presented her primarily as a face frozen in a wall but still used the symbolism of a protruding breast and hand. Veleshnja and Ikonomi note that the work was well received by local residents and complement the park's aesthetics (Veleshnja et al., 2021, p. 89). Interestingly, residents witnessed the creation of the work during Albanian-Montenegrin sculpture workshops, which were open to the public and held in various locations in Shkodër. All the works created at that time were placed in public spaces within the city, and the project was financed by the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme for Albania and Montenegro (Crossborder Sculpture Symposium Albania-Montenegro, 2011).

The illustrations by Antonella Pelilli (see Pugliese, 2012) for the story of Rozafat, written in the Arbëresh dialect and in Italian by Fernanda Pugliese, can be considered an example of aesthetics with a strong folk accent. Two things deserve special attention here. First, the title of the story is *Tra storia e leggenda. Rozafat – un racconto arbëresh* [Between history and legend. Rozafat – an Arbëresh tale]. As I have already mentioned, there are no songs about walling up among the Arbëreshë, so the text and illustrations can be considered a realisation of the same intention that guided the early collectors of folklore and the first editors of folk song volumes, namely, to create a comprehensive Albanian tradition. This time, however, the direction was reversed, from Albania to the Arbëreshë communities, unlike Haxhihasani, who considered the ballads of the Albanian diaspora in Italy to be the foundations of Albanian national culture.



Figure 16. *Rozafa* sculpture by Destan Gashi, 2013. Carrara marble (60 × 30 × 26 cm). Photo by Barbara Gashi, 2025

The second thing that deserves special attention here is the didactic intention, which becomes clearer when the attentive eye notices on the poster accompanying the publication that it is a school text, financed by the Italian Ministry of Education under the 1999 law "Principles for the protection of historical linguistic minorities". This is why Pelilli's illustrations are simple drawings, devoid of colour. She referred directly to the traditional costumes of the Arbëreshë, even placing a cross on one of them that normalises the story of the walling up, as the viewers, especially the youngest ones, get the impression that this is an everyday situation: as there is life, sometimes there is also death (Pugliese, 2012).

Recently, a remarkable and dynamic process has been observed. Namely, a new aesthetic has emerged, which I have termed the aesthetic of criticism and contestation, and it has become increasingly pronounced over time. This criticism concerns the means of expression, while the contestation concerns the pain accompanying the walling up and the consequences of this act, particularly for the young mother and her son. An example of this trend is the work by sculptor Destan Gashi, simply titled *Rozafa* (Figure 16). Born in Kosovo but living in Vienna since 1978 and working with traditional methods (marble sculpture), Gashi captured the moment of feeding the woman's son. However, he omitted the entire context of the song and focused on the child reaching for his mother's breast. There are no references to devotion and self-sacrifice for the common good, because the mother is absent and only the breast is visible.

This is what draws the viewer's focus solely to the relationship between the son and the woman feeding him.

Photographer Nerina Toçi carried out a similar artistic project. Born in Tirana in 1988, the artist divides her time between Albania and Italy, where three of her albums have been published. In several photographs, Toçi explored the act of walling up, looking at it through the prism of feminist anthropology and focusing on the relationship between the female body and the wall (Figure 17). Central to the artist's work is a careful look at the tormented female body as a metaphor for the mechanisms of violence and the loss of self. There are no additional references, characters, or relationships here.



Figure 17. *Untitled*, photograph by Nerina Toçi, 2020. Source: https://www.nerinatoci.it/albums/la-cadenza-del-suono.html, retrieved August 9, 2026

This is undoubtedly an interesting aesthetic and ideological turn, which, however, remains on the margins of the interpretative field of songs about walling up. Firstly, this is due to geographical and bibliographical reasons as the album was released in Italian by a contemporary art gallery in Milan, which significantly reduces the chances of its reception in Albania. Secondly, it is a fairly unambiguous and therefore one-sided interpretative approach to the walling-up topos. Admittedly, when it comes to humanistic reflection more broadly, feminist analysis of the walling-up topos in Albanian culture is still in its infancy, with artists leading the way.

Thus, in 2019, the city of Durrës (the second largest in Albania) hosted an important artistic event inspired by the global campaign against violence against women, the *Red Shoe Movement* (Albanian: *Këpucët e kuqe*). Two local artists, sculptor Ivo Moja and graphic designer David Kryemadhi, created two art instal-

lations which director Driada Dervishi placed in front of the city's main police station, "where reports of violence against women are filed" (Azizolli, 2022). Kryemadhi prepared a graphic inspired by the figure of Rozafa, the walled-up woman. Clothed only in jewellery around her neck and a knight's helmet on her head (these elements emphasise her femininity and archaic nature), Rozafa looks directly at the viewer with her eyes wide open. Behind her, the graphic artist placed a field with words condemning violence against women (Figure 18). This is a clear and powerful transposition of meaning, which Kryemadhi argued was intended to draw the viewer's attention to the fact that Rozafa sacrificed herself for her family and still suffered violence (Azizolli, 2022). Thus, for the artist and the social campaign, it is no longer a song or a fortress but Rozafa as a woman who is the only symbol.



Figure 18. *Rozafa* by David Kryemadhi, 2022.
Source: Azizolli (2022)

An interesting attempt to comprehensively capture the tradition of the walling-up topos in Albanian art was an exhibition organised by Përparim Kalo in 2017. Kalo is a well-known Albanian lawyer, judge of the Constitutional Court, professor of law, but also a patron of the arts, collector, and owner of the Kalo art gallery. On his initiative, a project was launched in 2016 to present the works of artists from Shkodër in a single exhibition. The project received financial support from the Council of Europe's Arts Club. It resulted in an exhibition titled *Legende da la citadele/The Legend of a Castle*, which ran from 9 January to 3 February 2017 at the Palace of Europe, the seat of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (see Tirana Times, 2017). Subsequently, under the changed title *The legend is back home*, the exhibition was moved to Tirana, where it was on display at the Kalo Gallery from June to the end of August 2017. It consisted of twenty works by Shkodran artists, including classic artists such as Kolë Idromeno and Danish Jukniu, famous living artists such as Edi Hila and Sytki Brahimi, as well as younger artists from different generations, such as Merita Selimi, Fatbardh Kalvari, Artan Draçini, Sidi Kanani, Eros Dibra, Gjon Jon Kraja, Pjerin Kolnikaj, and Andi Hila. The collected works represented a vast spectrum

of artistic techniques and strategies – from realism to postmodernism – but the leitmotif connecting them was Shkodra and the legend of Rozafat Castle, considered its main symbol. Thus, in one place, it was possible to see various interpretations and references to the topos of walling up: from references to the sacrifice of a young mother, through impressionistic and realistic depictions of the fortress, to abstract references to the meaning of the act of walling up and its consequences. This is the only exhibition of its kind in the history of Albanian art. Moreover, although Shkodër was the real hero of the exhibition, it was the legend that was highlighted in the exhibition's title and promotional materials, making it the main symbol defining the city. This demonstrates the vitality of the topos, which in this case became a slogan, a symbol, and a kind of keyword for contemporary Shkodër.

The gradual shift from contemplation of suffering and sacrifice to contestation and criticism can also be observed in literature. An interesting example of this process is a one-act drama titled *Utopos* [Utopia] by Shkodër-born playwright, writer, and literary historian Stefan Çapaliku. While researching the presence of the walling-up topos in the cultural life of Shkodër, I spoke with the writer and obtained a typescript from him. It is a highly intriguing and multi-layered text, which forces the reader to take a fresh look at the act of walling up, the meaning of the walled-up woman's sacrifice, the behaviour of the characters in the song, the fortress and its symbolism, and, not least, to revise their knowledge and beliefs about this topos. Çapaliku builds his work on a retrospective view of the events celebrated in the song/legend. There are three brothers – Moshi, Krispi, and Utopos – with the surname Drinon. The wives of the two older ones are Tea and Rea. Additionally, there is Commissioner Barleti, who, in the course of events, turns out to be a woman and investigates events that took place many years ago. There is also the son of the walled-up woman, who has grown into a man; however, his name is simply "Nameless Son". The walled-up woman is the only heroine of the song/legend who is physically absent from the drama, although we learn almost immediately that her name was Sko, and that the fortress is now named after her. At the beginning, we see Utopos, an old man tired of life, and, on top of that, not quite remembering what happened a long time ago. The reader learns that the three brothers and the wives of the two older ones still live together in the fortress, which is now in ruins. The action picks up with the arrival of Commissioner Barleti, who begins an investigation into a crime that took place during the construction of the fortress. When he asks who built the fortress, Moshi and Krispi initially refuse to answer, claiming they cannot remember. But the more they try to evade the question, the more memories come back to Utopos. We learn that the brothers were born at the same time and that their mother had other children who scattered around the world, building fortresses and bridges. It was not the brothers who began building the fortress; they were born next to it, and the work of construction and destruction had been going on for thousands of years. Moshi and Krispi blame an old man for planting the idea in their heads to wall up the wife who

brings them food the next day. The drama takes a peculiar turn at this point, as Commissioner Barleti, now a woman, meets the Nameless Son. He has grown into a half-mad man who bears a resemblance to a monster. He knows nothing of the world, he is no warrior or hero, but every day he climbs high up the ruins of the fortress to drink the milk of his mother, Sko. He is almost a ghost, inspiring fear with his long nails, nakedness, and twisted body. It is the Nameless Son who adds that it was this old man who eavesdropped on the conversations of each of the brothers under the windows of their chambers: how Moshi and Krispi had told Tea and Rea not to come with food that day, and how Utopos had struggled and fought with his thoughts but had said nothing to his wife. The Nameless Son, eternally searching for nourishment from his mother, accuses everyone of being guilty, and his appearance and subsequent disappearance open the door to a seemingly simple question: Did the brothers do the right thing by walling up Sko? Utopos finally tells what happened that day, how the walling up took place, how his brothers placed his wife in the wall, pressing her down with the heaviest stone. Moshi and Krispi, in turn, evade blame, claiming that they warned their wives because they wanted to protect them from cruel fate. They place responsibility for everything on Utopos, who kept his word. Thanks to this, the walling up took place, and a fortress was built, which became their common prison. According to Moshi and Krispi, *besa* serves to defend one's loved ones, and nothing else. Utopos, on the other hand, explains that he was bound by *besa* and had to build the fortress for defence against invaders. There is no longer a spring with clean and life-giving water, Çapaliku emphasises through the mouths of his older brothers, as it has been contaminated by the decomposing bodies of those who died fighting for the fortress. A hand exposed outside the wall has withered, and the eye has become overgrown with moss. The commissioner has no choice but to declare Utopos – a man without a place – guilty and arrest him. The act of walling up proved unnecessary.

This is indeed a powerful message. Çapaliku rejects the popular interpretation of the legend. In his view, the act of walling up brings misfortune to everyone, and the fortress becomes a prison where life freezes; it is a metaphor for confinement, fear of the world, and significant loss. Çapaliku does not glorify the heroism of the walled-up woman and rejects the primacy of the common good over the individual. One gets the impression that he is radically breaking with the communist past, and his fortress evokes slogans from that era, when Albania was likened to an impregnable fortress or rock on the Adriatic. In Çapaliku's work, the fortress is replaced by three movable tin panels, which symbolise its current pitiful state. The writer's conviction that nothing good and lasting can be built when the foundations are rooted in evil forms the work's final moral message.

Journalist and writer Ndue Dedaj presents Rozafa in a similar light in his story *Gjuhët e Rozafës* [The Languages of Rozafa]. After many years of being stuck in limbo between reality and dream, life and death, Rozafa straightens her body and begins to look at the world around her through cracks in the

wall. Everything has changed. She wonders whether it is the lake below that is whitening the world, or perhaps it is her breast milk, which has been leaking for centuries. Her husband, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law have long since passed away, as has her son, whose "death she carries in her breast" (Dedaj, n.d.). In front of the wall, where she stands resurrected but not alive, crowds of visitors move by, looking at the stones for a moment, taking photos, filming, and rushing on. Rozafa does not understand their languages; in any case, she is condemned to silence, but she has just found her voice. However, only the old guide can hear her, and she engages him in conversation. Rozafa demands that he stop recounting the story of how she ended up in the wall. She demands that he tell the others what happened to her and her son, her husband, and brothers-in-law, to the fortress her son was to inherit, and to the city that her bones gave birth to. "The ballad says nothing about that", and "it's not my fault", the guide defends himself. There, the first powerful message of the story resounds:

> You are all guilty, all of you, even that old man who advised the three brothers to commit a greedy act of sacrifice. Tell me, was my husband tried, was he convicted by a court, a prince, a senate, or a republic after committing the crime? The besa he gave his brothers was fatal to me. His besa killed me, I lived off their bread. How can a besa kill? (Dedaj, n.d.)

The walled-up woman demands that the guide stop telling the old legend and that visitors no longer be fed false myths like animals fed hay. There would be no city without her sacrifice – her voluntary submission. How is it, asks Rozafa, that only women sacrifice themselves constantly, and men do not? Only one of them did, Jesus, but he became God. Meanwhile, those who pass by the wall see only a cover, without wondering what her life would have been like if she had not been walled up, how many children she would have had, or what she would have experienced as a woman, a wife, and a mother. Furthermore, at this point, Dedaj makes an interesting turn. Suddenly, a man appears and shyly approaches the wall. Then a miracle happens. Rozafa begins to speak not only in her former language, Arbëresh, as Dedaj writes, but she now understands all the languages of the world, both living and dead. She hears those languages, understands them, and can speak them. Having been stuck between life and death for centuries, she acknowledges that all those who look at her, even if they rush off somewhere, also live within their walls and always end up that way. Being walled up is a common state, but only she knows this and understands it.

As the heroine tries to draw the visitors' attention to the white lilies covering the lake below, the stranger bends down and kisses her petrified lips, handing her a white lily, a symbol of purity and virtue. Her figure then appears in full view, speaking and alive. Who is this man? Perhaps he is the murderer of his wife, hiding in a fortress "where police sirens can never be heard" (Dedaj, n.d.).

This is Rozafa's full empowerment. Dedaj sides with her, with the victim of murder, but also with a woman who consciously accepts her fate not out of fear or custom, but because she knows what her sacrifice will serve. Walling

her up takes away her voice, and the ballad passes on her silence. It is time to change this, says Dedaj. The native language is not enough; her sacrifice deserves more – it must be heard in all languages. It is no longer just about the fortress or Shkodër, but about humanity. Dedaj's Rozafa shows us, both readers and visitors to her wall, that in reality it is we who live within a wall, not understanding the world around us, making no effort to change this state of affairs. The heroine becomes a metaphor for breaking out of the wall of ignorance, the rigid framework imposed on us by legends and myths, as well as by a superficial life. The last kiss is perhaps a thank you for this awareness. What about the fact that the alleged murderer does it? It might also be a request for forgiveness.

The metaphorisation of Rozafa is not only the work of artists and writers. For instance, Artan Fuga, a long-time professor of sociology at the University of Tirana and currently a member of the Albanian Academy of Sciences, coined the term "Rozafa complex" in an essay written in the mid-1990s, in which he discussed the state of the Albanian media in the early years after the fall of communism. In his view, it meant blind submission to the inevitability of fate, a kind of escape from rational thinking. Fuga then made this concept the core of his book *Ikje nga kompleksi i Rozafës* [Escape from the Rozafa Complex], which contains a comprehensive analysis of the media world in the first decade of the country's post-communist political transformation. The core of Fuga's argument is the belief that the fortress – a symbol of defence and steadfastness – was built as a result of lies and the subsequent crime. However, the sociologist wrote, perhaps we should not judge our elder brothers as harshly as the legend does, because after all, the fortress was built. With her sacrifice, the walled-up woman reminds all participants of this tragic legend – her husband, brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law – that they must create genuine relationships and institutions that will fill the power vacuum. One must be prepared, and in the future, decisions must be made in a dignified and open manner. Otherwise, the danger will recur and no fortress will ever be built again (Fuga, 2001, pp. 334–343). The basis of Fuga's metaphor is the shift of emphasis from the walled up to the fortress, which means that the act of walling up ceases to be a family affair, as in the legend, and becomes a social and, therefore, political situation. Known for a certain frivolity in expressing his judgements and dressing them up in metaphors, the scholar this time reached for the concept of a complex, which in this context evokes rather negative connotations, as it is associated with fear, shame, and hidden vices. However suggestive, such a shift in concepts from the individual to the societal level raises legitimate methodological objections. Nevertheless, that is not the point here. In the context of the analysis undertaken here, I draw attention to this aspect of the vitality of the walling-up topos, where the legend serves the sociologist in describing post-communist Albanian reality.

Even more significant and strongly motivated methodological objections are raised by the concept proposed by Panajot Barka, already mentioned above. In one of the predatory journals which offer points needed to obtain further academic titles in exchange for publication in English (which has become a com-

mon practice in Albania in recent years), Barka published a short article in which he used the legend of the walling up to justify the division of Albanians into the Ghegs and the Tosks. Barka argued that the former, in the north, are dominated by closedness, isolation, severance, severity, and an emphasis on the need for defence. For all these reasons, the theme of building a fortress dominates their songs. In the south, the latter are characterised by openness, mobility, a desire to communicate, and a striving to overcome barriers, which is why the legend of the walling up refers to the construction of a bridge. Thus, two metaphors – the fortress and the bridge – become suitable tools for describing the constitutional characteristics of the two, as Barka calls them, ethno-cultural groups that make up the Albanian nation. However, the researcher did not stop there. He reasoned further that the bridge originated in the Greek cultural area, its roots date back to antiquity, and the archetype of the motif is a song about the construction of the bridge of Arta. Today's southern Albania (or Epirus, as Barka refers to this region) has always been an area through which the contents and achievements of the Greek world migrated northward (Barka, 2015, p. 293). It was one great historical bridge, and the materialisation of this historical process is the 139 stone bridges scattered throughout the region, meticulously counted by the Greek researcher Spiros Mandas. The current population of this region, the Labians, are newcomers from the north, as evidenced by the patriarchal structures and customary law that have been preserved for a very long time. However, even they, Barka notes, adopted the bridge model as a way of organising social relations. As the researcher concluded, in the case of the Albanians this is not a dilemma – stemming from specific historical and political conditions – between sacrificing a person during the construction of a castle or a bridge, but a geographical division resulting from diachronic ethnic and cultural differences between the Ghegs and the Tosks (Barka, 2015, p. 294). This article serves as an illustration of the perceived durability of an interpretive model that views the song/legend about walling up through the prism of national culture. The core of this model is influenceology.

School Education

This issue leads me to the last topic to discuss in this section: education. A brief review of school textbooks and teaching practices is enough to notice that the previously discussed change in the interpretative strategies of the song/legend about walling up has not affected the education system. Primary school pupils learn about the song *Rozafat* in the last, ninth, grade. They read the canonical version and then receive a set of information that situates the song in the context of Albanian folklore and culture. The prevailing view is that the ideological core of the song and legend is the third brother's keeping of his word (*besa*), while the act of walling up is presented as a voluntary and necessary sacrifice on the

part of the woman. The song is treated as a ballad, i.e., an epico-lyrical genre, and is placed in the context of other similar songs/legends. Although it is noted that the song also exists among other peoples in the Balkans and further afield, it is generally regarded as an Albanian song, testifying to the antiquity and uniqueness of Albanian culture. From what I heard during conversations with several teachers, only some of them try to go beyond this framework, encouraging students to reflect more deeply on the act of walling up itself and its consequences for all the characters in the legend. However, these are exceptions, and the teaching model described above is the one that prevails. For example, one can learn more about it by following the online Albanian language teaching platform prepared by the Albanian Ministry of Education and the Albanian state television programme dedicated to school education (RTSH Shkolla) during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

Lesson nine of the syllabus was prepared by teacher Liri Sena, who explains how to interpret the ballad *Rozafat* (P Tech, 2020). In a separate video, but as part of the same lesson, another teacher, Irena Sërbo, presented a poetic analysis of the song (P Tech, 2021). A similar platform was developed by the Kosovan Ministry of Education, which also included a traditional analysis of the ballad *Rozafat* (Platforma në gjuhën shqipe, 2021). A similar trend can be observed in extracurricular educational projects undertaken by students from various schools, mainly primary schools. Children take on the roles of the song's characters, following its various elements in turn and participating in the process of recreating it. For example, children from the Future Generation School in Shkodër prepared a dramatic adaptation of *The Legend of Rozafa* and posted a video on YouTube (Future Generation, 2018). Another project was carried out by even younger children from Class V B of the Lush Kola Primary School in the village of Barbullush. It is clear that the performance is primarily fun, but at the same time the old song becomes the younger children's story and enters their understanding of the world – this is how they learn about Rozafa and the history of *her* fortress (Rrezearta Jasini, 2019). It is precisely this shared participation that is considered a key component of the educational process here. Similar content and methods of interpretation are also being transferred from Albania to schools operating outside the country for Albanian migrant children. For example, on the Facebook profile of *Shkollat shqipe në Diasporë* [Albanian Schools in the Diaspora], I came across a post titled *Legjenda e Rozafës* [The Legend of Rozafa]. It consists of a painting by the artist Elona Marika and a poem titled *Vaji i Rozafës* [Rozafa's Lament], written by Gentiana Marika (Shkollat Shqiptare në Diasporë, 2020). Elona Marika is a renowned artist who, among other things, has been working as an art teacher at the Albanian school "Scanderbeg Parma" in Parma, Italy, since 2009. She portrayed the walled-up woman following the tradition established by Kraja's relief, i.e., half enclosed in a wall but standing upright and breastfeeding her son. Gentiana Marika's poem is Rozafa's lament addressed primarily to her son.

However, it is impossible to limit the presence of the topos of walling up in the education system to school teaching alone. Continuing the idea that guided

Kuteli when he prepared his collection half a century earlier, in 1993 Odhise Grillo, one of the leading writers for children, published the book *Rozafa: Legjenda e murimit* [Rozafa. The Legend of the Walling-up]. He retold the song *Rozafat* (Grillo, 1993) faithfully, but in a way typical of literature for younger children. As I have pointed out, this and similar publications have made the text of the song widely familiar to children and young people. For example, in the second edition of *Legjendat shqiptare në novelat grafike* [Albanian Legends in Comics], third prize went to the young artist Sara Trebicka, born in 1995, for her work on the legend of *Rozafat* (Ministria e Turizmit, Kulturës dhe Sportit, 2015). Trebicka described the most important elements of the legend, using the simplest and most familiar form of comics (Figure 19). The durability of such artistic and educational references and allusions is evidenced by the staging of *Roza dhe Fati* [Roza and Fati] by artist and director Meri Gurra at the Puppet Theatre in Tirana in May 2023. Gurra based her vision of the song on wordplay, breaking down the name Rozafat into Roza (meaning girl) and Fat (meaning fate). I have not seen the performance, so I cannot offer an opinion on it. However, the fact that the Tirana (and national) Puppet Theatre has chosen to tour Albania with this performance is a testament to the recognition of its educational value and support for similar cultural and educational initiatives and projects.



Figure 19. *Rozafati* by Sara Trebicka submitted to the "Albanian Legends in Comics" competition.
Source: Ministria e Turizmit, Kulturës dhe Sportit (2015)

From Folklore to Folklorismus

In addition to the cultural phenomena described above, the vitality of the song/text/story of Rozafa is also ensured by other channels of transmission – those of everyday life, one might say. These include family stories, television programmes, tourist trips, city walks, café chats, etc. This is the area of interperson-

al communication where the walled-up topos lives, functions, and undergoes various transformations or transpositions. This process takes place, as it were, alongside the main discussions, disputes, and interpretations concerning the canonical version; to put it another way: folklore gives way to folklorismus and intellectual reflection gives way to simple fun.

Obviously, the publishing of song lyrics did not mean that new versions of these songs ceased to be sung. With the fall of the communist regime in Albania, the music scene was also freed from strict state control and supervision. Many researchers look at this process primarily in terms of the emergence and development of musical genres such as rock, jazz, and, more recently, hip hop, but a similar revolution took place in what was known as folklore or folk music. It also transformed; there was no longer any control by state institutions; everyone could sing, record, and sell their music. Thus, out of folklore, folk was born, a new genre similar to the so-called newly composed folk music in the former Yugoslavia. Over time, a whole constellation of new forms and styles emerged, such as *çifteteli* in Albania and *tallava* in Kosovo, very similar in rhythm and style to Bulgarian *čalga*, Serbian *turbofolk*, and Romanian *manele*. And, like their Balkan counterparts, these genres also underwent a shift in transmission, moving from almost homemade cassettes in the 1990s to CDs and television, and now primarily function on social media and YouTube. In this context, it is worth noting the numerous examples of the revitalisation of songs about walling up.

For example, singer Fadil Kurti, who comes from the Mati region, which is considered to belong to northern Albania but is definitely far from the Shkodër and Malësi regions, created a new song based on the motif of walling up in a fortress (Tv Topestrada Tetovë, 2020). Unlike the *jare* genre performed by Bik Ndoja, here the song flows rapidly, and the singer, playing rhythmically on the *çifteli*, clearly aims to tell a story rather than create a reflective and melancholic mood. Although he retained the narrative framework of the song *Rozafat*, Kurti created a completely new text, starting with identifying the building as the "fortress of Shkodër" (Alb. *kalaja e Shkodrës*), i.e., he deliberately linked the song to the Shkodër fortress. In contrast, the name Shkodër (or in its articulated form as Shkodra) does not appear in either of the above-mentioned oldest variants of the *Rozafat* song (although Taipi included it in the title). Furthermore, Kurti modernised the language of the song. There are no archaisms, nor Turkishisms, nor even old Albanian words. For example, he uses the word *grua* to mean wife, instead of *vashë*, which is used in the canonical version of the song.

Another singer, Fran Reka, who comes from the town of Laç but resides in Pavia, northern Italy, followed suit. The narrative line of his song *Rozafa*, recorded in 2022, differs significantly from the canonical version (Reka, 2022). The singer begins the story with an old book containing the ancestors' request to build a fortress in Shkodër. The eldest of the brothers reads the book, discusses the matter with his brothers, and only then do they decide to build the fortress together. They seal their intention with a public promise (in the original – *besa*) that they will do so. From this point on, Reka's song follows a familiar sequence

of events, except that the old man "with white hair and beard" who advises them on what to do to make the wall stand recommends that they sacrifice a woman, not the wife of one of them. It is the brothers themselves who decide to wall up the wife who brings them dinner the next day. The two older brothers "committed betrayal", sings Reka, which in terms of semantic weight differs significantly from "they broke their *besa* and broke their faith" in the canonical version. Another difference is the element of the dream that the young wife recounts when she entrusts her son to her mother-in-law's care. She senses that it is a bad dream because she saw herself remarrying in it. Such a prediction in a dream appears in several variants in central and southern Albania, but not in the *Rozafat* version, so this is a transposition of other local motifs. At the end of the song, the singer radically alters the request of the walled-up woman: she asks to leave only her right hand outside so that she can stroke her son when he comes to her, and her "left side", by which the singer refers to her left breast, as the singer continues to sing about feeding the baby. He describes the process of walling up quite accurately; however, he uses the word "varr" [grave] to refer to the place in the wall where the act of walling up takes place. The walled-up woman is surrounded by marble, out of which white milk gushes.

I mentioned above that the song about walling up in the foundations of a bridge is not as complex as the one about the Shkodër fortress, which refers to the folklore of southern Albania. However, songs about walling up in a bridge, sung in the north of the country and in Kosovo, are much longer – for example, the song about the brothers from Has who build Ura e Fshajt, performed by famous singers from Gjakovë: Rifat and Mehdi Berisha (RTV Fontana, 2020). The lyrics of the song do not differ significantly from the version known from publications, but the musical layer, the two-part singing, the playing of the *sharki* and *çifteli* against the backdrop of a fireplace, clearly indicate that the performers were stylising themselves after the old singers who, during long winter nights, entertained guests in this way in the so-called *oda e burrave* [literally: men's room, but increasingly it is simply a guest room].

However, the song about the bridge in Nartë is indeed much shorter. The text published by Haxhihasani in his anthology is one of the longest I know. It is the singing technique that makes the song drag on and seem much longer when performed live. It is a polyphonic singing style, called *me iso* in Albanian, although the term *polyphony*, borrowed from scientific jargon, has also been used among singers for a long time. This type of singing dominates in the Labëri region, a mountainous area stretching between Vlorë and Gjirokastër, bordered by the Vjosa River valley to the east and the Ionian Sea coast to the west. Other versions are also more widespread in southern Albania, but different regions are characterised by specific features (Shituni, 1989). Based on a combination of three voices and a background drone (bourdon, *iso*), this singing technique allows for the performance of joyful love songs and humorous songs as well as epic songs and laments. The singers classify the song about walling up in the foundations of a bridge as the latter. Of course, this is related to the subject

matter, but the lead singer plays a crucial role in all this, as he sets the tone of the song. In the performance of this song by a band from the village of Lapardha, the unique singing and craftsmanship of Nazif Çela play a key role. Born in 1959, Çela (then 24 years old) and his ensemble made their debut at the National Folklore Festival in 1983 with the phenomenal song *Janinës ç'i panë sytë* [What Janina's Eyes Saw]. The ensemble used a similar singing technique in their performance of a song about walling up. Still, this time, alongside Çela's leading voice, the second voice of Golik Likaj (Sotolestele, 2020) sounded even stronger. The song has only four verses, and each line is followed by the refrain *e mjera unë* [woe is me]. The first verse recounts the construction of a bridge over a river by master builders; the second tells of a mother's request to her first daughter-in-law to bring bread to the masters; the third describes a conversation between the mother and her younger daughter-in-law. The fourth verse is interesting because the singer completely omits the bridge, saying that a living girl was walled up in the foundations of a fortress. This is indeed an astounding change, specific only to this performance, where the fortress takes the place of the bridge as the place where the girl was walled up.

Another variant of the same song, titled *Balada e urës* [Ballad of the Bridge], was presented by singers Avni Lushka from the Mokër region and Endri Fifo from the Devoll region (Korça district) during the National Folklore Festival in 2003 (Folklori Shqiptar, 2022). In accordance with the dominant style of polyphonic singing in this part of Albania, it was not *iso* but an example of imitative polyphony, rather than contrasting polyphony, as in the case of Labëria. The singer immediately draws the listener into the centre of the action: builders are constructing a bridge over which "both Turks and giaours" (Alb. *kaur*), i.e., Muslims and Christians, are to pass, but the work is not progressing. A passerby mentions the need to make a sacrifice in the foundations. It is an old man "with white hair", which is both a characteristic and a typological phrase. However, the song omits the entire typical sequence of events, jumping to the moment of walling up when the wife is talking to her husband. It is significant, however, that she asks him why he wants to make their son an orphan. This postulate is met with an attempt at an explanation by the husband, who replies that he too was an orphan and that he kept his *besa*, which is why he did not tell her about the builders' decision to wall her up. The song ends as dynamically as it began, without any final phrases of good wishes, leaving the rest to the listener's imagination. It is a remarkably short performance, but it is precisely the fact that the rest of the events are left to the listeners' imagination that has such a strong effect, almost inviting them to sing along and complete the song.

Returning, however, to the beginning of this analysis, it can be said that the walled-up woman appears more in the form of stories told to tourists than in songs/legends/texts. Just type "Rozafa" into a search engine to see that it is mainly associated with a trip that has already taken place or an invitation to take a trip and visit Shkodër. In the era of mass tourism, these and other marketing measures contribute significantly to spreading knowledge about the

legend and song about walling up. Of course, this presence is heavily distorted, flattened in content and rudimentary in form, but – at least potentially – it ensures the vitality of the topos. This was well understood by Blendi Fevziu, one of Albania's leading journalists and author of the programme *Opinion*. In a series of trips around Albania, Fevziu also visited Shkodër and toured the fortress. In a very serious tone, he stood in front of the recess in the wall and solemnly announced that "this is where Rozafa was walled up, or at least so the legend says" (RTV Klan, 2020). In other words, here is a journalist pointing to the place where legend meets reality. However, this is not about historical truth, nor is it about focusing on the rich history of the fortress, as the museum curator strongly emphasised during our conversation. Fevziu's statement aligns with the aesthetics of breakfast television: it should be light, pleasant, interesting, and yet impressive, which guarantees its attractiveness. In this area, the topos of being walled up appears as a simple activity, just a topic for a short TV news item or a short video to share on social media.

Summary

The aim of the above considerations was simple: to show how the topos of walling up emerged, grew, established itself, and changed in Albanian culture. It was therefore necessary to adopt a historical approach, which has been the dominant one here. However, I have also attempted, albeit to a lesser extent, to adopt a communicative approach. It is possible to pinpoint quite accurately, and not only in the case of Albania, the moment when a song was transformed into a text, an oral tradition became a legend, and a live performance became words captured in an unchanging form. In other words, it marked the beginning of the topos of walling up in a culture dominated by writing. At the same time, however, it was also an era of building national cultures, for which the spiritual and material creativity of the people, increasingly referred to as folklore, was to be an essential building block. At this moment, I believe, the topos of walling up took its central place in Albanian culture. Of course, oral communication did not cease, so the song continued its life, albeit under different conditions. The emergence and development of audiovisual media in the second half of the 20th century, as well as the current rise of social media, inevitably brought with it new forms of expression and iconographic strategies. However, the central place of the topos in national culture was not questioned even when its meaning and social usefulness were debated. Despite the changes in the historical context, the primary axis of meaning remains unchanged. It can therefore be concluded that the topos of walling up in Albanian culture is a transhistorical phenomenon. Its vitality is based on a lasting conviction of its centrality in relation to other cultural components. Both interpretive and educational efforts contributed to the strength of this constant.

It is precisely this centrality that is the source of constant references to the topos, and thus to its reconfiguration and transposition. All these attempts, interpretative approaches, and creative treatments constitute a specific spectrum of cultural manifestations. Many of them have been discussed here, while others have been omitted because they either duplicated existing main interpretative trends or were too marginal to significantly influence the course of these trends. Against this background, two phenomena seem to be very important. Firstly, within Albanian culture, the walled-up woman no longer appears as nameless but bears the name Rozafa. I have shown how this name emerged, and its vitality is proof of the permanent establishment of this topos in culture. Secondly, the walled-up woman is a point of reference not only in the sphere of the written word and images, but also in social practices of a magical nature. Thus, the topos of walling up is not confined to an old legend or its various interpretations and references but is directly linked to important elements of social life.

Considering all this, these reflections cannot have a conclusion. Given its durability and repeatability, the walled-up woman topos is a living and constant source of new forms and content in Albanian culture.

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Marzena Maciulewicz

Bosnia and Herzegovina. Basking in the Light and Shadow of a Nobelist

Folk Art and the Boundaries of National Identity

Any reflection on the issue of the walling up of women in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter referred to as BiH), Montenegro and Serbia must be preceded by a preliminary comment on the ambiguity of borders in this area, and their variability and inadequacy in relation to cultural divisions. The borders of the current states impose certain institutional frameworks for research, but the analysis of historical phenomena must also take into account other frameworks of organisation, including those from the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, which established permanent geographical and cultural borders, as well as the borders of historical nation states.

This research also requires consideration of the specific nature of the academic and cultural milieus involved in the creation, preservation, and analysis of literary works. The boundaries of research are often determined by political and social divisions that have shaped local cultural communities. This means that it is necessary to analyse Serbian–Montenegrin, Montenegrin–Bosnian and Bosniak, Bosnian–Bosniak, and Serbian–Bosnian and Bosniak relations, as well as variously defined internal divisions, especially in academic and cultural circles.

The migration of a topos is a story of fluid cultural spaces and complex identities; it is a migration of meanings in time and space, between historical and geographical regions, between disciplines and different spheres of artistic expression; between rulers, scholars, writers, and their intellectual milieus; it is a story of their correspondence, disputes in magazines and publications, and public debates. An integral part of this migration is the formation of national literature and the related process of recognition of orature by a given community as "its own". The context of the creation and publication of collections of oral literature, which in many cases form the foundations of national literary canons in this area, is discussed in this publication in the part devoted to the development of folklore studies in Serbia. At this point, I would like to note that this is an important aspect of contemporary research on the cultures of this area, and

that a correlation can be observed between interest in oral creativity and the process of creating or redefining cultural identity. The significant need to define cultural distinctiveness, among other things by redefining one's own literary creativity, becomes particularly evident after changes in national borders (especially in the context of the collapse of former empires and socialist Yugoslavia).

This problem is very well illustrated by an analysis of the works of contemporary researchers of local orature published in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro who strive to give appropriate status to local oral literature previously included (especially during the wave of folklore studies in the 19th century) in the Serbian or Croatian tradition, or later in the Serbian–Croatian tradition. Particular attention is paid to the work of Vuk Karadžić, whose collections are impressive in terms of volume and popularity (also abroad) and were among the first to be published, but the list of authors whose works researchers find in their collections is much longer (see Buturović, 1992; 1995; Kilibarda, 2009; Kodrić, 2018; Radoman, 2015). I will mention a few of them in relation to works involving the topos of the walled-up woman.

And so Sanjin Kodrić, in an article on the relationship between Serbian and Croatian practices of collecting orature and folklore in relation to literary works in BiH, especially Bosniak oral literature in the 19th century, draws attention to the importance not only of collections published by folklorists, but also of texts published in magazines (Kodrić, 2018). On the one hand, contemporary researchers appreciate the fact that an impressive number of works have been collected, as this has ensured that the material has been preserved, is widely known, and can be studied. On the other hand, the inclusion of specific works in a given national tradition had consequences for the process of building the status and identity of the region's literature, including oral literature.

In connection with the above, in the area under study we encounter a number of scientific works on orature, anthologies and song collections which aim to separate the region's own literary heritage from the dominant national literatures. The criteria for including a given work in the Montenegrin or Bosnian/Bosniak tradition include the storyteller, the place where it was recorded, the language of the text (dialects, lexicon, phraseology, anthroponyms), the events described in the work, and elements characteristic of a given culture. Researchers point to the inadequacy of contemporary political borders and cultural boundaries within which folk literature developed.

Đenana Buturović emphasises that orature originated in a larger area than that defined by the contemporary borders of BiH. These include other areas inhabited by Bosniaks: the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, and various parts of Montenegro, Metohija and Kosovo (Buturović, 1992). She draws attention to the geographical and cultural spaces that emerged within the Ottoman Empire and continued to function as cultural entities even after its collapse, such as Bosnia and Sanjak. Incidentally, Gora is also a very good example here as it was only divided by political borders in 1912. Buturović also draws attention to the long formation period of orature, the participation of storytellers in its

creation, and the specificity of Bosniak creativity, mainly in the context of the cultural influence of the Ottoman Empire (events, religion, heroes, migrations).

The changing cultural boundaries are indicated by the ways in which Buturović characterises the same collection of works, which are referred to as "Bosnian Muslim epic" or "Bosniak epic", depending on the date of publication. In her book *Bosanskomuslimanska usmena epika* [Bosnian Muslim oral epic] (Buturović, 1992), Buturović presents the characteristics and specific elements of Bosnian Muslim epic poetry. In her important publication titled *Studija o Hormanovoj zbirci* [Study of the Hörmann collection] (Buturović, 1976), she analyses Kosta Hörmann's collection of songs, whose title *Narodne pjesne Muhamedovaca u Bosni i Herzegovini* [Folk songs of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina] (Hörmann, 1888-1889) points to yet another identification of the contemporary community's creative output: Muslims in BiH[1]. Furthermore, Buturović, like other researchers of the region, points to the underestimation of Bosniak creativity in Yugoslavian contemporary literary studies. It is worth noting that both Kosta Hörmann's song collection and Đenana Buturović's publications include the song *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* [Building the bridge in Višegrad], which contains the foundation sacrifice topos.

Since we are talking about contemporary BiH, we cannot ignore the voice of researchers from Republika Srpska. In the article *Фрагменти о српским народним пјесмама из Босне и Херцеговине* [Fragments on Serbian folk songs from Bosnia and Herzegovina], Jelenka Pandurević points out that determining the status of Serbian literature in BiH also requires developing an attitude towards the corpus of Serbian oral tradition recorded in these areas (Пандуревић, 2011). Pandurević draws attention to the fact that the emergence of songs in written form was closely linked to, and often subordinated to, national and political goals, with the result that the values articulated by a literary work were interpreted as converging with the values of one's own national community. Due to the political context of literary orature, the researcher believes that contemporary analysis should focus on two main aspects: authenticity (which I will return to later) and the history of reception (Пандуревић, 2011, p. 87). The key period determining the change in the perception of cultural boundaries in this area was the gradual withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from Bosnia and the neighbouring nation states' subsequent struggle for influence. Pandurević pays particular attention to the issue of confessional identification within a given national community and the change in this respect over the centuries. She notes that the identification of Serbs as a group of three confessions, which was commonplace in 19th-century BiH, no longer has any validity in contemporary times. This is an important point of reference in determining the rela-

[1] Buturović claims that Hörmann and his collaborators considered the significance of the edited collection on a very broad scale, believing it to be important not only for Bosniaks from Bosnia, but for all South Slavic Muslims. For this reason, Hörmann included a religious designation in the title: *Muhamedovci* (*Muslims*) (Buturović, 1995, p. 63).

tionship between works classified as Serbian or Bosniak in BiH, including the attitude towards Orientalisms and elements of culture characteristic of Islam as components of one's own or a foreign culture. The author asks whether folk songs should be considered part of the heritage of the communities that sing them or of the communities in which they were created. She calls for a clear definition of the status of lyric and epic songs in the context of Serbian literary history. Pandurević's article is an important voice in the debate on the status of orature within local literatures. It is worth noting, however, that the song *Zidanje Skadra* [The building of Skadar] and other texts referring to the topos of the walled-up woman (Кнежевић, 2017; Пандуревић & Кнежевић, 2018) have not been included in the most important recent publications on orature published in Banja Luka[2].

Similar opinions are also expressed with regard to the status of Montenegrin literature within the broader tradition of Yugoslavian or Serbian–Croatian literature. The voices of researchers who postulate the inclusion of the Montenegrin component in the narrative of the region's folk art (Kilibarda, 2012; Radoman, 2015; Зоговић, 1970; Меденица, 1975) are discussed in the chapter on Montenegro.

In his preface to the first anthology of Albanian ballads translated by Esad Mekuli into Serbian and Croatian, Vladimir Bovan points out that Albanian ballads contain many motifs also known in the Serbian–Croatian area and that they are part of a common oral literary heritage (Бован & Чета, 1976). The publication is aimed at a wider audience, who, thanks to the translation, can learn about parts of Albanian oral culture, but also at researchers unfamiliar with the Albanian language who are involved in comparative studies of the folk poetry of the Balkan nations. The anthology also includes an Albanian ballad containing the topos of the walled-up woman, as well as a commentary on the meaning of this motif and its occurrence in other literary traditions.

The practice of incorporating a specific cultural tradition into a given national space may be related to confessional identification or be a consequence of the perspective that the heritage of a given area in the national sense belongs to a specific culture (e.g., Serbian, Croatian, Montenegrin or other) (Buturović, 1992; Radoman, 2015). It is impossible to trace the migration of a topos while ignoring such an important aspect as national identity, which has determined the way of thinking about collective identity since the 19th century. I would like to emphasise, however, that my priority is not to determine the affiliation of individual works to a given national culture (in my work, I will refer to numerous texts whose authors attempt to do so), but to present the wealth of variants and interpretations of the topos, as well as different approaches to or uses of it, taking into account all the problematic aspects outlined above. Therefore, in

[2] The monographs are part of the anthology *Српска књижевност у Босни и Херцеговини* [Serbian literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina], published by Друштво чланова Матице Српске у Републици Српској.

my study, I draw attention to the places where the works were published, their authors and cultural environment, as well as the boundaries of the prevailing socio-political context at the time.

I would also like to point out that works containing the walling-up topos appear in various variants throughout the area I have studied. Examples from the Serbian and Montenegrin traditions revolve mainly around the motif of walling up in a fortress (Skadar), while those from the Bosnian and Bosniak traditions are primarily associated with the town of Višegrad and a foundation sacrifice walled up in a bridge. However, there are also examples of combinations of these two variants.

Folklore – The First Texts With the Walling-Up Topos

The song about the construction of the bridge in Višegrad is much more varied than the songs about the construction of the Skadar fortress (see the chapter on Serbia). One of the most famous versions of the song including the foundation sacrifice topos is *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* [Building the bridge at Višegrad], recorded by Konstantin Hörmann in the first volume of the collection *Narodne pjesne Muhamedovaca u Bosni i Herzegovini* [Folk songs of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina] from 1888. In the introduction to the volume, the author expresses a positive opinion of the collections of Vuk Karadžić, Bogoljub Petranović and Simo Milutinović, emphasising that there is no similar publication of songs by Muslim brothers (*Muhamedovaca*) from BiH. In his opinion, their work is in no way inferior to that of Christian folk artists and bears witness to the customs, heroism, and important events of the followers of Islam who have lived in these lands for centuries (Hörmann, 1888–1889). Interestingly, he transcribes the songs in Latin script and standardises the transcription in accordance with the Ijekavian variant. After the publication of the first volume, he was criticised for using Latin script, the abundance of "foreign" words, and writing all songs in the Ijekavian dialect, which he mentions in the introduction to the second volume from 1889. Among the most important commentators on Hörmann's collection are Vatroslav Jagić, Luka Marjanović, Tihomir Ostojić, Jan M. Černý and Bronisław Grabowski (Spahić, 2018).

In this version of *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu*, Mehmed Pasha decides to build a bridge over the Drina, with Mitro as the chief builder, accompanied by 300 assistants and 1,000 children. The success of the bridge construction is to be ensured by the riches of the pasha and the sacrifice of a human being. The builder is informed of the necessity to wall up Stoja and Ostoja in the foundations of the bridge by a *vila* (fairy) from the supernatural world:

Cross the green field,
And seize Stoja and Ostoja,
Wall them up in the foundations of the bridge,

Then a bridge will rise on the Drina.
When the builder Mitro heard this,
He went across the green field,
Seized Stoja and Ostoja,
Walled them into the bridge foundations;
And so the bridge over the Drina was built,
The work was completed after nine years[3]. (Hörmann, 1888–1889, p. 71)

After the children were walled up, the bridge, which took a total of nine years to build, was completed, the builders were paid, and its designer and founder were recorded in folk memory. Apart from minor differences in the text, exactly the same version can be found in subsequent editions of Kosta Hörmann's collection titled *Narodne pjesme Muslimana u Bosni iI Hercegovini* [Folk songs of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina] (e.g., Hörmann & Buturović, 1976, pp. 68–72).

No work with the walling-up topos is included in the collection of folk art collector and mayor of Sarajevo Mehmed-beg Kapetanović Ljubušak: *Šta misle Muhamedanci u Bosni* [What Muslims in Bosnia think] (1886), *Narodno blago* [Folk Heritage] (1888), *Istočno blago* [Eastern heritage] (1896). No narrative featuring the walling-up motif appears in the collections of other important collectors of Bosnian-Muslim epic poetry, Vuk Vrčević, Friedrich S. Krauss and Luka Marjanović. I have not been able to find a text based on this topos in most anthologies (referring on various terms to the cultural space of BiH, of Bosnians, Bosniaks, or Bosnian Muslims) published after Hörmann's collection until the publication of Đenana Buturović's work[4]. The exception is an anthology published in BiH: *Junačke narodne pjesme* [Heroic folk songs], edited by Salko Nazečić (1961), published in Sarajevo in 1961, which includes the song *Zidanje Skadra* in the version recorded by Vuk, and not *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* or a song referring to the presentation of a foundation sacrifice in this variant. Buturović's output is directly linked to Hörmann's work and, in the opinion of researchers, like the earlier works of Luka Marjanović, it constitutes a tremendous contribution to the development of research on Bosniak epic poetry and the affirmation of Bosniak folk songs, emphasising the distinctiveness of their creation (Spahić, 2018). The song *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu*, although included in the collection of Bosniak orature edited by Buturović, as well as in a publication on Kosta Hörmann's two-volume anthology, is not analysed here. In *Usmena epika Bošnjaka* [Oral epic of Bosniaks], the song *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* is preceded only by the following annotation: "Storyteller unknown (2nd half of the 19th century,

[3] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Maja Jaros either from the Polish translation by Marzena Maciulewicz or directly from the original Polish text.

[4] In new editions of folk song collections, e.g., *Brez Bošnjaka ne ima junaka: bošnjačke epske narodne pjesme* from 1996, the song *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* appears in the version known from Hörmann's edition (see Kajan, 1996, pp. 110–115).

Visegrad)" (Buturović, 1995, p. 145). However, in *Studija o Hörmannovoj zbirci muslimanskih narodnih pjesama* [Study of Hörmann's collection of Muslim folk songs], an impressive work containing a critical study of one of the most important collections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the song *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* is mentioned only in relation to the unusual subject matter of the piece. According to Buturović, the main themes that appear in Hörmann's collection include marriages against adversity, matchmakers/matchmaking, kidnappings, revenge, liberation from captivity, the release of prisoners, falling into captivity, and the return of stolen spoils. At the same time, Buturović identifies six contexts that are specific and constitute completely independent themes, including the issue of building a construction amid adversity, which refers exclusively to one work marked with the reference *A, III*, namely the song *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* from the first volume of Hörmann's collection (Buturović, 1976). This motif is considered important for contemporary Bosniak culture (since it was included in a volume published in the 1990s by a scholar of orature), but neither the work nor the topos are the subject of scientific analysis.

Bogoljub Petranović's version titled *Како се оградила ћуприја на Вишеграду* [How the bridge in Višegrad was built] from the 1867 collection *Српске народне пјесме из Босне и Херцеговине* [Serbian folk songs from Bosnia and Herzegovina] is definitely closer to the Serbian tradition and fits in with Petranović's cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Petranović, born in Drniš (now Croatia, formerly Austria-Hungary), worked as a teacher in Dalmatia before coming to Sarajevo. Between 1862 and 1869, he was employed as a teacher at a Serbian school in Sarajevo, during which time he began collecting folk art. While working in Bosnia, he published six collections of folk songs: two lyrical and four epic[5]. One of the storytellers mentioned as Petranović's collaborator was Ilija Divjanović from the Jahorina area (Кнежевић, 2021, p. 9). In the introduction to the Sarajevo edition of Petranović's 1898 collection, Kilibarda claims that thanks to Divjanović's improvisational and creative skills, Petranović obtained songs that corresponded to his national and political views. Petranović was supposed to provide the storyteller with inspiration in the form of various texts, which he used to create satisfactory variants. His collection was reviewed by many contemporary cultural figures (including Vatroslav Jagić, Stojan Novaković, Tomo Maretić, Josip Milaković and Vojslav Jovanović), and opinions varied greatly: from admiration for the beauty of the songs to doubts about their authenticity and suspicions of mysti-

[5] Petranović was supposed to serve as a representative of the Serbian authorities in BiH. His activities were to include raising national awareness and calling for a fight against Ottoman Turkey, as well as all actions aimed at regaining BiH for Serbia (the period before the Congress of Berlin). Belgrade's favour towards Petranović is evidenced by the fact that the Archbishop of Belgrade instructed the Serbian Association of Scholars (*Srpsko učeno društvo*) to publish folk songs collected by Petranović. In 1867, Prince Mihailo Obrenović rewarded Petranović for preparing the publication by giving him one hundred ducats and recommending that it be printed by the State Printing House (*Državna pečatna*) on the most favourable terms (Килибарда, 1989; Kodrić, 2018).

fication. Apart from the artificial creation of songs by "inspiring" the storyteller, other examples of Petranović's intervention in the texts have also been pointed out, such as the removal of some Turkish words or the replacement of Muslim names with Serbian ones. Considering the impressive collections he gathered and published in such a short time, it cannot be ruled out that he also benefited from the support of other song collectors, such as students at his school.

Under the title of the song *Како се оградила ћуприја на Вишеграду* [How the bridge in Višegrad was built], there is a reference to *Испод Јаорине* [At the foot of Jahorina], which may indicate the authorship or co-authorship (inspired by readings provided by Petranović) of the aforementioned Ilija Divjanović. A characteristic feature of this variant is the historicisation of the characters: Stoja and Ostoja are not random twins sought throughout Bosnia, but the children of King Milutin.

> And tell him how things stand.
> He [King Milutin] is to give you two children,
> Two children: Stoja and Ostoja,
> The sister Stoja and the brother Ostoja,
> And he is to give you precious metal.
> Take Stoja and Ostoja,
> Bring them to Višegrad […]
> If God and luck allow you,
> You will build a bridge over the water,
> You will leave your signature on it,
> When the bridge is built on the water,
> Let it be known
> How it was built by children,
> Two children of King Milutin,
> The brother Ostoja and the sister Stoja. (Петрановић, 1867, pp. 542–543)

Both King Milutin and his children display all kinds of virtues, courage, cleverness, and generosity, while the pashas, who are the founders of the bridge, are portrayed as corrupt, cruel, and naive, and they make the decision to build the bridge while drinking wine liberally. The necessity of sacrificing children is revealed to *neimar* Rade[6] by a *vila* in a dream. She claims that all the pashas' Turkish possessions are poisoned and that no amount of money will enable him to complete the construction. King Milutin gives up his children to protect, or rather liberate, the land from Turkish plunder. The children also agree to be sacrificed. However, Prince Ostoja demands that, in order to appease the river, the pashas cross to its other side with their property. The pashas obey Ostoja's order and all three drown. In this version, unusually, the children are saved, even though they bear names referring to standing and stability, to an

[6] Neimar – a Balkan Turkism, a word derived from Arabic meaning architect, builder, civil engineer (Škaljić, 1985, p. 490).

unchanging and persevering attitude, while the founders die. In this version, King Milutin and his children save the bridge (without sacrificing themselves) and donate it to the city.

Miljenko Vukičević's publication *Знаменити Срби Мусломани* [Famous Muslim Serbs] (Вукићевић, 1906) from 1906 contains two stories referencing the construction of the bridge on the Drina at the order of Mehmen Sokolović. Unlike the previous texts, they do not contain elements of songs or other lyrical forms but are written in prose in the form of folk tales. One of them contains the topos of a foundation sacrifice. According to the annotation, the story was written by Ostoja Nikolić, a lawyer from Biograd, but the author of the collection himself heard this variant in Goražde in 1900. Unlike the previous variants, the story mentions that milk and blood still flow to this day from the place where Rade walled up Stoja and Stojana. The two bodily fluids symbolising life are inextricably linked here with the foundation sacrifice topos.

All the variants discussed feature a motif referring to rituals of atonement to the river for the losses that will occur after the bridge is built (Nodilo, 1981; Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971). The river is usually appeased in two ways: by offering material wealth and by making a blood sacrifice. The motif of wealth to be spent on the construction of the bridge is related to the relationship between the founder and the main builder. Mitro and Rade are aware that without sufficient funds and willingness to make sacrifices, all efforts related to the construction will prove futile. In Vukičević's story, the builder even puts the founder to the test, instructing him to part with a significant sum of money without giving a reason before construction begins. In Petranović's version, even enormous wealth is not enough to build a bridge if it comes from the wrong people. The founders and builders are put to the test, as a result of which the three clearly negative characters lose their lives, while the builder Rade, like the legendary Prince Marko, crosses the Drina on horseback.

The main blood sacrifice is the foundation sacrifice: in Hörmann's version it is Stoja and Ostoja; in Petranović's, it is three young pashas in place of King Milutin's children (Stoja and Ostoja); and in Vukičević's, it is Stoja and Stojan. Blood appears in rituals performed by the head builder during or after the completion of construction, but after the foundation sacrifice has been made. These actions, which are a kind of test of the bridge's strength and the durability of the structure, are the final confirmation that the river has been appeased. In all variants, artefacts are used whose symbolism indicates the ritual dimension of the characters' actions. Particularly noteworthy are trees belonging to the pine family, such as fir and spruce (*jela*, *omorika*), and a specific type of double-edged axe with a wide blade and a long handle (*bradva*). In Slavic mythology, the pine tree is associated with beliefs and funeral and commemorative rituals, also serving as ceremonial trees. Its physical properties are a key to its cultural symbolism: evergreen, fragrant, thorny, "feminine" and fruitless, it is seen as an "unlucky tree" because if it grows near a house, no boy will be born into the family (Кулишић et al., 1970, pp. 145–146). Researchers Petar Džadžić

and Natko Nodilo point to the function of the *bradva* in Roman sacrificial rituals (*ascia*) and raise the issue of the presence of this object of Roman origin in local legends (Džadžić, 1992, p. 123; Nodilo, 1981, p. 209). Nodilo claims that this is evidence of ancient pagan beliefs, according to which water can be appeased with a blood sacrifice (Nodilo, 1981, p. 209).

The builder, either on the orders of the water spirit or on his own initiative, uses an inverted axe to cut down a tree that has been carried by the river during a flood and has come to rest between the spans of the bridge. The tree takes on anthropomorphic and magical properties, becoming at once a woman, a *vila*, a river, and a series of phenomena representing the spirit of the Drina.

It is enough, Soko Mehmed pasha,
Set the axe inverted,
And lower me onto the thin beams,
So that I can cut down the slender spruce
[…]
Mitar cuts down the slender spruce,
Blood gushes from the abyss,
Something speaks from the darkness:
"The bridge will remain on the Drina
As it is today, so it will be forever." (Hörmann, 1888–1889, pp. 71–72)

[…] And he strikes the branches of the fir tree,
until he stirs the water with blood,
Until the fir snaps under the branches,
Water will not flow and it will carry away the scaffolding,
And the bridge will remain on the Drina […] (Петрановић, 1867, p. 548)

Rade immediately inverts the axe head and begins to strike the branches of the fir tree. He does not strike the branches of the fir tree, but the vila's head, until the river flows muddled and bloody. The fir tree floats between the pillars, and something speaks from the water.
– Do not strike me, Rade Neimar, for the bridge over the Drina will hold as it is today, forever, and ever. (Вукићевић, 1906, pp. 55–56)

Once the builder strikes the branches, blood gushes from the tree or, alternatively, the waters of the Drina become muddled and bloody. The tree floats between the spans, and a woman's hair becomes tangled on the axe or around the legs of the builder's horse. In Petranović's version, the *vila* advises Rade to throw the axe into the river after everything is over. The worlds of nature, of the supernatural and of humans are joined. A voice from the watery abyss assures the builder that the structure will stand on the Drina for centuries. The text ends with a mention of the completion of the construction, the builders' remuneration and the commemoration of the founders.

Several interesting variants of the foundation sacrifice motif can also be found outside the song collections. In 1888, the magazine *Босанска вила* [Bos-

nian fairy] published a variant of *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* in a fairly untypical form: a story of a song or legend. The text titled *Вишеградска ћуприја* [The bridge in Višegrad] was printed across two issues (10 and 11) (Богдановић, 1888; "Вишеградска ћуприја", 1888). Apart from the continuous text, which dominates the entire work, we find only a fragment of the song. The first part describes the curse that Rade casts on the Drina after failing to build a bridge; the second is the *vila's* command in response to his reaction:

Listen to me, builder Rade!
You cannot build a bridge
Until you find Stoja and Ostoja
Brother and sister they must be, Rade,
And you immure them in the bridge over Drina,
Which will make it last forever…! (Богдановић, 1888, p. 175)

Apart from the form, the variant from the magazine *Босанска вила* also differs from all others in the introduction of a pregnant woman as a foundation sacrifice (such a character appears in Romanian versions). In the story, milk from Stoja's breast spills onto the pillar, and the traces of the liquid are later attributed with healing properties.

In the 1863 issue of *Даница: Лист за забаву и књижевност*, in the section *Narodna pesma* [Folk songs], there is a piece titled *Кула паше Новљанина* [The tower of Pasha Novljanin] (submitted by an author whose initials are S.N.). The text contains a note about the storyteller and clearly indicates its connection with the song *Zidanje Skadra*: "I received this song, which is a variant of *Zidanje Skadra*, from Zikojin Radonić, a teacher from Mačva" (С. Н., 1863, p. 316). The pasha builds a tower with master builder Jovo. In order for it to be erected, a child no older than twelve must be sacrificed. The child, half walled up, asks the builder to leave holes for his eyes so that his old mother can see him. However, the tower does not prove to be durable; only fifteen days pass before the mother's prayers for its destruction are answered; thunder from the sky sets the tower on fire, the wind destroys it, and Pasha Novljanin burns along with it.

A similar piece found its way into the Sarajevo magazine *Behar*, published at the turn of 1910. The column *Narodne umotvorine* [Folk art] features a text titled *Grad gradio paša Novljanine* [Pasha Novljanin was building a stronghold]. In this version, the pasha builds a stronghold, and, as in most variants, what is built during the day is destroyed at night. One night, three *vilas* appear and order that a human be walled up:

Do not build a stronghold, do not lay foundations,
Before wandering far off,
Go far.
And capture a white child,
And throw the child into the foundations. ("Grad gradio paša Novljanine", 1909–1910, p. 126)

In this version, the walled-up child asks for a hole in the wall so that he can see where his mother is looking for him. The song ends with a direct appeal to her not to look for him as he has been walled up in the foundations of the building.

In the literature of the subject, I also found a mention of works with the motif of walling up children in the magazine *Bosna* from 1873 (in reference to a bridge near Trebinje) (Bejtić, 1945), in *Glasnik Zemaljskog Muzeja* and *Bosnische Post* from 1912, as well as variants referring to cities other than Višegrad (Čelić & Mujezinović, 1998; Palavestra, 2004).

Although references to the presence of the foundation sacrifice topos in folk tradition appear before the publication of the song collection *Narodne pjesne Muhamedovaca u Bosni i Herzegovini*, Hörmann's variant should be considered the source text due to, among other things, references in the literature on the subject and its reproduction in anthologies. In newer editions of folk song collections, e.g., *Brez Bošnjaka ne ima junaka: bošnjačke epske narodne pjesme* [Without Bosniaks there are no heroes: Bosnian epic folk songs] from 1996, *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* is printed in the version known from Hörmann's edition. Both in Hörmann's version and in most of the texts discussed above, which I associate with BiH, the foundation sacrifice is a child or children, usually twins with names implying stability and permanence. Among the numerous variants, there are both infants with no say in their own fate, and older children who make their own decisions (such as the walled-up woman, who often shows concern for others and a willingness to sacrifice herself). Alternatively, foundation sacrifices include a pregnant woman (also named Stoja) and substitutes, who die unexpectedly as a result of the actions of other potential sacrifices (pashas).

The Foundation Sacrifice and the Bridge in Ivo Andrić's Novel

The motif of a (foundation) sacrifice comes up numerous times in one of the best-known novels of the region: Ivo Andrić's *Na Drini ćuprija* [The bridge on the Drina] from 1945 (Andrić 1945/1956)[7]. Despite widespread international recognition of the writer's work, awarded the Nobel Prize in 1961, both he and his output are viewed ambiguously by some contemporary intellectual elites in the region. Some Bosnian intellectuals see the world presented in Andrić's prose – especially the image of Muslims and life in the times of the Ottoman Empire (also in *Na Drini ćuprija*) – as a manifestation of the author's Eurocentrism and hostility toward Islam. He is criticised for inadequacy in relation to

[7] The text of this novel, which undoubtedly belongs to the cultural borderland, is discussed in the chapter devoted to Bosnia and Herzegovina as it presents a motif dominant in the space of BiH and concerns a place located within the current borders of that country.

the realities of the time, negative portrayal of characters from the Muslim world, and ideological involvement (see Bavčić et al., 2000). This is important because, depending on the environment, the interpretation of folk art adaptations, and thus also the topos of the foundation sacrifice, can be more or less ideologically charged. For example, Muhsin Rizvić thus ends his analysis of *Na Drini ćuprija*:

> At the heart of the narrative fabric of the novel *Na Drini ćuprija*, as well as other historical novels and short stories by Andrić, lies the concept of active confessional-national antagonism and long-standing hatred as the fundamental experience of Bosnia, which has not changed since his doctoral dissertation. This is the idea of Bosnia as a country of hatred. However, this idea is not exclusive to Andrić. It is a legacy of Serbian Orthodox myths, church texts, and epic poems – tales of Turkish and Kosovar guilt that reinforce these negative feelings – in which the term Turk is later replaced by Bosniak, yet the same national character continues to be identified under the older label, reflecting the historically Islamic identity of both groups. This accumulated legacy places the burden of history on the Bosniaks even after the Turks withdrew from the South Slavic countries, but this concept is also visible in Catholic Franciscan texts, especially from the first half of the 19th century. (Rizvić, 1995, pp. 293–294)

Such approaches, which often reduce Andrić's literary creation to the status of political journalism, testify to an attempt to invalidate everything that constitutes the cultural area of interest to us here as a human experience of a shared destiny and cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 2007), despite irreconcilable religious and ethnic divisions (Falski, 2022).

Meanwhile, when asked in 1972 by Ljube Jandrić about the title of his novel, Ivo Andrić supposedly said that he had taken it from a Muslim song about the construction of a bridge that he had heard from elderly women in Višegrad: "Come on, forward, Višegrad / Let a bridge rise over the Drina." The writer also mentioned that he later came across the song *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* from the aforementioned collection *Narodne pjesne Muhamedovaca u Bosni i Hercegovini* by Kosta Hörmann (Rizvić, 1995).

From the very first pages of the novel, the reader has no doubt that the history of the town is inextricably linked to the existence of the bridge: "In any case, one thing is certain: there is a deep bond between this bridge and the lives of the inhabitants of the *kasaba*."[8] (Andrić, 1956, p. 18) Its history, terrain, location on the border between Bosnia and Serbia (later emphasised as the border between Bosnia and the East) determine the importance of the *kasaba* as a transit city – multi-ethnic and multi-religious. The history of the bridge is the compositional backbone of the novel (Nemec, 2016, p. 232) and, presented as a model of human life, is inextricably linked to the fate of the city's inhabitants (Рудјаков, 1998, pp. 39, 232). The bridge and everything associated with it form the basis of the novel's artistic structure, determining the references to the past and the way it is presented (Рудјаков, 1998, p. 39). It is also undeni-

[8] Kasaba – a Balkan Turkism, a word derived from Arabic, meaning a small town, Turkish *kasaba* (see Škaljić, 1985, p. 398).

ably the main character of the novel: its fate begins and ends the work, and in each chapter it constitutes an axiological point of reference. Milošević points out that the bridge – beautiful and impressive – is the legacy of Mehmed Pasha (*Mehmedpašina zadužbina*), but in the novel it also symbolises wisdom, goodness, permanence (Milošević, 1976, p. 17), and the overcoming of chaos and opposition to human limitations (Nemec, 2016, p. 248). Georg Simmel, in his essay *The bridge and the door*, points to the relation between man and nature, stating that a bridge illustrates man's unification of what is separated in nature (Simmel, 2006, p. 252). However, the catastrophic ending of Andrić's novel is also a good illustration of another idea of the German philosopher, who did not ignore any human intentions, drawing attention not only to the aspect of peaceful connection between the riverbanks, but also to conquest and violence, for which a bridge can be a tool (Simmel, 2006, p. 255).

In the novel, we can find reflections on the many victims and sacrifices made for the bridge, especially on the part of the local population, who were obliged to work on its construction and were burdened with the so-called blood tribute (Andrić, 1956, p. 22). This is why the location of the bridge was associated with the despair of mothers who for centuries followed their children taken into slavery until the raging river prevented them from continuing their journey. One of Andrić's characters, Mehmed Sokolović, founder from a nearby village of the stone bridge in Višegrad, remembered his separation from his mother.

The legend of the walling up in the foundation is an important, though seemingly not central, element of the novel's plot. References to it appear repeatedly in the form of direct references to legends or linking them to characters in the novel: Ilinka, Radisav and Crni Arapin[9]. The first legend to be mentioned refers to a song from Hörmann's collection, but in fact it is a compilation of a number of variants, including *Zidanje Skadra*, recorded by Vuk Karadžić (Korać, 1970; Nemec, 2016, p. 251). Andrić's version features the motif of a river *vila* (who destroys at night what has been built during the day), twins (Stoja and Ostoja), a nursing mother, and the builder Rade. This literary version is linked to the song *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu* by the location and type of building, the person who founded it, and the foundation sacrifice in the form of twins with the same names. A significant difference, however, is the character of the main builder (Rade, not Mitar) and the fate of the mother of the infants. In Hörmann's version, she is not mentioned (Hörmann, 1888–1889, p. 71). The common elements with the song *Zidanje Skadra* are the character of Rade, the presence of a *vila*, the motif of two types of foundation sacrifices, the presence of a nursing mother and the leaving of holes in the wall for her, as well as information about life-giving juices and belief in the power of the "food" flowing down the wall. This variant completely omits the story of the three brothers and their

[9] Crni Arapin translates literally to "black Arab". Aware of the semantic connotations that this phrase might invoke in Polish, I intentionally use the source language term. More on this figure in South Balkan cultures further on in this text.

family relationships. In Andrić's novel, in order to complete the construction of the bridge, Rade was supposed to wall up the siblings in the pillars at the urging of "something from the depths" (*"nešto progovorilo iz vode*"). The search for suitable twins was conducted throughout Bosnia; when they were finally found in a remote village, they were taken away from their mother by force. She followed them to Višegrad, and the builder Rade agreed to leave holes in the wall so that she could feed her babies. In this version, it is not the woman who is walled up, but her children, which causes her to remain at the wall probably until all three die. The number of foundation sacrifices is therefore not limited to those literally walled up.

This legend, like all others related to the creation and construction of the bridge, is widely known, even to the youngest residents of the city: "They [children; author's note] had known them forever, subconsciously, as if they had been born with them into the world, just as one knows prayers without remembering who taught them or when they first heard them." (Andrić, 1956, p. 9). References to folk tales are accompanied by the narrator's comments, which, however, indicate that he distances himself from them. This is evidenced, among other things, by a remark about the figure of the builder Rade, who, in the narrator's opinion, would have had to have lived a hundred years to build everything he is credited with in Serbian lands: "It was built by Rade Neimar, who must have lived for several hundred years, since he managed to erect everything that is beautiful and durable on Serbian soil, a legendary and actually nameless builder, whom every nation imagines and wants to have because it does not like to remember too much or to hold gratitude for too many people, even if only in memories" (Andrić, 1956, p. 9). According to Džadžić, he is an example of a mythical builder, whose prototype was Rade Borojević, who lived during the time of Prince Lazar, the builder of the Ljubostinja monastery (Džadžić, 1992, p. 122).

The tension between the rational motivation of events and their mythologisation is consistent throughout Andrić's novel. When, for example, the workers rebel and sabotage the construction, they also engage it what today we would call a "disinformation campaign", based on their knowledge of social beliefs. When the conspirators begin to steal tools and materials and the constructed parts of the structure are destroyed at night, they spread information about the actions of a demon – *vila brodarica* [the guardian of the crossing]:

> So, with the arrival of the first days of autumn, news spread, first among the labourers, and then throughout the entire *kasaba*, that the *vila brodarica* had interfered with the construction of the bridge, destroying at night what had been built during the day, and that nothing would come of the bridge. (Andrić, 1956, p. 35)

> The peasants who listened to the minstrel at night said that the vila was destroying the bridge and had told Abidaga that she would not rest until the twins, a brother and a sister named Stoja and Ostoja, were walled up in the foundations. Many

> swore that they had seen seymen wandering around the villages in search of such children. (Seymen did indeed visit the villages, but they were not looking for children; on Abidaga's orders, they were snooping around and asking people questions to find out the identity of the unknown perpetrators who were destroying the bridge.) (Andrić, 1956, p. 36)

This part of the novel also tells the story of Ilinka, a lonely mute woman whose fate is linked to the legend of the immurement of children. The woman gave birth to stillborn twins, whom the village women buried in an orchard. The miserable mother refused to believe that they had died during childbirth; finally, tired of her questions, the villagers told her that the children had been taken to the *kasaba*. From then on, the woman wandered around the bridge, convinced that they had been walled up there. When chased away, she tore her shirt, exposing her breasts swollen with milk and her blood-stained nipples. The madness of a mother who had lost her children needed a narrative form, which folklore provided. Eventually, the townspeople accepted the woman's presence, allowed her to live on the construction site, and called her "crazy Ilinka". However, the use of rumours about the walling up of children as proof of the workers' loyalty did not mean the end of their problems. Their leader was betrayed and tortured, and he was sentenced to death by impalement when he refused to turn in his comrades. His agony was accompanied by mockery from his tormentors: "Radisav, mountain *vila*, (…) Why don't you tear down the bridge?" (Andrić, 1956, p. 57).

As I mentioned, Andrić also used motifs from the legend of *Crni Arap*, who was "walled up" in the central pillar of the bridge. In the world presented in the novel, the tragedy occurs after three years of successful construction[10]. The description of the event is preceded by a remark about the need to make a sacrifice so that the great construction can be completed (Andrić, 1956, p. 71). When the central pillar supporting the *kapija* was being completed, the ropes holding a stone block came loose and it fell on an Arab (a helper of the builder Antonije, a native of Ulcinj), who soon died. By a strange coincidence, the stone lands in its intended place in the structure, and (according to legend) there is a huge chamber in the place where the worker died, which is the seat of Crni Arapin – and, according to legend, anyone to whom he shows himself dies (Andrić, 1956, p. 10).

Crni Arapin belongs to figures of memory common to the Balkan, Mediterranean, and perhaps even universal context. This figure took shape in folklore long before the conquest of the Balkans by the Ottoman Turks, when it was

[10] The text contains references to motifs related to foundation sacrifices, emphasising the dependence of the success/failure of constructions on legends. Along with a mention of a longer period of good fortune for the construction and the workers, who, in accordance with the agreement, now received their pay and food rations, there is a reference to Ilinka, who "disappeared without a trace in winter": "Everyone received their wages and food rations: flour and salt. So everything went faster and more efficiently than in Abidaga's time. Crazy Ilinka also disappeared, lost somewhere in the winter without a trace. The construction grew and expanded" (Andrić, 1956, p. 69).

revitalised in the form of a Turk and later an Arnaut (Kulavkova, 2009). In Balkan beliefs, Crni Arapin appeared as a symbol and synonym of a demon of the underworld (Кулишић et al., 1970, p. 15). The sociocultural and historical interpretations of this character are so diverse that we could actually call it an arabesque of multicoloured references (Kulavkova, 2009). Due to its symbolic layer, Crni Arapin appears in the novel as the other, personifying archaic cosmic and chthonic energies (Kulavkova, 2009, p. 42). The creation of this character corresponds to the binary logic characteristic of the mythological semantics of the plot, e.g., up – down, black – white, which over time become "objectified" and complemented by the simplest interdependencies, e.g., sky – earth, day – night (Mieletinski, 1981). The demons of the underworld are black, the stone block kills the dark-skinned builder, and from that moment on Crni Arapin symbolises the underworld. It is also significant that this character is "walled up" in the central pillar, which is a vertical element of the structure symbolising the connection between heaven, earth, and the underworld. At the same time, it is located in the very centre of the bridge and is supposed to support the *kapija*, thus occupying a central position, a kind of *axis mundi*, where chaos is overcome by offering a foundation sacrifice. According to Petar Džadžić, we can identify four basic mythical and ritual elements in the scene where the character is "walled up": (1) placing the victim in the foundation of the structure; (2) placing the victim in the lower part of the central pillar; (3) the chthonic sign of the sacrifice symbolised by the colour black and the lower part of the body covered with a stone; (4) the inclusion of only the bottom part of the body, considered to be something "lower", which from then on will symbolise the presence of a representative of the underground realm (Džadžić, 1992, pp. 107–110).

The fates of Ilinka, Radisav and Arapin intertwine in the narrative of the construction of the bridge and are key to interpreting the presence of the foundation sacrifice topos in the novel. Radisav and Crni Arapin play the role of foundation sacrifices at different stages of the bridge's construction, with Radisav dying, as it were, "instead of children" during the laying of the foundations, while the blood of another, shed during the construction of the central part of the bridge, is the final stage of appeasing the river. The construction of these characters, combined with the narrator's numerous comments on the relationship between legend and reality, clearly points to a meta-reflection on mythical thinking.

Andrić engages in a dialogue with folk art and the interrelationships between literature, oral tradition, and beliefs, pointing to possible sources of human fantasies (Milošević, 1976, p. 11). He uses legends and tales to confront historical and legendary truth and the universal and local contexts, and as the basis for a narrative model that allows for journeys through time and space. He demythologises folk tales in accordance with the idea expressed in *Znakovi pored puta* [Signs along the way]: "one more legend – one less truth" (Nemec, 2016, p. 252). On the one hand, Andrić diminishes or even rejects the messages of the legends, but he uses their key elements to remythologise the story of the bridge. From the legend of the bridge, he takes primarily its mythical core:

the belief in the necessity of sacrifice and its walling up in the foundations of the structure (Džadžić, 1992, p. 125). Although the circumstances of the sacrifice and the actors participating in the ritual are not identical in the legend and in literary reality, the sacrifice itself and the irrational motivations are. On the one hand, people believe in the legend of the walling up, repeat it, and fear supernatural intervention; on the other hand, those who do not believe in the existence of the *vila* use the power of the legend for their own purposes. Petar Džadžić notes that the integration of myth with reality takes place here "under the guise" of chance ("in an incomprehensible way", "by a strange coincidence"), because Andrić, by showing the human sacrifice as a work of chance, does not deprive it of the power inherent in archaic sacrificial rituals (Džadžić, 1992, p. 243). The motivation behind the events thus encompasses two orders: a rational cause-and-effect order and a parallel mythical-legendary order. For example, the children are not walled up, but other characters are introduced in their place. Džadžić points to the similarity between the names Rade (Neimar) and Radisav, which confirms the rule of designating one victim in the place of another (Džadžić, 1992, p. 245). The irrational appearance of the sacrifice in the world presented shows how myth determines its formation: it not only exists in people's consciousness but also keeps returning in favourable circumstances. These returns and repetitions are an ontological rule of the novel, and the narrator takes on the role of an improvising storyteller. The novel contains references to legends on various levels[11]; its composition itself contains repetitions characteristic of epic songs, while the entire fabric of the novel reveals a cyclical entanglement of elements of the mythical world with literary reality. This is illustrated, among other things, by the topos of the foundation sacrifice which is of interest to us here (Džadžić, 1992, p. 29).

In the novel, the topos of the walled-up woman is introduced several times as a significant element of folk beliefs and, if we consider Višegrad to be a metonymy for Bosnia, as an element of the cultural image of the region (Nemec, 2016, p. 234). Predrag Palavestra, referring to Andrić's work, presents the "third world" [Bosnia] as a space that is neither East nor West (which confront each other in the Balkan region) and does not contradict them but is governed by its own laws, which means that the principles of "universal history" have no place here (Палавестра, 1992, p. 56). People living in this space function on the edge of two worlds that they know well, but they are unable to bring them closer together (Палавестра, 1992, p. 57).

[11] Petar Džadžić distinguished several levels of the use of mythical and legendary motifs in Andrić's work: (1) direct introduction of motifs from legends, tales, epic poems, ballads, etc.; (2) mythicality as a hint contained in metaphorical allusion or convergence of images that would otherwise have no direct mythical meaning, implying the mythicality of an image; (3) mythicality as a source of unusual circumstances and connections; (4) mythicality as a source of cyclical organisation of time as opposed to linear organisation; (5) mythicality as a source of coincidences, which are often referred to as "incomprehensible" and "unusual" (Džadžić, 1992, p. 56).

In the Footsteps (of the Legends) of the Walled Up in the Bridge on the Drina – Andrić's Višegrad

In search of traces of the topos, I went to the place associated with the source song: Višegrad, a town currently located within the borders of Republika Srpska, one of the entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was particularly keen to find out whether the legends about the walling up were known to the inhabitants and whether they were present in the narrative about the town. My encounter with the bridge marked the beginning and end of my stay in this place. Immediately after arriving in Višegrad, I hurriedly crossed the bridge in the pouring rain, treating it as a convenient route. Later, I observed it from the terrace of the house where I was staying, as well as during walks around the town. The structure is monumental and fits perfectly into the landscape (Figure 1), its majesty emphasised by the mountains, the colour and flow of the water, and the people walking on it, who look like almost invisible, slowly moving dots against the backdrop of the bridge (Figure 2).



Figure 1 and 2. The bridge over the Drina in Višegrad.
Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz, 2024

The bridge was built according to the design of the leading Turkish architect Mimar Sinar, also known as Koca Mi'mâr Sinân Âğâ, on the initiative of Mehmed Pasha Sokolović between 1571 and 1577 (Čelić & Mujezinović, 1998). It has withstood numerous floods and reconstructions after the damage caused by WWI and WWII. Since 2007, it has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO World Heritage Convention, n.d.). On the left bank of the Drina, at the entrance to the bridge, there is a hill and a road leading to Sarajevo, while the other side of the bridge leads to the city centre. Near the bridge, on the side of the city, stands the Višegrad Hotel and a monument of Ivo Andrić, erected by a Sarajevo-based artist following the awarding of the Nobel Prize to the writer. Opposite the entrance to the bridge is a square commemorating fallen soldiers (*Trg palih boraca*) with a monument to the defenders of Republika Srpska (*Spomenik braniocima Republike Srpske*), commemorating the events of the war

in the 1990s[12]. The square, where the railway station used to be located, now serves various service and transport functions (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The square opposite the stone bridge in Višegrad.
Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz, 2024

For the locals, the bridge is a meeting place and a venue for local events, a must-see destination during daily walks and a goal in itself. A middle-aged woman recalled that pupils always walked across the bridge after school in her school days, and when she was a university student, she would deliberately get off the bus on the other side of the river so that she could walk across the bridge. Every day, I observed three elderly men discussing and walking back and forth across the bridge. Sometimes there were also individuals or couples walking and taking photos on the bridge. Unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to experience this myself, but I learned from the locals and promotional materials that the bridge is also a venue for local cultural, artistic, social, and sporting events, including diving, competitions, and fairs featuring local handicrafts and food products.

The bridge is part of the so-called big circle, a route running along both banks of the river and across both bridges spanning the Drina[13]. Just as elements of the mythical and legendary world intertwine with literary reality in Andrić's novel, elements of the novel intertwine with the narratives of the inhabitants and their experiences. Points of reference for navigating the city's topography include natural features, historical sites, and objects or places that are key to the characters in the novel *The Bridge on the Drina.* The bridge is the perfect place to describe Fata's journey in her wedding procession to the nearby vil-

[12] Višegrad is full of traces of past conflicts and crimes. Destroyed and abandoned houses and cemeteries filled with new gravestones are reminders of the war of 1992–1995.

[13] A new bridge was built in 1988; it is now open to car traffic. When the site of the present Andrićgrad was still a sports centre, the route led from the main street, along the Rzav, around the peninsula and then along the riverbank (still on the same side) to the bridge and back, then to the main street, which began at the square by the bridge.

lage of Nezuci, or the legend of Marko Kraljević jumping over the Drina on his horse, and to locate Lotika's house. Overlooking the city is a cemetery, where supposedly the woman whose fate inspired the character of Rifka in the story *Ljubav u kasabi* [Love in the kasaba] is buried. There are also references to places associated with the writer himself, such as the house where he lived and the school he attended. I asked all my walking companions if they knew any legends associated with the bridge and the city: the one about walling up was widely known (some also knew the song *Zidanje Skadra*), but no one mentioned it spontaneously during a walk around the city or a conversation about the bridge; Andrić's novel served as their main point of reference.

Today, Višegrad is Andrić's city, as indicated not only by the narratives of its inhabitants, but also by numerous signs in the urban space: monuments (Figs. 4 and 5), plaques, graffiti (Figs. 6 and 7). The culminating point that made Višegrad literally the writer's town was the creation of Andrićgrad[14] on the site of a former sports centre.



Figure 4. Monument to Andrić in Andrićgrad.
Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz, 2024

[14] Andrićgrad is an architectural complex located on a peninsula between the Drina and Rzav rivers in Višegrad. It was built between 2011 and 2014 on the initiative of director Emir Kusturica. It is currently one of the tourist attractions of Višegrad (see visegradturizam, 2019a). Until its opening, the main tourist attraction of Višegrad was a walk across the bridge (see Turizam TV, 2018). On Andrićgrad as a controversial architectural and ideological project see Karčić (2016).



Figure 5. Monument dedicated to Andrić erected near the bridge after the writer received the Nobel Prize.
Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz, 2024



Figure 6. Andrić and the bridge in urban space. On the left, a quote: *Život je neshvatljivo čudo, jer se neprestano troši i osipa, a ipak traje i stoji čvrsto kao na Drini ćuprija* [Life is an incomprehensible miracle, constantly squandered and destroyed, yet it continues and stands firm like the bridge over the Drina].
Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz, 2024



Figure 7. Mural at the Višegrad Hotel site depicting the works of Ivo Andrić. Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz, 2024

The bridge is inextricably linked to the memories and everyday practices of the inhabitants, and as a symbol of the city it is undeniably one of its tourist attractions. I was interested in whether part of the narrative about the bridge and the city presented to visitors also includes legends (as is the case with the Skadar fortress), and if so, whether the motif of a foundation sacrifice is present and in what version. I observed visitors, used the services of a local tourist guide, and analysed materials available on the internet and tourist brochures available at the local tourist information point.

The "Legends" tab on the website of the town's tourist organisation (*Turistička organizacija Višegrad*) contains one of the few mentions of foundation sacrifices – Stoja and Ostoja. It starts with a quote from Andrić's *Na Drini ćuprija*:

> A people remember and retell only what they can understand and what they manage to turn into legend. Everything else passes by without leaving a deeper trace, with the mute indifference of nameless natural phenomena; it does not stir the imagination and remains only faintly in memory. (Andrić, 1956, p. 27)

The quoted text, titled *The legend of Stoja and Ostoja*, is an abridged version of the legend and of the circumstances surrounding the construction of the bridge from the novel. It contains information about the founder and main builder of the bridge, the intervention of the *vila*, the search for and walling up of the twins, and the belief in the healing power of the white liquid flowing down the wall at the place where they were walled up (see *Legende*, n.d.). In addition to the legend we are interested in, the website also features legends about Fata, Marko Kraljević's tower, the old fortress of Dobrun, and a story about the origin of rock pictograms in the vicinity of Višegrad in the village of Žlijeb. Some of them, like the legend of Stoja and Ostoja, are shortened versions of legends from the novel *Na Drini ćuprija*.

The tourist brochure and other materials available online do not mention the topos (Dacešin, 2023; visegradturizam, 2019b). These materials contain a wealth of visual material and are published in various languages[15], encouraging visitors with a photo of the bridge on the cover and the slogan "A small town for a great holiday". It offers basic information about the town, the bridge (without mentioning the legend, but with a translation of the inscriptions on the plaques on the bridge), Ivo Andrić, Andrićgrad, the Drina River, the Stari brod monument (*Спомен комплекс Стари брод*), the Dobrun monastery located twelve kilometres from Višegrad, the Višegradska Banja spa complex with its 16th-century *hamams*, and the most important religious buildings (two Orthodox churches and two mosques). The description also includes practical information about water attractions (boat trips on the river, kayaking and standup paddleboarding), mountain climbing, food, and accommodation, along with the most important contact details.

My observations of tourist traffic were limited due to the time of year. I arrived there in mid-March, before the tourist season, which, according to the locals, begins in April. Although there is more traffic at weekends, the rainy weather discouraged potential visitors. On the other hand, I had a unique opportunity to observe views that are rather rare during the season, such as the empty bridge and empty streets of Andrićgrad. This was also possible thanks to the closure of the stone bridge to motor vehicles in the 1980s. Thus, during the day, there were no crowds on the bridge (Figure 8), although every now and then a local resident would hurry by. Sometimes I observed a few tourists, couples looking around and taking pictures (at the plaque, on the *sofa* and with the bridge in the background), and maybe twice I met a group visiting the city.

During my stay in Višegrad, I therefore took on the role of a tourist myself. I met with a professional guide who, during the season, shows foreign and local groups around the town in a tour lasting about an hour. At 3.30 p.m., we started at the bridge and walked to Andrićgrad. Usually, tours also visit the former Andrić school building, but off-season access is limited.

We met in front of the Višegrad Hotel and walked towards the bridge. Standing there, the guide pointed out various points of interest and told me about Old Višegrad, the tower of Marko Kraljević, Dobrun, sacral buildings, the stone from Banja from which the bridge is built (thanks to which mineral water springs were discovered), then about Mehmed Sokolović (his childhood and motivation for building the bridge in Višegrad – *danak u krvi* [blood tribute]) and the builder Sinan. There was also information about nearby places and other attractions (including typical tourist attractions).

The guide did not mention the legend right away when talking about the history of the bridge. Only when we could see the bridge from a distance did she

[15] I am analysing an information brochure published in Serbian (Cyrillic) and English. I know it was published no earlier than 2014 because it contains information about Andrićgrad, which opened that year.



Figure 8. Bridge over the Drina nowadays.
Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz, 2024



Figure 9. Bridge over the Drina when open to car traffic.
Photo by Ibrahim Kljun. Source: JU National Library "Ivo Andrić" in Višegrad

say that there are various legends associated with its construction, including those about Crni Arapin and Stoja and Ostoja. She pointed out which part of the bridge is connected with the legend of the foundation sacrifice: the central part on the water side, at the height of the *sofa*, where a small hole and white sediment on the wall are visible. On the side, there is a small window, and this place is connected with the legend of Crni Arapin. She mentioned that Andrić often came to Višegrad to collect stories by talking to older people in the town and the surrounding area. In her opinion, he spent about twenty years preparing to write *Na Drni ćuprija*. She emphasised that Andrić used historical sources in his work. When, at the end of our meeting (which we finished in a café by the bridge), I asked her once again about the legends, she did not refer to the motif of the foundation sacrifice.



Figure 10 and 11. The bridge over the Drina in Višegrad seen from the water. Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz, 20214

A few days later, I took the opportunity to explore the city from the perspective of the river. On a sunny Saturday morning (at 11:30 a.m.), I took a thirty-minute cruise on the Drina, which began and ended – where else? – at the bridge. There were several of us in a small boat. The captain entertained us for a long time with stories about the city, then turned on some local music. He talked about the founder, Mehmed Sokolović, the builder named Rade, who was Serbian, as well as the construction and inclusion of the site on the UNESCO list in 2007. Then, as the landscape shifted, he pointed out other places and objects, ending with a lengthy speech about Andrićgrad. Although we were practically

within arm's reach of the place that the guide associated with the legend of the foundation sacrifices, the captain did not mention it at all.

Summary, or a Word About Marginalisation

The topos of the foundation sacrifice is not a culturally significant point of reference in Bosnia today. The work *Zidanje ćuprije u Višegradu*, which should be treated as a source in this context, is included in a collection of Bosniak orature edited by Đenana Buturović, a scholar of orature, as well as in her aforementioned publication titled *Studija o Hormanovoj zbirci* [Study of the Hörmann collection] on Kosta Hörmann's two-volume anthology, but it is not the subject of detailed consideration. What is more, the topos does not appear in the contemporary education system, nor is it present in other literary and artistic forms. Research in Višegrad has confirmed that contemporary information about the legends associated with the construction of the bridge is available in a mediated form and that its source is not folklore texts but Ivo Andrić's novel. The cult of the writer in this city is undeniable.

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Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa, Sylwia Siedlecka

Bulgaria. Nourishing Death

Labyrinths of Knowledge

In Bulgaria, the oldest written record of the custom of walling people into the foundations of buildings dates back to the 14th century. It is translated from Pseudo-Prochorus's *Acts of John*, a Greek apocryphal work which condemns the submission of masons to the "devilish" temptation of "strengthening buildings" at the cost of human life. Of course, this was connected with the negative attitude of the Orthodox Church to all bloody sacrifices and magic. The story of the walling up of two young people in a Constantinople bathhouse – discussed in a didactic work by Mariia Spasova (М. Спасова, 2015, pp. 81–82) – in which they are condemned to death by starvation, transformation into demons, and ultimately damnation, serves as a warning and helps shape human attitudes. The effectiveness of magic must have been frightening, since even in the 19th century people avoided staying in the vicinity of ongoing construction sites so as not to risk the walling up of their shadow. This is confirmed by a short report published in Russia in 1846 by Zakhary Knyazhesky, *Болгарския поверья* [Bulgarian beliefs] (Княжеский, 1846), concerning practices in the Bulgarian–Macedonian region. These were supposedly based on the belief that a person whose shadow was walled up would die after forty days and then become the guardian spirit of the building under construction. Another synthetic description of the phenomenon of walling up and its material traces is provided by Efrem Karanov, who in his 1884 publication refers to the famous *Кадин мост* [Kadin most, bridge of the *kadın* – Turkish for "woman"] in southwestern Bulgaria, but also looks for comparative material in Germanic cultures and shows transgressions of customs, such as the custom of burying used liturgical books in the foundations of Orthodox churches (Каранов, 1884, p. 134).

Bulgarian folklorists today agree that the ritual of walling up a woman so that a building could stand was a reflection of archaic ideas about the cosmic act of creation that are now impossible to reconstruct. However, opinions differ on the details. According to one group of researchers, the purpose of the ritual was to strengthen the work of human hands by offering a bloody sacrifice to destructive spirits (Колев, 1995, p. 260). According to another, the magic

aimed to generate a guardian spirit of the structure (Арнаудов, 1961; 1972, pp. 221–244; Георгиева, 2013, pp. 333–347). Others saw in the narrative of the walling up of a woman reminiscences of a rite of passage associated with marriage and motherhood (Agoston-Nikolova, 1994; di Nola, 2006, pp. 269–274; Атанасова, 1993; Парпулова,1983). Some saw traces of the Thracian-Orphic solar cult and even ancient Indian mythology (Атанасова, 1993; Моллов, 2002; В. Николова, 1991; 2008, pp. 9–52), and still others saw evidence of religious syncretism (Guéorguièva-Dikranian & Ouzounova, 1998; Георгиева, 2012), a naive literalisation of metaphors from the Orthodox Marian cult (Парпулова-Грибъл, 1989) or evidence of the psychotherapeutic potential of native folklore (Анчев, 2011).

In a way, the direction of this research was set by its 19th-century initiator, Anton Popstoilov (поп Стоилов / Попстоилов / Стоилов), author of a 35-page study from 1901 titled *Зазиждане на живи човеци в основите на нови градежи. Фолклорни студии* [Laying living people in the foundations of new buildings. Folklore studies] (Стоилов, 1901, p. 35). The analysis of folk variants in this text was preceded by a reference to poetic adaptations of the topos: Tsani Ginchev's *Две тополи* [Two poplars] (Гинчев Шкипърнев, 1872), Petko Slaveykov's *Изворът на Белоногата* [The spring of Belonogata] (Славейков, 1873) and Petyr Ivanov's *Балада или Павле Кьопрюсю на Марица, според народното верование* [Ballad, or Pavle Köprüsü on Maritsa, according to folk belief] (П. Иванов, 1875). What follows next is a discussion of folk ballads from Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece, as well as their Aromanian, Romanian, and Albanian variants. Stoilov considered Greece to be the birthplace of the ballad, and in the final parts of his 1901 study he traced the origins of the custom of making sacrifices and establishing a good spirit of the place – *talasum*. He listed alleged cases of commemoration of such acts (e.g., stone heads in the wall next to the Dupnitsa Gate of the Rila Monastery). He sought extra-regional parallels in the bloody history of bridges in Prague and Halle, in Scandinavian epics, in the customs of Arab nomads, and in the Old Testament story of the fortress of Jericho, for which King Ahab sacrificed his sons (1 Kings 16:34). Stoilov attributed great importance to the people's softening of the former cruelty of the ritual, discussing the process of substituting living human victims with replacement sacrifices (human corpses, body parts, shadows, statues, live and then dead animals, stone figurines, books, etc.).

The first to continue Stoilov's research intuitions was Mikhail Arnaudov. His 1920 study *Вградена невеста* [The walled-up woman] was the most comprehensive study of the motif in the folklore of Southeast Europe at the time (Арнаудов, 1972), containing fifty songs from various linguistic and cultural regions. The discussion of their poetic structure is accompanied by reflections on the origins and migration processes of the motif in oral tradition and by attempts to create a typology of narrative variants and define the semantics of the ritual itself.

Arnaudov defended the concept of walling up as a ritual of establishing a guardian spirit for a building, rather than a sacrificial rite (*kurban*). He linked this to the folk cult of this spirit (*домакин/домошар, наместник, таласъм, стихия*), to whom food offerings (*стопанова гозба*) were made, but he omitted the fact that this custom did not include spirits that were once human. Assuming that the prototype of the folk poetic narrative about walling up should be sought among the Greeks, Arnaudov questioned the possibility of precisely reconstructing the ballad's migration route due to the lack of clearly related intermediate links. As a result of the translocation of the motif from one linguistic area to another in folk poetry and prose in the process of amplification, simplification, and transformation, various variants of the song were created and underwent aestheticisation or aesthetic degradation, while retaining their constituent elements (Арнаудов, 1972, pp. 246–301).

In considering the Macedonian and South Bulgarian variants, Arnaudov noticed a peculiar overlap of two ritual traditions: the original one (invoking a guardian spirit) and the later one (the folk tradition of *kurban*, commemorated in a series of songs and legends about Abraham's sacrifice). What had grown out of the original monism thus gained a pseudo-religious sanction rooted in the Judeo-Christian and Judeo-Islamic traditions. While allowing for eclecticism in the folk understanding of the world (in the spirit of the Enlightenment, which he called "superstition"), Arnaudov also argued against researchers' efforts to evaluate national cultures based on the criteria of beauty and the seniority of a work (Арнаудов, 1972, pp. 377–437). He instead leaned toward accepting the multicoloured manifestations of human talent, arguing that:

> If the Greek versions arouse interest because of their dramatic concept and the originality of their ideas and motifs, the Bulgarian versions attract attention with their familiar tone, depth of compassion, and realism of description; the Serbian versions with their epic sweep and historical context; the Romanian ones with their painterly colour, which, however, goes beyond the framework of pure folk art[1]. (Арнаудов, 1972, p. 437)

Arnaudov thus opposed Goethe's judgment, rejecting the song's Serbian variant as "barbaric". On the other hand, he made efforts to strengthen the authority of the Bulgarian song, pointing to its humanism and deeply human values.

Arnaudov had already revealed this "justifying" tendency earlier, in his article *Митически песни* [Mythical songs], where, referring to the Roman concepts of *lar familiaris*, he emphasised the psychological realism of Bulgarian folk artists and their sensitivity to the suffering of the two characters in the ballad – the woman who was walled up and her husband, a builder (Арнаудов, 1961, pp. 50–52) – which was supposed to counterbalance the cruelty of the ritual. Arnaudov's position thus differed from that of Bulgarian folklorists who chose to ignore this motif in their compendiums. This was the case, for example, with

[1] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Maja Jaros either from the Polish translation by the Authors or directly from the original Polish text.

Dimiter Marinov (Маринов, 1914/1994) and Christo Vakarelsky (Vakarelski, 1965), who idealised and Christianised the morality of the Bulgarian people.

The last chapter of Arnaudov's study deserves special attention: it is devoted to reflections on the career of the walled-up woman motif in European humanities since the Romantic period and its literary adaptations. As examples of 19th-century adaptations, he cites, among others, A. Forstenheim's poem *Manoli, rumanische Vilssage* [Manole, Romanian word] (1884) and Carmen Sylva's tragedy *Meister Manole* [Master Manole] (1891). The researcher analyses Bulgarian texts from the period of national revival: Ginchev's *Две тополи* [Two poplars] (Гинчев Шкипърнев, 1872), Slaveykov's *Изворът на Белоногата* [The spring of Belonogata] (Славейков, 1873), Ivanov's *Балада или Павле Кьопрюсю на Марица, според народното верование* [Ballad, or Pavle Köprüsü on Martisa, according to folk belief] (П. Иванов, 1875) and the modernist period: N. D. Yurdanov's ballad *Майстор Манол* [Master Manole] (Юрданов, 1901) from 1901, Ana Karima's short story *Янин извор* [Jana's spring] from 1903 (Карима, 1912/1917, pp.12–21) and *Майстор Манол* [Master Manole] (Карима, 1912/1917, pp. 70–79) from 1912, Petko Todorov's drama *Zidari* [The bricklayers] from 1902, and, finally, Lubomir Bobevski's libretto for Georgi Atanasov's opera *Гергана* [Gergana] from 1917 (Бобевски, 1917). Arnaudov thus continued the approach of Stoilov, who considered the migration of motifs from oral to written culture an extremely important phenomenon.

A return to research on the motif of the walled-up woman occurred in Bulgarian folklore only during the communist regime, under the ideological pressure characteristic of that era. Conciliatory interpretations of the motif were provided by Petyr Dinekov in his book *Български фолклор* [Bulgarian folklore] (Динеков, 1959/1990). Following Arnaudov, Dinekov assumed that the ritual was of a magical nature, summoning the spirit-guardian of the building (Динеков, 1959/1990, p. 410), but he also made three attempts to "justify" the place of this motif in folklore. The first of these attempts, which – to risk an anachronism – I would call postcolonial, is expressed in the evocation of the context of "Turkish slavery" and the plight of the enslaved Bulgarians, who, in the name of higher goals, had to resort to all available means of survival for the community (Динеков, 1959/1990, p. 411). The second attempt, which I would call Marxist, consists in proving the socio-economic determinants of the motif, commemorating the difficult working conditions (Динеков, 1959/1990, p. 410); it appears in a commentary on an article by the writer Georgi Konstantinov *За произхода на някои народни песни* [On the origin of some folk songs] (after Динеков, 1959/1990, p. 410). The third attempt – moral – is expressed in the recognition of the ethics of the Bulgarian people and the folklorist's real support for contemporary folk storytellers who were able to bring out the depth of Manole's moral dilemmas and all the nuances of suffering: "The ballad about the walled-up woman has enjoyed the interest of the Bulgarian people for centuries, as it tells of profound experiences and great feelings, puts tradition and

morality, duty and love to the test, and shocks with the tragedy of human fate" (Динеков, 1959/1990, p. 413).

The appreciation of the moral man in the Bulgarian is a clear continuation of Arnaudov's thinking, whose scholarly authority prevailed, even though after World War II he was accused of fascist inclinations and condemned to infamy. It was not until 1972 that his works were republished by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. This contributed to renewed interest among scholars in the topos of the walled-up woman.

One of the first texts written by a new generation of researchers was Liubomira Parpulova's (known as Lyubomira Parpulova-Gribble following her emigration to the USA) structuralist article *Баладата „Вградена невеста": Кратки бележки относно структурата и семантиката ѝ* ["The walled-up woman" ballad: Brief remarks on its structure and semantics] (Парпулова, 1983). This researcher argues against reducing the semantics of the song to construction rituals. In her opinion, the work should be read metaphorically as a coded message about marriage and the birth of the first child (Парпулова, 1983, p. 31. Parpulova interprets this motif in connection with the myth of the cosmic tree, which marks the axis of the world and carries the promise of life. However, in a subsequent article *Към реконструкция на отношенията между фолклор и религия на Балканите през средните векове: Въз основа на баладата „Вградена невеста"* [Towards a reconstruction of the relationship between folklore and religion in the Balkans in the Middle Ages (Based on the ballad "The walled-up woman"] (Парпулова-Грибъл, 1989), the researcher changes her point of view, attempting to interpret the ballad through the prism of heterodox Orthodox-folk-Bogomil theology. She highlights the connections between the religious imagination documented in ballads and the medieval *Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God* (*Akáthistos Hýmnos*, 5th–6th century), where Mary is compared, described and metaphorically referred to in terms of life-giving bodily fluids (water, milk) and architectural and construction semantics (Парпулова-Грибъл, 1989). Parpulova also points to the connections between the motif of posthumous lactation in ballads and the Marian legend popular in Byzantium about a drop of milk that fell on a rock in the cave of Bethlehem and continues to reproduce there as a remedy for mothers suffering from a lack of milk. Mary is a mediator between man and God in the history of individual human life, which is reflected in the symbolism of the bridge (see: Simmel, 2006), ladder, and tree (Парпулова-Грибъл, 1989, p. 32). However, she is also a stronghold and bastion of the Church, a role which is associated with the history of Constantinople and the appointment of the Mother of God (depicted in iconography as a warrior) as the patron saint of the city (since the 6th century; Cameron, 1978, p. 89). This translated into the cult of images of Mary as a figure embedded in walls (e.g., *Нерушимая стена* [The unshakeable wall]); coins with the figure of the Mother of God in the orans posture, incorporated into a fortress with six columns, one of which is Her, were also in circulation (Парпулова-Грибъл, 1989, p. 31). Parpulova also presents arguments in favour of linking the Bulgarian

cycle of ballads about a walled-up woman with Bogomilism, which, recognising Mary as the vessel of God's word, made her a model of a perfect believer and a symbol of Heavenly Jerusalem.

More far-reaching hypotheses about the connections between the motif of the walled-up woman and the religious traditions of the Bulgarian lands, including Bogomilism, were formulated by the pseudoscientific researcher Vidka Nikolova in her 1991 article *Тезиси на тема „Вградена невяста"* [Theses on the "Walled-up woman"] (В. Николова, 1991). These ideas were later reproduced in her books *Поради тракийския орфизъм. Три опита в историята на идеите* [Because of Thracian Orphism. Three attempts regarding the history of ideas] (В. Николова, 1999) and *Богомилството. Предобрази и идеи. В пътя от Първи до Трети завет* [Bogomilism. Preimages and ideas. From the First to the Third Testament] (В. Николова, 2005, 2008).

Nikolova's 1991 article is written as a series of theses. According to the author, in the light of Paleo-Balkan and Thracian research, the figures of the master and his wife can be seen as personifications of archaic royal spouses, forming a dyad of the goddess-mother and her son within Thracian Orphism. The researcher considers the voluntary or involuntary nature of the sacrifice to be the main criterion for this interpretation. According to Nikolova, the former would precede the latter in mythological thinking, while in Thracian beliefs it has its zoomorphic counterpart in the figure of a deer, which during the summer solstice voluntarily enters an Orphic temple to be sacrificed and return again in a year (В. Николова, 1991, p. 91). Similarly, the walled-up woman disappears and returns to feed her child, which allows her solar-chthonic character to be linked to Thracian Orphism and identified with the great mother goddess. The fact that the story takes place among white stones (they are a building material, a murder weapon, a place where female nourishment flows) is decoded by Nikolova in relation to solar symbolism and the stone sacred sites of Orphism, and she identifies the opposition of day and night with the opposition of creation–non-creation, cosmos–chaos. In the case of a voluntary sacrifice, the woman (*люба*, *девойка*) does not bring food and calmly accepts the wedding. The son-demiurge-husband builds the Cosmos, and chaos is always overcome when a female spouse is present in the structure, whose sacrifice in the esoteric Orphic rite cannot be replaced in any way.

The situation is different in the exoteric rite, which, according to Nikolova, is characterised by involuntary sacrifice. There are episodes here that do not appear in the first variant: the woman brings food, having first performed many household chores; she is a mother-nurturer, lured down by a golden object (usually a ring), which, as a decoy, plays a role typical of Dionysian mysteries. In this variant, the woman cries/begs/curses or appeals to her husband's conscience. Nikolova writes about the orgiastic aspect of such a ritual (В. Николова, 1991, p. 100) and the symbolism of food offerings (milk, butter, cheese, etc.) exposed in the songs, and this theme leads her to the Sanskrit etymology of the names Manu (man in the Rigveda) and Manu-ilica (Ila). In Hindu mythology, Ilā/Idā is

the wife and mother of the human race, the goddess of prayer and liquid offerings, milk and butter libation (В. Николова, 1991, p. 103). Hence, the researcher concludes that relics of Hindu tradition may have survived in songs about walling up. Yet later, in her aforementioned *Богомилството. Предобрази и идеи. В пътя от Първи до Трети завет* [Bogomilism. Preimages and ideas. From the First to the Third Testament] (В. Николова, 2005, 2008) Nikolova develops the concept of the Balkan autochthonous nature of pre-Christian ideas in the Thracian-Orphic culture, of which, in her opinion, Bulgarians are the heirs and creative continuators. Using associative logic and partial scientific theories, the author presents Thracian Orphism as a religion that developed at the same time as Judaism and was predestined to prepare the ground outside the Jewish world for the main ideas of the New Testament, namely the ideas of a living god and the immortality of the soul. If we look at the motif of the walled-up woman in Bulgarian folklore from the perspective of the Thracian-Orphic belief system, then, according to the researcher, we will see an archaic image of a living goddess – mother and bride of the god of light – adopted by folklore, as well as the image of a voluntary sacrificial victim whose fate anticipates the supernatural status and earthly destiny of Christ (В. Николова, 2008, pp. 44–45).

Nikolova combines the myth of the walled-up woman with the supposed Bogomil mysticism interpreted from the Thracian perspective, about which, despite the vast literature on the subject (Гечева, 1997), still little is known. She refers to her own typology of songs about walling up (voluntary/involuntary sacrifice) and proves its validity by showing (sometimes based on dubious reconstructions) connections with the Thracian (voluntary sacrifice) or Hindu (involuntary sacrifice) traditions. According to Nikolova, this mixture of Thracian and non-Thracian elements is fully revealed in *The Secret Book of the Bogomils*. She claims that Thracian monotheism (with its belief in the immortality of man) in Greek songs is undermined by images of the Goddess-mother-sacrifice due to the polytheistic Hellenic tradition (with its belief in the immortality of the human soul). Nikolova's reasoning reveals a tendency to treat the topos of the walled-up woman as a functional tool for building the authority of the Thracian tradition of the Bulgarian lands as pre-Christian.

Two Bulgarian researchers, Nevena Georgieva-Dyakranyan and Zhaneta Uzunova, express similar views in an article published in France as *La ballade de I'emmurée vive dans le folklore bulgare* [The ballad of a woman walled-up alive in Bulgarian folklore] (Guéorguièva-Dikranian & Ouzounova, 1998). This text, little known in Bulgaria, contains several intellectual tropes that point to an intention to interpret the motif from the perspective of the history of mentalities, structural anthropology, Durkheim's sociology, and his concept of the sacred gift. The authors present the state of research and place their study in partial opposition to Arnaudov's thesis, which describes narratives about walling up as "the fruit of primitive religious consciousness" (Guéorguièva-Dikranian & Ouzounova, 1998, p. 126), the objective of which is to endow a building with a protective spirit. They refer to Parapulova's work, which provides them with

arguments in favour of the wedding symbolism of the ballad (isolation – integration – creation of a new cosmos, family) and its religious interpretations. However, they raise the question of why the substitution of a female character as a Christomimetic figure is blocked. Based on Levi-Strauss's ideas, an analysis of Bulgarian folklore texts leads the researchers to conclude that, at the level of mythical thinking, the differences between myth and ritual are blurred (they become two forms of expressing mythical consciousness – verbal and operational), and the subject of difference is how the sacrifice is treated. Following Eleazar Meletinsky, the researchers adopt the image of the master mason as a cultural hero whose role is to establish/restore order on both the natural and cultural planes. They perceive the contextualised role of a woman primarily as nurturing, which is linked to the motif of her death in the ballads. In order to determine the specificity of the Bulgarian ballad in the context of Orphism, they refer to the achievements of Thracology, especially the works of Bogdan Bogdanow and Aleksander Foł, from which they derive confirmation for the hypothesis that the symbolic rituals of masonry can be treated as an echo of archaic initiations in the cult of the mother goddess, and at the same time the goddess of water and stone.

Ivanichka Georgieva, in her article *Вградена невеста. Пример за битово християнство* [The walled-up woman. An example of folk Christianity] (Георгиева, 2012) accepts Petyr Dinekov's concept of the influence of Ottoman rule on ballads about walled-up women and the assumption that the folk imagination at that time was characterised by the overlapping of Christian and pre-Christian traditions, which took on stable forms in "folk Christianity" (Георгиева, 2012). Referring to Lidia Stareva's book *Български магии и гадания* [Bulgarian magic and divination] (Старева, 2007), she attempts to reconstruct the way of thinking of pre-modern man, who recognised fatalism and the important place of sacrifice in his life, which unfolded within an imagined circular time. She evokes the Greek idea of *kalokagathia* and a poorly documented folk-Christian superstition that all beauty and goodness must be paid for with suffering, and that only perfect beings who are close to God may be sacrificed. Seeking biblical support for this view, she links it to the popular myth of Abraham's sacrifice; however, with regard to the topos of the walled-up woman, she prefers Arnaudov's idea that it is an act of summoning the protective spirit of the building. Georgieva considers the archaic belief, reproduced in the ballad and rooted in Bulgarian folk culture, that God expects a flawless sacrifice – offered without objection from people performing a creative act – to be typical of the Christian rite (Георгиева, 2013)[2]. According to Georgieva, and following in Eliade's footsteps (Eliade, 1972/1996), this wandering motif, as developed

[2] In this text, Georgieva places the myth of the walled-up woman in the context of European and non-European archaic cultures and links it with belief in the guardian spirit of places. According to Georgieva, walling up was no longer practised in the 18th and 19th centuries. This act (similarly to shadow laying) should be interpreted as the magical creation of the spirit of the guardian of the building, which is based on the belief

in Bulgarian folklore, says the most about the values preferred by Bulgarians: "one of their [the people's – GSG] best qualities is that they can endure suffering with a smile, without forgetting who they are and without trying to avoid their duties (even when the people call them fate)" (Георгиева, 2012). According to Georgieva, this is confirmed by Todorov's drama *Зидари* [The bricklayers], but Radichkov's story *Църковно настоятелство* (The parish council; Радичков, 2002) is already a literary testimony to the collapse of old norms.

In her article *Баладата "Вградена невеста" и връзката и с Коледа в българския народен календар* ["The walled-up woman" ballad and its connection with Christmas in the Bulgarian folk calendar] (Атанасова, 1993), Ekaterina Atanasova recalls various concepts of protective magic to shed new light on songs about a walled-up woman performed during the winter and summer solstices and at times marking the beginning and end of field work. The aetiology of Christmas is linked to the Roman Saturnalia, which in turn is identified as the ancient Greek Kronia (commemorating the loss of power by Cronus to Zeus; the holiday is accompanied by a reversal of social roles), the birth of Mithras, etc. The point of reference for the analysis is medieval apocrypha, e.g., *The miracle with the Bulgarian* provides arguments for linking the semantics of the ring in the ballad with the solar cult (Атанасова, 1993, p. 174), and Christmas rituals, whose purpose is to stimulate the dying sun to grow (Jesus takes on the role of the sun). The author discusses in detail the winter solstice games of people dressed in costumes (*kukeri*), which in contemporary times are usually accompanied by pro-social activities, such as fundraising for public buildings. Games in which men participate have sexual and phallic subtext (Атанасова, 1993, p. 177), and symbolic acts of the walling up of a woman take place during ritual transvestism in order to keep the woman for oneself (Атанасова, 1993, p. 178). Atanasova discusses cases of omophagy associated with archaic rituals accompanying relations with elders (playing dead, dismembering a corpse; Атанасова, 1993, p. 178). She refers to the custom of a second funeral (after eight years) practised by Bulgarians, Macedonians and Greeks (after exhumation, the bones are washed with wine and, after a night of incubation in an Orthodox church, are placed back in the grave) and the Anatolian custom of embedding the purified skeletons of ancestors in the walls and floors of houses (Атанасова, 1993, p. 179). This ritual was interpreted as "rebirth".

According to Atanasova, the motif of walling up a woman retains the dualistic semantics of burial as rebirth and marriage. In this context, she analyses Christmas songs about a girl building a city (*Гради мома града* [A girl is building a city]), which symbolises marriage; the accumulation of difficult conditions in the marriage contract ultimately prevents the wedding from taking place. According to Atanasova, some light is shed on the ballad by the apocrypha about St. Spyridon (12/25 December), the patron saint of builders, who came

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that the spirit of the deceased tragically remains at the place of death (Каранов, 1884) and appears in human or animal form at night.

into being as a result of homogenesis/autogenesis (Атанасова, 1993, p. 184), and his tear caused a crumbling clay vessel to take on the form he gave it. This corresponds to the motif of posthumous lactation of a walled-up woman who, at the moment of death, is ritually impure after childbirth and as a breastfeeding mother. The next link is songs about the marriage of the sun; the connecting element in this case is a ring symbolising the sun's movement across the sky. The woman's task is to ensure the fluidity of this movement, which involves the necessity of giving up her life.

The ballad about the walled-up woman is part of a circle of solar-chthonic practices aimed at overcoming death through fertility on a cosmic, economic, social, and family level. The singing of songs during the winter solstice is proof that, in an eschatological sense, it is the woman who shows the way to the sun and overcomes chaos, although in the social plan it is the man who is established as the main figure of the family. Eliade's idea that in ballads death is equal to life returns in the researcher's reflection, but the practices of *kukeri* indicate that imitated death is sufficient for the ritual.

In her article *Walled-in wives, dragon's brides, and wild fairies: women in the Bulgarian folk tradition* (Milkova, 2005), Stiliana Milkova examines three folkloristic motifs: the walled-up wife, the bride of *zmej*, and the *samodiva*. Following Lyubomira Parpulova, she understands the ballad as a metaphor for marriage and the co-establishment of a new cosmic and social order thanks to a woman's sacrifice. The author interprets the figure of the walled-up woman as a kind of living cornerstone, creative and binding the family, home, and folk cosmos.

The authors of the compendia *Българска етнография* [Bulgarian ethnography] (Колев, 1995) and *Българска митология. Енциклопедичен речник* [Bulgarian mythology. Encyclopaedic dictionary] (Стойнев, 1994) also gravitate toward interpreting the ritual as an act of offering rather than as foundation magic. The author of the first of these, Nikolay Kolev, discusses the construction ritual of walling up a person or their shadow, placing it in a sequence of many other masonry customs. He interprets this ritual as a *kurban*, an offering to the forces of chaos, similar to animal sacrifices. In turn, in Anani Stoynev's encyclopaedia, a small fragment of the entry *жертва* [sacrifice] is devoted to the motif of the walled-up woman, which seems significant as evidence of the classification of this phenomenon, perceived in this case as a variant of sacrificial magic rituals (Buchowski, 1986; Tambiah, 2007; van Gennep, 2006). Although the bibliography contains references to Arnaudov's study, his theses are not taken into account.

In the first part of the anthology *Български народни балади и песни с митически и легендарни мотиви* [Bulgarian folk ballads and songs with mythical and legendary motifs] (1993), edited by Lyubomira Parpulova (Парпулова et al, 1993, pp. 348–363), there are sixteen ballads about walling up (items 468–483); these are accompanied by musical notation and information about the source and ritual function of the texts in specific circumstances (*kolo* dance,

evening song, harvest, when bread is brought in the morning, Easter *kolo*, women's evening chores). A more detailed commentary on this group of ballads can be found in the footnotes (Парпулова et al, 1993, pp. 543–548); a short "canonical" bibliography (Arnaudov, Parpulova, Talos, Megas, Stoilov, Dinekova, Zhirmunsky) of studies is also provided there. There is a summary of knowledge about the origins of this group of ballads (Greek), the subject of transmission (*дюлгери* [builders]) and its routes (1. starting from the Struma River to the north, 2. the Western Rhodopes and Thrace), the names of the master and his wife, the location and type of structures erected by the builders, etc. The commentary concludes with an extensive bibliography of ballad variants (Парпулова et al., 1993, pp. 544–546).

A few years later, a collection of folklore texts edited by Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov was published, presenting Roma variants of ballads, legends and tales about walling up in a bilingual Bulgarian–English volume titled *Песента за моста. Текстове за културата на ромите в България* [Song of the bridge. Texts on Roma culture in Bulgaria] (Марушиакова & Попов, 1997). The texts (including prose) published here on the *Song of the bridge* are a Roma version of a topos popular throughout the historical and cultural area that the authors of the collection refer to as the Balkan-Caucasian region (Марушиакова & Попов, 1997, pp. 185–193)[3]. Their research findings are preceded by a brief summary of the state of research on the topos in general and a discussion of the main trends in interpreting the origins of ballads and legends. All Romani material is grouped together under the label "non-Greek", thus erasing internal boundaries, including confessional differences. The authors link this to the specific lifestyle and mobility of this group and their occupations (e.g., musicians). Despite marked dialectal differences, the structural unity of the narrative is preserved, although the originality and variety of detailed motifs and storytellers' phrases addressed to the audience (additional comments, wishes, toasts, words sung to the melody of funeral songs, closing words) are surprising, as is the tendency to link the story to real but distant objects. According to researchers, the fear of such haunted places and walling up is dying out in the Roma community, but the tradition of the *kurban* remains alive. According to Marushakova and Popov, the memory of these songs is also disappearing among the Gypsies (e.g., in Sofia), but interest in the motif of walling up itself is reviving under the influence of popular culture. It should be added that Roma versions of these songs are characterised by a distinct tendency to exaggerate elements of the depicted world, e.g., the warm milk of the walled-up woman always flows down the walls (Марушиакова & Попов, 1997, pp. 185–193), her curse caus-

[3] The authors of the afterword mention, among other things, the existence of Kurdish, Georgian, Armenian, and Gagauz variants, as well as contemporary artistic renditions, such as the award-winning 1984 film *The legend of Suram fortress/Ambavi Suramis tsikhitsa/ Легенда о Сурамской крепости*, directed by Sergei Parajanov (Серге́й Ио́сифович Параджа́нов / Sergei Iosifovich Parajanov).

es (Engelking, 2010) the church being built to turn into a place where pigs feed (Марушиакова & Попов, 1997, p. 74), and an honest brother who did not disregard his oath gets back his wife, who was resurrected by God's will (Марушиакова & Попов, 1997, p. 148).

In the 21st century, Todor Mollov has added texts mentioned in the anthologies by Arnaudov and Parpulova to the largest electronic database of Bulgarian ballads and stories about walled-up women, sponsored by the LiterNet portal (Моллов, 2006–2011), but he did not include any Roma variants. The collection consists of song texts only (without musical notation), accompanied by information about the source, place and author of the transcription and, where applicable, the first publication. These texts represent over 100 cultural microregions. A specific commentary on them is provided by Mollov's article *Троица братя града градяха* [Three brothers building a town], published in 2002, in which he analyses the song as one of the most popular religious and mythical ballads in the folklore of the Balkan peoples (Моллов, 2002). According to the author, the song about walling up refers not to real events from the life of the community, but to mythical events related to the act of creation, when God creates a harmonious Cosmos, often depicted as a beautiful building (*Мироздание*). God himself is the first *майстор – строител* [master builder]. According to Mollov, the remarkably enduring myths about the world's creation became an instrument for overcoming crises, e.g., during the winter solstice. Building a new order was presented as the erection of a new structure (a tower or a bridge) that was to restore the broken ties between the worlds. A tower symbolised the restoration of vertical connections (the lower world, the local world, and the upper world), while a bridge symbolised horizontal connections (the present world and the opposite world) which had been severed by water (a river, less often the sea) and were fundamental to the order of the cosmos. This is why the tower and the bridge are characterised as "white", which indicates a connection with another world.

Significantly, *Майстор – строител / божествения Първостроител* [Master Builder / Divine First Builder] is named Manole / Emanuel (Heb. God is with us) – the name given to Jesus to emphasise his bond with God the Father. This is illustrated, for example, by iconographic depictions of Christ Emanuel as a child on a special medallion on the Virgin Mary's chest. In turn, in the Paulician-Bogomil regions, the builder is named Paul (Greek for 'small'), which is an allusion to Jesus's childhood. According to Mollov, Manol bears the characteristics of God the Father in songs about walling up, while the walled-up woman bears those of the Mother of God, as she is called in religious texts (*Невеста*, *Кула*, *Крепост*, *Стълп на Църквата*). The world built by God the Father is strengthened by the Mother of God – its foundation, wall, tower, and fortress.

Mollov brings out yet another aspect of the drama: the betrayal of Manol's companions, which he links to the disappearance of the (Paulician) mythical message and the emergence of a moral interpretation – an evolution from myth to poetry. He considers the hero's virtues to be an attempt to translate the

language of myth into moral categories understandable today, which, in the researcher's opinion, remains a futile effort.

> If we are to continue in this vein, we must say some not very pleasant things about him: he accepts the possible death of his wife with cold blood; he is ready to make his child an orphan; he willingly throws his golden engagement ring into the foundations of a building so that his unsuspecting wife will enter the river and be buried among stone walls… This is why we must always see the difference between the message of a myth and our contemporary analytical skills – because mythology and folklore are not like contemporary literature, and literary analysis of such material has its limitations… (Моллов, 2002)

In turn, Anton Anchev, in the third chapter of his book *Сянката* [The shadow] (Анчев, 2011), analyses a group of ballads about the walling up of a woman's shadow from the perspective of Jungian psychology, recognising the walled-up woman as the anima of the master builder. He casts the other builders (Manol's younger brothers) in the role of his shadow, and their wives in the role of Manol's wife's shadow (Анчев, 2011, p. 105). As we know, the shadow is the negative side of one's personality. Anchev attempts to prove that songs about walling up could have had a therapeutic function for audiences of folk culture. However, *Сянката* is only a compilation and overinterpretation of quotes taken out of context from the works of Jung and his students (on the shadow, the symbolism of buildings, stone, etc.). By focusing on the motif of the walling up of the shadow, the author ignores the extensive folkloric sources concerning the walling up of a living person. He aestheticises the existing material in order to attribute therapeutic power to it in the process of a woman's psychological initiation (Анчев, 2011, p. 145).

The Basic Module. Non-Mother. The Canonical Version

The Pristine Guardian of Virtues

It is significant that in successive eras and literary currents the motif of the walled-up woman became an object of peculiar artistic recycling, which in many cases remained somewhat fruitless because the aesthetic of identity characteristic of folklore (to use Lotman's term, which is functional for us) retained its power for a long time within the so-called "new Bulgarian literature" and hardly yielded to transformations carrying original innovation.

The first Bulgarian writer to reach for this motif was Tsani Ginchev (1832–1894). He made a certain reinterpretation of the heroine's character, choosing for her not a nursing mother (the variant most popular in Bulgarian lands) but a girl. He based his ballad *Две тополи или неожидана среща* [Two poplars and an unexpected encounter] (Гинчев Шкипърнев, 1872) on the romantic motif of love obstructed by evil forces. This rhymed work, which is about a hun-

dred pages long, is woven into the fabric of a slim prose text, acting as a kind of bracket. The truncated plot of the prose fragments is wrapped around the motif of the protagonist's wandering, looking for his brothers lost in the turmoil of the Crimean War. In order to rest, he accidentally stops at a bridge, which, as it turns out, is connected to the legend of a couple terribly wronged by fate. The legend is told to him by a mysterious girl in white, who weaves her narrative slowly, as if she wanted to keep him there as long as possible. When she finally disappears, the protagonist meets one of his lost brothers on the bridge.

Inscribed in the structure of the work, the ballad about Nencho and Deshka consists of 53 parts, and (as Arnaudov, who was critical of it, rightly pointed out) the motif of the walling up of a human shadow in the structure is seemingly marginal there. Fascinated by folklore, Ginchev was a teacher who considered it his vocation to popularise knowledge of Bulgarian folk culture, albeit filtered through Enlightenment thought and thus sensitive to the destructive power of superstition. Thus, with a reverence for detail, he evoked village customs (evening gatherings, *kolo*, feasts, wine harvesting, etc.) but located the topos of walling up a shadow not in the realm of the practices of the time, but in the realm of the superstitious thoughts, dreams, and the fears of the characters, who suspected that the master was tricking them into putting their shadows into the structure of the bridge. When Nencho falls ill and nightmares haunt him at night (Гинчев Шкипърнев, 1872, pp. 50–51, 55, 89), he becomes convinced that he is a "victim of the bridge" and dies with this thought (Гинчев Шкипърнев, 1872, p. 109). Deshka, too, is afraid of being walled up (Гинчев Шкипърнев, 1872, p. 62). The archaic topos of foundation sacrifice is thus rationalised here as an element of the characters' mental reality, thereby having a negative effect on them. Toward the end of the piece, however, Ginchev opens up the possibility that the events are motivated by fantastic elements when the mysterious and benevolent guardian of the bridge turns out to be the heroine of the poem, and the meeting of the brothers seems to have been arranged by her. We find no information regarding the reception of Ginchev's work beyond the critical remarks of Arnaudov, who noted in his study that he mentioned it only out of documentary diligence (Арнаудов, 1972, p. 447).

Ginchev's artistically weak work was forever overshadowed by Petko R. Slaveykov's poem *Изворът на Белоногата* [The spring of Belonogata] (Славейков, 1873), which entered the canon of Bulgarian national culture (Кирова, 2008). Slaveykov – a poet, folklore collector, publicist, social and political activist – experienced a difficult period of loss of faith in the meaning of his own political activity, and in one of his poems he harshly condemned a nation resistant to the ideas of freedom. This exposed him to the ridicule of his fellow writers, which only aggravated the crisis. The poem about Gergana is one of the first works written by the poet after this breakdown, so it is not without reason that it has been perceived as his new credo.

The plot is simple. The protagonist of the work – a beautiful, hard-working and modest village girl – rejects the advances of a Turkish nobleman who has

come to the area with his entourage. She prefers the rural world of modest needs and purity of heart (garden, icons, family, custom) over the delusion of a prosperous life in the big city[4]. Although in the poem the Turk shows magnanimity and allows Gergana to stay in the village, the intrigue of a local demon (*vila*) causes the heroine to lose her life at the hands of her own people: fulfilling ancient magical rituals, the builders working on the construction of the *češma* (public fountain) wall her shadow in the foundations of the structure and thus make her the guardian of the place. Despite the efforts of her beloved to save her, the girl dies.

The paradox in this work, undervalued by Bulgarian literary studies, is that Gergana's choice of modest happiness is counterproductive; it brings her the loss of everything, including her life, and after death makes her a prisoner of the fountain. Tapping into the topos of the walled-up woman, the poet invokes a dark ritual to show that the idyllic world has a dark side and that the project of a national idyll is not viable. Gergana dies, and mourners escorting her to the grave are shown as reconciled to her fate: "A year has not passed/ to God she gave up her soul…/ The village mourned her/ and everyone gathered,/ each lit a candle…/The girls wove wreaths/ The boys made the coffin…/As they took her from the house/ one by one they carried her away,/ to the dark grave, / carried her away and left her there" (Славейков, 1873).

The meticulous ritualism of the villagers seems to be accompanied by the quiet triumphalism of the living, already distanced from the body of the deceased and her spirit, leading her new life-in-death right next to the spring. Only Nikola keeps Gergana company, playing a yearning melody on his pipe every night.

In Bulgarian folk songs about the walling up of a girl (but not a mother!), the story usually ends there. Slaveykov's work, however, gives us a glimpse into Gergana's postmortem situation. We see her in the moonlight as she sits by the fountain spinning a thread, which is sometimes interpreted as a metonymy for the fulfilment of her role as priestess of the household hearth (Колева, 2002). However, it seems that the heroine was thus likened by the poet to the Greek Moira Clotho, who is the spinner of human Fate. Thus, Slaveykov's heroine, so ordinary before her death, full of fears and ill premonitions, accepts her mystical destiny along with the power that results from it. Whose thread is Gergana spinning? Is it the thread of the life of the Orthodox-folk community she was so reluctant to leave? Or, in Slaveykov's depiction, does Gergana's misfortune rather foreshadow the imminent end of this "paradise"? This is not elaborated,

[4] Slaveykov puts into the mouth of Gergana his own vision of Istanbul, which was then modernising along Western lines, as a symbol of degeneration and spiritual death. As Zhechev writes: "All of Gergana's magnificent responses to Pasha's enticing words are *pre-cultural* and therefore strong and unassailable; her morality *precedes cognition* and is therefore comprehensive; all the arguments against the city are *rural* and therefore convincing […] Slaveykov […] paints a bygone Bulgarian paradise where the tree of knowledge has not yet been planted, a paradise full of purity, order, fidelity and ritual, where everything is born, grows, lives and dies blessed" (Жечев, 1980, pp. 571–572).

and in the colloquial reception this aspect of Gergana's transformation is generally reduced to an ornamental function. On the other hand, the choice made by the girl herself is evaluated positively.

Operatic Elevation

In the second decade of the 20th century, Slaveykov's poem became the blueprint for Bulgaria's first national opera, *Гергана*[5] [Gergana] (1917). Composer Georgi Atanasov (1882–1931) modelled the work on 19th-century late Romantic Italian opera (Ivan Petrov, 2016). The libretto was developed by Lyubomir Bobevsky (Figure 1), who made far-reaching alterations to the original, reportedly criticised by Atanasov himself, who disapproved of Bobevsky's trite linguistic concepts and trivialisation of stage characters (Сараев, 1976).

As is well known, such disputes are part of the history of the libretto as a cross-genre phenomenon that is, as a rule, belittled, in contrast to the appreciation of the musical layer of operas (Walczak, 2014). The underestimation of the multiple functions of the libretto in the process of interaction between the arts is particularly evident in cases of adaptation of a pre-existing literary text. Therefore, it is worth interpreting it as a testimony to the reception of the original text, mirroring the tastes and intellectual and emotional preferences of the era (Walczak, 2014). Looking at Bobevsky's libretto from this perspective provides some insight into the mentality of the audience that conditioned the enthusiastic reception of the opera. Starting from 24 October 1917, the opera was repeatedly staged at the Sofia opera house and in theatres outside of the capital (Stara Zagora, Yambol, Burgas, Harmanli, Lovech, Ruse, Khaskovo, Sliven, Plovdiv, Pleven), soon garnering the reputation as the most Bulgarian of all operas[6].

The stage design, with its colourful ethnographic décor, so appreciated by the audience, arguably had an effect on the reception. The genre scenes that initiate the performance depict idyllic rural everyday life, where the logic of ancient myth, tradition and words as causative agents seems to rule. The viewer, who is in an intimate relationship with folk culture, is moved from the very first words uttered by Gergana's beloved Nikola, who explains his tardiness to the girl by saying that he was on an expedition to get stones for the construction of their shared house. The lexemes "girl" and "stone" pull the viewer's imagination toward motifs known from folklore.

[5] Fragments of the opera can be listened to today on various websites on the internet (see ФОБИ 2015, 2017).

[6] "The touching plot of this ballad, centred on the pure patriarchal love of Gergana and Nikola, the typical idyllic atmosphere of an old Bulgarian village, full of magic and superstition, good and bad underground forces, living in forests and glades of vipers and rusals, and occasionally visited by pashas and beys, cherchives and kyrjali – this is a circle of images and relations that the master's lyrical talent had to confront and through which it developed in its fullness" (Кръстев, 1976).



Figure 1. Cover of Ljubomir Bobevsky's libretto for the opera *Gergana* (1917). St. Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia (see Бобевски, 1917)

After all, the libretto is a variation on Slaveykov's poem, steeped in romantic moodiness. The flow of the narrative initially corresponds to the original: the peaceful life of the engaged couple, the arrival of an Ottoman nobleman, the attempt to make Gergana a favourite, her refusal and the magnanimous reaction of bey Selim, who accepts the girl's choice and orders the construction of a fountain to commemorate the meeting. At this point the plot of the opera begins to diverge from the poem. At the end of Act Two, two separate choirs of Christians and Muslims sing in unison (each in the spirit of its own tradition) words of admiration and blessing for the Turk. This sets a solemn mood, accompanied, however, by a smug concern that an equally beautiful ending in the real world – where "the very good is not good at all" (С. Стойкова, 2007, p. 163) – is not possible. And indeed, in the third act the viewer learns that Selim's benevolent gesture has unintentionally led to misfortune. When Gergana falls ill, the superstitious villagers begin to whisper that the builders have walled up her shadow in the foundations of the fountain (Бобевски, 1917, p. 53). As predicted, the heroine fades away, as told by her friends in the solo parts, for she herself does not return to the stage. Nikola, upon hearing of Gergana's death, loses his mind and dies of despair.

The libretto, which is a testimony to Bobevsky's reception of Slaveykov's poem (but also to his commercial mindset), devotes a lot of space to psychological aspects, exposing Gergana's fears, her dependence, and her mental rootedness in the world of folk norms, trivialised notions and superstitions ("a black

cat on the road brings trouble", "darkness is the realm of impure forces"). The viewer, whose emotions are stimulated by the word and music, is directed to contemplate what appears inevitable in the life of human beings – though at no fault of their own – and which results from the verdicts of inexorable Fate, from a peculiar predestination of the heroes, whose "porous self" (Taylor, 2007, pp. 19–21) is affected by external hostile forces. The topos of the walled-up woman of interest to us is first mentioned in Gergana's solo parts: "No, Nikola, let's go / I still hear the words of grandmother Vela, / About the masters who have laid / a woman in the foundations of the bridge… / It is true, believe me, / I am overcome by fear, a terrible fear!" (Бобевски, 1917, p. 23).

Plagued by ill premonitions, the girl persuades her grandfather Nedialko to tell her about the walling up. The stories he tells become an anticipation of future events. The first of them, explicated on stage in the form of a recitative, serves to evoke affect in the audience, as it were, inflicted on them by cultural memory rooted in folklore; it concerns the bridge in Kamenovo, falling apart during construction until a sacrifice – the wife of the oldest master – was walled-up in it:

> – Well… listen, then. I am reminded of Kamenovo. There is a bridge there. Folks say a woman is walled up in its foundations. They started building, but what they did by day fell apart at night… And so today, tomorrow, a week, a month…, and the bridge was not finished… They said that the bridge wanted a sacrifice, a living human to be placed in the foundations. They did it… They walled up the old master's wife and the bridge withstood… (Бобевски, 1917, p. 29)

The second story tells of the terrible fate of grandfather Nedialko's beautiful daughter, walled up in the foundations of the mill:

> I love you, Gergana, / as if you were my own child / because you remind me of Radka / who left us so early!/ She was like a slender twig / but an evil fate befell her / In the Mincha mill / the master walled up her shadow!
>
> […] They say she became a vampire/ my beloved daughter!/ They see her in a white dress
>
> / In a white robe/ glancing up at the moon laughing in the sky!…/ But enough of this, I don't want to disturb / her cherished bones / May she rest in peace / May God have mercy on her! (Бобевски, 1917, pp. 29–30)

The theme of Rada's posthumous vampirisation occurring in this passage corresponds with allusions to *samodiva* characters known in folklore (Георгиева, 2013, pp. 225–256), while the way these characters are spoken of evokes associations with Christo Botev's poem *Хаджи Димитър* [Haji Dimityr], where they accompany a dying *yunak* (clad in white, the moon… smiling). From that moment on, Gergana, who reminds the old man of his daughter, Rada, seems predestined to become another ghost in white, a *samodiva* twirling in the moonlight, respected by the people. This is the image of the girl as seen before the eyes of Nikola, overwhelmed by madness in his dying moments (Бобевски, 1917, p. 62). This scene's music for the *rusalka* ballet dance is considered the

weakest fragment of Atanasov's composition (Сагаев, 1976). However, one may be tempted to argue that this motif (not found in either Slaveykov or folklore) of a joyful posthumous existence of the walled-up woman, who enjoys the company of her demonic sisters, significantly shifts the semantic emphasis of the story: it removes the odium of trepidation from the foundation sacrifice narrative. Gergana is no longer a lonely victim, but an immortal inhabitant of the supernatural realm. The synthesis of popular motifs in Bobevsky's libretto makes the viewer leave the theatre uplifted, happy with his own accommodation amidst the personalised phantasms of a collective consciousness treated with tenderness.

Spiritual Exercise for the Intelligentsia a Century Later

Another testimony to the enthusiastic reception of Slaveykov's poem, but also to a generational formative project, is a book by Toncho Zhechev (1929–2000), an acclaimed literary historian of the People's Republic of Bulgaria (PRB), titled *Български Великден или страстите български* [Bulgarian Easter or Bulgarian Passions] (Жечев, 1975). In a period marked by an absence of creative freedom, Zhechev attempted to reactivate the idea of Bulgarian liberal conservatism by appreciating the 19th-century struggle for an independent Orthodox Church and pointing to the Bulgarians' religious indifference as the reason behind the failure of this struggle to capitalise on the success of the 19th-century movement (Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2017). During the oppressive Zhivkov era, when citizens were forced to embrace atheism and the ideals of communism, Zhechev's essay was received as a testimony to intellectual and civic courage – a subversive work.

In the book's extensive epilogue, Zhechev revitalised Slaveykov's modest poem so that it could become the foundation of a renewed tradition. He interpreted this 19th-century work as an evocation of the poet's own worldview. After becoming disillusioned with the aforementioned nationalist movement, the poet found meaning and peace in embracing native indigenous values. This pseudo-Rousseauesque approach (Warchala, 2006) – aiming to solidify the illusion held by the man of the second half of the 20th century on the superb value of the rural, natural lifestyle – seems somewhat dishonest due to the communication situation in which humanists of the PRB found themselves. In his efforts to revitalise the Bulgarian folk-church tradition, Zhechev disregards almost a century of development in the national humanities, instead embracing the "authenticity" of folk culture as it was conceived during the national revival. In the Bulgarian theatre of everyday life, this is expressed through the adoption of a rustic, homely façade (Ciesielska, 2020). If we were to accept Toncho Zhechev's argument, Petko R. Slaveykov's ballad would have to bear no traces of the anthropocentric turn; it would only reproduce the main moral imperative of the time: to serve the nation. In the work, the tension appears along the

native–foreign divide, but also in the power and subordination relationships resulting from the cultural gender hierarchy (Чернокожев, 2001).

Yet, in order to bring out the assumed wisdom of popular culture, Zhechev used the artificial opposition of Slaveykov versus Dostoevsky, constructed around questions about the ontology of evil. Unlike Dostoevsky, who failed to overcome the aporia contained in the question of God's responsibility for the suffering of the innocent (Жечев, 1980, p. 587), the Bulgarian poet seemingly rejected the theological impulse to seek an answer to this question. Zhechev, who combined the biographical method with allegoresis, brought out the superiority of the wisdom flowing from the original Bulgarian religious syncretism over Christianity (and its clumsy theodicy). In doing so, he made a significant gesture, exposing the therapeutic power of the archaic myth, which offers mankind an opportunity to come to terms with the world of "necessity" (Жечев, 1980, pp. 588–589).

Related to the topos of the walled-up woman, the motif of quiet acceptance of the sacrifice of life reveals affinities with the pre-war thought of Mircea Eliade. This raises a number of questions as Zhechev made no references whatsoever to the text of the Romanian philosopher. He found confirmation of this concept in folklore as an expression of the people's archaic wisdom, in literary texts as the result of the fruitful meeting of different ideas, and in the intertwining of these ideas, which promoted the mental integration of a poet who was helpless in the face of the ethical problems of "Bulgarian development". Finally, he found confirmation of this concept in metatext as a reference point for the reality of the 1970s, which was marked by the Marxist notion of historical necessity.

A jaded Bulgarian reader of the PRB era, disillusioned by the gloom and pallor of the socialist realist monoculture, could recognise themselves as a "Bulgarian Odysseus", liberated from the compulsion to dwell on past misfortunes and the oppression of shame resulting from their own conformity to political violence. They could find their way back to their archaic core identity, free from the constraints of "fake" modern culture. Thanks to this message, Zhechev's book had the ability to shape the attitudes of an entire generation of the Bulgarian intelligentsia, thirsty for water from the source of Belonogata, as Krum Vylkov wrote about in his poem *Посрещне ли ме бурята…* [A storm will come to meet me] from the collection *Вградена сянка. Лирика. Сатира* [Walled-up shadow. Lyric. Satire] (Вълков, 1989), written in 1989, i.e., at the end of the Zhivkov regime. The poetic motif of a heart "walled up like a shadow" in the freedom of Bulgarians is an example of how strongly the ideas of Bulgarian religious syncretism proclaimed by Zhechev could be associated with patriotic feelings in this era: "at the moment of death / my heart will not stop … / It will beat to the pulse of the homeland. / It will drink water again from Belonogata, /walled up like a shadow into our freedom" (Вълков, 1989, p. 67).

Harmanli: Erosion

However, Gergana's poetic and ideological history is not limited to words; it has a material dimension in the town of Harmanli, forty-four kilometres from the Turkish border. Today it is mainly populated by Bulgarians (68%), but the Roma minority (7% of the population in 2021) and the Turkish minority (10%) are increasing in numbers (Национален Статистически Институт, 2022). During the Ottoman reign, Harmanli was a place of tax collection in this part of the Empire. Situated on the route from Sofia to Constantinople/Istanbul (or, as residents say today, from Europe to Turkey), it produced an infrastructure that accommodated the flow of people, goods, and ideas. This route has lost its importance only in recent years, since the completion of the "Maritsa" bypass in 2015, due to which the E-80 road to Istanbul became marginalised. However, the flow of people has not stopped: today, this is the route through which refugees from Syria and Afghanistan try to enter Europe. During the migration wave in 2013, the largest refugee camp on Bulgarian territory was established on the site of a former military unit in Harmanli, and it remains operational to this day. The camp is open, making the city a space of frequent contact between permanent residents and migrants.

On the outskirts of Harmanli is a fountain, built in the 16th century on the initiative of Siyavuş Pasha, still referred to in both Bulgarian and Turkish as "the spring of Belonogata [the white-legged woman]" (Bulgarian: *Изворът на Белоногата*, Turkish: Ak baldır *çeşmesi*). The significance of this place in the Bulgarian cultural imaginarium stems from its association with Slaveykov's poem, which is included in the school reading curriculum and discussed in the ninth grade of school.

Petko R. Slaveykov used to visit Harmanli on his way to or from Constantinople. According to the local historian Zlatan Petrov, he taught the locals how not to succumb to the threatening Greekomania in the second half of the 19th century, perceived as a threat to emancipatory efforts for the Bulgarian language and culture (Петров, 2010, p. 169). This poet knew the local teacher and national revival activist Dialko Milkovsky: it was from him that he heard the story of the fountain and the walling up of Gergana's shadow.

Milkovsky writes that as early as 1868, Slaveykov asked him if there were any famous graves in the Harmanli area (Ралов, 1929). However, the reference was not to the grave of Gergana, but to that of the Serbian ruler Vukašin Mrnjavčević, who was supposedly wounded in the Battle of Maritsa in 1371 and buried 2000 meters from where the fountain is located. Not only were the leaders, Vukašin and Uglješa, killed in this battle, but also many Bulgarians who fought under Serbian leadership; in this sense, it is also a Bulgarian memorial site. The clash between the Turkish army and the armies of Serbs and Bulgarians, among others, strengthened the Empire's position, vassalised southern Serbia, and reaffirmed Turkish supremacy over the Bulgarians. According to Milkovsky, the

locals believed that a grave formerly existed in the clearing, called *nalet mezar* (treacherous grave) by the Turks and *namaz mezar* (grave of prayer) by the Bulgarians, and anyone passing by was ordered to throw a stone toward the grave until a sizeable pile formed. The stones were then collected and used to construct the road to Istanbul.

However, as we learn from Milkovsky, Slaveykov could not have found out about Vukašin's grave in 1868 because it was the time of the arrests of revolutionaries, and Milkovsky himself was imprisoned in Plovdiv and did not meet with Slaveykov, as they had planned (Петров, 2010, p. 169). Nevertheless, Vukašin's legendary grave, located near the fountain, also inspired local legends: it is mentioned in a 1929 article from the journal *Zora*. Its author recalls, among other things, the legend of an icon of the Mother of God that supposedly hung miraculously in the mosque (formerly St. Mother of God Church in Harmanli), even though the Turks had earlier thrown it into the waters of the Maritsa (Ралов, 1929).

The legendary tomb of Vukašin and the symbolic tomb of the walled-up Gergana are linked not only by location, but also by the motif of foundation sacrifice. The walling up of Gergana's shadow makes the girl the guardian spirit of the place, a positive heroine who perishes due to unfortunate circumstances. King Vukašin, on the other hand, is the hero of the Serbian song *Zidanje Skadra*, which features the theme of the youngest brother's wife being walled up. In the song, Vukašin is the eldest brother who breaks an oath by revealing the builders' intention to his own wife, thus protecting her from death and condemning the wife of his youngest brother.

The legend of Gergana, thanks to Slaveykov's poem, has become much more significant in local memory than the legend of Vukašin's grave (Figure 2). However, such close placement of the two graves in the collective imagination begs the question about the mechanisms of displacement of one story by another: the corpse of the Serbian king makes for a much less enticing story than the tale of a girl whose shadow was walled-up in the foundations of a fountain. An "ordinary" Bulgarian girl from the people, who courageously expressed her will to the bey, becomes a more important element of self-identification than the "foreign" royal tomb.

For Slaveykov, the immediate inspiration for writing the poem was the aforementioned fountain (*češma*), built in 1585. Its founder, the husband of Fatma (daughter of Sultan Murad III), was a Croat who converted to Islam to preserve his wealth. For his services to the Janissary corps, he received a Harmanli *waqf*, and his high income allowed him to cover the costs of building several public buildings in the city: The Humpback Bridge, a public bath, a mosque and the fountain (Сакарски, 1930). The development of *češmas* in the empire was closely linked to the cult of water, which originated in the Quran, and rulers became patrons and initiators of such structures. This tradition still persists today (Миков, 2020, p. 95).



Figure 2. Sculpture of the White-Legged Woman (Belonogata) – the symbol of the city – by the road entering Harmanli from the south (from the direction of the border with Turkey).
Photo by Sylwia Siedlecka, 2023

Originally, the fountain took the form of a pavilion supported by columns, with a vaulted ceiling covered with lead or tiles, and benches for travellers (Figure 3), since they were the primary users of the fountain (Миков, 2020, p. 94).

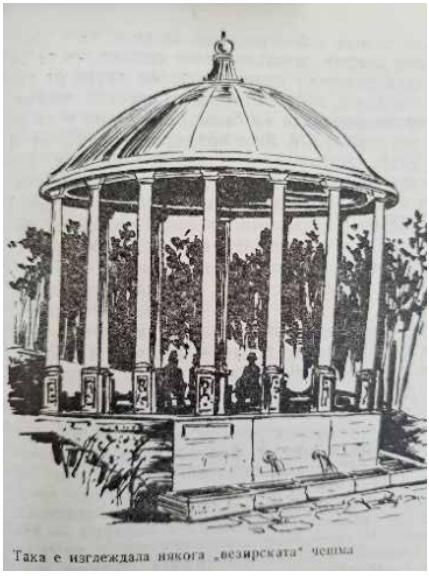


Figure 3. Graphic depicting the original appearance of the fountain in Harmanli. Author: G. Orshakov.
Source: Ангелов (1980, p. 50)

There were also three plaques on it, of which only one remains "Everything lives thanks to water. Benefactor, the venerable Siyavuş Pasha. 1585". The fountain's present form is the result of a reconstruction in the 19th century. The facility is confined to a rectangular platform 8.5 meters wide and 1.14 meters high (Figure 4), formerly used for washing clothes, carpets and rugs.



Figure 4. Spring of the Belonogata in Harmanli today.
Photo by Sylwia Siedlecka, 2023

Its location on a travel route and on the outskirts of the town made it easily subject to vandalism, and as early as 1930, regional expert and local lawyer Marko Sakarsky lamented the condition of the site. In particular, he complained about treasure hunters, who were drawn here by the legend that the fountain hides precious stones left behind by caravans (Сакарски, 1930). According to folk mythology, the buried treasure is watched over by a guardian (Bulgarian: *стопан*, *таласъм*), to whom the role befell as a result of a curse or magic imposed by the owner of the precious goods. A human or animal sacrifice must therefore be made the guardian of the place, hence the many tales of people who fell sick, lost their minds, or died after finding the treasure, and the curse that has followed their descendants for generations (Стойнев, 1994, pp. 158–159). The ill fame of the *imanjars* (treasure hunters) continues in Harmanli to this day due to the cyclical plundering of land in the Belonogata complex by unknown persons, who were indicated as the perpetrators of the damage by an interviewee during Sylvia Siedlecka's field research (С. Николова, personal communication, April 24, 2023). The power of the legend of hidden treasure still stirs the imagination.

The oscillation between acts of degradation and elevation has become a permanent part of the practices associated with this place. The vandalism of the fountain itself began as early as the end of the 19th century, after the unification of Eastern Rumelia (to which Harmanli belonged) with the Principality of Bulgaria. This continued also in the first years after the declaration of independence of Bulgaria (1908). The lead roof of the fountain was stolen, the columns were demolished (Динков, 1989, p. 37). The peculiar status of the site meant that after independence it could not be included in the de-Ottomanisation process of Bulgaria, as was the case, for example, with some mosques, which were demolished or rebuilt and restored to their former status as Orthodox churches. In the colloquial understanding of Gergana's story, the figure of the Turk remains not only a figure of power, but also the fountain's founder and a person who respects the girl's decision. According to one of my (S.S) interlocutors, Prof. Tsonka Kasnakova, director of the Harmanli Historical Museum (Ц. Каснакова, personal communication, April 25, 2023), the figures of Gergana and the bey are still used in the city's image discourse as an example of the coexistence of cultures, respecting the borders of ethnos, and a positive exception in the history of Bulgarian–Turkish relations (Ц. Каснакова, personal communication, April 25, 2023)[7].

When Slaveykov first published the poem *Изворът на Белоногата* [The spring of the Belonogata] in the magazine *Читалище*, the name of the location was mentioned in a comment (Славейков, 1873). This sparked a dispute that continues to this day regarding the fountain's location. Information on this subject can be found in historical and popular science publications, the Historical Museum in Harmanli, the press, and the contemporary netosphere. The contention stems from the fact that Slaveykov uses the name "Bisercha", to which both the residents of Harmanli and the nearby village of Biser claim the right. Most are of the opinion that the village of Bisercha has nothing to do with the village of Biser, which admittedly also has a Gergana's fountain[8], but it was not built until 1876, or three years after the poem was published (Петров, 2010, p. 164). To bind this very place to the legend, in 1960 Mikhail Chaushev created the wall painting *Гергана и везир* [Gergana and the Vizier]. The emotions surrounding this dispute were not only related to the struggle for symbolic capital. In Slaveykov's time, the village of Biser was called Injeli and its 120 houses were inhabited by a purely Turkish population; Bulgarians began to move there only after 1878, i.e., following liberation. Documents mention that the Turks living there were cruel and responsible for the deaths of many Bulgarians from the areas along the Maritsa River, which were referred to as *момино поле* [girl's

[7] At the same time, when I (SS) asked this person who took the measure to wall up Gergana's shadow, she said it was the people of Siyavuş Pasha, although this is not referenced in Slaveykov's work.

[8] "Something between a shrine and a propaganda poster board", wrote Ljuben Hubenov, a journalist for a communist daily, about the fountain in the village of Biser (Хубенов, 1961).

field] (Динков, 1989, p. 39). Founded at the end of the 16th century by Indzhe Isuf, the village was named after him, and a commission in Stara Zagora responsible for changing place names came up with the name Biser (pearl) as a literal translation from Turkish in 1906. Therefore, granting the village of Biser the right to a legend would not only be an anachronism but would also disrupt the narrative of the ethnic "purity" of Gergana and subsequently blur the canonical interpretations of Slaveykov's poem (Динков, 1989, p. 58).

The rivalry between Harmanli and the village of Biser became a matter of state importance in the 1950s. The Ministry of Culture, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Todor Zhivkov himself became involved in resolving the dispute. In 1960, based on the results of archaeological research, the dispute was settled in favour of Harmanli. It was assumed that Bisercha must have been a nearby settlement that no longer existed, called Yutrishtata (from Turkish Old Village) by the locals. From there came the nineteen native Bulgarian families, whose members later moved to Harmanli. Therefore, they were supposedly exclusively Bulgarians, which supports the hypothesis that Gergana came from one of the old Bulgarian families from Harmanli (Динков, 1989, p. 39).

The closure of this case became an opportunity for municipal and state authorities to take action in the local area. In decree no. 1163 of 15 December 1958, the Ministry of Culture recognised the Belonogata spring as a cultural monument of national importance, thus initiating a large-scale project to build a park complex around the fountain which would encapsulate the memory of many eras of Bulgarian history, culminating in the final phase of communism. The original, not fully realised project was a utopian attempt to combine tourism, recreation, sports, education, and patriotism. The motif of the walling up of the girl did not play any role in it[9].

It was a large-scale investment, meant to be impressive due to its proximity to Turkey; it was to attract people using the border crossing in Kapitan Andreevo, truck drivers transporting goods, but also employees of educational institutions, students, and the military. The complex was designed to include a restaurant with a capacity of 200 people, hotel rooms with 20 beds, terraces, space for an orchestra and dancing, a restaurant kitchen, garages, and a warehouse. Next to the restaurant, there was to be a parking lot for 50 cars. Two outdoor swimming pools (one for adults and one for children) were planned in the park, including one for sports competitions with a diving board and bleachers for 1,000 people. The changing rooms were to accommodate 300 people. There were also plans for infrastructure for team games, a lake, and a fountain in the park. A bus stop and parking for 30–40 trucks, 100 motorcycles and 100 bicycles were planned. There was to be a summer theatre for 800 people, shops, administrative and service buildings, as well as a small zoo and an aquarium (Апостолов & Петров, 1961). A camp base was also planned for the recreation

[9] Only the local historian Zlatan Petrov mentions the superstitions of the builders, who needed this story to give more significance to their work (Петров, 2010, p. 164).

and education of communist youth. The garden area was to include a flower seedling base and a conservatory (Желев, 1958). The plants in this project referred to Slaveykov's poem; rejecting the vizier, Gergana praises her beloved garden, listing the names of local Bulgarian flowers.

The planned project included many historical monuments with a regional context. In the place where the legendary tomb of Vukašin was supposed to be located, a bas-relief commemorating the Battle of Maritsa in 1371 was planned. The project also included a visual representation of the scene between Gergana and the vizier, with an appropriate quote from the poem, where Gergana states that the sultan is the ruler of her life, but not of her will. The park was also to feature busts of Petko R. Slaveykov, Rade Ivanov (the first stationmaster of Harmanli, who in 1876 hid the rebel Zakhary Stoyanov and fought for the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule), as well as a bust of Stoyanov himself. Another important element was the commemoration of the nearby execution site of young communists: Ivan Gebeshev (1943), Margarita Gogova, and Kosta Angelov (1935; Апостолов & Петров, 1961).

This enormous investment was accompanied by a political idea. In the project documentation, the Harmanli region is referred to as "the southern gate of our homeland" (Апостолов & Петров, 1961). The Belonogata complex was therefore intended to fulfil an image-building function and convey a clear patriotic message. However, it was also about showcasing the socialist era: the documentation intended that all visitors should see where the socialist world begins (Апостолов & Петров, 1961). In this sense, the semantics of the park was the antithesis of the Turkish political system.

Only a modest part of these plans was accomplished: primarily, the park and the monument to Belonogata with a plaque featuring excerpts from Slaveykov's poem. In the 1960s, a restaurant called Belonogata's Spring was built, as well as a campsite and a motel, which was often used by truck drivers who needed accommodation on their way to and from Istanbul. In the early 1950s, the newspaper *Отечествен фронт* initiated the idea of building a museum dedicated to Bulgarian women in this place; it was to be a materialised story about brave Bulgarian women and Gergana as the first among them (Желев, 1958). Ultimately, Gergana was commemorated in a different way: in 1960, the authorities decided to erect a monument to a woman in 15th-century folk costume from the Harmanli region, designed by Mariana Zabunova, a student at the Academy of Fine Arts, on the cemented square next to the fountain (Figure 5). A plaque with an excerpt from Slaveykov's poem was placed nearby (Figure 6). These initiatives were intended to rekindle the residents' interest in the history of the city and the fountain itself (Димов, 2010, p. 650).

In a brochure about Harmanli published in 1980, historian Georgi Angelov writes: "The town is getting closer and closer to the fountain", adding that it could be reached by bus or on foot. There are always many cars and tour buses in the hotel parking lot, Angelov reports, praising the lush plants in the park and the clearing where one can feel a fresh breeze from the nearby Maritsa but



Figure 5. Monument of Belonogata by Mariana Zabunova.
Photo by Sylwia Siedlecka, 2023



Figure 6. Plaque with an excerpt from Slaveykov's poem.
Photo by Sylwia Siedlecka, 2023

also hear the sounds of cars driving along the road to Istanbul. Angelov draws attention to the stately trees: ash and elm, and the pedestal on which stands a monument to a village girl with a water container in her hands, dressed in traditional costume from the Harmanli region (Ангелов, 1980, pp. 34–35).



Figure 7. The Belonogata Spring restaurant in the album Harmanli (Septemvri, 1989). Photo by Karekin Karekinian.
Source: Харманли: албум (1989)

The restaurant (designed by architect Tencho Dimov) was built in the post-war modernist style (Figure 7), with a large, well-lit upper hall and decorative wall mosaics with folk motifs, spacious terraces and a beautiful view of the wooded slopes. For several decades, the restaurant hosted family celebrations, Sunday dinners, class reunions, and weddings. The park was also a place of local practices related to rites of passage. My (SS) interlocutor, a high-school teacher in Harmanli, recounted how, after a prom, she went with her students to the Gergana monument, and together they welcomed the sunrise (Д. Ангелова, personal communication, April 25, 2023). Poetry readings, outdoor lessons with students, and public recitations took place near the Gergana monument. Held for the first time in June 1967, the municipal holiday of Belonogata became a literary festival known throughout the country within a few years. On the initiative of the Harmanli Municipal Council and the Bulgarian Writers' Union, a state literary prize was established, with the poet Damian Damianov becoming its first winner (Димов, 2010, p. 650).

The interior design of the Belonogata restaurant featured many visual references to Slaveykov's poem. A wooden bicycle with an electrically powered wheel that moved was mounted on the ceiling of the main hall, and a quote

from the poem was displayed on the wheel, spinning in front of the visitors. The restaurant served, among other things, a roll (*pitka*) called "Gergana". Every half hour, a tape recorder played a recording of the voices of the acting duo Yordan Matev and Vancha Doycheva reciting the lines of Gergana and Nikola from Slaveykov's poem. During the summer season, every evening at 10:30 p.m., two artists in traditional costumes performed live, reciting the poem accompanied by folk instruments. Orchestras from all over the country and abroad, including Poland, performed at the facility, as there was only one brass band in Harmanli. When the complex was included among the 100 most important tourist attractions in Bulgaria, it became a destination of school trips from all over the country, and a guide was appointed to show visitors around the facility. The kitchen worked in two shifts, and in order to improve the quality of service, old waiters were replaced by graduates of the technical school of gastronomy in Haskovo. From 1968, they served guests in folk costumes (Спасов, 2020).

The reduction of the original design of the Belonogata park raises questions about how the initial design compares to what was ultimately implemented. The sports and educational facilities were dropped, as were most of the historical commemorations. The park design, whose qualities were supposed to refer to Slaveykov's poem, was retained. Cascading fountains were installed along the stairs leading down from the restaurant to the spring, which is a clear reference to the aquatic symbolism of the fountain itself, located in the central part of the park. Stone slabs with engraved quotations from the poem were also placed along the stairs so that visitors can read them on their way down. The oldest trees were preserved in the park itself, but some of them were probably cut down to create a concrete square around the spring, surrounded by seating areas (Figure 8). In some way, the idea of this new stage-like space referred to the original form of the 16th-century fountain, which served as a place of communication between travellers who rested there and drank water. The communist square was a space for presenting and viewing staged artistic performances and is still used for this purpose today, albeit rarely.

The most important part of this square–stage was, of course, the fountain and the sculpture of Gergana standing on the opposite side – the ideal Bulgarian woman, the only distinctive heroine of this story. Contrary to the tradition dominant in Bulgarian folklore, the legend about her is not a legend about a nursing mother who, although she lost her life, was allowed to feed her child through a hole in the wall for some time. The local story is about a girl who dies before she marries her chosen one, Nikola. Gergana's life-giving power is associated not with motherhood, but with water, which fertilises the soil and sustains the lush vegetation of the park. Additionally, unlike the heroines walled up in bridges and other structures separating foundation sacrifices from the plant and animal world, Gergana's body is laid to rest in the ground because it is her shadow/soul that has been walled up, not her body. Despite this, Gergana gains – derivatively – the social function of a nurturer. This symbolism is reflected in the concept of the park, in the fertilising symbolism of water, but



Figure 8. The square with the monument to Belonogata.
Photo by Sylwia Siedlecka, 2023

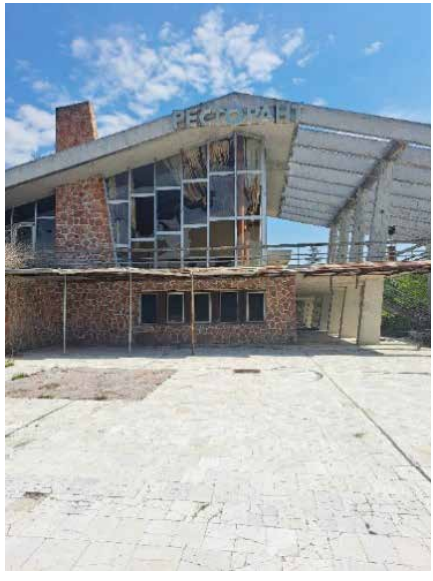


Figure 9. Restaurant in the Belonogata complex; current state.
Photo by Sylwia Siedlecka, 2023



Figure 10. Interior mosaics in the Belonogata complex.
Photo by Sylwia Siedlecka, 2023

also in an institutionalised dimension, evident in the idea of the "nurturing" restaurant The Spring of Belonogata.

In the mid-1980s, along with the erosion of the communist state, the crisis of the Belonogata complex in Harmanli (Figures 9 and 10) followed suit, gradually losing its significance locally and beyond. In the 1980s, the restaurant became the property of the state-owned company Balkanturist, and after a few years, in the wake of the changes of 1989, it passed into the hands of Fuat Gyuven, an entrepreneur from the Turkish minority (allegedly a former agent of the Bulgarian communist secret services). As one of the former restaurant managers writes in his memoirs:

> And then the Balkanturist company, with its management in Haskovo, was sold for a pittance. A Turk became the owner of the Belonogata complex. If he has read the poem, may he take an example from the generosity shown to Gergana by the vizier, who ordered the construction of a fountain, and rebuild the complex so that we, Bulgarians and Turks, can feel joy and pride together. (Спасов, 2020)

The infamous activities of Gyuven, one of the largest investors in the region, are particularly associated with the period of privatisation of state property, which gave rise to the fortunes of the later oligarchs. In conversations about the fate of the restaurant after 1989, residents rarely mentioned Gyuven's name when talking about the sale of the property, saying instead: "The Turk who bought the restaurant never shows up here."

The restaurant gained a bad reputation in the 1990s as a meeting place for criminal groups. Its erosion steadily continued: broken windows and doors, dismantled equipment, crumbling walls. The locals ascribed the condition of the building to the investor's ill will and his desire for revenge on the Belonogata complex, an ironic reference to the former glory of the place and a mockery of

the founding narrative about Gergana and the vizier: in post-transformation Bulgaria, a Turkish investor, as the ruler of capital, becomes the winner, mocking the "southern gate of Bulgaria".

The narratives about the current state of this place are therefore marked by humiliation, still framed by Slaveykov's poem. A discussion was started on the local internet forum "Harmanli in photographs" about the deplorable state of the restaurant and the "Turk" responsible for it. A drawing of the Belonogata spring from 1585 was also posted. There were also comments linking this issue to the broader trend of foreigners buying up Bulgarian land near the border. One forum user wrote: "Various Turks and Russians are buying up plots of land, some are building mosques, others tourist complexes and whatever else, and we stand by and watch dumbstruck, waiting for them to buy us out to the ground??? And then we will be their free labour force… with our lack of prudence and infantilism" (Tiholova, 2023).

While the restaurant and its parking lot remain in the hands of a Turkish entrepreneur, the park adjacent to the restaurant, along with the spring and the Belonogata monument, was transferred to the municipality of Harmanli in 2022. This decision was made after many years of efforts by some residents, especially activist and city councillor Svetlana Nikolova, who repeatedly informed the Ministry of Culture about the deplorable condition of this site. It took four ministers of culture to take an interest in the matter. Perhaps not insignificant is the fact that the last of these was Haskovo-born Atanas Atanasov, a representative of the democratic party Продължаваме Промяната [We Continue the Change] (Svetlana Nikolova also ran for the National Assembly under its banner in the 2024 parliamentary elections). In September 2022, the decision to lease the land to the municipality was announced at the Belonogata spring. Those present included the Minister of Culture, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, Asen Vasilev, who is also a native of Haskovo. The decision also became part of the party's programme, under the slogan #Change, to correct erroneous administrative decisions that had hampered investment in sites with an unregulated legal status for years (Продължаваме Промяната, 2022). Harmanli Mayor Maria Kirkova was absent from the ceremony. This move could be seen as a political statement: the municipality has supported the centre-right GERB party for years, and the official website's cultural calendar does not list the "Eyes of Belonogata" festival, which has been held at the fountain for the past few years, nor any other event at the former complex.

The municipality's lease of the park offered hope, albeit tempered by fears that the park's renovation could turn out to be an empty election promise. The city is facing challenges such as unemployment and strained relations with the Roma population living in two neighbourhoods (including the impoverished district of Malamar Dere, which has a growing crime rate). A well-known problem in Harmanli is that Roma sex workers bring their clients to the fountain area on the outskirts of the city, which is located near a road where drivers can be flagged down.

The fountain is still in use, and local elderly people regularly fetch water from it in plastic containers. The water is not certified, but they believe it has health benefits (С. Николова, personal communication, April 24, 2023). The dilapidated monument doesn't attract many tourists. However, when I visited in spring 2023, I noticed a crew reinforcing the plaza near the car park. This may have been the city government's first initiative in years to restore the site.

Harmanli is home to Bulgaria's largest open refugee camp, which has sparked periodic protests by residents distressed by the presence of Syrians and Afghans on the streets. Protesters are calling for the camp to be turned into a closed one, and for the city's security to be strengthened. Currently, this service is provided by a private company. Residents have written to the National Assembly requesting protection from the Ministry of the Interior (Кръстева, 2023). Meanwhile, refugees usually do not consider Harmanli as a destination: their goal is to move on to Western Europe, mainly Germany.

The camp, situated in a former military unit, has become the subject of a film and scholarly articles, including critical pieces on the "hunting" of refugees by the town's residents (Ilieva, 2022). There have also been integrative initiatives, such as a concert by the Pleven Philharmonic Orchestra at the camp and educational activities for children. Svetlana Nikolova, an activist, deputy director of a vocational school in Harmanli and literature teacher, told me that she had come to the Belonogata spring with her students (50% of whom are Roma) and refugee children in order to introduce them to Slaveykov's poem (С. Николова, personal communication, April 24, 2023).

The Eyes of Belonogata Festival, which has been held for several years, is the brainchild of Nikolova and other members of the community. The event features recitals, performances by folklore groups, and *kolo* dances (Figure 11). However, some residents have criticised the project, accusing those involved of being amateurs, which is inappropriate for a place of such high cultural status.

In 2021, the short film *По стъпките на Белоногата* (In the footsteps of Belonogata; XNEWS, 2021) premiered at the Belonogata festival in Harmanli. It was created by employees of a local library together with residents of Harmanli. The film was sponsored by local entrepreneurs, and only the cameraman was paid; the rest of the crew worked for free. Paulina Veselinova, who works at the local library, directed the production. Svetlana Nikolova wrote the script, and the cast were amateurs from Harmanli. The only exception among the amateur actors was a 19-year-old acting student who played the character of Gergana; a local firefighter was cast as the vizier. The film not only depicts the poem's plot but also introduces the circumstances of the work's creation, emphasising Slaveykov's ties to the city. It also presents the official interpretation of the work by the director of the Historical Museum, who identified Bisercha as Harmanli, thus highlighting that the spring is a part of the city's heritage (Михайлов, 2021). According to the creators, the film can only be viewed at the fountain using a smartphone and QR code, but a two-minute trailer is available online (XNEWS, 2021).



Figure 11. Eyes of Belonogata Festival in Harmanli.
Source: Svetlana Nikolova's private collection

Thanks to civic initiatives united by the figure of Svetlana Nikolova, Belonogata Park now exists as a place of social practice. Nikolova is proud to belong to one of Harmanli's oldest families. In 2006, she returned to the city after an extended stay abroad, and she stresses that although she has wanted to leave Harmanli again many times, "something keeps her here". When asked why she devotes so much energy to the park and its memory despite her many unpleasant experiences there, Nikolova speaks of her identification with Gergana and the blood ties that supposedly connect them. Through her activism, she embodies the independence and agency of the legendary girl. Nikolova's perspective on women's agency is influenced by Slaveykov's poem, which she sees as a testament to this concept. On the other hand, in the folk tales of walled-up girls, Nikolova sees a need for social justification for the sudden deaths of young women. In her opinion, these kinds of legends were intended to provide meaning in the face of premature death. Nikolova also stresses that the poem itself does not make it clear who the foremen were who walled-up Gergana[10]. However, she has no doubt that, given the importance of the building, the ultimate sacrifice was necessary (С. Николова, personal communication, April 24, 2023).

Nikolova is one of the few people reviving the symbolic meanings associated with the Belonogata complex. She organises lessons here that introduce students to Slaveykov's work and the local ecosystems, including the birds, trees and traditional Bulgarian flowers that are often forgotten nowadays. In 2022,

[10] In all likelihood, the fountain was reconstructed by Bulgarians in the 19th century, as evidenced by the form and ornaments, which resist Western influences and were already characteristic of this type of Ottoman construction at that time (Миков, 2020, pp. 95–96). I have not encountered information on who might have built the original structure in the 16th century, however.

on her initiative, an ash tree near Belonogata Spring was given the status of a natural monument. According to local lore, this is where Slaveykov supposedly began writing his poem. Birdhouses were also installed on the surrounding trees. However, this hasn't changed local customs, with bonfires still being lit and rubbish still being left behind after late-night parties.

Most of my interviewees believed that the fountain and the Belonogata complex have gradually been losing their status for the past three decades. This was attributed not only to the changes since 1989, but also to the evolving role of the locality in a globalised world. Public education about the fountain usually takes place elsewhere because it is avoided due to its bad reputation. Despite there being no lessons dedicated to local history in the high school curriculum, one of my interlocutors, who worked as a history teacher at the Neofit Rilsky High School in Harmanli for forty years, taught field lessons at the fountain some 40–50 times during her career. She incorporated the Belonogata fountain into lessons on national revival, also encouraging students to perform dramatisations of the poem.

Popularisation of knowledge about the spring, which is one of the key elements of the city's historical image, is also taking place at the local Historical Museum (Д. Ангелова, personal communication, April 25, 2023). This spirit also prevails in what I heard from the museum's director, Tsonka Kasnakova, who is also the rector of Stara Zagora University and the author of history textbooks for fifth and sixth graders. These students are introduced to the ballad of the walled-up woman during literature lessons. In her interview with me, Kasnakova emphasises what shapes children's worldviews most, relating it to her field research as a social educator in regions with ethnically mixed populations. According to Kasnakova, the key factor is not so much the school and the knowledge acquired there, but rather the family environment, which shapes beliefs more profoundly than anything else. Kasnakova uses the concept of "ancestral energy", which is passed from generation to generation. In this sense, traditional culture (and within it, small family and regional communities) is one of the pillars of individual development. In areas with mixed populations, it is necessary to transform people's thinking and influence family and ethnic values through stories that unite different ethnic groups. One example of such a story is Slaveykov's poem, which symbolises a relationship that respects ethnic, religious, and cultural boundaries (Ц. Каснакова, personal communication, April 25, 2023). However, taking the indeterminate places in Slaveykov's poem into account provides perspective on the multifaceted and often tension-filled drama of coexisting ethnos in cross-border areas. This drama is evident today as much as in the author's time and is a tangible living reality manifested in the refugee crisis, the threat of "foreign capital", and the city's economic collapse.

Interpretations of Slaveykov's *Изворът на Белоногата* [The spring of Belonogata] (Славейков, 1873) point to the symbolic orders in which the various narratives are anchored. The aporias of local memory are manifested in practices centred around the Belonogata spring. Over time, these practices have been expressed through the alternating acts of elevation and degradation to

which the site has been subjected. During the communist period, the complex became a project combining an idyllic vision of a natural retreat with the dynamic nature of an expressway. In recent decades, the site's neglect has been institutionalised. Therefore, the city of Harmanli's temporary lease of the complex brings it back into the field of institutional visibility and possible real and symbolic development. There is also some hope in the application for funding for the restoration of the Spring of Belonogata that was submitted to the "INTERREG Bulgaria-Turkey 2021–2027" program by the Harmanli Municipality, at the request of Councillor Svetlana Nikolova.

Meanwhile, the dispute over the location of the original spring continues: Harmanli residents call their fountain Big Gergana, and Biser residents call their fountain Little Gergana (Х. Христов, 2014) (Figure 12). During my stay in Harmanli for the 55th anniversary of the Historical Museum, the director mentioned this in her opening speech. She devoted considerable time to Slaveykov's work and the character of Gergana, emphasising – with a smile, but firmly – that the work is part of Harmanli's heritage. This public gesture, in the presence of, among others, representatives of the village of Biser and the Harmanli municipality, shows that although the dispute has moved into a conventionalised formula, it remains a self-identifying element, and the legend of Gergana serves contemporary local interests in the city.



Figure 12. "Little Gergana" in the village of Biser. Photo by Katrin Naydenova. Source: https://aquaiarte.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/DSC06676-11-scaled.jpg, retrieved July 21, 2022

A contradiction exists in the practices associated with the Belonogata spring, stemming from the high symbolic status of Slaveykov's poem and the low status of the now-degraded site. Although the site remains an important element of the city's identity, it is alternately eroding and undergoing reconstruction. While the complex's out-of-the-way location facilitates uncontrolled decay, this is not enough of an explanation.

In a catalogue created for the 2013 European Union-supported rural revitalisation program, the Harmanli municipality lists sites with revitalisation potential on a three-level scale (medium, low, or high). Belonogata's medieval spring is presented as having low historical and cultural value, low potential for tourism and research (!), and low self-identification value for the local community. It only received a score of "medium" in the rubric devoted to "exposure possibilities". At the same time, structures from the Ottoman period are valued highly, with the so-called Humpback Bridge in the city centre being a prime example (Спиридонов & Рафаилова, 2013, pp. 10–11). Subsequent years confirmed the direction of investment in the city. In 2022, the Humpback Bridge was restored as part of cross-border cooperation between the Harmanli municipality and the Turkish city of Edirne (the Bulgarian side was the main investor). During the opening ceremony – attended by the city officials, two consuls from Edirne, and a representative of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – speeches were given that used metaphors describing the bridge as a symbol of communication, mediation, and cooperation. Nowadays, this has become vividly apparent in real life: on the bridge, Harmanli residents pass migrants from Syria and Afghanistan living in the camp. Recently, illegal graffiti in Arabic has appeared here (the slogan is neutral, according to one of my interviewees) (С. Николова, personal communication, April 24, 2023).

The bridge has risen in importance through modern practices. Its location in the city centre has probably played a role in this, as made apparent by the contrasting situation of the Gergana fountain, which requires a special trip. The bridge, rather than the fountain, has become the embodiment of cross-border mediation. Together with the renovated building of the Historical Museum, it sends a clear symbolic message. The fact that water no longer flows under the Humpback Bridge in the former Harmanli riverbed is irrelevant here. After the flood, which also flooded the nearby Historical Museum, the river was redirected to a more distant location. The tragedy of Belonogata which unfolded at the fountain in Harmanli continues to evade a soothing, symbolic closure. This is also reflected in the current state of the physical setting of the drama: Belonogata Park and the spring are falling into disrepair and have been pushed beyond the sphere of social visibility.

The Basic Module. Non-mothers. The Modernist Version and Its Late Continuations

Wisdom and Muse

The historical drama Зидари [Masons] (1902) by Petko Todorov, one of the most prominent modernists (Атанасов, 2004), and a member of the elitist group of Bulgarian modernists, or the so-called "Thought Four" (Dąbek-Wirgo-

wa, 1973; 1980, pp. 132–138), is at the antipodes of the ethical and ontological orientation represented by Slaveykov's poem and related cultural texts. The work is set in the era of Ottoman rule and revolves around the construction of a temple. The predicaments stem from an internal crisis that aligns with Girard's model of mimetic rivalry and an external crisis involving attacks by bands of outlaws. In Todorov's work, which explores the rivalry between two men competing for social prestige and the affection of the same woman, it is not the fiancé but rather the rejected suitor who delivers Rada as the foundation sacrifice (Иванова-Гиргинова, 2010). The temple builders carry out the murder, believing that they have the wisdom of an ancient custom on their side. However, they misinterpret this custom according to the Christological key (Донева, 2009).

> Dragan: God wishes to test our faith first; force us to redeem our sins, and then to pour the foundation of his name in the healthy place! [...] He wants sacrifice! Sacrifice to redeem all. A sacrifice of a human being – to strengthen our fair. [...]
> Master Braino: When there is not unity between the bricklayers, a sacrifice is needed to unify them.
> Dragan: So it is. This is the law of bricklayers since the dawn of time. A sacrifice is a test from God: it gathers, soothes, unifies. It holds the foundations and the buildings. (П. Ю. Тодоров, 1968, pp. 133–134)

And yet, against all expectations, they fail. While they manage to finish the church by the deadline, it does not integrate the community. The temple is seen as the grave of Rada and the wretched avenger Donch, who – as befits Judas – hung himself from the cross crowning the dome. Thus, from the community's perspective, the heroine died unproductively; her death did not give rise to new forms of life or to causal, communicative energy. Magic proved ineffective. Only Christo, the girl's beloved, dreams desperately that he will one day find her "shadow" – her soul. He sees himself as a builder of a free world based on "true values" and considers his murdered fiancée a source of future inspiration.

> Christo: [...] I have nobody, I want nobody. I will set off into the distance to seek Rada's shadow. I will gather stones somewhere and she will teach me how to build a church with self-confidence… A new church, my church! (П. Ю. Тодоров, 1968, p. 176)

In interpreting the artist's spiritual dilemmas, Todorov does not resort to the Luciferian symbolism typical of Neo-Romanticism. Instead, he uses the image of a female soul as a personification of Divine Wisdom (Sophia), imbuing her with the characteristics of a Christianised muse (Brzozowska, 2015, pp. 171–248). This symbol engages not the sense of sight, but of hearing. In order to capture the quiet voice, the artist must reject the conformism that results from collectivism and undertake the solitary work of a titan (Пенчев, 2003). Only then will Rada's hushed whisper, inaudible to others, perform its intimate advisory function.

In Todorov's drama, the girl, who is supposed to fulfil post mortem the role of mystical Sophia (Evdokimov, 1991), deviates from this ideal during her lifetime.

She is beautiful and attracts the lustful gazes of men. She is sincerely devoted to her fiancé. However, she is also quite abrasive and obsessed with getting married as soon as possible, yet the wedding date rests on the church's completion. Fighting fiercely for her right to love, she in reality remains a person who is not free. Chained to a single obsessive desire, she is fully subjugated to the community's norms, up until the tragic finale. Before and after death, Rada is two different characters united by the moment of transition: for one, it is the end of life; for the other, it is the beginning.

Theatrical productions of the play *Зидари* have generally failed to reflect Todorov's subtle intentions and have often exacerbated dissonances. Of the relatively few reviews, only a few provide information on stage solutions for the walling-up motif. In a 1908 review, an author publishing under the pen name Johannan gives details of the scene depicting Rada's demise: "the miserable girl arrives, bursts into the church, where the falling scaffolding drowns out the voice of horror and crushes her young, graceful body, loved by all" (Johannan, 1908). Other reviews did not touch on this topic (e.g., Ангеловъ, 1908; cf. Народен театър "Иван Вазов", n.d.), instead focusing on the charm of the local colour in the play (И. Иванова, 1990). On the other hand, the respected literary and art critic and co-founder of the first wave of Bulgarian modernism, Krastio Krastev, discusses the topic more broadly in his 1919 article *"Зидари" на сцената на Народния театър* ["Masons" on the stage of the National Theatre] (Кръстевъ, 1919). In it, he praises the 1908 production, when Pencho Slaveykov was the theatre's director. He criticises the 1918 production to the point of not even gracing the director Sava Ognianov with a mention (Кортенска, 1988). He accuses him of misinterpreting the characters, of unintended comic effects, and of obscuring the seriousness of the main problem of national discord in the drama: "I think I understand why the actors acted inappropriately. It was probably due to the uncouth audience members at the National Theatre who laughed at the most serious and tragic moments in the play, such as when the scaffolding collapsed" (Кръстевъ, 1919, p. 2).

The descriptions of the behaviour of the audience, amused by the scene of the "construction disaster" and insensitive to the drama of the perishing girl, are accompanied by Kristev's positive remarks on the role of Rada played by Rayana Talinskaya as a modern woman. Further on, however, the argument of the father of Bulgarian modernism is marred when he reveals the conservatism hidden behind his praise: the overt and possessive love of Rada is, in his opinion, alien to the affection and habits of a "modest, pure and innocent Bulgarian girl" (Кръстевъ, 1919, p. 2). Thus, Kristev makes the heroine of the drama an outsider who violates social norms.

The issue of the norm remains important also in the later period. The play was performed at the National Theatre in Sofia in the 1981/82 season, in an era of strict communist censorship, and it was met with harsh criticism. Ekaterina Vasileva-Petrova accused the creators (dir. Vili Tsankov, stage design Svetlana Tsvetkova) of frigid rituality, and of employing artificial symbols and meta-

phors. She sharply criticised the stage setting (the wardrobe-houses filling the stage resembled, in her opinion, iconostases, topped with a bovine skull in place of a cross, which evoked demonic connotations), but above all she condemned the ahistorical thinking of the show's creators (Василева-Петрова, 1982). In her opinion, it showed in the neglect of the depth of the folk concept of sacrifice and its replacement with simple tricks, such as the ceremonial roof falling from the sky immediately after Rada's death. It seems that in contesting this aesthetic, the reviewer was, above all, rejecting the director's suggested connotations of folk myth with a naive understanding of Christianity. The critic sided with the myth, but the issue of cognitive dissonance stemming from the inability to distinguish between these two layers of sacrificial ritual remained unrecognised in the 1980s in reflection on Todorov's drama (Тенев, 1984, pp. 34–53).

Pneumatophora

Over a century after Todorov's drama, the motif of the interpenetration of the material and the spiritual reappears in Viktoria Beshliiska's popular historical novel, *Глина* [Clay] (Бешлийска, 2020), for which the topos of the walled-up woman (non-mother) is foundational. Although the author subjected it to a significant metamorphosis – the artistic creation in the novel is a clay vessel – the paradigm of transubstantiation, or the transformation of the female body and spirit into the final product of men's hands, remains.

The novel's collective protagonist is the inhabitants of a 17th-century Bulgarian village who make a living from pottery. When robbers appear in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire and violence and chaos escalate, the artisans decide to go to the sultan with a gift so beautiful that it will surprise him and help secure his guarantee that they can continue their itinerant trade. Veliko, a talented potter, is the originator of this expedition. As a child, he was saved by an herbalist folk healer who came to the village. Zevna healed him, but her actions indirectly contributed to the death of his parents. They fell into a mountain river while returning from the sacred springs of physical and spiritual strength. The orphaned boy grew up in difficult conditions but became a strong man. Thanks to the kindness of one of the best pottery masters, he learned the deepest secrets of the trade. He returned to his native village as a grown man, marked with the stamp of uniqueness.

Besides Zevna and Veliko, two other protagonists have the status of outsiders in the depicted world: the healer's daughter Zhara and a young rebel Boyko, to whom Zhara had given her heart before becoming passionate about Veliko. They are accepted but kept at a distance. Thus, Beshliiska evoked the same trivial motif of the love triangle that Petko Todorov had made the centre of the disaster in the drama *Зидари.* However, these themes are more subtle in her work. The psychological portrayal of the characters is more believable than in Todorov's work. The motivations behind the characters' actions are

complex and not very obvious. Quasi-biblical and extra-biblical mysticism reveals its depth when archaic beliefs are embodied in the characters' personal experience.

Beshliiska's novel is linked to Todorov's drama by the socio-historical motivation of events. In the context of "Turkish bondage" (Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2011, pp. 190–197), this motivation is characterised by growing violence and the threat of the community losing the basis of its existence. As in *Зидари*, the well-being of the collective is the guiding value of the characters in the novel, including Veliko, who is eager to create a beautiful vessel that will win the favour of the sultan for the village. After several attempts, he finally succeeds, but only through an intimate relationship with Zhara, whose name symbolises fire and thus the Spirit (Paprocki, 2012). Enthralled by the artist's inner strength, the girl impulsively goes to his house to say goodbye and give him a talisman to help him overcome any obstacles on his trip to Istanbul. The physical intimacy between the two may be triggered by the talisman's enchanting influence. The sexual act, which is a liminal situation in the girl's life, is poetically presented by Beshliiska through aquatic metaphors (the elements of blood and water). It is preceded by a caress initiated by Veliko, which brings to mind the biblical description of the creation of man, when God breathed spirit into the clay:

> Breathe!
> drew in air and slowly released it from his mouth into her parted lips, as if he wanted to give her breath, and then kissed her for a long time. She faltered as the fire that entered through her throat ignited in her belly, engulfed her knees and burned her feet. When he felt the girl become as heavy as a piece of wet clay in his hands, Veliko bent down, took her in his arms, and carried her to the bed. (Бешлийска, 2020, p. 193)

Fire, air, water and earth participate in the act of love, which first leads to the mystical union of the two, and then becomes the beginning of the girl's semi-alchemical transmutation into a pottery work of art. The depth of emotions experienced by them both makes Zhara a source of inspiration for Veliko, but also a helpless clump of clay in his hands. Dazzled by his lover's beauty, he creates a beautiful vat, mapping the lines of Zhara's body (Бешлийска, 2020, pp. 196–198), and then gives his own breath to the interior of this vessel (Бешлийска, 2020, p. 198), convinced that his every gesture is guided by God himself. In the novel, the only witness to this ritual is Boyko, who peeps in on them. The community has no idea about what is going on. Perhaps that is why no one associates Zhara's sudden illness with Veliko's creative act, and Veliko begins to understand what has happened only after returning from his successful mission to Istanbul, when he discovers that his beloved is fading away. He then realises that he may have inadvertently performed a magical ritual[11] that put Zhara in harm's way, a fact he confesses to the girl's mother:

[11] Usually, it was a woman who involuntarily performed acts of magic (Douglas, 2007, p. 137–139)

> I went down to the workshop, took a lump of clay and sat down at the wheel. And as God is my witness, aunt Zevna, he guided me as I was forming it. I only remember… – he paused to look into the eyes of Zhara's mother and let her see the terror in his own gaze: – I only remember that when making the vat, I formed its interior as I memorized her shape. I left a part of Zhara's body inside, in the devil's vat.
>
> […]
>
> If this is all, she is not in danger. You did not take her shadow, did you? Are you certain this is all? – the healer asked, and her lips shivered in anticipation of the answer.
>
> I do not know… When I finished the vat and put it up to dry, I blew into its throat. It was the same breath I had shared with Zhara the night before. (Бешлийска, 2020, pp. 328–329)

Thus, the awe-inspiring topos of a woman who undergoes magical incorporation into the work of male hands comes to life in the consciousness of the characters. In this case, it is not the taking of the measure from Zhara's body that proves fateful, but the transfer of her breath, and thus her spirit, into the vat[12]. The clay vessel, bringing deliverance from oppression to the community, can fulfil its function by combining the talents of a man with the feminine energy flowing from love. And yet, it is impossible to see this paradigm as Christlike because, unlike Jesus dying on the cross, Zhara seems to be unaware of her part in the sacrifice to the end.

Tormented by guilt, Veliko decides to give up his attempts to save the girl. On the urging of the healer, he entrusts her to Boyko's care, hoping the boy's love will heal her. Boyko's efforts do not bring about a change for the better. The situation becomes more complicated when Zhara is kidnapped to the sultan's harem. The sultan covets her beauty, which inspired the creator of the "devil's vat".

The girl's life for the common good – this is how the writer actualises another topos of the kidnapped woman circulating in Bulgarian culture, feeding the myth of Turkish captivity, which is foundational for the national canon (Аретов, 1999; 2006, pp. 55–68). Beshliiska, thus paying tribute to the collective imaginaries of Bulgarians, seeks new relationships between the phantasms revitalised in Beshliiska's work. Key in this context is the attitude of the girl's mother towards the tragedy. The healer, equipped with extraordinary skills and an understanding of the forces that govern the natural world, magic, and divine miracles, reluctantly accepts her own powerlessness in the face of fate. What is more, she has a painful sense of losing her previous bond with Zhara – of severing the umbilical cord that connected them. Her daughter's body, still alive and inspiring sympathy, becomes alienated. She seems to already belong to an-

[12] As is well known, the idea that the human soul is linked to the breath, rooted not only in Bulgarian folk tradition (Стойнев, 1994, pp. 105–106), was common in antiquity and the Middle Ages. It was mentioned by diverse thinkers, such as Porphyrius and St. Augustine, and formed the basis of Christian and pseudo-Christian demonology (Lombardi, 2004, pp. 153–156) and alchemy (von Franz, 2015).

other dimension of reality. The healer finds sense in the girl's transformation and she hopes that Veliko's theurgical power will allow her mystical existence to continue. She commands him to keep working, to replicate Zhara's beauty time and again, and to extend her life in the clay objects infused with the breath of their love, so that they can bring joy to their future users.

> – Veliko, there is nothing I can do. You cannot bring her back, either… Listen, son! As long as her breath is in you, throw the clay! Put a part of her in each vat and each bowl. Leave the pain with the tears and pour only love into the clay. Your hands that hold the clay are a temple. And God is in there too, child. Throw the clay to keep the fire alight. Throw it to keep the world alive. Throw it, so that Zhara can stay in the world. (Бешлийска, 2020, p. 330)

It seems that the clay vessels do not need Zhara's body for their magical existence; they need her spirit. They become her pneumatophoroi (Domańska, 2016). Yet the whisperer considers the matter closed only when the girl's corpse, abandoned by Ottoman soldiers, is found. She entrusts it to the local soil and then brings Veliko back to the village to perform his work from this very material. Thus, the girl becomes both the humic and spiritual leaven of the beauty materialising under his hands.

Although Veliko called his vat "devilish" (given its complicated form due to its many mouthpieces), the Luciferian character of his work, insinuated initially in the piece, is challenged. Beshliiska is preoccupied with the problem of the creative man's imitation of the Creator – long embedded in European culture – but leads her reader toward a compromising view from the perspective of Christian theology of work. It is about the motivation for one's actions.

Alexandre Ganoczy, in his *Der schöpferische Mensch und die Schöpfung Gottes* [The creative human and the creation of God] (Ganoczy, 1976, 1982), points to two recurring motifs in the Bible: the anthropocentric orientation of God's creative acts and the theocentric orientation of human creativity that God desires. Man, participating in the process of creating the world, realises a distorted praxis whenever he is motivated by the lust for possession and dominion rather than love and service (Ganoczy, 1982, pp. 186–192). Within this meaning, Veliko chooses the correct praxis. Interpreted in terms of rationality and magic at the same time (Tambiah, 2007, pp. 127–177), his work, conditioned by multifaceted mystical participation, flows from the most ethically appropriate motivation, which is love and the desire to submit to God's will.

Thus, Veliko (the embodiment of Master Manole) is vindicated and fully cleared of the charge of faithlessness in the pages of Beshliiska's novel. The girl, on the other hand, remains a breath and clay in his hands, but from the perspective of the celestial powers she is a hidden spark that belongs to the Sun. The writer does not elaborate on this truly Kabbalistic motif (Scholem, 2020), closing the novel's narrative with the Moon's ironic statement that these are "just pots". Nor does her goal seem to be the popularisation of neo-animistic concepts, but rather an attempt to poetise a mentally distant world, once open

to the spiritual aspect of every being (including the products of human hands). Symbolically placing its fate in the hands of the chosen ones – holders of esoteric knowledge – Beshliiska's potential beneficiaries are all human beings, sensitive to beauty and capable of transcending the boundaries of collective rituals to trust the intimate space of human hearts.

The Humic Basis of the World

The modernism of the early 20th century, however, also brought a more critical interpretation of folk myth and its cultural transgressions. Anton Strashimirov, in his 1906 historical drama *Над безкръстни гробове* [On graves without crosses] (other title: *Лобната скала* [Execution Rock]) (Страшимиров, 1906/1907a, 1906/1907b, 1906/1907c, 1906/1907d), took up a polemic with Todorov's *Зидари* (Попилиев, 2008, pp. 83–97). Creating an image of essentialist femininity, he used topoi of Orthodox-folk culture in such a way as to bring out their ambiguity. Although Strashimirov exposed the mechanisms by which women are objectified in patriarchal societies, he did not actually give them a voice.

In his work, the writer refers to the legend of the martyrdom of forty virgins on the Kaliakra Peninsula (cf. *История и легенди за нос Калиакра*, n.d.; Гюзелев, 1981), to the folk myth of the bride of the Sun, and to the topos of the walling up of a woman. The latter is encoded, among other things, in the title metaphor of "unmarked graves with crosses" and the frequently recurring lexeme "walling up" in the characters' statements, e.g., in the sense of persisting in resistance to the enemy (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 21), literally understood as hiding (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 45) or struggling against a curse (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 30).

The first semantically important "unmarked grave" in the drama is the grave of the mother of the antagonised brothers, one of whom (at the time of the action, master builder Nikola) had seduced the fiancée of the other (Georgi, now a hermit and lighthouse keeper) many years earlier. Cursing the future church builder's obsession with greatness and the wrongs he had caused, the mother decided to go into hiding and spend her life near her wronged son. After her death, the culprit stole her corpse from the cemetery and secretly walled-up it at the highest point of the rocky peninsula as the foundation of a lighthouse (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 24). The elevated female body, which is the site of the emanation of light, evokes the Gnostic tradition, where the female aspect of the deity personifies the "first idea" at the root of all things (Quispel, 1988, pp. 118–127). However, despite alluding to Gnostic ideas popular in modernist literature, Strashimirov does not explore the semantics of this trope in the drama; he only hints at it. For the recipient, after all, this necropersona (Domańska, 2017) becomes a symbol of strength, flowing from the depths of a woman's heart capable of sacrifice.

The second case of walling up concerns the bodies of girls liberated from the hands of invaders. After the trauma they endured hiding under the bloodied bodies of their neighbours, they actually seem to belong to Thanatos from the moment they appear on stage (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 37). Nikola, the Hermit's stepbrother and formerly the father of one of the girls, is the one who, in the face of the advancing invasion, decides on their fate: he suggests collective suicide as a way to escape dishonour. He is an unfulfilled artist whose ambition grows under the influence of renewed rivalry with his brother. He dreams ever more frantically of building a temple that is not material but mystical. The skills of a craftsman are not enough for him: "[…] I have spent my whole life… crumbling rocks, building temples, and joining stones with mud and lime. God, with mud and lime, I joined stones. Grant me, Almighty One, your will to erect an immaterial temple – to create life through death" (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 43).

He wishes to see himself as a co-creator of God's supernatural work, but his understanding of the Creator is only seemingly grounded in Christianity. For this reason, he does not hesitate to send frightened girls leaping into the abyss after leading them into pseudo-mystical ecstasy. During this time, they are likened to virgins surrounded by a halo of light and wedded to the Sun. Soon after, feverish and in a state of quasi-prophetic rapture, Nikola predicts their return as swans. As is well known, in modernist literature these birds symbolise, among other things, the purity and fullness of mystical experience (Podraza-Kwiatkowska, 1975, pp. 182–192). Adopting the attitude of a mediator between God and people, Nikola thereby prophesies a miracle. After the departure of the Tatars, however, he dies, the Orthodox church is in ruins, and the people are slaughtered. The sea washes the corpses of virgins onto the coastal rocks; the whiteness of their bodies reminds the survivors of the prophecy. However, Strashimirov disrupts this allegorical interpretation. For the girls' bodies are already tarnished, entwined with other non-human forms of life: "their hair entangled with sea grasses" (Страшимиров, 2008, pp. 48–49). They seem to have succumbed to necrotic transformation. They no longer belong to the Sun; they belong to the Earth. The world given over to death loses its contours.

The drama has two endings. The first, briefly presented here, foretells total disaster. The second was written in 1929 (thirteen years after the drama was first published) and takes the form of a short two-page epilogue. On the "rock of execution", where the tragedy took place, stands a bustling monastery. The centre of the pilgrimage rituals is a cavern with an opening overlooking the abyss. The graves of the girls are located at the foot of the cavern. We do not know the name of the main facilitator of the cult, who weaves his bond-forming narrative, full of misrepresentations. Nevertheless, his "mummy face" is a reference to the necrotic dimension. There is no certainty as to who this man is: the former Hermit, or perhaps a naive disciple of Nikola who looks up to his master. In his teachings, this monk focuses not on the martyrs, but on the monastery's patron, Master Nikola, who is now referred to as a servant of God. He is the one who, as if by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saved first the girls' earthly lives and then their

eternal lives as well: "children of Christ, pierce the rock with your bodies, discover the light of God and unite yourselves with it" (Страшимиров, 2008, p. 51).

A careful reader of the drama will experience cognitive dissonance here because, in the second ending, the false legend and the hagiographers' lies triumph. What in Todorov's *Зидари* remains within the realm of oneiric potentiality, grounded in trust in a brilliant individual, is realised in *Над безкръстните гробове*, but in a form marked by demonic traits. The "immaterial church" is created as a result of the elevation of what had grown in a dark place of the master's heart. The artist is presented as an effective individual, but with misdirected drives. Trapped in the rocks and walled-up in stone crevices, the bodies of the swan girls form the humic foundation of the male world, much like the once "burning" body of the protagonists' mother (Rogowska-Stangret, 2021). In Strashimirov's work, these corpses play no role other than as neutralised objects of male historical necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003). Although they are not worshiped, they have not been desacralised either, and they still evoke *tremendum et fascinosum*. At the same time, however – somewhat against the modernist fascination with the figure of the free male genius artist – by virtue of a paradox, he is presented as a subject dependent both on an essentialistically understood femininity that is weak but possesses metaphysical power, and on the collective, which can ultimately be the beneficiary of his actions and give them the appropriate rank. In the end, everything turns out to be a social game and only the death of the victims is irreversible (Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2022).

At the end of the 20th century, this kind of intuition would be confirmed by another text, exposing the mechanisms of violence linked to cultural collusion. I am referring to a short poem by Konstantin Pavlov titled *Българо-вавилонско стихотворение* [Bulgarian-Babilonian poem], which I quote here in its entirety:

Майстор Маноле,
Аз
ще построя една висока кула.
Много висока кула.
Най-високата кула!
От върха й
с бог ще разговарям
и ще се надпявам с космонавтите.
За да бъде вечна
и неразрушима,
в нейните основи ще зазидам –
сянката на моята жена,
сянката на твоята жена,
сенките на майките ни,
сенките на нашите деца…
Нужни са ми сенките на цялото човечество!
Майсторе,
ела да чиракуваш! (К. Павлов, 1965, pp. 21–22)

Master Manole,
I will build a tall tower.
A very tall tower.
The tallest tower!
From its top
I will talk to God
and compete with the cosmonauts.
To make it eternal
and indestructible,
In its foundations I will wall up
the shadow of my wife,
the shadow of your wife,
the shadows of our mothers,
the shadows of our children…
I need the shadows of all humanity!
Master,
be my apprentice! (Trans. by GSG)

In Pavlov's approach, the ambitious local master Manole attracts the attention of another master, someone with global aspirations and a desire for infinite power, obtained even at the cost of the lives of millions of women and children. Although he exhibits human attributes (he is married, has a mother, children, appreciates astronauts, and sings), his hubris and lack of moral scruples make him a demonic being. It seems that Satan himself proposed to Manole that he learn the craft, for which the conformist Bulgarian master with his mania for greatness seems particularly predestined.

Although Pavlov alludes to the biblical motif of the Tower of Babel, in his poem the daredevils' tongues are not confused and their work continues unhindered. Clearly, this text should not be interpreted in isolation from the political context of the moment it was written (Gołek-Sepetliewa, 2011). However, the poem's message does not only speak to conditions in the communist bloc of the 1980s: it retains its universal dimension as an inextinguishable voice of opposition to the endless chain of violence, the allegory of which is the local topos of walling up a woman.

Binding Agent

In 2012, the Plovdiv State Puppet Theatre produced *Вграждане* [Walling up][13], inspired to some extent by Maria Stankova's work *Мъртвата глава ми про-*

[13] Director Veselka Kuncheva, stage design and costumes Marieta Gogomekhova, music Christo Namlyev, choreography Stegan Vitanov. With the participation of Maria Atanasova, Michaela Andonova, Tatyana Etimova, Zhivko Dhuranov, Rosen Rusev, Alexander Karamanov, Christo Takov. I would like to thank the management of the Plovdiv

говори [A dead head spoke to me], discussed later here, and above all by the neo-Romantic dispute over the moral duties of an artist. The director Veselka Kuncheva abandoned the predatory aesthetics of the grotesque, characteristic of Stankova's "minidrama", in favour of simplifying the message to bring out the emotions of the characters through expressive play with the broken word, whisper, movement, sound. The image of the human condition is co-created by the primordial elements of material reality in the background – stone (Szczepański, 2010) and water.

In seeking the universal dimension of the story of sacrificing a loved one for the sake of one's own work, the creators of the play preserved clear links with both folklore and literary interpretations. They decided to modify the characters of Stankova's two protagonists, keeping only individual phrases and the musical and rhythmic setting. On stage, the literary headless character (shepherd Manole) becomes a builder again, and his wife Neda, who is a mother, is likened to the non-motherly characters from the folk song. The creators put the builder and his moral dilemmas in the spotlight. At the same time, they attempted to universalise the voices of tradition, placing them within a modern aesthetic of stage minimalism.

A screen was used in the production of *Вграждане* that partially obscured the stage. Thus, the audience could only see a narrow gap below the screen's lower edge, which was spotlit with warm yellow light. It would seem that this space, surrounded by darkness, as if two-dimensional, suggestively represented an artificial world framed not by a theatrical box stage, but by contemporary media – television or film. The gap-screen is filled with stones, water and fragmentarily visible human bodies – most often legs in constant motion. They tell the story of love, betrayal, violence, suffering, death, and their narrative function remains in an intertextual relationship with contemporary film art, including one of the sequences of Michel Hazanavicius's film *The Artist* (2011), whose protagonist is a silent film actor fading into the past.

In Kuncheva's production, the peculiar defragmentation of the characters does not interfere with the depiction of the beauty of the young woman who is predestined for walling up. As a non-mother (which I emphasise), she has a lower social status than the heroine of *Мъртвата глава ми проговори*. The characters in Kuncheva's play use body language and a broken stage whisper; their gestures are repeatedly accompanied by phrases from Stankova's work. Only fragments of utterances reach the audience's ears, suggesting the determination of the collective ("we need a bridge"), male domination ("so that men can walk on it in their business"), and the hypocrisy of the women-mothers, who are only seemingly passive observers of events, but in reality accomplices in the violence ("God forgive me, it is better this way", "she has no children").

State Puppet Theatre for providing me with a recording of the performance in 2021 (Кунчева, 2012), and Veselka Kuncheva for the conversations and for sharing Maria Stankova's work, *Мъртвата глава ми проговори* (Станкова, n.d.) (GSG).

The demonic in this play is inscribed in the very structure of human reality: it lurks in the relationships, in the acrimonious determination of the builders, in their cruelty, in the conformism of the women, their God-fearing and sinister whispering, their fear, their escape from real responsibility into small charitable gestures ("I'll bake the children a *banitsa*"), in the celebration of crime. Maternal caring is realised in this case at the price of acquiescing to murder, of looking the other way. In the on-stage "gap of existence", everything that makes up the experience of life is at once strong and weak, hard as stone and soft as water, fragile as human bodies and unyielding as the human (male, female?) will.

In his review of the play *Майстор Манол, поваленият* [Master Manole, defeated; Новков, n.d.), Mitko Novkov draws attention to the gender aspect of freedom and subjugation; in order to illustrate this, he uses aquatic symbolism as a presumed inherent element of essentialised and Eliadesque femininity:

> The feminine element can be contained only as it is walled-up […], inscribed, classified, obscured, numbered and bound in a building, in a system of male power. The Spirit of God hovers over the waters and says: "Let it be done". Master Manole hovers over primordial femininity and says: "Weave!" – and she weaves, "Knit" – and she knits, "Bring!" – and she brings. Master Manole is not a tragic figure at all; he is a demonic figure and the play shows him just like that – possessed by something, overwhelmed by something, fascinated by something… But not by his beloved, but by what he desires – to grab the element of water with his strong hands, squeeze and overpower it forever. To become the master and to subjugate her: the MASTER and the servant. (Новков, n.d.)

In the play, the body and soul of the walled-up woman are symbolised by a white robe with a red edge that submits to the actions of men without resistance and is incorporated into the stone building, becoming its almost invisible binder. The stone surrounding her on all sides (Skoczylas & Żyromski, 2007) here symbolises the subjugation of the female element by the empowered male (Bourdieu, 2004). In Novkov's terms, this limitless male desire for domination cannot be satisfied. In the end, Manole suffers a not-so-obvious defeat, since, according to Novkov, the taming of the river can only occur with its acquiescence. Full of activism, the initially dominant *homo erectus* inevitably becomes a supplicant (*homo prostrates*), which in the play is reflected in the transgression of the protagonist, crawling in the gap-screen in an expression of weakness and resignation.

> Legs rise, enter the water, jump up, step carefully, fall and rise – legs are the foundation of man. But in the play they are unstable, just as Master Manole's bridge is unstable. More: while these legs/bases/foundations are initially mobile and reckless, attracting attention with their cheerfulness, over time they leave the frame more and more often and become submissive. The characters they are supposed to carry are horizontal rather than vertical – lying, crawling, and shrinking on the ground (and water). The legs do not hold them up; they give up and cannot stand. *Homo prostrates* […] replaces the *homo erectus*. (Новков, n.d.)

In his interpretation, Novkov approaches the issue of cultural roles in the sphere of procreation but ultimately ignores the phallic symbolism of the stone and does not elaborate on it. Manole attracts Novkov's attention because of the downfall the builder experiences as a result of his own moral disorientation (Pleşu, 2019, pp. 11–25). This is the critic's overt advocacy of the "female element" and its rights.

However, it is worth noting that the final scene of the play, which concludes the story of a woman's walling up, contains a far more universal message concerning the status of binary cultural genders in the theatre of everyday life. After the screen-curtain is raised, the actresses and actors (including those playing the role of Manole and the walled-up woman) are finally seen on stage in not a horizontal position, but a vertical one. It may seem to the viewer that they are standing on their own and that this is simply a moment of farewell between the ensemble and the audience – a moment of applause and overcoming the theatrical illusion. However – in this kind of *post scriptum* – the actors' heads abruptly fall onto the wardrobe-guillotine bar under their chins, giving the impression that they are lifeless marionettes, hung up after the performance in the theatre closet, or decapitated. This can be read as a summary of the participants' situation in the staged crime. However, it can also be seen as an allusion to off-stage reality, where compromising one's conscience leads to moral apathy and an inability to break free.

Some light is shed on the intentions of the show's creators by the accompanying play poster, designed by two well-known artists: Marina Dodova (visual artist and stage designer) and Daniel Rashev (photographer). The poster depicts an image of a woman's face placed in a stone crack whose structure



Figure 13. Promotional material by Marina Dodova and Daniel Rashev for the play *Walling up*, dir. Veselka Kuncheva.
Source: Archive of the Library of the National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts (Sofia)

resembles human hair. The woman's eyes are closed, her eyelashes are coated with a layer of dust, and her mouth is gagged with a stone. In this depiction, the woman has been completely objectified and deprived of not only agency, but also her voice.

Thus, a woman's beautiful face draws the eye and invites contemplation of the unspeakable: the unarticulated female voice stifled by stone-carrying silence (Marin, 2011, pp. 394–411).

Reconciled

This beautiful and shocking theatre poster captures a certain tendency in contemporary Bulgarian art which manifests itself in the desire to contemplate the beauty of a heroine reconciled to the verdicts of fate. In 2012, the Stara Zagora gallery hosted the third quadrennial, dedicated to the myths of the Balkan countries. Two works presented (Bulgarian and Romanian[14]) were dedicated to the figure of Master Manole, and one to the walled-up woman. The author of the painting *Вградена невеста* [The walled-up woman] (oil, 100 × 80 cm) is Rumiana Yotova. The artist skilfully uses colours, such as various shades of grey, white, and red. In the unformed block in the foreground, a massive crack is visible, suggesting a construction disaster. However, the eye of the beholder has to make quite an effort to find the tiny female figure situated "on the edge" in two ways: over the precipice and on the edge of the painting, in the upper-right corner. As is well known, objects "on the edge" of paintings organise their symbolism (Marin, 2011) and create a place where the eye "penetrates" the image (cf. Arasse, 2012, pp. 25–42). Clad in white, which symbolises purity, and surrounded by dark male silhouettes, the woman is waiting for something. The Bulgarian viewer, familiar with folklore, knows what will happen in a moment and contemplates the disproportion between the power of the stone and the fragility of its future guardian. The barely visible and marginal position "on the edge" is decisive for the fate of what is centrally located.

I (GSG) have not encountered other paintings interpreting the act of walling up itself. Artists are more drawn to the figure of the heroine – her tranquil allure despite her unfortunate circumstances – than to the bloody ritual. Contemporary painter Rumen Stankov created a series of dozens of paintings dedicated to this theme. Over the past few years, they have been shown in Bulgarian galleries, e.g., in Burgas (2011), and Sofia (2023), in various configurations. The paintings appear to be firmly rooted in the Orthodox sacral tradition and in the folklore-based poetics of so-called native art, represented, among others, by

[14] Maria Bianka (Romania) – *Легенда за Майстор Манол* [The legend of Master Manole], Vasil Karadimov (Bulgaria) – *Възнесение на Майстор Манол* [Ascension of Master Manole].

the prominent interwar painter Vladimir Dimitrov-Maystor. In the paintings of this patron of many generations of Bulgarian artists, the figures of robust and comely Bulgarian peasant women freeze in calm stillness, becoming icons of what is eternally native and indigenous (Аврамов, 2011).

Stankov's compositions allude to these representations, but above all they evoke associations with iconographic art and orthodox images of Our Lady Hodegetria. The faces of the walled-up women are calm, turned *en face* to the onlooker, keeping their gaze on him (Figures 14 and 15). The choice of white and gold as the dominant tones can be interpreted as a manifestation of semi-secularised neo-Byzantinism (Rogozińska, 2009, pp. 19–50; Onasch & Schnieper, 2002), but also as an allusion to folkloric and literary representations of the bride of the Sun.



Figures 14 and 15. The Walled-up I and II by Rumen Stankov.
Materials from the artist's collection

Although the halos (sometimes taking the form of a crown or cap) that surround the heads in Stankov's paintings (Figures 16 and 17) are shattered, they are an obligatory attribute of the depicted figures, but at the same time they arouse anxiety, an impression of cognitive dissonance, as a clear mark of the violence experienced by the walled-up.



Figures 16, 17 and 18. The Walled-up III, IV and V by Rumen Stankov. Materials from the artist's collection

Of the images provided by the artist, one contains additional clues hinting at the oppressive nature of the evoked event or state of "being walled up" (Figure 18). In this case, the prominent chasm in the stone in which the woman's face is placed is seamed together as if with a canvas stitch, providing additional

prison-like security. The depiction of fabric, which seems to either shield the walled-up woman or impede her return to the world, may be reminiscent of iconographic representations of the Dormition of the Mother God, where Mary's soul, supported by Jesus, is wrapped in strips of fabric, but I think these connotations are too far-reaching.

The female faces in Stankov's paintings express tranquillity. This begs the questions: Has the sacrificial victim attained a higher state of being, which, according to Eliade, is guaranteed by sudden but peacefully accepted death? Are the depicted characters fulfilled in the mystical sphere? As is always the case with art, answers to these questions depend on individual interpretations. However, it is hard to resist the impression that the artist is expressing his desire to capture the beauty of women, which he views through a Neoplatonic lens as a reflection of the non-sensual in the sensual world. This recurs in his creative imagination as a transcendent pattern imprinted in the matter of the visible world.

Another artist of this generation, Krasimir Todorov, employed a similar solution in his black-and-grey graphic, which goes by the titles *Вградена невеста* [The walled-up woman] and *Легенда* [Legend]. In his sepulchral representa-



Figure 19. Krasimir Todorov, *Walled-up woman*, 1987. Mixed technique, 58 × 38 cm. The photograph was available on the BAN Central Library website. It can now be found on the website of the Ilia Beshkov Gallery in Pleven at No. 39 in the artist's collection in the folder Плевенски художници [Pleven Artists].
Source: https://plevengallery.com/плевенски-художници/, retrieved February 25, 2023

tion, the woman has a focused expression and closed eyes; it is unclear whether she still belongs to the world of the living or already to the world of the dead. The cracked stone in which her body is trapped is reinforced by cords of varying thickness that stitch the fissure's two edges together.

In Todorov's painting, the woman is wrapped in stone like a cloak, lending her an air of mystery and dignity. However, the four clear openings on the right side of the painting suggest that the viewer has fallen victim to an illusion arising from his cultural conditioning. The woman is surrounded not by stone, but by metal armour. Its poor-quality cords, corresponding to the bridge's flimsy poles, can be torn apart if the woman desires, yet she chooses to contemplate her own immobility.

The Basic Module. Non-Mother. The Subversive Version

Suicidal Woman. A cosmic particle

One of the responses symbolised by the stone of captivity may be a suicidal crisis. This crisis takes centre stage in Yana Yazova's 1936 novel *Ана Дюлгерова* [Ana Dyulgerova] (Язова, 2019), which fed into Bulgaria's nascent current of women's writing during the interwar period (Кирова, 2009).

In his 2019 commentary on the new edition of the text, editor Petyr Velichkov highlighted biographical elements of Yazova's life that shaped the novel. Thus, for example, he interpreted the relocation of the place of action from the writer's hometown of Lom to Plovdiv as a kind of camouflage to distract readers from the real prototypes of the characters in her book and her personal experiences (П. Величков, 2019). Historical and literary critics agree that Yazova exposes the hypocrisy of Bulgarian society and the mechanisms operating in the bourgeois milieu that deprive women of their agency (Пелева, 2010). The writer puts the elites of Plovdiv and Sofia in the spotlight; she directs the blade of criticism against them, rather than against the simple people and their cultural habits. And yet, in her novel, Yazova guides the reader to tropes familiar from folklore that support the interpretation of reality. These are not overt updates of the topos of the walled-up woman that interests us here, but rather allusions that run through the narrative fabric of the work. The very title of the novel, which, alongside the main character's name, is her surname – Дюлгерова – evokes associations with the construction craft (*Дакова*, 2012), as *dülger* is Turkish for carpenter, and in Bulgarian, where the meaning has been modified a bit, it means a builder/mason (*зидар*) (Геров, 1975, p. 394). The surname, carried by all family members, seems to be inscribed in the very core of their identity, as an indelible stamp of belonging.

The plot of the novel boils down to a love intrigue. The heroine is Ana, the daughter of a married couple living apart: a fickle father and a ruthless moth-

er who mercilessly subjugates Ana to the rules of life in Plovdiv's bourgeois community. The girl mentally outgrows the standards set by this environment. Sensitive to art, gifted as a painter, and intellectually alert, she gives her affection to a man much older than she is: a popular pianist and a married friend of her father. His name – Bogumil Dionisov – is significant: the given name refers to the founder of Bogomil gnosis (according to some theories derived from Orphism), while the surname refers to Dionysus, an important figure for Orphism. As is known, Orpheus's worshipers killed him and threw his severed head into the Maritsa River. In Yazova's novel, the river's waters flow by the walls of the Dulgerov household.

Dionisov is a musician worshiped by women. He is only able to understand his once-dismissive attitude toward them thanks to Ana's love and lack of hope for a future together (Язова, 2019, p. 96). He reciprocates Ana's feelings. However, his disordered personal life and family situation, his wife's claims, his sense of loyalty to his friend, and a number of other real or imagined concerns lead him to decide against living with her. In agreement with Ana's father, he leaves the country. His farewell letter brings the girl no consolation. She chooses suicidal death in the depths of the same river that had once swallowed up Orpheus.

Yazova guides the reader through all the stages of Ana's suicidal crisis (Améry, 2007, pp. 137–257), up until the final act of her taking her own life. Despite the mythical tropes suggested in the narrative, the protagonist's death is not a result of the archaic ritual of walling up. And yet, the collective violence and betrayal that the girl experiences in various forms, as well as the metaphors of stone, encasement, separation in the midst of unyielding walls that recur time and again in this context, in addition to the allusive surnames, beg the question about the character of the relationship between the novel and the topos of the walled-up woman. It seems to emerge on the horizon of Yazova's imagination when she talks about the condition of women in a patriarchal society, in which violence against the nonconformist comes from both men and women, and its tool is entrapment. Although Yazova leaves no doubt about society's moral state, she neither explicitly values nor denigrates any of the groups in her novel. Both women and men are victims and torturers, embroiled in the mechanisms of mutual dependence, although economic power and the right to choose a partner are seemingly in the hands of men.

In this world, it is the heroine – a nonconformist gifted with exceptional sensitivity and intelligence – who constructs the walls separating her from the world in her mind: "The Great Wall of China of their limited lives stifled her desire for art, which she had purchased with suffering, from paving the way in her life so that she could go much further, beyond this city and these people" (Язова, 2019, p. 29). In another passage: "Dionisov's broad shoulders appeared between her and her friends and separated her like a wall from the entire world" (Язова, 2019, p. 89). This is a separation that she desires. She seeks it often in the privacy of her room until desperation pushes her to plunge

into the river's depths: "Ana […] locked herself in her room. The wide window offered a view of the vast panorama, the deep and broad river, the opposite bank drowning in green willows, the rapid current of the water" (Язова, 2019, p. 29). "The deep and yellow waters of the Maritsa flowed slowly against the wall, low by the high bank" (Язова, 2019, p. 27).

It is interesting that Yazova, who repeatedly emphasises Ana's uniqueness and self-forming ardour, styles her in the final passages of the text after the heroines of folk narratives surrounded by solar symbolism, e.g., about the walled-up woman or the bride of the Sun (Георгиева, 2013; Стойнев, 1994, pp. 335–336). Ana herself intuitively chooses such styling as, just before her death, she wears a white gown that gives off golden reflections (Язова, 2019, p. 114). In her last moments, she also accepts the greeting of the Sun, which envelops her with warmth and radiance. However, in the clash between the "self-forming" Ana and the environment pressuring her, the ultimate winner turns out to be the elements of the earth: water and stone. Influenced by conversations with Dionisov, the heroine associates these elements of material reality with the eternal power of the universe and freedom:

> This is the most beautiful death. To be far from people, on a small speck of land in the midst of the ocean […]. One day you will stop breathing and your body will be lying on some stone or tree; you will slowly unite with the dust of the earth, and then with the Cosmos. […] There you will feel even the immensity of the moisture that covers the stones on the island, because you know that […] it binds you to the infinite […]. (Язова, 2019, pp. 81–82)

Thus understood freedom, after all, means choosing radical non-existence: self-exclusion first from society and then from life in order to transform one's own body into an element of the cosmos, with its vague promise of the oneness of things.

Dismembered

No less obvious is the reference to the topos of the walled-up woman in Emilia Dvoryanova's novel *Земните градини на Богородица* [Earthly Gardens of the Mother of God] (Врина-Николов, 2015; Дворянова, 2006), which seems to be an important voice in contemporary disputes about the identity of *a Woman*[15], a voice of reckoning with various layers of tradition, including feminist and revolutionary ones (Marinova, 2015). Milena Kirova, writing in 2002 about Dvoryanova's earlier works, draws attention – with reference to Cixous's concept of "feminine writing" (Cixous, 1993) – to the need to express a femininity free from normative patriarchal thinking, concretised and embodied (Кирова, 2002). According to Kirova, Dvoryanova's aspiration to overcome the dualism

[15] Following Rosi Braidotti, I understand this italicised term as an established construct in Western culture (Braidotti, 2009) – GSG.

inherited from antiquity is expressed, among other things, in a kind of struggle for the recognition of the normative status of the female "body-soul". According to the researcher, one of the elements of cultural tradition that Dvoryanova evaluates in this context is the metaphorical treatment of the folk motif of the walled-up female body:

> Folkloric thinking in the Balkans disseminates the motif of the walled-up female body with a stubborn belief in its symbolic meaning. But what better to call the sacrificial object? Was it necessary to fortify the building-house of communal existence with a body that continues to feed through the mercifully left opening, or with a soul capable of giving the breath of life? And how to detach the breast from the soul of the walled-up woman? Sacrificial symbolism makes it impossible to separate these things: it is precisely because of its pre-dismemberment that the female body-soul provides the mythical foundation for the social contract. Once offered in the name of the idea of walling up, it remains invisible, dead to consciousness. The image of the symbolically dead father appears to be a later version of a constructed mythical paradigm. (Кирова, 2002)

The message of the novel *Земните градини на Богородица* confirms Kirova's research intuitions about the direction of Dvoryanova's ideological quest (Дворянова, 1992, 2003) and its relation to folklore and the Orthodox tradition. In the world depicted in the novel, conflicting models of the world – embedded in Orthodoxy, Balkan folk culture, liberalism and contemporary ideological currents of Christian feminism – compete in the deep mental structures of the characters. They act like operating systems; they represent the order of hegemonic androcentric power and of the emancipatory projects that compete against it. However, as Bulgarian philosopher Vladimir Gradev rightly points out, Dvoryanova's language "derived from the body" means that any attempt to translate the meanings into the conceptual system of the modern humanist reader must, as a rule, lead to trivialisation, to simplification of the subtle and ambiguous message of this prose (Градев, 2007). Thus, the attempt at interpretation is made here with the hope that, despite these dangers, Dvoryanova's intentions can be salvaged.

The space in and around which the novel's events take place is the Holy Mount Athos, Monastic Republic, which is a particular kind of symbol of women's separation in the patriarchal world (Dymczyk, 2017, pp. 165–194; А. Стойкова, 2009). Women are not allowed access to the Holy Mountain by virtue of the *avaton* law, which must have been in effect long before the 10th century (Talbot, 1996, p. 69). In his 2017 book *Kobiety Świętej Góry Athos. Nieobecna obecność* [Women of the Holy Mount Athos. An absent presence], Rafał Dymczyk argues that the rule of *avaton* was not misogynistic in nature, but a result of monastic practices, the needs of the spiritual life of the monks and their fears of carnal temptations (Dymczyk, 2017, pp. 49–68). Formally, however, the reason cited for separating women was not preventive measures, but rather the will of the Mother of God (Naumow, 2009). According to the founding legend, she did not want to see other women there

as she was driven by her desire to have exclusive possession of the land given to her by Jesus. As Dymczyk (2017) writes, historians have documented cases of women staying legally on the Holy Mountain, generally by virtue of their high social status, merit to the Monastic Republic, or danger to their lives. These, however, were exceptions to the rule. The presence of meritorious Christian women is usually concretised in everyday life in other ways. Religious veneration in the Athos monasteries was extended not only to iconographic representations of the Mother of God and female saints, but also to their numerous relics (Kracik, 2002).

From the perspective of contemporary research on the anthropology of death (Domańska, 2017), the religious veneration paid to dead dismembered female bodies seems a kind of necrotic reverse *avaton*. In Dvoryanova's novel, these relics play a tremendous role, becoming active and affective observers of events. The remains of martyrs, anchorites and intercessors retain their miraculous power. Admittedly, in the novel this power is manifested with certain excess[16], but hyperbole here is meant not as blasphemy, but rather as a poetic stylisation of the mystical experience lived through the body. In search of non-bipolar readings of tradition, the writer treads the line of blasphemy but does not cross it. Dvoryanova's reinterpretation of the legend of Mount Athos and its environs – a place sacred to the Orthodox Church – challenges the intentions of a petrified religious institution. In doing so, she brings to light a deeper message from the Gospel as understood by its contemporaries.

And so, a group of Bulgarian men and women arrive on the Chalkidiki Peninsula to carry out a research project on Athos[17]. As planned, the men head to the Holy Mountain, while Maria and the-other-Maria[18] stay outside the walls of the sacred space, in one of Ouranoupoli's harbour hotels, hoping for an interesting working vacation. Things become complicated, however. Contrary to what had been agreed, the men do not regularly send their daily reports; their silence becomes increasingly puzzling. The two Marias initially downplay this but eventually become concerned and try to find out what is happening. The men send vague messages, as if enslaved by the mystical mystery of their whereabouts. While wandering around the area, Maria succumbs to a fascination with the nearby island of Ammouliani, from where an enigmatic woman in white arrives

[16] E.g., the relics react with a stir to the sexual act taking place at the foot of Athos, on its waters.

[17] Bearing the same name and thus preliminarily unified, the heroines are, however, distinguishable: they represent different lifestyles, different ways of thinking, and this makes them reconstruct events differently, as if "writing" their own versions (Неделчев & Огойска, 2012). Cf. https://ebox.nbu.bg/aton2012/view_lesson.php?id=1

[18] This way of referring to the protagonists, who all share the same name (Maria, the-other-Maria, Maria-the-other), is a reference to The Gospel of Matthew 28:1: "Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre." In Bulgarian, the word *друга* also means "different".

by boat every day, unsuccessfully trying to cross to Athos[19]. The locals call her "the madwoman of Ammouliani". When Maria suddenly disappears one day while taking one of her mysterious walks, the-other-Maria calls upon another friend, Maria-the-other, who had previously refused to participate in this expedition, to come from Sofia.

Although the protagonists have the same given name and are thus somewhat unified in a preliminary way, they are distinguishable: they represent different lifestyles, different mindsets, and this makes them reconstruct events differently, as if "writing" their own versions. Each of them talks about her own need for mystical participation, about love, lack of fulfilment, and exclusion. The constant changes of the narrative perspective mean that the same initial situations seemingly lead to different plot solutions. There seems to be an autotelic play of conventions in this stylised postmodern novel (Sandauer, 1968), in which the criminal plot is interwoven with other plots: romantic, religious, mystical and, finally, a self-referential one. Even the novel's ending has two variants, which I will discuss later. At the same time, and seemingly in opposition to postmodernist assumptions that everything is a game, Dvoryanova does not leave her readers in an axiological void. Instead, she leads them toward the ontological penumbra and the promise[20] – or mirage – of a world of values. In the work, this world is symbolised by a seemingly background character: the aforementioned madwoman of Ammouliani, who, as it turns out, is the Mother of Jesus.

By engaging in a dialogue with the legends associated with Mount Athos, Dvoryanova creates this character within the visual sphere, moving away from iconographic aesthetics. Clothed in white robes symbolising the presence of the Holy Spirit and always covering her head, this poor occupant of a shack made of sticks and leaves is completely unlike the heroines of medieval icons, apocryphal texts, and legends. She creates an image of the victorious Virgin Mary, who, in apostolic times, arrived on the peninsula by ship after it had veered off course during a storm en route to Cyprus. According to Drzewiecka (2009, pp. 286–288, the Virgin Mary was warmly welcomed by the local worshipers of Apollo because she displayed royal attributes, such as retinue and gold, and she worked miracles. The worshipers recognised her as the Mother of God and the propagator of the true faith. Many centuries later, the miraculous icon of the Mother of God was welcomed with equal enthusiasm at the Monastery of Iviron, where, according to legend, it supposedly arrived by itself, carried by the waves in an upright position (Drzewiecka, 2009, p. 286).

In Dvoryanova's novel, the madwoman of Ammouliani/the Virgin Mary is an unwelcome guest on Athos, just like the other women. Unrecognised by her worshipers, she attempts unsuccessfully to access her Gardens. She repeatedly sails the ship through an area of maritime chaos, following the same route she

[19] In Balkan folklore and the apocrypha, the description of the arrival of the Mother of God on Athos is a leitmotif (Drzewiecka, 2009).

[20] I employ this category after two authors (Merz & Merz, 2017).

took before, but still encounters resistance. Thus, she fails when confronted with the Tradition formed centuries ago and cannot fulfil her only desire to feast her eyes on the view of the Gardens. Yet, her presence arouses the curiosity of the local people, especially the women and the monks. They unsuccessfully try to find her on Ammouliani, where the "madwoman's" stay is accompanied by the extraordinary blooming of rare flowers and the strange activity of sea turtles (Цочева, 2018). In the novel, therefore, the Mother of God is also given the characteristics of a pagan goddess of nature (Георгиева, 2000), a tender protector of flowers and animals, full of sensual sensitivity to the beauty of the world. It is only her name and the story of her motherhood that connect her to the figure depicted in Orthodox icons. Maria is attracted to the staffage of the Madwoman of Ammouliani, which opens her imagination to the mystical depths of Christianity, free from the burden of Orthodox Tradition. The Virgin Mary becomes a spiritual guide for her. Her attitude of kind concern – free from the fears and constraints of religious prejudices – triggers a process of spiritual transgression.

Nevertheless, Dvoryanova's Mother of God strives to override the principle of *avaton*. She does not abandon her roles as Intercessor, Guide, and Mother, as accorded to her by the Orthodox tradition as a "spirit-bearing" person (Florenski, 2009, pp. 255–310). Instead, she brings her own understanding of freedom to these roles. As Julia Kristeva writes in her essay *Stabat Mater* (1976): "The function of the Motherhood principle as a space in which transformation takes place has been particularly highlighted by Eastern Christianity, which calls Mary the 'link', the 'heart', the 'space in between' […], thus giving her the attributes of the Holy Spirit and opening the door to more or less heretical interpretations of this figure" (Kristeva, 2021, p. 336).

Dvoryanova's Maria, who by virtue of her lifestyle appears to be a modern incarnation of Mary Magdalene, enters into an exchange relationship with the Virgin Mary for one night. She becomes her apprentice and, at the same time, a guide who helps the ruler of the Gardens to enter her domain. Recognising the Mother of Jesus in the madwoman of Ammouliani, she sets out to fulfil the same role as the "woman with clean hands", who, centuries earlier, had helped the Goddess Cybele come ashore in Italy (Drzewiecka, 2009, p. 289). The fact that the Virgin Mary said she had been waiting for such a woman for a long time favours such connotations and shows Dvoryanova's subtle revitalisation of an archaic myth in a cycle of repetition.

> […] She told her that She had actually known for a long time that a woman would come one day and take Her back to Her Earthly Gardens. This was certain because She desired to return with an overwhelming and deep-seated longing, but not to stay there. There was nothing for Her to do there, and She would naturally return to Heaven, to the place beside her Son. However, the desire to see Her Earthly Dominions, even if only for one night, was overwhelming and had to be fulfilled. (Дворянова, 2006, pp. 351–352)

Maria and Mary make their way to Athos not by boat or ship, but on foot. They take a walk on the sea, just like the icon of the Virgin Mary Keeper of the Gate centuries ago, whose extraordinary arrival was considered a miracle by the monks, who – responding to the wish of the Mother of God – placed the miraculous image in the gate of the Monastery of Iviron:

> It is easy to walk on water when there are no doubts and the Hand touches you; then a route is given on the sea, and a safe path among its waves.
> The stroll was long and sweet, the Earthly Gardens grew closer with every step – the flowers opening and closing their calyxes in eager anticipation, the sap in the evergreen trees fizzled, the birds refused to sleep and filled the night with their singing.
> Mary and Maria walked on the surface of the sea, fish flitted around them, and their conversation was cheerful. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 351)

Aware of God's presence and power over the elements, the pilgrims also know that they need each other on this journey for the plan to succeed. At the same time, their "conspiracy" of two is not directed against the administrators of the Gardens. As the Virgin Mary says, the monks will be forgiven for the *avaton* as it was a result of a mistake: "[…] do not worry about them, they will be forgiven because it was by accident" (Дворянова, 2006, p. 353). In light of the subsequent events, this succinct statement seems essential, as everything said about the ban violation turns out to be untrue. The two women's appearance on the Holy Mountain does not cause the predicted fire; they are immersed in a deep sleep and unaware of the miraculous visitation by their Lady or the intruder's violation of the *avaton*. Only the Athosian relics and icons recognise the Visitor and express their joy (Дворянова, 2006, p. 354). The brief portrayal of this solemn occasion encapsulates the image of the Virgin Mary ascending to heaven on a cloud, a concept trivialised in Western culture. Meanwhile, her companion enters the sea under the cover of night, and its waters close over her forever (Дворянова, 2006, p. 354).

During her few days at the foot of the Holy Mountain, Maria underwent a transformation that was expressed in her growing openness to mystical experiences and her changing approach to the space of Athos. From the men's statements about the place, the heroine concluded that they also found things complicated. According to one of them, the ban on women approaching the Holy Mountain stems from the belief that the "body of the peninsula" is female and therefore it should not be touched by another woman. The role of men, therefore, is to guard the place against this kind of sacrilege and sexual perversion:

> […] this earth is a sacred body, and this Body is female, and women are forbidden to touch a woman's body; it does not belong to them. You cannot touch yourself; your ways are circuitous, amniotic, but we are not allowed for other reasons and in other ways, though we tread there. We only protect this forbidden place; we protect it against itself so that it does not touch itself. (Дворянова, 2006, pp. 237–238)

The allegedly "female" character of this earth, however, turns it into an object of male erotic desire, which is punished by exile.

> These are the Virgin Mary's gardens and you will never be there, evergreen and sodden with sap, flooded with fragrances; look how the waterfall pours onto rocks as if from open bowels, but don't think it's just water; it only looks that way, for it comes from the bottom where the fiery magma rages, from female springs that give a gift, open the earth like a ripe pear: when split in two its syrupy juice flows out, and the taste of this water is so sweetly bland that it flows into the body like real balm; it anoints the insides, and a human cannot bear it – I could not bear it either, for I can no longer be a monk and look to the sky; I succumbed to the smell of the bay leaf. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 240)

In the passionate, erotically charged relationship between a man and the mystical earth of the Virgin Mary's gardens, a dark tension manifests between the "sublime" and the "abject", as Roudinesco put it in *Our dark side. A history of perversion* (Roudinesco, 2009, pp. 15–41). In the opinion of the Athosian sage and confessor, this is a fall so common as to be forgivable (Дворянова, 2006, p. 240). Meanwhile, Maria, adopting criteria based on a gender dichotomy to describe the peninsula, at first perceives it as ontologically "masculine"; its shape at one moment reminds her of the body of a lounging Titan, at another of his penis:

> This body […] is male, one has only to look at the map to see the body of a Titan, one can see it as an erect penis making its way through the water, ready to possess the sea, but it can also be a body stretched out, tense in its most important part, where the sanctuary sits like a mole. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 239)

But later, when she sets off for Ammouliani and is with Virgin Mary on Athos, she adopts a "masculine" perspective and sees the peninsula as "feminine". Its shape reminds her of a cow's udder heavy with milk (Дворянова, 2006, p. 348), suggesting a maternal and feeding power (see Zając, 2013, pp. 109–146). This change (in the context of the binary female–male opposition) seems crucial for the later parts of the work, in which another of the novel's protagonists, Maria-the-other, comes to the fore. Significantly, she is a lesbian and is in love with Maria.

The events depicted so far become part of an oneiric vision that Maria-the-other experiences in the Athosian police station, where she (like the-other-Maria) is interrogated as a witness in the case of their missing friend. An increasingly aggressive investigator demands that the women identify a fragment of Maria's body that was found during the search for her – or her corpse – a hand that has been placed in a locked case as if it were a relic. Both women recognise the missing woman's hand, but only Maria-the-other admits this. As she contemplates the object that terrifies and evokes tenderness in her, she retraces her beloved's last few days in her mind's eye. In response to her testimony, the police officer incomprehensibly decides to change Maria-the-other's status from witness to suspect and imprisons her in the basement of the police station: "he

led her down the stairs […] to the underground level of the building. He shoved her into an empty room with walls of hewn stone." (Дворянова, 2006, p. 356) Maria-the-other is brutally thrown into the stone basement of the building that adjoins a rather flimsy part of the Athosian "wall". The testimonies of nameless witnesses about Maria-the-other's place of imprisonment are integrated into the structure of the narrative and presented as uncertain and ambiguous. However, they confirm that she was surrounded by stone walls.

> The room […] didn't even have a window, it was a cell dug deep into the ground; Maria-the-other was separated by walls on all sides
> […] she was in fact thrown down, although not quite underground, but into a basement with a window high up, through which only the sky could be seen. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 357)

The perspective of Maria-the-other, which is a kind of synthesis of these stories, is found to be the most reliable, but it is still conveyed in the inferential mood of the Bulgarian language, which suggests the uncertainty of the information provided:

> Maria-the-other […] looked around after the men pushed her to the floor. She saw a small window through which she could see the sky and, sometimes, a round moon […] the window was as narrow as an arrow slit, so she would have to turn into a snake, lizard, or mollusc to sneak through it unharmed and regain her freedom. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 360)

In Dvoryanova's novel, the descriptions of the stone trap evoke associations with the folk song about a walled-up woman. These descriptions are accompanied by information about the place's contradictory nature: the indestructibility of the main material and its haphazard setup (bars falling apart, plaster peeling off, and netting full of holes; Дворянова, 2006, p. 357). The immovable stone (Bartmiński, 1999, pp. 235–246) coexists with constructional blunders that evoke thoughts of the building's instability, both literally and metaphorically, and its impermanence.

> Maria-the-other was in fact thrown down, although not quite underground, but into a basement with a window high up, through which only the sky could be seen, and its bars were not strong enough, for everything in the building was makeshift, crumbling and flimsy, as she said herself, and these witnesses can point to this window with its thin netting, which is why she escaped after all. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 357)

In folk songs, Manole's wife makes no attempt to escape. She dies so that the structure can persevere. As per foundation magic, she becomes the guardian spirit of the place, and the small window in the wall, through which she is able to feed her baby, is her only consolation throughout her slow agony. In Dvoryanova's novel, Maria-the-other is not a nursing mother; she does not accept the unfair sentence and decides to escape from the cellar. She is supported by the-other-Maria, who follows all the instructions of the imprisoned woman. So

here we have a situation different from that in the folk song, where the whole community turns away from the woman intended as a sacrifice. Dvoryanova elaborates on the theme of escape, perversely crossing the boundaries of the absurd. Maria-the-other's plan is to dismember her own body, the parts of which she gives to her friend with the instruction that she take them to Mount Athos, as she expects them to miraculously reintegrate there:

> […] I have a plan: I will break the windowpane, I will tear the netting; you will help me with it, it will be easier from the outside, and then you'll throw me a big knife, the biggest one, and I'll dismember myself with it. Take me out in pieces, don't be afraid of blood, don't be afraid of my death, it won't be real, because then you will carry me to Mount Athos, and there I will merge back into a whole. (Дворянова, 2006, p. 360)

Thus, rather than the breast of a walled-up mother feeding into the outside world through the window in the wall, it is the dismembered body of a woman overwhelmed with despair and hope for survival. It is not life-giving milk but blood that flows down the walls of the building, altering the symbolic message carried by these fluids (Harrell, 1981). The drastic self-dismemberment of Maria-the-other is a metaphor for the disintegration of her personality, the experience of the death of her former self, accompanied by the surprising certainty of an anticipated miracle – resurrection through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. This act of self-annihilation also represents a subversive reversal of the process of relic formation: devout life – martyr's death – miracles – body dismemberment. The miracle does happen, although the readers only learn of this via uncertain witness testimonies interwoven into the narrative. Some claimed to have seen the two Marias in Ouranoupoli, one of whom had barely visible scars on her body (Дворянова, 2006, p. 361). Others maintained that they are still on the Holy Mount Athos, wandering around the least accessible parts of the peninsula. The-other-Maria supposedly wants to find her husband, while Maria-the-other plans to take the icon of the Virgin Mary Keeper of the Gate (Вратарица) out of the gates of the Monastery of Iviron to open the gates of the Virgin Mary's Gardens to all women, which is a blasphemous one from the perspective of the monks.

> What happened after that is not quite clear, because it is very difficult to understand what happens on Mount Athos; the mysteries and sacraments are great there, but it is certain that both women are still in the Forbidden Place, because, according to testimony, no one has seen them since. It is not a difficult thing to hide, especially if they got some habits; there are many strays there with unclear facial features, and the eyes of the monks are weak from staring in another direction so that their stay there is probably problem-free. One must only wonder how it happened that the ground beneath their feet did not ignite, how her body did not burn up… it is certain, however, that this did not happen, as there has been no news of a great fire on Athos, and certainly not one from within the earth, nor of the capsising of the Holy Sleeve of the peninsula to the bottom of itself, from which it follows that Maria-the-other has not yet carried off the Keeper of the Gates. (Дворянова, 2006, pp. 363–364)

And yet, nothing happens. Neither a feminist religious revolution (Adamiak, 1999) nor the apocalypse heralded by the Orthodox Tradition takes place (Дворянова, 2006, p. 180). The world of signs, symbols, prohibitions and imperatives continues in a seemingly unchanged form; there is only some local gossip about Athos as the arena of women's corporeal presence and their "body-soul" mystical participation, which monks no longer control. Surrounded by relics, the Athosian monks persist, admittedly, within the Virgin Mary's Gardens, worshiping religious fetishes (Böhme, 2012, pp. 143–180), but in the novel's world their spiritual competence is somewhat undermined. The real power over the future of this place seems to be put in the hands of the Athosian nomads in their "bodies, encore", to invoke Rosi Braidotti's categories of thought (Braidotti, 2009, pp. 219–225). And yet the transformation that Maria-the-other and her friend go through does not extinguish their obsession with Athos; on the contrary, the price for perusing the Virgin Mary's Gardens is the loss of facial features, the concealment of body shapes, the severance of relationships with the outside world, and blending into the order created by men. Through this kind of disembodiment, Dvoryanova's protagonists become their own shadows. Their (non-)life resembles the postmortem fate of the walled-up woman from folk songs, who transforms into the immortal guardian spirit of a structure erected by men. As advocates of the feminist revolution on Athos, the two Marias fall into the trap when they take on (as if unintentionally) the role of pilgrims. Thus, Dvoryanova's response to the exclusion dictated by the Tradition, rooted in the Orthodox religion but no longer confessional (and not heretical, either), engenders an intuition previously expressed by Rosi Braidotti. According to this Italian philosopher, any attempt by women to repair androcentric reality is sooner or later threatened by homology, by absorption into phallogocentric categories of world perception, followed by secondary (and more sublime) subordination (Braidotti, 2009).

An alternative response to this contradiction is the novel's second ending, which seemingly rationalises the mysterious events. Everything seems to return to the common-sense norm: Maria's disappearance was caused by her departure, and the story told – with its marvelousness and fantasy – is the plot of Maria's novel about the Mother of God. Lending credence to the events, what seems like a trivialised procedure offers the prospect of the protagonists returning to their "normal" lives from before their trip to Mount Athos. In this life, they are a group of female friends who give each other support and whose strength lies in their unity. But this layer of the narrative also proves to be a zone of "ontological penumbra" (Merz & Merz, 2017, p. 2) because of the stones of the Mother of God found by Maria at the foot of Athos and sent to the Sofia address of Maria-the-other. In the depicted world, these likenesses of the Mother of God, tossed out by the sea, become the most modest yet insistent evidence of mystical forces at work in the space of Mount Athos – forces that women cannot resist. Written by nature in accordance with accepted iconographic approaches, the likenesses evoke images of Jesus "not made by human hands",

whose prototype was the legendary imprint of his face on the cloth intended to heal King Abgar. Dvoryanova makes these "miraculous" objects a sense-making component of ideas about the salutary role of the "spirit-bearing" Virgin Mary, who in Orthodox theological thought is sometimes identified as Sophia – the Wisdom of God (Florenski, 2009, pp. 282–310). While the reproductions of the icon of Jesus mentioned here are associated with an inherently impermanent material such as fabric (although the first one is supposed to be imperishable) (Lubańska, 2019, pp. 270–271), in the novel the place where the presence of the Virgin/Sophia is visualised becomes a stone – an entity that is "immutable, eternal and unharmed"[21]. Thus, the novel's rational narrative closes with the aporia-based suggestion of the sophiological ontophany of stone – a manifestation of the mystical unity of being that cannot be articulated or grasped through rational cognition yet remains free from the dualism that restricts the freedom of human thought.

Therapy Through Art

Petya Yordanova's poem *Вграждане* [Walling up] was published in 1975. Despite its light-hearted form, the poem contains a pessimistic message about the cultural conditions that foster the idea that women have a subordinate role in relationships with men. The lyrical subject asks her beloved to wall her up in his heart, thoughts, daily life, tears, songs, and seasons, even the most difficult moments. Then, she herself will become magic to him (Йорданова, 1975). The metaphorical use of the trope of the walled-up woman creates in the poem an image of the girl's expectations for her partner's loving commitment. This commitment is expressed through complete integration and co-presence in every moment and place of their lives together. And yet this is preceded by her plea, only seemingly a joking one, which echoes with the woman's fear that her lover "not be like the master".

The poem inspired a 1979 hit song by Mimi Ivanova, a Bulgarian pop star of Zhivkov's time. The music to Yordanova's poem was composed by Ivan Karachi-

[21] As Agata Bielik-Robson put it: "In the metaphysics of the Greeks, being is eternal and aspires to nothing: it finds fulfilment in a closed circle of reproduction of what is. The order of this metaphysics is well reflected by the metaphor of 'stone': the ontophany of stone underlies the entire Greek *logos*. I say this in polemical reference to Derrida, who, in an obvious reference to Plato, argues in his *White Mythology* that the sun is the leading metaphor of *logos*. Perhaps the sun is there, but besides and before it is the stone. This is the debt of the philosophical *logos* to mythic experience, brilliantly described by Eliade, according to whom stone has the nature of absolute existence that is immutable, beyond, and invulnerable, that is one that cannot be belittled. At the same time, it turns out to be a very reliable element of the metaphysical order: of all entities, stone 'is the most', and this is why Aristotle's unmoved mover is a stone entity, not a solar one" (Stroiński & Bielik-Robson, 2009).

nov, and the song was released on the album *Диско ракета* [Disco rakieta] – BTA 10382. The dynamic disco-style performance, coupled with the singer's poor diction (cf. Стойо Дженков, 2020), sapped the lyricism of the poetic appeal and, paradoxically, the female voice was drowned out by the music.

In 2009, the cosmopolitan Bulgarian feminist artist Boryana Rossa (D'Urso, 2018) presented her performance *The Vitruvian body* (in collaboration with Oleg Mavromatti) (Figure 20) at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. It was documented and described in detail on the artist's webpage (https://boryanarossa.com/category/works/). Before the eyes of an assisting audience, the artist allowed herself to be shackled to a metal structure, alluding to Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing visualising Vitruvius's calculations of human body proportions. Her female body, not conforming to the Vitruvian standard created for a man, did not fit into the installation. The process of placing Boryana in a circular machine was intended to visualise this "defect" and the cruelty of having to "adapt" her body to the golden standard. The process was carried out by Oleg Mavrovatii, who shackled the artist's hands and legs, pulling them through openings and sewing with surgical threads. Rossa was in pain, as her leg and sewn-up lips bled, as the audience watched on. The artist believes this allowed the viewers to share her personal artistic experience (Гяурова, 2012, pp. 227–229).

This performance, whose message dealt with the oppressiveness of the androcentric model of the world into which women are forced by way of violence, in many ways referred to the work of the performer Marina Abramović. In it, the profaned, tormented female body became a vehicle for a message about the human condition, finding a perverse indulgence in violence, sometimes hidden behind the guise of a passive witness.

This begs the question of whether this concept may have been born in Boryana Rossa's artistic imagination as a consequence of her original Bulgarian socialisation, which equipped the artist with a particular cultural memory. It is difficult to say unequivocally whether, in this case, we are dealing with an artistically revitalised act of walling up, which, through the evocation of the Vitruvian wheel, was taken out of its local folkloric context and thus universalised. In response to my inquiry on this matter, I (GSG) received a comment from the artist that she did not think about the topos of the walled-up woman during the work, but that it was compatible with its message. In this context, the roles assigned to men in the performance and the stares of the audience, whose members are of various biological and cultural genders, are interesting. Rossa, like the folktale heroine, turned at one point to one of the spectators and encouraged him to free her. He did. Val Phoenix, in a commentary on this performance, wrote "we observed her pain and we were partially to blame for it, but we could also participate in her liberation" (cf. Phoenix, 2009). This raises the question: We, meaning who?

The motif of walling up of a woman as a metaphor of one cultural gender's power over the other keeps recurring in contemporary art. An installation by



Figure 20. Frame from Boryana Rossa's and Oleg Mavrovatti's performance *The Vitruvian body*, 2009.
Source: https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/boryana-rossa/, retrieved July 21, 2022. Photos available also in the book (Гяурова, 2012, pp. 227–229)

the Bulgarian artist Kapka Kyneva, presented in 2022 at the Sofia Ракурси gallery as *Пространства на сенките* [Spaces of Shadows], might serve as a *memento* of a sort in this context. It included works whose themes referred to Bulgarian folklore. They were made of aluminium in the openwork technique; an important element of this "cutout" is the light, which comes from several sources and is variable. The viewer (understood as a co-creator) can change the way the installation is illuminated. A laser-cut aluminium plate was embedded in a metal body depicting a book. The choice of the location of the backlighting and the colour of the light influences the shape of the shadows cast on the wall/paper sheet and, thus, the semantics of the works. As the author herself says:

> One can generalise that the visions generated by this principle are analogous to traditional Asian shadow puppet theatres, popular for centuries. However, while shadow theatre usually relies on a screen that separates the viewer from the process of performing the "magic" of illuminating the object and generating the shadow, in the light spaces of art-books it is a necessary condition that the viewer has a view of the entire structure, along with the mysterious object embedded in it. Moreover, the viewer is called upon to penetrate it, make sense of it and change it. I desire that art-book solutions, i.e., light installations, be actually inhabited, and the openwork objects within them be manipulated and experienced. (*Пространства на сенките*, n.d.)

Among the works presented at the exhibition was one titled *Вградена невеста* [Walled-up woman] (Figure 21). To date, it has appeared in several versions: as a cardboard prototype of the art-book type, as the aluminium object discussed here (200 cm x 100 cm), as an illustration in a book of poetry, and finally as an element of a psychotherapeutic board-text game.



Figure 21. Photo of Kapka Kyneva's mock-up of the *Вградена невеста* installation. Photo by Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2023

In 2022, Kyneva took part in a project by the Bulgarian Emprove Foundation, which runs therapeutic programs aimed at helping people overcome helplessness after experiencing violence, terror or bereavement. The artists were asked to create works in response to the brief testimonies of female therapy participants. The testimony that Kyneva received triggered associations with the topos of the walled-up woman for her. What emerged was an image of a woman caught up in a relationship with a dominant partner, who had a habit of punishing her for the slightest "offences" with months of silence:

> ANNA – A NEW DAY
>
> He walked into the kitchen and scratched his chin. His misty gaze followed her.
>
> "Good morning", she said. He did not respond; he poured himself a cup of tea and went back to the computer room.
>
> He hadn't spoken to her in two months. It was his way of punishing her.
>
> She went out on the terrace, looked around and smiled. The flowers in the garden and the mountain view were the only things she'd miss. (Анна, 2021, game card)

As the artist admits, after reading this statement, her own cultural memory evoked an analogy with the folklore heroine. Referring to this topos, she decided to interpret it in a revolutionary way. In her installation, she placed the heroine in a cage formed by the outline of a male head and torso – it is the man who has become a prison for the woman "walled-up" in him. He dominates her completely, although he himself seems lifeless, immobilised in the situation he has created. The cage bars cast a shadow over the woman's face, which thus seems fragmented. This visualisation reflects her sense of disintegration, typical of a person in mental crisis.

However, Kyneva does not stop at diagnosing death. She shows the heroine at the moment she realises her freedom depends only on her. The process of the heroine's release is, as Kyneva says, a painful but necessary coming out, associated, we would like to add, with transgression from a state of negative disintegration to a state of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 2019):

> Physical aggression, active domination, explicit attempts at subjugation are not the only forms of violence known to humanity. Fear and insecurity can subtly turn us into slaves: in our unwillingness to reject someone whose love we have chosen to believe in, we sometimes endure unimaginable things. I believe that many people of both sexes need to rethink their relationships and partnerships, recognise and respect their own needs, and allow themselves to seek help and support. (Mineva et al., 2022)

The photograph of the *Walled-up woman* from Kapka Kyneva's installation became part of a bilingual set of thirty cards in the *Пробуждане между редовете* / *Awakening Between the Lines* therapy game mentioned here, which the Emprove Foundation makes available to those seeking support in crisis (cf. https://emproveproject.eu). The folk story of the walled-up woman thus becomes part of a contemporary practice of therapy through art, underwritten by the cultural memory of Bulgarians, in this case transcending the boundaries of language.

Module Two. Nursing Mother

In Bulgarian folklore, the topos of the walled-up woman is overwhelmingly associated with the conceptualisation of sacrificial motherhood. Meanwhile, literary variations on its theme favour a different status for the heroine, that of a fiancée or a yet-childless wife. From the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century come two works evoking the motif of the walling up of a nursing mother, giving rise to a second developmental line of literary interpretations of the topos. According to Arnaudov, both are imitative in nature. And indeed, in the ballad *Павле Кьопрюсю на Марица, според народното верование* [Pavle Köprüsü on Maritsa, according to folk belief] (П. Иванов, 1875), Petyr Ivanov reproduces the details of the folk narrative and includes in the finale informa-

tion about the traces of the murdered nursing mother's posthumous presence in this place: it is a voice, inquiring about the fate of her son, and milk flowing from her breast down the bridge vault. Both of these motifs will later return to feed the lapidary of popular culture and the pages of educational materials.

Another translation of the topos in question from the language of folklore into the language of popular literature is a rhymed poem by N.D. Yurdanov, *Майстор Манол* [Master Manole] (Юрданов, 1901). The author reproduces the motifs previously mentioned here: the conspiracy, Manole keeping his word to the masons, his wife's morning chores, his neighbour's lie, the ring as a decoy, the victim's plea for mercy and her weeping that lasted three days. In Yurdanov's case, however, the motif of the gap through which the walled-up mother could feed her child does not appear, and the ending resounds with words of condemnation for the cruelty of the builders.

И три дни се чува сподавений вик,
На никого не дожаляло, –
Нехаят дюлгери и зидат, градят,
Че тъй се кале задържало. (Юрданов, 1901, p. 35)

And a muted cry could be heard for three days
Yet no one felt compassion, –
The masons pay no attention, they lay the bricks, they build,
And that's how the fortress held up

I left this text in the original due to the linguistic peculiarities in this fragment. In the last verse, the poet's use of the Bulgarian inferential mood – marking the limited credibility of the information conveyed – serves to undermine belief in the effectiveness of foundational magic, and thus in the meaning of the violence that occurred.

The Living Breast of a Corpse

Similar doubt seems to underpin Stilian Chilingirov's drama *Моста на Струма* [Bridge on the river Struma] (Чилингировъ, 1930a, 1930b, 1930c, 1930d). In the work of this rebellious writer, magic does not work. The eponymous bridge remains unfinished due to the death of the main constructor, who commits suicide, devastated by his failure to save his wife from walling up orchestrated by a rival architect/constructor and, at the same time, a suitor rejected by Milezina. All of the manifestations of the construction crisis in the piece are fake, and Manole's wife dies not to strengthen the building or resolve the conflict, but as the result of an intrigue driven by personal revenge disguised as an archaic ritual. In this regard, by showing the base psychological motives behind the tragedy, Chilingirov follows in the footsteps of Petko Todorov's drama.

Images of the collapse of the structure erected by people in *Моста на Струма* are accompanied by an original attempt at reconceptualising the feminine role. In order to strengthen the distance to tradition, the author employs a fantastical pseudo-folkloric frame, placing the action of the story inside an ethnographic museum, where mannequins – one of whom is a storyteller beloved by children – come to life each night. At their behest, he tells them an old story of the beautiful, good and honest Milezina. This perfect member of a patriarchal society, both humbled by men's creativity and critical of their emotional impoverishment, thus explains her understanding of women's role in the world:

> I don't know… If people were only guided by the reason of masters, they would build bridges, build houses, erect palaces, but they would not raise children. We women are simple and do not comprehend great matters. We understand only one thing: that you have to bow to the masters and love people. (Чилингиров, 1930b, p. 89)

Awareness of her own intellectual limitations and devotion to her maternal mission make her a model of a woman consciously blending into an androcentric world but also maintaining personal dignity in the face of the precepts and prohibitions of tradition. And yet it is she who must succumb.

Reconstructing the posthumous life of his heroine in the drama's epilogue, Chilingirov follows the path of neither the Romantics nor the Modernists (Речник, 1994). He does not make her a redeemer of the world, or even (like Todorov) an incarnation of Sofia. The death of the heroine does strengthen the structure; she does not become the guardian spirit of the bridge, as folklore would have it. Milezina, accessing a new form of her life-non-life after her tragic death, retains her original self-awareness, and with it her former concerns for the child, the people and the bridge. Meanwhile, in the eyes of Manole, who accompanies her in this form of (non-)existence and cares for his walled-up wife and child, both of them cater only to their own impotence:

> Voice: Manole … Has the bridge connected both lands of Strachilov?…
> Manole: It has connected our shadows, Milezina… Shadows, shadows only! (Чилингиров, 1930d, p. 280)

This, however, is not the only truth about their situation. They remain devoted to each other, and their shared concern for their hungry child, who may no longer be alive, likens them in this mission to the Holy Family. As a result, what resonated in the final image of the heroine is not only her weakness, but also her gendered-conditioned metaphysical dignity expressed in her tenacious ethics of care. In this context, special significance is acquired by the scene in which Milezina feeds the baby, for which rational support can be found today in interdisciplinary research on corpses and the gradability of death (Thomas, 1991, pp. 9–27), but Chilingirov's motif of a lactating dead woman is known from folk songs (Моллов, 2012). In folklore, the process of milk production never ceases, and the food flowing down the stone walls becomes medicine for anyone who needs it.

It seems that this motif may be seen as a trace of the primary right of participation within animism that advocates a mystical and material unity of objects, animals and people. It was present not only in folklore, but also in Byzantine apocryphal literature, where this slightly perverse manner of visualising post-mortem lactation can be found in *The miracles of the Mother of God*. The Third Miracle, for example is an account of *A dead woman who fed her baby for an entire year and then came back to life* (Схимонах Паисий Българин, 1995, pp. 8–11). In this Byzantine text, formative for the Christian imagination, an unconscious and lethargic woman stuck on a desert island continued to produce milk by an intervention of the Mother of God, thus she was able to feed her baby and keep it alive for many months. In the end, she regained consciousness and returned to life. The fate of Chilingirov's walled-up woman is quite different. The lactation and love for one's child that transcend death grant ultimate status to her remains, which do not become the bonding agent to connect the stones of the bridge or the community, but remain an anomaly that evokes sympathy and respect, a vessel for "otherness" (Cixous, 1993; Janion, 1996; Badinter, 2013; Michna, 2014).

Water of Life I

Ana Karima presents a much more affirmative, although equally essentialistic, understanding of female altruism (Р. Радев, 2009). In her 1903 short story *Янин извор* [The spring of Yana] and in its 1939 drama adaptation (with the same title; Карима, 1939), the author explores the motif of the walling up of a woman, highlighting above all the innocence and sanctity of the sacrificial victim, as well as her never-ending readiness to serve people and to maintain friendly relations with them. Although the character of her husband, a master mason, is secondary in both of these works, Karima closes in on the remorse that plagues him after his wife's death and, finally, on the redemption he finds by succumbing to an inner impulse, thus becoming the usher of a miracle. In the finale of the play – in a world where magic has failed, the bridge has collapsed and social relations based on violence bring only suffering – the protagonists see a spring of "water of life" burst forth from the stone grave encasing the measuring thread that symbolises the soul of the sacrificed woman and mother.

Thus, a ray of hope is provided by a miracle of transubstantiation, understood as divine intervention into human reality. This is hardly a case of a necrotic transformation in the new animist sense because Yana's corpse remains outside the scope of this transmutation. Her body remains in the grave. It is her soul, freed from stone, that seeks communication with people in this way and bestows matter with causality. Symbolically, in this context it is her own child, on the verge of death due to the lack of mother's milk, that becomes the first person to be healed and brought back to life. Here, the symbolism of water as a life-giving substance clearly alludes to Yana's corporeal, biological mother-

hood. Following her death, her nourishing function extends to encompass all of humankind. As an entity seeking relations, Jana remains a person, albeit a not-only-human one, who maintains close relations with others only through the medium of the water of life. The Orthodox Church reclaims this ambiguous and heterogeneous – to use (neo-)animist terminology – "necropersona" (Bird-David, 1999; Domańska, 2017, pp. 57–59) by surrounding her and the spring of "water of life" with an aura of sanctity.

> The spring marks an innocent soul which you have put to death. God has made Yana's innocent soul holy. Let those who drink from the pure spring find their cure and bless Yana's name. (Holds out his hand over the spring) Let the spring of Yana, innocent Yana, remain here forever. And let the memory of her purify all dark souls! (Raising his hand) Let her name be eternal! (Карима, 1939, p. 39)

The overtly moralistic conclusion of the story serves the purpose of social didactics and constitutes a folklore-clad sublimation of Ana Karima's feminism with undertones of indigenous mysticism (incidentally, in her time the author was deemed the very embodiment of misandry; Кузмова-Зографова, 2002). Consequently, despite its leftist sensitivity to the economic aspects of the depicted tragedy, in its reliance on the topos of the walled-up woman the play *de facto* preserves the religious and folk understanding of the role of a mother who – even after death – is predestined to maintain relations with others and (in line with original mysticism) in order to retain her conscious intentionality.

The Healer

Within this context, it is impossible not to mention a site in Bulgaria that is considered to be proof of such a miracle. We mean here the bridge in the village of Nevestino on the river Struma in south-western Bulgaria. The title of Chilingirov's drama refers to this place. The bridge was built on the communication route connecting Constantinople (Istanbul), Kyustendil, Skopje, and the Adriatic Sea (Н. Владимиров, 2007, p. 9). Erected in 1470, it has a number of names in Bulgarian: the Turkish *Kadı Köprüsü,* the Bulgarian *Невестин мост*, and the hybrid *Кадин мост*. The official name in Bulgarian is the Turkish version (while in Turkish, the official name is the Ishak Pasha Bridge, after its founder). Both names mean "woman's bridge" and suggest a mythical genealogy, linked with the figure of Struma, whose shadow was allegedly walled-up in the middle span.

The Proto-Slavic noun *nevěsta (woman), found in the name of the bridge, but also in the name of the village itself, means "the one no one knows about; the one no one knows". This word was used to denote a young woman who joined a new family: a fiancée, bride, daughter-in-law, sister-in law ("Niewiasta", 1963). The determinant of her status was her potential or realised reproductive capabilities, that is giving birth or, in the case of an unwed woman, the possibility of giving birth to family descendants in the future (Чолева-Димитрова, 2002, p. 142).

At 89 meters long and 6.5 meters wide, Kadin Most is the second largest Bulgarian bridge from Ottoman times, after Svilengrad. The current is strong between its spans (Figure 22). Its sturdy, massive construction and size liken Kadin Most to other stone structures erected between Istanbul and the Adriatic Sea: the bridge on the Maritsa river in Svilengrad, the Skopje bridge on the Vardar river, and the bridge on the Maritsa in the Turkish city of Edirne (Odrin in Bulgarian). Their purpose was to expedite the movement of people and goods, but they also had military significance. Kadin Most was built during the march of Ishak Pasha's army to Bosnia. The inscription etched on a granite plaque near its western end says (in Arabic) that he founded and erected the bridge so that travellers could use it free of charge. Date: 874 (that is 1470; Танев, 2004, p. 126). There is a legend about slabs that "walked by themselves" to the construction site, likely conjured in connection with their size, which made it difficult to transport them in the 15th century.



Figure 22. Kadin Most in Nevestino.
Photo by Zofia Kręc, 2021

Two variants of the legend surrounding the bridge's construction function in Nevestino. The first one accounts for the motif of foundation sacrifice and centres around Struma, the wife of the youngest of the builders, whose shadow is walled up into a span to ensure the structure's stability. According to local belief, the cries of Struma, who misses her child, can still be heard from the bridge. The other version speaks of a Bulgarian wedding party that sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror stumbled upon while passing through the village in 1463. The bride stood before him and bowed three times. Touched by this gesture, the sultan wished to give her a gift, and the bride asked for a bridge. Sometimes the person retelling the story mixes up the two variants, thereby contaminating them[22]: in one of them, Struma is a girl at a moment of initia-

[22] The church of St. Anna in the village of Smolichino too has its legend, about Yana (Anna) and nine brothers who loved her. Yana is unfairly accused of acting against her

tion – her wedding[23]. At the core of the song about Struma is her motherhood, which does not end even when she is walled up. She continues to feed her baby through a gap in the bridge, which over time endows this place with the status of a healing site, not only locally.

In 2021, as part of Bulgaria's cross-border cooperation with the municipality of Probishtip in North Macedonia, the bridge was renovated: the asphalt was removed from the road, and the slabs were exposed in accordance with the structure's original appearance. A restaurant named Струма невеста [The woman Struma] operates by the bridge today, but the figure of Struma was already appreciated during the period of the Bulgarian People's Republic: a stone monument of her was built near the bridge, designed by local sculptor Mite Chudomirov (b. 1953) from Kyustendil (Figure 23). The strong, upright posture of the young peasant woman wearing a headscarf and traditional garb is inspired by the paintings of Vladimir Dimitrov, which is further emphasised by the apples the girl holds in her folded hands. The plaque under the monument reads: "The woman Struma". The statue is a manifestation of strong and monumental femininity rather than of victimhood. The sculptor also introduced a significant replacement: Struma holds fruit, not her child, who was her main concern at the time of her death. These can hardly be considered a meal that she brought to the bricklayers on the fateful day. The apples are the fruit of Struma's labour, an expression of her relationship with the earth, similar to the depictions of village Madonnas as depicted by Vladimir Dimitrov in his series

family, including murdering the child of her brother's wife. An intrigue, plotted by the wife of Pavel, one of the brothers, leads to the decision to kill the girl. Before her death, Yana announces that an Orthodox church will be built on the site of her death. The current church, dating from 1888, was built on much older foundations and has burned down several times. Yana also indicates the place from where the water is to emerge – today there is a waterfall and a spring (*ayazmo*) next to the church (Т. Георгиева, personal communication, 23 February, 2021; Танев, 2004, pp. 130–131). In this version of the story, the death of an innocent victim is the result of an intrigue, a mimetic rivalry whose stake is to level tensions in a crisis.

[23] Elena Ognianova cites not only the legend of Struma and the Bulgarian wedding, but also the legend of the Struma River itself, which is still murky. The author relates the tale of a girl who, in Ottoman times, was ambushed by a Turk who wanted to rape her. Struma was with child at the time. She fled from the Turk into the river, but her tormentor caught up with her and ripped open her belly, which contained the baby (male), with a knife. Since then, the river has carried her pain, and that is why its waters are murky. In the same volume, Ognianova also cites the story of the old bridge on the Belitsa River in the village of Debelets (near Tarnovo), in which appears the name of Master Manole of Struma. The nameless Bulgarian master from Debelets decides, after his failed attempts to build the bridge, not to make a foundation sacrifice, as Master Manole of Nevestino did, and spends the night on the bridge himself during a great storm, deciding that if the bridge does not hold, he will go down with the structure. But it holds, and the weather clears up in the morning. The bridge withstood without a human sacrifice (Огнянова, 1984, pp. 118–119).

inspired by icons. The Struma of the monument embodies the values of "women of the people", which were promoted during the socialist period: the toil of daily work and the worship of the crops of the land. Chudomirov picked a specific moment in Struma's biography; in order to maintain decorum, he dropped the sacrificial motives in favour of the feminine vitality. Dimitrov "the Master", hailing from a town near Kyustendil, as well as his followers, referenced the region's status as the literally understood "orchard of Bulgaria". The orchard tradition (the region is now known mainly for growing cherries) stemmed for centuries from the favourable climate and fertile soils, and the first orchard experiment station was established in Kyustendil in 1896. To this day, orchard fruit-growing remains a key branch of the local economy, and the local calendar of events includes numerous fruit festivals, such as the Cherry Festival and the annual September Harvest Festival. During my stay in Kyustendil in 2024, I (SS) asked Mayor Atanas Ognianov what he thought was a distinctive part of the city's and region's identity. In one breath, he listed over a dozen names of festivals and holidays related to fruit, fertility and harvest (А. Огнянов, personal communication, June 4, 2024). None of them, however, take place near the bridge in Nevestino.



Figure 23. Monument of Struma in Nevestino.
Photo by Zofia Kręc, 2021

Even in the second half of the 20th century, the key beliefs associated with the bridge were expressed in what is sometimes referred to as "embodied religiosity", whose origins can be traced to Byzantine culture, founded on Christianity

and Greek antiquity (Lubańska, 2019, pp. 69–73). In her book on healing practices in Bulgarian Orthodox monasteries, Lubańska states that religions always involve material forms and sensory experiences, citing Birgit Meyer's definition of religion as a mediation practice focused on "sensory forms" (Lubańska, 2019, p. 81).

The nucleus of the beliefs centred around the Nevestino bridge was the belief in its life-giving energy, stemming from the presence of walled-up Struma's soul. According to Kadin legend, the bridge "weeps": one spot always remains wet, despite being above the water's surface. The water dripping from the stone is supposed to testify to the mother's longing for her child (Огнянова, 1984, pp. 115–116). The crying of the walled-up Struma at night is also supposed to testify to maternal suffering (В. Иванова, personal communication, December 12, 2021). Through sound and material representations, Struma is inscribed into the life of the place as a living figure who does not keep silent, but cries, evoking sympathy but also stirring consciences, reminding all of the violence of the foundation act.

Another belief is related to the bridge's alleged positive effect on infertile women and women who have no breast milk, which gives the structure the status of a space with the ability to mediate between the material and the spiritual[24]. In my research, I did not come across direct references to embodied imagery of Struma; what is cultivated is rather the memory of her presence manifested through sounds and bodily fluids (tears, milk). In Bulgarian mythology, the life-giving milk has medicinal functions; on St. George's Day, it is sprinkled on the skin of brides and pregnant women to ensure that the former become pregnant soon and that the latter have enough milk (Стойнев, 1994, p. 219). In local beliefs, the healing power of the bridge and of the water flowing underneath manifests itself especially for women and couples trying for a child. Water from the river is poured on those in need of help (Попов, 1994, p. 220). The method for nursing mothers is to chip off a piece of stone from the bridge, boil it, and drink the resulting concoction (Н. Владимиров, 2007, p. 17; Огнянова, 1984, p. 118; В. Иванова, personal communication, December 12, 2021).

Thus, unlike in the Macedonian legend from Kratovo, where imagery is also centred around the walling up of a young mother, the bridge "does not demand more sacrifice" and does not set the wheel of violence in motion but is instead recognised as a life-supporting object. The starting point for this story is a gap in the wall left, according to legend, by the builders for a breast so that Struma could feed her child. According to the local Nevestino legend, a woman's shadow was walled up in Nevestino, which is related to the belief that her body rests elsewhere, and the structure was populated by the woman's soul – so the bridge is not a tomb, but the dwelling/home of Struma's spirit.

[24] At night, beings from the in-between worlds (*samodivas*, *talasum*) may appear under bridges, or the shadow of a person walled-up in the bridge (Попов, 1994).

The aforementioned beliefs in the healing power of the bridge remained vital even during the communist period and were solidified by popular, high-circulation publications that popularised folklore and sightseeing as important domains consistent with the state's cultural policy at the time. Today, traces of magical healing practices are fading, although one can still read information about the bridge's healing power as a curiosity in guidebooks and tourist brochures about Nevestino. During my field research in June 2024, villagers I asked about contemporary references to the belief in the healing power of the bridge stated that this belief is waning. According to interviewees, the extinction of these practices and beliefs is primarily due to generational changes. Young people are not interested in maintaining the tradition, and there is a lack of institutional attempts to revitalise the topos in the form of educational activities, holidays, and customs involving the local community (В. Спасова, personal communication, June 19, 2024).

The absence of a formal system to preserve knowledge has also muted these vernacular narratives. There is no longer one main message about the bridge. Instead, there are scattered narratives, some of which mention the bridge as the grave of Struma or as a cursed place. Such audiovisual interpretations, albeit disregarding the legend of the bridge's healing power, can be found in YouTube vlogs. These vlogs find horror conventions, mysterious deaths, and ghost séances more attractive. During these séances, the spirit of Struma and the ghosts of witnesses to the founding murder are invoked (Siedlecka, 2025).

The residents' accounts of the bridge built by the Turk five centuries ago correspond with a narrative about the village not having its own Orthodox church, something every Bulgarian village should have. One of my interviewees (Б. Ваташки, personal communication, December 12, 2021) considers the lack of such a church shameful[25]. Consequently, Blagoy Vatashki, a locksmith, and his wife, Violeta Ivanova, decided to build an iron chapel in Nevestino with their own efforts. The chapel of St. Theodore Tiron of Amasea was consecrated by the Metropolitan of Sofia in 2021 (*Тържествено*, 2021). Vatashki found it telling that when the three main funders backed out of their commitment to contribute to the construction, all three died within a year (Б. Ваташки, personal communication, December 12, 2021). He sees this as a sign that God's punishment befell the would-be donors[26].

[25] My interviewee also sees this as a manifestation of Bulgarian national mentality, expressed in the Bulgarians' disrespect and disregard for their own culture and traditions, juxtaposing Bulgarians with Greeks: "Here, whenever there is some discovery, twenty people question it, unlike the Greeks, for example: whatever tiniest discovery they make, they show it off, dedicate a museum or a monument to it, etc." (Ваташки, personal communication, 2021) St. Petka's Church was completed and consecrated in the summer of 2021, after the interview had already taken place.

[26] In 2017, Kadin Most also became the backdrop for events celebrating the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. Present was then Bulgarian Ombudsman Maya Manolova, a native of nearby Kyustendil. She gave a speech next to the bridge, referring

The Kyustendil region, in particular, has many sacred sites, which are primarily stone buildings (светилища, оброчища; В. Спасова, 2023, p. 81). Belief in the healing power of stone has been reactivated in recent years in a rock cult and ritual complex dating back to the 5th–4th centuries BC, located near the village of Lilyach. The locals call this place Провирялката [Gap/ Clearance], and throughout Bulgaria it is considered a place with high energy and healing properties due to the divine intervention manifested there (В. Спасова, 2023, pp. 83–84). The complex itself was built by the Thracians in honour of the Mother Goddess and her son, the Sun. The complex was associated with the belief that the sun's rays penetrated the rock openings and fertilised the Mother Goddess, who was identified with the earth and rock. Hence, the belief that this site can cure infertility persists to this day. A popular modern healing practice involves crawling through a narrow rock crevice before sunrise. An important part of the ritual is the presence of a boy with living parents who slips through the opening first. A childless woman follows him. After undergoing this rite, they are recognised as kin. The rock formation itself (Figure 24) resembles a woman's buttocks, and slipping through the gap, only 30 centimetres tall, is compared to passing through the birth tract and being born again (В. Спасова, 2023, p. 86). People from all over Bulgaria come to crawl through the clearance with the intention of gaining fertility, health, and good energy. These practices became especially popular during the COVID pandemic (*Заедно по свещените места на планината Осогово: пътеводител*, 2009, p. 96).

From Thracian times comes the legend of a dignitary whose wife, after visiting this place, gave birth to numerous offspring, although she had previously tried unsuccessfully to get pregnant. Also Theodora, the wife of Emperor Justinian in the 6th century, was said to have been endowed with fertility after visiting the complex next to the village of Lilyach. In this case, the healing substance is stone, which conveys hardness and strength, as well as the boundary between past and present. The dolmens were believed to be home to ancestral spirits, with the stone representing the body of a deceased individual. Crawling through stone holes and crevices itself is a practice known in Bulgarian rituals. Many rock formations are objects of worship, especially in prayers for a good harvest, health, fertility. During sacrificial rituals, the stone also took on the function of a prothesis (sacrificial table), located east of the Rift (В. Спасова, 2023, p. 85).

The sites in Lilyach and Nevestino are linked by the belief in the healing power of the stone and its life-giving energy, which sustains the continuum of life. This power manifests itself especially through the woman–boy arrangement: in Nevestino, the walled-up Struma feeds her male infant, giving continuity of life to the entire family, while in Lilyach the boy–female pair is linked to the

to the structure as a symbol of dialogue between human hearts, also repeatedly mentioning the figure of the Mother of God as the patron saint of the Bulgarian people, and finally presented the residents with an icon of the Mother of God in connection with the ongoing construction of an Orthodox church in Nevestino (В. Владимиров, 2017).

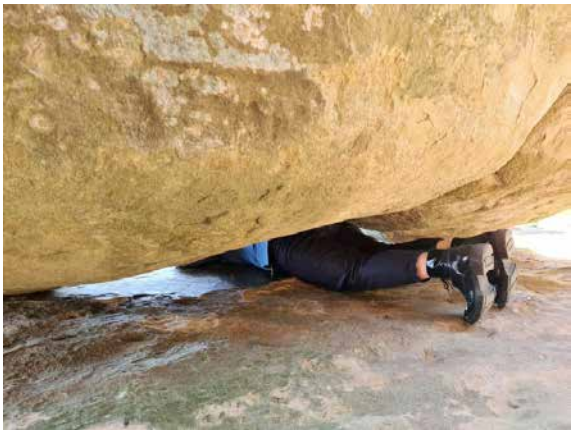


Figure 24. The Gap near the village of Lilyach.
Photo by Vera Aleksandrova, 2021

Thracian cult of the Mother Goddess and her son, the Sun. In both cases, a key role in maintaining the balance of the universe is created by an empty space – a clearance in the stone. In Nevestino, it is a space in the middle span from which the healing substance (mother's milk) is supposed to flow, while in Lilyach it is a claustrophobic space that must be squeezed through to achieve the desired healing effect. In the cases of both stone objects, this clearance is the channel through which life flows. In Nevestino, sensory forms were associated with "consuming" the body of the bridge, which produced, it was believed, a healing substance. The practice of squeezing through a stone passage in the village of Lilyach is a total experience, involving the entire body. "Re-birth" practitioners are cast in the role of children, born through the body of the universe.

Guardian of the Water of Life

It is difficult to say whether the authors of the modern dance-pantomime performance *Българска мистерия* [Bulgarian mystery][27], staged in the 2019/2020 season at the theatre of the Bulgarian Academy of Theatre and Film in Sofia (НАТФИЗ "Кръстьо Сарафов", 2019), are aware of how much they have in common with Ana Karima's message from the first half of the 20th century. On the other hand, they are certainly aware of the folk affiliations of their ideas.

[27] Libretto Stanislav Semerdzhiyev; direction Margarita Bozhilova; stage design Petya Karadjova; music Valeria Krachunova, Georgi Andreev; modern dance techniques Nedelya Gancheva; stage combat Kamen Ivanov; folk dances Elitsa Kostadinova; photographer Krasimir Andonov (cf. Божилова, 2019; *Българска мистерия*, n.d.; Клас доц. Александра Хонг 2020, 2021). I would like to thank Margarita Bozhilova for providing me with a video recording of the performance (GSG).

The libretto of the piece, directed by Margarita Bozhilova, was written by longtime university rector Stanislav Semerdzhiyev, who created an eclectic piece that aspires to be a contemporary morality play, half-jokingly and half-seriously (Семерджиев, 2021). The author juggled conventions by using the technique of bricolage. He juxtaposed elements of folklore and medieval miracles that were unknown in Orthodox tradition with street farce and dance. Like Karima, Semerdzhiyev rather subversively linked the topos of the walled-up woman with the Christian imaginarium, represented by angels, devils, and supernatural inspirations. This is an interventionist gesture of sorts, since confessional accents did not appear in the Bulgarian foundation sacrifice ballads written down in the 19th century. Semerdzhiyev thus made a late translation of pagan archaisms into the language of Judeo-Christian symbols in order to simultaneously cast doubt on the order thus created.

The piece's plot, which is narrated through choreography and pantomime that refer to folk dances, centres on the construction of a fountain that turns out to have healing powers. The first man to experience the miracle is the old Master Manole, who, through accidental contact with the spring, is rejuvenated. The spirit of the place reveals the reason for the transformation and his calling: to provide access to miraculous water for the sick.

Although faced with a fait accompli, Manole avoids the Faustian trap (Kunicki, 2002); he does not sign a pact with either the devil or God but simply approaches the spring. However, when people from the nearby village enter his space, he faces dilemmas that lead to a spiritual struggle. Manole is forced to choose between serving God and loving a woman. As befits a morality play, the Devil and the Angel intervene in the internal negotiations. The former encourages Manole to start a family and enjoy Elitsa's love. The latter does the opposite, pulling him away from the girl so that he can choose the altruistic goal.

Both the Devil and the Angel remain invisible to the characters for a long time, which allows them to intervene in events implicitly. The genre scenes, as played out on stage in the poetics of folklorism, have complementary components of popular angelology and Christian demonology that are visible to the audience. The Angel and the Devil watch each other and try to stay ahead of their opponent's every move. Initially, the evil spirit proves more effective. It causes conflict within the community, resulting in such violent behaviour that the nearly completed fountain is completely destroyed. Fuelled by the Devil, the crisis escalates and finds symbolic expression in the eighth scene of the play, where it becomes a collective dance. For the three characters fighting for love – Manole, Elitsa, and the Foolish Young Man – this dance becomes a dance to the death. For a long time, the Angel and the Devil do not allow it to be interrupted, and they even get into a "dancing" duel themselves (Семерджиев, 2021, p. 116).

Only when the spirits move away do Elitsa and Manole make a free decision to be together. That same night, however, a mystical experience happens to each of them, which changes their thinking. For Manole, it is a terrifying dream in which he sees the Devil dancing on the bodies of people who are dying and are

denied access to the water of life. He also sees himself with a stick, chasing them away from the spring. On the other hand, Elitsa meets an angel in her vision who grants her power and opens her heart to accepting suffering voluntarily.

> Not knowing what is actually expected of her but understanding that she must sacrifice her happiness for the good of all, ELITSA falls to her knees and asks God to grant her strength. A ray of light engulfs her and her shadow is "projected" on the wall in front of the MASTER. Shaken, he stops, wobbles, violently takes Elitsa in his arms and leaves […]. (Семерджиев, 2021, p. 118)

From this point on, Elitsa becomes passive, which is visualised on stage when she stops moving on her own. Manole carries her to the spring, places her on a swing suspended from a tree, and with his own hands walls up her shadow into the fountain wall, which Elitsa passively watches. The completion of the construction awakens the joyful spirit of the spring, which teaches the weak woman the dance of "free water/will". This dance has the character of a *credo* and foreshadows the future unity of good spirits dedicated to a common goal:

> THE SPRING helps her up. It leads her with it and shows her the dance of "free water/will" – beautiful and serious, frightening and solemn. ELITSA and the SPRING dance in increasing harmony, faster and faster, until Elitsa falls … into the arms of the awakened MASTER, who carries her home […]. High up, the ANGEL blesses the spring, flapping its wings over it three times. (Семерджиев, 2021, p. 119)

Elitsa, submitting to the divine/angelic will for the sake of others, is likened to a Christomimetic figure. The shared joy of the Angel and the people arriving at the spring of life, however, does not last long. The Foolish Young Man leads the incited crowd to the house of Manole and Elitsa; he wants to immerse the girl in the miraculous water and restore her strength. He kidnaps her and carries her to the spring, but with each immersion the girl grows weaker until she finally dies. In her case, the miraculous water kills. Enraged, the crowd then turns against Manole. A lynching takes place, and the Devil triumphs, sitting on a pile of dead human bodies.

Death, however, does not have the last word. Against the backdrop of pastoral nature, two twin figures of angels sway on heavenly swings. The one with red wings (the colour of martyrdom and the Holy Spirit) is Elitsa, whose presence gives impetus to the water; if heaven is an eternal state of mind, then, the narrator says, "by submitting to the will of God, she has achieved it. However, the world of men knows no stability, for man – praising the miracles – is ready to crucify his benefactor at any moment" (Семерджиев, 2021, p. 123).

In the final scene of Margarita Bozhilova's pantomime-dance performance, this pessimism about the fate of the world was expressed by a choreography resembling a fountain made of piled-up dead bodies. The satisfied Devil sits on top with a commanding gesture. However, it is known that a woman stands on the side of humanism in the endless struggle for world power. In Semerdzhiyev's view, it is she who is predestined for the life-sustaining mission of feeding and healing.

The Cosmic One

Ekaterina Tomova's 1994 contemporary novel *Гости от другия свят* [Visitors from another world] (Томова, 1994) is a text that angelises the walling up of the woman-mother. Told in the first person, the story provides emotive insight into the fate of a homestead that is passed down from generation to generation but is about to disappear as the local mafia has earmarked the building for demolition. The protagonist of Tomova's story returns to the town she once left, determined to fight for the house that holds a special place in her memories. During her extended stay, she recounts three intertwining stories: her ongoing battle against the town's corrupt administration, her family's and the town's history, and the enigmatic guardian of the place, whom she calls Shadow-Mother. She dreams of her, and she writes down those nighttime visions:

> The floor opened and closed with a monstrous clatter, and some enormous shadow hovered over the farmyard. She was so old that her hair seemed transparent. Her old clothes hung on her like a giant spider web. All that remained of her bright eyes was the glint of silver in her eye sockets. Her jaws stretched in a horrible, ghostly smile. I knew her instinctively: Shadow-Mother, the eldest, who had erected the frame of the house in distant times. This sinister figure was also the best. All stood before her in respect. (Томова, 1994, p. 8)

Although at first glance Tomova uses trivialised horror tools in her description of the Shadow-Mother (the phantom's transparent hair, cobweb clothing, hollow yet strangely glowing eye sockets, and the creepy smile of the jaws stripped of muscles), the appearance of this figure evokes feelings of inner peace and acceptance in the heroine. Accompanying ghosts also do not evoke fear, not even the headless husband of the Shadow-Mother, who was killed during the battle of the Adriatic Sea several centuries ago (Томова, 1994, p. 9). In the first pages of the novel, the reader learns that in her human life the Shadow-Mother had to flee war-torn Trieste with her son (Томова, 1994, pp. 9–10). The road led her first to Serdika (Томова, 1994, p. 58) and then to the mountains of Orpheus (Томова, 1994, p. 59), where, after many tribulations, she found refuge. She built a house with Gan, while the Shadow-Father, who accompanied them in this work, settled in the foundations of the building so that it would remain unshakable. After her natural death years later, she too was buried in the foundations of the house (Томова, 1994, p. 59).

Thus, Tomova significantly altered the topos of a walled-up woman. The first semantic shift is related to the gender of the person trapped in the foundations, the second to the voluntary nature of this act. As a male spirit, the Shadow-Father consciously assumed the role of supernatural guardian of the house. Perhaps he appears in the heroine's real life as a huge, ant-like male, whose sex is repeatedly emphasised. He becomes the heroine's only companion during her lonely stay in the house, and a rather capricious one at that. In the end, it is Ant – seemingly small and powerless – who sets a fire in the building with

his micro-actions. Afterwards, only a burnt-out area remains, and the object of the heroine's efforts ceases to exist. Tomova leaves the reader with a lot of ambiguity – not only about Ant's status. The novel interweaves a number of conventions. Some fragments are maintained in the realist style, drawing from the Bulgarian reality of the communist and so-called transitional periods (Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2020, pp. 278–280); others follow a poetic/oneiric convention with an admixture of psychological self-analysis. All this provides a kind of motivation for narrative breaks, understatements, allusions, and plot shifts. What binds this seeming chaos together is the figure of the Shadow-Mother.

This may be the first time that a mystical guardian of a home has been given so much space in Bulgarian literature. Although the posthumous life of the walled-up woman has been touched upon by a number of writers, as a rule this has been reduced to suggestions about her presumed existence in the hereafter within the framework of culturally conditioned imagery. Thus, some writers have drawn from folk demonology (Slaveykov's Moira, Atanasov's samodiva, Karaliychev's Erinys, Chilingirov's nursing corpse); others have tapped into biblical or hagiographic sources (a spring of living water in Karima's work, Divine Wisdom in Todorov's work, and the Angel in Semerdzhiyev's work). Tomova liberates her heroine from this kind of folk-ceremonial framework and turns the founding mother of the local centre of the world into a free spirit of the Cosmos who learns her own mental limitations in the course of her peregrinations through the galaxies. The unexpected experience of freedom is accompanied by the Shadow-Mother's shedding of all attributes of humanity besides memory. This takes place during the heroine's peculiar confrontation with the cosmic entity of apocalyptic time, which unifies death and life.

> The Shadow-Mother came face to face with him. This being was death-life. It breathed at the same time, and the Shadow-Mother instantly felt her forgotten weight as a human being and her current weightlessness. She stirred but did not disintegrate. The being closed its mouth and pulled it down like a bridge in front of the Shadow-Mother. She heard the human voice inside her say "PASS" and she moved across those lips. Their bridge carried her carefully across the edge of the earth toward the open space of stellar chaos. Before she entered it, the Shadow-Mother lost her shape. Her long hair fell down and remained on the ground, as if about to take root. She lost her human appearance and shape and moved away to the world of stars. She retained only memory, for memory is the true mover of the universe, the eternal roots of the universe, spreading everywhere. (Томова, 1994, p. 11)

This description of the Shadow-Mother's transgression toward a new non-human form of existence complicates the semantics because of the main character's reflections on the life-giving nature of Necros that preceded this event. While walking together with the shadows, she experiences with all her senses the decay of plants, their growth, the structure and smell of humus as a sphere of life and death happening at the same time. She is fascinated by the changeability of forms, the vigorous roots waiting for their time (Томова,

1994, p. 10). This animistic fascination with nature forms the basis of her future transformation in her understanding of the world.

The protagonist's sensitivity allows her to perceive and name the experiences of the wandering Shadow-Mother in the universe, who, having divested herself of everything human (and therefore of her ties to animate nature), has retained a memory to which the narrator attributes the status of the first cosmic mover. Like an expansive rhizome, growing roots into any substrate, she embraces the universe with her power. This, however, brings with it the mutability and uncertainty of all forms. Memory gives rise to desires, and it is memory that makes the Shadow-Mother experience cognitive dissonances in her disembodied form. Yes, she feels free because nothing limits her flight, but everything resists her attempts at understanding (Томова, 1994, p. 28) because the cognitive apparatus of the old woman, associated with memory, is earthly in nature. The beauty of the Cosmos captivates the human eye from afar. Up close, however, it turns out to be a feast of destructive processes, arousing horror and despair (Томова, 1994, p. 29). The only place that brings her solace is the planet – the double of the Earth, its serene mirror image of the shadows of everything and everyone that has ever existed. The sight of familiar places and people makes Shadow-Mother long to return, if only for a moment, to her previous human condition:

> The Shadow-Mother felt as if her blood was flowing. How she longed to break out of this state and become human again. (Томова, 1994, p. 32)
>
> The Shadow-Mother longed for this wretched globe – pale and meagre compared to the fantastic splendour and forms of star giants and blinding suns – as well as for the tiny wild village and its bizarre existence, so irrelevant to the life of the universe. To her own astonishment, she began to feel this nostalgia; she wanted, if only for an hour, to become her old human being, and then she could disappear forever, even as a shadow wandering through the universe […]. (Томова, 1994, p. 56)

In order for the ever-emancipating woman to bring also this plan to fruition, it becomes necessary to destroy the house she has erected. And so, this time – like always in life and beyond – she proves herself to be a great causative force. The cause-and-effect relationships of the individual events lead the reader to assume that the two shadows entombed in the foundations, Mother and Father, were the ones behind the liberating fire. Half hallucinating and half seeing clearly, the heroine slumbers on the bus back to Sofia and experiences full integration with the powerful Shadow-Mother, who chooses her last descendant's fragile body as her home. This peculiar incarnation does not mean that the protagonist loses her personality. On the contrary, she begins to experience more and understand the world around her more deeply. The words that invade her like ghosts become a metaphor for this transformation:

> They crowded, chaotically at first, in large groups, then began to organize themselves – each went to its place, because they all knew their places. They clustered one above the other, one next to the other, and erected walls with an inhuman hand, piled high, while others joined above the ceiling like a roof. They

> built rooms. A house was created. Identical to the one that burned down. She instinctively felt it was her house, one that would not be destroyed by fire. Floods would not carry it away. Earthquakes would not tear it down. (Томова, 1994, pp. 155–156)

Like in Orthodox icons, they erect a house, built with a hand that is not human, which cannot be destroyed by anything. This paraphrase of Gospel of Matthew (Mt 7:27) in this case is used to construct an autothematic utterance: "The house of words, although not created by human hand, protected this second life, in which the possibility of salvation was inscribed" (Томова, 1994, p. 156).

Speaking of future creation, of "houses made of words", however, she does not refer to the figure of the divinised Jesus as the guarantor of their stability but takes as her point of support the shadows of ancestors and roots (including the roots of memory), whose master is the single most coveted ruler of the earthly world: life itself (Томова, 1994, p. 158). Tomova thus shows a certain consistency in transforming both the Christological paradigm and the folk topos of the walling up of a woman. The motif of the Shadow-Mother, which is a paraphrase of them, offers a comforting new meaning. She rises to the status of the only force capable of saving man, while beyond her strength and love there is only the indifference and emptiness of the starry skies.

The Teacher

Theodora Dimova's short novel *Майките* [Mothers] (Димова, 2005), which was awarded the Main Prize of the 6th "Development" National Literary Competition for the New Bulgarian Novel, was published in 2005. The focus of Dimova's novel is the crisis of values in Bulgaria of the period of transition, which did not spare the family and motherhood. The subsequent chapters of the book depict the daily lives of several teenagers. Each ends with a transcript of a police interrogation. At this stage, the reader does not understand why the investigators are interested in the students' dreams about their teacher, Yavora. The meaning of the annexes becomes clear only when the crime committed by the teenagers is revealed.

Dimova's characters are young people wounded by their parents, often heroically fighting for their own humanity. Dimova does not judge anyone. Instead, she exposes the sources of mothers' selfishness – traumas later projected onto their children – and shows the mechanism of psychological violence inflicted by an abandoned woman (*Андрея*), a sex toy (*Никола*), a career woman (*Деян*), a guest worker (*Дана*), a woman forced to adopt (*Александър*), and a hypochondriac (*Калина*).

Read in the context of considering the topos of the walled-up woman, Dimova's novel appears to be a metaphor-based extended complement to Marguerite Yourcenar's short story *Le lait de la mort* (The Milk of Death; Yourcenar, 1988). In her piece, the French writer poignantly develops the Balkan motif of

the walled-up woman-mother, deeming it capable of "evoking no less tears in poets than the story of Antigone" (Yourcenar, 1988, p. 32). The ideal mother in the story finds her shadow in the person of the Gypsy woman, who blinds her child in order to profit from it (Yourcenar, 1988, p. 32).

Avoiding the moralising tone which can be found in the ending of Yourcenar's story, Dimova's novel offers in-depth portraits of several mothers who ooze the milk of death to their children. Axiological chaos reigns in the novel's dystopian world. The once repressive order of the patriarchal-communist world has crumbled, and the place of discarded façade principles has been taken not so much by freedom as by widespread acquiescence to arbitrariness. In the adult world, as Dimova sees it, there is no room for either a maternalistic ethic of care or patriarchal authoritarianism, while the proliferation of psychological, physical and economic violence has no gender (Wodzik, 2011; de Beauvoir, 2019).

Evelina Lambreva Jecker, analysing *Майките*, links the characters' attitudes to female perversion, which, following Estela V. Welldon, she identifies with pathological motherhood (Welldon, 2016). She also includes the teacher in this group of perverse mothers, noting that she is the only one to manifest evangelically motivated concern for children. The researcher sees her as a narcissistic Madonna who manipulates students and makes them emotionally dependent on her. So, when she announces her departure, the teenagers' anger and aggression seem almost natural (Ламбрева, 2007). In Dimova's work, however, the character of Yavora is more complicated than this analysis would suggest. A beautiful and charismatic teacher, she attracts adolescents hungry for moral authority and affection. Her wisdom and relationship-building skills make her a reliable person for the students; as it were, she takes the empty place left by their mothers. The announcement of her departure, which is a paraphrase of Jesus's words (John 16:7;14), therefore arouses fear of emptiness and hostility in them (Димова, 2005, pp. 180–182). In an instant, she goes from being a person who commands authority to being a "whore" and a "liar" who should be punished in the eyes of the students (Димова, 2005, pp. 185–186).

In her analysis of the novel, Dimana Ivanova follows Bataille's thinking, characterising the crime committed as an orgiastic act to prevent the relationship from breaking down (Д. Иванова, 2016). Additional ways of interpreting the final chapter, which is a description of the murder, are suggested by the dream-like visions reported by the girls and boys during the investigation. The structure of the adolescents' individual statements is fragmentary and sometimes lacks coherence, as is typical of the forced verbalisation of dreams (Ogden, 2019, pp. 149–181). Yet the individual images of Yavora complement each other, together making up a picture of a being that is half-human and half-divine, which evokes associations with a God-/Spirit-bearing figure, so important in Orthodox theology (Florenski, 2009, pp. 255–310). In Dimova's work, the protagonist combines the qualities attributed to all the persons of the Holy Trinity. She becomes similar to Jesus when she accepts her suffering with humility and compassion for her murderers (Димова, 2005, pp. 38–40). In the teenager's

visions, she invites student-pilgrims into her home, cares for them, and grants them the grace of forgiveness in imitation of the Father in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:12):

> […] one day, however, we will make it to Yavora's house, and it will be cool; the floor will be covered with marble, there will be ponds and a rock garden; there Yavora will take care of us, wash our feet, give us clean clothes, give us food and drink, and it will be as good as before… (Димова, 2005, p. 84)

Clad in white, symbolising the Holy Spirit, by her very presence she restores moral order in a dysregulated world: a boy who thinks of himself as a beast regains his humanity (Димова, 2005, p. 108); the depraved one regains purity of heart (Димова, 2005, p. 131). In the dreams of the teenage murderers, Yavora – the bearer of the attributes of the Trinity – becomes God. Then, as in Kalina's dream, she becomes androgynous and finally disappears behind a veil of music and darkness (Димова, 2005, pp. 175–176).

Dimova builds a version of theology in which God is feminised by the fact of his revelation in a woman. In doing so, the writer employs not the established Orthodox sophiological-Marian paradigm[28], but another tool of persuasion to add weight to the impact of her morality play, namely the topos of the walled-up woman. In one of the aforementioned dream reports, Yavora is depicted in a robe that barely covers her as she runs on hot stones in the sunlight, stepping between lounging venomous vipers:

> And she walked in the greatest scorching summer heat, she walked alone on the parched stones, almost naked, with her hair loose; the salt that the earth bore blinded her eyes; she walked through the nests of vipers, to be stung by the most venomous of them all. To feel a slight pain, like the sting of a thistle on her foot… to take a few more steps before her knees weaken, before she sinks to the scattered stones, curled up… her hair spilling over the stones… and lie like that for a second or two, until she runs out of air, until the poison seeps into her blood, until she is overwhelmed by numbness… and another second or two, until the shadow of Hades engulfs her… until the sun and stones darken and plunge into gloom. (Димова, 2005, pp. 153–154)

The symbolism of the stone, the sun, the (personal) strength and the (social) weakness of Yavora evoke intentional associations with the folk image of Master Manole's wife from folk songs, who, treading among vipers, runs towards certain death (Моллов, 2006–2011). Although there have been attempts in Bulgarian scholarly literature to interpret this motif in a Marian context (Парпулова-Грибъл, 1989), other mythographic approaches prevail. These approaches depict the folkloric heroine through the lens of solar symbolism and in the context of archaic goddesses (В. Николова, 1991, 2008). What they have in common is the perception of the walled-up woman as a personification of moral virtues. The exaggeration makes her an anomaly, and as is well known, in traditional cultures this can sometimes lead to her annihilation (Douglas, 2007, pp. 80–81).

[28] E.g., in the thought of Pavel Florensky, the most perfect incarnation of Sofia (Divine Wisdom) is the Mother of God (Florenski, 2009).

In the passages containing the description of Yavora's stoning, Dimova took care to provide details directing readers' attention to these similarities. The heroine of the folktale is subjected to a swift execution and perishes under a hail of stones. The only trace of her walling up is a gap left for her milk-producing breast. In Dimova's work, a murderous frenzy grips the girls and boys, whose bodies first form a firmly fused "wall" around the knocked-down Yavora, and then a "well" into which she is to be thrown. Like the folk builders, the group remains deaf to her pleas for mercy, and the stones do the rest:

> […] all with muffled screams in their throats clung tightly to each other, like a wall around Yavora, like the wall of the well into which Yavora was to be thrown; thrown into this well of their bodies, Yavora the only one, Yavora their love. (Димова, 2005, p. 181)

> […] have mercy, stop
> and then someone threw the first stone
> followed by the rest
> and then the hollow thud of stones against Yavora's body and head could be heard. (Димова, 2005, p. 186)

Thus, the martyrdom of Yavora is not depicted as exaltation on the cross, but as a humiliation in the chthonic dimension. The affinities with the topos of the walled-up woman-mother do not end there. The description of the execution closes with the image of the victim's "still alive" breast emerging from her torn blouse:

> Everything happened too quickly for them to believe what they had done, to believe the sight of Yavora's body, her light blue jeans, her half-closed eyelids, the glassy blue of her eyes, the torn striped shirt from which her still-alive breast slipped out. (Димова, 2005, p. 186–187)

In Dimova's work, the breast belonging to a corpse that is not a mother in the biological sense, but rather a person who "feeds" from the perspective of the maternalist ethics of care, is a conventionalised allegory of immortal maternal love (as in folk songs). The function of the motif is not only preserved here but even hyperbolised as a result of linking the topos to the Christological message. The death of the one who "bears love" (Łamejko, 2003) rules in the changing staffage of the religious time of repetitions.

Pure. Until She Is Not

This motif is subversively developed by Maria Stankova[29] in her short, eight-page-long text *Мъртвата глава ми проговори* [A dead head spoke to me] (Станкова, n.d.), which follows the poetics of the grotesque. In 2012, it be-

[29] Her prose was introduced to Polish readers by Elka Traykova (Trajkowa, 2009).

came the basis for the previously discussed play *Вграждане* [Walling up] at the Plovdiv State Puppet Theatre. Stankova's work, while fitting into the current of women's writing, is muddled in terms of genres. The author defined the aesthetics of this – let's call it – screenplay-like didascalia, evoking the world of an ancient Greek tragedy, with its masks, chorus, or rather, the world of modern ideas about it:

> The action takes place on an empty stage covered in black. In the middle stands a lone tree, and on its branches instead of leaves hang skulls and masks expressing various emotions. The murmuring of a stream can be heard. The needed props are brought and carried out by the characters themselves. This is to be played like an ancient Greek tragedy. The characters dance instead of walking around the stage, to the rhythm of the drum and tarabuka […]
> The text should be spoken in a sing-song manner, as in a folk song, with several voices. The sound and rhythm must be similar to a song, but the body language should be expressive. (Станкова, n.d.)

In the didascalia, Stankova provided an in-depth explanation of the musical setting of the performance. She referred to the archaic rhythms played on drums and tarabukas, to which the author attributed Orphic and Assyrian origins. It is also there that she locates the roots of the ritual of walling up a woman, which (especially in the Assyrian variant) was supposedly to be accompanied by incredible cruelty:

> If we account for the fact that the myth of the walling up of the shadow is Orphic, the mixing of rhythms is justified. The origin of the ritual of walling up is much older – Assyrian. The bodies of the victims were torn into four parts and buried in the four extremities of the city walls. The dead could not find peace and screamed whenever an enemy approached the city. If the bones were dug up and put back together, the city would fall and the inhabitants would be slaughtered. Some victims were torn apart alive. (Станкова, n.d.)

In her interpretation of the walling up topos, Stankova distances herself from both folklore and the presumed Assyrian archaics. Manole – the husband of Nena, who is walled-up in the finale – is not a builder. A peaceful owner of livestock and their shepherd, he becomes the victim of a murder perpetrated by a greedy village community that hides its deed from Nena.

Stankova puts the emotional aspects of human actions – individual and collective – at the centre of the story. Following the example of ancient drama, the faces of the characters are covered with masks frozen in a grimace of anger (male chorus), fear (female chorus), boredom (narrator), humility (Nena), suffering (Manole), and reflection (master). They all move to the rhythm of Balkan folk dances, which seem to define their attitudes to life: the male chorus – simple *kolo*; the female chorus – *kopanitsa*; the narrator – heavy male *kolo*; Nena – female *rachenitsa*; Manole – Greek *sirtaki*; the master – male *rachenitsa*. Using musical devices and mantras recited by two separate choirs of men and women, Stankova reveals the predatory nature of the human world hidden under the

guise of life's wisdom; no matter what cultural forms of expression it may be associated with, it is always equally frightening. The information contained in the didascalia serves to expose gender stereotypes, but the social practices of the binary-defined world ultimately reduce these primary oppositions in the work.

The character that Stankova creates along the lines of the folk heroine of Bulgarian ballads about walling up is a nursing mother absorbed in the daily care of her child and household. In her characterisation, the author uses hyperbole, reducing the activities she performs to obsessively sweeping the yard on a Sunday morning. The words "sweep"/ "swept" are repeated ten times in the short passage quoted below. The accompanying lexeme "clean" occurs as many as three times:

Narrator – The woman Nena was sweeping the yard
on a Sunday, before church.
Nena – Early.
Chorus of women – You sweep early, Nena.
Nena – Early, but on time.
My child is small, my husband
far away,
God is not here.
Chorus of women – A woman is humble and bony.
Chorus of men – Toward whom is she humble?
Narrator – Toward fate?
Chorus of men – Why is she bony?
Chorus of women – She is not made of clay; she is made of bone.
Nena – A man has a fate,
A woman has a road.
Chorus of women – The road must be clean,
swept
sprinkled,
Nena – so that she can walk it
and return.
Narrator – Come back.
Like a cat,
Like the shuttle of a loom,
Chorus of women – forward – backward,
Chorus of men – forward – backward.
Narrator – Sweep, Nena, sweep!
– Your husband will be back soon.
Chorus of women – Where do men go?
Taking care of their various business.
Chorus of men – The women wait.
On the road.
In the yard.

Clean and swept.
Chorus of women – Sweep, Nena, sweep!
Early, before church on a Sunday.

Pause

Narrator – And the Sun watches and watches from above.
The woman Nena was sweeping the yard in the morning
– early on a Sunday before church.
The wind was rocking a cradle,
And in the cradle lay a child,
sleeping,
fed,
loved,
waited for.
Nena – and the sun watched from above early
on a Sunday before church.
The yard and the road are swept.
Clean.
I wait, as if I were no longer waiting. (Станкова, n.d.)

In folk ballads, the range of chores that Manole's wife performs is usually much more extensive (carrying water, personal hygiene, washing cauldrons, sweeping the yard, washing bedding and linen, grinding flour, milking cows, separating calves, baking bread, curding milk, bathing her child, wrapping it, feeding it, putting it to sleep, putting it in a cradle, cooking dinner), while individual tasks (e.g., laundry) are not infrequently repeated three times (cf. Райчев, 2011).

Struna's extraordinary diligence and perseverance in the ballad allow her to accomplish all her tasks. If we look at her activity through the lens of the meanings Jolanta Brach-Czaina gives to seemingly trivial everyday activities in her philosophical essay *The cracks of existence* (Brach-Czaina, 2018), we can see in her domestic duties – that is, in what the Polish philosopher calls "busywork" – the sphere of life-sustaining activities in a constant struggle against impending death, symbolised by the earth and the processes of decomposition of once-living substances. In Stankova's piece, the swept yard and the road on which the returning Manole is to tread are thus cleansed of any humic particles encroaching from outside and threatening human life. The yard is ready to welcome the lost one – as is the new life born of this union, the child who is "wrapped, sleeping, fed, loved". However, caught in the trap of busywork, motherhood, loneliness and the experience of God's absence, Nena gradually weakens; as she herself says – "she waits and as if she were no longer waiting" (Станкова, n.d.).

Witnesses to Nena's efforts are the people commenting in a chorus on her life, and the silent sun. This motif, invoked twice in the text, evokes associations

characteristic of Bulgarian tradition with folk narratives about the sun's forbidden love for a girl endowed with exceptional attributes (Георгиева, 2013, pp. 26–45). As a nursing mother, Nena cannot be the sun's chosen one, but her uniqueness predestines her to the role of victim. Short, monosyllabic comments by women, men, the narrator and Nena herself somehow objectify her. A chorus of women characterises her as "humble and bony." Bony, because she is created not from clay, but from bone – Adam's rib. Perhaps this is meant to signify psychosomatic qualities different from those of a man. Humble, not toward fate, but toward her road, because, as Nena puts it, the road (clean and sprinkled with water) is an attribute of women. And yet, Stankova's heroine is aware that she moves along it in a pendulum motion (forward – backward), "like a cat" (the narrator) or a "loom shuttle" (the women's chorus), which allows her to measure time but does not mean actual displacement in space; it is a repetition:

Nena – Nena sweeps the yards
sweeps and splashes puddles,
the world smells beautiful,
of earth, of yellow quince and of swept floors.
As if I have been doing only this always
As if there were no end
But I am fed up already
I want to get dressed, too
And go see people…
Instead I am only rocking the cradle
And sweeping the road
And waiting. (Станкова, n.d.)

The men's chorus defines this situation of suspension in space as in line with the order of the world, "women's waiting", waiting "on the road, in the yard, clean and swept" (Станкова, n.d.), waiting for the return of men who are busy with their own affairs, waiting to embrace life. This means, among other things, evoking the fate of the mythical Penelope (the loom shuttle points our imagination in this direction), as a model protecting the foundations of the patriarchal order. In Stankova's work, however, the situation of Nena – the one whom "no one protects" – quickly changes. The status of the one who waits is not enough. It becomes necessary to take her life.

When the men of the village decide to build a bridge and problems arise with the stability of the structure, stones are set in motion. At first, it is the sun itself that hurls them onto the road, the bridge and the people. But then, in the face of the building disaster that repeats every night, a man grabs a stone and hits God in the face:

Narrator – And the man threw a stone at God
He threw and he hit.
The stone was real.

It hit God's face.
[…]
Chorus of women – Oh my! Hit God in the face!
Narrator – An unfortunate curse.
Chorus of men – Dark.
Chorus of women – Total.
Narrator – Bitter.
An unfortunate curse.
Worse than an offense.
And God threw a stone at the people. (Станкова, n.d.)

The community is aware of the outrageous act of profanation and, fearing God's retribution, decides to take control of the situation by offering him a sacrifice as a gesture of reparation. This is where they choose the candidate. The community quickly abandons the idea of crucifying the guilty man; instead, it accepts with relief the Master's suggestion that an innocent person should hang on the cross (according to Christian tradition).

Chorus of men – Onto the cross,
Onto the cross.
Put the guilty one on the cross!
Master – A guilty one cannot redeem a sin.
Nail an innocent one to the cross.
Narrator – Another pays for someone's fault.
Chorus of men – Indeed so.
Master – That is how it is now.
Narrator – That is how it shall be.
Nena – Always.
Narrator – Now and forever. (Станкова, n.d.)

Nena too agrees with this logic, based on the perverse imitation of Christ's sacrifice. She does so with an expression of humility on her face-mask. The completion of the task is placed in the hands of the men, who make further changes to the original form of the sacrifice. First, they decide that not a man but a woman will be sacrificed, and soon they abandon crucifixion in favour of walling up. A woman is to be the one who will fulfil the function of a bonding agent and turn the stone into iron:

Chorus of men – A woman will be walled-up.
Chorus of women – A living one.
Along among stones.
Narrator – A woman is faithful and bony.
Chorus of men – A woman will bond the stone
And it will turn into iron.
This is how it is now. (Станкова, n.d.)

In Stankova's piece, the first to arrive at the construction site with a meal for the masons is Nena, unprotected by anyone, which – according to the logic of the myth – is a death sentence for her. The Chorus of Women (forewarned of the danger by their husbands) and the Narrator at the last moment try to reverse her fate, urging her to flee, but at this point the initiative is taken by the men. Despite her pleas and the argument that her child needs her and that she must wait for her husband, she is walled up.

Nena – Why me, oh God!
I still have to wait, this
Stupid waiting of mine.
Narrator – We need a bridge!
Chorus of women – She dies.
They walled up her shadow.
Chorus of men – She dies with her shadow walled-up!
Narrator – Shadows are calling her already.
Chorus of women – She is no longer crying.
Chorus of men – She is no longer calling.
Chorus of women – Poor her!
Narrator – The road needs a bridge, so that people can return.
This is all. (Станкова, n.d.)

After Nena's death, the first person to appear on the road leading to the bridge is her husband, subjected to a grotesque, one might say neo-expressionist defragmentation. His head, detached from his torso – evoking associations with Orpheus and iconographic depictions of John the Baptist – informs those gathered that Manole has been murdered by greedy men. In response to his questions about what happened to Nena, the male chorus responds with the only pragmatic argument: "We have a bridge!" Initially, Manole wins the favour of the Narrator and the Chorus of women, shocked by Nena's walling up. In solidarity with her at this point, in imitation of the heroine of Greek variants of the song, women cast a curse on the users of the bridge:

Narrator – People are not people! Even a wolf is more human!
Chorus of women – May those who walk on the bridge be cursed.
Chorus of women – May their houses collapse! (Станкова, n.d.)

However, the moment Manole's head asks God to restore his life so that he can mourn his wife and take care of his child, the women's sympathy fades. They consider the dead man's plea an unseemly violation of order and quickly (under the pretext of sympathy for the orphan's plight) join Manole in making another request – this time for the death of the child. The ruckus that takes place on stage at this point does not bring an answer to the question of whether Manole's will has been fulfilled, or whether the life to which Nena had submitted herself has expired with the making of her body into organic connective

tissue for stone. Although the severity of the stage setting, the sparsity of the words, multiplied by the actors in numerous repetitions, intensify the emotional message suggesting the triumph of evil, the open-ended formula leaves the viewer in doubt.

Petrified Madonna

It is striking that a similar type of association also feeds the imagination of contemporary Bulgarian artists in a discernible way. Although a three-year search and consultation with art historians did not yield any works on this theme dating from the 19th or 20th centuries, I (GSG) came across a number of more recent paintings and sculptures that reflect the increased interest among 21st-century artists in the topos of the walled-up woman. With regard to older resources, it is worth noting that although I found no traces of interest in the theme of the walled-up woman in existing collections, albums, and studies by art historians, this does not necessarily mean that such artistic interpretations do not exist. They may be hidden or obscured by more obtrusive expositions in the foreground. We cannot ask the artists, as they have all passed away by now, even if their works evoke determined associations in a viewer with certain cultural competencies and interests. Does Andrey Nikolov's *Spirit and Matter* (1922) (Figure 25), a sculpture full of symbolism, contain such a reference? Nikolov was one of the most prominent artists of the interwar period, whose works were exhibited at the National Art Gallery in Sofia (Бошев, 2000). Is the expressive female body-soul emerging from the stone that is its prison, or is the stone engulfing her to feed on her power? Is this the ecstasy of birth, or a grimace of agony?

In the sculpture *Mother* (Figure 26), is the nursing mother, herself half-stone, an image of the folk vision of a walled-up woman? Or are these motifs entirely disconnected?

These questions must remain without answers. Much greater interpretive possibilities are offered by contemporary artistic works whose creators have chosen to title them *The walled-up woman (girl)*, and which without such a thought-provoking cue would perhaps not provoke similar associations.

The message of the cultural texts discussed here, therefore, stems not only from an unmet need to understand the contradictions inherent in traditional forms of biopower, but also from a kind of impotence in the face of the pressures of imaginaries incoming from this place. As a result, modern and postmodern attempts to overcome the archaic ontology of the dead female body lead (as if in defiance of the creators themselves) to forms of recycling of the folkloric topos of female walling up which in their deepest sense still fall within the realm of folk aesthetics of repetition. At the same time, it seems that from the perspective of contemporary neomaterialism and post-humanist ethics, which enables us to look at the issues presented here from a different angle, this fact



Figure 25. Illustration of the sculpture *Spirit and Matter* (1922) by Andrey Nikolov.
Source: Николов (1922)

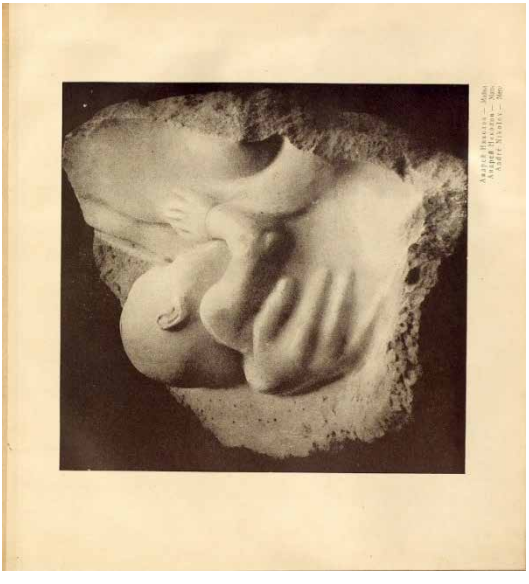


Figure 26. Photograph of the stone sculpture Mother by Andrey Nikolov.
Source: Николов (1922)

does not depreciate the works as providing insufficient conceptual and artistic surprises. Rather, we should speak of the thought-provoking yielding by writers and artists to the intuitions stored in their culture about the entanglement of the world, the hard-to-grasp interpenetration of bodies, substances, living beings and stones, an interpenetration charged with meaning but not always subject to affirmative transformation.

Yordan Angelov's painting *Вградена невеста* [The walled-up woman] (see Yordan Angelov Art, n.d.), exhibited in 2004 in Stara Zagora at the Balkan Painting Quadrennial "Myths and legends of my people", may serve as an example of an artistic approach to this problem. The work, which depicts a pile of stones that form (perhaps) the pillar of a bridge, has a varied texture, which is the result of the use of yarn, giving the effect of roughness. Maintained in light earth tones, stone – the most durable element of visible matter according to cultural superstition since Aristotle – is presented in Angelov's work as an ontologically precarious object. This is suggested by the insistently visible straight weave of yarn, which appears to be the work of human hands. In the centre of this representation, one can see a blue-and-white blotch, the outline of which resembles the shape of a woman's body.

The white, which symbolises purity, and the ultramarine of the lower part of the garment of this geometrical figure, as well as her frontal representation, refer to iconographic depictions of Our Lady of the Sign. An example of such



Figure 27. The fresco representing the Last Supper and Our Lady of the Sign in the church of St. Clemens in Ohrid.
Source: https://www.pravoslavieto.com/poklonnichestvo/starite_bg_stolici/Ohrid/sv_kliment_perivlepta.htm, retrieved February 25, 2023

a depiction can be found, among others, in the 13th-century church of St. Clement in Ohrid (Figure 27).

In medieval frescoes, the hands of the Virgin Mary are raised to the sky, and the twelve apostles are at her feet. However, when looking at Angelov's painting, it seems – due to an optical illusion – as though the white breasts of the walled-up woman are pushing the stone apart and extending beyond the plane of the painting. The crack in which the heroine is trapped arouses anxiety, attracts the eye, as if the connective tissue she has become were made of another matter. This cognitive illusion is contradicted by the yarn that is the warp of the painting. Its insistent presence reminds us that everything is just a staging.

Module Three. Annihilated

Conscience I

It may come as a surprise that in Bulgarian literature in the early 20th century, the process of rehabilitating and neo-mythologising Master Manole[30] (the infamous accomplice in the walling-up ritual) was initiated by the feminist activist Anna Karima (Кузмова-Зографова, 2002). In the short story *Майстор Манол* [Master Manole] (Карима, 1912/1917), styled to resemble a folk tale, we see the hero as a great and world-famous builder. The greatest of his achievements is the recently completed mosque in Adrianople, which has brought him recognition in the eyes of the people and the Sultan. In his moment of glory, Manole takes pride in the fact that his skill allowed him to complete the work without human sacrifice, for he is still haunted by the memory of his wife, whom he walled-up in the foundation of a bridge over the Tundzha River at the beginning of his career. This story, traumatic for him and memorialised in the songs of the people, has become part of his fame and accompanies him every moment of his life as a remorse.

Karima fashions the character of Manole as an artist who sublimates his difficult foundational experience so as to make his professional effectiveness, unassisted by magic, the measure of his own divinity. Intoxicated by his success, he decides to demonstrate this in an original way. During a fire which he set intentionally, he took to the skies on wings he had constructed, much to the delight of the people:

> Master Manole gnashed his teeth, stood at the very edge of the minaret, spread his enormous wings and flew above the people below, high over the strong fire. They all saw him, stupefied; they abandoned their cauldrons, gazing at the enormous bird above them. […] This dream has lived on in every mind: the dream of human strength, equal to God's. (Карима, 1912/1917, pp. 78–79)

[30] In art, this is illustrated by such artistic events as Квадринале 2012 in Stara Zagora, and Vasil Karadimov's painting *Възнесение на Майстор Манол*.

The writer, without much concern for psychological plausibility, gave her hero the characteristics of both the mythical Daedalus and Icarus, creating an exaggeratedly monumental figure of a man with tremendous causal power and indomitable will. Yet in the story, Manole, like Icarus, is defeated: his wings fail him and he loses his life. In a way, he becomes a victim of his own creation, duplicating the death of his wife in the foundation of the first building. Unlike in the Greek myth, the site of his fall is noticed; people mark it with a marble slab engraved with the name and an apologia of the builder who wanted to equal God (Карима, 1912/1917, p. 79):

> On a level field near Adrianople lies a marble slab. They call it "the grave of Master Manole", who built the miraculous mosque in Adrianople. In his hubris, he decided he was equal to God and wanted to fly like a bird, but he fell to the ground with broken wings at the place where the marble slab was deposited as a memorial. This is known as "the grave of the great Master Manole". (Карима, 1912/1917, p. 79)

However, this place offers no consolation to people, unlike the life-giving spring that flows from the burial place of Yana – the heroine of Karima's story and drama mentioned earlier. The writer does not resort in *Майстор Манол* to the symbolism of the miraculous transubstantiation as the crowning event. She focuses her attention above all on the creative and volitional potential of the protagonist, who found in himself the necessary power to act, but this did not save him from failure.

Conscience II

Remorse is referenced by Angel Karaliychev in his short story *Росенският камен мост* [Stone Bridge in Rosen] (Каралийчев, 1941) from the 1940s. The very title of the piece refers to an existing structure, the Stone Bridge over the Rositsa River in Sevlievo, built in 1856 by the most prominent Bulgarian Revival architect, Kolio Ficheto.

The story was published in 1941 in collections under the same title (Каралийчев, 1941). In this dense work of several pages, far from superficial folklorism, the author introduces readers to the situation of a confession. It has not yet been resolved whether Karaliychev refers in the story to a ballad written in the village of Sredni Kolibi (Elena municipality), or rather whether this folk text, surprising on Bulgarian soil, was included in Todor Mollov's (*Вградена невеста*; Моллов 2006–2011) collection as a testimony to the penetration and transformation of literature into folklore. His use of the modern Bulgarian language rather points to the latter. Like Karaliychev's short story, the ballad has the character of a conversation between a son and his mother, to whom he reports on a foundation sacrifice made several years ago, ridden by remorse and doubts about whether he had been right to act as an obedient son. The de-

scriptive layer of the literary text is also reduced to a minimum; it is dominated by the confession of the architect and builder, who on his bed of sorrow reveals the cause of his suffering and admits to his mother that he walled-up the shadow of his beloved in the foundations of the bridge. The mother has no doubt that the death-bearing magic deserves condemnation, but she does not abandon her son, who is overwhelmed with trepidation and gradually relates how the mishap occurred. He speaks of the role of his uncle and masonry teacher, who, while cheering for the construction of the bridge, awakened his ambition, but also instructed him on the necessity of making a sacrifice:

> – Listen, Manole, I was not able to, but you will succeed. Here. Let it sit on both banks and connect two worlds. There, on the other side, there is bread for the people. Give them a bridge so that they can cross it and take the bread. […]
> – You can. Remember this well: this is the best place. An enormous stone bridge, make it with four arches. Summon craftsmen from Thrace; tell them to split the stones. Gather peasants to help and fear nothing. They will remember you until the end of the world. There can be no greater good. […]
> – "When you finish it", I heard my uncle's voice say, "wall up the shadow of the person dearest to you". (Каралийчев, 1941, p. 11)

When Manole begins work, his master is already dead, but he appears in the young man's dreams, reminding him of his duty to offer what is dearest to his heart. Manole delays his decision until he finally spots the eagle he saw in his dream on a tree in his bride's farmyard. He reads this as a sign, indicating that the victim is to be his fiancée, and accepts Fate's verdict:

> I decided: let it be as it is written for me.
> In the evening at the well, my Milka bent down to draw water. Her earrings shone beautifully as I measured her long black shadow.
> Only the moon saw it… (Каралийчев, 1941, p. 14)

This act is not preceded by a building failure, so it does not serve to resolve a crisis (Girard, 1987). Instead, it bears the hallmarks of anticipatory protective magic (Wawrzeniuk, 2016). It also becomes the beginning of a rite of passage (Turner, 2010), which brings the protagonist into mental crisis so that he can mature morally (Pleşu, 2019, pp. 11–24). Foreshadowing this transformation is the protagonist's vague, non-verbalised realisation that what he took as a sign may have been an illusion:

> I sat down at the grave and searched with my eyes for Milka's walnut tree. A white cloud was floating across the sky. A white angelic soul bathed in the flame of the morning. (Каралийчев, 1941, p. 13)

The world of mirages becomes a form of visualisation of the inner moral conflict experienced by the hero since the completion of the bridge. He initially suppresses the voice of conscience, but it is awakened when, in a state of drunken confusion, he experiences a terrifying encounter with Milka, who has been transformed into a demon:

> And I saw standing opposite the grave, in the field, a naked woman, with her black hair loose and long, down to her heels.
>
> […] Who is this woman? Where have I seen her before? How dark were her eyes, my word, when have I looked into them before? Why were they so familiar to me? They gazed at me warmly and she approached. White and beautiful. I have never seen a naked woman before. Her black hair was swirling, rustling. Her eyes burned me. Suddenly the fields darkened, and she stretched out her naked arms to me:
>
> – How long have I waited for you!
>
> And as soon as she spoke, I recognized her: "Milka!"
>
> No. I did not scream. I felt terror overcome me. I ran across the fields, she followed me.
>
> – Why are you running away, Manole? We were betrothed today. Did you not see how many people came? From all the villages. To congratulate us!
>
> And I heard her mad laughter – the kind I know. […]
>
> I fell.
>
> I felt her soft hair choking me… (Каралийчев, 1941, p. 16)

In this passage, Karaliychev alludes to the archaic myth of sacred nuptials (*hieros gamos*). The day of the bridge's completion, originally planned as the day of Manole and Milka's betrothal, sealed the union through her death. Karaliychev depicts the female figure, who is a product of Manole's imagination and the personification of his fears, not as a humble guardian of the bridge, but as an avenger. Stripped of her robes and full of wrath, she resembles the implacable Erinys, and yet Manole, aware that everything is playing out in his imagination, waits for a sign that the crime has been forgiven and the waters of the tamed river have washed away the sin. Yet the guilt Manole feels does not seem to be the same as accepting responsibility for his choice. Although he annihilates himself, he transfers the responsibility for his own healing to Milka. In his world order, she remains the distributor of forces associated with persistence and life.

In 2011, Marius Kurkinsky created the monospectacle *Български разкази* [Bulgarian short stories][31], in which he used Karaliychev's short story. No recordings of the event are available, but one review and an interview with the actor and director bring a handful of information about the artistic interpretation of the text. On 9 June 2011, the actor defended the "truth and purity" of Karaliychev's message on the iNews portal (Дечева, 2011). Although the actor explicitly supported the writer's moralistic stance, namely his disagreement with sacrificing another human being, in the performance he put in the spotlight the tragedy of a creator torn between two duties: toward art and love for a woman. In his finely honed monologue, the actor conveyed the protagonist's suffering in a way that, in the spirit of modernism, made him a fellow victim of the drama of creation (Sever.bg & Куркински, 2011).

[31] Director Marius Kurkinsky; music Emilian Gatsov. The play was awarded the "Icarus 2011" award in the category of "Leading Male Actor" (award of the Union of Artists in Bulgaria).

The One Who Waits

In 1949, the Manole-Icarus/Dedal motif was used spectacularly by a prominent interwar poet, Assen Raztsvetnikov, who in the 1920s was a member of the leftist group of the so-called September Four. His poem *Майстор Манол. Легенда* [Master Manole. A legend] (Разцветников, 1949) was published by the Детиздат publishing house at a time when the newly installed communist government in Bulgaria had already taken full control of the publishing market. The illustrations for this small book addressed to children were done by Iliya Petrov, a well-known portraitist who turned to historical subjects after the communist coup of 9 September 1944, and at the time of publication served as secretary of the state-run Union of Bulgarian Artists (1949–1951 and 1957–1959). Readers of this work should therefore bear in mind the multi-layered ideological filter that has been superimposed on the folk tale of the Bulgarian builder.

The walling up of a woman is omitted in the poem. The affirmed builder himself is identified with the figure of the famous Ottoman architect Sinan, known, among other things, for the construction of the Edirne mosque. The initiator and founder of this work, Sultan Selim, makes a vow to God that in return for his help in the battle and victory over the Magyars, he will erect the most beautiful marble mosque in the world within three years. The one who takes up the task is Manole. He introduces himself to the sultan as an architect and builder like his father and grandfather, which immediately places him in the best tradition of Bulgarian craftsmanship:

> I am Manole from the city of Sliven,
> I was taught, and taught well,
> by my grandfather, an old builder,
> who erected houses and bridges,
> and by my father, a famous master,
> who built towers and palaces,
> erected marble mosques,
> from Bulgaria to the faraway Masur,
> until he fell down and died,
> while building the tower in Solun. (Разцветников, 1949)

Construction of the mosque using fine materials such as heavy oak, marble and gold is proceeding smoothly. In the process, love is born between the Sultan's half-Bulgarian daughter, Aykuna, and Manole. Against customary probability, she is the one who takes the initiative, charmed by the attitude and masculine beauty of Manole (Figure 28), who is presented as an awe-inspiring strongman:

> His eyebrows – the wings of a raven,
> his eyes – two dark wells,
> his body – straight as a beech tree,

which grew on a mountain plateau,
when he walks, the ground trembles,
when he gazes, he tilts the grass. (Разцветников, 1949)



Figure 28. Aykuna infatuated with Manole. Illustration by Iliya Petrov for the poem *Майстор Манол. Легенда* by Assen Raztsvetnikov, 1949.
Source: Разцветников (1949)

Unlike Manole's description, which is kept in dark colours, the characterisation of Aykuna is dominated by luminous colours. When the girl reveals her bright face to Manole, violating the rules of Islamic tradition, he is blinded by her beauty. In presenting his heroine, Raztsvetnikov appeals to the cultural memory of the audience and evokes associations with representations of the best and most beautiful woman in folk ballads about walling up, but these are only allusions in the work under discussion here. Indeed, the mosque has been completed without a foundation sacrifice, and things seem to be progressing well. However, Manole falls out of favour when the sultan learns that the temple has one fewer window than the thousand promised, and that the builder's reason for this omission is religious and, to use a contemporary term, patriotic. Fearing that Manole will build an Orthodox church on Bulgarian soil as magnificent, or even more beautiful, than the mosque in Adrianople, he decides, in keeping with medieval custom, to take Manole's life. However, Aykuna, who is in love with Manole, brings him a silver ring to his holding cell, from which he forges elaborate wings for himself. Here we have a far-reaching modification of the ring motif from the folk song; there, it serves to lure Manole's wife into the

foundation of the building, where she will die. In Raztsvetnikov's poem, on the other hand, the ring is the woman's life-bearing gift to the master. Thanks to his inventiveness, he manages to outwit the Turks on the day of his execution. He gets Selim's permission to climb to the top of the minaret so that he can embrace his homeland with a last glance. From there, he delivers a patriotic oration, insulting to the sultan, and then spreads his wings, hidden until that moment, and flies away. The poet builds the image of the homeland as seen by Manole from high up, alluding to well-known literary works, including the poetry of Christo Botev. Manole loses himself in the blue skies as a free man. The Turks watching the event turn into stone. In a way, the same fate also befalls Aykuna, from now on a slave to hope, stuck in her father's palace to look out day and night into the sky, waiting for the return of her beloved (Figure 29).



Figure 29. "Petrified" Aykuna looking out for her beloved Manole. Illustration by Iliya Petrov for the poem *Майстор Манол. Легенда* by Assen Raztsvetnikov, 1949 (Разцветников, 1949).

In addition to its patriotic and anti-Turkish message, Raztsvetnikov's poem also carried formative patriarchal content. Although physical beauty is attributed to both sexes here, certain psychological attributes are clearly linked to cultural gender: powerlessness, unconditional loyalty, and willingness to sacrifice turn out to be feminine attributes, while strength, activism, movement, aggression turn out to be masculine. The servant of the nation, the strongman under whose feet the earth shakes, is the warrior-builder of the world of the future, which can be formatively functional for any totalitarianism.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in the early 1950s (that is, still in the Stalinist period) the motif of Master Manole/Icarus returned in a film script. In 1952, Dimo Lingorsky made a 16-minute educational puppet animation film *Майстор Манол* [Master Manole][32]. The director and screenwriter developed his own version of the story of the heroic builder, stylised as a medieval rhyming chronicle that transports the viewer into the world of social injustice and violence of the period of Ottoman rule. From the first frames, the patriotic (but also xenophobic) intention of the film is visualised by the puppets carefully developed by the filmmakers. Those with beautiful, harmonious features represent noble Bulgarians; those with ugly, grotesquely exaggerated features represent Turks; and those with negroid features, powerful bodies and mindless obedience represent cruel Ottoman overseers. The protagonist of the story is the industrious and brave builder Manole. One of the first scenes shows him building the fountain, which symbolises his role as the giver of water and life. Manole decides to undertake a task that no one else wants to perform out of fear of the sultan: to build a huge marble mosque in a short amount of time. However, he waives payment in exchange for the sultan's promise to free his compatriots, who are depicted in the film as helpless women and children in chains (Мутафчиева, 1995).

The sultan accepts his offer. Manole erects the mosque, but the sultan adds a condition for fulfilling his part of the bargain: the builder must convert to Islam. Manole refuses and spends the night before his planned execution forging wings for himself. The next day, before the eyes of incredulous onlookers, he flies away to his homeland to take up the fight for its freedom. The chained women and children observe this through the bars of their cell. Like Aykuna from Raztsvetnikov's poem, they will probably hold this pose until Manole's return.

In the puppet animation film *Майстор Манол*, this ethically controversial picture of the (otherwise colourful) world is constructed by revitalising the circulating mythologems of the Bulgarian national idea. In addition to the myth of the "Turkish yoke" (Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2011, pp. 190–197) and the complementary topos of the "three chains of slaves" (Мутафчиева, 1995), the film also employs the topos of "sly Peter", a village wise man who defeats a stronger adversary through cunning (Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2008). It illustrates the relationship between the Bulgarian, who represents an oppressed minority, and the sultan, who embodies that violence. Although the motif of cunning needed to escape had already occurred in Karima's short story and later in Raztsvetnikov's poem, the film discussed here for the first time gives the character of Manole (a creator and craftsman) the characteristics of a national freedom fighter who is destined to return to liberate his people. In this variant of the story, celebrating Bulgarian craftsmanship and valour, a woman is assigned the role of a person passively waiting for a change of fortune.

[32] I would like to thank Bulgarian National Film Archive for letting me watch the film.

Revived in Stone

This tendency was exacerbated in the 1960s by Nikolai Sokolov, a Socialist Realist writer who was not a leading artist but fit into the current of Bulgarian Social Nationalism. He gave the subtitle *Драматична поема в две части* [Poetic drama in two parts] to his work *Майстор Манол* [Master Manole] (Соколов, 1969), which was staged at a theatre in Blagoevgrad in the 1970s. However, the actual genre of this verse work is unclear. Sokolov was inspired by Raztvetnikov's text, thus the line initiated by Karima found a continuation in his work. He referred to the same initial situation: the construction of a mosque in Adrianople by the Bulgarian master. His time in the city is, however, overshadowed by unrequited affection from Mefküre (meaning "ideal" in Turkish), the sultan's cruel and vengeful daughter.

Manole's reason for undertaking the construction of the mosque is crucial for the development of the plot: he wants to recover his wife Elena, who was kidnapped to the sultan's harem. Selim initially agrees to the exchange but fails to keep his word, incited by the vizier and the possessive Mefküre, who is jealous of Manole's affections. The lack of customary and psychological plausibility in the work, Manole's unbearably pathetic orations heralding the future prosperity of the Bulgarian homeland, and the vague cause-and-effect connections in the storyline – all these make Sokolov's poem/drama a work that linguistically and compositionally crosses the boundaries of graphomania. What makes it interesting in the context of the topos of the walled-up woman are some attempts at innovation with regard to the semantics of femininity and stone.

And so Sokolov, constructing the image of Manole/Icarus's final flight, goes for understatement. Although, like Karima and Raztsvetnikov's characters, Sokolov's Manole throws himself from the tower of the minaret, it remains unclear whether he flies away or dies. The former outcome is supported by the Muslims' fear of Manole, "the devil", hovering over their heads (Соколов, 1969, p. 104). The other outcome is suggested by the desperation of Mefküre, who commits suicide, convinced that she is following in the footsteps of her beloved (Соколов, 1969, p. 105). Manole's clandestine construction of the wings is not mentioned by the characters or the chorus (*четци*), to which Sokolov assigns a traditional commentary role in his poem. The motif of the ring used by Raztsvetnikov does appear in Sokolov's work, but it is given no other function than to provoke Mefküre's anger (which was initially directed against her father for insulting her by giving her the ring of his concubine, Elena). By contrast, the chorus's comments reveal another important detail: while trapped in the darkness, Manole endures the cold and the absence of light. However, it is in this darkness that he carves the face of his beloved Elena into stone (Соколов, 1969, p. 85).

In Sokolov's piece, the folk ritual of walling up, the act of incorporating a woman's body into a stone construction, is reversed in a peculiar way. The heroine – the sultan's slave and servant and then prisoner of his daughter – does

not become a foundation sacrifice, lending her power to the structure. On the contrary, it is the master's hands that extract her image from the stone, and it becomes the object of his adoration and the source of his power:

MANOLE
Forgive me, I have offended you,
when I brought to life in stone,
your features so that I could look at you,
as on a feast – pale with sorrow,
with eyes cleansed of sin…
Child, I am alive, do not fear! (Соколов, 1969, p. 86)

The artist is aware that by carving a human face he is breaking the prohibitions of both Orthodox religion and Islam. However, he relates to his own work with the same tenderness as he does to his first love, family, and national community. He contemplates the stone image like an icon and gives the depicted "saint" the attributes of a mystical protector[33], for he is characterised above all by inner freedom and fidelity to values defined as Bulgarian.

Sokolov's drama lived to see three stage productions: in 1963 on the stage of the theatre in Blagoevgrad (dir. Dimityr Pundev), in 1969 in Smolyan (dir. Vladimir Polyanov); in the 1970s it was played by the Amateur Group in Kazanlyk. Interestingly, in the memoir *Автобиография на един театър. Изповеди на строителите и вдъхновителите на Благоевградски професионален театър „Никола Вапцаров"* [Autobiography of a theatre. Confessions of the builders and artists of the Nikola Vaptsarov Professional Theatre in Blagoevgrad] (Цолов & Илиева, 1995), the performance in Blagoevgrad is fondly remembered by artists as "poetic" (Цолов & Илиева, 1995, pp. 156, 164).

Caryatid

The figure of Manole – an unyielding builder who could serve as a role model for others – was also used during the People's Republic of Bulgaria period in a popular science history of Bulgarian architecture and construction, published by the trade union publishing house Профиздат. This refers to Nikolay Todorov's book titled *Крилата на майстор Манол* [The wings of Master Manole] (Н. Тодоров, 1980). In a series of essays, the author presented outstanding figures of Bulgarian architectural and construction tradition from the Middle Ages to the socialist era. The figure of Master Manole (of folkloric provenance, but, as the title of the collection itself says, in a variant developed by Karima

[33] At the opposite end of this model of femininity is the Turkish woman Mefküre: a murderer and potential father-killer who is driven to suicide by an unsatisfied need for love and pride. She scornfully refers to Manole's sculpture as a "stone head" (Соколов, 1969, p. 92).

and Raztsvetnikov) became, in his interpretation, the personification of the highest patriotic, professional, and ethical values inherent in Bulgarian culture (Н. Тодоров, 1980, p. 16). Tapping into the image of the ideal hero-builder, Todorov reaches for the (neo)romantic glorification of creative effort, which requires perseverance and self-sacrifice:

> Isn't art itself an act of self-sacrifice? Isn't the desire to create beauty and values that endure beyond the confines of ordinary domestic life an act of self-immolation, straining every nerve and fibre of the human being? (Н. Тодоров, 1980, p. 82)

> This ballad, full of mystical superstition and sublime tragedy, reveals not only the fate of the builder, but also his morals, his ethics, the purity of his Bulgarian spirituality. He is committed to an austere object; he remains firm in his oath to part with the person dearest to him for the sake of a work he had begun, of unity with his colleagues, of human honour. (Н. Тодоров, 1980, pp. 84–85)

The aestheticisation of Manole's character in the spirit of the Bulgarian 19th-century (Хаджийски, 2002) and later socialist work ethos is accompanied here by a tendency to interpret the ballad metaphorically, especially when it comes to the female character. The author seeks to lend credence to the chosen perspective by citing the intuitions of the British scholar Mercia McDermott (1927–2023), highly regarded in socialist Bulgaria. In her biography of the Bulgarian-Macedonian revolutionary Gotsé Delchev, *Freedom or death: The life of Gotsé Delchev* (MacDermott, 1978), she includes a reference to a bridge across the Bregalnica River in Macedonia (a tributary of the Vardar), which is adorned with two female breasts carved in stone. Todorov interprets this work as commemorating the topos of a walled-up nursing mother and, at the same time, confirming his thesis as to the significance of stone representations of a female giantess:

> Stoyna comes to the construction site, bends down to search between the walls for the ring that her beloved seems to have dropped, and the builders bury her "stone by stone, piece of wood by piece of wood", deep in the foundations, so that she can hold on to her back, like a tragic Bulgarian caryatid, the white buildings… (Н. Тодоров, 1980, pp. 85–86)

In Todorov's interpretation, the artist (willing to sacrifice personal happiness for the work he has undertaken) and the impassioned strongwoman, a "caryatid", are corresponding ethical ideals of binary cultural genders. Woman and stone. It evokes a life-giving being enchanted into an object deprived of life, or one finally emerging to life from stone. Todorov gives no additional philosophical interpretation of his reasoning. From this perspective, the metaphor of the woman-stone, created through the transformation of building magic into theurgic magic, seems to express the immortality desired by the creators for their work. This immortality is guaranteed by the stone, which is the most durable element in the metaphysical order, and by female *bios*, which is capable of reproduction and of carrying moral values.

An analysis of Bulgarian cultural texts that revitalise the topos of Manole while downplaying the tragedy of the woman shows that the authors do not pursue a moral reckoning of this figure in their narratives but instead depict the man as someone who suffers from the compromises he had to make for the greater good.

Erased

Konstantin Pavlov, regarded as a political nonconformist and already mentioned here, ironically used the topos of Master Manole and walling up, this time in the screenplay for the film *Масово чудо* [Mass Miracle] (1981, dir. Ivan Pavlov; И. Павлов, 1981). This film is autothematic in nature (Szary-Matywiecka, 1992) and consists of five mini-etudes, forming a series of stories about life on a large socialist construction site. The realities of that time are seen through the eyes of an ambitious young boy who has applied to study film direction for the third time. His attitude towards that place and its people is a mixture of despair and cynicism, tenderness and warm irony. This allows him to highlight the ambiguity of human attitudes and the paradoxes of everyday existence. This existence is grey and monotonous, yet not without great ambitions, feelings, and surprises. This combination creates an aesthetic effect of lyrical grotesque.

In one of the etudes, titled *Страдания на работника, който искаше да построи комин, но го построи друг* [Suffering of a worker who wanted to build a chimney, but someone else built it first], the figure of the shockworker Manole (Konstantin Dimchev was cast in this role) appears. He wants the management to entrust him with the erection of the tallest chimney, and he understands this task as "sacred" in the spirit of the socialist cult of labour. He even goes as far as to threaten the management, saying he will "jump from the highest spot" if his request is turned down. What is striking about the hero's portrayal is his inconsistency: every violent gesture is transformed into its negation; aggression is transformed into a resigned caress. In subsequent scenes, we see Manole in his home, growing increasingly anxious as he waits for the management's decision, which the viewer already knows. The modest, makeshift interiors are not lacking in oriental design elements. The protagonist himself, who is a Pomak, is handled like an infant (dressed, patted, fed) by his domestic slave-wife, which makes him a tragicomic figure, a "paper tiger" fully reliant on a woman. Mentally, he is stuck in the romantic world of great deeds, hence his obsession with building a chimney, greater than his love for his child. He wears dirty work clothes, but – as befits a sensitive man from the Rhodopes – he possesses Orphic attributes; he is a skilled clarinettist who, even when lying down (!), can play a passage from *Morning* from Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite No. 1 (Op. 46). This romantic music, evoking associations with the world of wild nature, creates a contrast with the barrenness and hopelessness of socialist construc-

tion. The etude closes with an image of Manole helplessly standing at the foot of the building, with his head raised. Glory is not his.

Nor does glory belong to the film's protagonist, who – once again not accepted to university – in the final scene looks at the same depressing structure, but from inside of it. "Walled-up" – he is trapped and, knowing this, stares hopelessly at the smooth, black walls and the distant light at the top of the chimney. And although this motif is a universal one, reading it in the context of the topos of walling up completes the semantics of the picture with associations inaccessible to viewers unfamiliar with the Balkan sphere of cultural intimacy.

Another master of the Bulgarian grotesque, Yordan Radichkov, disarms the demonic aspect of the walling up of the human shadow in his short story *Църковно настоятелство* [Parish council] (1985), included in some contemporary textbooks for fifth graders in elementary schools. In this parody piece, the writer travesties the folk motif, reducing it to the status of an irrational alibi for greed. The object erected by builders under the conditions of the socialist "now" is admittedly an Orthodox church, but the events surrounding the ever-recurring building disaster are rationalised. The idea to wall up a sacrifice in this context appears to be a deliberate strategy employed by the parish council, despite being cognisant of the fact that the damage is being inflicted by workers who are motivated by a desire to earn their wages for longer. The council's actions seem to be driven by a calculated effort to instil irrational fear in the populace, thereby fostering a sense of dependence on the religious community. As the result of a series of cunning tricks, in the end a rooster's shadow is walled up. The shell structure is completed, but the interior works cannot continue as funds have run out, and the church remains unfinished:

> Thus, to this day, the Orthodox church in my village remains unfinished, and the parish council continues to manage the small estate, collecting a paltry rent from it. It was only later that we found out that it wasn't some kind of evil force that had destroyed the walls, but that our people had done it because it was hard to find work at that time. The parish council knew who was destroying the wall too, but it stuck to the belief and the story about walling up a shadow, hoping that this would make people more pious. But how can people become more pious if all day long they are building a church only to tear down its walls at night? (Радичков, 2002)

In his story, Radichkov fully annihilates the tragic aspect of the topos of the walled-up woman. The guardian spirit candidate does not appear at all, and the walling up of the rooster's shadow is a laughable mockery against the dramatic potential of folk songs. Thus, the folk superstition turns out to be obsolete. The practice of magic has been exposed as a fraudulent enterprise, and the Orthodox Church has been shown to be powerless in the face of human indifference in matters of faith. Furthermore, the Church's attempts to instrumentalise superstition have been unsuccessful. What remains is an Orthodox church in a state of disrepair and abandonment, condemned to non-existence before it was built in the first place. This serves as a poignant *postscriptum* to the patriotic inter-

pretations of Petko R. Slaveykov's poem *Изворът на белоногата* (Славейков, 1873), from which it all began.

Present Through Absence

In 2023, the theme of a woman walled up in a world constructed by men returned in the work of a representative of the youngest generation of Bulgarian artists. For two sculptures titled *Вградената невеста* [Walled-up woman], Viktor Petrov won first prize in the "База"[34] competition, co-organised since 2008 by the Open Society Foundations (USA) and the private organisation Институт за съвременно изкуство [Institute of Contemporary Art]. The structures of these objects – a bridge and a church – were made of white-coated metal rods used to manufacture dish dryers (Figure 30). The author thus generates an impression of the inappropriateness of the building material used to create architectural objects that enjoy social prestige.



Figure 30. Viktor Petrov's sculptures *Вградената невеста* at the 2008 exhibition in Sofia.
Photo by Ana Stoykova

Chaotically filled with plates, the "bridge" and the golden wedding ring stuck in the "walls of the temple" are a clear visualisation of objectified forms of social violence, which are considered by leftist and liberal circles today as an expression of the lack of real emancipation of women. As Gergana Nikolova rightly notes, the work aims to unveil the patriarchal power structures associated with the two sites of female enslavement: the kitchen and the church (Г. Николова, 2023).

Thus interpreted, the very material used by the sculptor and the title of the work would be enough to fulfil this kind of ideological task. However, it seems that the artist's message is deeper, and his political gesture is accom-

[34] For artists up to 35 years old.

panied, among other things, by an attempt to show the consonance of Bulgarian and German traditions of perceiving female cultural gender and the mutual translatability of the two cultural codes. Petrov had the opportunity to experience German culture in depth while studying and working in Berlin. It is a well-known fact that the kitchen and the church are two of the three elements of the renowned German triad Kinder – Küche – Kirche, which has become a clear allegory of patriarchal violence. Despite the omission of the third element (children) in Petrov's depiction, the artist, who was enculturated in Germany, adroitly utilises the notions of cultural gender instruments that are currently active in Western culture. Seeking the tension between the social body and the political body, and their materialisation in selected architectural objects, he emphasises manifestations of power that have become so trivialised in the social sphere that they are no longer recognised as oppressive, not only by conservative circles. In the words of the author himself, quoted in an article published by *Капитал*:

> From the point of view of folklore, this legend can have various metaphorical interpretations. From my point of view, this patriarchal violence has never disappeared from our society. It is simply told in different words and received in silence. (Тодоров, 2023)

A persistent enigma in the sculptural series under consideration pertains to the eradication of human figures, including the eponymous figure, though manifested through material traces of the artistic process. This is exemplified by the gleaming plates, symbolising meticulous cleanliness, and the ring/decoy, a tool purportedly utilised by the master to entice his wife into the foundations of the building under construction, as depicted in the folk song. All these objects together make up the structure of the bridge or church – they are their "body". But the Bulgarian audience knows something that audiences outside of Southeast Europe may not know, namely that this body is integrated with the body of the walled-up woman, as well as with that which is immaterial and associated with her efforts, relationality, and generosity. The woman is invisible, but it is because of her that the world created by men continues to exist: "there is a bridge", as put by the characters of Maria Stankova's work, already mentioned here. After all, one of the bridge's constitutive elements is the ring/decoy buried with the walled-up woman: to some a symbol of deceit, lies and betrayal; to others, a symbol of the creator's self-sacrifice.

In a radio interview cited by Yulia Petrova in her article on the exhibition (Ю. Петрова, 2023), Viktor Petrov reveals that the problem of the artist's responsibility has aroused his interest since his early encounters with the ballad as a child and young man. It is an interesting testimony to the influence of cultural patterns internalised in the process of socialisation, and at the same time a document proving that for Petrov – despite the feminocentric title of the work – the central figure is not a woman but the artist, with his eternal questions about the limits of freedom and violence.

Razgrad: Omission

The collection of legends from Ludogorie, edited by Boris Iliev (Илиев, 1993), contains a slightly modified story told time and again by the inhabitants of Razgrad during fieldwork carried out in 2022 within the framework of a research grant. According to this story, when Ibrahim Pasha became grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire, he decided to build a mosque to match the magnificence of those in Adrianople and Constantinople, to be named after its founder. Known for his skill as a builder, Manole was compelled to build the mosque as there were few people in the Empire at the time capable of erecting such an enormous structure. Five foremen and many local residents joined the work. The builders, against the sultan's will, incorporated Christian architectural elements into the structure, such as 13 windows in 3 walls, in the likeness of Christ and the 12 apostles, or an entrance on the west side. While building the minaret, the foremen made it taller with each passing day in order to drag out the work, as its completion meant the need to convert to Islam. Wanting to avoid this, they secretly built wings from planks, agreeing that after they placed the crescent moon on top of the minaret, they would attach the wings to their backs and fly away, which they eventually did in front of the crowd that gathered to admire their work. The men took axes and saws with them. They headed south toward the Balkans, but the tools they took with them accidentally clipped their wings and tore the canvas stretched over the wooden scaffolding; as a result, they began to fall one by one. Since the master builder's axe was the sharpest one, he was the first to fall while still over Razgrad, landing on the court of Rufat Bey, at the foot of a hill south of the city. None of the foremen reached the Balkans; all of their tragic flights ended in nearby villages. In each of these places, until the liberation of Bulgaria, the sites of their falls were commemorated by both Muslims and Christians (Илиев, 1993, pp. 94–97).

The motif of wood – the primary building material in the Ludogorie region for centuries – is important in this story. The name of the region literally means a place where the forest (Bulgarian: *gora*) grows like mad (Bulgarian: lud). Master Manole is a stonemason and builds the mosque from stone, but he constructs the wings from local material, namely wood. It also seems significant that a group of men are killed by their own weapons, not so much out of carelessness or hubris – as in the most widespread interpretations of the Icarus myth – but by accident.

Artefacts related to the walling up legend, located in the Bulgarian city of Razgrad[35], virtually ignore the topos of the walled-up woman. Narratives cen-

[35] From the 1st to the 4th century AD, the city of Abritus existed in the Razgrad area, an important point on the Carpathian–Ruse–Varna route, used to transport rock salt by river through Ruse, then by road to Varna, and on through the Black Sea and the Bosporus. Located on the transport route, the city lost its importance during the Ottoman rule, when its status changed several times: it was a *vilayet*, a *sanjak*, a *kaza*. Razgrad fell victim to epidemics, floods and fires several times, and in the 18th century to reg-

tred around the 16th-century Ibrahim Pasha mosque and the 1970s statue of Master Manole standing next to it produce meanings in mutual juxtaposition: the figure of the muscular, back-turned Master Manole is inscribed into the background of the Great Mosque, one of the largest Muslim shrines in the Balkans.

The mosque's founder, İbrahim Pasha, was a representative of Sunni Islam sent by the sultan to Razgrad to rule over a city dominated by Shiite adherents. Descended from nomadic Turkic tribes, Shiites did not fit into the institutionalised framework of the Ottoman state, did not want to join the army or pay taxes, and were considered by Sunnis to be a blasphemous branch of Islam, which is why they became an object of special attention in Ottoman politics. Ibrahim Pasha's genealogy is shrouded in ambiguity. Although he was raised alongside the sultan and held a position of proximity to the royal family, the precise circumstances surrounding his presence at the court during his youth are uncertain. The identity of his parents remains a mystery. Razgrad City Library director Dimityr Petrov says he could have been Albanian, Greek, or perhaps Italian (Д. Петров, personal communication, Jaunary 31, 2022). The design of the Grand Mosque included rooms for soldiers and a large market around the building. The person who built the magnificent temple was a foreman whose story is the axis of the legend of Master Manole. According to a common account, he was said to have come from Albania. The director thought it justified to add that Ibrahim Pasha found the contractor in the region from which he himself had been taken as a child (Д. Петров, personal communication, January 31, 2022). On the outer wall of the Grand Mosque is a plaque stating the year the temple was built and the origin of the builders (the village of Poroishte) (Figure 31).



Figure 31. Plaque on the Ibrahim Pasha mosque in Razgrad. Photo by Litev, 2016. Source: Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA. https://tiny.pl/5kg6v5nd

ular attacks by kardzhali bands. When the Grand Mosque, associated with the name of Ibrahim Pasha and the legend of Master Manole, was built, the city functioned as an important centre of Sunni Islam in the Shiite Deliorman region (the region's current name: Ludogorie).

The information about who inhabited Poroishte (Albanian name: Arnautköy) leads to potential clues related to the imagined genealogy of the legendary master Manole. The stonemason may have been Albanian, as were the inhabitants of the entire village (Д. Петров, personal communication, Jaunary 31, 2022). Nenko Metev, a sculptor and longtime director of the Razgrad city gallery, accepts two possible tropes: according to the first, the builders were Bulgarians; according to the second, they were Turks who faced harsh punishment for defying the sultan. However, Metev adds that this legend fails to account for two issues: the fact that the village of Poroishte was at the time called Arnautköy, which means a village of Albanians (Arnauts), and the fact that Albanians were allies of the Turks but were not eager to take up construction (Панов & Метев, 2016).

The genealogy of the builders is important insofar as what is at stake in discussions of the origins of Manole and his comrades is the status of the main character: a rebel and antagonist of the sultan who won a moral victory. The Bulgarisation of the hero allows him to be inscribed in the national imaginary. However, the basis for this is uncertain, as is the genealogy of Ibrahim Pasha. This blurs the key narrative in the 1970s school textbooks, which provides the framework for the conflict between Manole (Bulgarian) and Sultan Selim I.

It was in this decade of the 20th century that a monument to Master Manole by sculptor Christo Tanev was erected in Razgrad. It features a towering, naked, muscular figure of a man with immense wings sprouting from his back and arms. The body of the sculpture is massive and heavy, and its *punctum* is the wings. Tanev used the idea of his wife, sculptor Nadya Petrenko, who presented a composition of several winged figures at the *Ludogorie '71* exhibition, recreating the legend of the construction of the mosque (Художествена галерия проф. Илия Петров в град Разград, n.d.). The sculptor used one of them, i.e., a small figure of Manole, changing the scale of the figure in his design (Панов & Метев, 2016).

For the first few years, the monument was located in a less prominent place in the Varosha district, but it was later moved in front of the Grand Mosque (Figure 32). In this highly prestigious location, the monument to Manole gains new meanings. The figure from the legend stands next to the historic building with its back to the mosque. He turns his gaze toward the city, which symbolises the refusal of communication and the conflict of images: to Manole, the mosque was a prison from which he longed to escape. However, when looking at him *en face*, it is impossible to separate his figure from the massive building. Against this backdrop, the builder appears to be incorporated into the Grand Mosque's facade. This effect is further emphasised by the contrasting colours of the dark monument against the light temple wall.

Manole seems to be walled up, thus becoming a replacement for the walled-up woman, absent in the Razgrad variant. The omission of the story of the walled-up woman while highlighting the drama of Manole is consistent with the policy of 1970s school textbooks, which minimise the role of female protagonists, reduc-

ing them to mere echoes of male adventures. In this sense, Razgrad represents the dominance of the male topos or – to refer to the title of Pierre Bourdieu's book – an example of masculine narrative domination (Bourdieu, 2004). This begs the question of what this practice yields. The walled-up woman was a foundation sacrifice that made the construction of an important object possible. The woman rebels against her fate in only a few variants of the story. Manole, in contrast, is a causal figure who determines his own fate, albeit in a tragic manner. Concurrently, he distances himself from the malevolent and terrestrial forces. His ascent toward celestial realms constitutes a Manichean act of negation of the "below", a realm to which reversion is conceivable solely through death.



Figure 32. Statue of Manole against the background of the (restored) Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Razgrad.
Photo by Zofia Kręc, 2021

Toward the end of socialist Bulgaria, during a period of escalating interethnic tensions and persecution of the Muslim minority as part of the so-called "revival process", the Great Mosque in Razgrad became a space for manifesting official state policy. Local philharmonic musicians were engaged to renovate the closed and dilapidated mosque (*Голямата джамия в Разград*, 2018). After decades of clumsy attempts to save the mosque, state-funded reconstruction began in 2020, and now (2023) the building's body, interior frescoes, and wooden structures, among other things, have been restored. One of the official justifications for the project is the concern of the government of the Republic of Bulgaria for interethnic relations, and at the local level, to stimulate tourism in Razgrad.

In December 2022, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan commented on the renovation work in a tweet, indirectly addressing President Rumen Radev: "We are committed to protecting our shared cultural heritage, and for this reason we have restored and reopened the Iron Church in the Balat district (in Istanbul, SS) in 2018. Our wish is that the Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Razgrad will also be restored and opened for worship" (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 2022).

In contrast, neither the Turkish president nor media discussions of the mosque's renovation include references to Master Manole's statue next to it, even though its presence visualises the conflict of national imaginations. The soon-to-be-reopened Grand Mosque in Razgrad will undoubtedly set in motion new narratives and practices regarding not only the temple, but also the monument to Master Manole located next to it. School education will continue to serve as the overarching context for the negotiation of meaning across all levels of social stratification.

Module Four. Within School Walls

Since 2020, there has been an ongoing dispute in the Bulgarian public space about whether the folk song *Троица братя града градяха* [Three brothers built a fortress] about the walling up of a woman should remain in the core curriculum of Bulgarian language and literature classes for fifth graders. A group of parents initiated the debate after their children experienced a mental crisis from the drastic scenes in the song (БЛИЦ, 2023; Г. Величков, 2020). Some argued that the cruelty of the work makes it unfitting for the school curriculum.

The media picked up on this topic, and on 15 February 2022, the host of the popular program *Вечерта на Иван Кулеков* [Ivan Kulekov's evening] pointed out a paradox: it is compulsory for the media to warn against content unsuitable for persons under 12 years of age. Meanwhile, a violent song about walling up is part of the curriculum for 11- and 12-year-olds. Kulekov perceives the ballad of the walled-up woman as an archetype of domestic violence. Statistics prove that domestic violence has been the most common form of violence against women in Bulgaria for a long time (Кулеков, 2022). A psychiatrist and an official from the Ministry of Education and Science joined the discussion[36]. Psychiatrist Vladimir Simov described the song as a brutal intrusion into a child's soul (Кулеков, 2022). Meanwhile, the ministry official Evgenia Kostandinova defended the song's presence in textbooks, claiming that it had "always" been in the curriculum and reflects an important aspect of Bulgarian mentality. She added for balance that children in the fifth grade play violent video games at home, but at school they have a teacher to guide them and provide the necessary context. Kulekov, howev-

[36] In Bulgaria, textbooks are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. Normative acts regarding the curricula and textbooks approved by the Ministry can be found on its webpage: https://web.mon.bg/bg/10

er, concludes the program by stating that the walling up song is an archetype of Bulgaria strengthened in the communist period, when servility and thoughtless violence were promoted by characters such as Pavlik Morozov. The boy walls up his father into the foundations of communism, much like the husband walls up his wife in folklore so that a fortress can be erected (Кулеков, 2022).

Other voices could be heard in this media-wide discussion. Plamen Ivanov defended the presence of the walling up song in textbooks on the nationalist bogari.bg portal. To him, this is a story about the fall of humankind, but it is also about his striving for goodness and his hope for salvation, the understanding of which requires the guidance of a teacher who can shed light on the content, especially on the tragedy of the man who walls up his wife (И. Иванов, 2023). The woman is instrumentalised in this approach, which shifts the focus to the male aspect of the story.

How come this highly emotional discussion (up to 200 comments on related posts) broke out after 2020, seeing as the ballad had been in the curricula since the 1970s? Was the impulse provided by the pandemic, which locked people up in their homes, causing grave social and mental crises? Two stances are made apparent in the discussions. The first group of commentators points out the negative models propagated by the work; parallels are drawn to the period of communism, which put the abstract community – the nation – above the individual that could be sacrificed for the common good, and this was also echoed in school curricula (Г. Величков, 2020). These are compounded with calls for putting Bulgaria on the map of Europe, for abandoning "barbaric" educational practices, for placing a thick line under pre-1989 symbols and attitudes. Thus, the ballad is seen as an embarrassing legacy that should be jettisoned in favour of more "civilised" models.

The other group of commentators uphold that the ballad is an integral element of Bulgarian tradition and that removing it would be to further cut into the already flimsy branch of native culture. They are of the opinion that this song can mentally strengthen children, boys especially, in preparation for their exposure to bloody folklore dealing with Ottoman rule, the Batak massacre, and the April Uprising. "Simple nation – weak authority", wrote an anonymous commentator under the text (БЛИЦ, 2023). Another argument in favour of keeping the song in textbooks is the brutality of contemporary culture: computer games, cartoons, but also Greek myths studied by children in the fifth grade.

In fifth graders' textbooks, the ballad is discussed as part of a module titled *Image of the world in folklore.* The preceding chapter, *Mythological world model*, introduces students to the image of cosmogony in Greek mythology and the biblical story of genesis. The part on folklore is extensive, with students learning about as many as four texts: *God and devil arrange the world*, *Three brothers and the golden apple*, *The golden girl* and, finally, *Three brothers built a fortress* (The White Fortress, as it is referred to in the song), which is a variant of a walling up song from the Smolyan Province in the Rhodope Mountains (Райчев, 1973, pp. 11–120).

Why have textbook authors consistently chosen this particular variant for years, when there are 180 others available? (Моллов, 2006–2011). This variant originates from southern Bulgaria, not far from the present-day border with Western (Aegean) Thrace in Greece[37]. The Smolyan variant features the same basic narrative elements present in other Bulgarian songs: first, there is a crisis over the inability to finish the structure (The White Fortress); the recognition of the need to make a foundation sacrifice (here it is Struma/Struna, the wife of the youngest brother); her walling up and her pleading for the men to leave an opening in the wall so that she can feed her infant. Two fragments are characteristic of this variant: the first is when the husband postpones his wife's arrival at the construction site, which not only suggests a certain loyalty that he feels for her but also presents Struna as a tremendously hardworking person. The second characteristic feature is the husband's ploy: in order to lure his wife into the foundations, he claims that he has dropped a ring. Struma reaches for it, and the bricklayers can proceed with their plan. This cynicism of the husband who lies to expedite the matter is characteristic of the Greek variants, geographically close to the Smolyan Province.

Since the 1970s, authors of textbooks for sixth or fifth grades of elementary school have consistently used the variant from the Smolyan area. The interpretive modes, contexts, and legitimisations to which the song has been subjected over the past half-century vary and are reflected in the content of assignments, discussions of the song, and the building of intertextual references in the form of supplementary texts or lesson plans[38]. Tracing these modes, contexts and legitimisations may allow us to grasp the place that the song about the walled-up woman occupies in the Bulgarian cultural imaginarium, both diachronically and from a synchronic perspective.

[37] In the past, the largest ethnic group in the area were Turks, followed by Bulgarians and Pomaks (ca. 20%). Bulgaria's loss of Aegean Thrace and the consequent loss of access to the Aegean Sea in early 20th century is the spine of an important Bulgarian narrative on lost territories. The so-called Aegean Pass (Беломорски проход in Bulgarian), connecting Plovdiv with Xanthi in Western Thrace (now Greece), traverses the city of Smolyan. The pass, once within Bulgarian territory, was divided by the Bulgarian–Greek border in the early 20th century. The pass was an important communication route between Bulgaria and Western Thrace until 1944, when border barriers were erected to physically separate the two countries, which remained in place until 1989. Repeated and unfinished attempts to make communications more efficient (including a never completed railroad project in the early 20th century, continued during World War II) show the area as a place of complex political processes, communication barriers and changing borders.

[38] Visual presentations for lessons on walling up can be found online. These are amateurish and error-ridden materials, accompanied by incoherent and inadequate music (especially in the first part of the presentation). In addition to the descriptive part, these presentations include an interpretation of the main characters: the positive characters are Struna and her husband, while the negative ones are the other brothers (cf. Учим онлайн, 2021).

The Walled-Up Woman as an Extra in a Social Drama

School textbooks from the 1970s mirror the state paternalism in the area of historical and cultural policy. It promoted the vision of women in traditional roles of mothers and wives (Воденичаров, 2004–2006). Earlier texts from the 1950s, for example from the official Bulgarian Communist Party newspaper "Работническо дело", featured women who pursued careers in politics, economy, or science. The approach to family roles had liberalised in the first post-war decades, at least in the propaganda layer: images of emancipated women, present in the public and professional spheres, had emerged. Petyr Vodenicharov sees this as a replacement of sorts of the figure of God/man with the figure of Party/mother. Feminine nouns such as motherland, mass, and party are an expression of the new order, while "masculine" institutions become a relic of the old order. Memoirs and autobiographies of communists published at the time feature a recurring theme: humble origins, a strong mother, and an absent, insignificant father – a part-time worker, itinerant musician, alcoholic, etc. Vodenicharov sees this as a male fantasy about the rebellion of the Mother, who rejects the Father's rules and enables the revolutionary terror, but also as turning the mother into a public icon: desexualised and active, inspiring others to participate in science, sports, and economic life (Воденичаров, 2004–2006).

In the seventies, however, women were no longer the heroines of modernising narratives. The media and the public sphere highlighted the mother figure as fulfilling her ambitions within the home, tacking on a new role: of a caring wife (Воденичаров, 2004–2006). This decade brought economic stabilisation coupled with a wave of retro-utopia and new politics of memory. In political terms, the key initiative was the nationwide "Memory of the Nation Speaks" campaign (Народна памет разказва), launched in the early 1980s (Ангелова, 2010). It aimed to create a new historical memory that erased echoes of the Bolshevik terror and relics of the bourgeois mentality in one fell swoop. In the patriarchal system, children and adolescents played a specific role: they collected and interpreted stories from the older generations, thus becoming links in the chain of politics of memory. Additionally, the Institute of Folklore Studies was established in 1971, with local branches throughout Bulgaria. This institute's research became part of state policy, as evidenced by the promotion of folklore in school curricula.

Textbooks from the 1970s and 1980s portrayed the character of Strunka/Strumka (the heroine in the Smolyan variant) as an exemplary Bulgarian woman: a mother and a wife (Котова, 1975, 1977; Котова & Матеева, 1978, 1981, 1984). The original title of the work is actually *Струна невяста* [Struna the woman], but the title used in contemporary textbooks based on this very variant is *Троица братя града градяха* [Three brothers built a fortress]. By the time sixth graders studied the story of the walled-up woman, they had already read other folk tales fostering models of femininity, such as *Мързеливата снаха* [The lazy daughter in law], still present in the textbooks and often staged

in children's plays. The protagonist of this folk story not only fails to fulfil her responsibilities in reprehensible disregard for the patriarchal order (in the work, the husband is marginalised and the in-laws perform household duties for the girl), but at the same time she is the weakest link in the family, especially in times of crisis (Agoston-Nikolova, 1994). In stark contrast, the heroine of the walling up song is hard-working, zealous, and conscientious. She is a role model, an *exemplum* of self-discipline in work for the good of society as cultivated by communism (Nowicki, 2016). She is depicted in the role of a perfect person: she has agency, but she is subordinate, as exemplified in the following task for the students: "Describe the spiritual beauty and strength of the Bulgarian woman praised in this song! What did the people value as the greatest merit and virtue of a woman?" (Котова, 1975, p. 45).

Attachment to the static image of women can also be seen in the content of the accompanying tasks: the students are asked to prepare a recital of songs about women and mothers for International Women's Day on 8 March. The authors also encourage students to write down family songs extolling the image of the traditional family, women, and mothers. The textbook emphasises the emotive side of storytelling ("We do not condone walling up! And yet the song still moves us. Why?") and appeals to the students' imagination ("Which moment of the song would you illustrate? Why?"). And yet, the primary beneficiary of empathy is Struna's husband, while she (the very protagonist of the recital and of International Women's Day) is an object not of compassion, but of veneration[39].

In the discussed textbook, the motifs of femininity and motherhood are explored in a colour supplement that does not reference the song but it thematises female figures. It features full-page reproductions of paintings, such as Ivan Mrkvička's *Лазарка* [Lazarka], Mara Tsoncheva's *Селско момиче* [Rural girl] painting of breastfeeding mothers, Ivan Milev's *Селска мадонна* [Rural Madonna], Vasil Stoilov's *Селска мадонна* [Rural Madonna], and Fra Filippo Lippi's *Madonna and Child*. The most space, however, is devoted to paintings

[39] This perhaps has to do with tenets of mental hygiene, developed in People's Bulgaria, where mental crises and neuroses that afflicted women were explained in categories of hysteria. It allegedly affected women who combined professional and domestic duties, especially with the role of mothers, and the key factor was their work outside of home, which overburdened their nervous systems and bodies, which were considered weaker than men's. The collective picture of hysterical women as presented in mental health programs consisted of images of overly ambitious women, tense daughters-in-law, and mothers exhausted with housework. They could only be saved from hysteria by implementing better hygiene in everyday life and avoiding mental overloading. This kind of approach to female crises called for automated methods of prevention, which boiled down to striking a balance between work and social environs, professional and domestic duties, entirely wiping out individual factors, such as those stemming from the personal lives of women. This was partially a result of the fact that mental hygiene advocates had a distrust of psychoanalysis (cf. Т. Христов, 2016, pp. 103–106).

by Vladimir Dimitrov ("The Master"), in which aestheticised rural women are portrayed during work in the summertime, surrounded by colourful nature, sometimes with their families. The visual material presents various stages and roles in the life of a woman, from adolescence to maturity and motherhood. The spread also features reproductions of paintings referencing the Ottoman rule: Boris Dankov's and Boris Grigorov's *Кръвен данък* [Blood offering] and Felix Kanitz's drawing *Турците откарват български девойки в робство* [Turks take Bulgarian girls to captivity]. These invoke the category of defiled female honour. The collection also leans heavily on images of Madonnas, corresponding to the Marian cult. In the context of our consideration of the topos of the walled-up woman, it seems significant that it alluded to Marian symbolism[40]. The triad of builder – walled-up woman – child is mirrored in the triad of God – Mary – Jesus Christ, and the act of building is a cosmogonic act. The interpenetration of folk and the Christian Marian cult is also evident in the network of symbols: water and milk, with which the walled-up/Mary feeds the child; the tree which she becomes in the Thracian variants. The motif of walling up in the ballad has its parallel in biblical symbolism, which linked the figure of Mary to a city, a fortress, a wall (Парпулова-Грибъл, 1989). In the 14th century, the Second Bulgarian Empire collapsed and its territories were taken over by the Ottoman Empire, as a result of which the symbolic interpretation of the ballad of the walled-up woman, with its subtle parallels with Christian theology, was slowly extinguished. It was replaced by a realistic interpretation, sustained by the Bogomil heresy, saturated with details and events of everyday life (Парпулова-Грибъл, 1989, pp. 36–37).

The presence of the Madonna figure in the discussed school textbooks is a continuation of this realistic trend, to which communism added rural Madonnas: mothers of young children, elevated by the physical labour they perform, heroes of everyday life. The Smolyan variant emphasises the heroine–fortress (White Fortress) dyad, which points to parallels with the Christian and later Bogomil imagery of Mary as a building. The inclusion of the Madonna of Tarquinia – a notable example of Western European Renaissance painting by Fra Filippo Lippi – in the textbook is a deliberate choice as the Madonna figure depicted in the Italian painter's work is widely regarded as a seminal example of realistic imagery. Mary and the child are shown without a halo, as people, inside a building, among everyday furnishings, overlooking a courtyard.

The recital and the celebratory way of talking about the woman in the context of the walling up ballad is muted in the textbooks of the 1990s. In this decade, the nationalistic contours of the story are also blurred to some extent, and the interpretations acquired universal overtones – ahistorical and devoid of local references. Struna no longer expresses love for the homeland or family, but rather love

[40] The cult of the Mother of God significantly increased in prominence after the Council of Ephesus in 431. From the 7th century, it began to penetrate beyond the borders of Byzantium (Парпулова-Грибъл, 1989, p. 31).

itself: students are asked to describe an event unfolding around the sentiment of strong love, but the authors refrain from prescribing the specific entity or element to which this love should be directed (Котова & Матеева, 1995, p. 122).

Iskra Kotova's 1977 textbook offers an attempt at constructing an alternative scenario to the walling up of Struna: students, having been given five variants of Struna's husband's reaction, are asked to choose the one with the strongest artistic charge. The fifth option is a monologue by the builder, who asks to be walled up along his wife: *Let's break our oath / Instead of one / let's sacrifice two / Put me next to her* (Котова, 1977, p. 48). This selfless act compels the community to reflect on the legitimacy of sacrifice itself. This variant is absent from subsequent editions; as for the other four, in all of them the husband sheds a few tears over his wife's fate but agrees to her walling up. The iteration that permitted an attitude of solidarity with a loved one was regarded as unpedagogical.

In the high school textbooks of the 1970s and 1980s, the androcentric narrative is unquestionably the most elaborate, transcending the familial imaginary to encompass the national imagination. Since 1978, a three-page excerpt from the 1949 poem *Master Manole*, by Asen Raztsvetnikov, has been included. The excerpt features illustrations depicting the winged Manole ascending into the sky and leaving the earth, punctured by the tower of the mosque he built, below him (Струмски et al., 1978). This poem has become one of the obligatory readings. In the textbook, the protagonist is interpreted in the spirit of 19th-century ethnocentrism, sharpening the polarisation of Bulgarians vs. Turks, Orthodoxy vs. Islam, but also of the people vs. the mighty. Manole becomes an expounder of "love for the land of Bulgaria", and students are tasked with reciting the passage in a way that makes listeners believe in this love. The textbook also includes a suggested assignment for those who wish to complete it: a comparison of Manole to Sultan Selim the Grim, followed by a rhetorical question – *Which character is closer to you?* (Струмски et al., 1978, pp. 22–23)

Raztsvetnikov's Manole is a bachelor, which eliminates the motif of walling up. The world of women is represented by the sultan's daughter, who is in love with him, and by Manole's absent mother, who regulates her son's conscience. According to Vodenicharov, she is the one who mobilises him to participate in public life and challenge the current order through revolution. Nevertheless, the authors and writers of the textbook do not prioritise female characters; the focal point is the conflict between Manole and Selim, where the former embodies the new order (technology, modernisation) and the latter represents the anachronistic and violent past.

Topos and Affect

Bulgarian literature textbooks for fifth graders, published after 2015 and included in the core curriculum by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Bulgaria, feature the song of the walled-up woman in a module

titled "The image of the world in folklore". As many as three lesson units are devoted to the theme of walling up: one introductory to the topic and two exercise units. Modern textbooks, like those of half a century earlier, are based on the variant from the Smolyan region, but in one textbook the Smolyan variant is compared with the variant from the Elensko region *Града градеше Маноил майстор* [Master Manole built a fortress], and in this case it occupies a record nine pages in the textbook (Герджикова et al., 2016, pp. 80–89). In the Elensko variant, a theme is brought out to redeem the husband: here, he does not sneakily throw the ring into the foundations of the building to lure his wife; instead, he delays her arrival at the construction site, and in the end he reveals the truth to her. In this version, the couple have twin sons: Peter and Paul. Here the authors use Arnaudov's concept of the wife becoming the guardian spirit of the building[41]. The juxtaposition of song variants, however, is an exception, meant to help students develop competences in comparative analysis of folk variants (Герджикова et al., 2016).

The supporting materials for teachers include information on the expected educational outcomes and competencies of students. These outcomes include knowledge of folk song genre features, identification of problems and conflicts characteristic of the folk worldview, and comparison with personal experience. Students are also expected to develop a personal stance on the issues addressed in the songs, particularly those concerning interpersonal relationships. The publication for teachers also includes a proposed scenario for a lesson titled "Three brothers are building a city – the magic of folk songs", based on group work. The scenario calls for students to choose positive and negative moments in the song (the authors suggest some key words, such as love, fidelity, and honesty). Next, the students are to elaborate on themes that cannot be clearly defined (for example, why Struna's appearance is not described in detail in the song). This lack of individualisation is linked to the text's normative nature, which is characteristic of traditional communities. The text conveys the messages that mothers should love their children until the very end, and

[41] *Talasum* is described by the authors as an image of Bulgarian mythology, pictured as an enormous, strong snake that lives deep under the threshold of the house. The inhabitants of the house can't see the snake, but they believe it is there and protects them from disease, deprivation, evil spells, and people wishing them ill. That is why during the holidays they leave food for it in the corners of the house. Meadows, gardens, vineyards also have their *stopans* – they protect them from mice, caterpillars; even the earth has its *stopan* which encompasses it like a hoop that makes the earth strong and steady (Герджикова et al., 2016, p. 83). "Talasum" also appears in a 1993 literature textbook for grade 4 of high school, where the authors included a piece by writer Nikolai Khaytov titled "Времето на таласъмските приказки" [The time of talasum tales]. Khaytov writes that fairy tales featuring guardian spirits were among the most fascinating stories of his childhood. The action of these fairy tales takes place from dusk to dawn, at a time when there is no death, only constant movement, transformation into another form. Only children have access to the world of the *talasum*; they lose it when they become adults (Матеева, 1993, p. 116).

wives should be subservient to their husbands. For this lesson, an example of homework is for the girls to retell the song about the walled-up woman from Struna's perspective, and for the boys to retell it from the husband's perspective (Протохристова et al., 2016). This seemingly dialogical scenario of group work essentially reproduces the idea that the male protagonist is superior, and the female character is reduced to a narrative device that highlights her capacity to give (Протохристова et al., 2016). Students were not allowed to choose their own perspective; rather, they were assigned to a gender category based on biological and cultural criteria.

Contemporary textbook authors juxtapose the song with literary interpretations of the bricking-up motif, such as the poem *Изворът на Белоногата* by Petko Slaveykov (Славейков, 1873) and the short story *Църковното настоятелство* by Yordan Radichkov (2022). This demonstrates the enduring presence of the topos in Bulgarian literature since the National Revival. Slaveykov's text is required reading in ninth grade as one of the canonical works of Bulgarian Revival literature. In the fifth-grade textbook, the authors only cover the theme of the love between Gergana and Nikola. The tasks for students revolve around the theme of "love stronger than death". The authors ask why the girl and Nikola still meet at the spring after Gergana's death (Божилов & Бунева, 2020, pp. 77–83). Radichkov, on the other hand, builds an intertextual dialogue using satire and humour. The sacrifice of an animal's shadow is presented as an outdated superstition, and the motif of bricking up serves as a backdrop for a tale about a community exploiting a crisis and failing to produce a common good.

The textbooks also cite scholarly sources (especially Арнаудов, 1961; Арнаудов, 1972) and information about the occurrence of the motif of walling up in folklore around the world. The authors emphasise that, unlike in works from other parts of the world where strangers are walled up (e.g., slaves, enemies, or abandoned children), in the folklore of the Balkan Peninsula the sacrifice is made of the closest person – the best and most beautiful (Божилов & Бунева, 2020). The category of mythological thinking is invoked here and students are made aware that the song about the walled-up woman is an expression of such thinking.

The new textbooks show significant changes. Those from the 1970s and 1980s use the category of peculiarity ("our ancestors believed that when a person is walled-up…"), but the new approaches emphasise the presence of the walled-up woman motif as part of a broader cultural heritage (Balkan and global). There are also essentially three interpretative orientations emerging: the exaltation of the (self-)sacrifice, the search for alternatives to walling up (e.g., avoiding foundation sacrifice), and the embodiment-affective interpretation (activating the mechanism of identification, emotional involvement of students in the plot).

The first of the proposed interpretations replicates narratives from the period of the People's Republic of Bulgaria: it fits into a nationalist framework and

links the folk motif of the sacrificial offering with the motif of (self-)sacrifice in Bulgarian history. The motto of the lesson series is a quote from a work by Stoyan Mihaylovski (a Bulgarian conservative poet of the late 19th and early 20th centuries): "A person does not choose their duty, just as they do not choose their origin." This is a reconstruction of the 19th-century model of patriotism. Students are asked the following question: "How do we feel today about Bulgarians who gave their lives for the freedom of their homeland or saved someone from death? What would you sacrifice for your loved ones?" (Герджикова et al., 2016, p. 83) The positive hero is the husband, who fulfils his duty to the community, believes in the salvaging power of love (his wife does not really die, but is saved), and mourns the loss of his wife. Struna is presented here as an exemplary mother and wife faced with a trial; she is explicitly described as the ideal Bulgarian woman.

> Her strength of spirit makes this petite woman stronger than men. Even when she sees what awaits her, she shows no weakness, does not blame anyone, does not complain; she only thinks about her child – the last words speak of her sacrifice as a mother. (Протохристова et al., 2019, p. 81)

The other two brothers are negative examples: they lie, break their word, and have a dismissive attitude toward work[42]. After copying the passage that the students chose as the cruellest (sic!) into their notebooks, they are asked to write five sentences explaining what they find cruel about it. They are provided with interpretative anchors in the form of words: fidelity, suffering, separation, maternal love, sacrifice, crying, and request (Герджикова et al., 2016).

Alternative plot solutions are the least common in the textbooks. When they do appear, students are offered the opportunity to change the ending in such a way that justice prevails or construction problems are solved. The possible versions use persuasion and are accompanied by specific questions: "How do you feel when someone breaks a promise they made to you? Why do you feel that way? What are your responsibilities? And what are the responsibilities of adults?" These questions suggest the importance of an individual's commitment to the community (Протохристова et al., 2019).

"Role-playing" consists of reading aloud with assigned roles, drawing the setting and subsequent episodes, and making decorations for a wordless stag-

[42] The textbooks hardly analyse the attitudes of the older brothers. However, their interpretation is provided in a discussion for students (which is not included in the core curriculum). Perhaps, the authors write, the two older brothers consider the very ritual of walling up a living person to be a senseless and barbaric gesture? According to the authors, such an attitude may be a sign of a transition from human sacrifice to symbolic sacrifice. However, this is not entirely the case as they willingly wall up the youngest brother's wife and thus believe in the effectiveness of human sacrifice. The authors also draw attention to Struna's last words: they are not addressed to her husband, but to the brothers, which indicates her resentment towards her husband for betraying her (И. Радев et al., 1993, pp. 7–10).

ing of the work (Ц. Петрова & Василева, 2017, pp. 40–42). The instructions in the textbooks encourage students to "empathise" with the characters' situation. The element of surprise is used: students see "bubbles" on the side of the text with questions asked as they read for the first time. For example, when the youngest brother sees his wife who has come to the construction site and starts crying, the question in the margin is: "What were your expectations regarding the plot? Why?" When the husband says that the ring fell into the foundations, the authors ask: "Is this passage a surprise to you? What would you do at this point if you were in the shoes of Struna's husband? What advice would you give him? Why?" And some closing questions at the end of the work: "Does the ending of the work match your expectations? What is good about this text? What is bad? Why?" (Протохристова, 2019, p. 82) These "surprise" questions create a specific situation: students are thrown into the world presented in the text, and their knowledge, acquired as they go, is completed during the reading. Finally, students are asked to put themselves in the shoes of Struna's husband, who is the only character with agency.

An examination of social media posts on the websites of primary schools and local cultural centres revealed that the song about the walled-up woman is often performed by students in school plays. They are mostly plays with actors, much less frequently with puppets or marionettes. The actors are children in the first grades of primary school, and the pretext for the staging are the classes and their content. The performances are also staged in higher grades of primary school, as exemplified by the puppet theatre from the village of Bolyartsi, prepared by students of class 7B in March 2022 for poetry week.

The authors of the photo reports from the performances eagerly capture the moment of walling up, when the bricklayers slowly and methodically put bricks around Struna's body. The captions under the photos do not elaborate on the subject; they are purely informative. From the collected photographs, it can be concluded not only that the song about the walled-up woman is a frequent theme of school performances (directed by literature teachers), but also that the visual representations come from small towns and villages, where performances often take place in open spaces. Nature itself (a mountainside, a forest) becomes the backdrop, and the song is thus naturalised, merging with the real, everyday local space. Sometimes, as in the case of the performance in the village of Gyovren in the Smolyan region, the performances are directly related to the place where the song variant originated, and the child actors themselves perform in black, white, and red folk costumes characteristic of the Rhodope region. Such initiatives have additional local significance as they feed into the collective memory, also at the schools themselves.

The popularity of the stage adaptation of the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* in the Bulgarian education program can be explained by the vitality of folklore itself in the life of Bulgarian schools, as evidenced by music and dance groups. However, the fact that most of the visual representations on the internet come from rural areas suggests that there these initiatives are a par-

ticularly important part of the educational path and an element that integrates local communities. The characters are played by children, but the audience is made up of adults: parents and the school community. These grassroots school initiatives in small towns are a parallel reality to the media discussions mentioned earlier, involving journalists, psychiatrists, and parents with higher social and cultural capital, mainly from the largest urban centres. In the first case, the song is revitalised by ever-new performative practices. In the second case, however, it is considered socially harmful, with the potential to negatively affect the psyche of children and, further down the line, the condition of society as a whole, seen as shameful in the context of Bulgaria's membership of European structures, which promote values of peace and tolerance.

How Could This Have Looked? Visualisations of Walling Up in Textbooks

Illustrated textbooks on Bulgarian literature for older elementary school students are a relatively new practice. The only illustration I came across in textbooks from the 1970s and 1980s that directly refers to the motif of walling up is a scene depicting Manole flying up to the sky, leaving behind stunned Ottoman dignitaries and the mosque he built himself (Котова & Матеева, 1981, 1984). However, the colourful visual composition in the textbook accompanies not the text of the song, but the aforementioned poem by Asen Raztsvetnikov. Manole's silhouette is not only individualised here in comparison with the rest of the characters, through a frontal view of his face, but it is also the largest and most prominent on a separate page of the book and a white background. In the lower left corner, four Ottoman dignitaries on horseback raise their heads, looking at Manole. Their faces remain invisible; their turbans stand out, emphasising their cultural and religious distinctiveness from Manole, who is – also significantly– depicted in folk costume. The image of the world "down below" is complemented by a small mosque (smaller than Manole's silhouette), resembling a child's toy, located on a hill, next to which two stunted trees grow. While Manole is shown against a white background, the Ottoman world contains many details, giving the impression of congestion and chaos. The illustrations in the textbook reinforce the nationalistic, openly persuasive message present in the questions posed to students, which is also underpinned by Manichean dualism: Manole leaves the evil world of earthly matter, renounces it, and soars to the heights.

Interestingly, the illustrations selected for the textbook focus on masculinity. The drama unfolds between men: the sultan and Manole. In the mid-1980s, this served to reinforce nationalistic attitudes in Bulgaria, where the Muslim minority was persecuted and the given and last names of Turks, Roma, and Pomaks were forcibly changed to Bulgarian-sounding ones (the so-called revival

process). The formulation of visual and textual messages in textbooks was also influenced by the celebrations of the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian state in 1981. These celebrations were accompanied by a festival of national pride and the instrumentalisation of tradition for immediate ideological purposes.

Bulgarian textbooks published after 2015 make greater use of visual material. A section containing the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress*, in addition to artwork, also offers photographs of artefacts related to the legend, especially bridges and monuments: the monument to Struma and Kadin Bridge in the village of Nevestino, the so-called Devil's Bridge on the Arda River, the fountain and monument to Gergana in Harmanli (Божилов & Бунева, 2020, pp. 80–82). Some contemporary textbooks emphasise the fact that the song belongs to the common heritage of non-European cultures as well, but visually they use material from the Balkan Peninsula, e.g., a photograph of a bas-relief in the Rozafa Fortress in Shkodër (Божилов & Бунева, 2020, p. 82).

The authors of the artwork focus on portraying Struma on her own or with a child in her arms. Shown during the walling up, immersed in sadness, she looks into the distance, but not in the direction of the reader – as if she were looking at a child outside the frame (Герджикова et al., 2016). This can therefore be interpreted as a scene of a mother saying goodbye to her child; even so, the mood is not tragic; it is melancholy, even though the protagonist is literally surrounded by a wall that is about to close. The arches of the building's foundations and the soft colours soothe the tone of the scene. The hoop around Struma's body and the wall immobilise her. Struma's fixed gaze into the distance is a common feature in many depictions: the authors draw attention to her face, focusing on her eyes, which are full of sadness and reflection (Ц. Петрова & Василева, 2017, p. 40). In most illustrations, violence is neutralised by focusing on Struma's figure and face, captured at the moment when she already knows what is about to happen to her. The act of collective violence itself remains invisible. Shifting the emphasis to the character of Struma in the visual materials modifies the interpretation of the song about the walled-up woman: the song becomes a story about the individual drama of the heroine, sacrificed by the community, but it is not a story about the latter.

An analysis of the function of the song about the walled-up woman in school textbooks has shown that from the 1970s to the present day, textbook interpretations of the song *Three brothers built a fortress* have been a constant element of the curriculum in sections devoted to folklore. After 1989, this song was not removed from the curriculum. However, the ways in which it was interpreted in some textbooks changed, while the legitimacy of the foundation sacrifice was still not denied. Textbook narratives have shown that education is a space for normalising violence against women and perpetuating gender inequality. Embedded in male cultural narratives, women are supporting characters who stabilise the male world but have no voice or agency of their own. In many cases, the sacrifice of a woman is described as just and noble, and her humble acceptance of death as obvious or even desirable.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the male-centred narrative became part of the state's nationalist policy, exacerbating ethnic antagonisms and taking on a paternalistic tone in the design of gender roles. The ethnic nationalism thus promoted defines national culture as dense, encompassing almost all spheres of social life. The national community defined in this way is exclusive in nature (Burszta et al., 2019, p. 47). In the most recent textbooks, the nationalist aspect of the legend's interpretation is softened, but it persists in the postulates of sacrifice for the homeland. For half a century, the song about the walled-up girl has remained an inspiration for performative activities involving primary school students. Contemporary performances are a school initiative not included in the core curriculum and are therefore a voluntary result of the activities of amateur class groups, theatre clubs, teachers, and parents.

The social phenomena and practices resulting from the presence of the song *Three brothers built a fortress* in the primary school curriculum can be read through the lens of the category of affect. Referring to Charles Altieri's concept, Mieke Bal defines affect as a range of mental states in which the agent's activity cannot be adequately captured in terms of either sensory impression or belief but rather requires attention to how the person proposes to express these states (Bal, 2015, p. 43). Emotions are distinguished within affects: they refer to the construction of attitudes, usually establish an individual cause, and thus situate the agent within the narrative (Bal, 2015, p. 43). In this sense, the media discussion on the legitimacy of including songs about walling up in school textbooks seems to be primarily an emotional story. On the one hand, some argue that the ballad is a harmful anachronism and a relic of the ideological heritage from before 1989 that promotes collective violence. Conversely, the media discussion is characterised by the emotional pleas of those who advocate preserving the song as a tradition in an increasingly globalised world. The emotional story is also shaped by recommendations in school textbooks, which focus on specific characters and their roles in the social spectacle, thus concretising the themes of guilt, responsibility, sacrifice, dedication, etc.

According to Bal, mood is an affect that is particularly effective. In the case of mood, the sense of subjectivity is dispersed, and the impression emerges in an undefined atmosphere that permeates the scene or situation. The neutrality of tone leaves room for the invasion of the body, giving way to the affectively diffuse meaning of subjectivity, and the discrepancy between mood and events has an invasive effect on the viewer's affective abilities, writes Bal (Bal, 2015, pp. 44–45). The mood, not the emotion, is the affect of the performative actions of the school initiatives surrounding the song about the walled-up woman. The neutrality of the performances, in which the students' recitation is accompanied by the laying of bricks around the body of a classmate, watched by an adult audience (teachers and parents), creates, through the dissonance of the content and its neutral tonality, a mood of anxiety; this, in turn, generates interpretive potential that can be explored more closely through field research practices.

The lack of intersection between discourses and practices centred on the presence of songs in textbooks is due to representatives of each position often operating within distinct information circuits. However, participants in both areas are united by their interest in the song from Smolyan. The song engages them emotionally, triggering associations, analogies, comparisons, and metaphors. This demonstrates that the song is an active part of Bulgarian culture.

Summary

Within the framework of the changing artistic and literary currents of the modern era, the multiple and numerous revitalisations of the folk topos of the walled-up woman in Bulgarian culture can be ordered according to multiple criteria. For the purpose of this study, we have chosen typological criteria relating to the heroine as a non-mother, nurturer, annihilated figure. We have singled out school textbooks and educational materials as a separate group of texts. These texts provide synthetic studies of the topos, taking into account all variants. This is usually accompanied by the purification of folklore texts. We call these four groups of cultural texts "modules", which seem related to the different modalities proper to each group. These modalities are the means of literary, artistic, and school persuasion.

The analysis conducted in three chapters ("The basic module. Non-mother. The canonical version"; "The basic module. Non-mother. The modernist version and its late continuations"; and "The basic module. Non-mother. The subversive version") has allowed us to conclude that the topos of the walling up of a bride or her shadow has unleashed the greatest creative potential in Bulgarian literature and art. This theme correlates with the concepts of ideal "eternal" femininity, personified by the virgin guardians of the Orthodox-folk world, martyrs, modernist priestesses, and muses. They carry values seen as the spiritual glue of the nation, faith, art, and, in more nonconformist approaches, as the humic basis of the world. In the prose and art of many women writers and artists of the 20th and 21st centuries, the topos (associated with female self-destruction) has served to criticise the mechanisms of patriarchal violence.

The part titled "Module two. The nurturer" discusses cultural texts that actualise the most poignant folk topos of the nursing woman (also *in spe*). Narratives constructed around this profiled heroine are framed by respect for the death-transcending maternal or paramaternal care of the child. And then the woman is the one whose affordance predestines her to be used as a glue, an organic connective tissue that gives life force even to stones. In this kind of story, there are motifs of transubstantiation, whereby the milk of the walled-up woman is transformed into a healing substance, placed at the centre of community local healing practices also today. Literary and artistic works that focus on the cult of motherhood and, more broadly, the nurturing and healing mission of

women become a way to translate archaic imagery into the language of heterodox worldview concepts.

The chapter "Module Three. Annihilated" analyses cultural texts in which the figure of the walled-up woman has been marginalised, and the protagonist of literary narratives or artistic works has become an artist, a creator of new worlds, putting the interest of the community (local, national, class) above personal interest. The ideological annihilation of the heroine's character goes hand in hand with Manole's stylisation as an active participant in the unending Bulgarian–Turkish antagonism or as a proletarian competing to become a champion of labour and a beneficiary of her work. The participation of female victims in these battles is generally reduced to traces of presence in the details of their husbands' work. This kind of false lyricism of ideologues is countered by writers, filmmakers, and artists who seek the universal message of the motif and expose the power structure in cultural gender relations. As a rule, however, these findings are not subversive in nature.

The analysis of school textbooks presented in "Module four. Within school walls" reveals that the song *Three brothers built a fortress* has been a permanent part of the curriculum since the 1970s. Following the democratic transition of 1989, interpretations of the song changed, but not to the point of negating the legitimacy of sacrifice for the greater good. Despite the potential for a critical interpretation of the song about the walling up of a woman, it remains an enduring element in the school curriculum that normalises violence against women and perpetuates gender inequality.

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Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk

Croatia. Foundations Laid in Forgetting

Croatian Spectra and Local Developments

Croatian folklore features at least two songs (with numerous variants) in which the motif of walling up a foundation sacrifice occupies a central position. The first is *Ćuprija na Drini* [The Bridge on the Drina], describing the walling up of twins into the span of a bridge over the Drina River; the second is *Zidanje Skadra* [The Building of Skadar], in which the stability of a fortress under construction is to be ensured by sacrificing the wife of one of the brothers building it. Folk song collections also include compositions that are a contamination of elements from both songs – The Building of Skadar and The Bridge on the Drina – while simultaneously introducing dramatic developments not found elsewhere. In doing so, they form unique local variants.

The first collection of folk songs published by the literary and cultural institution Matica hrvatska, which operated within the context of the national revival movement was titled *Hrvatske narodne pjesme* [Croatian Folk Songs] (Broz & Bosanac, 1896), and included the song *Ćuprija na Drini*[1], recorded by Vice Palunko from Popovo in Herzegovina. In 1886, Palunko collated 220 folk songs from Herzegovina and the island of Šipan near Dubrovnik. Responding to the call of the then highly active Matica hrvatska, which was cataloguing intangible heritage, he donated his collection to the institution. The song he recorded tells the story of the building of the bridge on the Drina, in which twin siblings – Stoja and Stojan – are sacrificed and walled up. Later, the same literary motif would be used by Nobel Prize laureate Ivo Andrić in his novel *The Bridge on the Drina* (Na Drini ćuprija, 1945).

The narrative structure of the song indicates its deep roots in local folk traditions. It explicitly references one of the most important folk and religious holidays in the Balkans, St. George's Day (Đurđevdan), as the moment when the construction of the bridge begins. The plot may be summarised as follows: the master builder, *neimar* Mitre, harnesses an unsaddled black horse to begin

[1] Song no. 36, originally recorded as no. 80. The piece consists of 67 verses; it is concise and economical.

construction across the Drina. However, the horse resists, unwilling to cooperate, and eventually escapes to the riverbank. Wrapped around its legs is a water *vila* (*vila vodenica,* a fairy), who warns the builders that killing her will doom the project. She instructs them to saddle the horse and find the twins Stoja and Stojan and then wall them up in the bridge as a foundation sacrifice. Since ignoring the *vila's* command would have dire consequences for the construction, *neimar* Mitre promptly follows her instructions, thereby ensuring that the bridge stands to this day.

The song collection includes editorial and interpretive commentary at the end, analysing key differences between the published version and those appearing in other folklore collectors' compilations[2]. However, it does not distinguish between a Bosnian variant, referring to the Drina bridge, and the Skadar variant, which centres on the Skadar fortress; both are treated as songs of common provenance.

In the collection of Ante Franjin Alačević (songs gathered in the Makarska Riviera), we find a version of the song describing the arduous construction of Skadar by three brothers. The destructive force here is a *vila*, who warns that the city will never be completed unless one of the brothers' beloved women is walled up. This constitutes an externalisation of evil: it derives not from the building's self-destruction but from the active interference of the *vila*. Consequently, the sacrifice of the first woman who brings food to the construction site is not an act of appeasement for a protective spirit but rather an offering to the forces of evil (Wawrzeniuk, 2016). Deception plays a role here as well: although the brothers make a pact, only the youngest keeps his word and refrains from warning his beloved, resulting in her unknowingly bringing the meal.

The song recorded from Makarska Riviera is an elaborate, composite variant that incorporates multiple motifs, including one from Greek tradition involving a supposedly lost ring, used by one of the builder brothers to lure the girl directly into the walling-up site ("Climb the walls of the building / My ring fell into the wall / You can easily retrieve it"[3]; Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 533). The victim, ultimately resigned to her fate, makes a final request to leave a small opening through which she could see her child: "Leave me a little peephole / So I may look out on the new city / To see where my little one will walk / Who will lead him, who will carry him" (Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 533). This motif replaces the more common plea to breastfeed through a gap in the wall. In the cited version, the mother's furtive glances bring forth three rivers flowing

[2] The topos of foundation sacrifice also appears in collections compiled by the following folklorists: Alačević II (no. 114); Bogdešić (no. 26); Terezija Burazović (no. 410); Gabrić (no. 80); Gazdović (no. 31); Ilić I (no. 252); Ivanišević (no. 106); Kamenar (no. 210); Klotilda Kučera VI (no. 2); Lovretić (nos. 19 and 32); Mostahnić (no. 10); Strohal II (no. 18); and Štuk (no. 13).

[3] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Kalina Iwanek-Malinowska either from the Polish translation by Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk or directly from the original Polish text.

around the city: rivers of milk, blood, and tears. The first is the river of nourishment – life-giving and salvific, not for the mother, but for future generations. The second symbolises the covenant – the blood that connects the community and cements the structure, inscribing the sacrifice into the order of the sacred (cf. Roux, 1994). The third is the river of maternal grief, the most personal element, embodying the mother's suffering. It adds emotional depth to the narrative and underscores the tragedy of the sacrifice. Thus, instead of a literal act of breastfeeding, we witness a metaphorical outpouring of maternal presence across the landscape, one that does not save the mother herself but enters the realm of collective memory. These rivers are traces of her irreversible loss, but also signs of life, sacrifice, and mourning that define the cultural topography of the city.

A salvific potamological motif also appears in the Slavonian version recorded by Luka Ilić (in *Narodne pjesme iz Slavonije*, MH26, 1852, no. 275) [Folk Songs from Slavonia], which tells the story of the walling up of Šimunica, the wife of the youngest brother, Šimun. The text reads: "The river of mother's milk flowed / Drank it did Mara the orphan / Drank it, bathed it in tears / And sighed for her mother" (Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 534). Art historian David Freedberg's words, "the human helplessness of the child, the human softness and beauty of the mother, and the tragedy of their subsequent suffering, pictured in terms of drops of blood and tears […]" (Freedberg, 1989, p. 167), evoke protective feelings towards the child and courtly love towards the mother, both elements typically found in miracle stories. Freedberg notes that emotional reactions triggered by such imagery play a key role in conveying the message of divine intervention and miraculous events. These emotional responses are essential to the effectiveness of religious and spiritual communication, which accounts for their presence in folk songs.

The song about Šimunica is also noteworthy for the names of its characters. Firstly, the women bear masculine-derived names, reflecting their inscription into a patriarchal worldview. The names of the brothers, Marko, Pavle, and Šimun (Mark, Paul, and Simon), as well as that of the orphaned child Mara (Mary), are of biblical origin, indicating a process of embedding the song within the local cultural-religious context. A similar phenomenon can be observed in another Slavonian variant recorded by A. and J. Kušmiš (MH37, no. 36), where the three brothers are named Marko, Gjuragji, and Ivo (Mark, George, and John)[4]. This song is also noteworthy for a different reason – its narrative reflects the pragmatic dimension of human life. This is evident in the motivations given by the wives of the two elder brothers when their mother-in-law asks them to bring food to the construction site. Having been warned of the potential danger, the eldest daughter-in-law refuses, claiming a headache; the second declines due to a toothache; the youngest, however, finds no excuse to avoid the task. This realistic, down-to-earth approach aligns well with folk tradition, which

[4] The set of names varies. Sometimes Latin and Byzantine names are intermingled (e.g., Bogdan, Mitar, Pavle – MH 140, no. 31).

often emphasises wisdom and survival strategies rather than idealised virtues. Here, too, the motif of a river formed by a mother's milk and tears is used; this time, the fluids merge. Symbolically, this river may separate the condemned mother from her child (the river as a barrier and liminal space) or represent the mother transformed into a life-giving river after death (cf. Masłowska & Niebrzegowska, 1999, p. 334).

In Antun Mostahinić's collection is another version of the Skadar song from Kata Matković, recorded near Cavtat, close to Dubrovnik. This version concerns the building of a city on the Buna River. The builders are the Jugović brothers, known from Serbian epic poetry. Their nightly ambushes against the destructive forces are in vain. One of the brothers receives a vision in the form of a dream, sent by a *vila*, who demands that one of their wives be sacrificed (Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 535). The story then unfolds according to the familiar pattern: the woman, Pavlovica (the wife of Pavle), unaware of her fate, arrives at the construction site and meets her end. The husband's deception is an element unique to this version, as he pretends to cry over the loss of a golden apple. The pomological motif is ambiguous – it may symbolise the marital bond, but also the fertility of the sacrificial victim in the foundation sacrifice.

The song versions also vary in terms of the city being built. Ivan Ivanišević (no. 106) and Petar Bogdešić (1884, no. 135) recorded songs in which the town being constructed is Biograd. Sometimes, the names of the builder brothers differ: in more Croatised versions, the brothers are named Jurjević (in a version recorded by Djuro Kamenar near Vrhovac, Jaska); Jakšić (in a version recorded by Josip Lovretić in Slavonia – MH140, no. 31); or Filipović (Petar Bogdešić, from Dragovci, Slavonia). All these changes indicate that the song was not immune to the influence of local contexts, socio-cultural conditions, and historical settings. It underwent dynamic transformations, adapting to evolving realities. This flexibility and openness to modification allowed the song to live, evolve, and embed itself in new contexts without losing its original identity.

The presence of Marian motifs "shining through" the songs is a characteristic feature of Croatian variants, attesting to the strong influence of the religious semiosphere on folk creativity in the region. This is suggested not only by the frequently appearing name of the female protagonist (Mara), but also by recurring floristic themes. In the songs recorded by Djuro Kamenar, the girl asks for a hole to be left for her right hand so that shepherdesses can braid roses on it and weep over them: "Leave my right hand outside / When the shepherdesses go grazing / Shepherdesses, my little orphans / Will gather roses for me / And braid them on my hand / They will shed their tears / And wash my hand with them" (Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 534). The offering of roses evokes associations with the rosary prayer, suggesting that the female figure in the song was shaped with reference to Marian aesthetics. This theme appears in the Christian poetry of Sedulius (ca. 430), who established the topos of *rosa mystica* in Christian culture: "A rose emerges from sharp thorns, having nothing that harms, and eclipses its mother in honour. Even so, insofar as holy Mary came from the

stock of Eve, the latter virgin was to atone for the misdeed of the earlier one" (Sedulius, 2013, p. 47).

Folk songs often reflect a historical sensitivity to the boundaries between life and death, depicting the interpenetration of these spheres within ritual and social imagination. One of the characteristic motifs of folk songs is the relationship between mother and child, in which the gaze, physical contact, and symbolic passages between worlds become carriers of memory and care. In a song recorded by Josip Lovretić in the village of Otok in Slavonia (MH 140, no. 31, from Bara Augustinović), the opening in the structure is meant not for the mother to feed or watch the child, but rather as a passage between two worlds through which the infant may reach the mother. Here, we encounter a motif of visitation – the child visiting the still-living mother in her crypt and penetrating the realm of death. The song must have taken shape at a time when the culturally conditioned shielding of children from certain adult domains – especially death – had not yet occurred (Ariès, 1962; van den Berg, 2022).

In many versions recorded in contemporary Croatia, the special relationship between the mother and child after the walling up is highlighted, conveyed through gaze and eye contact. Looking becomes performative – it expresses care and maternal attention, thereby elevating motherhood from a purely biological experience to an act of caring and seeing. Through this shift, the caring mother becomes the seeing mother. In the Slavonian version recorded by Petar Bogdešić, the walled-up Mara asks for a small window through which she would be able to see her child. Her request is not about breastfeeding, but about being able to see "Leave me a little window / So I can see my orphan / Walking around the city / So I can see if she is not naked, / If she is not naked or bareheaded, / If she is not thirsty, if she is not hungry for her mother" (Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 533). Looking at the child – checking if they are dressed, covered, thirsty, or longing for their mother – is the highest act of care. This duty does not cease even in the face of death. Such an elaboration stands in stark contrast to versions of the song from the Serbian cultural region, where the aim is to deprive the woman of both her voice and her sight (Arsić, 2002, p. 263).

This is reversed in the version recorded by Klotilda Kučera (MH 24, no. 394, from Koleta Filipović in Novi Mikanovci, Slavonia), where the opening left in the wall serves as a mirror through which the child perceives the mother searching for them: "Leave a little window / A window like a mirror / So the child can see how the mother is looking for them" (Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 535). Thus, the mother–child relationship is mutually constructed through seeing. The song's motif of mutual gaze and mirror reflection resonates with Donald Winnicott's (2005) psychoanalytic reading. He described the significance of the "mother's face" as the child's first mirror. The mother's face is where the child sees their reflection and begins to understand their feelings and reactions. This interaction is crucial for the development of the child's sense of identity and self-awareness – the child wants to see that they are seen. In the context of the maternal gaze, French philosopher Luce Irigaray, in her work *Speculum*

of the Other Woman (Irigaray, 1985), emphasised that the mother's gaze is not a neutral act of observation but a relational encounter that enables the child's first experience of being recognised and valued. It is the mother, through her gaze and responsiveness, who creates the space for the child's emerging identity. Irigaray, however, suggests that patriarchal culture devalues this role and focuses instead on the father's gaze as the one shaping subjectivity.

In other song variants, the walled-up mother's request for a window to see the child through is accompanied by an additional plea for openings that would allow her to breastfeed, attesting to the richness and diversity of these traditional narratives, which elaborate on the mother–child bond and the significance of the motherly gaze in the context of death and motherhood. In one song from Banja Luka, the motherly gaze does not end with the mother's death – her dark eyes continue to gaze from the wall, transcending traditional eschatological concepts and emphasising the enduring bond between mother and child, even beyond earthly life. This song appears in the collection *Ženske pjesme* [Women's Songs] (Andrić, 1909), which includes three songs of particular interest collected in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina. These contain unique internal developments. The song recorded in Banja Luka (Antun Hangi, no. 55) directly references the Skadar construction motif but introduces specific narrative elements. The narrator delays the arrival of the youngest wife at the construction site by introducing a dialogue among the sisters-in-law, who offer to look after the child only to send the mother to her death. This motif likely serves to build narrative tension by prolonging the climactic moment. Another notable element is the rare monologue of the youngest brother, who laments the loss of his golden apple (his wife) and the seed that remains (the child). The seed, deprived of its apple (wife/mother), cannot survive: "I had a golden apple / Which my brothers took from me / I grieve for the seed of the apple / Which I had long awaited / I awaited it like a freezing man awaits the sun / But now the seed will rot / The seed will rot without the apple" (Andrić, 1909, p. 140). This passage reveals not only a solar motif typical of folk poetry – expressed in the idea of the man awaiting the child as one freezing awaits the sun – but also symbolic connections to the cyclical and vegetative order of life. The apple, symbolising fertility and abundance, reflects life's cyclical nature. The man's monologue is a lament, a kind of funeral song expressing male grief. However, it is important to remember that this song is part of the *Ženske pjesme* – "women's songs" – cycle, a specific genre of traditional folk songs performed by women. Thus, the lament is a projection of the female perspective onto the male world. The woman, singing of the man's grief, is in fact expressing her own fears, longings, and desires.

The final motif that makes this song exceptional concerns the plea for forgiveness from the brothers to the woman: "Forgive us, dear lady! The hour of your death has come today" (Andrić, 1909, p. 141). Although it is fate that acts as the creator of this scenario, the brothers ask for "halal" – the victim's consent to the sacrifice. In *Poetika žrtvenog obreda* [Poetics of the Sacrificial Ritual]

(Pavlović, 1987), one of the key regional works analysing rituals, myths, and ceremonies in a literary and philosophical context, literary theorist Miodrag Pavlović emphasises that the acceptance of the offering is a necessary condition for a proper sacrifice, meaning consent from the victim is a requirement for the deity to accept it. Pavlović also notes that the victim should be conscious and aware of her fate and must not resist destiny. Even animals are expected to be appeased. In practice, efforts are first made to calm the creature, and only after this state is achieved is the sacrificial act carried out (Pavlović, 1987, p. 42).

The diversity of folk songs manifests not only on the textual level but also in their rootedness within local cultural contexts. Songs, as carriers of tradition and identity in local communities, evolve under the influence of specific linguistic, religious, and ceremonial conditions. This variability is evident in differences in vocabulary, style, and in the social functions these songs fulfil in various regions. This is particularly visible in the already cited collection *Ženske pjesme*. The second version published in this collection, *Zidanje Derviš-pašine munare* [The Building of Derviš-Pasha's Minaret] (Antun Hangi, no. 29, recorded near the town of Bišće in Herzegovina), concerns the construction of a mosque. The builder is Derviš-Pasha, who has been raising a tall minaret for seven years, only for it to be repeatedly destroyed by gusts of wind. Despite numerous attempts and the performance of various rituals, the construction cannot be completed. Eventually, in a dream, the pasha learns that to finish the building, he must offer a *kurban* – a sacrifice. According to the dream, he must give up one of his three sons. The determined pasha instructs his wife (!) to choose one of them. When she is unable to make this tragic decision, the father resolves to sacrifice the youngest son. This decision leads to the wife's death from grief, and the pasha, full of determination, tells his thirty master builders that if the sacrifice does not bring the desired result and the structure is still destroyed by winds, he will burn the entire building down. In the climactic moment of the song, Derviš-Pasha sacrifices his son, burying him in the foundation, which finally enables the completion of the minaret. The scene evokes the biblical motif of Abraham's sacrifice; however, its ending differs significantly from the Judeo-Christian pattern. Whereas in the biblical story, God tests the father and ultimately shows mercy by providing a substitute in the form of an animal, in the case of Derviš-Pasha, there is no divine mercy intervention to save the child. The youngest son, along with his mother, is buried in the building's foundation. In addition to the clearly Islamic elements – such as architectural details, language, and the motif of the *kurban* – the song reveals significant modifications to the original schema: the sacrifice is made not by the builder's wife but by his son; the three brothers are substituted for the three sons of the pasha; and most importantly, the inclusion of the wife in the sacrificial structure – her death completes the tragedy of the tale.

A different conclusion is found in the third song in the collection: *Atlagići uzidali čobanče* [The Atlagićs Walled Up a Shepherd Boy] (Fra Mirko Šestić II, no. 44č, recorded from Ružica Grgić in Potočani near Derventa, Bosnia, later

repeated in the second volume *Izabrane narodne pjesme II ženske* [Selected Folk Songs II: Women's Songs]; Andrić, 1913). This narrative depicts a child, not a mother, as the sacrifice. As in the Banja Luka variant, the victim is a boy (a shepherd), but this time he is not related to the builder. Miodrag Pavlović, in his work on ancient sacrificial rituals, notes that there was likely no distinction between male and female sacrifices – both were believed to possess equal power. However, sacrificing a woman was thought to bind the earth or the structure to the feminine element, guaranteeing fertility and abundance. Hence, in most songs, the youngest sister-in-law is chosen. If she had no child, her body was considered full of vital energy that had not yet been transferred to another life. In this case, the sacrifice ensured the transfer of all her power and vitality to the construction (Pavlović, 1987, p. 41).

In the referenced song, the motif of visual contact between the victim and their loved ones returns as the *vila*s instruct the builders that a mirror-sized opening must be left in the wall so the sacrificed boy can observe the search efforts of his mother and sister. The act of seeing here takes on a perverse character: it not only prevents the victim from passing immediately but also prolongs the process of dying, holding him in the realm of the living. From a contemporary perspective, this can be read as a transgressive approach to death and dying, in which the experience of passing is put on display and subjected to the viewer's gaze, acquiring perverse traits.

In Josip Lovretić's collection (MH 140 no. 32, recorded in the village of Komletinci in Slavonia, from Anka Lukić), as well as in Klotilda Kučera's collection (MH 24 no. 1), there is an intriguing song in which a woman named Mandalina builds a city. Following a *vila's* advice to sacrifice someone from her own kin, she invites her sister Katarina[5] to her home. Katarina entrusts her newborn child to their mother and, unaware of anything, responds to the invitation. In this song, Mandalina transcends the most common female roles in folklore (liminal or mediating figures, fairies, or demonic "wild-women"; see Walęciuk-Dejneka, 2014) and takes on an active role traditionally reserved for male characters. Although the brutal details of the walling up act are absent, the plot structure and the fate of the victim remain the same: the sister is walled up, and the only mercy shown to her is the opening left so she may see her child.

The appearance of both a woman-builder and a woman-victim in the Croatian version of the song breaks the traditional narrative pattern in which the woman is usually a passive participant in the sacrificial ritual, subordinated to men's decisions. Mandalina, as the city builder, assumes a role previously assigned to men, shifting the gender emphasis within the topos of walling up and opening the song to socio-cultural and mythopoetic interpretations. Her figure becomes part of an agency structure but does not escape the logic of sacrifice. Mandalina, though she gains power, simultaneously becomes its instrument,

[5] The song indicates the location of the fortress' construction as Prolom Planina, situated on today's Serbia/Kosovo border.

replicating mechanisms of oppression and the sacrifice of a woman for the sake of structural stability. The inclusion of the woman-builder also opens interpretive space for viewing the song as a reflection on the dual condition of women in culture: both creators and victims of their own world. Mandalina is not merely a passive tool in the hands of men, but an active agent of her sister's fate. However, her agency proves illusory – she operates within a sacrificial mechanism that has determined women's fate in myths and rites of passage for centuries.

Equally significant is the fact that the victim is a sister, symbolising a female community that, under extreme conditions, may be internally fractured. In contrast to male variants, where brotherly bonds are sometimes undermined (e.g., through betrayal or broken oaths), here we encounter a female form of betrayal – emerging not from selfishness, but from submission to the ruthless logic of collective action. Mandalina is inscribed into the patriarchal ritual not as its passive victim, but as its executor, making her figure particularly tragic. Ultimately, this song, rather than presenting a classic tale of male dominance over the female body and its fate, depicts a more complex picture: women can become the builders of the world, but only if they accept its rules. It is a transgressive yet dramatically ironic revision of the sacrificial myth, in which the woman, instead of being excluded from the act of creation, becomes its active participant – at the cost of loyalty to her own sister.

Croatian Variations and Interpretive Proposals

A distinctive phenomenon in the Croatian cultural sphere is the presence of songs about walling up that feature alternative "rescue" endings in which the sacrificial victim ultimately survives. One such song was recorded by Rudolf Strohal in the village of Stative near Karlovac. In this version, the walled-up woman does not passively accept her fate but, facing death, decides to fight for her life. She pleads with the *vilas* to release her ("By God, fairies from the hills, / move one stone from another, / one dry plank from another, / let me go to my two orphans"; Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 536), then returns home and exacts vengeance by killing her husband and two brothers-in-law, who were responsible for carrying out the failed sacrifice.

The forces reversing the victim's fate vary depending on the location where the song was recorded. Niko Štuka, in the village of Kučište on the Pelješac Peninsula, documented a text in which the youngest woman, walled-up by the three Tatković brothers, manages to escape her prison through a supernatural force from the heavens: „Midnight had not yet passed, when an arrow shot down from the sky" (Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 536). The reckoning in this version is somewhat gentler: once freed, the woman does not seek revenge but instead reproaches her husband for his lack of loyalty, which he explains as keeping a promise made to his brothers ("I did not want to break the promise"; Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 537).

"Rescue" endings also appear in versions containing religious elements. In a variant recorded by Petar Bogdešić (Dragovci, Slavonia), a child is puzzled by the sweet milk flowing in a river, reminiscent of his mother's breastmilk: "Dear God and sweet Mary! How sweet is this river water, like my dear mother's milk!" (Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 537). This plea moves God himself, who shatters the structure with a lightning bolt, freeing the woman and allowing her to reunite with her child. In some versions, fiery thunderbolts are sent down to earth,[6] while in others, God dispatches angels[7] to destroy the city and rescue the young mother of Roža, whose cries reached the heavens ("Wails and cries little weak Roža, / dear God was moved with pity / He sent two young angels / to shake the white city / and free young Uglješa's girl"). The builder brothers are punished for their treacherous act along with their wives – they drown in the river of the would-be victim's milk, "overfed" and overpowered by the very life-giving force they sought to harness ("The river overflows with her milk, to drown the two young brothers-in-law, and sink the two young sisters-in-law"; Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 534).

Some of these local Croatian variations thus transform the topos in a moralising direction: crime is met with punishment or at least a lesson to be learned. This phenomenon may be seen as evidence of the dynamic nature of oral tradition. Original motifs and plotlines, passed down through generations, are reinterpreted and adapted to evolving social and cultural realities. In this process, alongside their original aesthetic and entertainment functions, folk songs serve a didactic purpose, shaping moral and social attitudes. The introduction of punishment as a response to crime is one manifestation of this moralising tendency. Traditionally, folk songs often praised heroic deeds that bordered on the limits of legality and morality. With social evolution and the increasing importance of ethical norms, there arose a need to portray the consequences of immoral behaviour. Punishment for crime thus became not only a plot element but also a cautionary device, showing that every action has its consequences.

The shifts that occur in Croatian cultural variants do not always take place on the narrative plane[8]; more often, they concern specific motifs or props, the

[6] Among others, in the song recorded by Vladimir Stahuljak (*Popijevke, plesovi i običaji iz Štivice*, IEF 187, no. 220), as well as in the version written down by Tereza Burazović in the town of Novska in Slavonia, and by Vjekoslav Gabrić in the town of Oriovac, also in Slavonia.

[7] For example, in a song recorded by Dragutin Gazdović (in the Novogradiška District of Slavonia, from the villages of Komarnice, and Nova Kapela in Slavonia – heard from Julia Petošić).

[8] In the Croatian oral tradition, there are also songs about the building of cities that do not contain the motif of walling up. This is the case with the song *Grad gradio Koviljiću* [Koviljić Built a City], recorded by ethnographer Olinko Delorko and published in the collection *Hrvatske narodne balade i romance* [Croatian Folk Songs and Romances] in 1951 (Delorko, 1951). This "deviant" song tells the story of Koviljić, a city builder who captures a *vila* who destroys at night what has been built during the day. Once caught,

presence and symbolism of which make it possible to interpret a given song as having developed under the influence of particular ethnic or religious traditions. This process also entails the contamination or blending of various cultural elements. For instance, in one variant, a child prays to God to send three clouds that will help free their imprisoned mother. Each cloud is associated with a distinct figure – the thunder-wielding Elijah (Gromović Ilija), Pantaleon, the master of lightning, and Fiery Mary[9]. We are therefore dealing with an integration of the religious sphere and elements of Slavic mythology. Elijah shares attributes with the Slavic god Perun. In folk and folk-Orthodox tradition, as well as in their artistic articulations, Ilija/Elijah drives a thundering chariot drawn by four fire-breathing horses. A similar transfer of attributes from pre-Christian Slavic deities can also be observed in the case of Saint Pantaleon and Fiery Mary, whose modern equivalent is Saint Margaret (or Marina) of Antioch, considered a sister of Elijah and Pantaleon. Folk belief holds that Saint Marina punishes anyone who performs hard labour on her feast day with fire. Both Marina and her brothers-companions belong to the so-called "fiery saints", commemorated in this region on the hottest days of summer (Marina – July 17, Ilija – July 20, Pantaleon – July 27).

Such folk-religious fusions most likely encouraged attempts to interpret the song as thematising the annual vegetative cycle. In *Stara vjera Srba i Hrvata* [The Old Faith of the Serbs and Croats], first published in 1884, Croatian scholar Natko Nodilo (1884/1981) refers to the song *Zidanje Skadra*, found in Vuk Karadžić's collection, and discusses beliefs concerning the birth of the new year and the rhythm of nature. Nodilo is convinced that the song is mythic in char-

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she promises to reward him threefold if he grants her freedom: his horse will be as swift as if carried by the wind (*nosit će ti vihar konja*), he himself will be the happiest among men (*bit ćeš sretan med gospodom*), and he will also enjoy the favour of maidens (*bit ćeš mio djevojkama*). Despite these tempting guarantees, the builder refuses, saying that his horse will be fast as long as he has oats, he himself will be fortunate as long as his hands and mind remain strong, and the maidens will like him as long as his face remains bright and young. The song was later reprinted in the collection *Hrvatske usmene lirske pjesme* [Croatian Oral Lyric Songs], edited by Stipe Botica (1997), where it bears the note "Oriovac", referring to a town near Slavonski Brod on the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Slavonian variant appears in three versions (Bogdešić 1884, 135 – HNP V.29; Burazović 1880, 73; Kušmiš & Kušmiš 1898, 59 – MH 37 br 59) and takes the form of shorter songs. The main hero is a young Ivica or Jovica, who builds a city which is destroyed nightly by a *vila*. His mother advises him to secure the city through magical protection and to place falcons in the streets, wolves in the alleys, and guards on every corner. In this way, they manage to capture the destroyer. Depending on the version, the *vila* offers different promises to the builder, though they usually concern love, offspring, and domestic happiness.

[9] The orphan prays: "Send, O God, three fiery clouds, the first cloud with Elijah the Thunderer, the second cloud with Saint Pantaleon, the third cloud with Fiery Mary. Strike with thunder, Elijah the Thunderer, shine with lightning, Saint Pantaleon, burn with fire, fiery Mary! Destroy Aunt Manda's city, and in Aunt Mandalina's town rescue my dear mother" (Broz & Bosanac, 1896, p. 535).

acter and that it is not, in fact, about the construction of a city. He draws attention to the rich symbolism of the number three (three brothers, three years of building, three master-builders; Nodilo, 1884/1981, p. 168). In his reading, the three brothers represent the first three months of the calendar year, in which development is hindered by the unyielding force of winter. After three years of construction, that is, the three initial winter months, the fourth year – the month of April – arrives, ushering in vegetative spring.[10] For the structure to endure, however, and for the cycle of growth to remain stable, a sacrifice (or ultimately its substitute) is required; one whose death would provide a firm foundation for the coming season of abundance. Nodilo recognises in the figure of Rade the Builder (*Rade neimar*) the Slavic god Radogost[11], interpreted as a solar deity

In fact, solar motifs appear in many versions and in various forms – sometimes as an apple symbolising the sun, which the sacrificial victim must bend down to reach, and sometimes as the sun itself, directly mentioned as the light in whose rays the walled-up woman will see her child. Nodilo emphasises the differences in how this act was perceived in Germanic and Slavic belief systems. The Germanic custom of walling up was dedicated to the Earth, which bore the weight of the building, whereas the Slavic one was directed towards the sun and focused on establishing the annual (solar) cycle (Nodilo, 1884/1981, p. 170). The scholar's interpretations reflect the intellectual trend that emerged at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, both in scholarship and philosophy, particularly in the context of comparative mythology, religious studies, and cultural anthropology. Within this framework, researchers sought to explain religious beliefs and mythologies through universal patterns, in which the sun – a key element of life and the agricultural calendar – functioned as a dominant motif.[12]

Nodilo also draws attention to another motif appearing in the analysed song: facing death, Gojkovica asks her husband to go to her mother and request that a slave, male or female, be sacrificed in her place. According to the scholar, such a plea may indicate that the practice of foundation sacrifice did in fact take place in the Slavic world (Nodilo, 1884/1981, p. 170). His conviction is further supported by the belief, observed in this region, that one must avoid

[10] In the song *Ćuprija na Drini*, discussed at the beginning of this section, the construction begins on St George's Day, that is, at the moment when the vegetative cycle begins.

[11] The name Radogost may mean "joyful guest", which, in a sense, could be associated with epithets traditionally given to the Sun as the giver of life and light. However, a comparison with Dažbog, identified with prosperity, wealth, and fertility, seems more justified (cf. Gieysztor, 1982; Łowmiański, 1979).

[12] In scholarship, figures such as Max Müller, Georges Dumézil, and James Frazer – whose *The Golden Bough*, devoted to beliefs and myths, appeared six years after Nodilo's work – represents this current. In philosophy, it was reflected in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and Julius Evola. The solar cult remained fashionable until the 1930s, finding expression not only in political ideologies (for example, in fascist and nationalist symbolism) but also in neopagan movements.

having a person's shadow fall upon the foundation of a building, as this foretold that person's imminent death (see also Brewster, 1996, p. 38). The researcher notes a parallel with a Greek superstition which he comments is "almost identical to ours" in that whoever first steps across the foundation stone of a new building will die within a year. It was believed that this could be prevented by offering a sacrifice of a black lamb or a black rooster. Nodilo adds that this ritual was unknown in ancient Greece, which, in his view, proves that the Slavs were responsible for its spread throughout the Balkans. He further asserts that such sacrifices were practiced even before the Great Migration of the Slavs[13], as evidenced by references in Helmold's *Chronica Slavorum*. However, there is no certainty that the Slavs continued this custom after settling in the southern lands (Nodilo, 1884/1981, p. 171).

In his work devoted to the ancient beliefs of the Serbs and Croats, Nodilo also refers to another song – *Ćuprija na Drini* – found in the collection compiled by Bogoljub Petranović (Book III, no. 52). He considers it compositionally inferior to the song about the building of Skadar, yet equally remarkable in terms of its mythic references (Nodilo, 1884/1981, p. 171). The building of the bridge serves the same function as the construction of a city, and there are numerous references to the symbolism of the number three. The structure is destroyed by raging waters and the force dwelling within them, which can be subdued only through a blood sacrifice. The scholar emphasises that the song contains pagan elements, noting that "perhaps in Petranović's version the pagan tone is even stronger than in Vuk's song" (Nodilo, 1884/1981, p. 173). In seeking earlier traces of sacrifices involving the offering of a living being's blood to water, Nodilo turns to Greco-Persian antiquity and Roman archaism[14]. As a proponent of interpreting the walling up song as a narrative about the annual cycle, the seasons, and the birth of summer, he looks for justification for his reading in ancient myths and rituals. In his view, the bridge is both a symbolic and material link between the cold and warm months. His interpretation is further supported by associations with the so-called Argive sacrifices – effigies thrown into the Tiber during purification rituals (possibly once involving human sacrifice) – which evoke the familiar Slavic custom of drowning Marzanna. In this context, he also recalls the legend of Romulus and Remus, the twin brothers cast into the Tiber, suggesting that it represents another variation of the ritual

[13] Referring to the Russian folklorist and writer Mikhail Popov, the researcher also cites the example of a city being built on the Danube, in whose walls a child caught at dawn was walled up. According to legend, the town's name – Detinec – is said to have originated from this event (Nodilo, 1884/1981, p. 170).

[14] He recalls the story mentioned by Herodotus about Xerxes crossing the river Strymon. In order for the passage through the water to be possible, a lavish sacrifice was required: a white horse, as well as nine male and nine female children. Nodilo also refers to the account by Procopius describing King Theudebert's army crossing a river near the town of Pavia (close to Milan), during which human sacrifices were necessary to calm the waters (Nodilo, 1884/1981, p. 173).

of immersion as a farewell to winter. This legend is likewise invoked by Miodrag Pavlović in his analysis of sacrificial rituals. While Nodilo focuses on the myth of the birth of the year, emphasising that milk symbolises light, Pavlović draws attention to the profound symbolism of nourishment and sacrifice. In his interpretation, the walling up of the mother-nurturer, responsible for sustaining the entire structure of the building and the city, is essential for preserving the community's integrity and survival (Pavlović, 1987, p. 158). The motif of nourishment appears in the song at least twice: first, when the girl is asked to bring lunch to the construction site, and later, when she wishes to nurse her child after being walled up. The mother-nurturer is aware of the role she plays in relation to the edifice-community and of the way the biological act is transformed into a social one. Pavlović also highlights the words of the *vila*, who, in destroying the structure, reminds the builder that raising a city is like sowing a meadow – the seed, in this case, being the sacrifice itself (Pavlović, 1987, p. 42)[15]. Walling up thus becomes a guarantee of the renewal of the life cycle and the continuity of existence.

Conversely, Pavlović's search for ancient archetypes leads him to reflect on the affinity between the walled-up victim and the figure of Iphigenia from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Alongside broader questions concerning the very meaning of sacrificial rites or the psycho-physical condition of the victim as a prerequisite for a properly enacted ritual, Pavlović offers a number of thought-provoking insights. He observes that the song under analysis does not allow for the substitution of the sacrificial victim. In Euripides' drama, Iphigenia is ultimately replaced by a deer; in the biblical narrative of Abraham and Isaac, the father's readiness alone proves sufficient. By contrast, the song leaves no space for such substitution. What emerges instead is the notion that the very *singing* of the walling up song may serve as a substitute. Just as in other traditions, the act of sacrifice can be replaced by dance, song, the shaping of an idol, or a mythic narrative; here, the performed song serves a similar function (Pavlović, 1987, p. 50). The act of narrating the walling up sacrifice becomes a mimetic gesture that provides the community with emotional *catharsis* without the need for an actual physical offering.

Interpretations of individual compositional, rhetorical, or narrative elements cannot, however, obscure the fundamental question of *why* such a sacrifice is performed in the first place. In his attempt to formulate a comprehensive philosophy of offering, Pavlović is disarmingly honest with his readers: there is no single, unequivocal explanation for this ritual. The core logic behind the act appears (perhaps excessively) obvious; a proportional economy of exchange, whereby one must give or sacrifice (žrtvovati) something to get or raise (*podići*) something in return. Although this rationale might seem too symmetrical, even

[15] Pavlović also writes that if a man is offered as a sacrifice, this should not be surprising, as it stems from the belief that men, too, carry within themselves fertilising energy (Pavlović, 1987, p. 42).

banal, to serve as a final explanation (Pavlović, 1987, p. 156), it nevertheless aligns with the beliefs and practices that sustained the ritual. Pavlović recalls the widespread conviction that stones can grow and be planted (megalithic stones were placed into the earth with the profound belief that they would multiply; mountains were thought to increase in size; and sacrifices, or shadows, captured in the foundations of buildings ensured that the structures would not collapse). The scholar further argues that sacrifice functions as a kind of fertilising act: the sowing of a seed of fertility into the soil or into the city, meant to endow the place with strength, energy, and the very attributes embodied by the victim. Sacrifice is thus a prospective act, directed toward the future; it is accompanied by faith in the multiplying, regenerative force of offering. As Pavlović emphasises, a sacrifice is made only when one fully trusts that it will be rewarded, and that the sacrificial "seed" will be resurrected in a certain form (Pavlović, 1987, p. 52).

Debate over Priority

In 1908, the song *Zidanje Skadra* became the subject of an animated debate among Serbian and Croatian scholars of regional folklore and literature. The writer and philologist Nikola Andrić (1867–1942) had been entrusted with selecting texts from the Matica hrvatska archives for the fifth of the ten-volume collection *Hrvatske narodne pjesme* [Croatian Folk Songs] (Velzek, 1950). Among the 175 songs collected in southern Dalmatia by the amateur folklorist Ante Franjina Alačević (1781–1856), Andrić identified three undated texts that turned out to be exact copies of songs published in the anthology of folk poetry compiled by the Serbian folklorist Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864). One of them was the song recounting the building of Skadar. Convinced that Karadžić must have obtained the songs from Alačević but had failed to credit their provenance properly, Andrić decided to publish an article titled *Otkud Vuku "Zidanje Skadra"?* [How Did Vuk Come by "Zidanje Skadra"?] in the scholarly journal *Glas Matice hrvatske* (Andrić, 1908a) – a journal widely read in academic circles at the time. Comparing the "Alačević version" with the "Karadžić version", Andrić noted that the former contained distinct Dalmatian dialectal features and employed the Ikavian subdialect. He argued that Karadžić had changed these into Ijekavian (a subdialect more common in traditional storytelling) and standardised the names of characters so the song would better align with other Serbian songs. He also pointed out that the song had been widely known in Dalmatia – Alačević had recorded several parallel versions – and therefore, it must have originated from that region. Andrić did not stop at scholarly analysis; he accused Karadžić of deliberately omitting the supposed Croatian origin of the song and interpreted this omission as politically motivated.

The response to Andrić's provocative article came swiftly, sparking a cascade of replies: thirteen of which were published between June and September 1908.

Moderate reactions came from the Croatian publicist and educator Josip Pasarić (1908a, 1908b) and Serbian historian and literary critic Jovan Skerlić (1908). However, Andrić's findings were met with sharp rebuttals from Serbian historian Jovan Tomić, who addressed the issue in five publications (Томић, 1908a, 1908b, 1908c, 1908d, 1908e), openly accusing Andrić of chauvinism. The main points of criticism included inconsistencies in Andrić's research, logical fallacies (e.g., the songs in Alačević's collection were undated and could have just as easily been copied from Karadžić), and the overly narrow scope of analysis (Andrić ignored the fact that the song also appeared in Tihomir Ostojić's collection from Novi Sad). Some argued that this narrative pattern was present throughout the Balkans, making it impossible to establish a clear path of transmission. Others emphasised that the Dalmatian version must have been derived from another, especially since the original events took place in Albania.

Unfazed by the controversy, Andrić vigorously defended his position, publishing a series of fiery follow-up articles (Andrić, 1908b, 1908c, 1908d). His fierce criticism of Karadžić's alleged defenders was based on a conspiratorial theory of the folklorist's political agenda which shifted the debate from academic discourse to ideological polemic. While some of Andrić's arguments were valid, such as his observation that Karadžić had failed to mention his informant Raška in the 1823 publication, they were accompanied by personal attacks. Through his stance, Andrić revealed certain anxieties present in Croatian circles: he wrote that Karadžić embodied Serbia's ambition to absorb Croatian culture and heritage into the dominant Serbian cultural sphere, and that he worked to deny the legitimacy of the Ikavian (i.e., broadly speaking, Croatian) linguistic tradition (Andrić, 1908b, p. 119).

The exceptionally intense dispute and politicisation of the issue prompted Josip Pasarić to visit the Matica hrvatska archives himself, bypassing any intermediaries who might influence his conclusions, to inspect Alačević's collection firsthand. As a result of his investigation, he presented a comparison of strikingly similar, though not identical, songs. His conclusion was likely intended to serve as a conciliatory gesture: Pasarić emphasised that the differences in the song arose from regional contexts, and that both researchers had probably collected the same song from two different singers independently. Andrić had also developed theories regarding the age of the paper and ink (naturally in favour of the Croatian version's precedence). However, Pasarić observed that the songs were written in three different orthographies and in several types of ink, debunking any suspicions regarding the ink's significance. He also found several dates in the notes related to the song (1842, 1847, 1850), which indicated that the Croatian version must have been written down later than Karadžić's.

Although the debate seemingly concerned only a minor archival detail, it echoed surprisingly widely, provoking heated discussions and unexpected reactions. Miroslav, the grandson of Alačević, felt compelled to speak up, and in the interest of preserving national heritage, he donated his grandfather's notes to the institution. In a letter addressed to both Skerlić and Andrić, he admitted

to having met Vuk Karadžić in Vienna around 1859/60 but insisted that he had never entrusted him with his grandfather's collection. He also doubted whether Karadžić was even aware of the song collected on the Croatian coast or the person who had passed it on. Although these clarifications should have put an end to the dispute – having decisively undermined Andrić's arguments – the Croatian scholar refused to yield, resorting instead to increasingly far-fetched claims. For instance, he argued that Alačević senior could not have copied the song from Karadžić because he had never learned the Cyrillic alphabet and did not own a single Cyrillic book in his library. Such arguments were difficult to address substantively. The polemic concluded with no consensus, merely polarising the scholarly community, which aligned either with the more rational arguments in Karadžić's favour or with Andrić's theories, which were clearly tinged with anxiety and veiled academic chauvinism.

Perhaps the inability to definitively confirm the Croatian origin of the song contributed to the implicit conviction – preserved in the modest corpus of Croatian scholarly reflections on the origins and meaning of this topos – that the ritual of walling up a foundation-sacrifice victim originated outside the cultural sphere to which Croatia belongs. This perception was surely reinforced by a harsh but sincere judgment passed much earlier, far from the Balkans, in a place where the emperors of philology raise / lower their scholarly thumbs in approval or disapproval. Such was the case when Vuk Karadžić sent the song to Jacob Grimm, the renowned collector of fairy tales and folk legends, who, reportedly, was delighted with the piece and arranged for its German translation to introduce it to a wider audience interested in Slavic folklore. It was through this channel that the song reached Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who judged it to illustrate a "superstitious and barbaric mindset" (Goethe, 1825). In other words, the thumb went down.

Although Goethe's mere mention of the folk song was in itself an act of legitimisation[16], the content of his commentary was not insignificant. Therefore, when the aforementioned dispute over the song's origins and precedence emerged years later, the memory of this harsh judgment must have resurfaced. Presumably, this opinion remained decisive within Croatian circles as references to Goethe's "verdict" appear in various texts, studies, and literary compendia. For instance, when *Zidanje Skadra* was published in 1836 in the Croatian revivalist periodical "Danica ilirska" (Zidanje Skadra, 1836), it was accompanied by a brief but telling commentary – supposedly an Illyrian proverb – that could be loosely translated as "Witchcraft and superstition, the wildest of demons" (Figure1).

[16] In the volume *Gete 1832–1932* [Goethe 1832–1932], published in Zagreb in 1932 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of J. W. Goethe's death, a text titled *Zidanje Skadra na Bojani u nemačkoj književnosti* [The Building of Skadar on the Bojana in German Literature] was included in gratitude for "introducing the literature of this region into the world". The text presents traces of the adaptation of the foundation-sacrifice motif in German literature (*Гете (J. W. Goethe): 1832–1932*, 1932).

Meanwhile, in a modest literature-history textbook prepared for the students of the Sisters of Mercy School in Zagreb, the section on folk literature notes that Vuk Karadžić published his collected songs under the title "Serbian Folk Songs", which led even the Croats themselves to believe the songs were Serbian. However, as the textbook's author, Paulina Majaron (1894), reports, the Slovenian philologist Franc Miklošič scientifically demonstrated that Croats had made significant contributions to the development of regional folk creativity and many old Croatian songs recount events from Serbian history, describing battles with the Turks (from Kosovo to the Battle of Mohács).



DANICA ILIRSKA.

TRĆAJ II. Dana 15. Listopada 1836. BROJ 42.

ZIDANJE SKADRA.

Grad gradila tri brata rodjena,
Do tri brata tri Merijaševića,
Jedno bilo Vukašino kralju,
Drugo bilo Uzjčin Vuvada,
Treće bilo Merijašević Gojka.
Grad gradili Skadar na Bojni,
Grad gradili tri godine dnoh,
Tri godine sa trista majstorah,
Nemogaše temelj podignuti,
A kamo li sagradili grada:
Što majstori za dan ga sagrade,
To svo vila za noć oborjaše.
Kad stanula godina četvrta,
Tada više sa planine vile:
„Nemili se, Vukašine kralju,
Nemili se, i ne budi blaga:
Nemoć'š, kralju, temelj postaviti,
A kamoli sagradit grada,
Dok nesadješ dva ašična imena,
Dok nesadješ Stojn i Stojana,
A oboje brata i sestricu,
Da zazidaš kuli u temelje,
Tako će se temelj skleriati,
I tako ćeš sagradit grada."
Kad to čuše Vukašine kralju,
On dozivа sluge Desimira:
„Desimire, moje čedo drago!
Do sad si mi bio virna sluga,
A od sada moje čedo drago,
Hvataj, sine, konje u hitove,
I pazesi šest tovarah blaga,
Idi, sine, preko bila světa,
Te ti traži dva ašična imena,
Traži sine, Stojn i Stojana,
A oboje brata i sestricu;
Jer ih otmi, jer ne blaga kóji,
Dovedi ih Skadru na Bojnu,
Da zidjemo kuli u temelje,
Neki T mom se temelj oborćnu,
I neki li sagradi grada."
Kad to čuše sluge Desimire,
On uhvati konje u hitove,
I pazese šest tovarah blaga,
Ode sluga preko bila světa,
Ode traži dva ašična imena;
Traži sluga Stojn i Stojana,
Traži sluga tri godine dnoh,
Al ne nađe dva ašična imena,
Al ne nađe Stojn ni Stojana,
Pa se vrnu Skadru na Bojnu,
Dade kralju konje i hitove,
I dade mu šest tovarah blaga:
„Ete, kralju, konji i hitovi,
I eto ti šest tovarah blaga,
Ja nesadjeh dva ašična imena,
Ja nesadjeh Stojn i Stojana."
Kad to zuše Vukašine kralju,
On podviknu Bada nemoru, (urlatiu)
Bađe vikne tri stotin majstorah.
Gradi kralju Skadar na Bojni,
Kralja gradi, vila obaljaje.
Nedu vila temelj podignuti,
A kamo li sagradit grada,
Pa pozivlje iz planine vile:
„More čuo li ? Vukašine kralju!

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Figure 1. Page from the journal "Danica ilirska", October 15, 1836, featuring a reprint of the song *Zidanje Skadra.*
Photo by Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk

However, the author notes that Croatian folk songs are more aesthetically pleasing than Serbian ones – something, she argues, that is "plain to the eye" when one compares them. She supports her claim by referring once again to Goethe's judgment but also makes sure to remind readers that while Goethe criticised Serbian songs as inhumane, he himself was fascinated by the equally brutal myth of Iphigenia[17] (Majaron, 1894, p. 73).

[17] The author alludes here to *Iphigenie auf Tauris* by J. W. Goethe, a variation on the mythological story of Iphigenia, who, thanks to the intervention of the goddess Artemis, was spared from being sacrificed by her own father. Iphigenia is the mythological counterpart of the biblical Isaac. The idea of offering her as a sacrifice to appease the goddess Artemis may be compared to the motif of the foundation sacrifice.

The debate sparked by Nikola Andrić echoed for many years in subsequent literature textbooks, where Alačević's "editorial liberty" (namely, that he allegedly had just copied the song) was delicately mentioned, without diminishing the titanic effort he put into collecting folklore. The issue was ultimately clarified by the Croatian literary scholar and specialist in oral tradition Maja Bošković-Stulli, who, in her *Povijest hrvatske* književnosti [History of Croatian Literature], stated without hesitation that the plagiarism had occurred, but in the opposite direction: Alačević "transcribed whatever he liked and wished to preserve and remember, just as one typically fills handwritten songbooks" (Bošković-Stulli & Zečević, 1978, pp. 314–317). What drew her attention most was the fact that all the songs examined in order to resolve the dispute – seven different pieces found in both collectors' corpora – were strikingly similar, which is highly unusual. She rejected the suggestions of Skerlić and Pasarić that the songs had been gathered independently from two different sources, arguing that such claims stemmed from a scriptocentric mindset and an inadequate understanding of oral poetics.

Although Bošković-Stulli emphasised that Alačević's collection remains a valuable body of work, reflecting the collector's zeal and the passion of the era, her "verdict" proved definitive. As folklorist Dorian Jurić has shown, later scholarly interpretations[18] based on this debate over priority most likely led to an unambiguous attribution of the song of Skadar's construction to Serbian tradition, which, in turn, marginalised its Croatian local variants. As a result, the possibility of its organic development in a rhizomatic mode – i.e., simultaneous functioning and transformation across diverse cultural contexts – was overlooked. Jurić further notes that this clear-cut classification influenced the international community of folklorists, who in their studies also reinforced the song's Serbian provenance, overlooking its potential Croatian adaptations and elaborations (Jurić, 2020).

If we accept that the dispute over the reach of the topos is, in fact, a dispute over the extent of cultural patterns, then Croatian territories – excluding certain marginal transitional areas – appear to form the boundary of the topos' further expansion, both horizontally and vertically. In this context, one can speak of a kind of Western-defined Balkan border, which was also drawn by delimiting the range and function of the topos under analysis. Yet we must remember that borders – both political and cultural – are inherently porous structures, subject to constant redefinition and renegotiation (Todorova, 1997; Wolff, 1994). Imagined and symbolic borders are especially prone to seepage and hybridisation, resulting in multiple processes of de-hermetisation and cultural interference. In the case of Croatia – often referred to as a border between two worlds (Brace-

[18] Jurić refers to the example of the Serbian scholar Svetislav Stefanović, who conducted a detailed analysis of the song while deliberately ignoring all Croatian versions, even though he was familiar with them from the writings of Jovan Tomić. Moreover, Stefanović also rejected the variants that had developed under the influence of Bosnian culture, referring to them as Serbian (Стефановић, 1937, pp. 288–290).

well, 1992; Goldsworthy, 1998) – we are dealing with a region where the line between East and West was never fixed but was continuously reshaped by geopolitics and the cultural semiotics of space. In this light, the topos of Skadar's construction, rather than marking a hard boundary, may be seen as one of the cultural texts that reveal the complexity of negotiating identity and civilisational affiliation in the region.

A Return to Yugoslav Universalism

Croatian culture did not adopt the topos of the foundation sacrifice (the walled-up woman topos) to the same extent as Serbian, Romanian, Hungarian, or Albanian cultures. Although it entered Croatian folklore to some degree – and, consequently, appeared in folkloristic scholarship – the motif was not significantly reinterpreted in local literature, music, or visual art. Croatian canon-building (or canon-buildings, if we accept that the canon is a shifting phenomenon) never sought a clear appropriation or ideological instrumentalisation of this topos. Literary adaptations or visual reinterpretations of the motif of walling up a sacrifice within a structure's foundations are much rarer than in neighbouring cultures (most often related to the *Zidanje Skadra* song), and when they do occur, it is usually in contexts of intensive intercultural contact and thematic "flows" between Croatian and Serbian cultures.

Although various agents of Croatian literature – both its creators and those who operate within the literary field (critics and scholars) – are aware of the existence of this topos, there is currently no attempt to canonise it in any sense. Instead, a tacit assumption prevails: although the motif is known and is, to an extent, intelligible, it is certainly not regarded as a native (local) topos. Contemporary literary culture has thus distanced itself even from the former dispute over priority, adopting instead a strategy of near-total indifference toward the motif of walling up. Since it would be futile to expect the Croatian literary field to justify its decision not to subject this topos to artistic reworking (for if it does not employ it, it can hardly be expected to explain its silence), one can only speculate that the failure of this motif to take root in the Croatian context stems from a broader labour of "differentiation", through which it came to be assigned to the Serbian literary tradition. This convenient simplification may have arisen, among other reasons, from the fact that the most widespread version of the song about the building of Skadar was tied to events central to Serbian narratives of the past and did not directly engage Croatian historical memory. The fact that the topos lay outside the thematic and aesthetic interests of Croatian authors, while at the same time signalling distinctly Serbian and Albanian associations, likely contributed to its exclusion from the local repertoire of familiar and readily deployable literary topoi.

Fortunately, since Croatian culture did not succeed in enclosing itself within an isolating layer that would render it entirely impervious to impulses arising from neighbouring traditions, a number of artistic manifestations emerged in which one can hear both distant and proximate echoes of the walled-up woman topos. The creation of such works was undoubtedly facilitated by historical and political circumstances that fostered rapprochement between Serbian and Croatian culture. One of the key catalysts for reconsidering Serbian–Croatian literary coexistence was the political situation after 1918 – that is, in the aftermath of the First World War and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire – when the question of the political future of both the Serbian and Croatian nations (and thus of their respective cultures) came to the fore. The scenario that ultimately prevailed (first the establishment of the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, followed by its incorporation into a kingdom and the entrusting of the fate of the former Habsburg South Slavs to the Serbian monarch) led to a resurgence, particularly in those regions of Croatia with a sizeable Serbian population, of openly professed pro-Serbian sympathies and, consequently, to renewed interest in literary motifs previously associated primarily with works produced in Serbian cultural circles.

In both Croatian and Serbian historiography – and, notably, not only within circles that affirm national narratives – scholars increasingly emphasise that the political entities incorporated into the new state in 1918 did so with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Certain political factions openly protested unification, and in Zagreb these tensions escalated into violent demonstrations (Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, 2024b). By contrast, among Dalmatian Serbs, a political milieu of considerable regional importance, the decision was received with enthusiasm, as it appeared to fulfil long-standing 19th-century aspirations advocating the incorporation of Dalmatia into the Kingdom of Serbia. Significantly, it was from this very region that some of the future leading proponents of the Yugoslav idea emerged, including Ante Trumbić of Split and Frano Supilo of Dubrovnik. In this context, news of the political transformation turned Split into a stage for fervent demonstrations in support of the Yugoslav state project.

The political union was also echoed in literary production. Supporters of unification had an opportunity for artistic exaltation on the subject, while at the same time retaining the hope of persuading at least some of those still unconvinced by the new political arrangement. As the theatre scholar Branko Hećimović observes, "The echo of enthusiastic rapture over the ideas of unification – and even of unification itself – is also present in dramatic texts which, in the first years after the war, respond to various incidents and events in the country, although not always, or rather very rarely, offering a genuine and sincere interpretation" (Hećimović, 1968, p. 142). The critic notes that although the plays staged at the time do not provide an unequivocal reading (whether political or artistic) it is not difficult to discern their ideological weight and the clear direction they impose upon interpretation.

Such political circumstances created exceptionally favourable conditions for the revival of the topos of a woman walled up in the foundations of a building as a foundation sacrifice. On 14 October 1920, during the celebrations marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the construction of the new building of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, and on the occasion of the anniversary of the unification of the South Slavic political community, the play *Zidanje Skadra* by Mirko Korolija (1920), written specifically for this event, was staged. In the 1920s, Korolija became known in intellectual and political circles, first as a member of the organisation *Jugoslavenska napredna omladina* [Yugoslav Progressive Youth], and later as the president of the radical ORJUNA (Organisation of Yugoslav Nationalists), whose worldview was clearly pro-Serbian and "Yugo-nationalist". Korolija was by no means a marginal figure in the literary and theatrical field: in 1920, he became a playwright at the theatre in Split, and a year later, the staging of his play *Jugana, vila najmlađa* [Jugana, the Youngest *Vila*] inaugurated the institution's activities. According to contemporary press reports, the event was framed as a cultural and artistic celebration, but it carried above all a national and political message – namely, the promotion of the idea of spiritual unity within the Yugoslav community (Милијановић, 1921).

Korolija is said to have begun writing *Zidanje Skadra* before the war, completing it in 1919. The motivations behind this work seem twofold: on the one hand, to narrate the Yugoslav idea and the unification process, and on the other, to exalt Serbia's role in that process – a Serbia that was supposedly renouncing its own political ambitions for the sake of South Slavic unity. The play thus articulates the philosophy of South Slavic unification and fits within a broader series of works created in an atmosphere of enthusiasm about the realisation of the Yugoslav idea (particularly in Serbian circles), reviving potential *loci communes* by drawing from folk motifs and reinvigorating a South Slavic quasi-universe. Other works in this trend include Ivo Vojnović's *Lazarevo vaskrsenje* [The Resurrection of Lazarus] (1914), and *Smrt majke Jugovića* [The Death of the Mother of the Jugović brothers] (1912), as well as Niko Bartulović's *Bijedna Mara* [Poor Mara] (1922).

To prove that this was not a phenomenon confined to the margins of the contemporary artistic scene, it is worth noting that Korolija received the prestigious *Demeterova nagrada* [Demeter Award] for *Zidanje Skadra* in 1920, given for the best dramatic text of the year (Bogner-Šaban, 1982, p. 351). However, in her discussion of the history of this award – granted between 1907 and 1944 for theatrical achievement – Antonija Bogner Šaban dedicates just one sentence to Korolija, emphasising that in this case the political value of the work outweighed its aesthetic merits (Bogner-Šaban, 1982, p. 342).

The political entanglement of the text is also apparent from its cover (Figure2). Although the play itself was written in Latin script using the Ekavian dialect of Shtokavian, the cover features Cyrillic typography, thereby encoding its Serbian cultural component. The publisher leaves no doubt about the cultural provenance of the theme explored in the text.

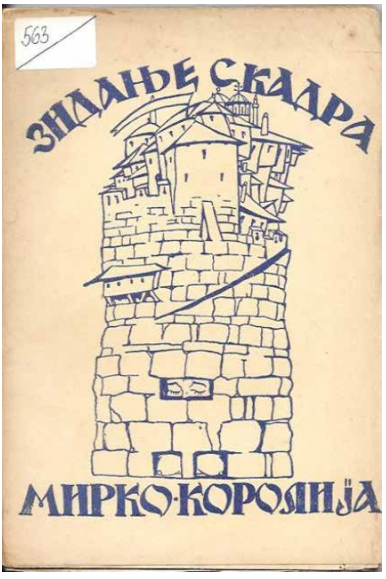


Figure 2. *Zidanje Skadra* by Mirko Korolija, book cover, 1920 edition. Illustration: Tomislav Krizman
Photo by Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk

The circumstances surrounding the staging of the play – including the celebration of a state institution (perceived by many Croats as oppressive), the commemoration of a controversial anniversary, and the ideologically imposed interpretation of the drama – may have deepened the Croatian audience's sense of cultural alienation toward the topos of walling up. What can be stated with certainty, however, is that the silence with which the press greeted the performance was largely due to the play's low artistic value. The rare mentions of the event in the press were restrained – seemingly out of courtesy or, perhaps due to professional entanglements – to noting that Korolija's drama lacked a clear developmental structure. Although no detailed accounts of the staging, costumes, or directorial notes have survived (the script was adapted for the stage by the renowned Croatian graphic artist and set designer Tomislav Krizman, and directed by Ivo Raić-Lonjski, one of the most prominent theatrical figures of the time), it is known that the production featured a well-respected and recognisable cast. The high calibre of the performers can be inferred from a surviving collage of portraits depicting key figures of contemporary theatrical life, created by the photographic studio owner Tonka. The role of the main heroine, Gojkovica, was entrusted to the then-popular actress Zlata Markovac (Figure 3), while the character of Gojko was played by the acclaimed stage actor Josip Pavić. Both actors were given prominent placement in the collage.



Figure 3. Jovan Bijelić, *Zlata Markovac* (who portrayed Gojkovica in the play *Zidanje Skadra* based on the text by Mirko Korolija), 1930, oil on canvas. Museum of Theatre Arts of Serbia, Belgrade

The reception of the play's text was inevitably burdened by the author's political and ideological affiliations. The performance found resonance among circles that shared not so much a clear position on the Yugoslav future but rather hopes for a just organisation of the new state. There is no doubt that such sentiments existed within Croatian society, despite the fact that during certain periods of the 20th century – particularly when nationalist tendencies intensified – attempts were made to erase their traces.

Although the topos of walling up originated from a song about the building of Skadar (a place geographically and symbolically distant from the Croats), it was not entirely exotic or incomprehensible. Responding, as it were, to contemporary demand, the journal "Dom i svijet" even published the text of the song from Karadžić's collection, along with a laconic and cautious review of the performance. However, it was the incorporation of this song into the structure of Korolija's drama that proved problematic. The reason was not the song's provenance, but rather the lyrical character it conferred upon the work. In this context, Zdenko Vernić argued that the audience was presented with a heterogeneous composition, filled with numerous literary reminiscences, which had not matured into a true dramatic work (Верний, 1920, pp. 1617–1621). Not all reviews, however, were so restrained. Yugoslav writer Niko Bartulović (later an ideologue of ORJUNA, and therefore ideologically close to the author) saw in the play "a poetic work, filled from the first scene to the last word with great poetic force and the sublimity of tragedy and suffering" (Bartulović, 1920).

Meanwhile, Dalmatian-born writer Rikard Nikolić went so far as to claim that, with a bold gesture, Korolija transformed a folk myth into a symbol of broader significance and scope (Nikolić, 1920). This conclusion suggests the absence of the song from the core of Croatian culture, implying that its introduction into the literary sphere had not only artistic but also cultural significance.

Among the more moderate voices, two stand out as affirming the performance. The first came from Stevan Galogaža, who – due to his pro-Yugoslav fascinations and political leanings – compared the text to the *Vidovdanski hram* [The Vidovdan Temple] by sculptor and architect Ivan Meštrović, a monumental mausoleum project commemorating the heroes of Kosovo and symbolising the unity of the Yugoslav nations. The journalist was convinced that Korolija's work would attain immortality and become "a classical piece that will leave a legacy of artistically positive creation with a permissible tendency towards lasting value" (Galogaža, 1920). Yet, in these words, there resounds a faint echo of the critic's awareness that this text was culturally foreign to the Croatian tradition, as well as an underlying anxiety that the drama might not be embraced as hoped.

The second voice in this vein was a lengthy and highly favourable review by Croatian writer and theatre professional Milan Begović, published in the journal *Srpski književni glasnik* [The Serbian Literary Herald] (Беговић, 1920). The reviewer notes that Korolija's work possesses a refined character, employs poetic language, and avoids cheap tricks ("not a single hasty gesture, not a single false grimace"; Беговић, 1920, p. 546), and, as such, would not satisfy the masses. Anticipating accusations of propaganda and pro-Yugoslav sentiment, he emphasises that the play contains no patriotic tirades intended to inflame the political emotions of the audience (Беговић, 1920, p. 547). Begović also highlights the reactivation of the events described in the song: Gojkovica's tragedy becomes "the tragedy of our entire Nation" (Беговић, 1920, p. 551). The Mrnjavčević brothers, in turn, symbolise the three South Slavic tribes that "build the ideal city of our unification" (Беговић, 1920, p. 551).

Pro-Yugoslav sentiments present in Croatian society during the early years of Yugoslavia would later (even in the 21st century) become a thorn in the side of many, as well as a focal point for growing misunderstandings and interpretative distortions. When Ivan J. Bošković, a scholar working on the legacy of ORJUNA, published his monograph on this radical Yugoslav nationalist organisation and mentioned the name of Milan Begović several times (in connection with Korolija), objections were soon raised, suggesting that he was ascribing improper political sympathies to Begović, thereby casting doubt on his moral integrity. One of the opponents of such simplifications, Miljenko Buljaca, responded by noting that Begović's positive review of the play reveals far more about the historical circumstances in which both authors lived, their hopes, and the resulting painful political disillusionments.

Our Three Tribes

Korolija's play is an occasional work of laudatory character, composed in honour of the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (the "first Yugoslavia", 1918–1929), and in fact, a political panegyric dedicated to Serbia. The author reveals his artistic and political intentions from the very beginning, offering the reader no invitation to explore nuances, ambiguities, or subtle interpretations. In the introductory stage directions, we read that the play is dedicated to "Mother Serbia" (Korolija, 1920, p. 9). The text draws on the song about the building of Skadar, using the version collected by Vuk Karadžić from oral tradition, and does not intervene in its structure beyond adding psychological depth to the characters. The folk song provides the narrative framework for the three acts and the final epilogue of the play.

The construction of the Skadar fortress by the three Mrnjavčević brothers symbolises the building of Yugoslavia by ethnic groups or nations torn by conflict, each striving for dominance and exclusivity in the governance of the emerging state. However, the play avoids explicitly assigning each brother to a specific nation; rather, the characters represent distilled aspects of power: strength, deceit, and passion. Due to the extraordinary beauty of Gojkovica, the wife of the youngest brother, she becomes the object of desire for each builder, and, because of suspicions that she is responsible for the fortress collapsing at night, also the object of their collective hatred. She symbolises Mother Serbia. Her sacrifice – agreeing to be walled up in the foundations of the Yugoslav fortress, to bury her marriage and personal ambitions for the sake of the common good – is portrayed as necessary for the success of the undertaking. The brothers, all of whom are in love with Gojkovica, fear that the completed structure will seal her union with her husband, and so they too engage in various deceitful acts to destroy the relationship. The voluntary sacrifice that Gojkovica ultimately chooses is meant to end the discord and cement the three nations in the new state. Earlier attempts to offer substitute sacrifices – not Stojan and Stoja, but Sloga and Jedinstvo (that is, Harmony and Unity – the ideological foundations of Yugoslavia) – had failed.

Korolija did not leave his audience much space for interpretive freedom or refined symbolic readings. As Bartulović already noted: "The three dark brothers are our three tribes, the sacrifice of Gojkovica is the sacrifice of Mother Serbia, and Skadar is our new state and new Freedom" (Bartulović, 1920). The fate of Gojkovica is thus evident from the start of the play, and the walls are described from the outset as tragic: "It is early morning, after a hard night full of destruction and marvels, and the tragic walls of Skadar are rising" (Korolija, 1920, p. 15). The audience knows that no alternative ending is possible; the sacrifice must be made. It is part of a grand plan, the significance, inevitability, and historical gravity of which are underscored by the use of capital letters. Thus, we encounter: the Great Work, the Empire that will result from it, the Great

Mother (elsewhere it is She, the *Uzvišena Podvizateljka*), who sacrifices herself for its fulfilment. The act of construction is even referred to as a *Podvig* – a term denoting a sacred or religious deed. The suspense the audience might expect is not in the plot, but in the interpretive plan. Korolija does not significantly alter the song but uses it to explain his contemporary political reality, crafting a Yugoslav mythology and its symbolic foundation.

The Walled-Up Woman – from Guilty to Redeemer

In Korolija's play *Zidanje Skadra*, the walled-up woman serves as a personification of the Yugoslav phantasm of homeland and statehood – one that gradually reveals itself in the text, assuming various modified forms. Each of these transformations is rooted in the corporeality of the main female character and the aura generated by her *physis*. The functions she fulfils manifest in several key emanations: domina, temptress, redeemer, mother, and the not-dead woman.

Domina

Gojkovica is the wife of the youngest brother, but due to her extraordinary beauty, she becomes the object of desire for the two older brothers, Vukašin and Uglješa. A rumour (quickly debunked) circulates that it was her beauty that incited the jealous *vila* to descend at night and destroy the city being built. However, the protagonist is no naive maiden unaware of her allure. Conscious of the impression she makes on her suitors, she engages them in a subtle game, hoping that Gojko eventually wins the contest that will determine her fate.

The brothers' emotions are intense and deeply conflicted, blending love and hatred, and exposing internal tensions and ambivalences. Their desire for Gojkovica is twofold: they long to possess her, and simultaneously to annihilate her. When they ultimately realise that none of them can claim her exclusively, they come to understand that their only recourse is to kill her. Gojkovica's beauty thus becomes the bearer of destructive power – her charm not only incites the *vila's* jealousy, with its catastrophic consequences, but also threatens to unleash fatal confrontations within the family. Female beauty, while a source of pleasure for her admirers, becomes her personal curse. The list of Gojkovica's admirers is not limited to the three brothers. Her allure extends beyond familial ties, also captivating the builders, whose fates are marked by even deeper and more existential torments. These men, though enchanted by her appearance, suffer from the physical and psychological burdens of endless labour on the construction site. In this sense, Gojkovica embodies the ultimate paradox: she is both *creatrix* and destroyer, introducing a philosophical dimension into the drama – a reflection on the human condition, in which beauty, though a force of creation, may just as easily become an instrument of ruin.

When the builders, convinced that she is the cause of all their misfortunes, prepare to attack her, just a few of her words – like incantations – are enough to entirely change their attitude. Gojkovica possesses a magical power that allows her to divert violence away from herself and the fortress. She intercepts masculine energy and subjugates it. Their words toward her take on an almost devotional tone, with religious overtones (Your bread is the sweetest – We want no other bread than yours! – O, our white wheat! – You tame Hunger and Poverty! – You quench thirst – your words are warm and soft like your beautiful lips! Before your beauty all forces tremble like green aspen leaves / Dearest Love!… Beauty!… Victory!…) (Korolija, 1920, pp. 48–49).

Here, the homeland is imagined as a supernatural force that seduces those drawn to it in an incomprehensible, almost magical way. Korolija presents the homeland as a source of suffering (cf. Anderson, 1983; Janion, 2000). It contains within it both a creative and a destructive element, thus provoking ambivalent emotions. The homeland, in Korolija's vision, seems to be part of a natural cycle resembling an elemental force that both creates and destroys, shapes and annihilates. Its presence is inevitable, and its influence cannot be fully controlled. It is a force that acts upon individuals, luring them with the promise of belonging, yet also entangling them in dramatic conflict. The play reveals that Yugoslavia's political tensions are organic – not merely the product of ideology or historical circumstance but deeply embedded in the essence of community and human nature. The homeland is not static: it lives, pulses, changes, and attracts and repels.

Temptress

Gojkovica's role in the drama is deeply embedded in the nexus of sexuality and power – resources the woman consciously wields. Her stance, in which she does not avoid the masculinised environment but actually confronts it, is full of genuine provocation. Not only does she remain un-passive amid growing tensions, but she actively instigates confrontation, challenging the labourers to acts that bind desire to violence. The questions she poses – who will strike her first, who will throw himself at her and tear off her garments – are not mere affirmations of her physical attractiveness, but rather an intentional deployment of her sexuality as a tool of manipulation. Gojkovica is aware that the builders crave not only her body, but also the emotions bound to it: lust and hatred, both inseparable from their relationship to her.

Among her admirers is Protozidar, a higher-ranking builder, an older, more experienced man. When he confesses his feelings – marked less by youthful passion than by aged reverence – his words are neither innocent nor clumsy. On the contrary, his declaration takes on a perverse tone, laced with veiled, subtle aggression. Yet the confession barely affects Gojkovica, who is accustomed to advances and expressions of desire. This evokes an analogy to Penelope's

suitors, who occupied Odysseus' household during his absence. The difference, however, is fundamental: Penelope awaits her husband's return to free her from obligations to her suitors. Gojkovica, on the other hand, must sacrifice her own life to avoid choosing among her suitors and to prevent discord between them. This decision carries a deeper, symbolic significance. Gojkovica – who in Korolija's text represents Serbia – becomes the embodiment of a nation that renounces its ambitions and dreams of sovereign statehood, laying them on the altar of Yugoslavia. This sacrifice aims to unify the different nations meant to coexist within a single community. Gojkovica-as-Serbia willingly surrenders her right to autonomy and personal desires for the greater good, symbolising the tragic yet heroic sacrifice of one nation for the good of a community composed of coexisting nations.

Fully aware of her fate, Gojkovica continues to engage her husband in a game of passion until the very end, witnessing his exhaustion and inner turmoil. Gojko, drawn on the one hand by her allure and on the other by his frustration with her manipulations and the ambiguity of their relationship, experiences an inner conflict that ultimately leads to his suffering[19]. Yet his presence in this relationship remains indispensable. A sacrifice cannot be performed without witnesses. In any act of offering, a role is assigned not only to the one who is to be sacrificed, but also to the one who carries out the sacrifice. This is why, as Pavlović observes, a parent stands by the *žrtvenik* when a child is offered, a husband when a wife is sacrificed, or another close kin – their presence reinforces the act, investing it with their energy, emotion, and the testimony of the moment (Pavlović, 1987, p. 51). Gojko thus functions not only as a husband, but also as a witness, whose presence is necessary for the tragedy to acquire its full weight and meaning.

Gojkovica skilfully uses her body to fuel male desire and incite conflict over her. This physical aspect – touch and sexual tension – accompanies the scene until almost the final moment of the sacrifice. The walling up of the girl is imagined as the work of a hundred hands closing in on Gojkovica, hands that – though they never touch her – long to do so, each craving to personally seal her into the wall. In an earlier scene, the image of adorning the girl with jewellery is established, the adornment representing traps into which each suitor wishes to ensnare her. This motif of ensnaring the woman-as-homeland – whether through netting, jewellery, or other entanglements – carries a mystical dimension (Janion, 1996). Sexuality here is not fully explicit; it cannot manifest freely. It remains in constant dialogue with the emerging phantasm of the homeland as a space of shared masculine experience: built by many male hands in a commu-

[19] "Violent and intimidating, he suddenly presses his lips against hers in despair, like fire, as if drinking from them the oblivion of all his poisonous doubts. Their strong souls intertwine in a single red knot, a kiss that endures. Then they part; he looks once more into her enigmatic eyes, decisively sheathes his sword, and walks away" (Korolija, 1920, p. 92).

nion of ecstasy and lust, controlled and overseen by men, constantly challenging them and straining their bonds.

The erotic dimension of this phantasm is not confined to the image of Gojkovica as a young wife. Even her transformation into the role of mother does not strip her of sexual attributes. During the walling up, the builders want to pierce her with a sword (a symbolic defloration). Gojkovica facilitates this by removing her cloak and revealing her body, provoking immense unease among the builders. Ultimately, the situation is brought under control, and the swords are lowered – symbolising either a loss of potency or the assertion of control over it. Alan Dundes had previously attempted to interpret the song in this spirit, basing his reading on the polysemy of the term "erection", its phallic associations, and the semantic polyvalence of the female womb (Dundes, 1996, pp. 200–201).

This erotic tension reaches its climax when Gojkovica asks to leave an opening for her breast. The news that soon everyone will be able to see it stirs wild excitement among the workers, who consider this sight as rightful compensation for the suffering endured during the endless construction. When Gojkovica begins to remove her garment, a roar rises from the crowd, and shouts of command: "Tear it! Grab it! Show it!" What is striking here is the emergence of an incestuous dynamic that seems to govern the relationship between the members of the community and the mother figure. Into the sacrificial mystery of Gojkovica creeps an element of the profane in the form of unrestrained male desire. For the community to survive, this tension must be contained. "Compliant bodies" are needed – those subjected to control and regulation – so that natural desires become more "civilised", subordinated to norms, and stripped of spontaneous and unruly expressions of lust (Foucault, 1976–1984/ 2000). What ultimately diffuses male tension is the woman's death – a convergence of death, power, and sexuality – forming the core of a distinctly Serbian ethnosexual discourse (Bjelić & Cole, 2002, pp. 287–291).

Such a depiction of a woman who consciously shapes her role as an object of desire and aggression diverges from traditional representations of the homeland, in which her sexuality (and fertility) is kept under strict control by the ethnic or national community (Mrozik, 2012, p. 112). Gojkovica is not a passive object of longing, but an active subject who manipulates her assets to provoke reactions that are as complex as they are dangerous. In this way, her sexuality becomes a force outside of social control – not merely an aspect of her physical allure, but a key to understanding the tensions and contradictions that govern her interactions with men. It must be emphasised, however, that the sexualisation of Gojkovica and the construction of the homeland as a female object of desire subject to male dominance are ultimately products of male fantasies (cf. Yuval-Davis, 1997).

The term "the male gaze", coined by Laura Mulvey (1975), plays a crucial role in shaping the image of the girl as a figure entangled in a network of desires and tensions associated with the idea of the homeland. Her sexuality, although

seemingly liberated and active, is still framed within patriarchal imaginaries, where the female body functions as a signifier in national and political discourses. In this context, the homeland is presented not only as an eroticised object of desire, but also as an entity subjected to control and domination, leading to an ambivalent tension between its idealisation and instrumentalisation. Thus, the sexualisation of Gojkovica, although apparently vivid and dynamic, remains part of the mechanisms of power and representation in which the feminine is not only desired, but also serves as a symbolic battleground in the struggle for control over the nation.

Mother and Saviour

In the previously discussed review of Korolija's play, Milan Begović observes that Gojkovica occupies a dual role in relation to the builders. First, she is a woman-lover (wife of the youngest brother and the object of desire for the remaining protagonists due to her external attributes), and second, she is a woman-mother, a role defined by her love, sacrifice, and devotion (Беговић, 1920, p. 547). These traits come to the fore when she strives to quell anger and hatred and to reconcile the brothers – even at the cost of sacrificing her own life. Her ultimate transformation into a maternal figure is confirmed in the scene where she requests that openings be left in the wall so she can continue to breastfeed her child.

The image of the homeland as mother originates from the iconography of the American and French revolutions. Initially depicted as a representation of Liberty, a young woman (sometimes a young mother) came to personify the Nation or the Homeland (e.g., Marianne) (Janion, 1996). Research in political anthropology indicates that, from the late 18th century, the image of the nation solidified not as an abstract *corpus politicum*, but as an allegorical female figure endowed with physical embodiment, as a virgin or a mother, sometimes as a virgin-mother (cf. Kristeva, 1986, pp. 161–186). In this fantasmatic construct, the homeland imagined as a female *corpus* is defined by harmony, gentleness, and fair complexion; when imagined as a mother, she is a life-giving, self-sacrificing nurturer. The editors of the anthology *Nationalisms and Sexualities* argue that in cultures with a dominant homosocial structure – such as Croatian and Serbian culture – the woman-as-mother occupies a sacred position (Parker et al., 1992). Male-centred narratives idealise motherhood and affirm heterosexual norms, thereby excluding non-reproductive sexualities from the national discourse. The mother figure poses no threat to bonds between men – unlike the woman-lover – and moreover, she completes the fraternal community. When Gojkovica is to be walled up, she asks that openings be left for her eyes so she may see her child. This gesture clearly references the folk motif of the "nourishing eye". Thus, once entombed, she will oversee her creation – but this act of watching is reciprocal: she will also be seen.

The transformation into the maternal role brings about yet another functional shift. The walled-up woman becomes the nation's body, its sacrificial victim. This evokes a secularised topos of crucifixion, here enlisted in the service of state-building. The walled-up woman, whose sacrifice delivers the community (from discord, from the inability to establish unity), becomes the centre of a patriotic religion, and her death is perceived as a necessary element of the national doctrine of salvation (Janion, 1996). Through her death, a great act (*podvig*) is accomplished – part of a broader historiosophical plan. In her final words, Gojkovica emphasises that this fate was always meant for her, and that in death, she can accomplish what she could not in life. Gojkovica's transformation is not abrupt; it is foreshadowed by subtle gestures and details: among the women, she behaves playfully and girlishly, yet once her fate becomes clear and inevitable, she grows solemn and contemplative, transforming into a dignified *Podvizateljka* [woman of heroic deed] who observes the construction of her Work (always capitalised), a beautiful and silent genius. The author calls her the *Uzvišena Žrtva* [Exalted or Elevated Victim]. The gesture of self-sacrifice that she performs becomes the foundation of the "work of unification". In this context, the imagined homeland is deeply bound to both maternal love and a messianic notion of redemption.

The Not-Dead Woman

The cover of Korolija's play depicts a woman walled up in the foundations of a fortress or city. At the top of the tower rises a flourishing settlement marked by architectural diversity – thus, cultural heterogeneity. At the base, we see deliberate openings through which the walled-up woman can see the outside world, along with two openings at the level of her breasts, allowing her to nurse a child. Gojkovica's body is a political body: embedding it into the foundation of the structure is an attempt to subjugate this political body, not to annihilate it definitively. This body, understood as an eternal foundation inscribed in the organic and cyclical dimensions of life – an eternal fertiliser, or humus, as Donna Haraway (2016) writes – is necessary for the structure to function properly.

Gojkovica does not die. As a political body subjected to thanatopolitics (Domańska, 2017), she remains under the constant threat of death. Nowhere in the text do we encounter abject remains, the corpse of a dying mother, or a figure of lamentation; the walled-up body remains vital. It is sacrificed, offered, and exposed to death, yet alive. Around this topos, no martyrological narrative is built, even though this "incomplete death" is always present. The absence of a corpse lends the potential agony an aesthetic power: it captivates, transporting the spectator into a world of eschatological reflection without unnecessary spasms of emotion.

Gojkovica accepts her fate with dignity and a smile, slowly transforming back into song. "She invariably smiles the same smile that remains forever

inscribed in the Folk Song", writes Korolija. Her smile, etched into oral tradition, testifies not only to her connection with literary heritage but also to her embeddedness within a broader cultural memory. This smile expresses dignity and the acceptance of fate, but also a final reconciliation with the role assigned to her by history. It is a moment of transcendence in which she becomes part of a larger narrative, moving beyond individual suffering. Yet, the smile offers no consolation to those who condemned her to death, even though this is the first time the brothers – and therefore, the nations – stand united. Gojkovica recognises that her task is complete and proclaims it with the words "Zidanje dozidano moje" (My wall is built; Korolija, 1920, p. 1690), a rephrasing of Christ's last words on the cross: "Dovršeno je!" [It is finished]. The comparison between Gojkovica and Christ introduces an additional religious and messianic layer to the interpretation of her figure. This transfiguration into an almost divine being – at once suffering and triumphant through the fulfilment of her mission – underscores the magnitude of her sacrifice and its meaning within the national context.

Korolija's drama is thanatopolitical in nature, even though the body is not subjected to a spectacular death. There is no climactic moment of demise; instead, the body remains suspended in a space of ambiguity, between life and death. Perhaps the agony is ongoing, not a singular moment but a prolonged process. The imagined community sketched by Korolija is built upon the foundation of a human life given in sacrifice. Victory does not lie in achieving ultimate control but in a continuous balancing act between extremes: between body and soul, between night and day, between life and death.

The Mystery of Building: Between Flesh and Stone

The author gradually leads the reader into the mystery of constructing the edifice. He does so by initiating the reader into the secrets of *zidanje* (building) and by introducing a wide array of characters involved in the fortress's construction, each with varying levels of responsibility and engagement: the *Protozidar* (Master Builder), the *Klesar* (Stonecutter), the *Neimar Rade* (Architect), masons and workers (*zidari, skelari, bodrič*), and day labourers (*argati*). All of them work to the point of exhaustion, calling out, commenting on their own work and its failures. In the text, these workers serve as a kind of ancient chorus – not only intensifying the dramatic tension but also transforming the tragedy into a communal experience. The builders speak in universal truths (unlike the particularities of individual characters); they become the voice of a collective body, the collective persona of the drama. And yet, the chorus is easily swayed and influenced in its mood.

Miodrag Pavlović observes that in ancient texts, the act of sacrifice never takes place on stage. Instead, the role of the narrator falls to the chorus, which carries the burden of retelling the event (Pavlović, 1987, p. 42). This may stem

less from the prohibition against depicting brutality on stage and more from the sanctity of the sacrificial act, which should not be exposed to random eyes. Building initially has a purely physical dimension here, but gradually it takes on the form of a mystery rite. The higher the degree of this mystery, the closer we get to the moment of sacrifice – that is, the connection between the human world and the divine, the opening of a dialogue between the two realms. The climax is both Gojkovica's exposure to death (which does not materialise in the play) and her simultaneous immortalisation through transformation into a work of art. Gojkovica is fully aware of her destiny. She knows that her fate has already been spoken as prophecy – inscribed in the song – and that she will ultimately become that song once she is walled up. She says: "I feel that from the soles of my feet to the top of my head I am a deceptive song" (Korolija, 1920, p. 43). What is spoken as prophecy thus becomes flesh: the song transforms into a corpus that must be offered, which is then transmuted into stone, and finally reverts back into the word. This perspective unveils a Christian paradigm lurking in the background of the song. This cyclical transition – from flesh to stone and back to the word – resembles a Passion mystery, where death marks the beginning of new life, and sacrifice assumes an eternal form, inscribed in history and preserved in a song that never dies. As Maria Janion wrote in her essay *Form and Death*: "Only Form can oppose death; shaping, formation, and structure are salvation" (Janion, 2000). The drama's heroine thus transforms into Form, which grants her immortality. Her walling up formally concludes the drama.

The stone that surrounds her – as we learn from the stage directions – serves both to separate her from the earthly world and to liberate her from all worldly limitations. The wall that forms around her paradoxically sets her free (see also the topos of walling up in the performance titled "Penance", discussed later in this text). The stone with which Gojkovica merges, assuming the form of a caryatid, becomes the guardian of her soul. This ties into folk beliefs in which stones are thought to have a unique relationship with the soul, divine origin, or even life-giving power (Zaborski, 2006). Particularly significant is the gravestone, which connects the temporal world with the otherworldly, or the *stanac* stone – a stone that marks the meeting point of beginning and end, life and death, the order of culture and the order of nature (for example, a dying child might be taken to be laid upon it so another mother can nurse and bring it back to life).

In one of the final scenes, the *Protozidar* laments that now a wall separates them – one far harder than any other barrier that had previously prevented their union (namely his advanced age). The old man, frightened and aroused by Gojkovica's power even in the face of impending death, furious that he cannot reach her – to kiss or bite her (!) – bites the marble that forms the wall around her (Korolija, 1920, p. 191).

The drama *Zidanje Skadra* is a work born of political pragmatism. While Korolija's play received some praise, most theatrical critics were rather unfavourable. What polarised the public was not artistic merit but political sympa-

thies and attitudes toward the newly formed Yugoslav state, which had already become a source of disappointment for some. The use of a folk song as the play's foundation – one familiar to Croatian audiences but not central to the local cultural heritage – was part of a broader phenomenon: the search for a shared Croatian-Serbian cultural universe that could be used in the service of political aims. Such a need was dictated by political circumstances and a degree of Yugoslavist fervour in certain creative circles.

The ideological criteria that determined the play's entry into wider literary and theatrical circulation also shaped its subsequent reception. The rapid shifts in political sentiment, repeated revisions within the literary field, as well as its own volatility – fuelled by the field's small scale (and the insecurities arising from it) and by its caution toward anything not perceived as "authentically Croatian" – resulted in the drama's failure to enter the literary canon after 1920. Post-war Yugoslavia did not reclaim it either.

Monumental Walling up

The scene of walling up depicted in the song about the building of Skadar also found visual reinterpretations. Although the subject concerns a monumental, sculptural relief – a work conceived with great ambition and executed with dramatic grandeur – there is a noticeable reluctance to assign the piece any definitive label that would situate or guide its interpretation. The work in question is *Zidanje Skadra* [The Building of Skadar] by the Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović, along with two closely related drawings (including one preparatory study for the relief). The hesitation to claim this artefact as Croatian (and therefore national) heritage stems not only from the challenging nature of its subject matter, but also from the uneasy position of the artist himself within Croatian cultural memory. Although there is no doubt that Ivan Meštrović was Croatian, deeply attached to his homeland (particularly to his "small homeland", Dalmatia), its history, and its cultural legacy, his oeuvre remains inconvenient for many: it exposes fissures in what is expected to function as a monolithic narrative and reveals moments of cultural dehermetisation. Meštrović was unusually open to a form of polyphony in this region – a stance shaped by his ideological commitments. He was an advocate of the Yugoslav idea (he described himself as a Yugoslav nationalist), a proponent of South Slavic unity, and at one point even endorsed the notion of a "Yugoslav type of man" (cf. Лазаревић, 1930). Crucially, he did not align himself with the Serbian option – he was, in fact, a vocal opponent of Greater-Serbian chauvinism and clerical nationalism. Disillusioned by how the Yugoslav project unfolded, and driven by artistic and intellectual restlessness, Meštrović left the region and spent significant periods of his life in Vienna and Paris, and after the Second World War settled in the United States.



Figure 4. *The Building of Skadar*, drawing, 1906, Meštrović Gallery Library, inventory no. FGM-934.
Source: https://virtualne-izlozbe.mestrovic.hr/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/24-Zidanje-Skadra-1906._crtez.jpg, retrieved 4.08.2026

The earliest graphic studies for the relief *The Building of Skadar* (Zidanje Skadra, figures 4 and 5) were likely created in Vienna. The relief both anticipates and remains thematically tied to Meštrović's so-called Kosovo Cycle – a collection of sculptural works produced between 1908 and 1914. This cycle brought Meštrović both artistic acclaim and political recognition, as it emerged during a period when the political trajectory toward Croatian independence (from Austria-Hungary) was taking shape, while the idea of South Slavic unity was being concretely articulated. Meštrović actively participated in this process as a member of the Yugoslav Committee and took part in the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

Public interest in the Kosovo theme re-entered political and cultural discourse in 1904. The occasion that revived it was the coronation of King Peter Karađorđević (held on the centenary of the uprising that had led Serbia to free itself from Ottoman political dominance). Journalists reporting on the ceremony repeatedly emphasised that Peter I was the first crowned Serbian ruler since the Battle of Kosovo (1389; Machiedo Mladinić, 2009).

The image undoubtedly resonated with observers of political life at that time, as it conveyed a sense of a new beginning, or a return to a time from before the rupture of cultural and civilisational continuity marked by the defeat at the Battle of Kosovo. This metaphor was legible to other national groups as well, since, as Meštrović himself asserted, each had its own Kosovo. The joy over Serbian independence reverberated throughout the region, encouraging the expression of pro-Serbian political slogans – including in Croatian circles – that attributed to Serbia a potential role of political primacy.

At that time, the *Prva jugoslavenska umjetnička izložba* [First Yugoslav Art Exhibition] was held in Belgrade with the goal of merging aesthetic and political ideals. The Kosovo theme received prominent representation in the artworks displayed, while "Kosovo became a symbol of national suffering, endurance, and



Figure 5. *Study for The Building of Skadar*, probably Vienna, 1906, black pastel and Indian ink on paper, 30.5 × 40.3 cm. Meštrović Gallery Library (inv. no. GMS-236)

an unrelenting desire for freedom. Writing and painting about Kosovo became a veiled form of expression at a time when much could not be said openly" (Machiedo Mladinić, 2009, pp. 144–145). During the exhibition, Meštrović also presented two works dedicated to Kosovo's heroic themes.

The relief depicting the scene of walling up (Figure 6) aligns thematically with the so-called Kosovo Testament. The choice of form is no coincidence – reliefs were frequently used in Art Nouveau, as they lend themselves particularly well to narrative art and the visual expression of plot within defined spatial limits (Kraševac, 2002, p. 143). It is likely that the piece was originally intended to adorn the never-built Vidovdan Temple (*Vidovdanski hram*), a visionary project dreamt-up by Meštrović, inspired by Serbian epic folklore. The work, which can be viewed in two stages (a drawing and the relief), presents the climactic moment in the Building of Skadar song – or rather, what comes just after it. While the drawing differs from the final relief, the narrative remains consistent. Examining them both together, however, reveals meaningful nuances.

In both versions, the woman has already been walled up into the structure, becoming an integral part of the monumental block. In the relief, her body almost fuses with the smooth, flat surface of the wall, leaving only her face and breasts visible – ready to nurse a child. The symbolic act of breastfeeding, made possible only through the intervention of a man lifting the child toward the mother's breast, intensifies the drama of the moment. The woman's face, frozen

in statuesque stillness, betrays no emotion, amplifying the sense of suspended time and her metaphysical separation from the realm of the living.

The tension of the walling up is palpable, yet the emotional dimension of the sacrifice is not expressed directly through the female figure. Instead, Meštrović sublimates suffering and helplessness by transferring them onto the male characters – it is in their physicality, facial expressions, and restrained gestures of despair that the tragedy finds its most vivid reflection. The muscular bodies of the builders, monumental and classicising in form, evoke associations with classical sculpture, while the flowing Art Nouveau lines, influenced by Viennese aesthetics, imbue them with an expressive, almost organic quality. In the drawing, the figures are depicted in states of physical and psychological exhaustion – hunched, bowed, and weighed down by the gravity of the completed ritual. Their strained bodies do not display heroic triumph but instead become vessels of grief. In this context, the work does not celebrate vitality so much as bear witness to sacrifice and loss.

In his interpretation of the legend of the walled-up wife, Meštrović draws on universal themes of sacrifice, transcendence, and the inscription of individual fate into a symbolic structure. The woman, transformed into a part of the architectural whole, forfeits her individuality and corporeality to become a lasting foundation of culture and memory. Her body is reconstituted as a structural element, echoing a reflection on the status of the female body as cultural matter – consecrated, enclosed within architecture, yet indispensable to sustaining the idea of community. The suffering of the men, expressed through their bodies and gestures, makes visible the awareness of irreversible loss. In this sense, Meštrović's work enters into philosophical reflection on sacrifice as an act that constitutes symbolic order, while simultaneously destabilising it, leaving a permanent trace of pain and absence.



Figure 6. *The Building of Skadar*, relief, 1906.
Meštrović Gallery Library (inv. no. FGM-935)

The reference to the song and the topos of walling up serves as a political cue. Meštrović thereby articulates his fascination with the construction of a South Slavic community. In affirming Serbian folk culture, he does not seek expression through Byzantine artistic means; instead, he draws inspiration from Western European artistic circles. He synthesises modern forms of expression with the folk idioms of the South Slavs. The artist appears to emphasise the difficulty of building such a community: on the relief, the builders are shown raising the structure on their own shoulders, like Atlas bearing the weight of the world. Meštrović conveys the message that only a communal approach, within which the individual sacrifices for the common good, "can build the edifice of unity" (Srhoj, 2014, p. 383). Yet, stone has proven far more enduring than the idea of national unity.



Figure 7. Marko Rašica, *Zidanje Skadra* [The Building of Skadar], engraving, 1919. Source: https://repozitorij.muo.hr/?pr=i&id=860130, retrieved 4.08.2026

When discussing Meštrović's works, it is also worth presenting a graphic print (likely a woodcut) by Croatian painter Marko Rašica, created in 1919 (Figure 7). Like Meštrović's relief, the scene unfolds after the woman has been walled-up: in the foreground, a male figure is shown helping a child reach the breast of the walled-up mother. The entire composition is rendered in an expressionist style, with a strongly geometric and highly contrasted arrangement. Stylistically, the work fits into the modernist trend of reinterpreting folk motifs. The raw, synthetic line emphasises the drama of the scene, while the woodcut medium itself lends it an archaic, almost sacred quality. Symbolically, the im-

age represents the woman's sacrifice, her transformation into an architectural element, but also the immortality of her motherhood – even as part of a stone structure, she remains a source of life for the child. The man who aids the child seems to serve as a mediator between the world of the living and the realm of the dead.

It is possible that Rašica was familiar with the aforementioned works by Meštrović. Their artistic or academic paths may have crossed in one of the European centres where they both explored their fascination with Art Nouveau. However, it is more likely that Rašica's Dubrovnik roots and his interest in folk culture led him to engage with this subject. The graphic in question is preserved in the digital repository of one of Croatia's largest museums (MUO). Yet the description of the artifact betrays a complete misunderstanding of the image – and perhaps even the obscurity of the topos itself among museum professionals: "Post-war theme, after World War I; [the image] shows a woman lifting a naked child to a window (of a prison), so that it may be fed" (*MUO-057705/03: Zidanje skadra*, n.d.). This time, the iconographic homework had clearly not been done.

Veronika and Ružica: Tourism Potential and Places in the Shadows

Croatian culture offers yet another story of a walled-up woman. Although it is not a tale of foundation sacrifice and does not directly relate to the aforementioned songs about the construction of Skadar or the bridge on the Drina, it represents a different but equally powerful connection between woman, stone, and wall – a connection that ultimately leads to the annihilation of the latter. While possessing a timeless dimension, this legend has been historicised and tied to a specific place. It is the 15th-century tale of Veronika of Desinić (Veronika Desinićka), recounting a forbidden love between a girl of lower social status (either from the peasantry or lower courtly ranks) and Count Frederick II of Celje, the son of a powerful noble family from the city of Celje. Veronika allegedly captured the heart of the well-travelled Frederick, who, fascinated by the girl, abandoned – or perhaps even murdered – his wife, Elisabeth of the Frankopan family. Accused of murder and of breaking the alliance between the Frankopan and Celje families, which the marriage had sealed, Frederick fled to Friedrichstein Castle (in present-day southern Slovenia), where he secretly married his beloved. Outraged by his son's actions, Herman II of Celje pursued the lovers. After capturing them, he imprisoned his son in a dungeon and condemned Veronika to a brutal death – she was drowned and then walled-up in the walls of Veliki Tabor Castle. The girl was said to have come from the village of Desinić, located at the foot of the castle, thus binding her tragic story forever to this location.

Although the legend exists in multiple versions (one even claims that Veronika saved Veliki Tabor from a Turkish invasion), none of them describe a protec-

tive spirit being generated to protect a building, project, or community. What connects this tale to songs of walled-up women is the notion of sacrifice as an act necessary to maintain power and stability. In the legend of Veronika, the woman is punished because she threatens the male-defined world order, and her death represents an attempt to restore it. In both the legend and the song about Skadar, the act of walling up renders the individual excluded from "living" society. Yet she does not disappear entirely; she becomes a dead but enduring element inscribed into the narrative of the community. In both cases, the integration of the individual into the community's narrative structures introduces a spirit of order and control over that which might destabilise the established norm. Both the legend and the song demonstrate how sacrifice can become the foundation not only of physical structures but also of social order.

The legend of Veronika from Desinić has inspired several literary adaptations. In 1904, acclaimed Croatian writer Eugen Tomić addressed the theme in his drama Veronika Desinićka (Tomić, 1904). Earlier, in 1899, a cultural enthusiast devoted to the region, Hinko pl. Davila – originally from Krapina, near the village of Desinić – recorded and published the story under the title *Zagorska ruža* (The Zagorje Rose) in twelve instalments in the journal Prosvjeta. It was published as a book later in the same year and reissued in 1911. Davila presented the tale in a romantic style reminiscent of August Šenoa's prose, emphasising Veronika's local identity and the foreignness (Germanness) of Frederick and his father. This aligned with Davila's political views as a self-declared "Starčevićanac" (follower of Ante Starčević), critical of foreign influence and supportive of a radical nationalist agenda.

Davila was not the only enthusiast of the legend. During the Croatian National Revival, it enjoyed significant popularity, as evidenced by the numerous dramatic adaptations: *Friedrich Graf von Cilli* by Johann Ritter von Kalchberg (1791); *Veronika od Desenic* [Veronika of Desenić] by Dragutin Rakovac (unfinished, 1831); *Czillei és a Hunyadiak* [Cilley and the Hunyadis] by Mihály Vörösmarty (1844); Veronika Desinićeva by Dragolja Jarnević (lost manuscript, 1851); *Veronika Desinićka* by Franjo Žigrović Pretočki (1876, staged at the old Zagreb theatre at St. Mark's Square, script lost); and Veronika Deseniška by Josip Jurčič (1886, published in Ljubljana). The story was also referenced in the 1996 film *Kalvarija* [Calvary], directed by Zvonimir Maycug, likely the first Croatian film to explore same-sex relationships. The film never entered the canon of Croatian cinema, partly due to its controversial artistic choices and the cultural environment's resistance to this experimental work.

The legend of Veronika Desinićka is an uncontested part of Croatian cultural heritage. There is no controversy surrounding its origin or its connection to a specific site: Veliki Tabor Castle in Croatia (Figure 8). Set in a defined historical and geographical context within Croatian state borders, the story has naturally been integrated into the national narrative and is included in the school curriculum. Its locality and clear rooting in Croatian tradition make it a widely recognised and transmitted legend within the national education system. By



Figure 8. Veliki Tabor Castle.
Photo by Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, 2022

contrast, *Zidanje Skadra* has not been included in the Croatian school canon, likely due to its ambiguous genealogy, stemming from the multilayered Balkan oral tradition and the diverse cultural claims over the story. The song exists in various versions and is present in Albanian, Serbian, Montenegrin, and Macedonian traditions, making it difficult to assign it to a single national space. Unlike the legend of Veronika, which fits neatly into a stable national context, *Zidanje Skadra* remains a text of indeterminate and contested cultural affiliation – likely influencing its exclusion from the Croatian educational system.

Veliki Tabor offers an excellent example of a site that successfully capitalises on its tourism potential. The museum's carefully designed communication strategy, together with the skilful extraction and framing of the walling up story as both narratively compelling and economically profitable, has yielded tangible results. This success, however, is not accidental; the region of Hrvatsko Zagorje is highly aware of its own touristic appeal and consistently cultivates its brand. Moreover, its dynamic and well-coordinated institutional network further strengthens the region's cultural and economic position.

The landscape surrounding the castle is characteristic of Hrvatsko Zagorje: hilly, verdant, and composed of a mosaic of forests, agricultural fields, and vineyards. The hills are covered with lush vegetation, including oaks, hornbeams, and chestnut trees, while the valleys host meadows and small streams. The region is renowned for its vineyards and orchards, as the microclimate is favourable for growing grapes and other fruit. A deeply rooted winemaking tradition acts as a major draw for visitors, fitting harmoniously into broader strategies for heritage promotion. Nearby, one can also find traditional rural homesteads and small towns that have retained their historical character. The castle is one of the region's most picturesque landmarks, and its surroundings encourage hiking and exploration of local nature and cultural heritage.

Visitors tempted to enter the castle are greeted by an inner courtyard surrounded by arched arcades. The stone arches and the cobbled ground give the space a distinctive character, allowing one to sense the spirit of past centuries. Inside the museum – part of the five-institution network of Muzej Hrvatskog Zagorja – there is an exhibition dedicated to Veronika of Desinić. In one of the chambers of the medieval castle, visitors can easily spot a human skull among the many displayed objects (Figure 9). According to local legend (and legends are not fond of rational verification) the skull belongs to Veronika.

Human remains have been discovered at the castle site on at least three occasions. The first occurred around 1890, when researchers found a skeleton; nearly a hundred years later, in 1982, a skull was unearthed. Without conducting any laboratory testing and by adopting an interpretation that conveniently aligned with the local legend, it was simply assumed that the skull was female. It was displayed in the castle chapel with a label reading "Veronika Desinićka?!", reinforcing the association between the human remains and the legend of the walling up. In 2012, during ongoing conservation work, more human remains were found in the castle walls – this time, two strands of hair. Carbon-14 isotope analysis revealed that both the skull and the hair most likely date from the second half of the 17th century and therefore could not belong to Veronika, whose story is set in the 15th century (Jagarčec, 2013).



Figure 9. Skull exhibited at the *Muzej Hrvatskog Zagorja* [Museum of the Croatian Zagorje], Veliki Tabor Castle. Photo by Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, 2022

Although it has now been confirmed that the skull does not belong to Veronika, who was supposedly walled up for her romantic transgressions, visitors to the castle still devote considerable attention to this exhibit. Catalogued as number 14, the artifact is laconically labelled as "Skull", which only fuels the imagination. Those who do not read museum labels carefully are left with the impression that it is indeed the skull of the girl from the legend. Next to it are the aforementioned strands of human hair (similarly labelled simply as "Hair"), followed by a fragment of a relief depicting a woman. In the room where these artifacts are displayed, visitors speak in hushed tones, as if concealing their desire for literal interpretation, voicing the question: where exactly was the woman walled up? This reveals how difficult it is to separate legend from reality, as well as how seductive the prospect of "an ultra-rational world built on concreteness, literal meaning, and the logic of either/or" can be (Tokarczuk, 2020).

The temptation to identify the woman from the legend in the remains, and the vivid fascination with her story, are also evident in the institution's guestbook. One can read, for instance, that someone found the story "captivating", that another visitor learned during the tour "that Veronika was buried alive within the walls" (Figure 10), or that guests expressed pity for the woman, claimed they had searched for her within the castle walls, and even reported hearing her voice during the visit.

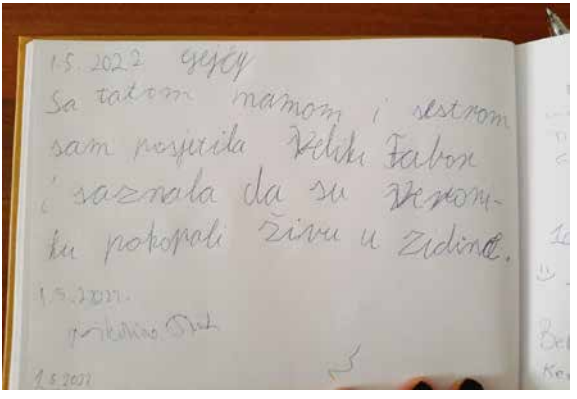


Figure 10. Guestbook entry at Veliki Tabor Castle, reading "With my dad, mum, and sister I visited Veliki Tabor and learned that Veronika was buried alive within the walls".
Photo by Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, 2022

A skull of uncertain origin evokes strong emotions: the idea of being walled up elicits compassion, ignites the imagination, and enables visitors to immerse themselves in the history of the place. Human remains become a medium through which contact with the past is activated – a prompt for reflection on the site, the region, and the social relations of the past. Contrary to expectations,

the skull does not provoke disgust. Stripped of skin and tissue, dried out, as if peeled away from the human being, it is entirely familiar in our culture, almost inviting various ways of looking: curious, reflective, scientific. It is, quite simply, a body after the body[20].

The literary and narrative power of the legend of Veronika of Desinić elevates tourism in Veliki Tabor beyond a typical visit – it becomes an immersive experience that prompts reflection on life and death. In stark contrast stands the small town of Orahovica: just under four thousand inhabitants, located in central Slavonia, a continental and less tourist-oriented part of the country, surrounded by picturesque hills and forests. Just before reaching Orahovica, travellers can stop at a scenic overlook offering a panoramic view of the green plain stretching all the way to the horizon. An information board reminds visitors that fourteen million years ago this area was submerged by the Pannonian Sea. Today, only a geological memory remains – the result of relentless climatic processes. Orahovica lies neither on the shores of the ancient Pannonian Sea nor on the modern Adriatic, which affects its status. In Croatia, the most valued and recognised locations are those on the coast. Even the most trivial stories can transform into narratives of monumental significance in coastal settings. Meanwhile, a powerful legend may completely lose its relevance if circumstances do not support it – when there is no spectacular backdrop and the prospect of profitability is lacking.

The most convenient way to reach Orahovica from Croatia's capital is by car. While public transport is available, it involves a seven-hour journey with a transfer. The prospect of spending so many hours on the road may not seem appealing to everyone – especially considering what this small Slavonian town has to offer. Orahovica does not try to hide its provincial character. Nestled among green hills, it lives a peaceful and safe life – so long as the bus connection to the outside world is maintained. The topographical centre of the town is a pleasantly arranged park. A visit in May promises a true symphony of rose scents – it is clear that they are especially well cared for here.

In addition to a bandstand used by performing artists – such as the amateur Brass Band of the Volunteer Fire Department from nearby Đakovo – the park also contains traces of the legend that lead us toward the town's past. At the centre of this spacious green area stands the *Sjenica kneginje Ružice* (Figure 11) – a pavilion dedicated to a girl named Ružica, offering respite from the scorching sun – as well as wooden figurines of medieval knights, likely remnants of one of the local festivals, suggesting the town's historical and chivalric traditions. Yet, the park is not a space bustling with everyday life. The Ružica Pavilion is set apart from the café life typical even of small Croatian towns. Though the cafés are relatively close by, they are oriented toward the bus station and local

[20] I have discussed the question of the body in the context of walling up in my article *The Body after the Body: The Topos of the Foundation Sacrifice and Attempts at Its Necro-Reading* (see Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, 2025).

market. Only the annual local holiday brings people into the park. Celebrated on 3 May, it merges the Orahovica Town Day with the parish feast day of the Finding of the Holy Cross (blagdan Našašća sv. Križa). However, the order of the festivities does not reference the legend, revolving instead around the activities of the volunteer fire department, Croatian tamburitza players, and veterans' associations, interwoven with religious ceremonies.



Figure 11. Pavilion of Princess Ružica in the city park in Orahovica.
Photo by Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, 2022

Not far from the park, on a nearby hill, rise the ruins of the medieval fortress Ružicagrad, whose image is also featured in the town's coat of arms (Figure 12 and Figure 13). The route to the fortress, however, is far from straightforward: an independent hike, even with the help of a navigation app, may end in the shallow waters of a small stream. When asked for directions, locals sigh deeply – walking from town seems nearly impossible, and car access is complicated by construction work near an artificial reservoir at the base. When summer comes, residents of nearby villages seek refreshment here on hot days – a perfectly understandable need given the local microclimate. For now, however, both the path to the water and the one leading into the past remain shrouded in the mist of ambiguity, requiring determination from any traveller who dares to follow them.

The history of Ružicagrad is associated with many tales, among which those containing the motif of walling up are particularly significant from my research perspective. The versions of the legend vary, each introducing subtle modifications, different rescue strategies, and divergent morals. In one version, the youngest brother refuses to accept the fate assigned to him and, in an act of re-

bellion, chooses to confront his older brothers. He prevails, and his reward is the right to continue building the city without the need to offer a human sacrifice.

This is a crucial transgression: a rejection of founding the community on sacrifice, a defiance of ritual, and a rupture with the supernatural forces that supposedly govern the site. The central figure of this refusal is the youngest brother – he questions the necessity of sacrificing his beloved and proposes a concept of "substitute sacrifice", offering his own life instead. In doing so, it is not his wife but he himself who becomes the figure of transformation, thereby redefining not only the role of the woman in this narrative, but also his own position within the structure of the community.



Figure 12. Ruins of the medieval fortress Ružicagrad.
Photo by Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, 2022



Figure 13. Coat of Arms of Orahovica.
Source: https://www.orahovica.hr, retrieved 4.08.2026

If we accept that the boundary of the Balkans runs along the Sava River (Cvijić, 1918; Reclus, 1882; Todorova, 1997), which lies about 60 km south of Orahovica, and recall the fact that Croatian versions of the song are almost always derivative of the Albanian/Serbian song about Skadar or the bridge on the Drina, it may seem plausible that this is the final place to which the song managed to spread. The numerous modifications it underwent, including the agency of the youngest brother, the husband's willingness to sacrifice his own life, the refusal to base the social order on a feminocentric thanatic element, and the severing of ties consolidated through violence, suggest that local cultural filters were stronger than the original force of the folk song. Ružicagrad, as a site that is hard to access, mysterious, and demanding of determination from travellers, becomes a symbolic point marking an elusive boundary – not so much territorial as symbolic – dividing different ways of perceiving community and belonging.

The contemporary version of the legend introduces yet another reinterpretation, illustrating a vertical transfer within a single culture. Written down by Hrvoje Hitrec, a writer and politician associated with the conservative Croatian Democratic Union, the legend is set in the context of the ancient history of Croatian noblemen who built fortresses in this area, vulnerable to attacks from eastern peoples (first the Tatars and later the Turks; Hitrec, 2012). This version serves more as a tool for sketching a grand Croatian past and narrating the origins of Croatian identity in the Middle Ages than as a tale of a foundation sacrifice, but nevertheless contains several elements of scholarly interest.

In this version, the father, Bartol, and his three sons, Adam, Radman, and the youngest, Nikola, arrive at one of the Slavonian manors, where the two older brothers find wealthy and beautiful wives, while Nikola struggles for a long time to find a woman to love. Eventually, Ružica appears, a poor but virtuous girl. Before long, the elder brothers' wives begin to desire a better life, prompting the brothers jointly to decide to build a new town. However, the construction does not progress, some force is hindering its completion[21]. A breakthrough comes when one of the brothers has a dream that explains the failure. This time, it is not a vision sent by magical forces but a divine intervention. God declares that the crumbling walls are a punishment for the sins of their ancestors, and that completing the construction will require a sacrifice. Here we see a clear cultural shift: human fate is no longer determined by magical forces but by God. It just so happens that Ružica, the most humble and dutiful, is the first to arrive at the construction site.

Though she bears no guilt, the girl accepts her fate, thereby becoming the vehicle through which the logic of collective responsibility for the past is enacted, and the sacrifice is carried out (Figure 14). This reproduces the traditional

[21] One version of the legend *O vili Ružici* [About the Vila Ružica] tells that the construction is being obstructed by fairies. At the climax of the story, the builders wall up the unruly fairy into the foundations of the structure.

role of the woman: her readiness to die for the community and her function as the sacrificial foundation of a new order. By uttering the words "Let God's will be done", Ružica is inscribed into a Christological narrative of accepting death for the good of the community.

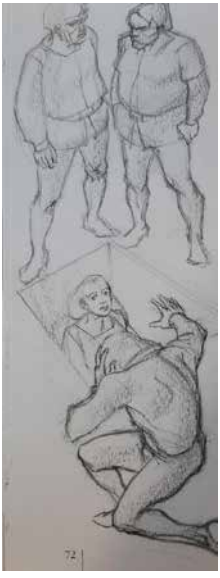


Figure 14. Illustration by Dušan Gačić for the version of the legend of the walling-up of Ružica, published in Hrvoje Hitrec's book *Hrvatske legende* (Hitrec, 2012)

The youngest brother, unable to bear the burden of the tragedy, descends into madness and flees into the forest, living like a wild animal. The other brothers, unwilling to reveal the truth, conceal the circumstances of the construction from their parents. Eventually, the youngest son is found and cared for by his mother. This aspect of the narrative is significant: from the very beginning, it contains a strong suggestion of the feminisation of the youngest heir (pale complexion, blue eyes, excessive sensitivity), which, in the context of Hitrec's conservative perspective, seems to reinforce the marginalisation of the protagonist both as a man (the youngest son) and as a figure of resistance to the traditional social structure.

The town is completed after three years. However, the youngest brother, nursed back to health by his mother, suddenly realises that he was the victim of a conspiracy by his older brothers, who had warned their wives in advance. During a visit by noble guests, he reveals the entire story, which everyone unanimously recognises as a terrible crime (*strašan zločin*). In an act of despair, the young man curses the town and leaps from the tower into the very place where his wife had been walled up. His father and mother follow in his footsteps, and

the brothers are struck by painful illnesses. The town becomes depopulated; it suffers the most dreadful punishment imaginable: total annihilation, compounded by a later Turkish invasion.

We are thus dealing with numerous traces indicating that the legend was filtered through a religious lens, which significantly shifted its ultimate message. Divine intervention and moral judgement of the act are introduced. The protagonist's descent into madness following the event, as well as his refusal to accept the necessity of the sacrifice, point to the influence of religious norms that define the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. This narrative shift, shaped by religious imaginaries, highlights the conflict between human will and the authority of the Old Testament God, who imposes demands that the protagonist perceives as impossible to fulfil.

In light of the above, the political potential of the legend and its deeper ideological implications, particularly within the context of a conservative political framework, also merit attention. The legend could serve as a tool in debates concerning tradition, social order, and the role of religion in shaping political values, especially in milieus that emphasise the religious foundation of statehood and morality.

However, Orahovica does not harness the potential of this narrative. It plays no central role in shaping local identity, nor does it serve as a draw for tourism. Economic investment is the region's priority, while the preservation of national heritage, though important, is relegated to the background in the face of everyday needs. The ruins of the manor on the hills are difficult to access, and any vision of their revitalisation seems unimaginable. In this context, the lack of investment in heritage preservation, alongside investment in the reservoir, does not appear to reflect neglect of history, but rather a rational decision based on economic pragmatism.

Performative Walling up

The art project *The Penance* by contemporary Croatian visual artist and performer Vice Tomasović[22] (n.d.) is a cultural text that offers a new interpretation of the topos of walling up. The project refers to the song of the foundation sacrifice only indirectly; nevertheless, within what might be described as a kind of cultural desert that surrounds this topos in Croatian culture, it deserves recognition and deeper analysis. In this project, composed of five interrelated

[22] Vice Tomasović (b. 1986, Split) received his degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Split in 2009. He is the founder and director of the contemporary art festival Almissa Open Art in Omiš. Until 2023, he served as the president of the Croatian Association of Fine Artists in Split and ran the Salon Galić Gallery. A versatile multimedia artist, Tomasović works across diverse artistic disciplines. I have written more about this performance elsewhere (Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, 2024a).

elements, the artist performs an act of self-walling up. The emphasis lies on the creation of various spaces, on establishing and dissolving boundaries between them, and on constructing specific heterotopias and heterochronies (Foucault, 1984/1986).

The performance consists of five parts, presented at different times and in different spaces. Its fundamental components are four classical performances staged in four distinct locations between 2015 and 2018. Each was associated with one of the four elements – fire, earth, water, and air – that, in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, constitute the universe. The final part, shown to the public in 2021, combines elements of performance and exhibition.

The structure of the artistic act followed a similar pattern on each occasion: using bricks and mortar, the artist enacted an act of self-inclusion within a confined space (approximately $1m^2$), consciously selecting sites and objects with contextual significance for the creative process. The artist himself interpreted the act of walling up through religious terminology and symbolism, referring to Christian spiritual techniques and to the concept of reconciliation as the foundation of coexistence (Tomasović, n.d.). In his understanding, the gesture had an expiatory character: it represented an act of atonement performed by one social group on behalf of another, symbolically connected to a given space. The artist explicitly stated that his aim was not to initiate a discourse on faith (Marjanić & Tomasović, 2019) but rather to highlight the importance of reconciliation, which, in his view, becomes manifest through an act of expiation.

In the folk song of walling up, the sacrificial act has a prospective character: its purpose is to appease supernatural forces to ensure the successful completion of the construction. It is therefore an action directed toward the future, intended to secure the success of the undertaking and, consequently, to guarantee the endurance of the community. In contrast, in the performance *The Penance*, the sacrifice takes on a retrospective dimension – it refers to the past and functions as a form of expiation for wrongs already committed. What connects both acts is the presence of an ambiguously defined *communitas*. In the folk song in which the brothers building the city are persuaded by a *vila* to wall up one of their wives (the first to arrive at the construction site), this community cannot yet be understood in national terms – the song spread during a period when national narratives had not yet developed in a systematic way. It was only in the 19th century that the song was adapted for national purposes. One may therefore assume that originally it referred to a community based on kinship, shared territory, or – most likely – municipal structures.

Tomasović, as an artist, also identifies with a community whose identity is fluid and negotiable. This is clearly revealed in his own interpretation of the performance: "In this (or our) penance, I use Christian elements to create a narrative of communal redemption" (Marjanić & Tomasović, 2019; Tomasović, n.d.). In the performances discussed, the artist becomes a representative of a group that has committed acts of violence, both physical and symbolic, and performs an act of atonement on its behalf. The artist thus becomes the con-

science of humanity – the one who cares for its condition. It is, of course, not a one-sided action, just as the performance itself is not one-sided: it "may have not only an external (social) dimension, but also an internal one (thus directed toward the agent, the performer of the act)" (Wachowski, 2015, p. 99). The penitential performance is therefore bidirectional, acting both upon the group to which it is addressed and upon the community on whose behalf the artist performs the act of contrition. As a consequence, the act of walling up acquires a communal dimension, entirely erasing the individual perspective of existence. The performer's body ceases to function as an autonomous entity and becomes a symbolic representative of the community.

Walling up as a performative act aligns with the specific logic of liminal spaces in which status transcends dominant social, historical, and political orders. These spaces – abstracted institutionally or discursively from the surrounding reality – constitute sites with clearly defined boundaries, where the system of opening and closing, often associated with rites of passage, plays a crucial role. Walling up, as an expiatory and communal act, unfolds precisely within such spaces, which simultaneously isolate and contextualise the artist's gesture, endowing it with multilayered temporal and symbolic dimensions.

Heterotopias, described by Foucault as "worlds within worlds" with a nested structure, operate according to their own rules, often in contradiction to those governing the spaces that surround them. They are places linked to states of crisis or deviation and also accumulate multiple temporal dimensions (Foucault, 1984/1986). In the context of *The Penance*, walling up not only abolishes the individual subjectivity of the performer – turning his body into a medium of communal redemption – but also transforms the given site into a heterotopia, where the individual act of repentance acquires social and historical dimensions.

Framing the performance within the concept of heterotopia allows us to perceive how the act of immersion in material, social, and intellectual contexts broadens the scope of its impact. Walling up – seemingly a gesture of physical confinement – actually opens a space for multidimensional interpretation, in which space, time, and community intertwine within a dynamic performative structure. Such an approach enables an analysis of the various elements that compose the sequence of *The Penance* – their constructive basis, shifting contexts, and final meaning – revealing the performance as an act of both retrospective expiation and contemporary reflection on the processes of reconciliation.

The Five Elements of Walling up: Fire, Earth, Water, Air, Aether

The first instalment of *The Penance* took place in 2015 at the synagogue in Varaždin – a site marked by a fraught history. Officially inaugurated in 1861, the synagogue was the first monumental Jewish temple in a Croatian city. However, during World War II, Varaždin earned the disgraceful distinction of being the first city in Croatia to "resolve the Jewish question" (cf. Lončarić, 2017),

and the synagogue was converted by the Ustaše regime into a stable. After the war, it served various purposes before falling into disrepair by 1990. Its restoration only began in 2019, transforming it once again into a cultural venue, partly dedicated to Jewish heritage. Tomasović's performance was part of the 14th Performance Days in Varaždin, centred around the theme "Tearing Down Walls", which emphasised the need to dismantle social, political, and mental barriers (Maletin Vojvodić, 2015). In a provocative inversion of this concept, Tomasović built a wall (Figure 15) as a symbolic act of expiation towards the Jewish community. In his interpretation, the wall did not function as a barrier but as a penitential medium in which walling up became part of a tradition of ritual atonement. The artist consciously employed the element of fire – both a symbol of mystical power and the destructive tool of the "Final Solution" – as an integral part of the work (Tomasović, n.d.). By invoking fire in this context, Tomasović touched on one of the most painful and insufficiently processed aspects of Croatian collective memory: the crimes committed during the Second World War. His body, subjected to the act of self-walling up, became a repository of memory, confronting the community with a repressed history. The artist emphasised his deliberate rejection of abstract spiritual techniques in favour of a physical, expiatory gesture (Maletin Vojvodić, 2015). In doing so, the performance became both a testimony of guilt and an attempt at symbolic reparation.



Figure 15. Vice Tomasović walls himself up in a synagogue.
Photo by Ljiljana Maletin Vojvodić, Varaždin, 2015

During the reprise of the festival in Pula in 2015, Vice Tomasović relocated *The Penance* to a new setting, thereby redefining its meaning – even though the core action, the act of walling up, remained unchanged. The artist deliberately followed new interpretive threads emerging from the specific history of Pula, a city whose identity is closely tied to its military character (Kalčić, 2015). This time, the walling up took place inside a bunker located within the grounds of the port admiralty (*Admiralitet*), a monumental structure erected

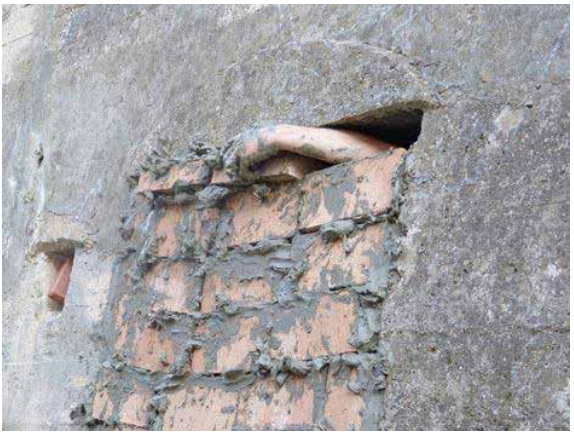


Figure 16. Performance in a bunker on the grounds of the Admiralty.
Photo by Ljiljana Maletin Vojvodić, Pula, 2015

in the 19th century that survived all major conflicts of the 20th century and for decades served as a naval command centre, first for the Austro-Hungarian Empire and later for Yugoslavia (Figure16).

The Penance performance in Pula was semantically tied to the element of earth. The artist commented on this connection as follows: "I walled myself up inside a military bunker, which is the most obvious architectural object associated with war, and wars are most often fought over land, on which such bunkers are placed" (Tomasović, n.d.). This time, Tomasović's intention was to perform an act of atonement on behalf of all those harmed by armed conflict. As an artist, he assumed moral responsibility for the suffering inflicted by armies and the political systems they serve[23]. This gesture carries a dual significance. On the one hand, Croatia has for centuries been a site of imperial rivalry, without playing an independent role in grand politics; on the other hand, in the 1990s it became an active participant in the bloody post-Yugoslav conflicts, both as a victim and as an aggressor. *The Penance* does not offer explicit references to any specific wars or crimes, which allows the act of atonement to become universalised; the artist performs an expiatory gesture on behalf of all humanity,

[23] A significant context for Tomasović's performance was another act taking place simultaneously: Dragan Vojvodić's performance *Hit me! Hit me! Hit me! Never stop!* During this event, Vojvodić repeatedly struck a tennis ball with a racket so that it bounced off the wall of the bunker in which Tomasović's performance was being held at the same time. Vojvodić's intention was to generate noise that, in his view, embodied futile activity and a "cacophonous racket", phenomena he considered symptomatic of social and political life in the Balkans (*14. Dani performansa Varaždin u Puli*, 2015). By producing constant noise, his performance, on the one hand, offered the audience a kind of visual counter-proposal – an alternative way of confronting the surrounding reality – and, on the other hand, intensified the calm, monotonous act of walling up.

suggesting that war itself is a collective guilt, one that cannot be assigned solely to particular nations or political factions.

The Split iteration of *The Penance* (2016), presented during the Open Performance Days "Dopust", was situated within the context of the element of water, though in its polluted, impure form. The act of self-walling up took place in the underground chambers of Diocletian's Palace, below sea level, near a former sewage outlet – evoking the topography of urban canals and the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, whose body was said to have been thrown into the Cloaca Maxima. The location was no coincidence – Tomasović launched a critique of the uncritical cult of Diocletian's heritage in Split, pointing to the paradox of the unquestioned celebration of the legacy of an emperor who was among the fiercest persecutors of Christians. In his view, this lack of reflection stems from a blind pursuit of tourism profits (Krolo, 2016).

The performance, therefore, did not concern itself solely with the past; it also addressed contemporary mechanisms of gentrification and the destructive effects of capitalism, which have transformed Diocletian's Palace into a space wholly subordinated to commercial interests. Once a site of significant artistic activity and now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the palace has become governed by profit-driven logic, with new legal regulations prohibiting the use of its space for artistic purposes (Marjanić & Tomasović, 2019)[24]. Deeply connected to the city of Split, Tomasović situated his act of walling up at the intersection of global (capitalism) and local (erosion of urban community identity) issues. In doing so, his performance aligns with the logic of the walled-up woman songs – anchored in a specific place and its social dynamics – underscoring the need for atonement on behalf of a city that has lost its integrity in the name of profit.

The fourth performance was presented in 2018 at the Meštrović Pavilion in Zagreb, a building administered by the Croatian Association of Visual Artists. The performer associated this iteration with the element of air and carried out the act in a ventilation opening located high under the ceiling (See "*Izložba VICE TOMASOVIĆA 'Kvintesencija'*", 2021). As he stated: "This Penance was directed at all institutions of power that exploit those they were created to serve" (Marjanić & Tomasović, 2019). The gallery located in this building is one of the most dynamic art institutions in the country. Its exhibitions set trends, critically evaluate artistic practices, and position Croatian art within a global context. The building itself has a complex history and is "saturated" with political and ideological meanings, as it served as the seat of significant institutions under different political systems. By choosing to perform his *Penance* in a cultural institution, Tomasović assumes responsibility for the field of art in which he

[24] Tomasović is likely also alluding to a conflict he had with the management of the City Museum of Split (a municipal institution). The dispute concerned the use of the basement spaces of the Diocletian's Palace and was reported in the local media. Since 2019, the basements of the Diocletian's Palace have been managed by the city authorities under an agreement with the Croatian Ministry of Culture (see, e. g., Vidulić, 2016).

occupies a dual position: that of an artist and that of a person managing various institutions, and thus someone who is intimately familiar with the structural pains of that environment. *Penance*, as a form of purification, becomes not merely a personal gesture, but also an attempt to provoke reflection on the need for structural change. Certain parallels may be drawn here between the folk song about walling up and the performance discussed, particularly in the understanding of space as both a metaphor and a tool of oppression – but also of purification. Both works may be read as narratives about establishing a new order and the necessity of transcending boundaries in that process.

The final part of the cycle, presented in 2021 at the Vladimir Bužančić Gallery in Zagreb, served as a conclusion to the entire artistic project. Titled *Kvintesencija* [Quintessence], it referenced both its synthesising character and Aristotelian cosmology, in which quintessence is the most perfect element: the ethereal substance of celestial bodies, and even a divine element. In the context of the exhibition, the term also acquired a contemporary dimension, referring to the cryptocurrency Ether, the currency required to access the video performance. This twist functioned as an interpretive key to the exhibition, which addressed the notion of markets – this time, digital ones (Greiner, 2021). The exhibition space featured bricks in glass cases, serving as material documentation of the four previous performances, accompanied by photographic records. The centrepiece of the display was the fifth act of walling up, recorded as a video performance (Figure 17). This remediation introduced a sense of aseptic detachment, while the video's bidirectional playback blurred the boundary between being walled up and being un-walled up.



Figure 17. Still from the fifth act of walling up, recorded as a video performance. Photo by Centar za kulturu Novi Zagreb

Through this "crypto walling up", Tomasović performed an act of penance that referenced the dark sides of the Internet: realms filled with hidden, alternative worlds governed by their own economic rules, generating half-truths, infodemics, and often possessing a criminal dimension. The artist performed penance on behalf of humanity, particularly its internet-using part, striving to redeem the digital transgressions of our times.

The final exhibition thus brings together all previously produced artistic manifestations, documenting them and creatively engaging with repetition. The event culminates in a virtual act of walling up, simultaneously an act of creating an archive of the performance, a form of documentation, and a remediation of ephemeral art. It also marks a symbolic return to material reality, embodied by the brick elevated to the status of an artifact. The artist deliberately rejects the anti-repetition ethos of performance art (Phelan, 1993, pp. 146–148), consciously engaging in repetition and marking each performance iteration with differences stemming from the semantics of the specific site, which produce shifts within the heterotopic nature of the performance itself.

Heterotopias of Performance, Heterotopias of Walling Up

A deconstruction of all Tomasović's performances comprising *The Penance* reveals a recurring pattern in the artist's practice: from a space embedded in the present, be it a decaying synagogue, a bunker used by now-defunct systems and authorities, a major tourist attraction, a prestigious and trendsetting art gallery, or the globally accessible realm of the internet, he carves out a human-sized cubicle and suspends its temporal function. When the self-walling up begins, the present is interrupted and connected with the past, or rather, with multiple layers of past meanings and temporalities. Performing within meaning-saturated spaces compels them to re-establish ties with their histories and traditions, and to rearticulate those ties. Performance is an art of the past – if only because, by the time we speak of it, it is already gone. The past, however, is complicated and difficult to navigate, which is why the act of walling up must be repeated. Still, each iteration constitutes a transformational repetition (Załuski, 2013, p. 50).

Within this carved-out space, the artist generates a temporally complex zone. Secular time loses its authority, giving way to sacred time: the time of sacrifice and penance. Behind the bricks, where the artist remains confined (Tomasović does not exit the wall until the last viewer departs), neither the past nor the present dominates – they coexist, as the time of performance and the time it thematically evokes. The future, as always, remains a potential. The initial act becomes an event that multiplies, divides, and mutates into a theoretically infinite number of instances, constituting a viral ontology of performance (Bedford, 2012, pp. 77–78).

This heterotopia is also produced through a distinct ritual of passage (enclosure), witnessed in real time by the audience. The performer's gradual disappearance from view is laborious: the process of walling-up is slow, and each brick must be carefully fitted. The restricted range of motion intensifies this condition; it defines the space as a heterotopia of deviation. The performer's body is confined, locked in an uncomfortable position, and stripped of the freedom of movement typical of the outside world. By immobilising himself, the artist renounces autonomy, submitting to social exclusion and removal from

circulation. He also embraces a form of inactivity, which in the contemporary context may be read as deviant. Furthermore, he suspends his own visibility, shielding himself from the audience's gaze, nearly contradicting the core of performance, which relies fundamentally on being seen. As he explains: "Viewers see only the process by which the bricks separate me from them, and I become one with the surroundings they inhabit. By doing this, I annul myself and in return incorporate part of them into a space burdened with their own heritage" (Tomasović, n.d.).

We may also identify a heterotopia of crisis, which is key to Foucault's conceptual framework. Walling up becomes a gesture of contrition and expresses the need for atonement. The artist exposes himself on behalf of a community he claims to represent, appearing between two extremes: transgression and redemption. Associations with Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* are entirely justified. The heterotopia of crisis is also evoked when the act of self-walling up is seen as a simulation of a suicide attempt (or, in another light, a ritual self-sacrifice) performed before an audience.

Finally, the artist's physical state borders on symbolic death. Walling up signifies not only obliteration and invisibility but also a submission of the body to potential death – first social, then biological. The meditative cell in which the performer resides – interpreted as a symbolic temple or heart, a site of death and resurrection, and a space of silence and contemplation – transforms into catacombs.

The final heterotopic feature of *The Penance* is its capacity to influence external space. Tomasović's performance aspires to reshape both local and global mental landscapes. This ambition is hardly surprising – socially engaged artists, as Tomasović is, seek to shape awareness and transform reality beyond the performance itself. This asserted right to influence the world stems from the quasi-magical character often attributed to performativity today. It is believed to possess the unbounded potential to alter the world and summon new realities into being (Lütticken, 2012).

Vice Tomasović's *The Penance* does not directly reference the song of the building of Skadar or any other cultural text concerning the topos of foundation sacrifice. Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to claim that his act of self-walling up functions in cultural isolation from such traditions. Tomasović reactivates the act of walling up, framing it as an act of penitence, a gesture of expiation. In doing so, he draws attention to its metaphysical and religious dimensions. It is not inconceivable that gendered dynamics play a role here: whereas the woman becomes the sacrificial victim of her community at the moment when that community is still being constituted (cf. Aleksić, 2013; Arsić, 2002; Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1985), the man appears as its redeemer who, through a generous gesture, decides to assume *ex post* responsibility for what has already been built. Regardless of the motivation, the performing body in Tomasović's work generates a heterotopia: a space of exception, governed by different rules. The performer's body becomes a repository of collective memory, compelled to re-

peat communal traumas, confront the return of what has been repressed and suppressed, or produce a form of counter-memory. Tomasović – active and agentive – carries out the redemptive walling up deliberately and willingly, rendering the act meaningful precisely because he anchors it in self-reflexivity regarding his own actions.

Conclusion

The topos of the foundation sacrifice in Croatian culture is marked by a distinctive semantic texture that generates unique structures of meaning, entangled in the region's specific historical and cultural context. Songs that draw on this motif undergo multilayered transformations through adaptation to the local linguistic landscape and through reflection of the identity structures of the communities that preserve and reinterpret them in the process of cultural transmission.

Academic engagement with this topos in Croatian scholarship remains relatively limited, creating space for independent inquiry unbound by established interpretive paradigms. As a result, this study was able to focus on tracing local idioms of walling up without adhering to predefined hermeneutic frameworks. Neither of the two major institutions that currently house archival records and audio recordings of such songs imposes such constraints: Matica hrvatska, which began documenting traditional folk repertoires in the 19th century, and the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb – a leading centre for the study of folk culture, including work in the field of the so-called "new ethnography". At the latter, I had the opportunity to listen to an archival recording made in 1969 on the island of Brač. The song *Zidanje Skadra*, performed by Kleme Dujmović, born in 1898, preserves a structure similar to the variant recorded by Vuk Karadžić. The piece is shaped by a rough, pulsing rhythm and an archaic, austere sound, dominated by melismatic technique and extended phrases. Its monotonous melodic narrative, reminiscent of prayer chant, reinforces the trance-like, almost ritualistic character of the performance. Experiencing the folk song in its archival form can be described as a liminal encounter that merges cognitive and affective dimensions.

The analysis of the primary texts reveals that the key variables within the topos of sacrifice do not focus primarily on the mechanics of the act itself; instead, they focus on the relationship between the sacrificed woman and the child. A particularly important function within this dynamic narrative structure is played by the gaze – an act of performative care – which aligns with the logic of the song and strengthens its affective expression. Christian symbolic tropes also play a significant role in these compositions, manifesting in both onomastics and sacred floral motifs, pointing to syncretic processes that integrate multiple semantic systems.

Of particular note is the presence of moralising endings, a distinguishing feature of the Croatian version of the topos compared to other Balkan variants. These endings highlight not only the mnemonic function of the songs but also their ethical and didactic role within the framework of local oral culture. Especially intriguing are the so-called "rescue motifs" found in some songs, in which the victim – through the creative intervention of the singer – escapes death. In this context, the figure of the author emerges as one wielding power over the word, which does not exist apart from their intentional influence, opening reflection on narrative agency and symbolic control over the topos.

In the early 20th century, interpretations emphasising solar and vegetative themes were also significant, suggesting a link between sacrifice and the annual cycle. In parallel, the topos was interpreted as a remnant of archaic fertility rituals and cosmogonic myths in which the sacrifice constituted an act of establishing order and harmony. In this view, the songs enact narrative transgressions – crossing boundaries between life and death, the sacred and the profane, history and mythology – transforming them from folkloric texts into philosophical and existential meditations on sacrifice, memory, and survival.

Equally important is the political instrumentalisation of the topos within the Croatian tradition, particularly evident in the interwar period, when Yugoslavia sought to consolidate its identity by invoking shared cultural heritage. In the 1920s, the motif of the foundation sacrifice was recast as a symbol of a unifying South Slavic community, in which the sacrifice served as the founding act of a new order. In state narratives, the topos acquired the status of an exalted metaphor for the individual's sacrifice for the collective, legitimising ritualised violence as a necessity of a higher order.

Today, however, references to this topos are rare, and the motif is often invoked as a conceptual experiment – an intellectual gesture devoid of organic continuity. This, however, does not imply that the topos has lost its semantic potency. On the contrary, its openness to new interpretations and its capacity for reinterpretation make it a space for potential, as yet unfulfilled, meanings.

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Przemysław Kordos

Greece. The Voices From Under the Stone

The topos of the walled-up woman in the modern Greek (Greek-speaking) world is well known to the general Greek public, and it has also been extensively researched. It may therefore be argued that this is one of the most thoroughly researched motifs in Greek culture. At the same time, it remains a living motif, to which contemporary artists – mainly theatre practitioners – return, offering new perspectives on the topos itself (although perhaps without proposing genuinely innovative interpretations). For this reason, the primary aim of this synthesis is to identify the place and function of the topos in the environment in which it operates: within the folk tradition from which it originates, and in its reception, as reflected in cultural texts that, aware of its folk significance, draw upon the topos in order to retell it.

Topos of the Walled-Up Woman in Greek Folk Tradition

The motif of the walled-up woman is present in modern Greek folk culture, primarily through the folk song *Της Άρτας το γιοφύρι* [The Bridge of Arta] (also known as *Το γεφύρι της Άρτας* [The Bridge of Arta])[1]. The song is one of the most recognisable Greek folk songs, and all other versions of the walled-up motif are either absent or subordinated to it. The popularity of the text is evident not only in the fact that it is a canonical example of Greek folk songs as such, but also in the fact that it has long been part of the school curriculum (today in the third year of lower secondary school) and continues to inspire derivative works – primarily literary, theatrical, and musical. It is a dominant story, not only in terms of its plot structure but, above all, in terms of its meaning and its broadly accepted interpretation. Moreover, the object itself – the bridge – and the place where it stands (Figure 1), namely the Epirote city of Arta, dominate the folk message itself: there are, in fact, few songs about any other object or

[1] Modern Greek titles, terms and quotations are given in the original script, followed where necessary by a transliteration according to the ALA-LC romanization tables, which are also used for Greek personal names. Ancient names are given in their conventional classical form.

place. Exceptions to this are identified below, while the findings of Giōrgos Megas and Kōnstantinos Nigdelēs are discussed.

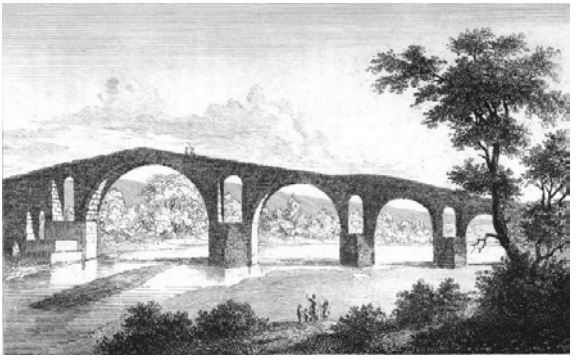


Figure 1. Drawing of the bridge in Arta by William Turner.
Source: Turner (1820, p. 112)

The plot of the story is relatively simple. Bricklayers and their apprentices are building a bridge that collapses every night. They are in despair, but one day they hear a supernatural voice that advises them to wall up a foundation sacrifice into the bridge: the beautiful young wife of the first master builder. The builder, therefore, sends for his wife. When the woman arrives, she is asked to go down into one of the pillars and find a ring that her husband has supposedly dropped there. Once she is inside, the builders begin to wall her up, and she casts a curse on the bridge. However, at the last moment, persuaded by their arguments, she changes the curse into a blessing that strengthens the structure. Of course, there are more elaborate versions of the song, including multi-threaded ones, which alter the setting of the action and introduce additional characters, but it seems that only the aforementioned elements of the plot are necessary to maintain minimum narrative coherence. The issue of plot extensions is addressed later in this chapter.

According to tradition, the construction of the current bridge was completed in 1612. It spans the Arachthos River (Αραχθός), which originates near the town of Metsovo (Μέτσοβο) in the Pindos Mountains. The river flows for approximately 110 km and empties into the Ambracian Gulf, part of the Ionian Sea, south of Arta. In its upper course, another famous stone bridge, the Plaka bridge, was built over it; the highest existing single-arch bridge in Greece, it is located in the Tzoumerka (Τζουμέρκα) mountains. The Plaka bridge collapsed during a flood in 2015 and was reconstructed five years later. The last comprehensive renovation of the bridge in Arta was carried out in the 1980s, and since the construction of a parallel concrete bridge in 1945, the historic bridge in Arta has been closed to traffic.

The historic bridge in Arta (Figures 2 and 3) is now 142 metres long and 3.75 metres wide. It consists of seven arches. Four of them are large, semicir-

cular, and asymmetrical, and lie above the water surface. The largest arch has an opening of 24 metres in width and 11.70 metres in height. The others are similar in size, with widths of 15.80 metres, 15.40 metres, and 16.20 metres, respectively, and heights of 9.00 metres, 9.60 metres, and 9.30 metres, respectively (Μαντάς, 2020, pp. 24–28; Μπεληγιάννης & Μπεληγιάννη, 2011, pp. 92–93).



Figure 2. The Arachthos River and two bridges in Arta, with the first, historic bridge in the foreground and the second, modern bridge in the background. On the right, on the southern bank, is the dark red building of the Regional Ethnographic Museum. Photo by Przemysław Kordos, 2022

An information board by the bridge provides a summary of its history and key dimensions. It also briefly mentions the legend: "Technical difficulties resulting from frequent floods and fear of the elements inspired the famous legend of the architect's wife, who had to be sacrificed so that the bridge could be grounded and strengthened (να στερεωθεί / na stereōthei). This legend became the subject not only of a famous poem, but also of plays and operas, as well as ethnographic studies"[2]. This passage refers not so much to a poem as to a folk song in post-Byzantine Greece, usually transmitted orally.

Below, I quote in full the only existing translation of the song into Polish (Borowska, 2004a, pp. 251–253), taken from the most comprehensive collection of Greek folk songs, with an extensive introduction to the whole and comments on each of the texts.

The Bridge of Arta

45 master builders, and 60 apprentices
Were building a bridge on the river near the town of Arta.
They built it all day long, but it fell down in the evening.
So the master builders began to weep, and the apprentices cried:
[5] "Alas, alas, our labour is in vain, our work is futile;
We build the bridge all day long, and it collapses in the evening!"

[2] Translation of an excerpt from the information board displayed by the bridge in October 2023.

Suddenly, a voice came from under the arch, the voice of a demon advising:
"The bridge will only stand when a person gives their life!
But an orphan is of no use, a stranger is of no use to you
Only the master's precious treasure – his wife is to be sacrificed".
The master hears this, feels pain, and despair breaks his heart.
He sends a bird; the nightingale is to convey these tidings to his wife:
"Do not hurry to get up and put on your dress, do not hurry to cook your food!
Walk slowly, come slowly, cross the bridge slowly".
But the bird did not listen to the master, and sang instead:
"Get up quickly, hurry to cook the food!
Walk quickly, come quickly, and cross the bridge immediately".
And not many moments passed before she could be seen in the distance.
The master looked, recognised her, and his heart broke with pain.
"Greetings, dear masters, greetings, apprentices!
But why does the master have a sad face and a gloomy expression?"
"He lost his ring, it fell down, by the first arch.
Who can go down, who can go up, who will find the master's ring?"
"I can go down, I can go up, I will find the master's ring!"
She had not gone far down the well, she was not yet halfway down:
"Pull the rope, pull the cord, pull me up,
I have descended here the whole world, and I have found nothing!"
But one grabs a trowel in his hand, another readies lime,
And the master lifts a large boulder and throws it down from above.
"There were three of us, poor sisters, three, all awaiting a harsh fate.
One of us built a bridge on the Danube, another built one in Avlon,
And I, the youngest of the three, am strengthening the Arta bridge today.
As my heart trembles with fear, let this bridge shake,
As my hair falls, let the passers-by fall!"
"Take back those words, daughter, change them, say another spell!
Your brother is somewhere abroad, what if he walks onto the bridge?"
"Like steel, my heart, like steel! Like steel, the bridge is unshakeable!
Like steel, every hair on my head is strong, like steel are the steps of the passer-by![3]" (Σπυριδάκης et al., 1962, pp. 320–321)[4]

[3] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Agnieszka Piskozub-Piwosz either from the Polish translation by Przemysław Kordos or directly from the original Polish text.

[4] Małgorzata Borowska, the Polish translator, used the version of the song recorded on the island of Lesbos, first published in 1947.



Figure 3. Bridge in Arta, from the south side, as of October 2022.
Photo by Przemysław Kordos

Formally, it is a typical ballad, written in political verse, unrhymed yet rhythmic, with a caesura and no enjambment. It is clearly a complete version of the song, as it contains the plot's resolution. The text has obvious oral features that aid the singer's memory, such as fragments repeated verbatim: "They built it all day long, but it fell down in the evening" (lines 3 and 6), or with similar grammatical structure but contrasting content. There are more such fragments, not only because they make it easier to reproduce the lyrics from memory, but also because they serve the plot itself: they function as a rhetorical device. For example, "Do not hurry to get up and put on your dress, do not hurry to cook your food! // Walk slowly, come slowly, cross the bridge slowly" (the message to be conveyed by the bird, lines 13–14) stands in opposition to "Get up quickly, hurry to cook the food! //Walk quickly, come quickly, and cross the bridge immediately" (the actual message delivered by the bird, lines 16–17).

The same applies to the final curse, although the grammatical structure is looser here. The first curse had a clearly negative connotation: "As my heart trembles with fear, let this bridge shake, //As my hair falls, let the passers-by fall!" (lines 33–34), but it is reversed into a blessing. This reversal consists in transforming the metaphors themselves: "Like steel, my heart, like steel! Like steel, the bridge is unshakeable! // Like steel, every hair on my head is strong, like steel are the steps of the passer-by!" (lines 37–38). Another fragment based on repetition is the question-and-answer construction: "Who can go down, who can go up, who will find the master's ring?" (line 23), followed immediately by "I can go down, I can go up, I will find the master's ring!" (line 24).

Another element indicating the original orality of the text is the presence of frequent redundancies, which at least partially repeat in the second half of the verse what has already been said – in a different way – in the first half: "Suddenly, a voice came from under the arch, the voice of a demon advising" (line 7),

"But why does the master have a sad face and a gloomy expression?" (line 21), or "Pull the rope, pull the cord, pull me up" (line 25). There are at least ten such repetitions, counting generously, in a mere 38 verses of the entire text.

Orality is not only a matter of repetition and rhyme, but also of an economy of expression. Many plot elements are omitted and left to the reader's imagination. For example, it is often unclear who is speaking a given line of dialogue. There are also bold plot transitions, where the audience must guess the events omitted by rhetorical ellipsis. In lines 15–19, we read: "But the bird did not listen to the master, and sang instead: // "Get up quickly, hurry to cook the food! // Walk quickly, come quickly, and cross the bridge immediately". // And not many moments passed before she could be seen in the distance".

From this, we may infer that the wife got ready, cooked a meal, and went to the bridge. Other versions of the song, mentioned below, describe in detail how the wife gets ready, how she chooses her outfit (festive or otherwise), and how she cuddles her child and puts it to sleep. Here, however, the author refrains from prolonging the action, shifting instead from the master's house back to the bridge. The text impresses with its artistry of expression, as well as the ingenuity of the narrative techniques employed: changing points of view, using repetition to achieve the effect of viewing things from multiple angles, and, above all, deploying interesting metaphors. The reader's attention is drawn, for example, to the image of steel as a symbol of durability and hardness. The number and variety of fantastical motifs are also striking: the voice of a demon (whose identity is never revealed), a talking bird, the power of a curse, and, of course, the necessity and efficacy of the sacrifice itself.

There are also unresolved issues and controversies in the song, including the list of potential foundation sacrifices mentioned, and the question of why the master's wife constitutes the most appropriate sacrifice (in some versions, this is explained in detail). Similarly, questions arise as to the identity of the two older sisters and the reasons why they reinforced two other bridges – one (somewhere) over the Danube and another in Avlon (Αυλώνας, Aulōnas), most likely in Vlora, in present-day Albania.

In her commentary on the translation, Borowska not only mentions Balkan themes of walling up, but also recalls a similar story from Ojców in Małopolska. She points to the variability of the Greek version itself and to the fact that the bridge is not always located in Arta, but appears, for example, under the name Γεφύρι Τρίχας / Gephyri Trichas [literally, "hair bridge"]. Perhaps, writes Borowska, this depends on where a given version of the song situates the bridge, but this opinion is not confirmed in the collected variants, which number well over a hundred, and even in Cyprus, Arta is sometimes sung about. Borowska (2004a, pp. 251–252) reflects on the character of the wife and her behaviour: she argues that the wife did not want to find the ring and that it was an attempt at deception on her part, because she immediately orders for herself to be pulled up: "She had not gone far down the well, she was not yet halfway down: // 'Pull the rope…'" (lines 25–26). This can be interpreted as a sign of

fear, a belated realisation that the whole ring trick is a deception by the builders. As will be shown later, this is how one of the researchers, Giōrgos Megas, interprets the characters' intentions, attributing innocence to the wife and, in some versions, even pointing to the cynicism of the master himself.

* * *

In order to clarify the terminology, the term *δημοτικό τραγούδι* / *dēmotiko tragoudi* [folk song] will be used as the basic definition of the folk piece that is the focus of the study. "Song" is preferred to "hymn" (in Modern Greek, there is no such distinction[5]), recognising that these songs are generally shorter rather than longer, and belong to folk culture, pre-popular culture, the culture of the community – of simple, often illiterate people. Their themes were sometimes sad (funeral songs) and serious (songs about history, klephts[6], or partisans), but most were frivolous, funny, entertaining, sung during holidays, at church fairs, weddings, or carnivals. The cultural world from which folk songs originate is referred to as "folk culture". The term "folklore", which is foreign to Greek ethnography, is avoided, and if it does appear, it is rather in the sense of Western thinking about folk culture (not necessarily Greek), or in a slightly pejorative sense, indicating the artificiality of the folkloric tradition. This artificiality is said to stem from the fact that folklore creations – in the Greek sense – are collected "externally" by researchers who are often non-Greeks, frequently transformed ("corrected"), compiled, and adapted to the needs and tastes of a non-folk audience (cf., e.g., Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1986, pp. 35–46). The concept of "folk culture", meanwhile, points to an internal reflection on it and to the fact that, until recently, modern Greek culture was par excellence a rural culture, and urbanisation – in the modern sense – in areas inhabited by Greek-speaking populations was achieved very late. This was compounded by the fact that during the Ottoman rule, it was clear that the Turkish, or rather Muslim, population was concentrated in cities, while the Greek population lived in villages. Furthermore, a large part of ethnography[7] in Greece is based on works, mainly analyses, conducted and published by amateurs and regional enthusiasts, who collect and record local customs and songs, create dialect dictionaries, and document dances and recipes.

Małgorzata Borowska (2004a) decided to use the term "communal song" (*pieśń gminna*), pointing to the additional confusion surrounding the term

[5] There is a basic word *τραγούδι* [song or hymn], whose etymology indicates a connection with tragedy, *τραγωδία* / *tragōdia*; there is also the word *άσμα* / *asma*, meaning a serious and solemnly sung piece, a word used in rather established contexts, for example, the biblical *Άσμα ασμάτων* /*Asma asmatōn* [Song of Songs].

[6] Klephtic songs praise the deeds of the klephts [literally, robbers], the leading Greek force during the Greek uprising that broke out in 1821.

[7] Although the term "ethnography" is etymologically Greek, the modern Greek name for ethnography is *λαογραφία* / *laographia*, because *έθνος* / *ethnos* means "nation" and *λαός* / *laos* means "people".

"folk". This is because, especially in music, there is rural folk music – *δημοτική μουσική / dēmotikē mousikē* – which is very different from urban folk music – *λαϊκή μουσική / laikē mousikē*; however, both adjectives – *δημοτικός / dēmotikos* and *λαϊκός / laikos* – are translated as "folk". In terms of customs, and especially in the sphere of music, these two traditions differ fundamentally: in melodies, themes of lyrics, instrumentation, and dances. By using the term "communal", Borowska clearly points to the rural nature of the texts she translates. The present study, on the other hand, does not require such a distinction, and therefore the terms "folk culture" and "folk song" will retain their basic terminology.

Thus, folk songs are examined within the context of Greek folk tradition, perhaps the first aspect of modern Greek cultural reality to be studied regularly and in depth. The process of searching for and collecting songs dates back to the first decades of the 19th century and, not accidentally, coincides with the Greek uprising (1821–1828) and the philhellenic movement, which greatly supported it. The anthologies of travellers and lovers of Greek folklore – Claude Fauriel, and later Niccolò Tommaseo, Arnold Passow and G.F. Abbott – laid the foundations for Greek ethnography and marked the peak of the fashion for Greece in European salons, where the collected, translated, and sometimes adapted, songs enjoyed great popularity at the time. This was also the case in Poland, thanks to the translations of Józef Sękowski and, later, Józef Dunin-Borkowski.

The Greeks themselves did not take up their own folk art until two generations later, and then with a specific purpose in mind. In defiance of Western researchers such as Jakob Fallmerayer and his theory of the genetic and cultural Slavic nature of his contemporary Greeks, they set out to prove their own Greekness and demonstrate the continuity of Greek history since ancient times. The most important of these early researchers, Nikolaos Politēs, a native of Kalamata (Messenia), took a systematic interest in the funeral laments (μοιρολόι / *moiroloi*) and began his long and fruitful career as the first Greek ethnographer.

Among the accepted and, in a sense, sanctified classification of folk songs into types (which was done for the Polish audience by Borowska, 2004a, p. 10), two are most attractive for research: laments and ballads. The former attracted researchers because they were often improvised, composed for specific occasions, and sung over the dead by professional mourners. The imagery of these songs virtually ignored the teachings of the Orthodox Church, drawing instead on Greek mythology, casting Charos (a portmanteau of Hades and Charon) in the role of a ruthless and cruel lord of death who imprisons the souls of the dead forever in the underworld, from which there is no escape and where there is no hope.

As already mentioned, the song *The Bridge of Arta* has been classified as a ballad (παραλογία / *paralogia*) (Kowalska, 2021; Ιωάννου, 1970) in the system universally used for the study of Greek communal songs[8]. The ballad seems

[8] The system for classifying communal songs in Greece emerged at the very beginning of their collection, a beginning that coincided with the peak of the wave of philhellenism in Europe and the Greek uprising (from 1821), and even then the first collectors

to be one of the most highly valued forms of communal songs and is appreciated by researchers on a par with threnodies. While threnodies – often improvised and sung only once, i.e. for the purposes of the funeral of a deceased person – display unprecedented imagery in eulogising the dead and presenting the afterlife as a land of wandering souls ruled by the gloomy Charos[9] (Bzinkowski, 2018, pp. 92–94), ballads captivate with their high diversity and ingenuity, as well as frequent supernatural elements, which make them surprising or even unpredictable stories. Their plots often deal with complicated relationships between women and men, love, betrayal, and lies, but there are also – to put it in modern terms – crime or horror stories. In these ballads, the dead appear as zombies or ghosts, and supernatural beings, both corporeal and ethereal, influence the actions of mortals. From the Greek perspective, ballads are distinguished by their universality among all types of communal songs. They can be sung on any occasion, as they are not tied to any cyclical holiday (such as carnival or Christmas songs), family occasion (such as baptism, wedding, or funeral songs), patriotic effort or identity need (such as historical, klephtic, or, more recently, partisan songs). Ballads can add splendour to any dance festival, including occasional, improvised ones, or a solemn reception for unexpected guests in the village. From the perspective of early collectors, the first philhellenes[10], ballads – in addition to the characteristics mentioned above – are also distinguished by their close ties to emerging Gothic literature in Europe, to horror stories, romantic fantasy, and quasi-religiousness. Perhaps this was one of the factors that made ballads among the most frequently recorded songs, and their corpus expanded, on a par with the corpus of threnodies, in the most rapid manner. However, the benefit of this is partly illusory: the more versions available, the easier they are to access and the more popular the song becomes – and such excess can effectively destroy the already fading oral tradition of a particular type of song.

(Claude Fauriel, Niccolò Tommaseo, and Wilhelm Mueller) were already bringing order to the collected material by dividing it into occasional, acritic, historical, and narrative songs. Interest in Greek songs was pan-European, and translations were not uncommon in Poland, where they were popular among Romantic poets. The term "ballad" as used here follows Małgorzata Borowska's definition (Borowska, 2004a, pp. 21–22).

[9] This representation is in clear contradiction with Christian doctrine, which fascinated researchers seeking elements of modern Greek folk culture that coincided with the concepts and sensibilities of antiquity.

[10] Originally, the philhellenic movement combined research and political interests, thereby contributing significantly to the success of the Greeks in their uprising against the Ottomans. Western researchers conducting the first field studies in Greece typically had a good classical education and were mainly interested in antiquity in modern Greece – hence their interest in art and archaeology, often pursued by collecting artefacts in a robbery-like manner. Over the years, they focused on the culture of their contemporary Greeks, searching for elements of the past. Folk songs seemed promising from the outset, as the first collectors and commentators found in them themes familiar from ancient literature (Kalinowska, 2007).

Several ballads have gained nationwide popularity (songs are usually strictly local in nature) and are known everywhere, as well as being part of the educational canon, serving as teaching material in school textbooks. These undoubtedly include *Του νεκρού άδελφοῦ / Tou nekrou adelphou* [Ballad of the Dead Brother], *Ὁ γυρισμὸς τοῦ ξενιτεμένου / O gyrismos tou xenitemenou* [Ballad of the Return of the Husband from Abroad], and *Τῆς Ἄρτας τὸ γεφύρι / Tēs Artas to gephyri* [Ballad of the Bridge of Arta]. The latter occupies a special place, as it is associated with a specific location.

Arta, a small town in southern Epirus, near the northern coast of the Ambracian Gulf, is a Byzantine town. It was once the capital of the Despotate of Epirus (13th–15th centuries) and is proud of its numerous well-preserved late Byzantine churches and the stone bridge over the Arachthos River, located east of the town centre. The Arta Bridge is the most characteristic feature of the city – its icon and landmark. On its western side, there is the restaurant *Πρωτομάστορας / Prōtomastoras* [literally "First Master" – an obvious reference to the main character of the legend] (Πρωτομάστορας, n.d.), and on the eastern side, there is a small building, former barracks, and a customs office[11], now the Ethnographic Museum, where a fraction of the exhibition is devoted to the bridge and its legend. In terms of tourism, the bridge remains an off-the-beaten-track and underutilised topographical point on the city map.

Before conducting a more detailed analysis of the literature on the subject, and thus of the scientific interpretations of the song in its variants, attention should be drawn to the Greek ethnographic tendency to seek ever newer versions and to create a holistic model encompassing all branches, distortions, and alternatives. Megas consistently applies the geographical-historical method, attempting to answer questions of origin, transfer, and distribution. The ideal result of the research would be a diachronic-synchronic map indicating the point of origin of the first version of the song and then marking the successive circles of its spread, together with the successive contaminations introduced into the original text. However, this is not the case – researchers and their readers are left with an extensive, only partially ordered catalogue of versions. We do not receive definitive answers regarding the flow of motifs, dating, or (despite what is often declared) the primacy of the Greek version over others; instead, a mosaic of regional variants emerges, sometimes convergent, sometimes remaining far outside the mainstream of the story[12].

[11] Between 1881 and 1912, the border between Greece and Turkey ran across the bridge.

[12] As a side note, it is clear that place is far more important than time and that maps appear far more often than timelines (which are only sketchy in nature). The research does not take into account large-scale migratory movements resulting not only from wars and ethnic resettlement policies, but above all from the radical population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923. Notes accompany the cited versions on Asia Minor (Cappadocian, Pontic) texts collected in Macedonia or Epirus from refugees. There are also suggestions about the silencing of immigrant versions in favour of exist-

This characteristic of research, probably resulting from admiration for the diversity of folk art, permeates Greek folk as a whole, especially in ethnographic approaches that present these phenomena for the needs of the urban community and its "urban folklore" (laikos politismos / λαϊκός πολιτισμός). Greeks, not necessarily researchers, tend to emphasise their local affiliation[13]. They trace their ancestry even if they have lived in Athens or Thessaloniki for generations. Districts of large cities often acquire a regional character, bringing together populations from a given region who settle in close proximity (for example, Maniatika in Piraeus or Nea Smyrnē in Athens). Residents gather in associations and clubs of Cretans, Epirotes, or Cappadocians, where they cultivate the old traditions of their "small homelands", traditions that largely amount to what can be presented: singing, dancing, cuisine, dialect, and ways of celebrating holidays. The sources of inspiration are museums, which meticulously differentiate between regions, as well as clubs, theatres, and other cultural institutions – public, but mainly private – which uphold traditions in a somewhat petrified manner.

A good illustration of this is the long-standing and commendable work of the Dora Stratou Greek Dance Theatre, which has been operating since 1953 in Athens' Plaka and has an open-air theatre on the slopes of Philopappou Hill. Dance performances are held there on summer evenings. The theatre has a rich wardrobe consisting of original costumes and lances. It maintains contacts with local singers, musicians, and dancers, who are invited to the theatre and pass on information to the ensemble – lyrics, melodies, steps – and often join the ensemble themselves. The theatre also organises year-round dance courses and seminars on folk music, and supports a network of numerous local societies that promote regional traditions, especially musical ones.

A typical performance consists of a programme covering several macro-regions (Thrace, Dodecanese, etc.). The dancers perform in uniformed costumes, usually festive, and sometimes even wedding attire. One version of a dance is chosen, with one melody and one song: this becomes its canonical form in the theatre. There are also certain concessions to the original material. For example, the Christmas custom of mōmogeroi, originating in Pontus, which in its original form involved the entire village and consisted of events taking place simultaneously (making it impossible to see the entire event in a single year), is here arranged chronologically into a story, in which successive parts are presented in sequence, simplified, and shortened. This choice is dictated by the needs of the audience, who are shown events that are, in a sense, closed and concise and, within a single evening, regionally diverse.

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ing ones (due to shame or forgetfulness). Still, no attempt is made even to estimate the phenomenon of the presence of two versions in one place: local and immigrant.

[13] Attachment to locality is a common feature, especially in the current post-urbanisation era, in which the majority of the country's population lives in the five largest cities (including Athens, which is home to about 30 per cent of the total population). In contrast, the interior of the country (*εξωχή* / exōchē), outside of a few cities, is virtually depopulated. Even in an ordinary grocery shop, the goods on sale bear information about their origin – not national, but regional: feta from Sparta, olives from Amfissa, or milk from Volos.

Treatises such as that of Megas provide excellent material for regionalised thinking about Greek folk culture. They reinforce a persistent tendency to focus on details in research – customs, dialects, celebrations at specific times of the year, and so on – while apparently avoiding syntheses other than non-committal indications of possible trends.

Ethnographic Studies of *The Bridge of Arta*

Besides the artistic inspirations mentioned above, the ballad about the bridge is also the subject of ethnographic study. Two works in particular – the extensive and comprehensive article by Geōrgios A. Megas (1971) already mentioned here, and the two-volume doctoral thesis by Lambros Euthymiou (Ευθυμίου, 2014) – provide the most extensive analytical studies of the subject and establish, as it seems, its official interpretation. Megas compared over a hundred versions of the song from different parts of the Greek world, traced each element, and discussed the state of research on the motif of walling up in Greece and Europe as it stood in the early 1970s. Euthymiou supplemented Megas' studies with the achievements of the following 30 years, but focused primarily on the musical aspect, which Megas had omitted. These works are accompanied by two further studies: Maria Alexandropoulou's master's thesis (Αλεξανδροπούλου, 1995), which predates Euthymiou's work and covers eight recorded versions of the song (while also containing several other interesting elements, such as two rare poems inspired by the bridge), and a short book by Kōnstantinos Nigdelēs in 2019 (Νίγδελης, 2019), which attempts to give the legend of the bridge of Arta a supra-Greek dimension. The latter, in turn, exemplifies the persistence of a certain way of discussing folk tradition.

These works will be discussed in detail later. At this stage, it is important to note that a group of topics remain largely unaddressed that are worthy of consideration in the context of *The Bridge of Arta*. One such issue is morality: in many versions, there are no openly evil characters. The wrongdoing committed by the master towards his wife results from placing the interests of the community above those of the individual; hence, she must sacrifice herself for the common good. This point of departure presents an enticing field for reflection, especially given contemporary debates over the importance of individualism. At the same time, however, within this framework, it is the man who sacrifices the woman, and she ultimately submits to her fate, despite attempts to retaliate against the community. Her sacrifice is therefore, in a sense, voluntary. This is also an excellent starting point for reflection on the position of women in traditional – but also in modern – Greek society.

Another overlooked theme in reflections on *The Bridge of Arta* is the fantastic (see e.g. Alexiou, 1983). In every version of the song, after the introduction, the action begins with the appearance of a supernatural voice. Sometimes it

materialises in the form of a talking bird, and sometimes it appears as a ghost or a group of ghosts who, as it were, announce a message from heaven. What is always present is the absolute lack of opposition to the suggestions conveyed by the supernatural being, as well as the absence of any dialogue with the fantastic. The command received has the status of a revelation, familiar from the Gospels, in which the divine voice appears several times as a kind of commentary on the events presented (cf. Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5). In *The Bridge of Arta*, the voice encourages action that will bring pain, suffering, and ultimately death, yet everyone submits to this turn of events. In the face of the supernatural, there is neither alternative nor escape.

Researchers of *The Bridge of Arta* are also familiar with the topic of orality as songs are increasingly recorded, both in the form of lyrics and sound recordings. Of particular note is the phenomenon of oral tradition being supplanted, but also "corrected", "repaired", or compiled for philological, aesthetic, or – unfortunately – ideological reasons, with instances in which findings or even theses are fabricated (cf. Beaton, 1986, pp. 110–133). The aforementioned researchers – Megas, and especially Euthymiou – write about this phenomenon, but they limit themselves to expressing regret about this state of affairs and make no attempt to reconstruct the original, nor do they indicate the direction in which such a reconstruction should proceed.

Closely related to orality is the topic of the presence of song in the education system, a phenomenon that will be analysed later. According to Euthymiou, the inclusion of the song in education has had a significant impact for over 100 years, both increasing its popularity and reach, and contributing to its standardisation and the decline of oral diversity. Its presence in the school canon has led many artists to engage with it as an essential element of education.

Giōrgios A. Megas' Study

Giōrgios A. Megas, a Greek folklorist and academic, is known for his methodical and patient approach to research. In his long and rich research career, he successfully mastered the historical-comparative method (then a methodological novelty in the field of Greek ethnography), analysing the similarities and differences between Greek folk culture and the folk cultures of other nations, particularly those of the Balkans and Europe. Megas reinforced the method through the use of extensive typologies and taxonomic schemes. He believed that the development of folklore studies as an autonomous and separate scientific discipline was not possible without a solid scientific foundation[14]. He strove to ensure that folklore was not perceived as a peculiar and nationalistic

[14] There are also claims that, despite the widespread use of quantitative or even statistical methods, the conclusions drawn from such compilations are sometimes puzzlingly (disappointingly?) subjective in Megas' work (cf. Βαρβούνης, 2016, p. 250).

object, but rather as an academic discipline of international relevance. At the same time, he considered the findings of modern Greek ethnography to be an intellectual tool for understanding the complexity of Greek culture (Varvounēs, 2015, pp. 36, 38–39, 43). His approach was not without foundation: in his work on *The Bridge of Arta*, for example, he confronts the nationalistic claims of Hungary and Romania, which sought to attribute the origin of the Arta song to their own cultures (Πούχνερ, 2018, pp. 170–171). His research demonstrates that this motif is prevalent across diverse cultures and cannot be attributed exclusively to any single nationality.

Before culminating his work with a study on *The Bridge of Arta*, Megas was also known for his contribution to research on Greek fairy tales. He compiled a catalogue of Greek fairy tale types, which formed the basis for later research in this field. In his work on fairy tales, as in his study of the aforementioned song, Megas employed a comparative method, analysing the similarities and differences between Greek fairy tales and those from other cultures. It was during this period that the mature form of his method, based on detailed taxonomy, was developed (Καπλάνογλου, 2018, p. 277).

The song *The Bridge of Arta* was thoroughly studied by Giōrgos A. Megas, representing his last major contribution to ethnography; further work was interrupted by his untimely death in a car accident. Megas discussed virtually every aspect of the song, providing an in-depth analysis of its structure and motifs. His study ensured that the song itself, as well as the presence of the motif across Greece, was documented and interpreted in an unprecedented manner. His study means that the song itself, as well as the presence of the entire motif in Greece, is recognised and decoded in an unprecedented way. The effects of this are twofold: after Megas, research on this ballad was largely incidental (from the researchers' point of view, the subject seemed exhausted or simply boring), yet for artists and creators, it remains an extraordinary source of inspiration – extraordinary because of its unveiling. Such detailed analysis allows for virtually endless exploration of the motif from different perspectives, with full awareness of its content, complexity, and variants.

Megas' approach also reveals a fundamental feature of systematic modern Greek thinking in general. To understand means to organise, and to organise, *τάξη* / *taxē* [order] is to divide, arrange, categorise, and name. Megas' work is exemplary in this respect: it realises the aspiration of order that guides many activities in the field of explaining cultural phenomena. Dictionaries and catalogues benefit from this approach, while attempts at synthesis and generalisation encounter limitations. Captivating diversity is more important than drawing summarising conclusions, which would require rejecting certain versions and omitting minor phenomena. For this reason, Megas' findings are discussed here in considerable detail.

The work was published in the annual *Λαογραφία* (27/1971) and takes up half of the issue (pages 29–212). In a short introduction (Μέγας, 1971, pp. 33–38), the author discusses the topic of foundation offerings (specifying in the

subtitle: "myth and reality") in Greece and other parts of the world since antiquity, before turning to a discussion on the Greek song itself.

The work is divided into five parts. Part I is a detailed list of motifs that may or may not appear in different versions of the song and are characterised by their variability. The translation of this part, considered crucial for the present study, is included at the end of the text. Part II lists all the versions of the songs used, arranged by region (the "usual" regions of Greece, as well as Cyprus, Cappadocia, Pontus – the area around Trebizond – and western Anatolia – the area around Smyrna). In total, Megas uses 333 collected texts, the oldest of which dates back to 1842. This section is accompanied by a map indicating the geographical origin of the sources (Figure 4).

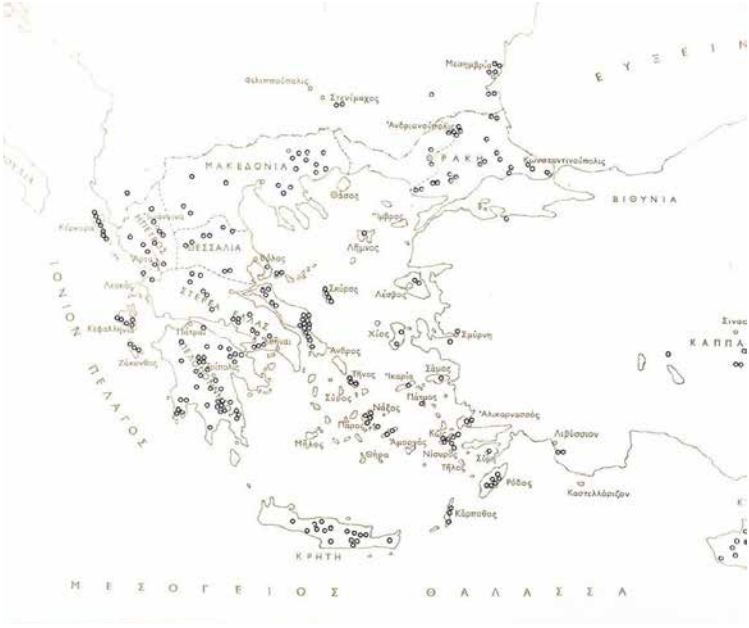


Figure 4. The western side of the map, on which Megas marked the origin of the song versions he used in his analysis, primarily to construct a narrative model. What is striking is the relatively even distribution across the whole of Greece, both mainland and islands, and the fact that there are not significantly more versions around Arta itself than elsewhere.
Source: Μέγας, Γ. (1971; booklet insert).

At the heart of Megas' findings is the following list of variant motifs from the song *The Bridge of Arta*, which together form a logically complete and coherent whole. With this structuralist approach, the researcher's achievement lies – as in the case of Vladimir Propp's study on the morphology of fairy tales (Propp, 1976, pp. 209–217) – in extracting the full structure of the story, which each of

the authentic variants partially realises. Few sub-motifs are interchangeable, and certain elements of the plot (such as the wife's conversation with the messenger, preparing to leave, or bargaining with the master before her death) are optional. Only a few of the following points are crucial, necessary for the story to remain coherent and to conclude appropriately. Numerous additions have been made to Megas' outline in order to clarify some of the briefly treated (sub) points and to highlight places of particular interest for further discussion and subsequent adaptations.

The following list is quoted in its entirety because it constitutes the core of Megas' entire study and its crowning achievement. By structurally analysing the motif, identifying a clear sequence of events, and exploring every possible development of the plot and subplots, Megas was able to grasp the entire richness of the song at a single glance and illuminate all its aspects: formal, but above all, content-related. The result of this study is clear: there is no longer any uncertainty here. In this way, Megas – rightly or wrongly – achieved what he regarded as his goal: the final, correct and, in his opinion, sole interpretation.

List of motifs from the article by Geōrgios Megas (with additions indicated in square brackets)

I. Introduction

a. order [and reasons – P.K.] to build the bridge.

1. Number of master builders and apprentices

2a. name of the first master builder;

2b. name of [his] wife.

3. Type of building. Its name

a. derived from the place;

b. derived from the name of the first master builder;

c. metaphorical;

d. not specified.

4. [Verse:] "They built all day, it collapsed at night".

5. [Verse:] "The king's order to behead the master builders" [if they do not finish the bridge].

6. The first master builder's question "Who is the one who destroys it …[?]"

II. Announcement of [the necessity of] the sacrifice

1. [Who announces it?]

a. A bird [with a human voice];

b. a voice from heaven (through the mouth of an archangel, other apparitions, or incorporeal beings;

c. the voice of the river spirit, or a dragon [dragon – *δράκος* / *drakos* or a giant drowned in a body of water, in this case a river; a river spirit/demon];

d. in a dream [of the master].

2. [It is to be] someone from the first master's family [and not a random victim, low in the social hierarchy: "neither an orphan nor a stranger"].

3. Cynical calculations by the first master (or his mother) [regarding which family member qualifies – the choice falls on the wife, because she is not blood-related and can be replaced].

III. The masters' consent to the sacrifice
1. Whose wife will come in the morning with food?
a. Breaking the agreement [it "accidentally" falls on the first master's wife].
2. Selection by drawing lots – the lot falls on the first master;
a. the cynical calculations of the first master;
b. the cynical calculations of the other masters.

IV. Informing/inviting the heroine
1. [Who is the messenger?]
a. a child or an apprentice?
b. a bird?
c. unspecified [i.e., there is one, but it is not known who].
2. Conveying the information
a. "get dressed quickly, change quickly, bring the meal quickly";
b. ([messenger] misheard) "get dressed slowly, etc.";
c. "do not wash on Saturday evening, do not dress up on Sunday, and on Monday go straight to the master";
d. [the messenger] heard: "wash on Saturday evening", etc.
3. The heroine's questions to the child [or another messenger]
a. whether he came with good or bad news, how she should dress,
b. answer: "go as you are [dressed]";
c. whether [her husband] needs her for work (or rather for dancing);
d. [the wife] dresses elegantly.
4. The heroine senses the purpose of the invitation, puts the baby to sleep, says goodbye to her neighbours.
a. the first master sends her back home once (and then a second time). The second time, she returns in black.
5. The first master returns home to take her away.
6. He reveals the purpose of the invitation.
a. he shows her the king's order (or a firman),
b. he tells her what the bird said,
c. she asks to be allowed to breastfeed (or to put to sleep) the child first,
d. [husband's] response: of course,
e. farewell to the neighbours.
7. Birds on the way: "Don't turn around!"

V. The ring scene
1. The heroine greets the master builders and wonders why her husband is worried.
2. Introduction of the ring: it fell into the right (middle) arch of the bridge.

3. The heroine expresses her desire to go down and look for the ring.
a. refusal.
4. Requests to pull her up
a. I found nothing – or, I found …,
b. the first master's response: I have the ring …,
c. …she grabs the hand of the black man [=death?]… or finds crossed snakes, tangled vipers [bones].

VI. The walling up
1. The foremen wall up the heroine
a. they wall up the measure [length?] of her shadow [instead of the heroine – in some versions].
2. The heroine's conversation with the first master. Arguments:
a. the house is open,
b. I have bread on the baking tray (in the oven) [who will take it out so that it does not burn],
c. I have a child in a cradle [who will feed it?].
3. Appropriate [negative] responses from the master builder.

VII. The fate of the three sisters [the sister being walled up now, and the two who were walled up earlier]
[1. the sisters list which structures have been strengthened by their sacrifice; some of these are bridges, but there are also other structures].
[2. The sisters' lament over the master builder's wife].

VIII. The curse
1. [cast on the bridge]:
a. let the bridge shake,
b. let the bridge collapse,
c. let the passers-by fall,
d. let no one remain from the first master's family.
2. Reversal of the curse:
a. because of the brother [of the heroine] – [the metaphors are reversed: may the bridge shake like steel, etc.];
b. because of the son [of the heroine] [as in point a.].

IX. Pleas
1. For the child,
2. For a candle [lighting a candle for her intention in church],
3. [Farewell] turn towards birds and plants.
[4. May no woman suffer the fate of the wife, may she not receive her beauty or the bitterness/suffering that accompanies beauty]. (Μέγας, 1971, pp. 41–43)

The essential part of Megas' work is sections III, IV and V, which are discussed in greater detail below. These sections contain, respectively, a detailed discussion of the above-cited list, an attempt at its synthesis, and a comparison of Megas' findings with the state of contemporary research within a broader Balkan context[15].

Part III (Μέγας, 1971, pp. 87–129) is a list of motifs with source texts. Point by point, Megas discusses the variability of each (sub)point on the list he created. For example, the first element – the number of builders and apprentices – is presented in the form of all encountered combinations and numbers: 9, 12+12, 18, 40, etc. He adds references to source texts for each option, and the frequency of a given element is immediately apparent: here, for example, the most common number is 45+60. Each such list of variants of a given element ends with a summary, often incorporating comparative elements and references to the findings of other researchers, not only Greek ones.

When discussing the subsequent points on the list of motifs (see Appendix), reference is made to the numbering used there, alongside indications of the relevant passages in Megas' text. The reason for building the bridge (Ia. Introduction) appears infrequently, and is found mainly in Thracian versions. It is mainly related either to the firman (a written order) of the sultan, or to the king's order; however, as Megas notes, this motif is common in Balkan versions. The number of builders (I. 1) in several of the more widely known versions is 45+60, 60+40, or 60+60. Frequently, as Megas observes, the number 1000 also appears, simply meaning many. Elsewhere, according to Vargyas, the dominant number is 9, occurring in 81 per cent of Romanian versions and 72 per cent of Hungarian ones. In Greek material, this number appears only in Cappadocian versions. Megas also highlights other interesting exceptions: three master brothers in Cappadocia and in the Wallachian versions (Modern Greek *κουτσοβλάχικα*: 100 per cent), as well as in Serbo-Croatian (62 per cent), Bulgarian (41 per cent), and Albanian (28 per cent). Megas returns to this three brother variant later in his analysis. He also notes a version from Lesbos featuring two brothers and points out that such variants – with a low number of builders – depict situations in which the masters agree among themselves who will be sacrificed (i.e., a member of whose family), only to betray this agreement one by one. In Cyprus, there exists a variant in which, at the request of the master, who recognises the need for a sacrifice, the king's wife is walled up in the bridge.

With regard to names (I, 2a and 2b), the most frequent names of the first master builder are Gian(n)ēs (Gian(n)akēs), Giōrgēs (George in English), and Kōnstandēs, while the most common names of his wife are Aretē (literally "vir-

[15] Olga Augustinos (2003) devotes a short article to the bridge in Arta and the "Balkan issue". In her analysis of the song, she compares it to the novels of Ivo Andrić and Ismail Kadare. She points out that the story of the bridge – the forces and tensions accompanying its construction – is a metaphor for the relations between the peoples of the Balkans, which were subject to ambiguous, complex dependencies, characterised by suffering, sacrifice, and triumph. See also a study by Kyriakē Χρυσομάλλη-Henrich (2022).

tue"), Vdokia (i.e., Eudokia, "kindness"), and Elenē (Helena, diminutive form Leniō, probably meaning "shining")[16]. Megas argues that the "folk poet" – as he refers to the collective author of the song in all its versions – does not attach great importance to names. The names cited are quite common; in fact, the vast majority of Greek names have a universally understood meaning. He focuses on the name Manolēs (from Emanuel), popular in Romanian and Bulgarian versions, particularly as the bridge in Agraidi (Evrytania) bears the inscription "built in 1659, builders: Dēmētrios and Manolēs". Megas quotes Nikolaos Politēs, who wrote in his *Traditions*, published at the beginning of the 20th century, that Manolēs, known from Romanian tradition, was a Greek living in the 17th century, as evidenced by the Greek epigraphic material preserved on buildings. Megas speculates that a name already known in Romania may have been retrospectively associated with a song about the sacrifice that emerged later. The existence of a Greek builder bearing this name was subsequently linked to the hero of the song.

As for the type of building (I.3, and its name I.3a–d), in the Greek version, it is invariably a bridge[17]. The most common name is Arta, followed by several others, including Andana, Larisa, and Danube. Some are related to location, for example, on the coast/shore, five are on rivers, some are at the ends of the ends (i.e., at the ends of the world), etc. There are rare exceptions, such as the Manolēsa, Pavlosa, and Giōrgosa bridges, as well as the frequent motif of the tēs Trichas bridge (meaning "of hair", see below). The lack of additional description of the bridge is relatively common (no geographical or other name appears), and sometimes an arch – *καμάρα* / *kamara* [bridge] – appears instead of a bridge, probably as *pars pro toto*.

Megas notes that although in the north the song refers to a monastery, church, or fortress, what is striking is the unanimity of the Greek "folk poet", who always sings about a bridge. Arta as a location appears mainly in versions from mainland Greece (Epirus, Macedonia, Thessaly, Central Greece, Euboea, and the Peloponnese), the Ionian Islands, and sporadically in Thrace and the Cyclades. Megas also finds Arta in Wallachian and Bulgarian versions and emphasises that this name constitutes the core of the song, on the basis of which he develops his theory concerning the dating and origin of its original form. Megas focuses particularly on versions about the Tricha bridge, a name he considers metaphorically as meaning a "light and airy" bridge. He suggests possible connections with folk beliefs about the afterlife (the so-called lower world, *Kato Kosmos*), where such a bridge – a bridge woven from hair – appears as a motif in threnody (a type of communal song).

[16] Names are significant, but it should be considered that most Greek names have an easily decipherable meaning: in other words, a name is usually followed by an obvious metaphor.

[17] But cf., footnote 25, in which I provide a list of rare suggestions of structures with a foundation sacrifice in Greece that are not bridges.

The issues raised in points I.4 to I.7, which include various laments voiced by the masters for different reasons, occur relatively rarely, which leads to an important structural conclusion: the more "branches" a given sub-motif has, the further it is from the original form of the song, and the more likely it is that we are dealing with later, creative additions.

The question of who announces the sacrifice (II.1.a–d) is resolved with notable consistency: as a rule, the message is delivered by a bird or by a disembodied voice from heaven.

The identity of the victim (II.2) and the accompanying calculations (II.3) indicate the dual nature of the sacrifice. The victim cannot be just anyone; it must be a specific individual. It must be someone close to the master (the song's hero), someone from his inner circle, which is the purpose of the first calculation. The second calculation, described by Megas as cynical, is a cold assessment of who within his circle can be replaced. The calculation invariably shows that it cannot be his mother, daughter, sister, or brother, but only his wife, who he can always – and easily – replace. Megas returns to this theme repeatedly, arguing that the song is, above all, a record of a woman's tragedy: a tragedy rooted not only in the fact that she is sacrificed, but also in her assumed replaceability.

Point III (pp. 100–105) is a variant of point II: the two hardly ever occur together. Here, the sacrifice is determined in a different way ("whoever crosses the bridge first in the morning"), and the motif of a contract and its betrayal also appears: almost all master builders warn their wives not to go to the bridge in the morning. Megas also points to versions in which the victim is chosen by drawing lots or by letting the first master make the decision. Initially ready to sacrifice himself, he is persuaded by the cynical foremen, as Megas notes. Once again, a clear demarcation emerges between the world of deceitful men and that of innocent women, that is, the sacrificial victims. As an aside, Megas – wrongly, as this entire volume demonstrates – states, following Vargyas and Baud-Bovy, that in the Balkan versions the walling up of one's wife is not particularly widespread.

While discussing this motif, Megas also draws attention to another recurring element: at the end of the song, children ask their father where their mother is. The master provides two false answers, dismissing the children, but on the third attempt he finally reveals the truth. Megas observes that a similar motif also appears in the Hungarian version, but believes that not every similarity should be considered a borrowing. This is certainly one of the issues that merits further discussion.

Continuing with the list of motifs: the heroine is informed of the need to go to the bridge (IV.1 and following) by a child or a bird, often the same messenger as in point II.1.a. She typically asks whether the messenger (the child or bird) has come with good or bad news, because she wants to dress appropriately. This opens up numerous branches of the motif. What is important in this part of the song is the introduction of doubt into the wife's mind. Megas emphasises the role of misunderstanding (and/or miscommunication), which causes the

woman to reach the bridge more quickly than the husband intended. He also draws attention to the woman's extraordinary gentleness and her submission to her husband's will, akin to "a sheep going to the slaughter". There are rare versions where the wife suffers violence, usually symbolic, but in most cases, despite hesitation and doubts, the woman goes to the bridge without delay.

Megas also finds elements in versions from the Dodecanese islands and from the southern shores of the Black Sea (Pontus), which, in his view, originate in other songs. This observation itself calls for further discussion, particularly regarding which motifs appear elsewhere in a similar form. In the scene involving the ring (V), Megas detects such contamination when, in one Epirus version, he finds the verse "I will go down, I will go up, I will find the ring", which he associates with the narrative of the ghost in the well and the ring lost within it. Megas suggests that not only the verse, but the entire motif of the ring may come from a different narrative tradition. He also returns to the theme of the innocence of the wife: despite her earlier doubts, she descends without hesitation to retrieve the ring; she is characterised, as Megas writes, by "naivety and gullibility". At the same time, this moment is, for Megas, a moment of creative genius on the part of the "folk poet", who is able in this passage to present a range of conflicting and contradictory feelings within the characters.

The walling up (VI) appears in approximately 40 per cent of the versions, meaning it is described explicitly only in a minority of cases. For Megas, this is important evidence of the song's origin.

The fate of the three sisters (VII), perhaps the strangest part of the song and the one richest in topographical details, usually consists of only two or three lines. The sisters themselves also usually build bridges: the first sister mainly on the Danube (18 per cent of versions), in Tirnawos (either in Macedonia or as a corruption of the word Danube) (5 per cent), and Galatas, i.e., Constantinople (11per cent). The second sister builds bridges on the Euphrates (11 per cent), Avlona (4 per cent), and Misiri (in Egypt?) (5 per cent). Only rarely are the sisters sacrificed in structures other than bridges, such as a church or monastery.

According to Megas, the curse (VIII) occurs so commonly that it must belong to the song's original version; its reversal, however, does not always occur. Incidentally, Megas informs us that the song is always sung and danced *a capella*.

Finally, Megas addresses the optional concluding part (IX) very briefly. Before closing his discussions, he refers to the areas inhabited by the Vlachs (*koutsovlachika*) in Greece, primarily eastern Epirus, to which he attributes the following differences when compared to the Greek versions: the masters are three brothers who are granted seven years to build a bridge by the king; the sacrifice is the wife of the youngest brother, who, after being walled up, begs to have her breast left outside so that her baby may suckle. These are elements of songs found in cultures north of Greece, or in the regions inhabited by the Vlach populations.

The discussions lack references to oral techniques and, more generally, to the relationship between the song's constituent elements and the orality of its

message. Nor does Megas undertake extensive narrative analyses that might demonstrate the ingenuity of the "folk poet" in concisely building tension and using other narrative techniques, including structural rhymes (e.g., the confusion of messages, resulting in their repetition on two occasions in formally similar but semantically opposite forms), and the reversal of curses, which produces a similar formal effect.

Part IV of Megas' dissertation presents the conclusions drawn from the analysis, along with an attempt to reconstruct the basic form of the song, the reasons for adding additional, regional elements, and hypotheses concerning the spread of the song throughout the Greek world. As stated above, Megas reconstructs the original version of the song, which consists of the following elements (the list is quoted in its entirety – according to Megas, these are all the necessary elements of the song, that is, its form stripped down to its essentials):

1. A group of master builders is tasked with constructing a bridge.
2. What they build during the day collapses at night.
3. A mysterious voice announces the need for a sacrificial offering, which is to be the wife of the first master builder (and no one else).
4. The master sends a child with a message to his wife.
5. She senses her husband's intention, feeds the child, and bids farewell to her home and neighbours.
6. [Being walled up] she laments her fate and that of her two sisters.
7. The bridge is cursed. (Μέγας, 1971, pp. 130–138)

The basic version does not include such seemingly iconic scenes as the walling up itself, the scene with the rings, the conversation between husband and wife during or before the walling up, or the reversal of the curse. The basic version is found mainly in Central Greece, the Peloponnese, and Epirus, and since it always refers to Arta, Megas locates the song's origin in Epirus. Versions from more distant regions incorporate additional elements and often change the content of the basic structure (including, for example, the name of the bridge). This is particularly evident in the Pontic variants, which weave elements of local "demonology" into the song. In Cappadocia, radically different ways of determining the victim appear, the number and status of the builders changes, and there is more cynicism in their deliberations. In Cyprus, similarly, the voice is that of an archangel, and the versions often draw motifs from other popular Cypriot communal songs. In Crete, the name Arta does not appear at all, and, as in Cyprus, the woman occupies the centre of the "folk poet's" absolute attention.

Having determined the geographical origin of the song, Megas points out that these areas – Epirus, Central Greece (Aetolia, Phocis, and Boeotia), and the Peloponnese – constituted a cultural unity prior to the first fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1204. Therefore, he dates the song's creation to no later than the 11th century. Hence, he endorses the conclusions concerning the primacy of the Greek version formulated by Mikhail Arnaudov (Арнаудов, 1920) and Giuseppe Cocchiara (1950).

Part V (Μέγας, 1971, pp. 142–190) discusses selected bibliographical findings. Megas begins with the works of Nikolaos Politēs, widely regarded as the "father" of Greek ethnography, and continues – largely in chronological order – with the findings of authors such as Samuel Baud-Bovy, Lajos Vargyas, Karl Dieterich, Lazare Sainean, Mikhail Arnaudov, Giuseppe Cocchiara, Petru Caraman, Svetislav Stefanović, Dēmētrēs Chatzēs (a Greek writer who emigrated to Hungary after the war), Mihai Pop, and Ion Talos. The entire section is comparative in nature, referring mainly to Hungarian, Romanian, and, to some extent, Bulgarian findings.

It is surprising that, aside from Politēs and Chatzēs (who wrote in Hungarian; Hadzisz, 1960), Megas makes almost no reference to the findings of Greek researchers, except for a brief mention at the very beginning of Stilpōn Kyriakidēs, who presented a perplexing concept about the origins of the song in Cappadocia (1913). Although the motif of the song about the bridge of Arta has been explored by numerous researchers, it has rarely been the central focus of their research, which has tended to concentrate on the sacrificial offering itself or its presence in songs from other cultural areas.

Megas devotes a lot of attention to discussing the research and hypothesis advanced by Arnaudov, who demonstrated the primacy of the Greek version and traced the subsequent stages of the motif's diffusion among the Balkan peoples, extending all the way to the Hungarians. However, Megas also notes alternative concepts, such as that of Petar Skok, according to whom the song originates from the (nomadic) Vlachs. He praises Cocchiara, who, like Arnaudov, identifies Greece as the source of the song, but emphasises its longevity, demonstrating this through the multitude of versions, popularity, and the vitality of the motif across so many different cultural contexts. Stefanović, in turn, searches for the "Urform" and "Urstoff" of the song, finding basic and variant elements, which aligns with the concepts previously presented by Megas himself. Among the various elements Skok identifies are the following:

1. Two children, or twins, as a sacrificial offering.
2. The master hides his wife's fate from her. She brings food to the workers and, in some versions, is "replaced" by the master's sister.
3. As she is being walled up, the woman pleads with the master or his men or casts curses on them.
4. She has a small child and begs to leave a hole in the wall through which she can calm the child.
5. After her death, milk flows so that the child has something to eat.
6. In the place where milk once flowed, a spring is created, or a tap with miraculous water is installed. (Μέγας, 1971, p. 145)

However, Megas devotes most attention – first to presenting the concept, and then to rejecting it – to two works by Lajos Vargyas (1960, 1967), who studied Hungarian songs and compared them with Romanian and Bulgarian ones. Megas' summary includes, among other things, a list of the main motifs

found in Hungarian songs, a comparison of Hungarian and Bulgarian motifs, a comparison of Hungarian and Romanian versions, and a demonstration of the affinity between Bulgarian and Greek versions (Ευθυμίου, 2014, pp. 164–166), which is not shared by the Hungarian type. In his conclusions, Megas once again confirms the long duration of the song as well as its Greek origin, and he rejects alternative schools of thought on the subject, especially that proposed by Vargyas. The arguments are concluded with black-and-white photographs of the bridges mentioned in the songs: Arta, the Manolis Bridge in Evrytania, the bridge in Konitsa in Epirus, and the Kremasti Bridge in Lesbos.

Part VI (Μέγας, 1971, pp. 193–211) is a compilation of selected source texts, one from each region. The study concludes with a brief mention of the music accompanying the performances of the song and with a summary in German (announcing the full German-language version of the study). It is precisely Megas' limited consideration of the musical dimension of the song that forms the starting point for Euthymiou's later study.

It is worth noting here that the data collected by Megas could be expanded by adding new visualisations. This would make it possible to carry out horizontal correlations, indicating whether convergence occurs not only within the highlighted sub-motif (e.g., the foreman being named Giōrgos rather than Manolēs), but also across multiple sub-motifs simultaneously – for instance, whether versions in which the master is Giōrgos have the older sister building a bridge over the Danube rather than the Euphrates. Megas limited himself to a single, simple statistical procedure, namely calculating the percentage frequency of a given sub-motif version in isolation. With his data and with modern capabilities, far more could now be accomplished with ease.

The Work of Maria Alexandropoulou

Maria Alexandropoulou's thesis, defended in 1995, is kept in typescript form in the archives of the Department of Musicology at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The author explored the issue of the variability of *The Bridge of Arta* through a detailed analysis of the lyrics and music of eight recorded versions of the song. Her content analysis is based on Megas' findings. From the outset, Alexandropoulou looks for elements in each song that form a content pattern (Αλεξανδροπούλου, 1995, pp. 1–2). It is worth contrasting the findings of the young researcher with those of her great predecessor. The thinking follows the same line: the song must be "solved". The juxtaposition of structural elements takes the following form:

The king's order to build a bridge;
The number of master builders and their apprentices;
The names of the first master builder and of his wife;
The type of structure and its name;

The nighttime destruction of the structure;
The announcement of the need for a sacrifice;
The command (*κάλεσμα* / *kalesma*) to the master builder's wife to come to the construction site of the bridge;
The manner in which the command is conveyed;
What the command contains – the master builder's message to his wife;
How the wife reacts to the message, and how the messenger reacts;
The preparations of the master builder's wife, who obeys the command;
The spouses' conversation about the ring – a pretext for carrying out the walling up;
The wife's greetings to the husband and his co-workers;
The wife's question about why her husband is sad, and the dialogue resulting from it;
The workers lower the wife into the structure, but she cannot find the ring;
The wife's request to be pulled out because the search is fruitless; the conversation with her husband and his refusal to pull her out of the building;
Crying, lamentation (*μοιρολόι* / *moiroloi*) and the wife's curse;
The formulation of the curse;
The wife revokes the curse. (Αλεξανδροπούλου 1995, p. 1)

Apart from two points, the pattern forms a coherent narrative, undisturbed by variation. Not every point is filled with appropriate content in every song. For example, the first point, about the ruler's order, is found in only one variant. On the other hand, few elements of the pattern are realised in all eight versions – one of them being the fact that the bridge is destroyed at night. However, when Alexandropoulou comments on individual points, she often draws on variants from outside the accepted corpus. She finds only two names for the wife (Aretē and Vdokia, i.e., Eudokia), but points out that in other parts of Greece and Cyprus, Leniō (Elenē), Marō, Maroudia, Maroulou (variations of the name Maria), and so on, occur. In the case of the name, she comments on the dispute surrounding the name Manolēs, which does not appear in her variants, but is discussed in the Balkan context by Megas. When commenting on the name of the bridge, she discusses the version about Tricha Bridge, pointing out that one of the explanations is not so much the place of construction as its shape (delicacy) or the difficulty that the builders had to face.

The fantastical element proclaiming the need for sacrifice is usually a talking bird or, in one case, a river spirit. The message is delivered to the wife by a child or, again, a bird. The wife sometimes asks what she should wear, and then, without finishing her housework or making any preparations, she goes to the bridge. Alexadropoulou goes on to write the following significant words:

> An important element that should be emphasised is the courage shown by the woman when the master builder himself comes to inform her of her impending cruel fate. She voluntarily, and without resistance, prepares herself and goes to the

> place of sacrifice, but first asks for a little time to take care of her little children one last time and to say goodbye to her neighbours. (Αλεξανδροπούλου, 1995, p. 14)

Alexandropoulou quotes a rare dialogue between a woman who is being walled up and her husband. She wants to be pulled out, but he disagrees; she puts forward arguments (a child to feed, bread to take out of the oven), but he dismisses them. This is followed by lamentation and a story concerning three sisters, each strengthening the foundation of a particular bridge. In one version, one died by the sword, the second by a knife, and the third is walled up in the bridge. More often, however, the names of other bridges or other locations appear. In Alexandropoulou's versions, these are the Danube and the Euphrates, but she also mentions, among others, Galata, Venice, Frangia (the country of the Franks, i.e., a country somewhere in the west), Rufo, Molai (in Laconia), Kopano, Agia Lavra (in Achaea), Karpenisi (in the Pindos Mountains), Algeri (possibly Algeria), Misiri (Egypt?), Biligradi (Belgrade?), and others. She also mentions other types of buildings – a church, a monastery, a well, and a mosque. Finally, the motif of the curse itself and its reversal do not vary considerably in Alexandropoulou's study. The song usually concludes with a request from the woman to the husband to take care of their child, a farewell to her neighbours, a request to light candles for her soul, and a request to nature – to the birds and plants – to take away her beauty, but also the bitterness she feels, so that no other woman with a similar fate will experience it.

In the interpretative section, Alexandropoulou writes: "Human superstition [about the necessity of sacrifice] prevailed in times of barbarism and lack of education, but it still exists today among uncivilised communities [*απολίτιστες κοινωνίες / apolitistes koinōnies*]" (Αλεξανδροπούλου, 1995, p. 20). She mentions a "milder" form of the custom, still present in Greek villages, of killing and walling up a rooster in the walls of a house under construction. Following Megas, she traces the song's origins to Arta, during the Byzantine or early Ottoman period, a view supported by the writings of Anastasios Orlandos (Ορλάνδος, 1936, pp. 195–196).

The author then moves on to the second main part of her work, an analysis of the recordings themselves. In terms of metre, the songs are identical: iambic metre, in 15-syllable lines, with a caesura after the eighth syllable, which, she admits, is the most common form of Greek folk song. The recordings were made between 1963 and 1992 and come from six regions: Eurythania, Aetolia-Acarnania, Crete, the vicinity of the city of Drama in Macedonia (but sung by refugees from Eastern Thrace), and finally, the vicinity of the city of Serres in Macedonia. The most recent recording was made by the author herself.

Regarding the first two regions, the author also provides information about the dances accompanying the song: they are similar in step to *tsamikos*, one of the most popular – and simplest – folk dances from the Peloponnese, while the song itself is performed without instrumental accompaniment. This is how people dance to *The Bridge of Arta*, as well as to another ballad, *The Dead Brother*.

The author has two recordings from the same village, the first from 1966 and her own from 1992. She did not find any major changes in the lyrics or melody of the song, but she highlights another interesting structural element. Many verses are interrupted by separate insertions, known as *τσάκισμα* / *tsakisma*, a word that can be literally translated from Turkish (*çakı*, onomatopoeic) as "strike" or "break". These are interjections, not always consistent with the text (for example, *μάτια-ματάκια* / *matia-matakia* ["eyes, little eyes"]), which interrupt the verse and are followed by the singing of the complete line (Αλεξανδροπούλου, 1995, pp. 24, 29–30). Similar insertions of the *tsakisma* type occur in the last, eighth recording (1963, Serres), where four appear interchangeably, but in this case, they are incorporated into the main text and repeated at the beginning of the verses. *Tsakisma* seems to be an interesting structural device, allowing even those who do not fully remember the text to sing along. It also reinforces the concept of procrastination in folk songs.

Lambros Euthymiou's Doctoral Thesis

Lambros Euthymiou's doctoral thesis is titled *Ο κύκλος τραγουδιών Της Άρτας το γεφύρι. Θεματικός και συστηματικός κατάλογος. Καταγραφές και παραλλαγές* [The cycle of songs "The Bridge of Arta". Thematic and systematic catalogue. Recordings and versions] and was defended in Thessaloniki in 2014 at the Department of Musicology (Chair of Ethnomusicology, Aristotle University). Its supervisor was Professor Ioannēs Kaimakēs. The two-volume work consists mainly of source material. The first volume, in its most extensive chapter VII, contains all the melodic versions of the song, first arranged according to 14 types and then again according to geographical division. The second volume contains only source material – the lyrics of the song: 112 versions divided identically as in the first volume, many of which have only two to four verses. The author was not interested in the lyrics or the meaning of the song, but in the melody, which – being repetitive – is already realised within the first few verses. Euthymiou's work leads to the general conclusion that in studies of the song *The Bridge of Arta*, questions about the origin, structure and journey of the motif have largely ceased, because Megas has extensively studied these issues. However, such studies supplement Megas' work through footnotes and addenda and, tentatively, explore areas where *The Bridge of Arta* resonates with current cultural and social issues, pointing to instances where the song can serve as a point of reference. In volume I (Ευθυμίου, 2014, pp. 31–33), Euthymiou discusses the origins of the original version of the song, quoting mainly Megas's speculations, as well as the concept, which he finds bizarre, that the original creators of the song were the Vlachs, who were bridge builders (Ευθυμίου, 2014, p. 32). The author quickly abandons this thread, accepting that it is impossible to answer the questions of origin unequivocally or at least with a high degree of probability.

Euthymiou reflects on the place of *The Bridge of Arta* in Greek ethnographic tradition (Ευθυμίου, 2014, pp. 61–63), outlining the history of the dispute over whether it is a Cappadocian acritic song (Stilpōn Kyriakidēs) or a ballad (Politēs), that is, a *paralogē*. The ballad is a category proposed by Politēs, probably modelled on Fauriel's category of *chanson romanesque*. The author mentions attempts to link the song to ancient and Byzantine traditions (Ευθυμίου, 2014, p. 78), as well as competing concepts that the song is a modern invention or a borrowing. He compares the idea of Giōrgos Iōannou, who links elements of the plot of The Bridge with Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, with Claude Fauriel and other philhellenic collectors who saw *The Bridge of Arta* as an original work by a "folk poet". Euthymiou points out that the lyrics of the song entered the educational canon surprisingly quickly: as early as 1913, according to Euthymiou – a date I have not been able to confirm in the textbooks themselves. According to him, it is often used in textbooks to this day, in the version prepared by Politēs and published in 1914, although Politēs himself admitted that he made aesthetic corrections to the lyrics (Ευθυμίου, 2014, p. 93). Euthymiou therefore regrets that perhaps the most widespread version known through the school canon is an artificial one.

Apart from his analysis of the melodic versions, Euthymiou provides most new information in a short chapter (Ευθυμίου, 2014, pp. 367–374) on the circumstances of the musical performances of *The Bridge of Arta*. Although he does not mention the instruments used to play the melody[18], or the a capella versions, he does point to the circumstances in which the song functions in communities: examples from several holidays when the song is danced – the days after Easter, the feast of St. Paraskevi (26 July), and the feast of the Epiphany (Theophany, 6 January) – ending with the 12 days of Christmas (*Δωδεκαήμερον* / *Dōdekaēmeron*). During carnival, however, *The Bridge of Arta* is, surprisingly, a "table" or "feast" song (*της τάβλας* / *tēs tavlas*), i.e., listened to whilst feasting. In Macedonian villages, it is danced in the form of a procession dance (*ζωναράδικος* / *zōnaradikos*), known mainly in Thrace, in which the dancers hold each other by the belts (*ζωνάρι* / *zōnari* [belt]).

In Epirus, on the other hand, a *καγγελάρης* / *kangelarēs* dance is performed to *The Bridge of Arta*. It is a typical procession dance with complex group figures, consisting of multiple intertwining rows of dancers. In this version, a master (usually simply a man working as a builder) is placed in the centre of the semicircle. In some versions, only women dance; in others, a procession of men and women (first, men according to age, then women arranged in the same way) takes place. Euthymiou's findings – unfortunately, gathered after contact with only a few interlocutors – point to the aforementioned universality of the song, which is danced in different ways at different times of the year.

[18] However, elsewhere (p. 162) Euthymiou mentions instruments that sometimes accompany the song: the violin, guitar and lute (Greek λαούτο, a stringed instrument similar to the Arabic *oud*).

The author criticises Megas only once: for omitting the existence of a phenomenon called *τσακίσμα* (*tsakisma)*, the repetitions discussed above, which are dictated by the needs of the melody's rhythm (Ευθυμίου, 2014, p. 115). This technique is still used today, for example, in carnival songs. Euthymiou and Alexdropoulou note that the *tsiakismata* omitted by Megas serve to extend *The Bridge of Arta* so that it lasts as long as possible. These repetitions also have a rhythmic and inclusive character, as they engage participants who do not know the lyrics being sung. The dance can last as long as desired: a single song may be danced for up to a dozen or so minutes, as it was not intended for an audience that would get bored with a lack of variety. The dance generally consists of simple, effortless steps, allowing participants to join in for as long as they wish. The front of the dance procession is particularly important, where the first dancer – *prōtohoreutēs* – dictates the tempo and, optionally, performs additional, more complex figures. The role of the first dancer is variable: every few minutes he is replaced by another dancer, while he himself moves to the end of the procession. This is a place of honour, where one can show off one's skills and sense of rhythm, although dancing itself is not a field of competition in Greek tradition. A longer dance allows for more frequent changes at the front of the dance procession.

The length of the dance serves another purpose: it is one of the few occasions when the entire community can see each other. Young girls can, without compromising their modesty, watch bachelors ready for marriage, who in turn can carefully observe the girls. This interaction will provide material for discussion with the matchmaker. Although strangers do not dance next to each other in a dance procession (usually one is surrounded by family members), the very shape of the dance, the existence of the procession, and the temporary audience allow individuals to identify one another. The dance is not antagonistic in itself, but it could help to determine the social hierarchy. It is therefore an important ritual, so important that rushing to finish the song is completely inadvisable.

In addition, rural cultural tradition is tied to scarcity: there was a finite and limited number of fictional stories passed down, for example, through songs, so listening to them and experiencing them was all the more enjoyable. Finding new themes and variations in these stories was probably even more fun, and this may be where the original impulse to collect so many versions comes from.

Kōnstantinos Nigdelēs' Study

Kōnstantinos Nigdelis' book, published by the Neapoli-Stavroupoli Monastery in Thessaloniki and the Museum of Greek Refugees in Thessaloniki in 2019, approaches *The Bridge of Arta* from a different perspective. The subtitle of this work, *Global Archetype*, indicates the author's ambition to situate the song not only in a Balkan context, but also in a much broader one. Nigdelēs, founder of the museum and a high school history teacher, places the sacrificial offering

from the song in a wider literary context, pointing to other well-known (but rarely cited) works on the theme of sacrifice, both globally and in Greek works. In the latter case, he mentions "Abraham's Sacrifice" in the biblical sense, but also points to a Cretan drama under the same title from the 17th century, probably written by Vintsenzos Kornanos. However, he draws most of his examples from ancient sources, including *Wanderings in Hellas* by the geographer Pausanias, who describes numerous sites in Greece in the 2nd century AD, along with stories and tales about them. Nigdelēs then quotes entire variants of *The Bridge of Arta* in rather exotic, extreme dialectal varieties, such as Cappadocian, Cypriot, Thracian, Pontic, and Pomak, and one from Central Greece. Three of these versions mention other bridges – Tricha, Spercheios (a river in Central Greece), and Pavlos (i.e., Paul) – which the author identifies as variations of *The Bridge of Arta*. In addition, texts in dialects distant from Modern Greek are translated into standard *demotic*. The interpretative section begins with the following words:

> The highest sacrifice of the best, most beautiful, most precious being for the benefit of the wider community […]. The word "sacrifice" was accompanied by a footnote: "The necessity of sacrificing personal happiness for the benefit of society as a whole". (Νίγδελης, 2019, p. 29)

The entire subsequent argument is consistent with this assertion. The author follows a similar path as Alexandropoulou did earlier, outlining the structure of the collected and selected song variants and identifying fragments corresponding to given content units. He distinguishes the following successive elements: the builders of the bridge; the time of construction of the object of sacrifice; the one who gives the order (or *deus ex machina,* who proposes an unexpected solution); the messenger; the content of the message; the messenger's mistake; the arrival of the victim at the place of execution (*μαρτυρίο* / *martyrio*); the lost ring; despair over abandonment and impending death; the curse and its reversal; and the death scene (Νίγδελης, 2019, pp. 33–48). The author then characterises the principle figures in the legend, namely the wife and the master himself (Νίγδελης, 2019, pp. 49–52). He concludes the publication with a short chapter titled *Loose Thoughts*, in which he interprets the archetype differently: he emphasises the courage of the victim, who senses her fate, and also of the master, who, having decided on his version of sacrifice, throws the first stone and, in a sense, completes the act of sacrifice. In this interpretation, the story's ending is not bitter, but a triumph for the characters involved: both sacrifice themselves, as the author previously expressed, for the common good.

It should be noted that Nigdelēs does not refer to any previous studies, and that his bibliography lists only a small number of folk song collections from which the versions he quotes are taken. The publication is richly illustrated by Vasilikē Dina, whose depictions (examples below, Figures 5a i 5b) always feature a stone bridge and, as a rule, a young woman in folk costume.

The four studies – the most comprehensive Greek publications on the ballad *The Bridge of Arta* – devote most of their attention to analysing the song's vari-

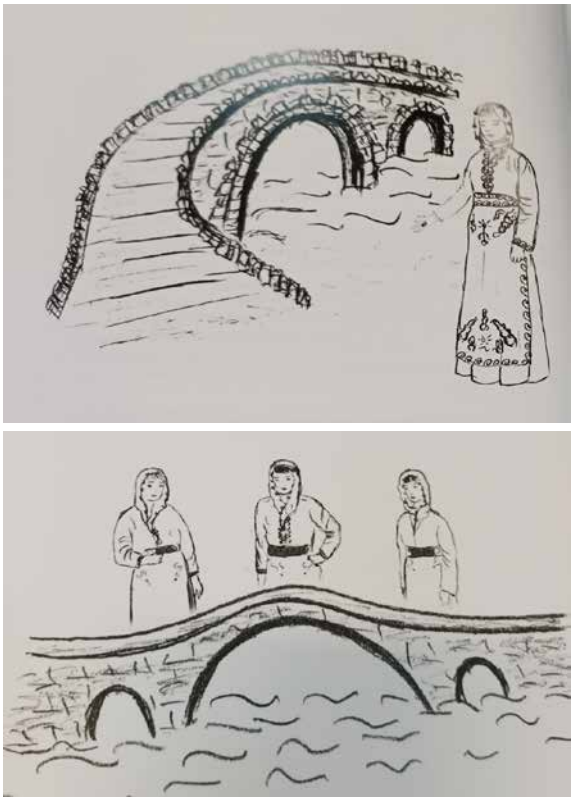


Figure 5a and 5b. Sample drawings by Vasilikē Dina from the work of Kōnstantinos Nigdelēs.
Source: Νίγδελης (2019, p. 10, 20)

ability. The authors are primarily interested in systematically breaking down the texts (and melodies) and constructing a general model that encompasses as many versions as possible. In addition, Megas addresses historical conditions, particularly the question of the song's origins, which he does not fully answer. Interpretative issues – with the exception of Nigdelēs' bizarre argument about a "world archetype" – hardly appear at all.

Aristeidēs Schismenos' Interpretation

In his extensive monograph on bridges, Schismenos offers his own interpretation (Σχισμένος, 2000, pp. 147–178). He begins by quoting a variant – without specifying the region – and then discusses its content. He focuses on the main themes and the basic meaning, which he interprets as a sacrifice for the good of

the community. He highlights individual elements of the song, which he discusses analytically: human sacrifice; the incorrect delivery (by a bird) of a message from the master; a justified curse; a psychological explanation for the reversal of the curse; and the omission of drastic details. This is, in itself, an interesting set of issues. Schismenos devotes most of his attention, however, to what he terms the parallelism of events. This enigmatic concept refers to an attempt to link the legend with ancient texts. He seeks inspiration in the myths of Achilles, Antigone, and, above all, Iphigenia. However, his reasoning is bizarre. For example, Schismenos gives the customary number of builders – 45 masters and 60 apprentices – a total of 105 people, which he compares with Thucydides' data on the ships gathered in Aulis before the Trojan campaign, and then relates this number to the dimensions of the bridge. At times, his argumentation is questionable or becomes incomprehensibly esoteric.

Other Studies

Relatively few academic articles have been written about the song itself outside Greece; however, the subject of the bridge of Arta has attracted the attention of several well-known researchers. In a volume edited by Alan Dundes devoted to the motif of the walled-up woman, Greece is represented by a contribution from Roderick Beaton (1996). The author, who largely reports on Megas' findings, emphasises a strong interpretative motif in his text – the chthonic. He points to three elements that enable such an interpretation: first, the existence of a version of the legend concerning the Bridge of Hair (*της Τρίχας το γεφύρι*), which functions as a link between the world of the living and the dead, a motif not limited to Greek folk tales; second, another encounter with the other world occurs when the wife descends to the pillar, where, in some versions, she finds bones, snakes, or other evidence suggesting the presence of a lizard or dragon, all of which point to the afterlife; third, the very end of the legend – the curse and its reversal – is necessary if the bridge symbolises the passage of souls which must be successful and safe. Hence, the curse is neutralised by the sister's love for her brother.

In the foundational first issue of the important *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Ruth Mandel (1983) focuses on gender roles in the legend and on the distribution of power. However, she also creates a kind of catalogue of possible interpretations of the legend, without developing any of the themes mentioned in particular detail. The main concept she uses in her analysis is liminality: she interprets the legend through a series of oppositions. She points to numerous moments when oppositions are juxtaposed: in colours (the gold of festive attire and the black of mourning attire), in mistakes and the juxtaposition of opposite meanings, and finally, in the reversal of the curse. The most important opposition is between one's own family and the stranger, and the first master's wife becomes the object of the transition, which is revealed in the advice of a su-

pernatural voice (a bird) that points to a possible victim. Moreover, she also acts as a link – or a boundary – between culture and nature: between the technology of the masons taming the river and nature, represented by the element of water and other surreal elements. The woman, the master builder's wife, is a mediator, and her sacrifice brings harmony between the conflicting spheres (Mandel, 1983, pp. 179–181).

Walter Puchner, ethnographer and Balkanist, uses three ballads (about a bridge, a dead brother, and a returning husband) to illustrate the close connections between some of the stories considered to be Ur-Greek and the entire spectrum of Balkan legends with a high degree of plot similarity (Puchner, 2016, p. 70). In the case of *The Bridge of Arta*, Puchner mainly draws on Megas' findings in the Greek version and points out that the core similarities lie in the voluntary nature of the sacrifice and the associated reversal of the curse. It is worth noting that Puchner thus places at the core of the song an element which Megas himself excludes from its basic form. Other elements may vary significantly. Artemis Leontis (1999) expresses a similar view when writing about the legend of the bridge as pan-Balkan heritage. In her extensive study on the presence of myth in modern Greek culture, Margaret Alexiou uses the example of *The Bridge of Arta* to illustrate several theses (Alexiou, 2002, pp. 162, 182, 184–185, 189–193). She points to its Balkan character and reminds the reader that the song is detached from the region itself and even from a specific occasion in the year. It can serve as a musical backdrop for various rituals, such as weddings. She reflects on the contrast between the sad content of the song and its cheerful melody, as well as the lively steps that usually accompany it. Finally, she quotes one of the versions of the song in its entirety to reflect on the theme of life after death. She rejects Beaton's chthonic ideas, considering them deceptively simple[19], and tends to treat the wife's sacrifice as a triumph over death, interpreting is as a symbol of rebirth, consistent with the imagery of Easter. Hence, the song is sung at that time or on the feast of Lazarus.

Before turning to the modern and contemporary reception of the work – consisting of a series of creative interpretations – it is worth commenting on an often overlooked, and perhaps the most impressive, element of the song: the final curse and its reversal. In her monograph devoted to the circumstances and semantics of a curse, Anna Engelking clearly outlines the structure of an incantation and the actors involved in such an act, and then points to various scenarios for its reversal (Engelking, 2010, pp. 225–237, 280–283). However, the curse in the song in question defies the usual patterns. First, it is complex: in addition to statements, it contains poetic metaphors. This elaboration is

[19] Alexiou's argument is based on the multitude of versions and different circumstances of the wife's death, when (in the Rhodes version) the master is happy about her departure because he will find a younger partner, or when the wife orders her husband to descend for the ring himself and the masons resort to violence against her (one of the versions from Cyprus) (Alexiou, 2002, pp. 190–191, see also a recording by the University of Cyprus – Πανεπιστήμιο Κύπρου University of Cyprus, 2013).

artistic because it is probably part of a literary work, but the metaphor also reinforces the curse's impact. Second, no higher power is invoked to carry out the curse – there is no mention of divine punishment or the devil. Third, the reversal occurs almost immediately, after the wife, once walled up, realises that the curse may affect her brother. Sisterly love then causes the woman to break the curse herself, thereby saving him and completing the sacrifice, as she ensures the bridge's durability. In addition, the punchline of this song has another dimension: the bridge is still standing, and the counter-curse is clearly still working. In this way, literature transcends fiction and enters the material and visible world.

Reception

Just as most researchers studying *The Bridge of Arta* have focused their efforts on analysis, most creators focus on its reconstruction, as shown below. Perhaps this is because Megas and his followers and commentators have revealed so many potential plot lines that there is little need to add to and supplement – rather than reverse – the entire story.

Furthermore, in the case of the bridge of Arta, we are dealing with a fusion of legend and existing structure. Meanwhile, in tourism activities, it seems that the legendary aspect is being downplayed. At best, it is one of many equally important aspects of the narrative about the bridge, such as its shape, building material, location among other stone bridges in Epirus and throughout Greece, and the structure's connections with antiquity. One of the most complementary tourist writings about Epirus, Stefanos Psymmenos' guidebook, published in the excellent series of guidebooks *Ανεξερεύνητη Ελλάδα* [Unexplored Greece], opens its story about Arta with a sentence taken from the folk song. Psymmenos writes: "'They built it all day long, and at night it collapsed' – this is a verse from a well-known folk song about the bridge of Arta, the topographical landmark of this beautiful city" (Ψυμμένος, 2007, p. 89). A few sentences later: "The song tells of the difficulties of building this ambitious bridge and is a romantic version of the story. The truth, however, is different" (Ψυμμένος, 2007, p. 90). What follows is a rare attempt to explain the legend by rationalising it. Psymmenos mentions that bridges, roads, and other public structures were built by travelling groups of masons (*kalfades*), who either had no families or left their families behind for many months in distant villages. The masons entered into temporary relationships with local women: widows or those whose husbands worked as travelling traders or sailors and were away for most of the year. The legend of the bridge tells of a situation in which the master builder enters into a deeper, possibly romantic relationship with a local woman and deliberately delays construction so that the relationship lasts as long as possible. The woman's fate is a cruel solution to the impasse; a solution devised and carried out

by other masons in order to finish the work, get paid, and move on elsewhere. Psymmenos does not return to the legend or quote other fragments from folk songs but moves on to the bridge's history, known from historical sources, and then moves into the city and recounts each of its monuments in turn.

The tourist portals which allow users to comment on attractions and aggregate opinions and ratings are consistent with Psymmenos' concept. The legend is rarely mentioned at all: travellers are satisfied with the information board placed next to the bridge, which states that the site is known "because of the famous legend of the sacrifice of the wife (*θυσιασμένης γυναίκας* / *thysiasmenēs gynaikas*) of the first master builder". If they do express an opinion, it is to complain that the bridge is on the city's outskirts, its surroundings do not have convenient infrastructure for tourists, and the museum by the bridge is either closed or the part of the exhibition concerning the bridge is not at all informative[20]. The museum consists of a dozen or so rather old photographs and a retelling of the legend. The installation is quite old and has a somewhat mandatory character. As the Ethnographic Museum is adjacent to the bridge, it and its legend deserve to be done greater justice. The reception of the legend, therefore, remains the domain of students, writers, artists, and researchers.

The dominant folk narrative has its origins in an oral tradition that is no longer accessible, transformed into various types and qualities of written records by philologists, ethnographers, and amateur collectors. Based on this material, systematised as early as the 19th century, derivative works were created, which from the outset served three purposes: education (the song enters the school canon), reconstruction (mainly in musical performances), and interpretation (Figure 6). In the latter case, the number of plays belonging to the literary genre of ethography (*ηθογραφία*, from *ήθος* / *ēthos* [custom]) that dominated at the turn of the century – is astonishing. Alongside descriptions of nature and its symbolic meanings in relation to human life (as was the case, for example, with Kōstas Krystallēs, who came from the Epirus village of Syrrako in the Tzoumerka mountains, about 80 km north of Arta[21]) reflections on everyday rural life in the conscious context of progressive urbanisation also appeared. Writers often drew on childhood memories and contemporary observations to create works that idealised rural life or, conversely, depicted the hardships of rural existence. Dramas such as the story of the people building the bridge of Arta were a natural inspiration for ethographic attempts: the rich plot provided the perfect building material for a multi-threaded adaptation (cf., e.g., Mackridge, 1992, pp. 148–168; Vitti, 1991; Beaton, 1994, p. 72)[22].

[20] I draw the data from opinions presented and collected on TripAdvisor (Tripadvisor, n.d.) and Google Maps (Google, n.d.).

[21] Kōstas Krystallēs wrote a poem about Manolis' bridge, telling a story that corresponds to the ballad about the bridge of Arta in a number of ways (Κρυστάλλης, n.d.).

[22] Małgorzata Borowska translates ethography as "literature of custom" (Borowska, 2013, p. 42).

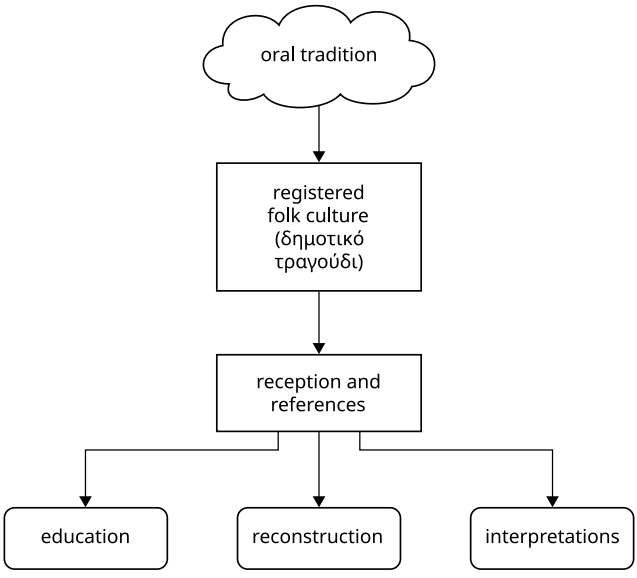


Figure 6. Folk tradition in relation to types of reception.
Author: Przemysław Kordos

The Bridge of Arta in the Education System

The contemporary beginning (and, chronologically speaking, the end) of the discussion about the song within the education system is the textbook on Modern Greek literature currently used in the third year of secondary school (Καγιαλής et al, n.d.), which quotes the lyrics of the song, accompanied by footnotes and interpretative questions. The questions help students to analyse the form of the text but point to a different context for reading the work in school – not as a story about sacrifice, or as an element of the "building" tradition, etc., but as an example of a specific type of folk song, the so-called ballad. The ballad, considered by researchers and artists alike to be perhaps the most attractive type of folk song, describes the most "narrative" songs, detached from places, history, and other circumstances, but containing stories that almost always include supernatural elements.

The Song About the Walled-Up Woman in the School Curriculum

The song *The Bridge of Arta* appeared in the school curriculum for the 5th grade of secondary school (at that time, the education system consisted of 6 grades

of primary school and 6 grades of secondary school), in the section devoted to folk songs in the 1960s, before the junta came to power in Greece. The song was reprinted in subsequent editions of the textbook, both during and after the junta. It appeared once in a mid-1970s primary school textbook; during the next reform, it was removed from the curriculum and has not returned since.

In the textbook itself, the song is quoted without commentary and without any indication of the source or regional version of the text. Much more information is provided in the teacher's textbook, which contains extensive analytical instructions and brief interpretative recommendations (*κυριαρχική ιδέα* [dominant idea]), summarised by the sentence "τα μεγάλα έργα απαιτούν τις μεγάλες θυσίες" [great works demand great sacrifices]. The rest of the discussion consists of summaries of the work and extensive comments on the form of the poem and the vocabulary used in it (Καλαματιανός et al., 1965, pp. 101–102; Στασινόπουλος et al., 1975, pp. 114–115; Μωραΐτης et al, 1965, pp. 101–104)[23].

Today, *The Bridge of Arta* appears[24] once in the textbook for the compulsory subject "Literature" (*Λογοτεχνία* / *Logotechnia*) for the third year of secondary school (Καγιαλής et al, n.d., pp. 12–14), i.e., for young people aged 15–16. The song, along with a short commentary and exercises, is included in the first section of the textbook, devoted to folk songs (*δημοτικό τραγούδι* / *dēmotiko tragoudi*). It is the last in a series of texts, preceded by a lullaby and a historical song about the Ottoman conquest of the Epirus town of Parga (from the Venetians in the early 19th century). These are by no means the only texts of this genre in school textbooks – quite the opposite. Folk songs as a distinct literary genre are well documented and institutionally recognised in education. In the history of Greek literature, they form a bridge between the literature of the Byzantine period and the Western-influenced Cretan Renaissance (from the 16th to the mid-17th century, until the Ottoman conquest of the island) and the literature of the modern, pre-uprising period, extending to the first decades of the 19th century (Vitti, 2015, pp. 156–159; Λ. Πολίτης, 1985, pp. 101–119).

History of Greek Literature (Αθανασόπουλος et al, n.d., pp. 51–56), accompanying all secondary school textbooks, briefly discusses the genre of folk songs and, even more succinctly, the history of its study. The main body of the textbook does not mention titles, only types (klephtic songs, love songs, lullabies, etc.), but one of the three exercises related to the text mentions *The Bridge of Arta*. The song lyrics are employed to illustrate the characteristics of Greek ballads. *The Bridge of Arta* is therefore considered a model of the genre. It plays the same

[23] Digital versions of all these textbooks can be found in the Ιστορική Συλλογή Σχολικών Εγχειριδίων (Historical Archive of School Textbooks) maintained by the Ινστιτούτο Εκπαιδευτικής Πολιτικής (ΙΕΠ, Institute of Educational Politics) on the Archive website (Ινστιτούτο Εκπαιδευτικής Πολιτικής, n.d.).

[24] All current textbooks, i.e. those that define the current school curriculum, are available on the Ministry's Digital School (Ψηφιακό Σχολείο, n.d.). The materials available there are a starting point for my reflections on the contemporary presence of *The Bridge of Arta* in primary and secondary education.

role in the main textbook for third-year students: it represents ballads. This is consistent with how *The Bridge of Arta* is treated in contemporary academic research on ballads (e.g., Ιωάννου, 1970).

The lyrics of *The Bridge of Arta* used in the textbook were taken from one of the oldest and most famous Greek anthologies of folk songs: a collection compiled by Nikolaos Politēs and published in 1914 (Ν. Πολίτης, 1914; cf. Megas, 1971). The least controversial version, originating from the island of Corfu and containing – according to Giōrgos Megas' map of themes – all the most common plot elements of the ballad, was thus selected. The text in question is quite extensive; it consists of 46 iambic verses in a typical rhythmic version – an unrhymed fifteen-syllable line. The version presented in the textbook can be summarised as follows: there are forty-five masters and 60 apprentices; the voice announcing the need for a sacrifice comes from a bird. The bird lists potentially unfavourable sacrifices – an orphan or a passerby – and points to the wife of the first master. According to the bird, she is to hurry and bring lunch to the bridge as soon as possible. The master conveys the message through another bird, delivering a reversed message: she is to take her time and bring the meal as late as possible, but the bird understands the opposite and conveys the original (and thus doubly reversed) message. The wife arrives quickly, which breaks the master builder's heart with grief. However, in response to his wife's questions, as she notices his gloomy mood, he lies about a ring lost in the bridge. The wife eagerly agrees to find it, but when she is lowered down, she quickly wants to be pulled out, saying that she has found nothing. Her request is not granted, and instead the masons wall the woman up alive in the bridge, while the master himself is the first to throw a large stone into the depths of the bridge pillar. With her last ounce of strength, the wife casts a curse: she mentions her two older sisters, who were sacrificed in two other bridges – in this version on the Danube and the Euphrates – and then the woman curses the bridge to shake like a walnut tree and for pedestrians to fall off it like leaves. But her husband reminds her of her brother, who may one day cross this bridge, so in her last words, the curse is reversed: "let the bridge shake like mountains and let passers-by fall like wild birds". The fate of the bridge is sealed.

As can be seen, the Corfu version differs from the Lesbos version, quoted in its entirety, in only a dozen or so details. The song in the textbook is preceded by an introduction, which mentions the source of the version, as well as references to the ancient tradition of sacrificial offerings. The motif of such offerings, which appears in folk poetry not only in Greece but throughout the Balkans, is also mentioned.

The six exercises that accompany the text are quoted below in full (Καγιαλής, et al, n.d., 14). Their themes and wording reveal the educational intentions that accompany the school reading of the song.

1. Divide the poem into sections and give them titles.
2. How are the difficulties in constructing the bridge described and how is the solution provided?

3. What is the role of the bird in the development of the narrative?
4. What adverb does the first master use in his request, and what adverb does his winged messenger use? What does the choice of the adverb indicate in the first case, and what in the second one?
5. How does the first master's wife react to her unexpected fate and what are her feelings towards her husband?
6. What features of this song indicate that it belongs to the ballad genre? (Καγιαλής et al, n.d., p. 14).

Two more extensive tasks accompany the short exercises. One involves independently collecting bibliographic materials on stone bridges in Greece. The other involves working in teams to gather information on the functioning of bridges from a diachronic perspective: from ancient times to the "modern era of rapid technological development".

The nature of all these questions is noteworthy. Apart from the last two tasks, which are more related to the song's setting (the bridge) than its dramatic content, the other six test the students primarily on the form of the poem, with the last question duplicating a task from the textbook on literary history. The first question organises the content, while the second and fourth test the reader's attentiveness (the answers are quotations – phrases or single words – the adverbs "slowly" and "quickly", both in dialectal, very demotic versions). The third question points to the fantastical element: talking birds are a common feature of ballads that link the real world with the supernatural, magical world. Their voice is often the voice of non-human beings, usually issuing categorical commands to mortals. The nature of the questions does not take into account other important features of this fragment, such as the criterion for selecting victims or, most interestingly, the reaction to the supernatural message, as no one comments on it or objects to it. The only interpretative references can be found in the fifth question: on the one hand, the wife eagerly enters but then wants to leave, and when she can no longer do so, she casts a curse but then reverses it (these symmetries are not addressed in the questions at all); on the other hand, hardly anything is known about the characters' marital relationship in this version. We only know that the master's heart breaks and he is worried afterwards, and we can only decipher his wife's feelings through her actions. We learn more directly about her attitude towards her brother than towards her husband, because she states it explicitly.

Work with this text is therefore limited to placing it within a genre formula, to simple formal statements, and a pinch of superficial interpretations, while the entire range of potential content, such as the moral implications of human sacrifice (not to mention gender issues), remains completely absent from such a reading. The school curriculum clearly opts for a conservative reading of the work, remaining faithful to the instructions of the 1960s but also shaping gender roles in line with the traditional, patriarchal rhythm of Greek society. Students learn about the form of folk works, the genius of anonymous creators,

and the richness of their imagination. Still, the textbook's authors do not suggest relating the text to contemporary times in any way – even the "field" task involves returning to the past. The material concludes with a photograph of the bridge in Arta at night during a full moon.

Additional Materials for Teachers

There are numerous, varied lesson kits available to teachers in supplementary textbooks and online materials, varying in degree of "officialness", i.e., compliance with ministerial institutional policies.

The materials published on the website *Πανελλήνιο Σχολικό Δίκτυο / Panellēnio Scholiko Diktyo* [Panhellenic School Network / Panellinio website], https://www.sch.gr/, repeat and supplement the information from the literature textbook. Teachers can read a short interpretation that explains the emotionality of the married couple but focuses primarily on pointing out the intertextual connections of the song. The expression of feelings towards her brother at the moment of the wife's death is linked to a similar motif in ancient tragedy, in the characters of Antigone and Iphigenia.

The anonymous hermeneuticist then points to the tension between "I want" and "I must", best expressed in the character of the first master, who chooses social duty (completing the bridge) over his family happiness and his wife's life. She, on the other hand, changes the terrible curse only at the thought of her brother, and not her husband, which emphasises the folk attachment to blood family and points not only to ancient texts, but also to another, already modern, famous text about sacrifice: *On the Sacrifice of Abraham* by Vintzenzos Kornaros, a 17th-century Cretan drama based on an Old Testament motif[25].

This is followed by a two-pronged analysis of the work – formal and semantic – with some of the issues overlapping completely with the tasks set for the students reading the work. In terms of form, the characteristics of the ballad are discussed, possible subtitles are suggested, and the characteristics of the text as a folk song are detailed, with particular emphasis on oral techniques (enclosing meaning within a verse, the use of stereotypical and connective expressions, repetitions, formal, and semantic contrasts). Certain themes preferred by folk artists are also indicated, such as the use of the bird motif and, more generally, the personification of nature, significant numbers (3; 60 – 20 × 3; 45 – 15 × 3), and hyperboles.

Much more attention in the materials has been devoted to the main characters of the song: the master builder and his wife. Their attitudes are discussed separately, with distinct comments on their marriage. The anonymous her-

[25] Cf., the Polish translation by Małgorzata Borowska with commentary in the volume devoted to Cretan dramas *Utrudzony*, *Piękna pastereczka, Ofiara Abrahama* (Borowska, 2004b).

meneuticist also addresses more general topics, such as the characteristics of society that can be inferred from the song's lyrics (the significance of the supposedly lost wedding ring, the division of space, and respect for the workplace) and, in the last paragraph, the meaning of the curse and its reversal. This extensive commentary is supplemented by links, including to Politēs' abridged anthology on the Internet[26] and other versions of the ballad – one marked only as a short collection (by Arnold Passow), as well as two from the island of Skiathos and one from Eastern Thrace. All of these are much more difficult linguistically and less detailed.

In addition, teachers are provided with links to six recordings of the song posted on YouTube, including one of the Skiathos versions mentioned above. This is an archival recording from Greek television from 1977, in which several procession dancers, led by Mairē Baltē (ΚΣΔΜ, 2014), sing the song *a capella*. The instrumental version, on the other hand, features lyrics from Thrace (Greek folk Music, 2012). Other recordings include the version performed by Domna Samiou and Giōrgos Bagiokēs with a choir, reconstructing the Skiathos version of the ballad; the recording comes from an album released in 1980 (Ελληνικό Τραγούδι, 2016). Similar in musical context is a recording of a version from the village of Drymos in the municipality of Elassona, Thessaly, produced by the Epirote Bridges Archive (*Αρχείο Γεφυριών Ηπειρώτικων / Archeio Gephyriōn Ēpeirōtikōn, ΑΓΗ*), recorded by Spyros Mantas in 2011. It is a performance of the song *Λε, καμάρα / Le, kamara* [Hey, Bridge], a regional *a capella* rendition of the ballad by a group of folk singers (Mantas, 2013). For teaching purposes in the third year of secondary school, part of a programme from the Greek state television channel ERT was also used. This contained excerpts from performances, discussion of the song's content, and photos of the bridge, with narration by Spyros Mantas (Mantas, 2017). The Balkan context is provided by a recording of the Hungarian version of the ballad from the village of Visa in Romania (in Mezőség, or the Transylvanian Plain), recorded in 2009 and published in 2011[27] (Mantas, 2011). It is worth noting that the authors of the materials used virtually all the important recordings available in this way, except for the most recent one. Marina Sati, a well-known alternative singer active in Greek pop music, presented the beginning of a version of the song, sung *a capella* with a small

[26] The anthology is to be found in the "Μυριόβιβλος" repository (Μυριόβιβλος, n.d.) and contains several *paraloges* collected by N. Politēs, including *On the Bridge of Arta*, with a short introduction discussing the custom of sacrificial offerings. His commentary contains an interesting reference to other Greek structures where legendary foundation sacrifices may have taken place (*οίον της γέφυρας του Σπερχειού, του Πηνειού, των Αδάνων, της βρύσης της Αράχοβας, του υδραγωγείου των Δέρκων κλπ.*), including the Spercheios Bridge, the Pineios Bridge, the Adan Bridge, the spring (or well) in Arachova, and the aqueduct in Derkon). Such versions, apart from changing the location, follow one of the plot lines outlined in the text of the most popular song from Arta.

[27] Like other recordings, this material comes from Spyros Mantas' book on song recordings (Μαντάς, 2010).

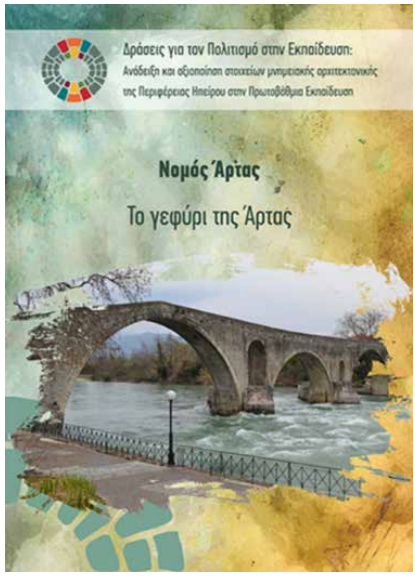


Figure 7. The cover of the textbook from the programme "Δράσεις…".
Graphic design: Aphroditē Zouki (Αφροδίτη Ζούκη).
Source: Παιδαγωγικό Τμήμα Δημοτικής Εκπαίδευσης Πανεπιστημίου Ιωαννίνων (n.d.), http://mnimeia.ptde.uoi.gr/ekpaideytika_senaria/nomos_artas/to-gefyri-tis-artas/

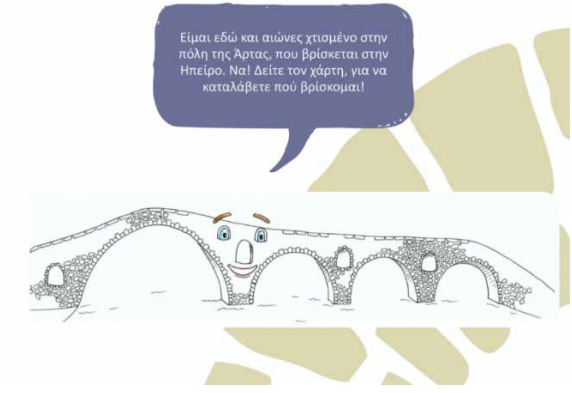


Figure 8. A picture from the book *Το γεφύρι της Άρτας* [student's book], p. 4. The bridge says: "I was built centuries ago in the city of Arta, located in Epirus. This is me! Look at the map to find out where I am!".[1] Graphic design: Aphroditē Zoukē (Αφροδίτη Ζούκη).
Source: Παιδαγωικό (n.d.), http://mnimeia.ptde.uoi.gr/ekpaideytika_senaria/nomos_artas/to-gefyri-tis-artas/

[1] The map – that is, simply a screenshot from the Google Maps app – is actually provided below the picture of the talking bridge.

female choir, titled *Χίλιοι μάστοροι / Chilioi mastoroi* [A Thousand Masters] (KEXP, 2020). This is the Peloponnesian version of the lyrics.

Phōtodentro [luminous tree] is an educational portal teachers use as a source of additional materials and inspiration for lessons. The bridge in Arta and the song about it are featured on a separate page (Φωτόδεντρο, 2018) by Giannēs Salonikidēs and Grigōrios Philippiadēs, both primary school teachers. The main materials consist of a summary of the song, its content, and a citation of sources, in this case, a collection of folk legends. It is interesting to note that the song's lyrics and the legend of the bridge are used for tasks related to geology and geography and supplement topographical and regional information. Far more important is the fact that the bridge is one of many, and at the same time one of the largest Greek stone bridges, rather[28] than any aspects of the content of the legend.

Interesting material is brought in two books, or rather educational brochures, created as part of the European program "Actions for Culture in Education: 'Promotion and utilisation of elements of monumental architecture of the Epirus Region in primary education'", available on the website. The program is coordinated by the University of Janenach, and the books are accompanied by a digital archive related to the monuments of Epirus in general. Some of the published materials concern the bridge in Arta (Παιδαγωγικό Τμήμα Δημοτικής Εκπαίδευσης Πανεπιστημίου Ιωαννίνων, n.d.).

One of the items is a student's book (Figures 7 and 8), the other is a teacher's book. The student's book has 33 pages, is richly illustrated, and consists of many tasks related to the bridge. One task is to recount the legend in the form of a song (in the Corfiot version, as presented in the literature textbook), and another is to summarise it as a story. The remaining exercises concern the history of the bridge, its shape, and the methods used in its construction.

The 24-page teacher's booklet mainly contains information about the bridge, with three pages devoted to the legend itself, briefly discussing the history of research into the legend. The text of the legend is quoted in the form of a footnote. The booklet focuses more on historical, structural, and even technical aspects; the legend itself, both in the text and in the bibliography, is treated as a marginal and largely insignificant curiosity.

Το Γεφύρι Της Άρτας Comic Book. From Education to Pop Culture

The comic book *Το γεφύρι της Άρτας / To gephyri tēs Artas* belongs to the series "*Κλασσικά εικονογραφημένα*". It seems to have been published sloppily: neither the author nor the illustrator is known, and the date of publication is unclear; it is assumed to have been in the 1950s. It belongs to a very long series of comic

[28] Cf., "Art of dry-stone walling, knowledge and techniques" on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage list, entered in 2018 as 13.COM 10.b.10.

books that became extremely popular in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s. The series began with translations and reprints of the American educational series *Classics Illustrated*, which ran from 1941 to 1969 and comprised 169 issues (Grand Comics Database, n.d.). Greek reprints began in 1951, published by Atlantis publishing house and bookshop in central Athens. Over three hundred issues were produced, although the exact number is uncertain, and the catalogues themselves, even those contained in individual issues, contain inaccuracies.

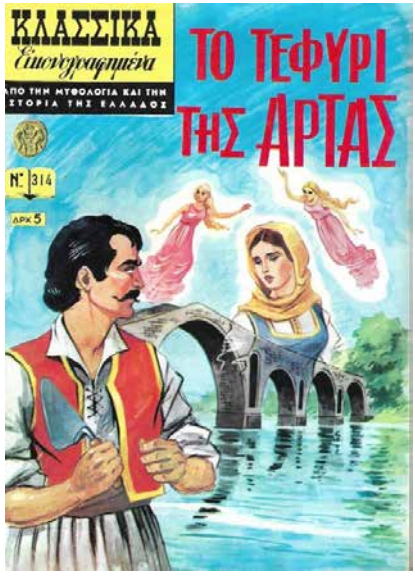


Figure 9. The cover of the comic book *Το γεφύρι της Άρτας* / *To gephyri tēs Artas*. Source: *Το γεφύρι της Άρτας* (n.d.)

Initially, these were simply reprints of American editions translated into Modern Greek, themselves comic adaptations of mainly 19th century well-known and popular novels and short stories (Βατόπουλος, 2021). From 1953 onwards, the Greeks began their own series of stories. Comics on Greek themes began to appear: first, mythological stories and illustrated, significantly abridged versions of ancient works; then stories from the Byzantine era and the Cretan Renaissance – primarily pictorial versions of Byzantine novels (*Kassianē*) and Cretan epics and dramas (*Erōtokritos*, *Erōphilē*), as well as adaptations of folk poetry (*Digenēs Akritas*). Finally, in the next Greek series, illustrators and authors drew on the biographies of heroes of the Greek uprising of 1821, historical events such as the blowing up of the monastery in Arkadi during the Cretan uprising in 1866, semi-historical episodes such as the Zalongo dance during the wars between Ali Pasha and the Suliots in Epirus in the early 19th century, and the plots of early modern Greek novels (*Loukēs Laras* by Dēmētrios Vikelas,

1879). *The Bridge of Arta* is the only comic in the series inspired by the folk art of the Modern Greeks.

This publication has the typical strengths and weaknesses of the entire series. The cover, which is a carefully prepared image (Figure 9), is of much better quality than the drawings inside, which are simple and painted with a very limited palette of printed colours. The characters are schematic, their facial expressions rudimentary, and the landscapes conventional.



Figure 10. Sample comic book panels (p. 4). The hurried production is clearly visible: elements of the characters in the background are roughly painted over. The colour palette of each frame consists of a limited number of colours (four to six), arranged in patches. Inaccuracies, discolouration, and imperfections are visible. Source: *Το γεφύρι της Άρτας* (n.d.)

The comic uses narrative tools typical for this genre – rounded speech bubbles with a white background, sometimes in the form of clouds indicating thoughts rather than spoken words, and *captions*, i.e., text fields with narration or stage directions (Figure 10). In this comic, apart from the fact that, in accordance with convention, the captions are rectangular, they also have a yellow background. However, the colour scheme is not strictly applied; for example, the statements of the creatures are also presented on a yellow background, perhaps to indicate that they have a different sound or that they are only audible to some of the characters.

The comic book is preceded by a one-page introduction and ends with so-called encyclopaedic pages (*Το γεφύρι της Άρτας*, n.d., pp. 47–48), which in this

issue introduce the phenomenon of folk songs: their brief history, dating back, of course, to Homer's epics, as well as the history of their study. The final paragraphs discuss *The Bridge of Arta* and point to two adaptations of the song – Nikos Kazantzakēs' drama and Manolis Kalomoirēs' opera (Καλομοίρης, 1924; Mantas, 2012; Vincent, 2003). The entry ends with an emphatic punchline: "Next to the old bridge today stands a modern bridge, with two-way traffic, 135 metres long. This one clearly did not need a sacrifice (*στοιχείωσις / stoicheiōsis* [visitation]) to stand …" (Το γεφύρι της Άρτας, n.d., p. 48). The action itself takes place over 45 pages of the comic book and is, naturally, an extension of the story from the song. Since the story has to be much longer for the purposes of the medium, new characters are introduced into the plot: in addition to the first master, his wife Lygerē (Λυγερή [literally "bent", or "limp", but metonymically "beautiful"]) and their infant son, there are also an old master, the main character's advisor, Mantos, who is a poet and musician, and the master's mother-in-law. In the background, numerous other builders appear.

At the beginning of the story, the masters finish the bridge, but on the first night their work collapses. The disaster is witnessed by Mantos, to whom spirits appear in the storm: nereids in the form of beautiful girls. Two of them, dressed like princesses (as evidenced by their European-style dresses and crowns or tiaras), demand that the master's wife join them to "build a bridge in Arta" (*To gephyri tēs Artas*, n.d., p. 5). That same night, the master's wife dreams that her brother is crossing the completed bridge, but he does not reach her because she is standing on the other side when the bridge collapses. In the morning, the town gathers in the main square, everyone terrified. There are rumours about spirits, and the mother-in-law suggests the need for a sacrifice. The master builders decide to rebuild the bridge. The work proceeds in a good atmosphere, and Mantos begins to compose a song about the bridge. The construction is completed, and the tired master builders decide to spend the night on beds laid out by the bridge. The nereids appear to Mantos again, demanding the sacrifice of Lygerē. Some of the awakened builders witness the apparition. Everyone thinks it is a dream, but in the morning light, the bridge is in ruins again. The old builder remembers that he once failed to build another bridge, on the Danube, where the story was similar: a nereid appeared and demanded a sacrifice, otherwise the bridge would collapse. The first master dismisses the old man's story and everyone goes back to work on rebuilding the bridge. While the master is away from home, Mantos visits Lygerē and tells her about his visions. Lygerē realises that she is to be the sacrifice. She accepts her fate and goes to the bridge, under the pretext of bringing her husband food. At the same time, the old master convinces the young master of the necessity of the sacrifice. The builders together invent a story about a lost ring and lower Lygerē, who has come to terms with her fate, on chains into one of the pillars under construction. Then they quickly wall her up. The mother waits for Lygerē until evening, and when she does not return, the mother goes to the bridge and, despite the builders' conspiracy of silence, quickly realises what has happened; she then

casts a curse on the bridge. However, she is persuaded to change her curse by others who remind her of her son abroad; he could one day be a passerby on the bridge. So, she reverses the curse. The whole town celebrates, the bridge stands unshaken, and a feast with dancing takes place. The first master builder disappears, and only Mantos, in the final words of the song, predicts what other buildings the master builder will erect and how he will train his son in the trade.

The presence of the original text is evident in many parts of the adaptation: Mantos sings fragments of the song, the characters sometimes speak the lyrics, and sometimes the lyrics are used as stage directions (caption-type elements). Almost the entire text of the song *The Bridge of Arta* is woven into the narrative. The story contains numerous additions, some referring to ideas from variations of the song itself, but most from earlier theatrical adaptations (for example, the characters of the mother-in-law and the old master), as well as elements sketching the master's future. However, no bibliographical references are explicitly cited.

In mid-2024, a comic book by Evi Poulopoulou, titled *Του Νεκρού αδελφού* [Song of the Dead Brother] (Πουλοπούλου, 2024), was published as a faithful adaptation of the traditional folk song by the same name. Like the song, the comic book tells the story of Areti, a young girl sent to marry far from home, in a foreign country. Inspired by ancient ceramics and Byzantine art, the author developed a comic book aesthetic that reflects the era from which the song originates. The comic book is rendered in subdued colours, and the frames are minimalist, devoid of unnecessary embellishments. Poulopoulou admits that her love of simplicity stems from her architectural education.[29] However, while the comic book is characterised by an original graphic form, in terms of text, it retains what is perhaps the most canonical, "school" version of the song, and the successive frames, usually occupying an entire page, correspond to one or, at most, two verses of the original work. Interpretation thus takes place purely in the aesthetic realm, while the textual basis of the narrative remains unchanged.

The Walled-Up Topos in the Visual Arts and Literature

An icon-styled representation of the legend – included by Spyros Mantas in his collection of song recordings and later in his work on "gephyrology"[30] (Μαντάς, 2020, p. 175; cf. Figure 11) – a depiction by the iconographer Spyros Kardamakēs, is rich in symbolism. The image shows a ruined or unfinished bridge. One of its two pillars is supported by a woman in a folk costume, completely submerged in water. Birds hover above the bridge, and the sun and moon appear in the sky: the sun is drawn in the foreground, partially obscuring the moon. On

[29] Interview with Ewa Poulopoulou (Γεωργακοπούλου, 2024).

[30] The original comes from the 1994 CD release (2 CDs) *Τραγούδια και σκοποί της Θράκης*, illustrated by Spyros Kardamakēs.

the right-hand side stands a group of three men dressed in festive attire. They are holding tall palm branches vertically in their hands, like those carried in Palm Sunday processions. One of the men holds an unrolled scroll – a plan of the bridge in Arta – while another holds masonry tools. The image is thus seen as a representation of the main characters of the legend and its outcome, but also as a sign of triumph and joy, expressed through the palm.

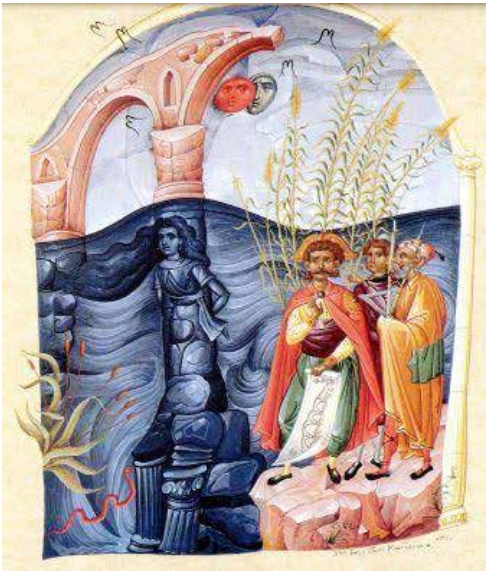


Figure 11. An icon-styled depiction of the bridge legend. Painting by Spyros Kardamakis.
Source: Μαντάς (2020)

In 2015, Kōstas Markopoulos published a collage-like work in the form of a booklet – or rather a sheet folded into a booklet, roughly A3 in size – in which the artist included the standard (textbook) lyrics of the song along with ten images (Figure 12). Nine of these are small, while the tenth, the largest, occupies the reverse side of the sheet and depicts the moon's phases. In the remaining images, Markopoulos presents the following motifs:

– above water reflecting the new moon, a figure riding a two-wheeled vehicle across the bridge;

– a bridge with a boat beneath it, and, in the frames below, two bricklayers, one with a hammer and the other with a ladder;

– phases of the moon above a well or a blue pond;

– a tree with a black bird perched on a branch above water;

– a ruined bridge, and underneath, in the frames – a crying man and abandoned masonry tools;

– a woman in a quasi-grave of oval shape;
– two hollow bridge pillars, one of which contains a barely visible ring;
– again a pond, this time dark navy blue; above it, the moon several days after the new moon and, alongside it, in two frames, bricklayers: one working with a hammer, the other preparing to throw a stone;
– a woman at the bottom (in the depths), enclosed within a blue oval grave; above her, far beyond her reach, against the backdrop of a full moon, the ladder appears once more. (Μαρκόπουλος, 2015)

The style of the images is simple and minimalist, stylised in a folk or naive manner. The colours are applied in visible brushstrokes and are textured and heterogeneous. This brief pictorial story aims to bring out the essence of the legend and is a record of its most important scenes. In this respect, it resembles scholarly attempts to try and capture the core of a story by reducing it to a set of essential elements. Here, however, the artist uses a sketched prop list instead of narrative descriptions of the plot. The extreme minimalism of the individual frames reinforces this interpretative strategy.

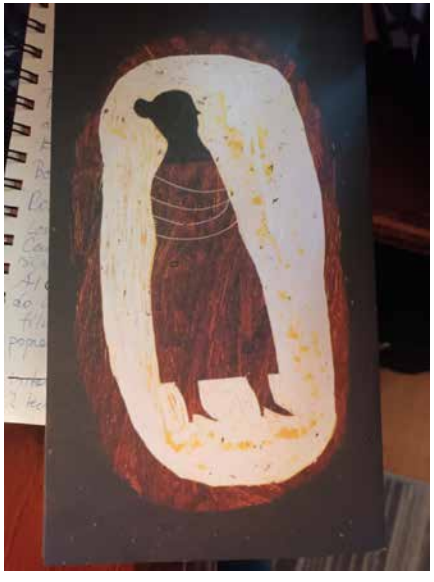


Figure 12. The figure of the first master's wife by Kōstas Markopoulos. Fragment of a double-sided "spread" from the book.
Source: Μαρκόπουλος (2015)

Finally, it is worth mentioning a work available online by Zenon Frudakis, an American sculptor of Greek origin. His street sculpture titled Freedom, installed in the centre of Philadelphia in 2000, depicts four stages of a walled-up figure emerging from a wall.

The Circle of Repetitions

Teaching about the legend of the bridge can be enriched with numerous derivative works – non-anonymous and contemporary – which go beyond the poetic form of songs and include poems, short stories, plays, paintings, and even comics.

The following brief description of the catalogue of such works draws primarily on the findings of Aristidēs Schismenos (Σχισμένος, 2000), an Epirote teacher who for some time held the position of regional superintendent of education at the primary school level. Among Schismenos' numerous publications on local history, as well as on local monuments, customs, and stories, there is an entire treatise devoted to the bridge in Arta. Alongside the ethnographic studies mentioned above, the work constitutes an important contribution focused specifically on the bridge.

For Schismenos, the bridge is not merely the subject of legend but also, and perhaps above all, a witness to history, a point of interest for tourists, a metonymy of masonry practices and architectural ideas, and a symbolic object. In the chapter "Bridge-related inspirations in literature", Schismenos quotes and interprets a folk tale about a walled-up woman; however, these reflections constitute only a small part of his book. In another, relatively short chapter, "Bridge-related inspirations in art", he includes a section devoted to reception – that is, derivative works related to the bridge (Σχισμένος, 2000, pp. 193–231). This aspect will be explored more fully below.

Schismenos distinguishes between poetic, theatrical, musical, popular science, visual arts, and craft works among texts inspired by the bridge. In this subsection, his classification will be followed, but the order of discussion will be reversed: the closer we get to poetic works, the more frequent the references to the legend of the bridge become, rather than to the bridge itself.

With regard to crafts, Schismenos rightly notes that the bridge motif is commonly used by the city's workshops as a popular decorative element, for example, in jewellery or tableware. These objects are usually tourist trinkets. Similarly, in the visual arts, the bridge is a showcase and symbol of the city, often drawn and photographed by passing travellers. Schismenos observes that many shops and restaurants in Arta use the shape of the bridge not only as a theme for engravings and paintings hanging on walls, but also as a decorative element at entrances or on signs. The same phenomenon can be observed in contemporary Arta, where these representations lack any legendary, magical, or sacrificial connotations.

Schismenos treats popular science texts instrumentally, publishing an extensive bibliography of such articles from the last hundred years. When writing about music, however, he is much more meticulous: he not only discusses numerous recorded performances of the song about the bridge but also points to examples of musical notation. In this medium, references to the legend in

its entirety are of particular interest since the song about the bridge is *par excellence* a folk tale about a legend. Nevertheless, the only truly interesting element here may be the text version adopted by a given performer. Schismenos, however, does not address textual "inventions", focusing instead on melodic reconstructions, sometimes in modernised form.

The researcher devotes more attention to playwrights inspired by the bridge. He writes about Nikos Kazantzakēs and his 1910 play *Ο Πρωτομάστορας* [The First Master], published under the pseudonym Petros Psyloritēs, as well as Manōlēs Kalomoirēs' 1916 opera inspired by this play. Giōrgos Theotokas, in turn, dedicated a drama titled *Το γεφύρι της Άρτας* [The Bridge of Arta] to the legend (Θεοτοκάς, 1959, 1965). Schismenos notes that the work remained faithful to the original, introducing as few deviations from the original legend as possible. The work was staged in 1946, and the people of Arta returned to it several times, staging it at the open-air theatre in Arta Castle and at the headquarters of the Skoufás Association, a local cultural centre. Schismenos also mentions several other writers inspired by the bridge and its legend: works by Pantelēs Chorn (1906, also Χορν, n.d.) and Ēlias Vouteridēs (Βουτιερίδης, 1905); an unpublished drama by Spyros Lambros; a series of songs; two "folk operas" from 1972 and 1977 by Samuēl Samoilēs (Σαμοΐλης, 1977); an opera by Giōrgos Koumentakis and Dēmētris Papaiōannou with the meaningful (and interpretatively important) title *Η Ιφιγένεια στο γεφύρι της Άρτας* [Iphigenia on the Bridge of Arta] (1995); and two plays in the Pontic dialect by Panagiōtis Phontiadēs (Φωτιάδης, 1927) and Philōnas Ktenidēs (Κτενίδης, 1962). To this corpus can be added another Pontic play, *Tēs Trychas to gephyr*, by Thodōros Kanonidēs-Apollōnas (Κανονίδης, 1930, cf. also Κανονίδης-Απόλλωνας, 2005). It is a story about the construction of a bridge that will connect Ardassa with the monastery of Agios Georgios. The master builder Constantine believes that the construction of the bridge will enable communication between pilgrims and the entire village community. In order to build the bridge, which is said to be destroyed every night by demons, he will compromise with them and bow to the demands of the sorcerer Χουλιαράς / Chouliaras and sacrifice what is most precious to him: his beloved Καλή / Kalē (lit. 'Good'). Written in the Pontic dialect, the play employs the well-known legend metaphorically, equating the construction of the bridge with the building of a new society. This process requires participants to relinquish selfish goals in favour of building something greater, something that may not bring personal benefits, at least not immediately. Sacrifice for the common good is thus interpreted as not necessarily involving the ultimate sacrifice, but simply prioritising common goals above individual ones.

Ēlias Voutieridēs, a historian and writer, originally published his play *Το γιοφύρι της Άρτας* [The Bridge of Arta], released in 1905, in instalments in the literary magazine *Noumas* (Βουτιερίδης, 1905). The action of this rather concise drama takes place in medieval Arta. The king orders the construction of a bridge, and the challenge is taken up by master Thomas. He is not the first to be given this task: attempts to build the bridge have been made for years, but

each time it ends up being destroyed. This time, however, the king's order is particularly harsh, because if the construction is not completed in three days, all the masons will be put to death. The witch Dafnē foretells that the king's wife, Smaragdō[31], must be sacrificed in the bridge. Thomas disagrees, and the whole town turns against him. He, in turn, is convinced that his *Τέχνη / Technē* [Craft] will triumph over Nature, which, in the eyes of the citizens, becomes a threat to everyone's life; yet, he is disappointed by the citizens' attitude towards sacrifice. As a result, Smaragdō curses the bridge. Meanwhile, Flōros, a resident of Arta and a friend of Smaragdō and Thomas, who is secretly in love with the master's wife, falls into the river and drowns in a final attempt to give her the love of which she has been deprived. At her husband's urging, Smaragdō's last words turn the curse into a wish for the bridge to endure and bring happiness to its passers-by. In Voutieridēs' work, apart from obvious folk inspirations, one can also discern the motif of the master builder's sacrifice for the common good. This recalls the sacrifice in Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis*, made to appease Artemis and allow the Achaeans to sail to Troy. At the end of the play, Iphigenia accepts her fate. Smaragdō's lament, on the other hand, resembles the final cry of Sophocles' *Antigone*, bidding farewell to the sun and to life. The characters' premonitions – which ultimately come true – omens and words, mainly those of Dafnē, which foretell a tragic future, also play a key role.

Pandelis Horn, a naval officer by profession but a playwright by passion – author of over 30 plays – in 1906 published a work titled *Το ανεχτίμητο / To anechtimēto* [Priceless / Things that cannot be valued]. The text was dedicated to Gianis Psycharis, a champion of the *demotic*, i.e., the colloquial (literally folk) variety of Modern Greek, and a great opponent of the artificial, archaic *katerewusa*, which dominated not only public life but also literature at the end of the 19th century. This helps explain why the language of the drama is so natural: the characters speak in a markedly "spoken" idiom, which brings the work even closer to folklore. There are eight characters in the play, only two of which are women. The action is complemented by other "craftsmen and apprentices", as well as various types of supernatural beings. The story is set in Arta.

The main source of inspiration for Horn is *The Bridge of Arta*, and studies show that the second folk song used by the author is the lesser-known text *Kolymbitēs*[32] [Swimmer], from which he takes all the additional magical elements: goblins (*καλικάντζαροι / kalikantzaroi*), gnomes or elves (*ξωτικά / xōtika*), and nereids (*νεράιδες / neraides*, a type of witch or fairy)[33]. The plot,

[31] This mysterious name, non-existent in Greek tradition, was later repeated in a work by Nikos Kazantzakēs. This exoticisation is probably unrelated to Gnosticism. It is possibly an allusion to the heroine of Victor Hugo's work, the beloved of the bell-ringer Quasimodo. The connection between Voutieridēs and Kazantzakēs' slightly later play is confirmed by Petrakou in her lengthy analysis of the latter drama (Πετράκου, 2005, p. 208).

[32] Cf., also (Σπυριδάκης, 1962, pp. 332–335).

[33] None of these translations is accurate: it is only in modern times, in fantasy literature and through other external influences, that these creatures, *kalikantzaroi*, *nereids*,

at least at first glance, thus deviates from the folk pattern. Master builder Andreas takes responsibility for building the bridge, and is assisted by an old bricklayer, Petros. The craftsmen build the bridge throughout the day, but every night these supernatural beings engage in a frenzied dance and destroy it. The town is afraid of these magical creatures, or rather, the manifestations of their presence, and refuses to allow the bridge to be built. Andreas, however, is the only one who does not believe in the folk legends about strange creatures demanding sacrifices, and he carries on with the construction. The beautiful and kind Flandrō, the master builder's wife, supports him despite strong opposition from Mrs Vasilikē, her mother, who believes in supernatural forces and their agency. The goblins and other creatures, however, are determined not to allow the construction to be completed. They send their representative, a demon transformed into a beautiful woman, to deceive the master builder. Andreas is enchanted by her beauty until the spirit reveals itself to him and announces that, in order to repair the bridge, they will have to sacrifice "what is priceless". Andreas's wife arrives at the bridge and learns of the demon's haunting. In a counter-move, she decides to sacrifice a family heirloom, an ancestral ring, which, according to legend, was once given to the first craftsman of the family by a nereid. But the builders decide to wall up the woman alongside the ring, as this is how they interpret the demon's message. They seek to save their own lives, as the spirit of the land has announced in an order addressed to Andreas that any craftsman who abandons his work before its completion will be beheaded. Andreas and his mother-in-law try to stop them, but at the last moment Andreas changes sides and sets his sights on the future durability of the bridge: he is the first to throw a stone. The dying Flandrō curses the bridge and all who cross it, but then remembers that one of them will be her brother, who lives abroad. The play ends with the laughter of supernatural beings coming from the bridge pillar in which Flandrō has been walled up.

The author admits that his intention was to remain faithful to folk traditions: "I wanted Art to be my guide, and as far as I could – and as far as my guide allowed me – I did not stray from the path of tradition" (Χορν, 1906, p. 10). For this reason, the work is full of references to folk tradition and is based on a combination of the two aforementioned folk songs. At times, characters speak in verses taken directly from folk songs.

Horn's exceptionally elaborate magical world is based around two poles: superstition and tradition. The author constructs a setting whose protagonists are supernatural beings – nereids and other creatures malevolent towards humans, who are plotting their evil plan. The reader learns stories told by the inhabitants that point to the actions of these beings and emphasise their hostility towards

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or *xōtika*, have been "tamed" semantically. However, for the purposes of this text, neither their exact folk appearance nor the customs associated with them (for example, the fact that *kalikantzaroi* are associated with mischief during the Christmas period and the "little carnival" that takes place at that time) are of great importance (cf., Kordos, 2014).

humans. For example, "one spring, a fairy laughed, and all the rose bushes were uprooted" (Χορν, 1906, p. 14). The author embellishes the narrative through the characters' dreams, which foreshadow bad events (Χορν, 1906, pp. 15–16), as well as the scene with references to traditional tools and clothing, such as a loom and Flandrō's gold-embroidered costume (Χορν, 1906, p. 30).

The aforementioned early work by Nikos Kazantzakēs was written during his stay in Paris in 1908–1909. Its original title was *The Sacrifice*, but in the following year it was published as *O Πρωτομάστορας* / *O Prōtomastoras* [The First Master], with the author writing under the pseudonym Petros Psiloritis. The play was dedicated to Ionomi Dragoumis, a writer and politician of the early 20th century. Kazantzakēs' work is particularly important due to the stature of the author, arguably the most important and certainly the most recognisable prose writer of 20th-century modern Greece. Kazantzakēs later wrote numerous other plays, mainly historical in subject, but none was as close to folk tradition. Interestingly, as the fame of Kazantzakēs' text was soon overshadowed by Manolēs Kalomoēris' opera based on Kazantzakēs' *The First Master* (see below), the first performance of the original prose text only took place in 1996 (Καζαντζάκης, n.d.) at the regional theatre in Argos, followed by another production in Athens in 2004. Most recently, in 2023, *The First Master* appeared on stage in the capital of the island of Kefalonia, staged by the amateur association "Evgeros" (Σύλλογος των Απανταχού Φαρακλάδων "Η Εύγερος", 2023; Σύλλογος Φαρακλάδων "Η Εύγερος" Κεφαλονιάς, 2023).

As Kazantzakēs carefully notes, the play, subtitled "tragedy", consists of two acts separated by a short interlude – without a falling curtain. It is written in simple demotic Greek. Five characters take part in the action, but only the central female character is named – Smaragda. The characters are accompanied by two choruses: harvesters (peasants) and Gypsies. This clearly references the conventions of ancient drama: the choruses comment on the fate of the protagonist, while functioning as a collective voice that drives the plot forward.

The play opens with a harvest dance performed by a chorus of harvesters, who joyfully sing about the newly built bridge. However, the old man, the oldest of all the builders, has a bad feeling about the coming night. The women, in turn, fear a repeat of the disaster: they remember three earlier cases on which the newly built bridge was destroyed at night by the rushing waters of the river, or perhaps by the spirit of the river (Ψηλορείτης, 1910, p. 6). A resident of the town, Dēmētrēs, brings prophecies from the Mother, who predicts a cataclysm. Her prophecies have already come true three times, preceding each collapse of the bridge. Suddenly, three girls run onto the stage and speak in terror of the roaring river and the trembling bridge. The old man states: "the river is a hungry beast" (μουγκρίζει σα λιμασμένο θερίο / *mounkrizei sa limasmeno therio*) (Ψηλορείτης, 1910, p. 9), craving human flesh.

Meanwhile, everyone is waiting for the arrival of the Ruler (Archontas), who is to reward the first master for a job well done, but the members of the chorus suspect that the river wants him, the master builder, as a "sacrifice for slaugh-

ter" (σφαχτάρι / *sphachtari*) (Ψηλορείτης, 1910, p. 10). The singer appears, madly in love with Smaragda, the Ruler's daughter, and after a moment she too appears, bringing occasional gifts from her father for the residents. She is joyful at first, but when the first master enters, it becomes clear that they share a secret, passionate love, consummated during night-time trysts.

The first master is not moved by the warnings uttered by the chorus: he does not fear Fate (Moira). This, in turn, ignites the anger of the old man, who sees the master's attitude as disrespectful towards supernatural forces. When the ruler arrives, it emerges that the newly built bridge is the fulfilment of his threat to the river: he had sworn to rein in the element that drowned his son. Thus, completing the bridge is a deeply personal matter for him, namely the satisfaction of taming the hostile forces of nature. The first master may ask him for anything he wants, as the ruler declares. He therefore asks for a large house in the middle of the village and the hand of the woman he loves. However, just as he is about to reveal to his father and the entire community that Smaragda is his chosen one, the terrified girl runs in and announces that the river is wrestling with the bridge and that the bridge is about to collapse. The first master builder, still unmoved, promises to rebuild it – once again. At this point, the mother enters the scene and prophesies: it is the fault of the master, who not only loved the woman but also enjoyed her body at night; as a result, the bridge is cursed by his actions, doomed to eternal ruin. However, there is a solution: the promiscuous woman must die to save the structure. The ruler orders girls to be brought from the village so that the master builder can choose one, but the master builder stays silent before the village girls. The singer already suspects that Smaragda is the chosen one and asks her to come forward. However, she does not move.

Meanwhile, there is a very short interlude in which a chorus of Gypsy women – divided into two opposing semi-choruses – dances to the accompaniment of tambourines, drums, and brass bells. One half-chorus mourns the fate of the first master and calls for submission to the judgments of fate, while the other celebrates the joy of life and calls for surrender to the embrace of desire.

> Interlude
>
> [The curtain does not fall. This intermezzo takes place between Acts 1 and 2. Gypsy dancers enter with tambourines, drums, and brass bells. Two semi-choruses].
>
> Semi-chorus I [they throw themselves to the ground and weep]
>
> – "Woe, oh woe! Your hands, first master, your strong hands, which seek to soften Fate, like soft wax, in their fists, grow faint when they remember the shape of the breasts of such a sweet Woman. Oh woe!"
>
> Semi-chorus II [joyful, dancing quickly]
>
> – "Deep is the plough of love; it ploughs our bodies, and all the bitterness is sown, then it rises, ripens, and devours our hearts! And we die – we die of pain, we bend over and say:" [the choristers stop, as if fainting with delight] "There is nothing sweeter than the world, the one above! There is nothing sweeter than the upper world!"[34]

[34] In comparison to the one below, that is the land of death.

Semi-chorus I [Jumps up and dances].

– "Do not listen! Do not listen, first master! Loosen the belt that binds you, the belt of illness! Untie the hands of the Woman from your neck, the hands of the Woman who so sweetly pulls you towards the abyss! You are the first among the masters! You did not come into this world to be happy; you came to build!"

Semi-chorus II

– "Hahaha! All bridges, all bridges are not worth as much as a kiss on the lips! Ah, I stretch out both hands and bless and invite – let sin come, let it embrace us tightly, throw us down, and delight us in warm beds!". (Ψηλορείτης, 1910, pp. 32–33)

At the beginning of the second act, the ruler tries to discover which of the village girls is the master's lover, because he has promised to sacrifice her for the common good. Smaragda can no longer keep the secret: she confesses that it was she who gave her body to the first master at night. The ruler declares that his honour has been tarnished and that he has nowhere to go, that he no longer has a daughter. However, he accepts her pleas for forgiveness.

Smaragda is ready for the sacrifice. The first master comforts her but does not prevent her. Meanwhile, the singer concludes that the master is in a hurry to wall up Smaragda as quickly as possible – before he perhaps changes his mind and decides to save his beloved after all. She is lowered into the foundations of the bridge, and the master forces the singer to weigh down her body with heavy stones so that she cannot escape. Soon the girl dies, and then everyone throws stones, including the master himself, who throws the largest one. The play ends with the chorus chanting: "Hail! Rejoice, first master!" (Ψηλορείτης, 1910, p. 47).

In addition, this work features numerous supernatural elements, such as the Mother's prophecy and the personification of the river as an elemental force. Other details are taken from the world of fairy tales: Smaragda is a "beautiful princess", but she also possesses the characteristics of a sorceress (Ψηλορείτης, 1910, p. 12), who seduces the master, while her father holds the position of king (rather than – given the folk tradition of the Ottoman era – an agha, vizier, or sultan). Patriarchal law suppresses freedom and desire, and those who oppose age-old, traditional laws must pay for it. However, only the female protagonist pays the highest price, while the hero loses his beloved, but not his life.

In this intriguing play, the author reconciles two great Greek traditions, the ancient and the folk, with his own ideas, which are characteristic of the period and reminiscent of Nietzschean conflicts. Kyriakē Petrakou adds that the text of the play has been slightly modified: folk song lyrics were added, and "offensive Nietzschean and misogynistic passages" were removed (Πετράκου, 2005, p. 212). Kazantzakēs writings are well known for exposing the controversial content of turn-of-the-century philosophy, especially with regard to the place of women in society. Today, they are subject to harsh criticism, all the more so because such elements also appear in his later and most famous works, such as *Zorba the Greek*.

Before Kazantzakēs' play became firmly established in the minds of readers (as it could not yet count on a theatrical audience), its text came into the hands of composer Manolis Kalomoirēs, who used it as the basis for an opera under the same title in 1916. This work became much more popular than Kazantzakēs' original adaptation and is still frequently performed on Greek stages (Εθνική Λυρική Σκηνή, n.d.). The Kazantzakēs Archive at his museum in Myrtia, Crete, reports that Kalomoirēs made several revisions to the musical version, and the opera itself was performed in 1930, 1943, 1944, 1948, 1951 and 1983. In later productions, the role of Smaragda was sung by Maria Callas. The opera also existed in a radio version. The most recent production was staged in January 2023 at the Olympia Music Theatre "Maria Callas", in Athens, conducted by Zōē Tsokanou (Καλομοίρης, 2023).

Its plot is very similar to Kazantzakēs' play, with only minor structural changes. For example, during the interlude there are two choruses: one of village women, who warn the first master against opposing Fate, and one of Gypsy women, who encourage him to give himself over to love. The music that makes up the opera, as in Kazantzakēs' work, combines various traditions. It is symphonic in character and, as critics have noted, in the Wagnerian tradition; at the same time, there are traces of folk tradition in it. This is quite a common practice in 20th-century Greek music, when classically trained composers turned to folk music – both rural and urban – either weaving it into their works or aligning themselves more closely with folk traditions. Notable examples include two of the most outstanding composers of recent decades, Mikēs Theodōrakēs and Manos Chatzidakēs. Kalomoirēs turned his work into such a link, building a bridge not only between two seemingly distinct traditions but also between popular culture and high culture. This explains the enduring popularity of his work and the continued interest in staging it in later productions.

Giōrgos Theotōkas, a writer and playwright, penned a five-act play titled *The Bridge of Arta* in 1942. It is an intimate work, set over the course of several hours, spanning evening, night, and morning. The story concerns the slow coming to terms with fate: the need for sacrifice is announced by the Shadow wandering near the bridge, and the master builder must first reconcile with what he must do, and then convince his wife to carry it out. In the morning, the summoned wife arrives at the bridge, and the builders hastily invent a reason for her to descend into the foundations. She descends, and they hastily wall her up. The old woman – the mother of the sacrificed woman and the master builder's mother-in-law – arrives; she casts a curse, which she later reverses. The masons accept the sacrifice and complete the bridge. Throughout, they are accompanied by a singer, who quotes fragments of one version of a folk song, expanding it considerably, and apparently weaving in other songs.

The play contains an epilogue (Θεοτοκάς, 1943, pp. 281–289), which depicts events taking place many years later. A group of children stands by the existing bridge, singing along with the now blind singer. The old master arrives, like a Shadow, terrifying the children. He stays with the singer, who finally finish-

es the song, singing its last verses about the three sisters walled up in three distant bridges. This, in turn, is commented on by the master, who cannot understand how he had not known about his wife's sisters. Then the ghost of the wife manifests herself to him, expressing pity for him, the shadow of a former man, forgiving him and accompanying him in his last moments of his life. As the master's body is carried away on a bier, the narrator addresses the audience:

> Listen, people of this land, listen to the bells of legend ringing through the ages! Listen to the language of your ancestors, the teachings proclaimed by the earth and stones and ancient buildings with blackened walls; listen to the courage that generosity brings, the sanctity of a job well done, and the bitterness of human sacrifice. Listen, people afflicted by the darkness of these troubled times. (Θεοτοκάς, 1943, p. 289)

In 2003, Michalēs Pierēs, a Cypriot poet, wrote a short piece in rhyming verse, in the Cypriot dialect, titled *Το άσμα του Γιοφυριού* [The Song of the Bridge] (Πιερής, 2003), suitable for musical stage performances. The work begins differently from most variants: "On five streams, on five roads // a bridge with 12 arches was built", but the story is similar.

The master has a wife, Maroulou, whom he decides to sacrifice (her, not her siblings or mother, but his wife – because, as he says, he will find a better one). He lures her onto the bridge, using a trick with a ring. However, his wife finds not a ring, but dragon scales. She fears that the monster will devour her and asks to be pulled out, but the master is adamant. Her pleas, her arguments that she has a small child or bread left in the oven, are to no avail. She is walled up. In her last words, she curses her mother for bringing her into the world and mentions her two sisters who were walled up in Galata and on the Euphrates.

Pierēs does not stop there. On the contrary, he begins the story anew, first in a version about the Tricha bridge, and then about the bridge of Arta. The story begins several times, using different folk variants, some of which are not finished before the next begins, and the master's wife is walled up repeatedly. Pierēs thus manages to highlight the multitude of versions, their formal diversity, while simultaneously demonstrating their convergent meaning. He is another artist who pays tribute to the multiplicity of regionalisms, which harmonise in an astonishing way as far as content is concerned.

A counterbalance to all these serious and sorrowful pieces is a small performance intended for children, presented in the form of Karagiozēs – Greek shadow theatre, which Schismenos no longer writes about. In 1965, Karagiozis virtuoso Thanasēs Spyropoulos created and performed *Το Στοιχειωμένο γεφύρι της Άρτας* [The Haunted Bridge of Arta], a work in which the drama of the master and his wife is marginalised, and the main role is played by the mischievous *kalikantzaroi* – chthonic creatures that frolic on the surface during the Christmas period, destroying and rebuilding the bridge.

However, Schismenos is most attracted to poetry, and he devotes the chapter primarily to it. He allows himself to quote the works in their entirety, so that the

reader focuses less on interpretation and more on their own reception of these texts, which actually constitute a mini-anthology. Schismenos begins by quoting a poem by Chrysanthē Zerva (pseudonym: Zitsaia or Zitsissa, i.e., a woman from Zitsa, a village in the Epirus mountains) from 1955. Her poem *Στο γιοφύρι της Άρτας* [On the Bridge of Arta] openly refers to folk versions, drawing on them for motifs and quotations, but in terms of plot, it focuses on the moment of walling up and its consequences. The poet writes about the bridge in contemporary terms, emphasising its durability and the pride of its creation, but ends with an ominous verse about how "times have changed and the bridges have begun to shake". Is the blessing of the walled-up woman waning?

As a side note, it is worth mentioning another poem by Zitsissa from 1967, simply titled *Το γεφύρι* [The Bridge], cited by Alexandropoulou (Αλεξανδροπούλου, 1995, p. 60), in which the poet returns to the bridge in Arta. This time, she focuses on the motif of sacrifice, wondering how many sacrifices are needed for the bridge to finally stand firm, how much blood and how many bodies must feed into the bridge's construction. There are still not enough sacrifices since the bridge "collapses every night". According to the poet, the story of the first master builder's wife has a different, reversed moral.

The great Greek poet Kōstēs Palamas took a different view, reciting another poem in Arta in 1926, at the unveiling of a bust of another poet, Kōstas Krystallēs. In his text, titled Κρυστάλλης [Krystallēs], Palamas praises the first master who built a bridge with his own blood – understood to be the blood of his wife (Σχισμένος, 2000).

Palamas' mention of Arta is not coincidental here: it is because Krystallēs wrote a poem titled *Το γεφύρι του Μανώλη* [Manolis' Bridge] about a variant of the legend. (Κρυστάλλης, n.d.). In the poem, which is a fairy-tale story in rhyme, the king's daughter sacrifices herself at the suggestion of the nereids and drowns so that the bridge can be completed. In the finale, the master builder, who has fallen in love with the princess, announces that the work on the bridge is finished, and then throws himself into the river to join his beloved.

Schismenos continues the anthology, citing three folk versions: the Peloponnesian (from Patras), which is distinctive due to the presence of the master's brothers and a child; the Thracian (30 lines longer than the "standard" version); and the Wallachian version from the Bucharest area, translated into Greek, which he reprints after Megas' article. The anthology is crowned with a sonnet about the bridge of Arta, written in 1953 by a primary school pupil, Ēlias Vratsistas. It is an apology for the bridge, the pride of the people of Arta: a bridge kept alive not by the sacrifice of the master's beautiful wife, not by the skills of the masters, nor by the efforts of their apprentices, but by the love of the local people.

In contrast to the poems mentioned above, there are three contemporary popular songs referring to the bridge of Arta and its legend. The first, simply titled *Της Άρτας το γεφύρι* [*The Bridge of Arta*] (1993), was written, composed, and sung by the famous bard Sokratēs Malamas (Μάλαμας, 1993). The song,

about love, suggests that, like the bridge, love must be sustained by the sacrifice – or rather the selflessness – of both lovers, otherwise it will be destroyed by the river every night. In 2015, Vasilēs Skoulas sang the song Ο αγέρας [The Wind] (Μάνιος, 2015), composed by Giannis Manios, in which he laments the fate of an abandoned man and addresses the woman who left him: "they walled up another woman into the Arta bridge, and not you". In turn, in 2021, Michaela Kyrgiafinē sings in her own composition *Και κάθε σπίτι ένας Γιάννης* [Every house has a Giannēs]:

> Wise people of empty knowledge
> As [it happened] on the bridge of Arta
> Where the bricklayer's wife
> Was cemented into the wall again (Κυργιαφίνη, 2021)

The young singer ironically points out that life in modern Greece is based on a simple mechanism: common people are constantly deceived by those in power, who establish laws and then break them. They do the same with promises, making them to their own advantage at the expense of ordinary people, who are constantly being lied to.

The instrumental use of the lyrics of *The Bridge of Arta* resembles the only known novel adaptation of the legend, Menelaos Perdikēs' forgotten crime novel *Έγκλημα στο γεφύρι της Άρτας* [Murder on the Bridge of Arta] (Περδίκης, 1962), which deals with a love triangle. In the finale, a jealous husband kills his wife in front of her lover, shooting her on the bridge of Arta (the new bridge). The woman dies having seen the legendary bridge before her.

Escape Routes

The works described here as "interpretative", i.e., those that artistically develop the legendary tale by transforming selected elements and introducing new ones, can be divided into two groups (see Figure 13). The first group comprises texts that follow a conventional line of interpretation, i.e., they accept the necessity of the sacrifice and do not question the master's actions. Many of them extend the narrative by adding a continuation that focuses on the master's suffering after the loss of his wife. Hence, he becomes the victim and it is he who had made the sacrifice. Such works accept the patriarchal interpretation of the song's content as valid. Works that serve an educational function, as well as numerous critical and scientific works that avoid a controversial interpretation of the song, adopt a tactic which may be called the "escape route". Rather than engaging with the ethical issues, they focus on the object itself (the bridge), the form of the song (a ballad), its Balkan context, and similar stories in other places, cultures, or languages.

Another form of escapism consists in focusing attention on added plotlines, events, or characters that come to the fore, thereby relegating the fate of the vic-

tim to the background. This strategy opens new areas of discussion concerning the motives or consequences of such actions and allows for interpretations that deviate from the central narrative. Finally, a small number of works – particularly some contemporary plays – offer readings of *The Bridge of Arta* that depart from the traditional, conventional interpretation. These may be described as subversive, in that they present the song as a vehicle for contemporary concerns, such as violence against women or the social exclusion of women in a still androcentric society. Other subversive stories, unfortunately not recorded in writing, suggest that the song tells the story of the punishment of an unfaithful wife or the deceit of the sultan's insubordinate subjects, who seek to justify delays in the construction work, but cannot postpone it indefinitely. Such voices appear often, albeit informally, and probably stem from the need to rationalise the story of the walling up, or to justify the undeserved punishment of the builder's wife. Unfortunately, such voices are rarely recorded – except perhaps for the story quoted in Psimennos' guidebook – and are typically circulated in a similar way to rumours or anecdostes.

The simplest rational explanations proposed in such contexts include revenge against an allegedly unfaithful wife, intended to avenge a dishonoured man; jealousy directed at a beautiful and innocent woman by other bricklayers, who convince her husband of the necessity of a sacrifice; or a paranormal explanation for the sudden disappearance of a young woman, framed as a thrilling story akin to an urban legend.

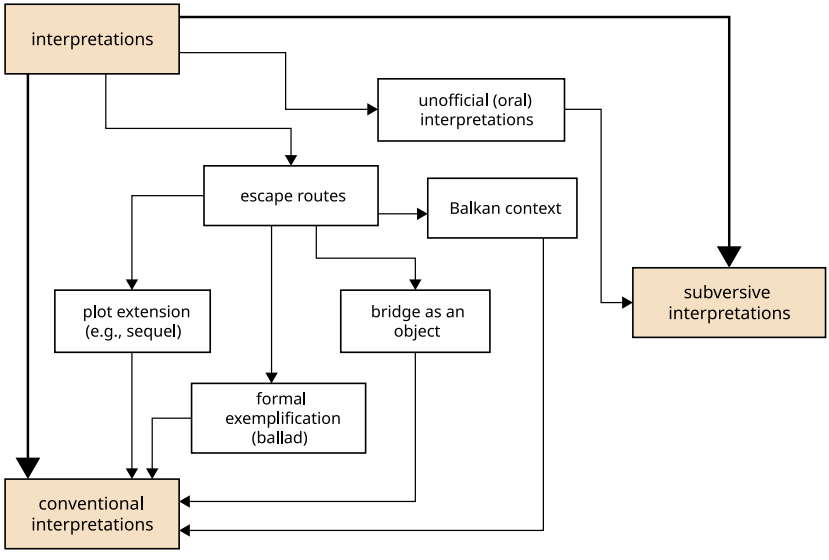


Figure 13. Diagram describing interpretation paths.
Author: Przemysław Kordos

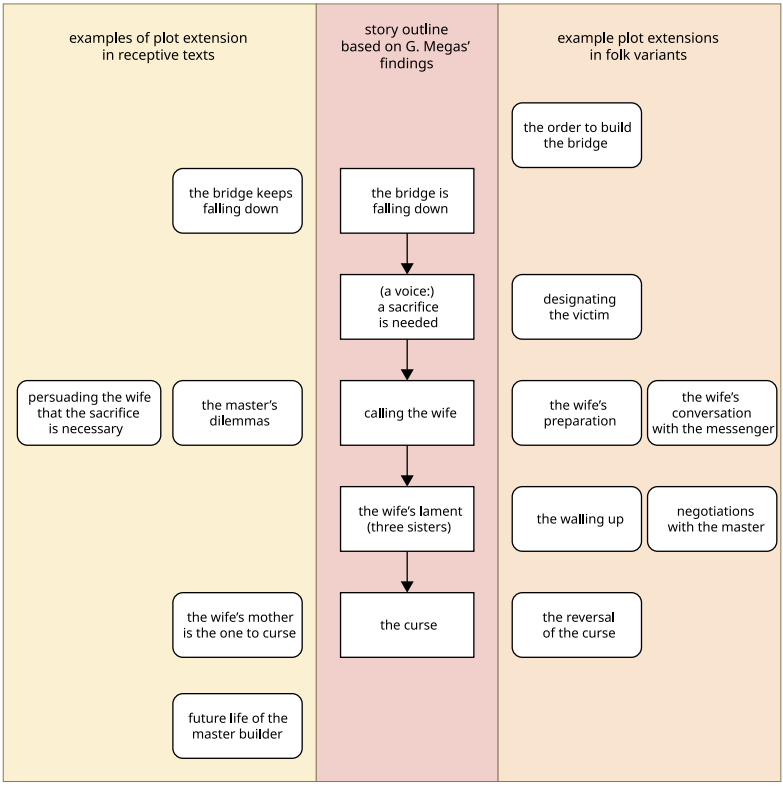


Figure 14. Chart of sample storylines.
Author: Przemysław Kordos

If the plot variations derived from folk versions of the ballad are compared with the ideas for narrative extensions introduced in reception works created since the beginning of the 20th century (especially theatrical ones), it becomes clear that the backbone of the plot and the tone of the ballad, established by Megas, remains intact (see Figure 14). While it is correct to assume that folk variants sometimes feature far-reaching deviations from the accepted basic form – resulting from factors such as textual contamination, creative occasional additions, or a desire to lengthen the plot – in the case of non-folk authors, playwrights working in urban environments, the motivations were different. Many of these authors were at least partially familiar with the richness of folk tradition and had read the variants collected and discussed by Politēs. Modern interpretations, therefore, introduced more complex dramatic variations: they increased the number of storylines by introducing new characters (such as the singer, the mother, and the old master), extended the time span of the action, added epilogues, introduced elements that archaise the form (for ex-

ample, a chorus commenting on events), and reduced the role of supernatural elements. Most of these innovations originate with Kazantzakēs, who decided not to place the married couple at the centre of the narrative, replacing them instead with a pair of secret lovers. The mystery of their love and its consequences add extra drama to the story and perhaps make Kazantzakēs' text – particularly in Kalomoirēs' successful musical adaptation – the most attractive of all contemporary adaptations among Greek audiences.

Nevertheless, the plot framework remains rooted in folk tradition, a fact that some authors acknowledge explicitly, either in their commentary on the text or within the text itself. Even Kazantzakēs preserves key points of folk interpretation: the sacrifice is voluntary and justified, and it is unquestionable. It is tragic, yet necessary. Ultimately, it is indisputable.

Only a small number of contemporary theatrical works attempt to move away from this interpretation of *The Bridge of Arta*, offering more or less bold subversive interpretations with no escape routes.

In this context, in March 2016, director Iris Chadzēantōniou staged the play *Το γεφύρι της Άρτας – επί του μῦθου σύνθεσις*[35] / *To gephyri tēs Artas – epi tou mythou synthesis* [The Bridge of Arta – continuation of the myth] based on the aforementioned drama by Giōrgos Theōtokas, the poem *Ένα σκυλί μέσα στη νύχτα* / *Ena skyli mesa stē nychta* [A Dog in the Night] by Giannēs Ritsos, and, of course, the lyrics of the folk ballad itself. The screenplay was adapted by the director herself in collaboration with Vangelēs Rokkos. This approach reflects a typical contemporary adaptation tactic for the ballad about the bridge of Arta: older texts are juxtaposed or harmonised to form new, more complex creations. For example, Chadzēantōniou takes from Theōtokas what is most dramatic and controversial in terms of media coverage, such as the scene of the walling up:

> Come on! One more time! Hit it hard! Stick it properly! Don't let her escape. Be careful! Come on, my good craftsmen and good workers, my right-hand men, my trained and skilled workers, my wonderful handymen! For our great effort! For our beautiful freedom! With all your strength! Strike! A little more wind in our sails and we will conquer Satan's castle, that infamous Bridge, that inhuman, insidious work! (Θεοτοκάς, 1943, pp. 283–284)

The performance contains clear echoes of Nietzschean thought and the figure of the overman, in an easily recognisable reference to the work of Kazantzakēs, as well as ancient tropes that point to the timelessness of the motif and its roots in myth. Above all, however, although the director does not depart from the central folk meaning of the ballad, she introduces new tropes and leaves interpretation up to the audience, flooding them with an excess of possible readings of the events happening on stage. The protagonist, a woman sentenced to death, is one of the sources of these non-obvious references. She describes herself as a lost, despairing dog, an image drawn from poetry by Ritsos:

[35] The use of ancient Greek (including the trisyllabic notation) is noteworthy, as it indicates in the title, the ancient references embedded in the work itself.

> Then he walked away, hearing the clatter of the tin can on the stones behind him / the dog was not sad at all, not angry at all / from the happiness of punishment for his first betrayal / That clatter, in all its sincerity, / would alert his Master / and one day he might meet Him… (Μπελέκου, 2016)

The visual design of the performance, its "trailer", and elements of the set design – most notably, the immersion of characters in the mud of the river-bank – point to important chthonic tropes explored by scholars studying the song. In the performance, however, the decision to wall up the victim is her own. In an interview with Errietta Belekou, the director responds to one of the closing questions as follows:

> E.B.: What does this "human sacrifice" symbolise today on an individual and collective level?
>
> I. Ch.: Transcendence. Overcoming despair. Sacrificing oneself for the collective. (Μπελέκου, 2016)



Figure 15. © Efi Gousi | Photograph for the production of the contemporary Greek musical *The Haunted* (*Oi Stoicheiomenoi*) by Dēmētrēs Maramēs, Megaron – The Athens Concert Hall, 2019, directed by Thanos Papakōnstantinou

At the turn of February and March 2019, on one of the most important Greek stages – the Alternative Stagtake of the Greek Lyric Theatre (at the National Opera) – Dēmētrēs Maramēs conducted a contemporary musical titled *Οι Στοιχειωμένοι* / *Oi stoicheiōmenoi* [The Haunted] (Μαραμής, 2019; Huffington Post, 2019; Γεωργαλάς, 2015). The work was based on the lyrics of two ballads, *The Bridge of Arta* and *The Story of the Dead Brother*, as well as on the contempo-

rary text *The Ghost of Charmena* by Sōtirēs Trivizas, itself based on another folk ballad from the Amfissa region. The production was directed by Thanos Papakōnstantinou (Figure 15).

The authors of this minimalist tale in three acts – whose texts consist exclusively of folk song lyrics – sought to highlight two concepts: the connection of all the texts with death and the afterlife, and their parallel connection with concepts known from antiquity. This effect was achieved not only through language, but also through movement and carefully selected set design, deeply rooted in ancient conceptions of art. The creators opted for performances devoid of colour (like stereotypically perceived ancient sculptures), highly stylised poses, and a stage design resembling a museum exhibition. In the summer of 2021, Marianna Kalbarē, director and manager of Teatro Technēs in Athens, staged a play based on the legend of the bridge, performed next to the bridge of Arta itself (Κάλμπαρη, 2021, "Το γεφύρι της Άρτας", 2021). Titled *Το γεφύρι της Άρτας και οι Λυγερές του Κάτω Κόσμου / To gephyri tēs Artas kai oi Lygeres tou Katō Kosmou* [The Bridge of Arta and the Beautiful Girls of the Underworld], the production centres on the fate of women from legends of this type: women who die for others, for ideas, for their husbands, and for bridges (Figure 16).

The modernity and temporality of the stage design clearly indicate the contemporary overtones of the play. It constitutes an important creative voice on the issue of ongoing violence against women – rapes as well as brutal murders – which have increasingly shocked Greek public opinion in recent years. The folk song is thus transformed into a loud form of protest against *γυναικοκτονίες / gynaikoktonies*, that is, the murder of women motivated by jealousy, lust, frustration, or a very distorted understanding of love. This issue is no longer a matter of voluntariness, but of opposition to the patriarchal order punishing women's aspirations to autonomy with violence.



Figure 16. The lead performers in the production directed by Marianna Kalbarē.
Source: Κάλμπαρη (2021)

Director Ellē Mantha from Arta staged a play in the summer of 2022, Η θυσία του πρωτομάστορα / *Ē thysia tou prōtomastora* [The Sacrifice of the First Master], based on a screenplay by Katerina Schismenou (daughter of the aforementioned populariser Stefanos), a folk ballad, and a work by Giōrgos Theotokas (Laboratory of Knowledge & Intelligent Computing, 2022). This play was also performed at the bridge. Both professional and amateur actors participated in the performance. The style referred to ancient tragedies, and the drama centred on the master himself and his participation in the walling up of his wife (Figure 17).

This performance is an example of theatrical "second circulation" in Greece, i.e., performances prepared by amateur troupes. Here, the town's residents, teachers, and entrepreneurs – all volunteers – were led by a professional actress and director in a joint effort to stage a cultural text that was important to them as artists, and that spoke of the symbol of their town.



Figure 17. A scene from the play directed by Ellē Mantha.
Source: Η Θυσία του Πρωτομάστορα στο Γεφύρι της Άρτας (Άγων, 2022, June 18)

Petrifications. Mothers. Lovers. Rebels

The tradition of thought regarding the *Bridge of Arta* has thus been captured (Figure 18). The song has been canonised in schools, discussion of it is well established, and interpretations have largely been settled. In terms of research, what could be determined has been determined, and what remains beyond the reach of researchers has been acknowledged. *The Bridge of Arta*, like many other elements of folk culture – its texts, objects, or customs – has been familiarised and simplified, reduced to a version with a specific interpretation. The only escape from it is through artistic interpretations, which function on a par with numerous reconstructions.

The main conclusion drawn from the analysis of the collected material is that of petrification. The reception of folk tradition is, for the most part, faithful to the meaning of the original, interpreted in a patriarchal manner and accompanied by the conviction that sacrifice is inevitable and justified. This is signalled by the way in which the bridge is usually described – *το (ιστορικό) γεφύρι και ο θρύλος του / to (istoriko) gephyri kai o thrylos tou* [(historical) bridge and its legend], or, more briefly, *το θρυλικό γεφύρι* [the legendary bridge]. The legend is an indispensable part of the bridge, but the interpretation of the legend is also an indispensable part of discussing the legend itself. There is one correct and indisputable interpretation, perpetuated by time and sanctified by tradition. Only a few texts – this applies to scholarly and critical works as well – veer towards a subversive interpretation.

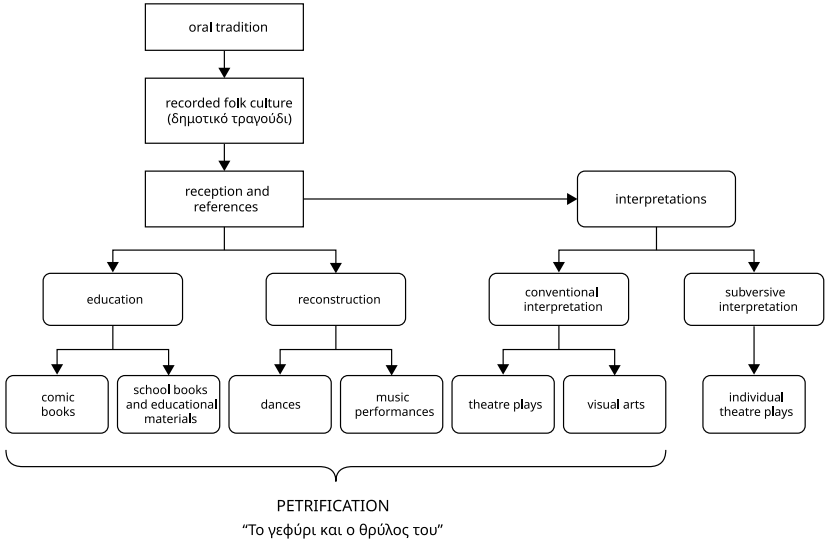


Figure 18. A graph describing the petrification of the motif. The phrase *το γεφύρι και ο θρύλος του / to gephyri kai o thrylos tou* [the bridge and its legend] describes a common, somewhat fossilised phrase used when writing about the bridge of Arta, in any context.
Author: Przemysław Kordos

Incidentally, this phenomenon – the love and preservation of the past, which results in stagnation in the present – is described by Giōrgos Seferēs, a Greek poet and Nobel Prize winner, in his poem *Με τον τρόπο του Γ.Σ.* [In the manner of G.S.], written in 1936 and included in the collection *Τετράδιο Γυμνασμάτων / Tetradio gymnasmatōn* [Book of Exercises] (1940). The refrain of the poem reads: "Anywhere I go, Greece hurts me". At the end, the poet included the following image in the poem:

The ships are whistling, as dusk falls in Piraeus,
they are whistling, keep whistling, but no capstan is moving,
no chain has flashed by the last ray of the setting sun
the captain is standing petrified in white and gold. (Σεφέρης, 2004, p. 163)

Greece, portrayed here as ships in port, stands still, despite declarations of progress and despite the changing world outside. It stands still, faithful to its past, or rather, to its interpretation of the past.

* * *

Two generations ago, Greece underwent a political earthquake. The year 1974 saw the fall of the military junta – a right-wing regime that could not withstand the pressure of student protests and the tragic intervention in Cyprus. The new political system, although increasingly dominated by two major parties, significantly strengthened the left: the Communist Party of Greece was legalised again and has since maintained steady support of 5–10% (7.7% as of June 2023).

Left-wing and less conservative writings found their place in the school curriculum, that is, in the collection of literary works considered valuable and appropriate for presentation to young people within the national education system. This included works by authors such as Nikos Kazantzakēs, previously marginalised because of his left-wing sympathies, and Kōnstantinos Kawafēs, known for his bold reflections on non-heteronormative relationships. Despite these changes, the place of women in the canon remains marginal – both as authors and as literary characters (Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2016). Although the influence of the conservative view from before 1974 is still in evidence, left-wing nostalgia has also failed to create space for the female voice (Koulouri & Venturas, 1994). These two seemingly opposing trends seem to speak with one voice on this issue. As Margarita Gerouki points out in her research on the teaching of biology in Greek schools, particularly sex education, the conclusions are clear: Greek textbooks are not keeping pace with changing norms, innovative content is blocked by strong conservative factions within society (including the Orthodox Church), and gender stereotypes continue to be perpetuated (Gerouki, 2008, pp. 338–340).

In Greek literature, women often play secondary roles as mothers, sisters, or wives (Alexopoulos et al., 2022). Moreover, analyses of history textbooks indicate the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and the marginalisation of women's roles in the past. Meselidis' research (Meselidis, 2009) shows that women are often portrayed in a stereotypical manner, which negatively affects the perception of their role in society. Primarily, they are depicted as assistants to men, supporting them in their daily duties and heroic efforts. A symbolic example is that of Greek women in the winter of 1940–41, who, according to reports, carried ammunition along mountain paths to support the fighting soldiers during the Greco-Italian war in the inaccessible regions of Epirus.

Even a cursory analysis of contemporary Greek textbooks on Modern Greek language and literature – from primary school to Lyceum – reveals a grim picture: texts written by women or about women are hardly ever included (Papadakis, 2018). In the male-dominated Greek literary world, female authors rarely gain recognition and are more often involved in genre literature. The so-called "women's literature" – often disparaged as paraliterature – occupies separate shelves in bookshops, easily recognisable by their distinctive covers. Textbooks – not only those designed for language, literature, or culture, but even IT courses, as indicated by a 2018 study by Stamatios Papadakis – are dominated by stereotypical representations of women and their roles in contemporary Greek society.

Not surprisingly, young Greeks have little exposure to stories told from a female perspective. To illustrate this phenomenon, three main categories of texts can be distinguished, classified according to the roles assigned to women: mother (or more broadly, family member), lover, and rebel. Each category reveals a different dimension of the female experience, although all remain limited by the patriarchal order of the literary canon. The heroine of *The Bridge of Arta* can assume all these roles. She is the guardian and provider for the child she leaves behind, she is the beloved of the master who sacrifices her, and, finally, she is a rebel who casts a curse in the face of impending death. However, this last trope is usually reversed, and the rebellion becomes self-limiting, as the curse is turned into a blessing. The rebellion has its limits, and thus the archetypal female character fulfils all subsequent roles: mother, wife, and reformed rebel. Its should be noted that, despite profound political changes that have significantly influenced the selection of works for the school canon (although these changes have not yet been properly researched, cf., Koulouri & Venturas, 1994), the song *The Bridge of Arta* has remained included in Greek textbooks, which indicates, among other things, the strength, complexity, and compactness of the image of women promoted in this work.

Writings about mothers, mainly in the form of short poems by authors such as Lefterēs Papadopoulos (Η μάνα μου [My Mother]) and Nikēforos Vrettakos (Δυο μητέρες νομίζουν πως είναι μόνες στον κόσμο [Two Mothers Think They Are Alone in the World]), appear as early in the school curriculum as primary school. They portray mothers as loving, but also deeply religious and attached to tradition – to such an extent that they are unable to understand or accept modernity or the differing attitudes of their children. Only in more advanced texts, such as Vrettakos' works aimed at secondary school pupils, does this image gains greater depth. These texts depict mothers who have lost their sons, giving their characters a more intense emotional dimension. Nevertheless, their sadness remains a passive reaction to events in which they do not actively participate. In contrast, in Viktoria Theodōrou's work (Εγκώμιο [Tribute]), aimed at Lyceum students, the portrait of the mother is significantly expanded. The protagonist is imprisoned for political reasons, but despite the difficult circumstances, she maintains a bond with her daughter. This symbolises her strength

and perseverance in the face of oppression, giving the character a new dimension that may be more accessible to young readers.

School textbooks also draw on classic works from the Cretan Renaissance of the 17th century. Examples include two female characters: Aretousa from the poem *Erōtokritos* by Vitzentzos Kornaros (1590–1610) and Erōfilē from the drama *Erōfilē* by Giōrgos Chōrtatzēs (1637). Aretousa, presented in texts intended for younger students (and therefore those who do not necessarily fully grasp the emotional range of the poem), is portrayed as a model daughter and young girl, while Erōfilē symbolises the perfect lover – the embodiment of eternal love and virtue. This theme is further developed in several poems by Mariē Polidourē, a leading representative of expressive love poetry, whose works reveal feelings and sensitivity in an authentic and intimate way. Then, in the realistic novel *Stella Violantē* (1901) by Grigorēs Xenopoulos, patriarchal social norms brutally interrupt a dramatic love story. The protagonist's father rejects her feelings, and her mother advises her to beg for forgiveness. However, Stella refuses to comply, which leads to her inner destruction and thus reinforces the gender stereotype of women in society. Stella is punished for defying social norms.

Also noteworthy is Zōē Karellē's 1955 poem Του καλοκαιριού [On Summer], an apostrophe to summer, in which the season is personified as a young, attractive boy – the object of the narrator's emotional and even erotic interest. Although the text has clear artistic value, its erotic boldness may be controversial, especially considering its intended audience of young readers. Nevertheless, this is a rare phenomenon in Greek textbooks.

In later stages of education, several texts written by rebellious women appear, aimed at teenagers. These writers are unique, original, and, to some extent, subversive in their literary work. Melpō Axiōtē's interwar novel *Δύσκολες νύχτες* [Difficult Nights] (1938) is surrealistic in nature and can be difficult to understand. The lack of clear temporal and spacial indications intensifies the sense of confusion; the memories of a teenager presented in this form may surprise even contemporary, conservative readers. But, again, this is primarily a rebellion at the level of form. Margarita Lymberakē's post-war novel Ψάθινα καπέλα [Straw Hats] (1946) stands in contrast with its much more orderly structure and is widely regarded as an outstanding work due to its theme of female liberation. It tells the story of three young girls and their different paths to adulthood, either following traditional paths or boldly going beyond social expectations: the eldest sister marries and starts a traditional family, the middle sister embarks on a turbulent romance, and the third sister leaves her provincial family and home behind and moves to Athens.

Another important example is an excerpt from the historical novel by Rhea Galanaki *Η ζωή του Ισμαήλ Φερίκ Πασά* [The Life of Ismail Pherik Pasha] (1989), set in 19th-century Crete. The narrative depicts the fate of two brothers: one is kidnapped by the Ottomans and trained as a soldier, while the other remains on the island, becoming an anti-Ottoman fighter. Their reunion ends tragically,

becoming a metaphor for the conflict between loyalty and destiny, set against the broader tragic fate of the Cretans, who fought for the freedom of their homeland until the end of the century.

In the school canon, the archetypal female character of *The Bridge of Arta* embodies all these categories: mother (in some versions) or potential mother; wife, and therefore also lover – as emphasised by her husband's emotional reactions; and reformed rebel whose resistance is suppressed.

What remains outside these categories? Few texts go beyond these three – admittedly arbitrary – categories. One example is Melissanthē's 1931 poem *Στη νύχτα που έρχεται* [To the Night That Is Coming], which touches on the universal themes of life and death. In turn, the story of poverty and marginalisation from Natasa Kesmetē's childhood *Το αιώνιο ρολόι* [The Eternal Clock] (1986) depicts difficult social realities, while Melpō Axiōtē"s 1965 work *Η ψυχή του νησιού* [The Soul of the Island] describes the disappearing folk culture on the Greek island of Mykonos.

Of particular note is the work of Kikē Dimoula, one of the most important poets of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, who, until her death in 2020, was a serious candidate for a Nobel Prize. Despite her importance, only two of her poems are included in the school curriculum – one in middle school and one in Lyceum (*Τα πάθη της βροχής* [The Torments of Rain] and Άωρα και παράωρα [Not in Time and Unusually]). Both works, dating from 1971, explore profound themes: the first is about hope, the other about transience.

The poem Άωρα και παράωρα, intended for third-year secondary school students, is particularly demanding: 30 unrhymed, non-rhythmic lines, accompanied by nine footnotes intended to aid interpretation. Dimoula's work is exceptional in modern Greek literature, transcending classic gender categories and offering universal reflection. She is a poet who is not approached through the lens of gender, but is, in a sense, "admitted" to the table of the greatest poets, such as Giorgos Seferis and Odysseas Elytis. Her poetry is not read through the prism of femininity, but as a fully mature – deliberately described so – contribution to the development and expansion of the boundaries of Greek poetry.

Instead of a Summary

Is it possible to break the petrification of the motif of the walled-up woman in Greek culture? Are there other motifs in the song that are not only worth exploring, but also worth using creatively? It is certainly worthwhile returning to elements related to death – not so much to the act of death itself, understood as an end, a transition, a journey, or as a promise of rebirth – but rather to the body, the dead body (Domańska, 2017). Gender-related issues – "playing" with gender and identity, their renegotiations, reversals, and transformations – remain largely unexplored. There is a lack of bold retellings: alternative points

of view, the addition of "unknown" fragments of the story, elements "hidden" from the recipient, conspiracies, collusions, or a broader contextual frame – in short, a lack of postmodern games. There has been no serious reflection on the sacrifice itself, and interpretations focus almost exclusively on the possibility and meaning of its voluntariness. Yet, this is not its only dimension. Might it be a sacrifice that reconciles opposing parties? If so, who are the parties? What conflict has been resolved (and what new conflict may have erupted)?

Yet another promising interpretation is to view Fate as a force guiding the characters. Greek tradition – and the pessimism of modern Greek culture – likes to show the inevitability of Fate, the Moirai, the Written (Pepragmeno). Why not locate it in this story? Why not play with it and confront it?

The problem of petrification in *The Bridge of Arta* is twofold. First, due to the richness of the literary tradition that Greeks are obliged to assimilate, the amount of space – both in the canon and in personal memory – for a specific text is limited; therefore, texts must be strongly stereotyped. Their descriptions are short, and their conclusions concise and unambiguous. That is why *The Bridge of Arta* becomes, in simple terms, a story of voluntary sacrifice for the common good (in terms of content) and a model ballad (in terms of form). Second, it is a very difficult text to relate directly to antiquity and instead leans towards a Balkan cultural context. It also lacks any recognisable religious or spiritual content and therefore remains outside Orthodox Christian thought. For many researchers and readers, this renders it less interesting than other texts that are more recognisably "Greek" in nature, that is, more closely aligned to the Greek understanding of history and philosophy. However, the possibility remains that it will be rediscovered and become an important voice in narrating both the past and the present.

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Leszek Hensel

Hungary. Twelve Righteous Men

The Birth of the Hungarian Variant of the Walled-Up Woman Topos

The written history of the Hungarian version of the ballad about the walled-up woman begins in the 19th century. Its existence in the Hungarian-speaking community was first recorded in 1848 by János Erdélyi in the third volume of his collection *Népdalok és mondák*[1] [Folk songs and legends]. As admitted years later, this first mention did not attract the attention it deserved from the academic world, let alone readers. The ballad would receive greater attention almost twenty years later.

In March 1862, János Kriza, a Unitarian bishop and collector of folk works, began promoting the songs and other folk works he had collected for publication in his collection titled *Vadrózsák* [Wild roses] (J. Kriza, 1863). When the work was nearing completion, almost at the last minute, three ballads came into his hands, including the one about the walled-up woman, *Kőmives Kelemenné* [The Wife of Kelemen Mason][2] [3], which aroused his particular interest. These ballads enchanted him. Before he fully realised how extraordinary these texts

[1] Five lines of the ballad were included there as a text under number 258.: "Úgy rakják, úgy rakják/Magas Déva várát, /Tizenkét kőmives, tizenkét kőmives. /A mit délig raknak, /Dél után mind lehull." [They're building and building/The Upper Castle in Déva, /Twelve masons, twelve masons. /But what they build before noon /falls apart in the afternoon]. It was accompanied by an editorial note: "According to Samuel Almási Jr., who sent the song, following a legend: the castle in Déva was built by twelve masons, but the wall built before noon collapsed every afternoon. According to the superstition prevailing at the time, for the wall to be durable, a human being must be placed inside it. Thus, the first builder ensures that the first of the builders' wives who comes with lunch is placed inside the stone wall; in this way, their work becomes durable. Unlucky fate dictates that the wife of the first builder arrives first. His companions grab her and put her in the wall, and thanks to this the wall no longer collapses" (Erdélyi, 1848).

[2] In addition to Kelemen Mason, there are several versions of the translation of the name of the main character of the Hungarian ballad into English: "Clement Mason", "Clement Stonemason", "Clement Bricklayer" and "Clement the Bricklayer" also appear.

[3] The other two ballads are: *Kádár Kata* [Kata Cooper] and *Budai Ilona* [Ilona Budai].

were, he hastily sent them to his friend, Pál Gyulai, with a recommendation that they were of the highest quality (J. Kriza, 2013, p. 19). To preserve the concept of his work, he eventually included them in the appendix of Wild Roses, published in January 1863. *Kőmives Kelemenné* appeared on pages 314–317.

The work on the anthology was preceded by years of field research and fundraising for printing, announced as early as 1842. Bishop Kriza not only handled the editing of his work, but also its promotion. He was assisted in this task by, among others, Gyulai, who in 1860 began publishing the most interesting folk songs sent to him by Kriza and gave lectures on them at meetings of Hungarian academic circles (e.g., a lecture titled *Adalék népköltészetünkhöz* [Contribution to our folk poetry] delivered on 25 February 1860, later published in the journal *Budapesti Szemle*) (P. Gyulai, 1860). Gyulai emphasised that Hungarian folk poetry has a wealth of epic works (P. Gyulai, 1862, p. 178). Kriza himself, delighted with the ballads he received at the final stage of his work, was so enchanted that he wrote in a letter to a friend that these works had come at the right time to find a place at the end of the table, but "they can still tell the host that the place of honour is where we sit"[4] (after Albert, 2011, p. 676).

The title that Bishop Kriza used to publish the ballad about the walled-up woman is not the only one under which it appears in Hungarian culture. At the end of the 19th century, it began to appear in the version *Kőmives Kelemen* [Kelemen Mason] (e.g., Arany & Gyulai, 1882, pp. 72–75), and less frequently under the title *A legnagyobb Pallér* [The main master] (Csanádi & Vargyas, 1954, pp. 74–76). Although works on the subject began to appear almost immediately after the publication of *Wild Roses*, to this day there has been no monograph that would not only provide an exhaustive folkloric analysis but also show its significance for Hungarian culture. The first part of this task was accomplished by one of Hungary's most eminent folklorists, Lajos Vargyas, who published an extensive article on the origins of the ballad *Kőmives Kelemen* (Vargyas, 1959). This work, with minor corrections, was then published in a two-volume monograph on Hungarian ballads titled *Magyar ballada és Európa* [Hungarian ballads and Europe] (Vargyas, 1976), first in Hungarian and later also in English (Vargyas, 1983). It was also included in a monumental monograph on folk poetry (Vargyas, 1988).

It is noteworthy that Vargyas, who, as the author of a typology of Hungarian ballads, defined the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife as a "walled-up woman" ballad[5], preferred to use a title that emphasised the male aspect of the story, i.e.,

[4] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Agnieszka Piskozub-Piwosz either from the Polish translation by Leszek Hensel or directly from the original Polish text.

[5] In Hungarian folklore, two variants of this ballad type exist in parallel: *The Walled-Up Woman*, first appearing in the anthology *Röpülj páva röpülj* (Csanádi & Vargyas, 1954, pp. 70–71), and *The Walled-Up Wife*, published in *Jávorfa muzsika* (Faragó, 1965). This modification resulted from the fact that in all known Hungarian types of ballads, it is the wife of the master builder who is walled up, while in ballads from other nations, it might be not only the wife, but also, for example, a sister. According to Albert (Albert,

Kelemen, the Mason, in his analytical works. In this way, he sided with those who emphasised the tragedy of a man who has to make a difficult decision which leads him to sin, lose his wife, have his fate turn against him, and lose his child. This interpretative uncertainty – the question of whose sacrifice was greater, the woman's or the man's, and, consequently, what title the ballad should bear – has accompanied it since the end of the 19th century. It was then that another variant of the ballad was published, titled not *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, but *Kelemen Mason* (Deák, 1886).

It is worth mentioning another researcher, Sándor Solymossy, who, in a study published in the journal *Ethnographia* (Solymossy, 1924), refers to the ballad *Kelemen Mason's Wife* as a ballad of *A befalazat nő* [The walled-up woman] (later referred to as *A falba épitett asszony* [The woman built into the wall]) in the context of the broader phenomenon of sacrificial offerings. As he notes, initially the victims were the builders themselves, but over time they were replaced by family members or strangers. The next stage was to sacrifice orphans (i.e., as the author notes, people whose revenge could not be feared by relatives) and animals that replaced humans. Over time, the sacrifices became of lesser and lesser value (such as black hens or eggs). Drawing on the literature on the subject, Solymossy reminds us that foundational sacrifices have been known since the dawn of humankind and were intended to appease evil spirits. In his argument, he refers, among other things, to the Hindu belief that the spirit of the sacrificed person transforms into a spirit protecting the place where it was made (for this purpose, the dead are buried near the entrance door to the house) (Crooke, 1896, p. 174, as cited in Solymossy, 1924, p. 133). Speaking about the research problems associated with the study of oral epic forms of folk literature, he states that it is generally impossible to determine when they started and how they spread. Still, in the case of the ballad *Kelemen Mason's Wife*, it is possible to decide on the place of its creation quite accurately, as well as to determine the route of its spread with great accuracy. Solymossy considers it certain that this type of ballad originated in Greece and spread from there, undergoing various modifications, to finally reach the northernmost point, i.e., the land of the Székelys, a population of Hungarian origin inhabiting areas in Transylvania. Furthermore, he believes that the oldest version of the ballad has been preserved in five modern Greek ballads, which are so similar to each other that they show only minor differences of philological significance. At the same time, he distinguishes between two types of ballads about the walled-up woman. In terms of structure, they differ in that the Western-type songs are more elaborate and richer, while the Eastern ones remain more like ballads. Solymossy favours the idea that Greece is the cradle of the ballad about

1995, p. 190), the latter name was introduced by József Faragó (1965) and then used by Vargyas Lajos (Vargyas, 1976, pp. 13–43). In the catalogue of ballad types compiled by Vargyas, The Walled-Up Woman type was among the 134 ballad types he identified based on six and a half thousand texts, defined primarily based on aesthetic characteristics (I. Kriza, 2011, p. 38).

the walled-up woman. Here, the oldest versions would be those from 1. Corfu (published in 1852), 2. Trebizond (1890), and 3. Zakynthos (1860), about Arta-bridge and 4. about the bridge over Elias River (1836) (Solymossy, 1924, p. 134). Since the murder of the victims is associated with a mason named Manole – as is also repeated in Macedonian, Bulgarian and Vlach ballads – the researcher expresses the opinion that it was this Greek version that travelled north from Greece along the eastern line (i.e., Bulgarian–Vlach). The second type (i.e., Serbian–Croatian) is thought to have developed independently of the Greek type and is represented by the ballad about the bridge over the Drina; this type of ballad spread in southern Albania and along the Sava River (Solymossy, 1924, p. 136) (Figure 1).

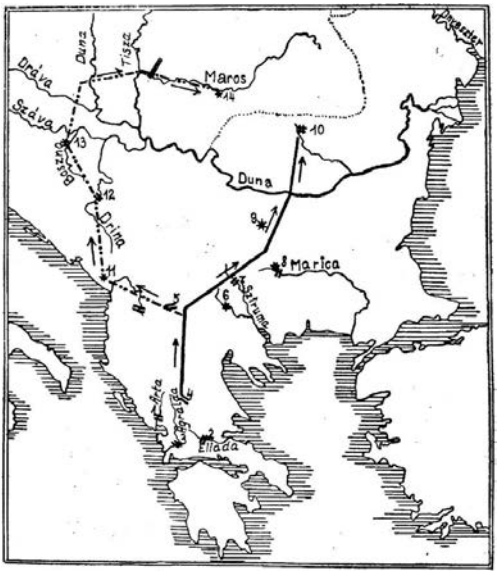


Figure 1. Map of the migration of the Walled-up Wife-type ballad.
Source: Solymossy (1924), p. 137 (Arcanum Újságok).
1–4. Modern Greek; 5. Serbian-Romani; 6–7. Bulgarian; 10. Vâlcea (Curtea de Argeș Monastery); 10a–13. Serbian-Bosnian; 14. Hungarian (Déva Castle)[6].

According to Solymossy, the Hungarian type of ballad is a Western variant, as evidenced by elements that do not appear in the Eastern variant, such as (1) it is chance that determines whose wife will arrive first at the construction site; (2) a gap is left in the wall for the woman's breast; (3) the active role of the child; (4) the source of milk. At the same time, however, the Hungarian variants contain

[6] The author illustrated his concepts with a map of migration of the ballad's types, marking only the ballads which took on certain local features or are connected with a construction in a specific location (Solymossy, 1924, p. 137).

elements that are present in the Western type but not in the Serbian–Croatian type, such as (1) Kelemen/Manole is the first to notice the arriving wife; (2) Kelemen/Manole prays to God to prevent the wife from arriving (they ask for the horse to limp, for the cart's wheels to break, for heavy rain to fall, for God to send wild animals and scorpions, for a dense forest to block her path). Ultimately, Solymossy concludes that the decisive factor should be the ending of the ballad, which introduces the involvement of a child. In the Hungarian version, it is a small child; in Western versions, it is an infant or a child led by the hand. Ballads from areas closest to Hungary, i.e., Croatia and Slavonia, mention an older child walking by the walls and praying to God to bring his mother back. In response, fiery stones fall from the sky and break the wall, from which the mother emerges. Such a scene appears in several Slavonian ballads. As a Hungarian scholar states, this is a positive ending and, with a few exceptions, is a younger solution compared to those with a tragic ending.

More than thirty years later, Vargyas published his comparative analysis of ballads of the "Walled-Up Woman" type; among 229 variants, he identified Hungarian (38), Bulgarian (70), Macedonian (17), Romanian (16), Serbian–Croatian (19), Albanian (14), Greek (15), Gypsy (2), Georgian–Abkhazian (14) and Mordvinian (4) ballads (Vargyas, 1976, pp. 6–10). For his research, the folklorist creates a typology of motifs. As a result, he distinguishes 20 motifs in the group of Hungarian ballads, 26 in Albanian ballads, 27 in Romanian ballads, 29 in Bulgarian ballads, 31 in Greek ballads, and as many as 45 in Serbian ballads. Such a multitude of precisely defined motifs is interesting from the point of view of individual cultures, but it makes it difficult to present a synthesis covering the entire area of the Balkans and Hungary[7].

Ultimately, Vargyas concludes that the ballad about the walled-up woman has its roots in the Caucasus region, from where it reached Europe in the 10th century via Hungarians when they settled in the Pannonian Plain. Years later, this concept was criticised by other researchers (including Hungarian ones) and, although it sometimes appears in studies on the subject, it is not considered binding (Faragó, 1995). In his monumental publication on Hungarian folklore, Lajos Vargyas, in an article on folk ballads, no longer argued for the Hungarian origin of the ballad about the walled-up woman (Katona, 1992). This concept was debated by, among others, József Faragó, a Hungarian folklorist associated with Transylvania, who linked this issue to the question of why the castle in Déva dominates in Hungarian variants of the ballad (Faragó, 1995). In

[7] For methodological reasons, it seems more effective to use the typology of motifs proposed at the beginning of the 20th century by Antal Horger. In his article on the origin of the ballad *Kelemen Mason's Wife*, he identifies only seven motifs – a much more limited number. These are: 1. The story of the construction of the castle; 2. The journey by four-horse carriage which the wife of the bricklayer Kelemen takes to the construction site of the castle in Déva; 3. Obstacles on the wife's journey; 4. Kelemen's wife's farewell; 5. Kelemen's wife being walled up; 6. The fate of the son; 7. The fate of the husband (Horger, 1902).

1971, Imre Katona stated that "Hungarian versions of the ballad, even the more northern variant from Jerez, almost without exception mention Déva, which proves their monogenetic origin" (Katona & Tripolszky, 1971, p. 22). In Faragó's opinion, this is proof that the ballad entered Hungarian folklore in this very region. The scholar links the emergence of the folk ballad with the settlement of Bulgarian Christians who, at the beginning of the 17th century, with the support of the government in Vienna, appeared in Transylvania and Banat, fleeing persecution by the Turks. Déva became one of the most important centres of this settlement. The Bulgarian theme is only one of the genealogical clues to the Hungarian variant of the walled-up topos. Faragó, who opposes the concept of the Hungarian origin of the ballad, and even more so its Caucasian roots, points out that Greek settlers appeared in Transylvania at around the same time as the Bulgarians. At the same time, this scholar does not reject other possibilities for the formation of the Hungarian variant of the ballad because, among other things, Transylvania – or more precisely the county of Hunyad (now Hunedoara County, Romania), whose capital is Déva – was a real ethnic melting pot. In addition to the groups mentioned above and the Romanians, there were also German, Slovenian and other settlers living there. For a better understanding of the area where the collected songs originate, Vargyas presented them on a map in his article (Figure 2) (Vargyas, 1959):



Figure 2. Map of the song's spread.
Source: Vargyas (1959), p. 11

Many works by Hungarian folklorists, including Vargyas, refer to the initial reactions to the publication of the *Kelemen Mason*[8] ballad, as well as to the first major dispute in the history of Hungarian scholarship, known as *Grozescu per* [the Grozescu dispute]. Published in János Kriza's anthology *Wild Roses*, the ballad immediately attracted a lot of interest in Hungary, but an article appeared in the then-popular magazine *Fővárosi Lapok* (G. J., 1864), signed with the initials G.J., which were interpreted as referring to Julian Grozescu. The author, a 26-year-old Romanian journalist living in Pest, presented opinions that were difficult for Hungarian opinion-makers to accept. He stated that the Romanians, who had adopted the epic genre from their French and Italian "brothers", had themselves become the creators of countless ballads, which over time began to spread among non-Romanic peoples. He also expressed his astonishment that a variant of the ballad known in the Romanian folk song tradition had suddenly appeared among the Hungarian Székelys. He attacked Kriza and the literary audience celebrating the publication of the *Wild Roses* anthology (Kósa, 2001, p. 33), calling the Hungarian variant a forgery based on the Romanian original. A lively discussion arose in magazines, mainly in *Fővárosi Lapok*, first between Grozescu and the author of the anthology he accused, Kriza, and then among a wider circle of intellectuals defending the Hungarianness of *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, as well as of the ballad *Anna Molnár*, which Grozescu questioned. The publication of ballads such as *Molnár Anna* [Anna Miller], *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* and *Ajgó Márton* [Márton Ajgó] caused particular outrage. In the case of the latter ballad, Kriza refers to an earlier article by his colleague Pál Gyulai, who did not find any similarities between the Hungarian and Romanian ballads but ultimately concluded that: "even if there are certain similarities, the question remains as to 'whether the Székelys adopted it from the Romanians or vice versa'; moreover, 'our *Anna Molnár* is a highly moral Székely mother, while Janka Tomy is a frivolous, superstitious Romanian woman'" (J. Kriza, 1864).

Referring to the ballad about the walled-up woman in its Romanian and Hungarian versions, Kriza sees the problem as follows: "The Romanian Manole is an extended [...] legend which, putting aside the differences, ends with the murderous masons climbing the tower, from which they fall and turn into stones, while Master Manole turns into a saltwater spring, which is a common variation of Ovid's tale" (J. Kriza, 1864). He contrasts this image with a Hungarian ballad, writing: "On the other hand, the Székely ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* is not only a ballad that stirs the imagination, but also a wonderful, independent fruit of the Székely people" (J. Kriza, 1864).

The discussion that followed the publication of *Wild Roses* and Grozescu's article had an immensely significant impact on the development of Hungarian folklore studies. For many years, it set the direction for reflection in this field, emphasising the development of fieldwork, the discovery and preservation of

[8] In his analytical works, Vargyas uses the title of the ballad *Kelemen Mason*, recognising that the Hungarian variant of the ballad focuses spiritually on the tragedy of the man.

as many artefacts of folk culture as possible, including variants of the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* itself, and the conduct of comparative research. Although no unanimous position was reached on the origin of the topos of the walled-up woman and the directions of its spread, these activities provided enough material to "warn against the danger of a one-sided national perspective" (Kósa, 2001, p. 34). This threat was noted by a large group of leading Hungarian folklorists (e.g., Alexits György, Ortutay Gyula, Viski Károly).

For Kriza himself, the discussion was a sign that "judging by these fragments alone, there must be a number of variants, or they must have existed not so long ago" (Albert, 2011, p. 676). Ernő Albert, who recalled these words on the 200th anniversary of János Kriza's birth, also attempted to summarise the results of collecting various variants of the ballad about the walled-up woman. It turned out that 48 variants were known by the end of 1972. In 1989, Albert added to this list 17 variants recorded in the Székely Land, and 6 in other areas. Since 1990, further variants have been added to this list, which has almost doubled the total number of ballads about the walled-up woman known to Vargyas in 1959: 38 (Vargyas, 1959, p. 6). It is worth noting that the ballad was recorded by scholars in new places but often fell into oblivion in places where it had previously been recorded. This situation was noted by Antal Horger, a teacher from Braşov (Romania), who, almost forty years after recording the ballad about the walled-up woman in Csik County (now Comitatul Ciuc, Romania), travelled around the entire region only to conclude that he could not find any trace of it. Nevertheless, as later field research showed, some researchers recorded further variants of the ballad in the same area. Vargyas's list contains the texts of thirteen ballads recorded there. Another area where new versions of the ballad were recorded later was the Háromszék region. While only two ballads had been found there by 1972, twenty-six more were added later. Some of them, as Ernő Albert writes, were recorded among the local Roma, who preserved the old type of ballad, while the Hungarians had already forgotten it. The Hungarian scholar links this fact to the preservation of Roma funeral customs and all-night mourning of the dead accompanied by the singing of sad songs, including one about a woman who was walled up. Four ballads about the walled-up woman and eleven records published by Ferenc Pozsonyi have such an origin (Albert, 2011, p. 676).

Since almost the beginning of research into the topos of the walled-up woman in Hungary, attempts have been made to establish a connection with the paradigm of foundation sacrifice. Emphasis is placed not only on the spread of this building custom, traces of which can be found almost all over the world, but also on who or what was sacrificed. In an extensive article on the folk poetry collection movement that developed at the end of the 19th century, Ferenc Irmei writes that a living, though already dying, custom recorded in the Székely culture, but also in the Vlach culture, is the practice of making a foundation sacrifice in the form of a "blade of rush"[9], which was used to measure

[9] Certainly, we can see in this custom a modernisation of an earlier ritual which occurred with the arrival of Catholicism in these areas: as in biblical language, rushes and

a person passing by the construction site. Although, as the author points out, builders are decreasingly inclined to believe in this superstition, it still evoked certain associations, since, as Irmei further notes, "The Vlachs are abandoning this practice because it was the cause of misfortune. It happened many times that the person who was measured fell seriously ill, and there were even cases where great fear led him to his grave" (Irmei, 1882).

One of the older articles on this subject is an article by Antal Hermann published in a periodical for architects and engineers at the end of the 19th century (Hermann, 1894, p. 302). Solymossy, mentioned above, also devoted a lot of space to this topic. In the introduction to his study on *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, he includes an interesting bibliography on this subject from the early 20th century, consisting mainly of German- and English-language works (Solymossy, 1924, p. 24).

Noteworthy are also the considerations regarding the manner of making a foundation offering presented in folk ballads about the wife of Kelemen Mason. As early as 1910, Rezső Szegedy emphasised the Hungarian distinctiveness in this regard:

> The fact that it was not popular among the Székelys, that it is of non-Székely origin, is revealed by the variants of *The Wife of Kelemen Mason:* while in foreign works everywhere we encounter the walling-up of a living person, each variant of the Székely ballad mentions a different method of sacrificing a woman. In Kriza's variant: "Whose wife arrives first, we will gently seize her, throw her into the fire, and mix the ashes of her delicate body with lime." In Szabó's variant: "Put her between the walls and burn her there." In the variant from Erdővidék: "Let us kill her and mix her blood with lime." In Deák Farkas's variant: "Throw her into the fire, turn her into ashes, and build the Upper Castle in Déva in this way." (Szegedy, 1910, pp. 19–20)

It is worth noting here that Hungarian researchers have commented on this Hungarian distinctiveness in various ways. At the end of the 19th century, György Sarudy mused on the subject as follows:

> Although trivial, walling up appears in all [ballads of the Balkan region – note by LH] and is richly ornamented; only the ballad of the Szeklers omitted it. The subtle artistic sensibility of the Székely people recognised that there was no point in exaggerating the horror of an already immoral subject because the audience was not a blood-sucking savage, a beast delighting in torture. (Sarudy, 1899, p. 57)

Hungarian research on the foundation sacrifice received a new impetus when, in the 1950s, Márton Istvánovics, while studying in Tbilisi, made contact with the Georgian ethnographer Mikhail Joseph Chikovani. Chikovani drew his attention to the foundation sacrifice in that area, referring, among other things,

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reeds are symbols of man. In Hungarian culture, the practice of offering a "rush stick" as a sacrifice is very rare. Interestingly, based on a variant of the ballad *Kelemen Mason's Wife*, in which such a stick is walled up, the Hungarian writer and ethnographer Laura Iancu, who hails from a region inhabited by the Csangó people, wrote an intriguing novel about life in a Hungarian village at the end of World War II (Iancu, 2011).

to Julius Klaproth's 1825 work on his folklore research in the Caucasus, which included a story about the foundation sacrifice (Obrusánszky, 2015). This led to Vargyas's concept, as described above.

In an article published in 1995 in Ethnographia, Olga Nagy, writing about the importance of using ethnological research in folklore studies, stated that

> Thanks to ethnological research, ethnographers can understand not their origin, but the fact that the discovered folkloric motifs originating from a similar spiritual environment and similar beliefs have acquired certain specific characteristics in poetry. And so, for example, the eastern, south-eastern or central European variants of Kelemen Mason's ballad or the fact of their occurrence in these regions do not tell us that one people "borrowed" them from another, but that they grew out of an ancient belief in sacrifice, a symbol of the walling up of a woman, which is clothed in artistic forms and appears in different guises among different peoples. In this way, […] we find folk spirituality present in folk poetry, art, way of life, spiritual and material life. (Nagy, 1995, p. 255)

A new impetus for Hungarian reflection on the origin of the topos of the foundation sacrifice, and at the same time an answer to the question of how it found its way into Hungarian folk ballads, was provided by an article by Borbála Obrusánszky from 2015, who, in search of its roots, turned her attention to Asia (Obrusánszky, 2015). She pointed out that, unlike in Europe, Chinese literature has preserved written evidence of the practice of foundation sacrifices in Asian culture when erecting significant buildings. Unfortunately, the fragments of texts on which the author bases her argument sometimes indicate that the nature of the offerings was different from that of foundation sacrifice. For example, she quotes a fragment of a 5th-century text on the construction of a new capital in Tongwancheng:

> When Helian Bobo planned the city of Tongwan várost, Chi-gan Ali was appointed master builder. Ali was a master builder, but he had a ruthless nature. The palace walls were built to be very strong. If a hole was drilled in them, he (Chi-gan Ali) would immediately kill the person who built the wall, and his body would be walled up in the wall. (Obrusánszky, 2015, p. 110)

This quote leads the author to the erroneous conclusion that she is dealing with a Chinese variant of the topos of a walled-up woman. However, this cruel custom was more likely intended to force bricklayers to adhere to high construction standards so that the structure would be durable. Murder was a punishment, but also an example for other builders (Obrusánszky, 2015, p. 110).

As a literary genre, the ballad (both folk and artistic) occupies a special place in the history of Hungarian literature and is an important component in the formation of Hungarian national identity. For this reason, its history has been the subject of numerous academic works. Progress in research on the ballad in other academic centres in the region, particularly in Romania, is also closely followed. For example, Ildikó Kriza published an extensive report on this subject in 1969. In it, she points out that the Romanian side attaches importance to

promoting folk ballads in society and publishes them in cheap versions, on recycled paper, obviously alongside anthologies printed to a high artistic standard, with thousands of copies of ballad collections (I. Kriza, 1969). However, this researcher does not comment on the fact that Romanian reflections on the Hungarian version of the ballad about the walled-up wife are still influenced by the idea initiated in the so-called Grozescu dispute, which points to the secondary nature of Hungarian ballads in relation to Romanian ones. At the end of the 20th century, Mircea Eliade repeats this judgement in his otherwise interesting study *Zalmoxis*, quoting the opinion of another Romanian researcher, Léon Sainéan (1902), who states that "the Magyar variants seem to echo the Romanian ballad" (Eliade, 1972, p. 174). It is noteworthy that this view dates back to 1902 and uncritically reproduces the position presented by Grozescu, among others. Incidentally, he was harshly criticised by the eminent Romanian scholar Josip Popovici, who wrote in his 1909 article that János Kriza had been attacked by Grozescu in an "unforgivable" manner, further pointing out "the superficiality of this unworthy attack, which has no place among serious people. We, Romanians and Hungarians, have various points of contact, but in this case the monastery of Argeşului and Kelemen Mason's Wife have only a tradition in common, to which Hungarians have the same right as Romanians" (Popovici, 1909, p. 17). Nevertheless Eliade was familiar with the much more recent study by Vargyas (Vargyas, 1967, pp. 173–233), which includes a very broad comparative analysis of various national variants of the ballad, including the Romanian one. Eliade does not notice the essential distinguishing features of the Hungarian variants pointed out by Vargyas, such as the fact that the bricklayer's wife is killed and burned rather than being walled up alive, as is the case elsewhere, or that in some variants the decision to kill her is made by the master builder, while in others it is made by all the builders. Using Vargyas's study, Eliade limits himself to summarising the ballad that the Hungarian author cites as an example, but he does not refer to his further reflections, or at least this is not apparent in the Romanian scholar's argument. This very selective view of the Hungarian author's work causes Eliade to miss an essential theme in most Hungarian ballads, namely the fact that Kelemen's wife appears at the construction site not because she has to bring her husband a meal[10], but because of her nightmare foretelling her husband's misfortune at the construction site[11].

[10] The version of the ballad summed up by Eliade following Vargyas is, as the Hungarian scholar writes, a characteristic variant. Still, a few sentences later, he points out that other variants are also known. The table attached to the work, showing the occurrence of various themes in Hungarian, Romanian and Balkan ballad variants known by the end of the 1960s, clearly shows that in ballads about Kelemen the brickbuilder's wife the motif of the woman coming to the construction site because of a bad dream is equally common. The omission of Vargyas's analyses renders several of Eliade's conclusions inadequate to the facts (Vargyas, 1967, p. 180 and table II after p. 303).

[11] In his summary of the Hungarian ballad, Eliade states: "[...] Clemens decides to sacrifice the first wife who comes with food for them the next day. There are no super-

This Romanian–Hungarian rivalry runs through the rich literature on the subject in both Romanian and Hungarian circles. At the end of the 19th century, Oszkár Mailand, a teacher at the secondary school in Déva and a figure who made a significant contribution to the development of research into Hungarian and Romanian folklore, published a comparative analysis of Romanian and Hungarian ballads built around the topos of the walled-up woman in his school's handbook, referring also to the Greek and Serbian variants of this topos. This analysis led him to conclude that

> It is likely that the Romanians adopted their story from the Serbs. […] Manole himself, as his name suggests (a variation of the Greek Emanuel), is not an original character in Romanian folklore, but a figure transferred from other legends, which the people have reworked, imbuing them with their own spirit. However, they could not wash away the foreign or ancient elements that lead to his roots. He adds that pointing out these foreign connotations "does not offend Romanian self-esteem, because even if the subject and the hero are foreign, what is beautiful and noble is due to the spirit of the people." (Mailand, 1885, p. 9)

For the issue of the walled-up woman topos, it is more important to recall Mailand's analysis, in which he points to a cosmological myth as its source for the first time in Hungary (Mailand, 1885). It is interesting that in later works devoted to the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, Hungarian scholars completely ignored this interpretation, while this very trope became the main interpretative motif of the Romanian variant of the ballad about the walled-up woman in Mircea Eliade's work, written almost fifty years later (Eliade, 1943), and it was widely used at the turn of the 21st century in other works by researchers from the Balkan region. Mailand's argument is brief, pressured by the fact that it would be published in his school's annual report. The Hungarian researcher finds inspiration for his thesis in Friedrich Spiegel's work *Eranische Altertliumskunde* [Studies on Iranian antiquity], published in 1871 in Leipzig. I will quote here only a short excerpt from his findings:

> The events in our ballads are based on the struggle between good and evil. The element of good is represented by a woman (the sun) and a higher power that tries to help her overcome obstacles. On the other hand, the elements of evil are the bricklayers (night, clouds of the evening sky) and Manole, who is forced to join them. The bricklayers build the evening sky, but they cannot gain power until the sun (woman) is buried. The walling up represents the disappearance of the sun. It disappears behind the castle. The sky in solar myths and other myths is also a mountain and a castle. In Romanian, Slavic, and even Hungarian mythology, the sky is a glass mountain. […] In the ballad of the Székelys, the woman is burned. The ancient belief that the sun burns itself and returns in the glow of the sun. […] Observing these phases, one can assume that this myth depicts the ancient drama of sunset, a moving moment taken from variants of the evening sky, in which the

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natural elements (genie, fairy, archangel, dream), nor do the master masons take an oath" (Eliade, 1972, p. 174).

> moon in love fights against the night (or clouds), which tries to snatch the sun from his wife. (Mailand, 1885, p. 7)

The extraordinary paths that the story of Kelemen Mason and his wife can take are illustrated by a tale quoted in a review of a monumental work by Ion Taloş on Romanian variants of the ballad about the walled-up woman, known under the name of *Master Manole*, by the Hungarian literary historian László Székely. He recalls a legend recorded at the beginning of the 20th century – associated with the then still existing ruins of a castle near Herculesfürdő (now Băile Herculane, Romania) – according to which King István V (1270–1272) brought builders from Italy to construct it, but:

> what they built during the day fell apart at night. For a long time, they were unable to solve this mystery. Finally, a blind man who found himself among the bricklayers, pondering the problem, revealed the secret of their failure. He said that a cursed spirit lived in the Bárány Mountains and was interfering with the construction. But they could free themselves from him if they walled up alive the first wife of a mason who brought her husband's lunch. The unfortunate masons, having a contract for the construction, agreed to such a cruel procedure. As we also know from other variants, the victim was the master's wife. According to the legend, master Kelemen did not survive the terrible blow. His orphaned son was taken to Italy by a fellow countryman and raised there. The young man grew up to become Pope Kelemen [Clement] VI (1342–52). (Székely, 1973, p. 636)

Déva – A Castle Built Into the National Imaginarium

In the topography of Hungarian literary sites, the town of Déva and its castle occupy an important place, as can also be seen in Zoltán Erős's lexicon of Hungarian literary sites (Erős, 1985); it is present in many Hungarian literary works and is also included in Hungarian school and tourist itineraries. The special place of this castle in the national imagination of Hungarians is evidenced by the memory of the poet Gyula Illyés, who in 1925 climbed the castle hill on the occasion of his book signing event:

> […] and as is characteristic of my need to gather impressions, on the morning of my author's evening, I climbed Déva Castle to experience the spiritual anxiety of Kelemen Mason's son, his mood, the pain he felt when his mother spoke to him from behind the wall. It was an incredibly beautiful walk, and the experience I had at the foot of the crumbling, green-covered rock walls made my heart tremble. (Márosi, 1969, p. 584)

The Upper Castle in Déva, built on a high hill (Figures 3 and 4) rising above the Marosz River valley, is perfectly suited to serve as a symbol of the Hungarians, a nation with Finno–Ugric roots that arrived in the Pannonian Plain. For centuries, it has lived like a lonely island, surrounded by a sea of other peoples, mostly Slavic, hence the term "Hungarian island in the Slavic sea/ocean". In

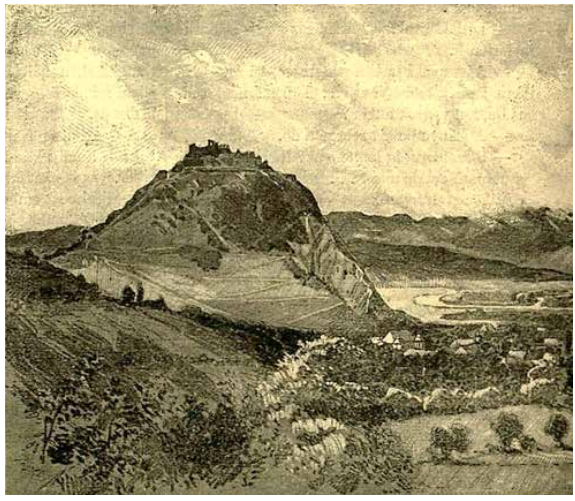


Figure 3. Hill with ruins of Déva castle. Author: Réthi Lajos.
Source: Hunyadvármegyéből (képpel). *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 1887, (32), p. 527l (Arcanum Újságok)



Figure 4. Ruins of Déva Castle.
Photo by Leszek Hensel, 2024

1928, a Hungarian member of the Serbian parliament said, "We always say that the Hungarians are an island in the Slavic sea, but they are not an island, they are a rock" ("Magyarság a szláv tengerben", 1928), which brings us even closer to the image of Déva Castle, built on top of a mountain. For centuries, the Hungarian people preserved their native language, even though their official language until

the end of the 18th century was first Latin and then German. It was not until the 19th century that the Hungarian language made its way into political life.

Alongside Transylvania, where it was built, this fortress – dating back to the 13th century and encoded in the Hungarian topos of the walled-up woman – occupies an essential place in the Hungarian national landscape. Tim Edensor notes that the ideology associated with the national landscape "is imagined as permanent spaces created over centuries by the sacrifice of blood and labour" (Edensor, 2004, p. 90). Both elements are constituent elements of the Hungarian variants of the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*. At the same time, Edensor reminds us that "for national space to retain its power, it must be domesticated, replicated in local contexts, and understood as part of everyday life" (Edensor, 2004, p. 89). Looking at this issue from a Hungarian perspective, it should be noted that school curricula, excursion programmes, and the introduction of the town of Déva into literature, art, and radio and television broadcasts are all subordinated to this task.

Examining Déva Castle – a sacred place for the Hungarians and a destination for their spiritual and historical pilgrimages – through the lens of its role in Hungarian literature reveals interesting twists and turns in its history. Its story begins with a pompous character.

Figure of the Community

Only some of the over one hundred versions of the ballad do not link the ritual of sacrificing the wife of Kelemen Mason to the success of the construction of the building of the castle in Déva. As Ákos Windhager notes:

> The story about the need to sacrifice people in order to appease local spirits disturbing the construction of the castle may be a legacy of animism or cannibalism, but it is much more symbolic. The castle, apart from being a symbol of power, provides protection and thus ensures the survival of the community. The community is held together by people's desire to belong, cooperate and serve; from a sacred point of view, she is therefore buried in the wall as a sacrifice for the common good. The oldest version of this is the heroic death, which occurs on the plane of reality and symbolism simultaneously, making the history of the wall a decisive episode in the history of the community's formation. (Windhager, 2017, p. 94)

According to Władysław Kopaliński, a castle symbolises, inter alia, "the meaning of existence, perfection, spiritual strength, grace and dreams" (Kopaliński, 1990). The castle in Déva is also a symbol of security and, at the same time, a symbol of community, created by walling up a woman inside it. This aspect is worth emphasising as it seems to be key to the meaning of this symbol in Hungarian culture.

The community symbolised by Déva Castle changed parallel to the socio-political situation in Hungary from the turn of the 19th century to the present

day. At the beginning of the First World War, Déva Castle (and Kelemen Mason, who built it) was presented as a symbol of the restoration of the stability of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as reflected in a text from 1915: "We think of the legend of Kelemen Mason: blood must be sacrificed, blood must be shed, so that the castle in Déva can stand strong and resist the passage of time. This war today – who knows, it is good to delude ourselves – will rebuild and cement the foundations of this monarchy with blood" ([Editorial], 1915).

At the end of the war, when the future borders of Hungary were being decided, Déva became a symbol not of the former monarchy, but of the great Hungarian state in 1920, following the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, which deprived Hungary of two-thirds of its territory. The image of the country before 1920 became ingrained in the national consciousness, expressed in the famous political slogan of the interwar period: "Truncated Hungary is not a state, the whole of Hungary is paradise". We are dealing with the construction of an ideological landscape that permanently incorporated the lands lost by the government in Budapest to neighbouring countries. This was the case, for example, with the town of Déva, which found itself within the borders of Romania. No wonder, then, that the town has begun to be reinterpreted. On the one hand, the castle built there is a symbol of the lost Transylvania, a mirage that was supposed to unite and develop in peaceful cooperation between Hungarians, Romanians, Germans and other nations. On the other hand, it has become a symbol not only of the community, but of the Hungarian state itself, whose borders were dismantled by the Treaty of Trianon.

The year 1922 brings several literary texts that not only introduce a change in the functioning of the castle in Déva in Hungarian culture but also revise the image of the characters from the ballad about the walled-up woman. First and foremost is Gyula Juhász's poem *Új Kőmives Kelemen* [New Kelemen Mason]. In this poem, the poet, as the new Kelemen Mason, calls on his compatriots ("good lads") to join forces to rebuild Déva Castle, which is a symbol of Hungary. "Let us build it from our dreams", encourages the poet. It is a task that requires dedication and sacrifice: "if necessary, let us wall up our blood and our bodies in it" (Juhász, 1922). In the same year, a voice from Transylvania also speaks out: László Tompa[12] writes about the need to build a new castle in Déva. It must be built, even though it has collapsed many times. Work and effort are needed because "nothing is lost", "And if necessary, my blood will be the glue" and "And one night, even if I fall dead on it, this castle will stand" (Tompa, 1922, p. 265). These two poetic calls have a common feature: a call to rebuild the castle in Déva, i.e., to restore the state taken away from Hungary by foreign powers, and the annihilation of the motif of female sacrifice. Both poets emphasise that the

[12] Another well-known Hungarian writer, Áron Tamási, writing about his past encounter with Tompa, mentioned that he lived in Székelyudvarhely, where, like the new Kelemen Mason, he walled up his life and "gloomy desires" in poems (Tamási, 1944, p. 127).

new building will be built with the blood of the masons, if necessary. Both break with the patriarchal objectification of women.

Hungarian literary historian Béla Pomogáts draws attention to yet another aspect of Tompa's poem. He emphasises that it is a model of poetry that "considered itself the guardian of the native language and community consciousness in the 'heroic age' and played a major role in keeping large sections of Romanian Hungarians free from the poison of nationalism and the desire for revenge" (Pomogáts, 1994, p. 56). However, he goes on to state that the hope contained therein for building the ideal of ethnic peace in Transylvania, and a universal European culture, was not realised due to "primarily Greater Romanian chauvinism and intolerance, because Bucharest's nationality policy has always aimed to intimidate the Hungarians of Transylvania and suppress their national consciousness" (Pomogáts, 1994, p. 56).

These poems show the evolution of the topos of the walled-up woman in Hungarian literature. To the fore comes the figure of Kelemen Mason, who begins to merge two characters that have become archetypal for Hungarians: Kelemen Mason, the master builder, the creator, or, as Fromm would say, God; and his wife, the sacrificial woman. This narrative replaces the entire narrative of the violence in the ritual of sacrifice present in the original ballads. In this version, the sacrifice is made by the men themselves, who make a voluntary and conscious decision. The divinity of Kelemen Mason is emphasised repeatedly, for example by József Utassy, who, in his poem *Mindenség Déva-vára* [Déva – the castle of everything], states that this castle-fortress in Déva exists because it was built at the cost of blood. It was built by bricklayers with "the faces of Christ" (Utassy, 1970, p. 1446).

The sense of community that Pomogáts points out is noticeable in later literary works, such as Jenő Horváth's poem *Új Kőmives Kelemen* [New Kelemen Mason] (Horváth, 1937). For the poet, Déva Castle, formed thanks to a "legendary martyr's blood", is a symbol of a glorious past, of "royal power" (Horváth, 1937). Demolished, it becomes a symbol of Transylvania (Hungary), inhabited by a multi-ethnic community. Now it is just a "graveyard". That is why the poet, "as the new Mason", addresses the nations that once built the greatness of Hungary: "Brothers! Romanians, Germans, Hungarians, let us start anew!" This time, his bond will not be the blood of women or bricklayers, but "the blood of Christ" (Horváth, 1937). In this way, the poet gives the castle of Déva a messianic dimension. God himself is to help rebuild Hungary's greatness.

When, in 1940, Hungarians were rejoicing at the return of part of Transylvania to Hungary, István Agyagfalvi Hegyi, a poet from that region, listed more than twenty Hungarian memorial sites in Transylvania in his poem *Mikes csillaga* [Mikes's star] (Agyagfalvi Hegyi, 1940). Among them, in fifth place, is Déva with its castle and its builder, Kelemen Mason. The poet addresses him: "What do you say, Kelemen Mason? You see that man sometimes builds ruins… Déva!" (Agyagfalvi Hegyi, 1940). He shows that building a community was a pure fantasy – an ideal with no chance of coming true – and that the sacrifice was in vain.

In 1948, while in exile, Albert Wass, a Hungarian count and writer also from Transylvania, wrote a poem titled *Üzenet haza* [Message to the Homeland]. The poet makes no mention of the wife of Kelemen Mason. He writes about the construction of a new house by "a thousand new Kelemens Masons" who "will build a new homeland from old stones". It will be a "house of peace". Its walls "will not be bound with ashes and human blood, but with holy water and wheat bread" (Wass, 1991). The poem features the sacralisation of the Hungarian nation – a theme often found in Hungarian literature. The new castle will be built thanks to the builders' strong work ethic and dedication. The sacrifice of a woman will not be necessary. It is worth noting that in 2019, on the occasion of another anniversary of 1956 in Hungary, Prime Minister Victor Orbán reminded his compatriots of Wass's poem *Message to the Homeland* (Bordács, 2019) via social media.

An artistic response to Wass's poem – a very poignant one, filled with deep longing for the homeland he was forced to leave – is the poem by Tamás Lovassy Cseh, a contemporary poet also associated with Transylvania, titled *Üzenem haza* [I pass on a message to my homeland] (Lovassy Cseh, 2013). In it, he rejects attachment to history and the need for a new Kelemen Mason to appear. The picture he paints is not of Arcadia, but rather of the last years of Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule, whom he considers the new Kelemen Mason. What he built resembles a prison rather than a common home. He built the walls of tomorrow "from barbed wire", which he strengthened with "lead, steel and human blood" (Lovassy Cseh, 2013). The old world is passing away. Those who once formed the community of "the righteous and good, the pure and steadfast, Jews, Gentiles, Nyirő's [13] and Wasses" are dying (Lovassy Cseh, 2013). Society is left with a mafia that destroys everything. Only stones remain of the buildings. In such a world, the sacrifice of women is unnecessary. Kelemen Mason, on the other hand, builds an ideologised world.

Communism/Socialism

At the turn of the 20th century, the left-wing movement began to gain importance in Hungary, which in 1919 led to the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, which lasted for 133 days. Despite its dissolution, left-wing ideology took root in the political and cultural space of the country on the Danube for many years. It is therefore not surprising that the castle in Déva began to appear relatively quickly as a symbol of the new system. A natural ally of this approach was the rhetoric of communist politicians, who compared the people

[13] József Nyirő (1889–1953), writer, Catholic priest, and politician. In the 1930s and 1940s, he gained popularity with his short stories and novels describing the life of the Székely people. His work is characterised by folk romanticism, religious motifs, and affirmation of Transylvanian identity. During World War II, he was a member of the Hungarian parliament, representing the fascist Arrow Cross Party.

creating the new political system to builders. This can be seen, for example, in a letter from the Hungarian communist Béla Kun to his Czechoslovak comrades, in which he demands the release of Hungarian prisoners of war so that they can take part in the "building of socialism" in Hungary ("Tusor elvtárs", 1919).

Kelemen Mason, who is building not a castle but a better world, appears, among others, in a poem by Zseni Várnai from 1926. Written for the opening of the B. Somogyi Workers' House, the poem shows that the house was built like a castle in Déva. Before the sacrifice was made and the young blood of Kelemen Mason's wife was mixed with lime, the construction had proceeded with difficulties. "This building was built in this way, with a blood sacrifice, even if only symbolic, the blood of our masters added the will and strength to make this building stand for eternity" (Várnai, 1926). The poem ends with a call to the workers, whose work will survive for centuries. Their deeds will live on in the songs of the people. "Let us carry stones! Let us raise words! Let us mix plaster! Let us build new buildings, let us dig foundations, we simple bricklayers, for a more humane, more just, happier world!" (Várnai, 1926) Hungarian poets after World War II would later refer to this image of building not a castle but a new world. Therefore, it is not surprising that in a 1949 poem by an unknown author[14], dedicated to a Turkish poet persecuted by the authorities, Nazim Hikmet[15], Kelemen Mason becomes a symbol of a tyrant who walls up his political opponents ("Hikmet", 1949). The castle of Déva itself becomes a powerful symbol: the tragedy of a society bound by cruelty. This is how Pál Fehér interprets Béla Balázs's 1911 poem in a Marxist spirit in his article on the tenth anniversary of the poet's death (Fehér, 1959).

The ballad is revisited as new times arise.

> The bricklayers who built the castle in Déva, under the supervision of foreman Kelemen Mason, were unable to meet their standards because what they built during the day fell apart at night. The bricklayers from Déva therefore decided to develop a new technology that would help them overcome their problems. Their idea was that the first person to arrive at the construction site would be thrown into the fire and the ashes would be mixed with lime. Thanks to this new process, the inhabitants of Déva managed to ensure that what they built during the day would no longer collapse at night. (Tokár, 1957)

The heroine of Vilma Sebők's poetic confession poem *Kőmives Kelemenné* [The Wife of Kelemen Mason] (Sebők, 1976), the contemporary wife of Kelemen Mason, talks about her political involvement. She transports mortar, campaigns for production cooperatives, and emphasises that she is building socialism – not for herself, but for others. When she sums up her life, she realises that for years she has been building the walls of a new system, in which she herself, like the wife of Kelemen Mason, has become walled up (Sebők, 1976).

[14] The author's name beside the text published in the Népszava daily is illegible.

[15] Turkish poet and playwright, member of the Communist Party of Turkey, imprisoned for many years for his political activities.

József Ratkó is a poet whose work is particularly strongly associated with the topos of the walled-up woman. Zoltán Jánosi characterises his work as imbued with "Déva syndrome" (Jánosi, 1999, p. 90). Themes such as a crumbling castle, a child, a walled-up woman or, more broadly, the problem of sacrifice often recur in his work. In a poem from the late 1960s, *Minket nem kérdezett* [We were not asked], assessing the history of Hungary, he states that this country, built by the nation, "even without God's help", is strong because it was built on the sacrifice of "walled-up" wives and fathers (Ratkó, 1969b, p. 3).

The theme of sacrifices made throughout Hungary's long history is also present in the poem *Két ballada* [Two ballads]. These sacrifices are an element that shapes Hungarian national consciousness, just like the castles of Déva, which, being built and falling apart, will become indestructible after being rebuilt with stone and blood. The poet also refers here to "his mother's ashes", identifying himself with the son of Kelemen Mason's wife, "the child from the ballad" (Ratkó, 1969d, p. 1929). This child is also mentioned in the poem *Déva vára* [Déva castle], in which he recalls that the castle was built using mortar mixed with his mother's ashes (Ratkó, 1979). As Ratkó admits:

> I realised […] that the community we call Hungarian consists not only of living people; it must also include the dead. […] I also read in Chingiz Aitmatov: a nation that does not respect its dead will sooner or later die out. […] We, contemporary Hungarians, are guilty of allowing the great heritage left to us by our dead to fall into ruin, without making use of it. (Ratkó, 1989)

Funeral references occupy so much space in Ratkó's work that Gábor Nagy calls him the poet of the dead (G. Nagy, 2003). In Ratkó's view, Hungarian society should be built on the memory of them. Among them, Déva Castle and the woman walled up inside it occupy a special place. She is often unnamed but can be discovered through coded references in the texts to the walled-up person, to the ashes of the mother (this motif of connecting the mother with death appears in numerous poems by Ratkó[16]. As critic Gábor Nagy points out, the castle of Déva that appears in Ratkó's works is sometimes a false castle, a symbol of a betrayed past: the promised construction is in fact destruction, the promised future is the constant destruction of values (G. Nagy, 2003, p. 111). Zoltán Jánosi sums this problem up by stating that Ratkó, in opposition to the image of Déva Castle, "which is presented and promoted using Marxist ideology, creates his own Déva Castle: a truly humanistic vision of the future, for which it is worth making sacrifices" (Jánosi, 1999, p. 91). The poet proclaims that it should be built "against the intentions of the times, against the false Déva". In the poem *Dal a jövőről* [Song about the future] (Ratkó, 1969a,

[16] *Keres az anyám* [My mother is looking for me] (Ratkó, 1969c), *Zsoltár* [Psalm] (Ratkó, 1975), *Cserébe* [In return] (n.d.), *Mégiscsak ők* [And yet they] (Ratkó, 1970), *Anyám* [My mother] (Ratkó, 1973a), *Déva vára* [Déva castle] (Ratkó, 1979), *Déva* [Déva] (Ratkó, 1973b), *Halott halottaim* [My dead dead] (Ratkó, 1971), *Két ballada* [Two ballads] (Ratkó, 1969d), *Új versek elé* [Before new poems] (Ratkó, 1974).

p. 51), he presents a woman walled up as a prostitute, which seems to suggest that, in the poet's opinion:

> An idea that has become a whore […] no longer wants to give birth to the future but seeks to plunder and consume it. The "prostituted" ideal, which opposes the human future and has thus become unworthy ("our seduced ideals / are distilled by troglodytes"), is replaced by motherhood and its meaning, the child being built in the mother, the true symbol of the future. It is the child, the mother, who faces the pseudo-Déva-expectant, also on behalf of the unworthy victims who were sacrificed in her name. (Márkus, 1976)

In his poem *Kinéz a kőből* [Looking out of stone], Ratkó expresses his belief that the walled-up wife of Kelemen Mason is constantly present in the lives of Hungarians. Although dead, she is still alive. She sacrificed herself for them out of love and care. The silence in the poem signals that the situation at the end of the 1980s, when the poem was written, reveals that the building for which she sacrificed herself is not as stable and durable as she was led to believe.

> The dead woman looks out of the stone
> with curiosity: what is the matter with us.
> I will not make her cry. I keep silent. (Ratkó, 1986)

The special significance of the folk tale about the construction of the castle in Déva for the socialist state is highlighted, among others, in documents of the Political Bureau of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP). When László Gyurkó's play *Kőmíves Kelemenné balladája* [The ballad of Kelemen Mason's wife] (1974) was written, it was – in keeping with the spirit of the times – closely watched by political circles (as was all Hungarian culture). A particularly noteworthy feature of the play was its portrayal of the wife of Kelemen Mason as a woman who decides to sacrifice her body in order to help her husband achieve his goal. In the material prepared by the Ministry of Culture for the Agitation and Propaganda Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party on the planning of the theatre repertoire for 1973–1974, we read that "the proposed plays (including the play about the construction of the castle in Déva by L. Gyurkó – note by LH) promise a strong, politically engaged image" (Imre & Ring, 2018, p. 190). The playwright himself emphasised the political significance of his play in an interview, stating that "sacrifice, the most extreme form of which is, of course, death, is, in my opinion, an essential feature of the socialist type of man", and citing the text of a funeral march in honour of Lenin: "You sacrificed your family and love…" (Mezei, 1975). For this reason, it is not surprising that in another document prepared for institutions implementing the policies of the Hungarian party, it was noted with regret that *The Ballad of Kelemen Mason's Wife* had been largely overlooked by critics, even though "it would be extremely necessary for the development of theatrical genres and audiences" (Imre & Ring, 2018, p. 25).

Figure of the Hungarian/Nation

The world depicted in the ballad about the walled-up woman is a world in which the division of social roles is strictly defined by patriarchy. This fact is also reflected in the Hungarian language. After Kelemen Kőmives, or Kelemen Mason, marries, his wife takes her husband's name. Her subjectivity is reduced to the suffix "né", meaning a married woman. As written in the ballad, she begins to function as Kelemenné Kőmives, which could be translated as "Kelemen's Mason" or "Kelemen Mason's wife". It should be noted that this form is still present in contemporary Hungarian, although it is no longer as commonly used as it once was. As Marianna D. Birnbaum states:

> Required reading for every Hungarian nobleman, a book of laws concerning women compiled by I. Verbőczy[17] […] a woman did not reach maturity until she married (although in other cases she was considered an adult at the age of sixteen and legally an adult at the age of twelve, notes DB), at which point her guardianship was removed, but authority over her passed to her husband. This law applied only to the nobility and free peasants. However, due to the specific nature of the bricklaying profession, these regulations also applied to the wives of master bricklayers. This system is superimposed on the Christian world, where the figure of marriage depicts two people who have married to become "one flesh and one soul". (Birnbaum, 1982, p. 4)

This positioning of women in the social structure likely results in the suppression of the female figure from the topos dedicated to her; the entire space is occupied by Kelemen Mason, who is both the creator and the victim, as he walls himself up. The topos becomes masculinised. This can already be seen in László Dobos's 1969 poem *Falak* [Walls]. Admittedly, the woman here is the "animated mortar" with which Kelemen Mason builds the world, but in this world everyone is both walled up and a master builder (Dobos, 1969). In a similar vein, the topos is updated by the Hungarian poet Gizella Hervay, who lived in Transylvania until 1976. In her poem *Kőmives Kelemen* [Kelemen Mason], she writes about contemporary bricklayers walling themselves up (Hervay, 1968). This generation of builders, driven by a passion for creation, erects walls that crumble to dust upon their death, but they are replaced by others who are ready to wall themselves up in their work even when their efforts seem hopeless. "Our fate is a ballad in which we die", concludes Hervay's poem (Hervay, 1968).

In an earlier lyrical oratorio for four voices titled *Zuhanások* [Falls], the poet, describing her state of being walled up, presents an image of a person subjected to dehistoricisation – sluggish and incapacitated (Marin, 2017, p. 76). She writes:

> Here I live, walled up in concrete / soundlessly. / My feet are on stone, / my hands are stone. / I cannot move my head […], / and the weight of the night weighs on my head. / Morning slowly creeps up my legs / like blood. (Hervay, 1974, p. 441)

[17] On Verbőczy's *Tripartitum*, see Hensel (1986), pp. 63–65.

Although she is aware that her walling up stems from her enslavement to the norms of the outside world, she humbly accepts what has been imposed upon her. In a poem from the cycle *Bevakolt ég alatt* [Under a covered sky], she writes that she is the wife of Kelemen Mason, "walking with a lock", and that her son is being fed by her neighbours; she is aware that being walled up in a castle is her destiny (Hervay, 1980, p. 345). Lili Debreczeny had already seen such a fate for women at the beginning of the 20th century in her poem *Déva vára* [Déva castle]. The lyrical subject is a girl walled up by her husband. According to her, the castle stones are held together by her blood, and the walls are nourished by her body and soul. "It would be futile for me to protest; my fate is the castle." She sums up her story by saying, "To be a woman and a Hungarian – that is my fate." "The castle of Déva already stands for my fate as a slave" (Debreczeny, 1927).

Figure of Home/Love

Déva is a symbol of community. Initially, this community, treated in a broad sense, was ideologised and imbued with patriotic elements. Only with time did the perspective in literature begin to change, taking on a more intimate character concerning domestic relationships, family happiness, or simply the relationship between two people who are close to each other. A popular English saying goes, "my house is my castle". It seems that this way of thinking was also familiar to Hungarian artists, who, from the mid-1930s, made the castle a symbol of the home.

In his 1930 poem *Az állomáson* [At the station], Pál Gulyás, a folk writer, reflects on life in constant motion – on the road, in a hurry. He longs for the stability that owning a home can give him. He writes, "Oh, good Kelemen Mason, build me a little house! Mix my dying blood so that my child can live happily! Build it strong and solid so that it can withstand stormy weather!" (Gulyás, 1930). Pál Gulyás addresses Kelemen as a well-known and respected bricklayer. He does not refer to the woman as a foundation sacrifice; he wants to replace her sacrifice with his own blood so that it will ensure the building's durability when mixed with lime.

The search for a safe haven can also be found in a poem from 1935 by László Mécs, a poet popular in the interwar period, titled *Kacsalábon forgó mentsvár* [The castle of salvation spinning on a duck's foot] (Mécs, 1935). In it, the poet says of himself that he is "building the kingdom of God like Kelemen Mason", sacrificing his own blood with "sacrificial love" to strengthen the mortar necessary for this construction. This is a reflection on the margins of a very personal confession of love for his mother. For her children, now grown-up daughters and sons, she is a castle – a stronghold, built (as in fairy tales) on a hen's leg (and in Hungarian imagination on a duck's leg), and a home providing a safe haven.

Another type of love poem is János Kulcsár's 1960 poem *Kőmives Kelemen*. The castle of Déva, built by the poet, is a metaphor for the construction of the

lovers' union. The lyrical subject needs the "full love" of another being to help him achieve this challenge. The price he pays is to wall up in the foundations not a woman but "strong will", hoping that together and "without shameful gratitude" they will manage to build strong walls and enclose all their longings and dreams within them (Kulcsár, 1960).

This construction of happiness between two people sometimes turns into an erotic poem, as in Béla Horgas's poem *Beszélgetések* [Conversations]. In this work, Kelemen Mason's wife builds a happy family and a home together with him. She is the main force binding the bricks together: "when we caress each other, the walls grow […] Kelemen Mason's wife squeezes the bricks with her small hands when we caress each other, when we build walls" (Horgas, 1966). In Péter Fábri's debut poem from 1972, *Köd* [Fog], there is a woman who dreams of giving herself to the contemporary Kelemen Mason so that he can wall her up "in his soft walls of fog". However, this desire is accompanied by the fear that the omnipresent fog will prevent the one she loves from fulfilling her desire (Fábri, 1972).

Zoltán Gábor sees the metaphor of home, family and community in his Déva castle, which he describes in the poem *Kockazat nélkül* [Without risk] (1968), concluding that he would not have built it without his beloved. During the summer, when the hot atmosphere also affects tensions between people, he says, "by morning, the castle had fallen apart" – and if Kelemen Mason had existed, he too would have begged her for help to return life to normal (Gábor, 1968).

Bratislava-born Károly Fellinger expresses the belief that everything is in the hands of women. In his poem *Kőmives Kelemen* (1985), he writes: "My ruined castle rests on your lap. We are beyond saving" (Fellinger, 1985). For István Polgár, in his poem *Örökség* [Legacy], Kelemen Mason's wife is like a legendary white lady guarding the house; she is a ghost who "comes out of the wall" to walk around all the corners, stroke the door and finally return to the wall (Polgár, 1987). In turn, Ducco Rapi, in his poem *Befalazott háziasszony* [The walled-up housewife] (2014), shows the life of a young girl "walled up in everyday life" (Rapi, 2014). She is the contemporary incarnation of Kelemen Mason's wife, condemned to a life of daily routine.

Figure of "Poetry"

A distinct place among texts inspired by ballads about Kelemen Mason's wife is occupied by poems in which the walled-up woman becomes a symbol of a person so devoted to work that they "wall themselves up" in their problems. Building often symbolises the creative process, in which poets struggle with the materiality of words, constructing works that, after a moment of reflection or a night's sleep, turn out to be misguided. The construction falls apart and the effort of rewriting the poem must be undertaken anew. Poets are so immersed in this creative struggle that they feel they are "walling themselves up" in their

works. As the poet Ágnes Nemes Nagy says: "Whoever writes poems should be both Kelemen Mason's wife and Kelemen Mason himself" (Horkay Horcher, 1996, p. 74). In the second half of the 20th century, this idea was repeated by Zelk Zoltán in his 1965 poem *A reggel négyszögében* [In the four corners of the morning], describing his process of "building" a poem: "in the evening you kill the poem, a reckless, angry outburst, and you destroy what was built in the morning". In creating, the poet walls himself up (Zelk, 1965).

In Menyhért Tomás's poem *Kőmives Kelemen*, the protagonist is the poet himself, who appears as the "youngest bricklayer". It is he who decides to add his own blood to the mortar to ensure the durability of the walls he builds (Tamás, 1973, p. 168). In turn, Kőmives Kelemen in Gábor Fülöp's poem of the same title [Kelemen Mason] (1985) builds a castle out of words, creating a poem in which words are only an "occasional binder". It turns out that without the woman "walled up in the poem", the work loses its meaning (Fülöp, 1985). Here, the poet seems to return to the words of Gyula Illyés, who in his poem *Mozgó világ* [The world in motion], written on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, recalls images from his life. In this fifteen-part work, he devotes one part to Kelemen Mason's wife, whom he longs to make his muse (Illyés, 1963).

The Walled-Up Woman in Literature

As cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall writes, artists – an artist "trained to be aware of the visual field – makes explicit the patterns governing his behaviour. For this reason, the artist is not only a commentator on the broader values of the culture, but also on the microcultural events that go to make up the broader values" (Hall, 1990, p. 79). Being aware that every artist is, to some extent, culturally dependent on the world in which they operate and to which they address themselves, I will now attempt to navigate the complexities of the functioning of the topos of the walled-up woman in Hungarian culture, taking writers, visual artists and musicians as my guides.

The ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason is* a hypotext (Genette, 1997, p. 5) for numerous literary works created in Hungary since the end of the 19th century. Its embeddedness in Hungarian culture is fostered by education policy, which very early on included the ballad of the walled-up woman in the school reading canon. However, this measure would have been far from sufficient to embed in the national topography the ballad itself and the castle at Déva, which is featured in it. This embedding is supported by a specific model of Hungarian literature, which, evolving through various stages from realism to postmodernism, refers to folk tradition, sometimes in its main current and sometimes in its subcurrent. As the well-known literary historian Béla Pomogáts writes, "folk poetry, on the one hand, referred to tradition, but on the other, it modernised it" (Pomogáts, 1982, p. 324). This approach was presented in the pages of the

magazine *Nyugat*, which set the direction for the development of Hungarian literature for over thirty years in the 20th century. This is complemented by the work of writers and artists described as representatives of the so-called *népi írók* [folk writers] folk movement, which had a powerful influence on Hungarian culture in the 1920s and 1930s but also played an essential role in shaping culture in the period after the Second World War, when it artistically supported the formation of the socialist system in Hungary.

The Hungarians' strong roots in tradition and folk culture became a natural ally in the further transformations of the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife. Calls for artists to draw on their folk roots accompanied Hungarian discussions about the direction of cultural development throughout the second half of the 20th century. During such a discussion in 1969, the poet and essayist Sándor Csoóri published an essay titled *Egykor elindult tizenkét kőmíves* [Once upon a time, twelve masons set out], whose title refers to the ballad that is of interest here, as it is a quotation from its first line (Csoóri, 1969). This essay is an appeal, a call for Hungarian artists to seek inspiration for their work in old ballads. Csoóri emphasises the depth of Hungarian folk poetry, its courage and openness. As András Görömbei writes, the poet showed that

> folk poetry can be a refreshing source of inspiration for contemporary artistic poetry. His aesthetic observations on our folk ballads were accompanied by moral judgements: the same attitude that marginalised our ballads, which always seeks convenient evasions instead of facing the facts. He described the marginalisation of ballads as a tragic flaw in our historical identity. (Görömbei, 2000, p. 74)

Contrary to what Csoóri suggests, the fact that writers did not forget ballads (including The Wife of Kelem Mason) is evidenced by an article published a few months later by László Kántor. He notes that the legacy of Székely folk poetry has been revived in the poetry of the youngest generation of Hungarian poets and emphasises that "they are attracted not only to folk songs, but also to more complex genres, such as legends […], with ballads having the greatest appeal" (Kántor, 1969, p. 786). At the same time, based on his own observations, he draws attention to another interesting fact, namely that in "modern poetry, contemporary Hungarian lyric poetry in Romania […] which has discovered and found contemporary meaning in ancient ballads […] has a surprising and even extraordinary significance" (Kántor, 1969, p. 786). In this context, the author identifies one of the most interesting phenomena as Sándor Kányádi's *Poema három hangra* [Poem for three voices], in which "there is not a word about Kelemen Mason or the construction of the Upper Castle in Déva, and yet twelve bricklayers are working there *within the walls of the poem*" (Kántor, 1969, p. 787). Another scholar, András Kun, notes that in the early 1970s there was a "revival, *modernisation* of various stylistic elements of folk poetry (ballads, folk songs): key motifs, standard images, popular forms" (Kun, 1972, p. 61).

The process of restoring the role of ballads continued in the 1980s. In 1980, István Nánay, writing about the place of ballads in Hungarian drama, recalled

that "Kelemen Mason is one of the folk ballads most deeply rooted in our consciousness. […] The ballad motif became one of the recurring motifs of Hungarian dramatic literature in the early 1970s" (Nánay, 1982a). He draws attention to the special role played by the preserved fragments of Imre Sarkadi's drama about Kelemen Mason. Based on these fragments, several versions of the play were created in the early 1970s (with the dramaturgical collaboration of Olga Siklósi and later Levente Osztovits), as well as a musical by Levente Szörényi and János Bródy, which is still performed today. Riding this wave, László Gyurkó wrote his play titled *Kőmíves Kelemenné balladája* [The ballad of Kelemen Mason's wife] in 1974, which was successfully performed by the legendary 25. Szinház theatre company, staging plays in a style similar to Jerzy Grotowski's Poor Theatre. In addition to Gyurkó's play, several other dramas referring to the story of Kelemen Mason and his wife were written during that period, including those by Zoltán Dér and László Tóth. Critic Sándor Csikó writes about the existence of a "generation of Kelemen Mason concepts" in Hungarian literature in the 1970s (Csikó, 1980).

Among those mentioned, Imre Sarkadi occupied a special place. As István Nánay emphasises, it was he who "was the first to present the story of Kelemen Mason as an allegory of the construction of a new society" (Nánay, 1982b). However, this statement is not entirely true. As mentioned earlier, Déva Castle had already become a metaphor for a new society in the interwar period. For this reason, it would be more accurate to say that in a country that was incorporated into the socialist bloc after the Second World War, he referred to a metaphor that already existed in Hungarian culture. However, he himself did not quite know which direction to take conceptually and did not finish his work on Kelemen Mason. His legacy included some ideas which were later developed into a complete drama by others. There is no doubt, however, that what Sarkadi created – especially by enriching the text with music in the form of a rock opera – has ensured the topos has a permanent presence in Hungarian culture.

The image of Kelemen Mason's wife in Hungarian literary works can be approached in many ways. The wealth of variations in which the characters from the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* appear in Hungarian literature makes it necessary to introduce a particular systematising factor. This gives rise to the temptation to refer to the catalogue of figures proposed by Roland Barthes in his work on the discourse of love: Agony, *Sobria ebrietas*, Truth, Connection, Addiction, *E lucevan le stelle* (Barthes, 2001). Even if the resulting systematisation of Hungarian heroines in narratives about the walling-up is not always identical to the conceptualisation of the eminent Frenchman, it seems justified insofar as numerous texts and statements by Hungarian authors emphasise the voluntary nature of Kelemen Mason's wife's sacrifice, resulting from her deep love for her husband. Moreover, this perspective is justified by the fact that although in the very lyrics of the folk ballad the description of the relationship between the spouses has been reduced to such conventional polite phrases as "my beloved wife" and "my beloved husband" and to showing that the woman went to the construction site out of fear for her husband caused by a dramatic dream, in

literary texts we are presented with a whole palette of colours describing their relationship. It is noteworthy that they reveal the extraordinary vitality of the modernist image of women as unpredictable and changeable beings. As Carol Duncan writes, she was "an alien, amoral creature of passion and instinct, an antagonist to rather than a builder of human culture – a strange, immoral creature composed of passion and instinct, more of an antagonist than a builder of human culture" (Duncan, 1973, p. 35).

Agony

When analysing how this topos is presented, one should refer to one of the first, if not the very first, artefact in Hungarian culture on this subject, namely Lajos Palágyi's poem *Kőmives Kelemen*, published in 1895 (Palágyi, 1895). This work shaped the approach to the topos of the walled-up woman until the publication of Imre Sarkadi's story about Kelemen the Mason in 1948. Unlike the folk ballad, which does not explain the reasons for the problems with the construction of the Upper Castle in Déva, Palágyi puts the solution to this mystery in the mouth of a clergyman. It is he who informs the builders that Satan is standing in the way of the construction and convinces them that in order to appease him it is necessary to sacrifice the wife of Kelemen Mason (Figure 5).



Figure 5. An illustration to Lajos Palágyi's poem *Kelemen Mason*. Author: DG.
Source: Palágyi (1895) (Arcanum Újságok)

At first, Kelemen rebels. He praises his wife's fidelity and emphasises his attachment to her ("she is more precious than a hundred castles"). Ultimately, however, his pride and "rage" prevail, as he believes that "because of his wife" his seven years of work on building the castle will not be successful. However,

he attempts to cheat fate. He convinces his colleagues that a female sacrifice must be made but that it should be the first woman to appear at the construction site. He then warns his wife and asks her not to come to him. Listening to Kelemen, however, the woman becomes suspicious that there is a rival with whom he intends to betray her. Therefore, contrary to her husband's request, she comes to the builders and is killed. The castle is built, but Kelemen "paid dearly for it" with the loss of his wife. His pursuit of his goal, even at the cost of violating ethical norms and murder, leads him to disaster. The poem ends with an image of Kelemen Mason wandering around the castle, haunted by voices coming from behind the walls and the sight of blood on the walls (Palágyi, 1895); the poet shows him as dying while still alive (Kaftański, 2012), or, as Søren Kierkegaard would say, sick unto death (Kierkegaard, 1988). This scene shows the destructive consequences of uncontrolled ambition. This theme appears very rarely in Hungarian variants of the ballad, which usually end with an image of the completed building. Only occasionally does the figure of the bricklayer's son appear, who, unable to come to terms with the loss of his mother, goes to the castle to make contact with her and ultimately dies there. Palágyi's poem paraphrases the text of the ballad, enriching it with new themes, setting the story in a Christian world and exploring ambiguous emotions in a marriage.

Unlike in folk ballads, here the woman goes to the building site not because she fears for her husband, but because she fears abandonment, to which Barthes, in his catalogue of figures of love discourse, assigned the figure of Agony (Barthes 2001, p. 29). This fear is the cause of Kelemen Mason's wife's unhappiness. "The blood of his faithful wife flowed in the castle", writes the poet (Palágyi. 1895). That is all he says about the sacrifice and the ritual of its offering. In his poem, Palágyi minimises, or perhaps even eliminates, the "sacrificial violence" (Girard, 1986, p. 88) of Kelemen Mason and his accomplices. Instead, he highlights a perception of the world typical of modernism. The characters, especially Kelemen Mason and his wife, see each other primarily through the prism of sex. The main question is that of fidelity ("she will be faithful to him until death", her husband believes; his wife goes to the castle because she is afraid that her husband has another woman; she does not understand her husband's interest in stones, as he puts it).

The issue of Kelemen Mason's work ethic, barely hinted at by Palágyi, would become one of the most important themes in Hungarian drama, especially throughout the 20th century. The fact that it appeared as early as the turn of the 20th century was due, among other things, to the influence of Scandinavian drama on Hungarian literature, particularly Henrik Ibsen and his *The Master Builder* (Juhász, 1928)[18]. In 1891, Ibsen visited Budapest, and Béla Lázár wrote in *Vasárnapi Ujság* that "Hungarian drama should learn from the Norwegian writer but should not make the mistake of imitation" (Lázár, 1891, p. 266).

[18] According to the literature, seventeen Ibsen premieres took place in Hungary between 1887 and 1906 (Bársony, 1956, pp. 509–510).

Sobria Ebrietas

In 1916, the play *Kőmives Kelemen* by Aurél Kárpáti and László Vajda (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916) premiered (Figure 6). Their master builder, like Ibsen's Solness, is focused on construction – on the realisation of his new work. In the case of these Hungarian playwrights, it is the construction of a castle like no one has ever seen before. Since the play is set in the 11th century, one can guess that Kelemen Mason wants to build a modern Gothic-style stronghold, although good people advise him: "build as in the old days and everything will be fine" (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 29). For a long time, he is unable to realise his vision because he is too much in love with his wife and does not want to leave her alone at home. When he finally takes on the job, the "modern walls" keep falling apart. However, the bricklayer is convinced that since God himself inspired him with the construction project, he will also help him to realise it (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 34). However, the mother of one of the bricklayers blames Kelemen's wife for the failure of the construction and predicts that the castle will not be built until Kelemen "feeds it with his blood" (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 37).



Figure 6. Kelemen with his wife and little son in the play Kőmíves Kelemen by Kárpáti-Vajda.
Photo by ifj. Alexy (Alexy Torj). Source: Színházi Élet, *1917* (4), 11.

"The conflict between love and art makes Kelemen Mason a full-blooded man of the twentieth century" (ib, 1917, p. 46). His desire for respect and fame is greater than his desire for love. He renounces his wife, willingly accepting

the accusations levelled at her by others. He adopts their perspective and sees her as a femme fatale who enchanted him so much that he "miscalculated and did not take into account the arches of the building" (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 38); she corrupted him "not with fortune-telling, but with everyday feminine corruption, with loving kisses" (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 39). Spurred by these accusations, Kelemen puts a ban on visits to the construction site, which is aimed primarily at his wife, because, as he himself admits, building the castle is everything to him (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 31). Kelemen, the bricklayer in Kárpáti and Vajda's novel, wants to "do something different, new, more beautiful than what others can do" (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 25). This means that his love for his wife was a "sin against work", against the construction of his longed-for castle (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 48). As can be seen, Kelemen Mason treats violent behaviour as a condition for the fulfilment of his desire. The man rejects the woman who is in love with him, and her love.

Like Ibsen's work, the drama about Kelemen Mason poses the question of ideals, their necessity and realisation. For the man, this ideal is the desire to build a new, more perfect castle in Déva. For the woman, the ideal is to be at her beloved's side, supporting him in his work, but also observing him in action. As in many of Ibsen's plays, Kárpáti and Vajda's play shows the hidden heroism of women, whose sacrifice is pushed into the shadows. Subsequent Hungarian poets and playwrights would continue this way of portraying Kelemen's wife. However, a belief grew that it is not only women who are victims, but also men. After the premiere of the play, one reviewer writes:

> Such is the fate of men, and such is the fate of women. Men are victims, slaves to their work, their calling, while women pour their souls, their monumental strength and humble lives into the work of men. […] Every lasting work is such a castle of creative genius. A tomb of life, love, happiness. (Anka, 1917, p. 2)

Yet another states:

> The master defeated the man, but he also killed him. Kelemen has been wandering around, silently, powerlessly, aimlessly, ever since the woman died. He searches the face of his little son for the features of the murdered woman, for reborn life, but to no avail. Then he too falls from a height into the abyss, like Master Solness[19], in whom Ibsen embodied with such unique force the sacred mystery of construction, its universal meaning, the builders' struggle for greatness, their triumph in rejuvenation, and their downfall. (Sebestyén, 1917, p. 12)

Among the reviews, criticism can also be found of the heroine of the drama for failing to understand her husband's work:

[19] Ibsen's play *The Master Builder* was translated into Hungarian and published in 1910 as *Solness Építőmester* [The Builder Solness]. It premiered at the theatre in Szeged in March 1917 (see: Bramin, 1917). On 30 May 1917, the Viennese theatre A Neue Wiener Bühne, concluding its guest performances in Budapest, presented *The Master Builder* ("Szinház és zene", 1917).

> and as such she is not the artist's wife, but a woman who, at best, can only be described using terms found in a clinical dictionary, and who is equally a plague on all husbands, regardless of whether they are artists or not. (Szalgó, 1917)

The spouses are bound by a great love. "It is a great love… I am almost afraid of it" (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 16) confesses the wife, while Kelemen admits that "he cannot think without hearing the rustle of her dress nearby" (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 20). In a conversation with her husband, the woman declares that "there is no God so merciless that he would force me to part with you" and "it is my duty to accompany you" (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 47). When he convinces her that they should stop seeing each other for a few weeks, until the castle is built, she states that then he "will be alive and she will be buried" (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 47) and therefore cannot obey him (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916, p. 51). Unaware of the consequences, the woman signs her own death sentence.

As can be seen, the construction of the castle in Kárpáti and Vajda's work leads to a marital crisis that ends in tragedy. In an expanded form, a similar theme of the relationship between Kelemen Mason and his wife resurfaces in 1935 in the novel *Válás a Budán* [Divorce in Buda] by one of Hungary's most prominent writers, Sándor Márai (1935/2019). It should be noted that a year earlier, Márai published a short novella, *Kőmives Kelemen* (Márai, 1934), which appears to be a preview of the later novel, serving as a kind of outline. The novella addresses the changing relationship between a man and his wife, influenced by information about the divorce of a couple who are friends of the married couple, Emma and Páli. After six years of marriage, Emma realises that her relationship with Páli is not a real marriage. Faced with this situation, the protagonist of the novella recalls a quote from the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife: "what is built during the day collapses at night" (Márai, 1934, p. 4). The breakdown of his friends' marriage triggers a series of reflections in the protagonist, leading him to conclude that his life is also not what it should be. When he met his wife, she was a reminder of another woman whose image had stuck in his memory. His reflections make him realise that the "castle" they built, like Kelemen Mason, and all they thought about their family happiness, although it seemed indestructible, completely collapsed in one night. Márai's story ends with the words: "In the morning, they woke up and sat silently among the walls, naked, alone and cold" (Márai, 1934, p. 4).

It is interesting that Hungarian writer and poet László Kemenes Géfin, who devoted a very insightful article (Kemenes Géfin, 1998) to the novel *Divorce in Buda* and its connections with the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, overlooks the novella mentioned above, even though they share many themes. In both works, we encounter a similar situation that forms the core of the stories. The main character (named Kristóf Kőmives [Christoph Mason], which suggests that he is the modern reincarnation of Kelemen Mason) marries a woman who is a memory (as in the novella) of another woman, or simply an escape from

another woman (as in the novel) who made a strong impression on him with her sexuality. While the novella does not reveal who the new Kelemen Mason is, in *Divorce in Buda* he is a judge who lives "a useful, hard-working, decent Christian life" (Márai, 1935/2019, p. 82), and his challenge is naturally not the construction of the castle in Déva, but the law as the foundation of a healthy state. Busy building this foundation, he simultaneously deals with matters that undermine it, namely divorce cases. This shift in the area of construction is symbolic and leads to Márai's reinterpretation of the image of Déva Castle, already rooted in Hungarian culture. Until now, it has served as a symbol of the construction of a specific national and cultural community. The sacrifice of a woman is the foundation of this community. At this point, it is worth recalling Tatjana Aleksić's (Aleksić, 2013) seminal study of the topos of the immured woman in Balkan cultures, in which she draws a crucial distinction between the notions of society and community. This distinction is particularly pertinent to Márai's reinterpretation, as, in the writer's view, the woman's sacrifice takes on the character of a foundational sacrifice made on the altar of society and the state, whose increasingly developed administrative and legal apparatus seeks to guarantee the stability of Hungarian society. The sacrifice thus becomes not merely an individual act of self-sacrifice, but a constitutive gesture through which the foundations and continuity of the broader social and political order are secured.

In his novel, as in the novella, Márai presents two married couples who appear to be in harmonious relationships, but at some point in both cases the women realise that these relationships are built on falsehood; they are burnt out and boring. As Peter Toohey writes, such an emotion is shameful (Toohey, 2012) and is therefore suppressed by the characters in both works. It only comes to life under the influence of impulses from the outside world.

A significant difference between the novella and the novel appears in the ending of the works. In the novella, the author leaves the reader with an image of a castle that has fallen apart during the night and which the new Kelemen will have to rebuild. In the novel, thanks to the sacrifice of the woman in love with Mason, balance is regained in the world in which the man lives. "The houses stand firmly and securely in their places" (Márai, 1935/2019, p. 174). The woman in love with Kristóf Mason commits suicide to escape her desire to possess her beloved, knowing – as the Hungarian writer and poet László Kemenes Géfin argues in his interpretation – that this will help him to live, just like his ballad alter ego, "in the belief that he is doing essential construction work in history and society" and that there is no more important goal in life than building a castle and serving society (Kemenes Géfin, 1998).

Unlike in Kárpáti and Vajda's work, where the woman is a victim of Kelemen Mason and his co-workers' decision, here we are dealing with a woman who is actively making a sacrifice.

Márai's view of the topos of the walled-up woman has another fascinating feature. In his works, the writer goes against the grain of a tradition that is al-

ready well established in culture. His reincarnations of Kelemen Mason show Kelemen as a weak man who avoids taking a decisive stance; he is more of an observer of the world than its constructor. The active characters who determine the course of events are women who make their own decisions to sacrifice themselves.

Opposition to the figure of *Sobria ebrietas* can be found in the work of Katalin Mezey, a representative of the generation that debuted at the turn of the 1970s, in her poem *Fordított Kőmíves Kelemen* [Reversed Kelemen Mason] (Mezey, 2018). The lyrical subject here is the hero's wife, who destroys what has been built because she perceives the castle created out of love as a threat. The woman rebels against her beloved, who wants to sacrifice her to build his castle Déva: "Woe is me, reversed Kelemen the Mason, / Love that builds the walls of my palace, / In vain I raise my iron-bladed axe, / The castle of Déva rises against me" (Mezey, 2018).

The convention of a conversation between a walled-up woman and her husband – rare in Hungarian poetry referring to this topos – was adopted in a 1984 poem *Kőmives Kelemen* by Gusztáv Bartha, who lived in Transcarpathian Ukraine. His heroine, in love with her husband, wonders, "Is love a curse?" (Bartha, 2005, p. 9). She asks this existential question while "living" among stones soaked with her blood. The sacrifice she made prompts her to protest, because out of love she gave her life for the walls of the high tower of the castle in Déva.

Truth

Ernő Ábrahám's mystery play *Isten vára* [The castle of god] (Ábrahám, 1922), staged in 1923, was born in considerable pain. The first version of the play was written in 1913, and the author showed it to his friend Aurél Kárpáti (see Ábrahám, 1963). Kárpáti criticised the text, emphasising the inappropriate portrayal of Kelemen Mason's wife, and declared that he would present his own image of the woman in his version of the drama (which resulted in the play *Kelemen Mason*, written in collaboration with László Vajda). Ábrahám revised the text twice more before it was presented to the public. Ultimately, it took the form of a mystery play, which included numerous elements borrowed from Christian culture. It features not only Satan, as in Palágyi's work, but also the Virgin Mary with a choir of angels and numerous references to images known from the Bible, including a scene reminiscent of the Last Supper and St. Peter's denial of Christ. In this mystery play, Satan informs Kelemen Mason that where Kelemen dreams of building God's Castle, he sees a place for a castle of hell, which he himself will build. The demon argues that the Castle of God can only be built by people without sin (here he emphasises that from the moment of marriage, the spouses constitute a single entity, so if one of them commits a sin, that sin burdens both).

To prove this, Satan puts Kelemen Mason and his wife (Erzsébet) to a test. While the man emerges victorious from this trial, showing that he values the

construction of the castle more than his parental love for his sick son, the woman decides to lose her honour and gives herself to Satan (who has taken the form of a doctor) in order to obtain a miracle cure for her child. As in Palágyi's work, the physicality of the characters is therefore of paramount importance. The sins with which the devil tempts both characters are related to their sexuality, and in accordance with modernist discourse, in the case of the woman, they result from her nature and thus her "inability to control her sexuality and subdue her urges" (Dębska, 2015, p. 18).

The woman's sin is a sentence on the building, so she decides to sacrifice herself to atone for her guilt and enable her husband to complete this great work. She allows herself to be walled up. Before this happens, however, a choir of angels appears and takes her on the path to heaven. Thus, God accepts her sacrifice.

In Ábrahám's mystery play, the love between the spouses is expressed by two figures. The man is locked in *Sobria ebrietas*. The woman is convinced that she is the only one who knows her chosen one, that she is the only one who can help him in times of difficulty, when he is consumed by the mission of achieving his goal. This is, in a way, the essence of Barthes's figure of Truth. She sees her husband's obsession with the idea of building: "I have never seen such fire in his eyes before. A luminous halo appears around his head, like someone whom the Lord and his angels are calling to hard, holy work" (Ábrahám, 1922, p. 9/16). She knows his stubbornness and focus on his goal – "even tears won't help, because when he plans something, he will go and do it. He will even abandon a child" (Ábrahám, 1922, p. 9/17). Her conviction that she knows her husband's psyche leads her to become (as Foucault would say) a docile body (Foucault, 2009).

The heroine of Imre Sarkadi's work also shows appreciation for Kelemen's great work. The eminent Hungarian writer struggled for years with the dramatisation of the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*. However, he never completed the work. After his death, fragments were published, which, combined with various variants, took the form of the stage drama Kőmives Kelemen. Its heroine, Anna, says of her husband that he was born for great things and that a great flame burns in his soul: "You know that only I understand you… And I can help you in what you do" (Sarkadi, 1973, p. 17). These words are spoken when her husband already knows how Anna can help him. Some time earlier, he had faced a rebellion by his fellow workers, who wanted to abandon the construction site in the face of the constant collapse of the walls. Kelemen Mason is obsessed with completing his great work and going down in history thanks to it. The idea of rebuilding the bricklaying community through sacrifice is suggested by another bricklayer, Boldizsár, whom we can consider Kelemen Mason's alter ego. He convinces the others that they should jointly sacrifice one of their wives, the first one to come to the construction site, because the spirit that keeps destroying their work is a spirit associated with children abandoned by a woman years ago in the forest and eaten by wolves. Kelemen, who is initially sceptical about

this idea, realises that it is the only thing that can give the bricklayers faith in the completion of their task. Boldizsár confirms this: "It's not your life at stake, at most your wife's" (Sarkadi, 1973, p. 12). The woman submits to being walled up, refusing for a long time to believe in the evil intentions of her husband and the bricklayers. She cannot believe what is obvious to Kelemen Mason, that she is "just a tool" in their work (Sarkadi, 1973, p. 17).

When the castle is almost complete, Kelemen realises how high a price he has paid for it. And yet, in the face of his personal defeat, he seems convinced that the work is worth the sacrifice. Nevertheless, at the end of the drama, the question remains whether this is really the case. However, such questions are present in the stage productions of the drama. Béla Markus writes about this in a review of a performance at the theatre in Veszprém:

> The staging of a fragment of the drama [...] in the finale does not give the leading role to Kelemen or even his companions. Twelve bricklayers stand at the front of the stage and pretend to ask each other a question, while asking us, the audience: "Are you happy?" Are you happy, are you satisfied that you have built what you have built? The hardest part is yet to come! (Márkus, 1974, p. 90)

Sarkadi's drama contributes to the growing interest in the topos of the walled-up woman in Hungarian culture[20]. It has inspired numerous dramas, poems and works of art. However, it is worth remembering that Sarkadi had already dealt with the topos of the walled-up woman shortly after the Second World War, when he wrote the novella *Kőmives Kelemen*[21]. This work fairly faithfully reflected the story of Kelemen Mason's wife, known from Hungarian ballads. However, it also contains some new elements. For example, the motif – taken from the ballads *Budai Ilona* and *Gyönyörű Bán Kata* (Márkus, 1992) – of a mother abandoning her children, who are then eaten by wolves, is presented in the novella as the cause of the construction failures of Kelemen Mason's crew. The construction is being built in a cursed place (Sarkadi, 1948, p. 355). The Hungarian scholar also draws attention to another motif in the novella – the fear of the bricklayers (an important aspect of psychological motivation in the drama *Kelemen Mason*): "We woke up at night to the sound of walls collapsing – and at dinner the walls collapsed again. And we looked, we looked at our surroundings, at the stones and the forest, and we thought about ghosts, about the woman left behind, and about what would happen next" (Sarkadi, 1948, p. 355). This fear prompts the bricklayers to accept Boldizsár's proposal to wall up the first woman who appears on the construction site. The fear of failure paralyses Kelemen to such an extent that he is unable to protest and defend his wife. Fear gives rise to a wish for the sacrifice to be made as quickly as possible, "to get it over with" (Sarkadi, 1948, p. 357). His beloved Anna is initially unaware of the situation, but she feels anxious because of her

[20] The significance of Sarkadi's dramatic fragments for Hungarian theatre in the 1970s is noted, among others, by Tamás Mészáros (Mészáros, 1975).

[21] According to Olga Siklós, written in 1947 (Siklós, 1973, p. 27).

husband's behaviour, the lack of a greeting, and his strange words. Only as she is being walled up does fear overcome her and she realises the finality of her fate. As the author writes, she looked at everyone as if they were murderers. In turn, when the bricklayers finished the castle, they felt that their bodies and bones had also been walled up in it.

In Sarkadi's work, we encounter Kelemen Mason from Márai's vision. As Béla Márkus writes, "he is a mere fool, a tool in Boldizsár's hands" (Márkus, 1974, p. 89), a bricklayer who in the novella is the personification of the devil, while the others are "murderers, nothing more" (Sarkadi, 1948, p. 357).

Union

In the poem *Kőmives Kelemen titkos vágya* [The secret dream of Kelemen Mason], Eszter Lárai places herself in the position of a woman in love, completely subjugated to her beloved. She wants to build the "imaginary castle of Déva" with him (Lárai, 2005), which is the relationship between two people in love. She is ready to make a sacrifice. Using figures of romantic discourse, we could say that we are dealing here with the figure of Union, the dream of complete unity with the beloved (Barthes, 2001, p. 226). The lyrical subject confesses: "I would like you to wall up a single moment; I could burn there forever, like a light bulb left on; I am Kelemen Mason's wife in the sweetest moment of your life" (Lárai, 2005).

Domnei

For poet and sociologist Ferenc Balipap, the sacrifice of Kelemen Mason's wife is a surrender to her husband's obsession with proving that he has not lived in vain. In the 1977 poem *Nem fúj a szél a szádba* [The wind does not blow in your mouth], the woman allows this man to wall her up, lock her within the walls, condemn her to loneliness, and live only for her chosen one (Balipap, 1977). This is the figure of Domnei, in which "common opinion sees the very condition of the amorous subject, subjugated to the loved object" (Barthes, 2001, p. 82). This is what a woman's submission to her partner's strong ego looks like; she submits because society expects her so. She succumbs to symbolic violence because that is what *habitus* dictates.

E Lucevan le Stelle

The 1976 drama *A vándor és a lovag vagy a nagy tét* [The wanderer and the knight, or high stakes] (L. Tóth, 1976), by László Tóth, a Hungarian poet and playwright living in what was then Czechoslovakia, features the characters of

Kelemen Mason and the most famous errant knight, Don Quixote. This chamber play attempts to find answers to existential questions, including whether it is acceptable to sacrifice one's own life or the lives of loved ones in the name of art or one's own ideals. Don Quixote is defeated by a windmill – the real world from which he has been fleeing for many years – and Kelemen Mason, despite having built a sturdy castle, ultimately abandons his home and possessions because he cannot find peace with his wife's voice echoing within the castle walls. As one reviewer of the play points out, Kelemen "almost envies his wife. / She can live in song – / more freely than I", he says. Both (i.e., Don Quixote and Kelemen Mason) – albeit in different ways – made themselves and their partners victims of their own ambitions, their higher, more lofty goals" (G. Komoróczy, 2004, p. 111). Tóth argues that none of the characters' sacrifices brings them happiness. The woman dies, but her husband, burdened by the crime he has committed, cannot live in peace. The crime has become Kelemen Mason's legacy. The heart-wrenching memory, as in Barthes's figure of "E lucevan le stelle", is inextricably linked to the beloved woman with whom he lived. But this is the imperfect tense. For he is like the murderer of his wife and children, Euripides's Hercules, about whom the Greek author writes: "I know of no mortal, anywhere, who is poorer than him" (Kubiak, 1997, p. 449).

A similar interpretation of the situation of the walled-up woman appears earlier, for example in Ferenc Németh's poem *Marad a hiány* [The emptiness remains] from March 1956. The poet confesses:

> From a singing young man, I have become a sad bricklayer, although I would much rather be Kelemen's silent wife than mix the ashes of my beloved's fragile body, whose eyes were blindfolded, with cement and thus build the High Castle in Déva, and thus live to see another happy day, my heart filled with the knowledge that I have become the murderer of Goodness. (Németh, 1956)

"I Want to Understand"

In 1928, György Sárközi published a poem titled *A torony* [The tower], which was a protest by the walled-up woman against the fate her husband had prepared for her. She wanted to live life to the fullest, but "the proud, beautiful murderers walled her up between strong walls, placed […] her bones among the cool stones, […] mixed her blood with lime and sand" (Sárközi, 1928) to strengthen the mortar. She does not understand why she had to sacrifice her life for the tower to be built and concludes that the structure built on her misfortune will not last because her dead blood will scream in it, her bones will shake the building, and it will eventually collapse. Her condition corresponds to the figure of I Want to Understand: "I want to understand / what is happening to me" (Sárközi, 1928). This theme is almost absent in Hungarian ballads about Kelemen Mason's wife, in which the woman submits to being walled up without resistance.

The complexity of the dialogue of the figure "I Want to Understand" can be seen in the analysis of two poems written in 1956: Gábor Devecseri's *Három földi múzsa* [Three earthly muses] (Devecseri, 1956) and Ferenc Szemlér's *Déva* (Szemlér, 1956). Born at the beginning of the 20th century, the poets were eleven years apart in age. After 1945, both sided with the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Both depict Kelemen Mason's wife walled up in Déva Castle, but their heroines are diametrically different. In Devecseri's work, she is placed alongside muses selected according to Plutarch's criteria, not divine but earthly. The Hungarian woman stands next to Antigone and Joan of Arc. She is walled up and crying; her tears do not strengthen the castle but destroy it, because Devecseri's building, the castle in Déva, is not a symbol and bastion of security but a symbol of power, representing the imposed foreign system that appeared in Hungary after 1945. Where Kelemen Mason's wife was walled up, Hungarian society was locked up. However, the woman is still alive and rebelling; she will turn the walls to dust. "Wife of Kelemen Mason, come out of the walls of your castle", calls the poet in October 1956 (Devecseri, 1956).

In Ferenc Szemlér's poem, the castle is also a metaphor for Hungary, but one that rose up against communist rule ("The High Castle of Déva is burning with fire"), fighting against Soviet intervention ("it stands only in ruins […] And although not against the Turks, it still faces the forces that are destroying the wall"; Szemlér, 1956). The role of the woman and her ashes, from which her husband created a miraculous mortar by mixing them with lime, also changes. As in the folk ballad, she does not rebel against fate in order to ensure the durability of the structure. And for enemies, the castle is "an example and a terrible warning" that the "beloved" will be sacrificed in times of trial by the builder so that something bright and magnificent can be created (Szemlér, 1956).

The figure of the love discourse "I Want to Understand" can be found in the text of Géza Apáthy, who is associated with Brássó (Braşov, Romania). In the poem *Halhatatlan erekben* [With extraordinary strength] (Apáthy, 1976), the lyrical subject is a walled-up woman. In a somewhat pompous tone, she expresses words of love, forgiveness, and understanding for her husband's deed, and even gratitude for making her immortal to her husband. Finally, she blesses him and his home, embodying the ideal woman in a patriarchal system.

Son

In Hungarian literary texts inspired by the topos of the walled-up woman, there are almost no images of maternal love shown to a child/son by Kelemen Mason's wife. The issue of the child usually arises when the woman realises that she will soon be sacrificed (the play by Kárpáti and Vajda) or that she will sacrifice herself (e.g., in Ábrahám's *The Castle of God*; Ábrahám, 1922). But even then, the mother does not always say goodbye to her child, because at the crucial moment the child is asleep and the caring mother does not want to wake him.

An analysis of literary works devoted to the relationship between a mother and her child suggests that Hungarian authors find it more interesting to look at this relationship from the perspective of the child rather than that of the woman and her maternal feelings. This seems to be the case in Gyula Bisztrai's 1924 poem *Új Dévavár allat* [Under the new castle of Déva] (Bisztrai, 1924). The poet first looks at the ballad as one of his childhood readings, vivid in his memory like other children's fairy tales, whose characters accompany people throughout their lives. What interests the poet in the story of Kelemen Mason is not the man himself or his young wife, locked away among the stones, but their child, who dies while searching for his mother beneath the castle walls. The writer identifies with the boy, who believes to the end that his words will reach "the bleeding heart [...] of his murdered mother" (Bisztrai, 1924).

In 1970, a radio play about Kelemen Mason's son, *Kőmives Kelemen fia*, was created. Its author is Zoltán Dér, a Hungarian writer living in Vojvodina (Dér, 1973). Influenced by Serbian variants of the topos of a walled-up woman, the author engages his bricklayers in the construction of a bridge (no such structure appears in any Hungarian variant of the topos). Its construction is commissioned by the *ban*, who wants the bridge to help during the impending Tatar invasion. The author of the play emphasises the poor work ethic of the builders. When the construction encounters problems and the bridge spans collapse, they suggest that the building should be completed quickly and they should flee before it collapses again. The failure is blamed on Kelemen, who delayed the start of work for a long time because he could not part with his wife. They see her as a witch who has possessed him. Ultimately, she is sacrificed to ensure the durability of the structure. The bridge is completed, and the builders are convinced that it is thanks to this sacrifice: "Blood has great power, especially the blood of a woman. Even the devil weakens from it" (Dér, 1973, p. 1091). However, it turns out that the success is temporary, as an ice floe floating down the river breaks the bridge. Ultimately, Kelemen's son rebuilds it, having watched his father's work and noticed where he had made a mistake. The son thus proves that his mother's sacrifice was unnecessary. Dér shows thereby that the old masonry custom of human sacrifice is nothing more than superstition.

Work Ethic

From its inception, Christianity framed the work ethic as a moral and religious value, emphasising its role in human improvement and community building. Work was seen not only as a duty to God, but also as the foundation of social order and obligations to the state. With the development of European culture, this ethos evolved, finding its reflection both in Protestant thought, which emphasised diligence and thrift, and in socialist ideology, which gave it a new dimension based on the cult of peasant and worker labour (cf. Kuran, 2019).

In this context, work ceased to be merely an individual duty and began to function as an element of collective identity and a driving force for social progress.

Such a well-established work ethic means that it quickly becomes an important element in artistic reincarnations of the topos of the walled-up woman. At the turn of the 20th century, this motif evolved: the problem of sacrifice is gradually removed from the narrative about Kelemen Mason and is replaced by an emphasis on the value of work as the highest sacrifice and the foundation of civilisational order.

I mentioned the appearance of this theme in Palágyi's poem at the end of the 19th century. It is also present in the first poetry collection by Béla Balázs, an outstanding Hungarian poet and publicist of the modernist era, published in 1911, in the poem *Kőmives Kelemen. (Variació a népballadára)* [Kelemen Mason. (Variation on a folk ballad)] (Balázs, 1911). Ernő B. Nagy, writing about the mystical-folk symbolism of Balázs's early work, mentions this variation, stating that

> it faithfully reflects the original ballad, but changing one place has given new meaning to the well-known story. According to the poem, Kelemen Mason's wife goes to the castle at her husband's invitation, so the master, who became the hero of Balázs's poem, consciously sacrifices his wife to create his great work. The essence of the idea is quite common both in Balázs's work and in general at the turn of the century: a man must choose between his vocation and love. (E. B. Nagy, 1964)

This verse seems to set the tone for the interpretation of the ballad, which remains relevant to this day, in which a woman walled up by her husband becomes part of his "divine plan", which is subordinate to the realisation of Kelemen Mason's architectural design. The necessity of completing the work becomes more important than the price at which the castle is built. Violence against women is suppressed, even though the poet directly suggests that the wife was deliberately brought to the place of sacrifice by her husband. There is no longer any mention of blind fate, which supposedly determines the choice of victim in the Hungarian variants of the folk ballad. Kelemen Mason's behaviour indicates his imprisonment in the patriarchal system. Even in Balázs's time, not everyone accepted such an approach. For example, another reviewer of Balázs writes that what he does with the ballad about Kelemen Mason is "to put it mildly: distasteful" (Várady, 1910).

László Tóth returns to the issues raised in the ballad about the walled-up woman in his 1982 drama *Az Áldozat* [The sacrifice], following his play *The Wanderer and the Horseman*[22]. This time, his work is strongly influenced by the

[22] "I reconstruct the drama based on a review of the theatre performance. I am in a similar situation to Gustav Tamás Filep, a researcher of Hungarian culture in Czechia and Slovakia and author of the monograph on László Tóth.Tamás Filep writes in *The Victim* that the play was not published because" the author of the manuscript, as an unfinished work, did not let it out of his hands." (Filep, 2010, p. 36) It is worth noting, however, that this "unfinished" work won a competition organised by the Hungarian Institute of Folk Culture in 1980 and, two years later, was performed in Košice (Filep, 2010, p. 36).

issue of the work ethic. The author does not specify the place and time of the action: it takes place wherever and whenever. In this place hanging in space-time, we meet Kelemen Mason's severely decimated team of builders. There are five of them left, as the rest have either left or died under the constantly crumbling walls. And yet the construction continues, and Kelemen, with fanatical faith and perseverance, tries to convince the others to continue working.

Although some of the builders believe that construction should be halted and they should return home, others remind them that there is payment to be earned. Everyone agrees that without offering a sacrifice, the building will not be completed. They draw lots to decide which one of them will have to sacrifice his wife for the construction. Kelemen loses, but he does so by cheating, because the castle means everything to him and he is willing to sacrifice his wife for it. When he goes to bring her, he begins to have doubts about whether he has the right to do so. However, the woman, informed by her husband about how she was selected, agrees to sacrifice herself. For Kelemen, the most important thing is what his work ethic dictates: what a man has committed to do, he must do, no matter the cost. After the woman is walled up, however, it turns out that her sacrifice was in vain. The building collapses again, but then the wife of the second bricklayer appears and stands by the wall herself and begins to wall herself up. As the reviewer points out, "the author leaves it up to the audience to decide whether the wall will withstand this double sacrifice. Perhaps the wall on stage will collapse again. But what we can continue to build on our own may stand the test of time" (Gál, 1982).

Fear

Many literary works feature the theme of fear felt by the woman who is to be walled up. She begins to feel anxious when she hears no response to her words of greeting, but as the plot develops, this turns into fear. These feelings also accompany Kelemen Mason and his fellow workers. It can be said that the love between two people is immersed in an atmosphere of anxiety, fear, violence and pain, and in Kelemen Mason's case it is entangled in a strongly developed sense of the need to achieve set goals. While anxiety is an emotion without an object – constituting a response to stimuli with an indefinite probability of occurrence (Werka & Zagrodzka, 2009) – and fear always focuses on a specific object (Szatan, 2012), the two very often occur inseparably. In the cultural texts examined here, they co-create a space that encourages actions leading to thinking about sacrifice.

Fear was the driving force behind the construction of the castle in Déva. It was built at a time when the country was threatened by invasions of the Tatars and Pechenegs, or, in more universal terms, foreign forces from which the local population wanted to seek refuge. This fear also accompanies the builders when they realise that the site designated for construction is a "cursed" place. They

are also anxious about disgrace in their profession, which could have significant consequences for their future lives. In László Puskás's mystery play *Julia szép leányka* [Julia, the beautiful girl], one of the characters puts it this way: "Gold, silver […] We'll never get it! The castle wall is falling apart, today again/ we have to go home, because we'll never get paid" (Puskás, 1929, p. 46). If it turned out that their incompetence was to blame, they would not only not receive payment for their work, but they would also never again be able to count on employment in this respected profession. Masons had their own guild. Their work was considered ennobling, which is why Ábrahám, the protagonist of the play *The Castle of God* (Ábrahám, 1922), even abandons his noble status for it. The special status of the masonry profession is already evident in the folk variants of the Hungarian ballad, where Kelemen Mason's wife travels to the castle construction site in a cart drawn by two or four horses, while in most ballads from other regions she walks to the construction site.

Fear is also the subject of a poem written in 1942 by Sylwester Orbán, *Kőrontó Erzsébet* [Elisabeth Stonedestroyer] (Orbán, 1942). The murder of Kelemen Mason's wife, which was supposed to ensure the stability of the castle under construction, causes the bricklayers to feel remorse, haunts them with nightmares, and paralyses them with fear. To appease God for their sin, they decide to use the money they earned from building the castle in Déva to build a castle for God, believing that this sacrifice will restore their peace of mind. But it soon turns out that this building is also constantly falling apart and thus requires a sacrifice. This time, one of the masons confesses to having intercourse with a woman and, in order to wash away this sin, proposes: "Take me, kill me, throw my body into lime and thus build a lasting castle for God!" (Orbán, 1942, p. 447). The sacrifice is made, but the castle is still not durable, it continues to crumble, and as more sacrifices are made from among the bricklayers, the number of builders dwindles. "Nine are working, then eight…" (Orbán, 1942, p. 447). The reader does not find out whether the castle will ultimately be built.

An atmosphere of fear mixed with pain dominates Imre Györe's poem *Bartók – Világfa* [Bartók – tree of the world] (Györe, 2006), in which the poet describes the dramatic moment of sacrifice. Göre is one of the few artists who dares to confront the dark side of sacrifice and to delve into the psyche of the woman being sacrificed. The image he paints resembles a feminist version of the figure in Munch's painting The Scream. We are confronted not with an exalted view of the victim, but with her physicality. As the poet writes, Kelemen Mason's beautiful wife, being sacrificed, screams; she screams as she is thrown into the fire, her remains mixed with cement in the mortar scream, and the entire structure of Déva Castle, bound by her, screams. The scream of her motherless son accompanies this woman's scream. A castle built on such injustice is a cursed castle. For Györe, this castle is "the castle of the dead, we are the ashes of the dead" (Györe, 2006).

Lajos Pintér introduces an atmosphere of mystery and anticipation with the very title of his poem, *Kérdőjel-gerincoszlopú férfi* [The man with a question mark

spine]. His protagonist "rides a horse at dawn" and "when he treads the earth, he walks in chains" (Pintér, 1974). According to József Seres, this man is everyone, the "new Kelemen Mason", whose "wife already fears death, hiding behind lime, under plaster" (Seres, 1976, p. 280). In the poem, Kelemen Mason's wife is the embodiment of fear. She hides from her husband, from life – "Her world: unimportant, her dreams: unimportant, her life: unimportant" (Pintér, 1974).

Ottó Jávor titled one of his short ballads *Bűnös* [Sinner]. It describes the atmosphere of an impending murder, when the lyrical subject initially hides from what is about to happen but eventually joins Kelemen's wife's murderers, believing that in this way the curse to reach the accomplices in sin will be less severe as it will be divided among twelve people (Jávor, 1978). This fear and violence mean that in narratives about the walled-up woman we are confronted with her dehumanisation and reduction to a structural element. Hence, figures such as mortar or brick appear in the cultural space to define Kelemen Mason's wife.

The atmosphere of fear is reinforced by the mention of the ballad in Mihály Bábics's 1922 novel *Timár Virgil fia* [The son of Virgil Timár]. One of the characters, a monk and teacher, recalls his journey to the monastery and tells of an old tower on the monastery grounds that is associated with an old legend about walling up a girl alive. He refers to this story not only to emphasise fear and mystery, but also to highlight the atmosphere of the area, remote from the world, where even "legends are alive" (Babics, 1922, p. 115).

Fear was also the driving force behind Kelemen Mason's builders from Sarkadi's 1948 novella. Sometimes the issue of anxiety/fear is treated humorously, as in Bei Heiling's book *Elmenekülhetsz* [You can escape], whose protagonist meets a boy while travelling in Norway and asks him what he does for a living. When he hesitates to answer, the girl jokes that he probably has not walled anyone up, unlike Kelemen Mason. When he does not understand the allusion, she explains that there is a Hungarian story about it. "This mason became famous because he walled up his wife, whom he had grown tired of, in the castle he was building" (Heiling, 2014, p. 128).

On Violence in Jest

Although I will be writing here about Hungarian jokes and humour referring to the ballad about walling up a woman, I must point out in advance that few of them even raised a faint smile on my face. Perhaps this is specific to humour concerning gender roles, which is often crude and usually not very funny. On the other hand, humour is also a mirror of society, so it is worth taking a look at local tastes:

> The topos of the walled-up woman in Hungarian culture is subject to various forms of recycling. The problem of violence encoded in it undergoes transformations,

> leading to its repression and replacement with something new. One of the most interesting forms of restructuring the perception of this topic is laughter. As French neurologist Henri Rubinstein states in his work on the psychosomatics of laughter: "laughter is the stimulation of the pleasure centres, and its vital function is based on this. We laugh in order to feel pleasure in both pleasant and unpleasant situations, to retain our pleasure in spite of everything". (Rubinstein, 1983, p. 36)

With this in mind, I intend to examine how laughter was used to discover the vital potential of a folk ballad that is closer to horror than humour. Initially, before the laughter appeared, there was a kind of euphoria among intellectuals that the topos of the walled-up woman also existed in the Hungarian-speaking world. However, this was followed by consternation due to the drastic content of the ballads. Hence, it was easy to accept the view that they must have been introduced into Hungarian culture from Balkan cultures. It was admitted, however, that Hungarian culture was familiar with the use of animal blood as a substance to strengthen structures (e.g., Sarudy witnessed such a practice in Sopron, where a clay bowling alley was sprinkled with animal blood brought from a slaughterhouse; Sarudy, 1899). However, the use of human blood as a binding agent was considered barbaric, and its roots were sought in the Balkans: "However, this is possible when it comes to people from the south. Albanians settle their feuds through bloody revenge, which still rages here with full force. Murder, abduction of girls, rape and adultery are crimes committed by these cruel tribes […] Among such peoples, violence and the burning of women may occur". And further: "The Serbian legend [about the walled-up woman – note by LH] is a development of the Albanian one. It was brought to Transylvania by the Vlachs", writes the aforementioned Sarudy (Sarudy, 1899, pp. 61–62).

Attention was also drawn to the differences between Hungarian ballads and their Balkan variants, where the victim destined to be walled up is lured by deception (which is allegedly consistent with the character of the peoples of South-Eastern Europe) (Sz-cs. G-a, 1888). In most Hungarian ballads, however, Kelemen Mason's wife is informed of her fate upon her arrival at the construction site, and only then is she murdered. After being burned, her ashes are mixed with lime to form a mortar used to harden the walls of the castle in Déva. Sometimes, before burning, her blood is also drained and added to the mortar. This "technology" is supposed to guarantee the indestructibility of the building. Discussing the ballad, its connotations with the Catholic religion were also noted (in all Hungarian versions of the story of Kelemen Mason's wife, there is mention of 12 bricklayers, and the heroine is probably Catholic because she refers to the custom of ringing bells in Christian churches during funeral ceremonies; Sarudy, 1989, p. 60).

As already mentioned, the ballad was relatively quickly recognised as important for Hungarian culture and was included in school curricula as early as 1895. Its characteristic structure, message, narrative elements and stylistic devices began to permeate Hungarian culture and everyday life, appearing in all literary genres. These features also became an inspiration for humorous works

in the broad sense of the word, as perceived, for example, by John Lippitt, who, when defining his field of research on humour, limited himself to the succinct statement that he would deal with everything that "is perceived, thought of or experienced, as funny or amusing" (Lippitt, 1991, p. 10). For Rod A. Martin, the subject requires a slightly broader view:

> Humour is a broad term that refers to anything that people say or do that is perceived as funny and tends to make others laugh, as well as the mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such an amusing stimulus, and also the affective response involved in the enjoyment of it. (Martin, 2007, p. 5)

Before turning to the main topic, I would like to point out that when writing about humour in a foreign culture, we face a problem of comprehension. Nothing is laughable in itself; humour is not an inherent feature of a text, statement, or communicative situation. What we perceive as "funny" results from a specific interpretation characteristic of a given person or community that shares a similar set of cognitive patterns and a common semantic background. Without knowledge of the cultural patterns and social context in which a given group of recipients interprets a text, it is impossible to predict the humorous effect. Humour only works effectively among participants whose cultural and social competencies overlap sufficiently, enabling them to activate the same scenarios and recognise the scenario opposites that form the basis of the comic effect. For this reason, humour often does not cross national borders and its effect weakens over time as the shared knowledge, conventions, and cultural assumptions necessary to activate the scenario change or cease to be shared by the audience (Raskin, 1944/1985).

It can thus be concluded that humour in translation is often incomprehensible, i.e., *de facto* untranslatable. However, it plays an extremely important role in social life; therefore, when discussing the functioning of the topos of the walled-up woman in Hungarian culture, this issue cannot be overlooked.

From Folk Ballad to Satire

The humorous potential of the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife was discovered as early as the beginning of the 20th century, when it was used in the political satire *Kőmives Kelemen (régi ballada nyomán)* [Kelemen Mason (based on an old ballad)], published anonymously in 1911 in the then-popular satirical magazine *Borsszem Jankó* ("Kőmives Kelemen (Régi ballada nyomán)", 1911). The old folk ballad became a pretext for the author to create an allegorical text in which he presents the work of contemporary bricklayers, building a "castle of light" with not stones but thoughts. This can be interpreted in such a way that their characters represent politicians who are building the "edifice of the state". This interpretation is justified by the fact that when their work does not bring the expected results (as in the old ballad, "what they built during the day

fell apart at night, what was built at night collapsed in the morning"), they decide to wall up one of the politicians as a sacrificial offering ("Kőmives Kelemen (Régi ballada nyomán)", 1911).

The humorous use of ballads in political recycling is rather marginal. Another example is Péter S. Föld's 1990 text titled *Néhány név a listáról: kik voltak a besugók* [A few names from the list: who were the informers], published in another popular humour magazine, *Ludas Matyi*. It addresses the then-current topic of the search for secret collaborators of the communist state services. The protagonist is József Torgyán, a well-known figure of the parliamentary opposition at that time and an attorney suspected of such collaboration. His case is reported by a secret informant with the pseudonym Dr Mária Incognitó, who, speaking of his "walling up/collaboration", states that he was not an informer, i.e., he was "walled up" not in "department III/III"[23] but during the construction of his villa, when "a drunk bricklayer mistook him for Kelemen Mason's wife. Fortunately, quite by accident, 34,000 peasants were passing by with a Zetor tractor and freed the lawyer" (Föld, 1990).

According to Raskin, political jokes fall into two categories: disparaging and exposing (Raskin, 1944/1985). It seems that both examples cited here can be classified in the latter category. However, it should be noted that they have a significant flaw. As Freud writes in his definition of a good joke: "a good joke makes, as it were, a total impression of enjoyment on us, without our being able to decide at once what share of the pleasure arises from its joking form and what share from its apt thought-content" (Freud, 1960, p. 132). However, years later, such an assessment of political texts has serious limitations, as the political context in which they were created is blurred and it is more difficult to evaluate such jokes in terms of their quality (Raskin, 2023).

Let us look at some other humorous uses of ballads. I will begin my journey through the Hungarian land of smiles around the topic of the walled-up woman, beginning with lexical jokes, to which Freud devoted a lot of space in his works.

Lexical Jokes

Lexical jokes referring to our ballad are created by using polysemes. Jolanta Krzyżewska and Seweryn Krzyżewski define this type of humour as an "operation without operation", i.e., the ability of polysemes or homonyms to evoke a humorous effect by means of "automatic redirection of meaning" alone (Krzyżewska & Krzyżewski, 2014, p. 87).

[23] This department was responsible for investigating, among other things, anti-communist circles. In 1991, a film titled *Beépített ügynök* [The Bodyguard] appeared in the film news section of Új Ludas Matyi, in which Kelemen Mason's wife was supposed to be a collaborator of the communist services, specifically Department III/III (see "Az Új Ludas Matyi", 1991).

In the area we are interested in, jokes are based on three polysemes: *fal*, *beépitett* and *vár*. Let us start with the word *fal*. In its noun form, it means "wall", but it also occurs as a verb, in which form it means "to devour, to gobble up" (figuratively – "to devour books"), while in its dialect form it simply means "to eat". Here is one example: "Kelemen Mason's family is eating breakfast. The father says: 'Eat, son, your mother is already eating/is a wall'" (Rónaki, 2003) or ("Playboy: Pofabaj", 2008). In recent years, another form of this joke has been circulating on the internet, based on the double meaning of the word *vár*, which means "castle" but also "to wait" ("Come on, son, your mother is already waiting/is a castle")[24].

The word *beépített*, which is a participle of the verb "to build in" and means "walled in/up" or "installed", has greater potential. In a figurative sense, it also means someone who is "installed" or "walled in/up", i.e., an "undercover agent". For example, in a joke in which Kelemen Mason is asked what kind of washing machine he has, the answer is *beépített*, meaning "built-in" ("Humor", 2003). In turn, in the joke "What will be the title of the Hollywood version of Kelemen Mason?", the answer is "Built-In Beauty" ("Nap vicce", 2003), which should be understood as "a beautiful female undercover agent"[25].

Lexical jokes, including those cited above, are dedicated jokes. According to Krzyżewska and Krzyżewski, the sender of such jokes usually expects only that the recipient, upon deciphering them, will feel a sense of shared worldview or aesthetic with their creator. At the same time, understanding the sender's message leads to an appreciation of the recipient's intellectual potential (Krzyżewska & Krzyżewski, 2014, p. 94). This often means that jokes related to the characters in the ballad are not really funny but contain many stereotypes and are strongly rooted in culture. Many of them are discriminatory and sexist.

This is even more evident in longer humorous pieces. It is clear to see how the problem of a woman who sacrifices her life so that her husband can achieve his goal completely disappears from them. This fact is suppressed and replaced by submission to the man's will, followed by another trivial problem that builders have been struggling with for centuries, namely the lack of materials on the construction site. The woman dies because "something" needs to be used for building. The woman's body is reduced to dead building material. What we are dealing with here is, in fact, the dehumanisation of Kelemen Mason's wife. Pál Peterdi went furthest in this direction when, comparing the characters in his series of stories about pioneers to the characters in the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife, he decided to explain to his readers who Mason's wife was: "she was raw material for the construction industry at a time when manufacturers of

[24] See http://kecskefeszek.net/vicc/egysoros-viccek/komuves-kelemen-2.html (retrieved January 22, 2023)

[25] The joke was probably created after 2000, when the film *Miss Congeniality* starring Sandra Bullock was shown in Hungary. The Hungarian title of the film is *Beépített szépség* [Built-in beauty].

prefabricated elements were building mothers' families into the walls of castles instead of concrete prefabricated elements" (Peterdi, 1962).

The longest tradition in Hungary is found in texts linking the walling up of a woman with solving two problems faced by Kelemen Mason: construction and marriage. The oldest text of this type that I have been able to find dates back to 1942. The New Year's Eve issue of the magazine *Szentesi Napló* features an article about how a humourist sees the problem of material shortages through the prism of literature. Referring to the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife, József Kiss states that the construction of the castle by Kelemen and his team was unsuccessful due to the use of poor mortar. Faced with serious financial consequences, the masons came up with the idea of solving the problem by mixing the mortar with the ashes of the first woman to arrive at the construction site, who was the wife of one of them. Since Kelemen Mason's wife was the first to arrive, she became the necessary mortar, the substitute material. In conclusion, the author jokingly notes that two conclusions can be drawn from this: 1) that the method used is noteworthy because a durable castle was built; 2) that it ends badly for a woman when she constantly controls her husband (J. Kiss, 1942, p. 5).

It is worth noting here that the figure of a woman as mortar is one of the oldest symbols used in Hungarian culture in relation to this topos. It was used, among others, as early as 1913 in Árpád Tóth's poem, *Csokonai Mihályhoz Invakáció* [Invocation to Mihály Csokonai], which is still very popular today. Expressing his hope for the rebirth of the Hungarian nation, the poet refers to the "sad symbolism" of Kelemen Mason's wife, wondering whether the country would not be more beautiful if mortar mixed with the blood of Hungarians were used to build a better future (Á. Tóth, 1961).

A large group of Hungarian humourists followed this lead. József Gőz, in his story *A Kelemen brigád esete Déva várával* [The case of Kelemen's brigade and Déva castle] (Gőz, 1987, pp. 118–119), decides to uncover the "whole truth" about the story of Kelemen Mason's wife. He does so by presenting the reflections of the last surviving member of the team of builders who constructed Déva Castle. He reveals that Kelemen Mason deliberately decided to kill the first wife who came to her husband and then wall her up because he was convinced that this woman would be his wife. Ultimately, the narrator concludes, by walling up his wife, Kelemen became the happiest man alive because he completed the castle, freed himself from his wife, and did not have to share his wealth with her. The protagonist of László Feleki's poem also solved his problems using "Kelemen's method". After completing the construction of the castle, he led a carefree life, working in the garden, and explained to his surprised colleagues that he had once loved his wife but had now "separated himself from her with a wall" (Feleki, 1970, p. 9).

A separate group consists of texts focused on the character of Kelemen Mason. Initially, he was presented as a symbol of a construction worker – an unlucky man at work, as in the text by an anonymous author titled *Még egy*

Kőmives Kelemen [Another Kelemen Mason] ("Még egy Kőmives Kelemen", 1923). It may have been influenced by the stage adaptation of the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife by Hungarian writer and journalist Ernő Ábrahám, which premiered two months earlier. The title character, Kelemen Mason, is a man who appears at the editorial office of the newspaper *Új Nemzedék*, seeking help regarding materials stolen from him on a construction site. For the editor, Kelemen's name immediately brings to mind the story known from the ballad and theatre, so he surprises the visitor by informing him that he is well aware that he is a bricklayer and has a problem with building a house. Kelemen treats the editor as a clairvoyant ("Még egy Kőmives Kelemen", 1923, p. 6).

In some works, Kelemen Mason's character displays an element of self-justification for his brutal treatment of his wife. This is linked to a reference to the stereotypical view of the subordinate role of women and, at the same time, the manipulation of his self-image. And yet, as Nęcki notes: "The essence of defence mechanisms is to reduce the psychological tension caused by negative images of reality, not by changing the situation, but by changing the perception and interpretation of unwanted events" (Nęcki, 2018, p. 133).

A 1968 text mentions the concept of walling up one's wife to improve the durability of a building as a "rationalisation invention", which is a term typical of communist newspeak. The building erected by Kelemen Mason and his crew keeps falling apart. The reason for this is a constant shortage of materials. Faced with the threat from headquarters that if he did not come up with a new technology, the construction would not be completed and the workers would be deprived of their bonuses – and also faced with his wife's threat that he would be expelled from the house – he had to find a solution. It turned out to be walling up his wife. The protagonist believes that, to some extent, she herself was to blame because she disregarded his warnings contained in a fragment of a ballad, which he quoted to her many times: "We will catch you beautifully, throw you into the fire, and mix your miserable ashes with lime" (Novák, 1969). In addition, as Kelemen states, she was "insufficiently aware; she did not immediately understand the significance of this matter for the socialist economy" (Novák, 1969). Ultimately, he sums up the whole story as follows: "My beloved wife always said, Kelemen, Kelemen, one day you'll get yourself into trouble… And you see, in the end, she got herself into trouble" (Novák, 1969)[26].

The murder of Kelemen Mason's wife seems to be treated by Hungarian satirists in a similar way to how today's generation (familiar with computer games) treats the issue of death, when it familiarises itself with it and does not take it entirely seriously. An example of this is András Kürti's article titled *Bünügy* [Crime], published in *Ludas Matyi* (Kürti, 1968). It consists of a series of short press reports that reconstruct how the newspapers and magazines of the time might have reacted to this tragic event. It begins with one of the most

[26] Earlier, in 1968, this text was published under a pseudonym (Novo) – (Novo, 1968a, 1968b).

popular newspapers of the time, the Budapest afternoon paper *Esti Hirlap*. The news item would be given the intriguing title "Cement helyett asszonyt!" [A woman instead of cement]. Underneath it, the shooting of Kelemen Mason's wife was described. The perpetrator, standing before the court, is presented as a money-hungry businessman who, in his defence, claims that in committing the crime he acted with care towards the victim, reassuring her that she would only be walled up in a wall. In the women's press, in what was probably the most popular weekly magazine in Hungary during the communist era, *Nők Lapja*, the news about Kelemen Mason's wife would appear under the title "Ahol a nő csak kötőanyag!" [Where a woman is just mortar]. Here, the "crime" was limited to domestic violence by her husband (euphemistically referred to as "inappropriate and harsh treatment"), and the whole problem was presented against the backdrop of the achievements of women employed on a state farm in contrast to their marginal participation in the company's management. The magazine *Ludas Matyi* responded to the matter with a press announcement by Kelemen Mason's son: "Who knows anything about my great-grandmother, Kelemen Mason's wife, who brought provisions to my great-grandfather at the castle in Déva and whom I have been searching for in vain ever since" (Kürti, 1968).

Using Freud's typology, construction humour can be classified as "exposing jokes" (Freud, 1960, p. 97). It contains criticism of the organisation of work on construction sites and bricklayers' work ethic. This can be seen, for example, in Pál Somogyi's version of the ballad, whose protagonist, Kelemen Mason, is building a skyscraper with his team. In the song, the traditional place of wives is taken by cards, but they interfere with work and are condemned because, as Kelemen says, "Work is not going well because the cards are going well." The "guilty" cards are walled up by Kelemen Mason: "When he had walled them up halfway, they thought it was a joke. When they were no longer visible, they thought he had gone mad, but when he walled up the red seven, they believed him"[27] (P. Somogyi, 1967). As the author concludes, this is how the skyscraper was built.

Humorous Drawings

Humorous drawings referring to the ballad about a woman walled up began to appear in the Hungarian press in the early 1960s. The very act of walling up aroused particular interest among cartoonists. It seems that the precursor of this type of joke was a cartoonist signing with the initials SZA. He used the ballad to humorously depict how a well-known Hungarian builder, Kelemen Mason, invented a technique for getting rid of unwanted women. The first to play this role was Kelemen Mason's mother-in-law. In a cartoon titled *Épitő jellegi népballada* [A folk ballad of a construction nature] in the magazine *Kisalföld* ("Épitő jellegi népballada", 1960), a bricklayer is seen pulling a woman towards

[27] This is a paraphrase of the lyrics of the ballad about the wife of Kelemen Mason.

a castle standing on a hill. Someone from the watching crowd compliments Kelemen Mason on his shrewdness because he will get rid of his mother-in-law by walling her up in the castle wall (Figure 7). Another drawing, by Balázs-Piri, shows an attempt to get rid of a wife using "Kelemen Mason's method". It depicts a construction worker who, pointing to an elderly woman standing next to him, explains to an elegantly dressed couple that if they allow him to wall up his wife in the villa he is building, the house will be more durable (Balázs-Piri, 1985).



Figure 7. Author: SZA. "A ballad about construction. – I always said that Kelemen Mason was quite a clever chap. He's going to wall up his mother-in-law in the castle". Source: "Építő jellegi népballada" (1960; Arcanum Újságok).

The theme of getting rid of one's wife appeared in the interwar period. The unknown author of a note published in 1933 titled *Kőmüves Kelemen vagy: a dévai patent* [Kelemen Mason or: the Déva patent] states that builders devised a way to get rid of their wives under the pretext of strengthening the castle they were building with their blood and ashes. He concludes his text with the statement: "We have the impression that if the patent from Déva were officially sanctioned, construction would be in full swing. If at least one woman could be murdered on every construction site, it would lead to a boom in the construction industry" ("Kőműves Kelemen vagy: a dévai patent", 1933).

Like the authors of written texts, illustrators also presented the walling up of women as a technological solution. Ibolya Dallos, one of the two graphic artists who took up a theme related to the ballad about Kelemen's wife, depicts a conversation between two young labourers. One of them boasts that he has seen the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife[28] and enthusiastically praises the

[28] This is probably a reference to the rock opera *Kőmíves Kelemen* by the duo Szörényi and Bródy.

excellent construction technology described in it (Dallas, 1976). Erzsébet Bene also approaches the problem from a "technological" perspective (Figure 8). Her Kelemen Mason walls up his wife, who, looking through the last open part of the wall with tears in her eyes, asks him to use quick-setting clay cement when walling her up (Csillag, 1968).



Figure 8. Author: Csillag Ferenczné (Erzsébet Bene). Ballad, modern version. "Kelemen Mason's wife: At least use aluminate cement". Source: Csillag (1968; Arcanum Újságok).

Here, the woman completely submits to her husband's will and, insisting on the use of the right cement, she also makes sure that the walling-up process is carried out to the highest construction standards. The idea of sacrificing a woman as a last resort for bricklayers who are unable to cope with the construction appears in Gyula Lengyel's 1978 drawing, which is a commentary on the economic situation in Hungary at the time and the government's analysis of the implementation of large investments. It shows Kelemen Mason AD 1978, a man dressed in a suit, probably the head of a large construction company, who suggests to the slightly frightened young girl accompanying him that she may have to sacrifice herself "if there is no other way…". In the background, you can see a large, abandoned construction site and workers playing cards or drinking palinka (Lengyel, 1978).

Other drawings depicting Kelemen Mason's wife are strongly associated with patriarchal attitudes towards women. As a wife, she is her husband's property and is completely subject to his will. Through the act of being walled up, she



Figure. 9. Author: József Szűr Szabó. "In the wall or on the wall. Kelemen Mason: Now she belongs to HIG!". Source: Szür Szabó (1961)

changes ownership. In such drawings, she is, in a sense, "nationalised"; she becomes the property, as the captions below them say, of the authorities administering the buildings. József Szűr Szabó created two such drawings. Both depict the same situation. We see the outline of a human figure walled up in a wall. In front of her stand bricklayers who explain to their interlocutors that the woman is no longer under their authority, but under that of the property administration offices, namely HIG (Szür Szabó, 1961; Figure 9) and HKI ("Kőmives Kelemen", 1968; Figure 10).

Against these drawings, the carefree humour of the youth weekly magazine *Re-branding* is striking. In front of a booth with a sign reading "Tavern", Kelemen Mason explains to a man that instead of a castle, they built a great pub because the castle kept falling apart (Kelemen, 1986), which can be understood as a general criticism of builders whose buildings are not entirely constructed according to plan.

The last drawing in this group – by József Sándor Békési – which is supposed to prove Kelemen Mason's mastery, should be classified, according to Freud's typology of jokes, as a nonsense joke, because "in presenting something that is stupid and nonsensical, the sense lies in the revelation and demonstration of something else that is stupid and nonsensical" (Freud, 1960, p. 58). The picture shows a men's toilet (Figure 11). Next to the urinal, there is a figure half-built into the wall, with its back to the viewer. Next to it, a man with masonry tools says: "Do you still think I'm a bungler?" (Békési, 1991). In fact, this drawing has a sexual, pornographic, or perhaps rather sadistic subtext. The bricklay-

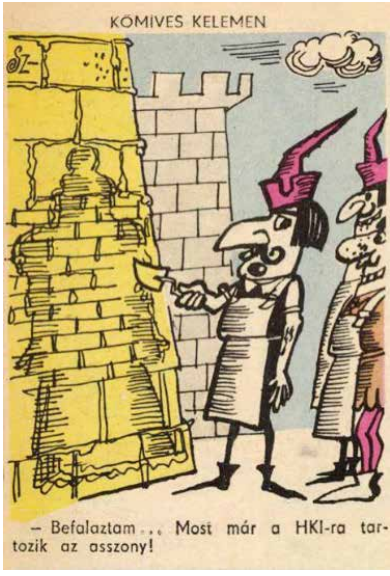


Figure 10. Author: József Szűr Szabó. "Kelemen Mason: I walled her up. Now she belongs to HKI."
Source: "Kőmives Kelemen" (1968; Arcanum Újságok)



Figure 11. Author: József Sándor Békési, *Kelemen Mason*.
Source: Békési (1991; Arcanum Újságok)

er exposes the woman to sexual contact with other men, presumably hoping that this will bring her satisfaction. However, this idea is not intended for her well-being but bears the hallmarks of revenge for (perhaps) humiliation previously suffered by the man.

As mentioned earlier, the oldest metonymy for a walled-up woman in Hungarian tradition is mortar. Due to the fact that it is difficult to represent in visual form, a brick appears in its place. This is referred to, among others, by the author of an anonymous drawing on a website (with puns), which shows a girl talking to a boy standing near a wall[29]. When a girl asks in Hungarian whether she is loved and what the boy loves most about her, he replies in English that she is for him just another brick in the wall. This is the reflection that haunts the author of the drawing after Pink Floyd's The Wall concert in 2008.

Online Humour

In recent years, humour referring to the ballad about the walled-up woman has moved to the internet. It is used to perpetuate ideas that already exist in Hungarian culture[30]. For example: "What did Kelemen Mason say to his son when he wanted to get married? 'Son, you need a woman in the house…'"[31] Interestingly, these jokes appear, among other places, on a website dedicated to so-called heavy, bizarre jokes[32]. These jokes can be treated as part of contemporary folklore.

Alongside repetitions on the internet, new approaches to the subject are emerging. Kelemen Mason has earned himself an entry in the Hungarian Nonsensopedia. His humorous biography states that he "was a relatively well-known architect, sculptor and psychopathologist", as well as "an expert in the field of female anatomy […] From an early age, he showed a particular fascination with stones and women, and in his spare time he wondered how to combine business with pleasure" ("Kőmíves Kelemen", 2007). He graduated from a technical school of castle construction and, after a few minor jobs, received a commission to build a castle in Déva. When it turned out that "what is built during the day falls apart by morning", he suggested walling up the gravedigger's wife. In protest against the attitude of the crew members, who were eager to get rid of their wives in this way, Kelemen's wife was ultimately walled up. Af-

[29] Source: https://szovicc.blog.hu/2008/09/18/komives_kelemen_a_pink_floyd_koncerten

[30] It is worth noting here a study whose authors, based on an analysis of sexist memes on the internet, point out that new technology creates new opportunities for promoting the exclusion of women (Drakett et al., 2018).

[31] See http://kecskefeszek.net/vicc/egysoros-viccek/komuves-kelemen-1.html (retrieved January 22, 2022). A similar joke was published earlier in Ludas Matyi, 1984, 5, p. 7.

[32] See https://faviccek.hu/komives-kelemen.html (retrieved January 22, 2023).

ter completing the construction, he was banned from practising his profession in the country, which meant that he carried out his later work abroad, because, as the saying goes, "no one is a prophet in their own country". In this way, using his "unique technology", he built such structures as "the Great Wall of China, the Berlin Wall, Hadrian's Wall and the Pyramid of Cheops". Shorter forms include jokes in the form of humorous text messages, such as "Thank you for using our services to build your house. Naturally, the price of 80 million includes walling up your mother-in-law"[33].

An important new medium promoting parody versions of the ballad about Kelemen Mason and his wife is YouTube. Although the number of views for new versions of the ballad posted there ranges from just a few thousand to several thousand, this platform is certainly a good tool for showing that Hungarians still treat the ballad not only as an important element of their cultural memory, but also as an inspiration for entertainment during various social and cultural events. Most of the amusing interpretations of ballads previously invented and described here are returning in new versions performed by more or less professional artists.

One such "new interpretation" is the version presented by András Magai. It combines the text of an authentic folk ballad with the popular jokes mentioned earlier ("a woman is needed at home"; "come home, son, your mother is already a castle/waiting"; Punctum3, 2009). A more elaborate satirical adaptation of the ballad was presented in 2010 by Levente Moravecz (Józsefné Dr. Aracsi (Ircsi), 2010). Here, the construction problem is the lack of gravel, which was not delivered on time by the supply company. As in most stories about construction, the bricklayers are interested in everything except work, which is barely progressing. And in this version of the ballad, there is a need to "take advantage" of a woman. Kelemen Mason's wife arrives. An argument ensues. The husband complains that she does not care for him but only takes his hard-earned money. Ultimately, Kelemen, to the satisfaction of the audience, pushes her into the lime. In the words of Jeannette Bicknell: "There is an element of malice in much humor. […] A good deal of our laughter in comedy is directed at misfortune, presented in such a way as to elicit amusement rather than outrage, tears or compassion" (Bicknell, 2007, p. 458).

The various satirical adaptations of the ballad available online allow us to observe how they are received by the audience. One such example is the version presented by three different performers, including members of the popular cabaret group Markos & Nádas & Boncz. Here, twelve unsuccessful masons steal from their construction site; they eat and drink more than they work. Eventually, they decide that they need a woman to increase their productivity, but when she appears they do not know what to do with her. "They smeared her with cologne and shaving cream, treated her with ointment and ultra-septic powder, and stood idly by with their noses in the air", reports the

[33] https://keptelenseg.hu/viccek/vicces-sms-ek-1904 (retrieved March 28, 2023).

narrator. Ultimately, the construction is not completed because, as we learn, no sponsor was found for it (see sandorareemen, 2009; Slagerek Valogatas, 2015; Vincze Váraszó, 2011). Both the text itself and the artistic device used, i.e., lisping, cause the audience to react with spontaneous laughter, as expected by the performer.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to recall the lesson that satirists from *Ludas Matyi* drew from the story of Kelemen Mason: "Marriage also has its good sides. For example, if Kelemen Mason had remained a bachelor, no ballad would ever have been written about him" (Dalmát, 1988). Naturally, without the ballad, there would be no analysis either. However, on the basis of the ballad, one can attempt to reflect on the image of Hungarian society that emerges from the humour and jokes discussed here, which are an important element of Hungarian popular culture (Mintz, 2008).

Recordings available on websites show that audiences generally respond positively to these jokes. This leads to a conclusion similar to that reached by Emi Nursanti in her work on male jokes (and almost 100% of the texts and drawings analysed here are the work of men): "Reflecting that most of the masculine identities and the language features in sexist jokes represent men's superiority, this kind of humour can be a way to maintain gender asymmetry in society. Besides, although humour leads to laughter and is considered healthy, sexist humour is dangerous as the expressions subordinate women" (Nursanti, 2022, p. 255).

In his work *Masculine Domination*, Pierre Bourdieu states that thanks to the activities of feminist movements, the situation of women has changed significantly (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 88), but he notes that the education system continues to convey the assumptions of patriarchal representation (based on the homology between the male–female and adult–child relationships) (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 83). This French scholar's observations can be applied to the situation in Hungary. One consequence of this state of affairs is the functioning of the topos of the walled-up woman in Hungarian humour.

A Woman's Body in the Hands of Men

The texts cited above prompt discussion of a theme signalled in the ballad and taken up in literary works, which seems crucial to the functioning of the topos of walling up in Hungarian cultural space. I am referring to the relationship between Kelemen Mason and his wife, and more broadly between the two sexes. It is worth looking at this problem through the prism of the work of Bourdieu, who sees the relationship between women and men as a model reflection of the male power system. Such power, symbolic in nature, is, in his opinion, both arbitrary and unrecognised even by those who are subject to it. This means that it is sustained "with the unconscious participation of women, whose bodies are

inscribed in a particular disposition to submit, bodily *hexies*"[34] (Dębska, 2015, p. 20). This leads to such a transformation of habitus under the influence of social structures that the individual loses control over these changes and begins to confuse innate and acquired traits (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 194).

Categories of the world and ideas about it imposed from outside become a matrix that most often presents necessity as a virtue, i.e., rejects what has already been rejected and accepts the inevitable (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 195). This matrix also contains the belief in human weakness. Satan from Ábrahám's *The Castle of God* clearly defines this issue: "The human soul is weak; it sleeps in sin. Man is defiled by vanity. He is a slave to greed" (Ábrahám, 1922, p. 11). Here, the Hungarian playwright directly names what is present in all versions of the ballad about the walled-up woman, as well as in numerous literary works, but is hardly ever named anywhere else. The cause of tragedy in these narratives is the weakness of men who are unable to admit their lack of building skills and, at the same time, driven by their vanity, cannot come to terms with their failures. The only way out of such a vicious circle is for them to resort to violence and make a sacrifice. Girard sees two forms of violence, the older one being collective violence, and when it ceases, individual violence emerges (Girard, 1989). Both forms occur in Hungarian versions of the walled-up woman topos.

An analysis of various narratives about Kelemen Mason's wife leads to the conclusion that she most often appears as a body predestined to play the role of a sacrifice – she usually easily submits to the will imposed by her husband; much less often does she take on the role of a sacrifice herself, recognising that she exists to support her beloved in achieving his goals. As a result, she becomes an implant that will strengthen the stone structure of the castle. This sacrifice is presented as a virtue. The words from St. Peter's Letter to the Romans come to mind: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship" (*Holy Bible: New International Version*, 2011, Romans 12:1).

To reinforce the message, the female victim is often sacralised. This is particularly evident in the mysteries that arose in Hungary in the interwar period (e.g., in Ábrahám's *The Castle of God*; Ábrahám, 1922), in which Kelemen Mason's sacrificed wife goes to heaven to become an intermediary in establishing contact between the sacred and the profane worlds. One could refer here to the results of research on the nature and function of sacrifice by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (Hubert & Mauss, 1899). Although these conclusions are somewhat exaggerated, they draw attention to the extremely important symbolism of sacrifice. They state that it is a gesture involving the destruction of animal or plant matter, aimed at transforming both the victim and the person making the

[34] Bourdieu defines bodily *hexies* in *Méditations pascaliennes* as "political mythology that has been realised, embodied, transformed into a permanent disposition, a permanent way of standing, speaking, walking, as well as feeling and thinking" (Protrka, 2006).

sacrifice. According to these authors, the benefits of such an act accrue not only to the individual, but also to the family, clan and community (Hubert & Mauss, 1899, pp. 29–138). We see this in Hungarian accounts of a woman walled up as an instrument of rebuilding the masonry community. French researchers also point to the element of sacralisation of the sacrifice. "Her death was like that of a phoenix: she was reborn as a saint" (Hubert & Mauss, 1899, p. 12). Comparing Greek, Christian and Vedic mythology, these authors conclude that resurrection occurs after death in all of them. Thus, sacrifice anticipates sacralisation.

Reconstruction of the Body

In the world of cultural events that contribute to the entrenchment of the topos of the walled-up woman in Hungarian culture, the visual arts, apart from literature and music, play a significant role. They not only create her image but also fictionalise her story. They do so in a realistic way but also refer to symbolism. They introduce characters known from other areas of culture into the national imagination, giving them a material dimension.

Innocent

Among Jung's archetypes, innocence is one of the most important symbols of culture. In the Hungarian collective consciousness, it has an extremely strong emotional connotation. This is, of course, a male projection, in which the archetype of innocence and devotion is constructed by the discourses of the patriarchal world. In his imagination, the woman becomes a symbol of subordination and sacrifice, and her happiness depends on the will of the man, which perpetuates the traditional image of the role of women in society. This way of thinking is also evident in the visual arts. A young wife dreaming of a happy life puts the duty of supporting her beloved man – her husband, a bricklayer, a creator – first. She would certainly agree with Nietzsche's words that "The happiness of man is: I will." The happiness of a woman is, "He will" (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 31). She came to the construction site to bring her beloved his lunch, or perhaps driven by a bad feeling that something bad had happened to him. She did not know that her fate had been sealed by his colleagues. It is worth taking a look at how this innocent victim is portrayed in Hungarian art. This is all the more worthwhile because the motif of the innocent, faithful woman has been present in Hungarian art for a long time.

The history of artists depicting the topos of the walled-up woman in Hungary began at the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, Károly Kósa's illustrated text of the aforementioned play *Kőmives Kelemen* (Kárpáti & Vajda, 1916) was published. In his perception of the characters, the artist refers to

the classic image of a woman, mummified by patriarchal society, for whom the highest virtue is the "duty" of a married woman, submission to her husband's will, and, when children appear, caring for and raising them. In line with this way of thinking, Kósy's woodcuts depict Kelemen Mason's wife as a nurturer of her son, whose life revolves around thinking about her husband.



Figure 12. Graphic by Károly Kós, an illustration for the book edition of the play *Kelemen Mason* by Kárpati and Vajda.
Source: Kárpáti & Vajda (1916)

One of the illustrations shows her in traditional dress, holding a child on her lap and pointing towards an open window, as if explaining that the child's father is building his castle somewhere far away (Figure 12). Another illustration depicts Kelemen's wife meeting her husband, who embraces her tenderly and seems to whisper love spells in her ear. Significantly, Kósa avoids depicting the most dramatic moments of the ballads in his illustrations, favouring traditional motifs of a loving mother and submissive wife. We are informed of her death by an engraving depicting the completed castle standing against the backdrop of a traditional Székely tombstone, known as a *kopjafa*[35]. However, this symbolic image contains a distortion that accompanies the visual narratives about Kelemen Mason's wife to this day. From the folk ballad, we know that one of the reasons why it was difficult for her to come to terms with her death within the castle walls was the fact that no one would know about her fate. When she was

[35] A traditional Szekler pole grave marker, usually made of wood. Often as tall as a person. Richly carved.

murdered by the masons, "the bells would not toll three times", as is customary when someone dies. Her trace would disappear within the castle walls, and so she would have neither a cross nor the traditional *kopjafa*.

Kós's illustrations in the book edition of the play were not his first attempt to tackle the theme of the ballad about the walled-up woman. He had done so earlier, in 1907, but even then he spoke more about life than death. In the painting, against the backdrop of a tree covered with leaves, the completed castle in Déva can be seen in the distance. An inscription with the title of the ballad surrounds the illustration. The inscription contains five hearts. However, their number is likely a compositional choice rather than something with specific symbolic meaning. Alternatively, they could be interpreted as meaning that Kelemen Mason's wife was surrounded by love. However, it is not certain that this interpretation was actually the artist's intention.

In the 1950s, Jutta Pallos created paintings dedicated to both Kelemen Mason's wife and him.



Figure 13. Jutta Pallos, *Kelemen Mason*, undated.
Source: *Utunk*, *1976* (32), p. 7 (Arcanum Újságok)

In the painting *Kőmives Kelemenné* [Kelemenné, the mason's wife], we see a group of bricklayers carrying their fainting, or perhaps already murdered, victim on their shoulders (Figure 13). They might be heading to the place where the sacrificial ritual will take place.

In the second work (Figure 14), a woman lies at the feet of her husband, who looks at her sadly. Behind him is a wall from which male figures emerge. In



Figure 14. Jutta Pallos, *Kelemen Mason*, undated.
Source: *Igaz Szó*, *1970*(2), p. 284 (Arcanum Újságok)

1958, the artist confessed to a journalist that she was not entirely satisfied with the painting *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* (Gazda, 1958) and would like to paint it again. Did she do so? I have been unable to find the answer to this question.

In 1961, Sándor Mikus built his story about Kelemen Mason's wife (this time enchanted in a bronze bas-relief) on a combination of text and illustrations. For years, it has adorned the pediment of one of Budapest's schools (Figure 15). In his description of the bas-relief, an art critic identifies two strong points. One is related to the fate of the woman: "Kelemen Mason's wife was captured and her ashes were mixed with lime. In the sixth panel, two bricklayers grab the woman, who is in shock and barely able to resist, and throw her into the burning fire" (Szij, 1965, p. 42). The second point is the tragedy of Kelemen Mason, who must confess to his child that his mother has been walled up and then experience the loss of his child, who, not finding his mother at the castle, falls into the ground through a crack that has opened up beneath him (Szij, 1965).

In the painting by Albert Nagy from Kolozsvár (Cluj, Romania), there is a surprising outline of a dove sketched on a red wall with a finger dipped in lime by a woman, the wife of Kelemen Mason, who is awaiting her execution. She is wearing tattered clothes; her face is thin and wrinkled. A Hungarian critic interprets the painting as follows:

> The blue sky the size of a hand above represents freedom that has gone forever. A slowly moving hand, completely impersonal: it is the inexorable approach of doom. And the woman experiencing her last moments in the solitude of death



Figure 15. Fragment of a bas-relief by Sándor Mikus on the wall of a primary school in Budapest.
Photo by Leszek Hensel, 2022

> sends a message to the free outside world: a white dove, a message of forgiveness, of love triumphing over death. A fascinating thought. (Pap, 1963)

In his wood carving, István Szalló from Csikszerda depicts a woman protesting against those who decide to wall her up in order to save the construction of a castle. Kelemen Mason's wife, fighting against twelve builders who are waiting for her sacrifice, seems to turn to the ultimate authority, God, for help.

God

In a patriarchal world, women have limited rights and, upon entering into marriage, they pass from the authority of their parents (or rather, mainly their father) to that of their husband. As Fromm states: "The person who has complete control over another living being makes this being into his thing, his property, while he becomes the other being's god. [...] Complete control over another human being means crippling him, choking him, thwarting him. Such control can have all forms and all degrees" (Fromm, 1973, p. 289). This interpretation is relevant for the phenomenon we are dealing with in the case of walling up women.

Consider György Buday's woodcut dedicated to ballad of Kelemen Mason's Wife[36]. It belongs to a group of works which, despite the title of the ballad, suggest that it is not a woman but a man who is the main character of the story. We can see oversized shapes and a large figure dominating the image. It is he – the

[36] Note that this print appears in proposals for schools to be used in lessons devoted to discussing the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* in Year 6 (Stark, 1978).

Great Builder, possessed by the idea of creating great, magnificent things that transcend the era. He is like a Great Visionary (Figure 16). In 1937, the artist received the Grand Prize at the World Exhibition in Paris for the series of woodcuts from which this work originates.



Figure 16. György Buday, *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* (1935).
Source: "Budai György fametszetei" (1935; Arcanum Újságok)

This woodcut is described by the eminent Hungarian ethnographer Gyula Ortutay as follows: "The head of Kelemen Mason, worried about his wife, rises from a small castle like a gigantic, writhing torment, far out of proportion to reality" (Ortutay, 1960). This monstrous figure resembles the figure of the Pensive Christ, known from Polish folk tradition, the son of God concerned about what is happening in the world. In Buday's depiction, Kelemen Mason is the ruling power of the world, the creator of the castle, but also the master of his wife's life and death. The woodcut refers to archetypal images of figures whose importance is emphasised by the size of their bodies, which far exceed the size of people of lesser importance. Kelemen Mason's wife, travelling to the castle in her four-horse carriage with a coachman, is almost invisible in Buday's image. She is travelling to fulfil her duty to her husband. In a moment, her body will be deconstructed and turned into valuable mortar.

Another representation is that of Kelemen Mason by Józsefina Orbán Fekete from Transylvania. It is a wooden sculpture; thus, it is made of a material that combines folk culture traditions with secular and ecclesiastical architecture. As art critic Sándor Fábian emphasises, what is striking in the artist's work is

"the monumental drama of Kelemen Mason towering over the viewer" (Fábián, 1969). This work "draws inspiration from the tradition of certain medieval winged altars to condense the ballad into a vivid story" (Nemlaha, 1969).

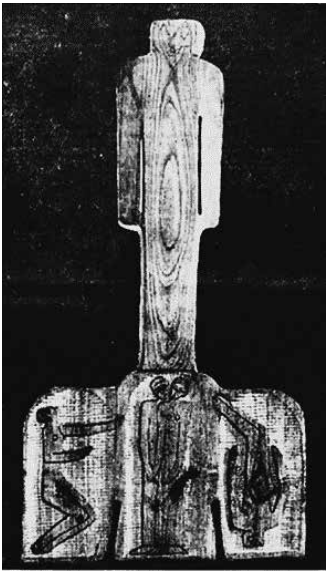


Figure 17. Sculpture by Józsefina Orbán Fekete, *Kelemen Mason*, 1968.
Source: Orbán Fekete (1968; Arcanum Újságok)

Three scenes from the woman's life are carved into reliefs (Figure 17). The first scene shows her idolatrous attitude towards her husband: she kneels with her eyes fixed on the man towering over her, her Lord. In the second scene, we see Kelemen Mason and his wife at the moment when the husband reveals his brutal sentence to her: they are united in suffering, which is vividly reflected on their faces. And finally, the third act of the woman's tragedy – the sacrifice has been made. The woman sinks into the foundations of the building under construction. I find it difficult to see the image that the Hungarian critic sees in this work. The doubt that has accompanied me almost since the moment I discovered the ballad returns: Whose tragedy does it tell? The woman's or the man's? I see here again the dominance of the male figure, whose greatness is built on the sacrifice of the woman. Despite the title of the work, *Kelemen Mason*, and despite his depiction in a form reminiscent of a cross, it is a woman who has been laid on the altar beneath this cross.

It is difficult not to find a religious interpretation in the works of Zoltán Bognár, who devotes four graphic works to the ballad *Kelemen Mason*. They show the successive stages of the drama. Particularly striking is the plate in which the artist summarises the entire ballad; it shows Kelemen Mason hold-

ing in his hands the payment for building the castle of Déva, which is also the payment for the death of his wife (Figure 18). The builder leans over her with a bowl full of "silver coins", payment for the sacrifice of the woman, who rests in an underground tomb and cradles her child in her womb. It is from their tomb that Déva Castle rises. Twelve masons watch everything like twelve apostles who do not really seem to understand the scene they are participating in. They only look on with horror, disbelief, and embarrassment, turning their heads away. Kelemen Mason is the central figure here. The whole action seems to revolve around him. He is the winner, but also the character most affected by fate in this entire drama. The woman appears to be watching him from her grave and asking if he really wanted what happened. The thick strokes of the burin in the linoleum seem to emphasise the drama of the scene recorded by the artist. The wolves, which in the ballad were supposed to prevent Kelemen Mason's wife from arriving at her place of execution, here attack Kelemen himself, who, kneeling in front of his lying wife and child, shows them the payment the bricklayers received.



Figure 18. Bognár Zoltán, *Kőmíves Kelemen balladája* [*The Ballad of Kelemen Mason*], 1975, linoleum on paper. Artist's own print 6/50, 37 × 42.5 cm. Source: Művészetek Háza Veszprém, Zoltán Kendi's collection

Zoltán Kendi takes a similar approach. In his painting dedicated to Kelemen Mason's wife, he places the woman in the centre; however, it is not Kelemen's wife who is walled up, but her husband. As he explains, this solution indicates that after the death of his wife, it is in fact her husband's soul that is walled up in the stone wall. He goes on to explain, "I imagine that with the death of his wife, the man suffers; he is spiritually broken because he had to sacrifice his life partner, the most precious woman in his life, in order to build the castle in

Déva. This idea can be further developed, and the woman can always be seen as the person responsible for the family, for happiness, for care, whose death is in fact a tragedy, a drama for her husband" (Dezsi, 1976).

A special group among the works devoted to this construct are those depicting the ritual burning of Kelemen Mason's wife, i.e., the decomposition and annihilation of her physicality. Interestingly, despite extensive research, I was only able to find works on this subject that were made using weaving techniques.

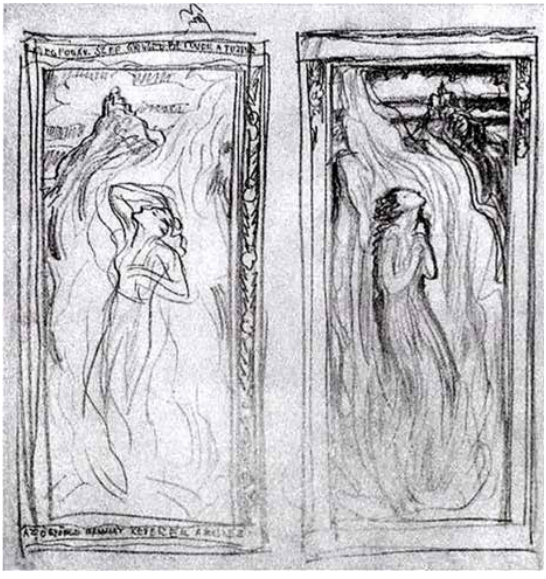


Figure 19. Sketches for Antal Diósy's tapestry *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*.
Source: Benkő (2009), p. 55

Around 1922, Antal Diósy created a tapestry dedicated to Kelemen Mason's wife (Figure 19). The artist's work can be followed in the preserved designs and photographs. He chose a very difficult fragment of the ballad, perhaps the most dramatic one, described in the words "We will gently grab her and throw her into the fire, mix her ashes with lime" (this text forms the upper and lower frame of the tapestry). Diósy quickly decides how the main elements of the scene will be composed: a woman consumed by fire, a castle on a hill. The main theme is the way in which the woman accepts the news that she is about to die so that the castle can be built. One design shows a female figure in a frenzy of despair (head raised, hands dramatically raised towards it), while another shows her seemingly resigned to her fate. All that remains for her is prayer. She stands with her hands folded. Ultimately, Diósy chose another depiction of the woman being consumed by fire. She has her hands folded on her chest and seems to be calmly awaiting her fate. This reflects the artist's vision well,

according to which the woman fulfils her marital duty by submitting to her husband's decision (Figure 20).



Figure 20. Antal Diósy's tapestry *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*.
Source: Benkő (2009), p. 55

Ilona Szabó from Transylvania often draws inspiration from folk songs and ballads for her tapestries. One of her most dramatic works is dedicated to the wife of Kelemen Mason. It shows the woman being carried by masons towards a large bonfire, where she will soon be burned (sinkovics, 1998).

Another such representation is Dezső Bandi's tapestry[37], which focuses on the last part of the ballad, first showing the woman riding to the construction site, then her death in a fire, the walling up, and the father revealing to his child that he can look for his mother under the castle wall. The woman's spirit is the mortar that, after the decomposition of her body, supports the castle tower, ensuring its durability.

Brick

The fascination with the theme of walling up seems to dominate Hungarian art inspired by the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife. These are very often figurative representations. They show the physicality of the woman, even though the

[37] See: https://archivum.helikon.ro/fotok/bandi-dezso-2/ (retrieved March 28, 2023).

ballads are dominated by a narrative that speaks of the heroine being walled up in a dehumanised form, reduced to a "miraculous mortar", a chemical compound. Despite this decomposition of the victim's body in folk ballads, works of art most often depict female figures inscribed in castle walls, as if built of stones, e.g., a mother with a child is built into the castle wall in Tünde Balog Jámborné's batik (Figure 21). She is pulled into its space by the claws of an unknown creature (the devil? murderous bricklayers?). The woman submits to this act passively. With her eyes closed, in sadness and concentration, she waits for what is to come.



Figure 21. Tünde Jámborné Balogh's batik *The wife of Kelemen Mason*.
Source: Halász (2016), p. 28

In paintings that emphasise the woman's bodily presence, artists portray her as a figure who exudes calmness and acceptance of her fate. This is the case, for example, in a book illustration for the folk ballads of the Csángós, a Hungarian ethnic group living in Moldova, among whom several versions of the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife have also been recorded (Faragó & Jagamas, 1954). It realistically depicts the scene of walling up, where Kelemen's wife calmly and, in a sense, understandingly submits to the bricklayers, who lay bricks row by row and gradually separate her from the world of the living. The scene reflects variants of ballads recorded among the Csángó people, who, unlike the Hungarian tradition of the ballad about a walled-up woman, portray her being walled up alive, as is the case in almost all variants known from other regions of the Balkans (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Csángó version of *The Walling Up of Kelemen Mason's Wife*. Source: *Moldvai csángó népdalok és népballadák*, (ed.) Faragó József i Jagamas János [Folksongs and Folkballads of the Moldavian Csángós. Selected and Edited by József Faragó, János Jagamas and Júlia Szegő.] (Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Bucureşti, Budapest, n.d.), p. 63



Figure 23. Bronze sculpture by Károly Kirchmayer titled *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*. Source: Catalogue from the exhibition in Békéscsaba in 1991 (Kovács, 1992, p. 39)

The image of Kelemen Mason's wife as a brick can be found in Hungarian poetry. It appears, among others, in Miklós Veress's poem *Requiem egy költő sírjánál* [Requiem at the poet's grave] in a collection published in 1979. In writing about Mason's wife, the poet wants to remove the stigma of dehumanisation from her. Her sacrifice is unnecessary: "You don't have to be a brick / to always be /Kelemen Mason's wife / no longer a necessary pain" (Veress, 1976). As the reviewer of the collection notes, "Instead of passive sacrifice, of being used as a brick, [there is] activity, a self-assured attitude, creation – the revolutionary

face that can be clearly shown" (V. G. Kiss, 1979). This is how Veress writes about the construction of the socialist system. In turn, Katalin Anita Szabó feels like a brick in her husband's wall in her poem *Nem tudom, mi végre…* [I don't know what, in the end…] (K. A. Szabó, 2010). Károly Kirchmayer's bronze sculpture also refers to this motif. Titled *Kőmives Kelemenné*, it depicts the wife of Kelemen Mason, who is not a foundation sacrifice for the castle in Déva, but is herself a structure built of bricks (Figure 23).

Construct

Some of the works present the woman as part of a sacrificial ritual, in which her body decomposes and becomes mortar. We see such a woman in the works of one of the leading representatives of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde, the neo-constructivist Pál Deim. In the 1980s, he became interested in, among other things, the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife, dedicating a series of paintings and graphic works to the heroine. According to the catalogue of Marianna Kolozsváry's works published in 1992, the first composition, titled *Kőmives Kelemenné* [The wife of Kelemen Mason], referring to the theme of the folk ballad, dates from 1980. The work, measuring 100 x 70 cm, on paper, in ink and tempera, is in the collection of the Historical Museum in Budapest. The more recent composition, *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, a panel painting, painted on woodblock in acrylic in 1981, is larger, 150x100 cm, and since its creation has been an essential part of Zsolt Pogány's private collection, which in the year of the work's creation was included in a collector's exhibition at the King Stephen Museum in Székesfehérvár. In the same year, two series of fifty small screen prints measuring 12x8.5 cm were created, followed by a 65x50 cm paper print dated 1983, which was shown at an exhibition of contemporary Hungarian graphic art at the Hungarian National Gallery in 1983. It was then exhibited at the National Fine Arts Exhibition in Műcsarnok in 1984, before being included in the modern collection of the Szombathely Gallery in 1985. In 1983, another series of screen prints was created, inspired by the theme of Kőműves Kelemenné: this time, forty copies of the heroine of the ballad, endowed with extended meanings, were published in a 74.5x53 cm format (Wehner, 2012, p. 59).

In these works, Deim presents a humanoid doll pressed into a stone wall (Figure 24). The doll and the wall form a kind of cross, to which the author of the composition returns repeatedly throughout the 1980s, playing with the colours and texture of the wall, sometimes enriching the message with more dolls, but always with the human form cutting perpendicularly across the wall at about two-thirds of its height. In his variations on the theme of Kelemen Mason's wife, the artist not only depicts the situation of a walled-up person but also performs their Christ-like sacralisation. The viewer is constantly confronted with the form of the cross in the basic outline of the painting. A Hungarian art critic at the beginning of the 21st century writes:

> The doll in the portrayal of Kelemen Mason's wife evokes associations with a dead woman lying on the ground. The artist does not seek the origins of the dramatic situation, does not project the antecedence of the tragedy, does not attempt to resolve the conflict. Pál Deim's work neither seeks nor provides an answer to the dramatic question of whether it is right to kill a human being, or whether a human being is worth as much as a work of art for eternity. It records the very fact of sacrifice in an evocative vision of the years between 1980 and 1983. (Wehner, 2012, p. 60)

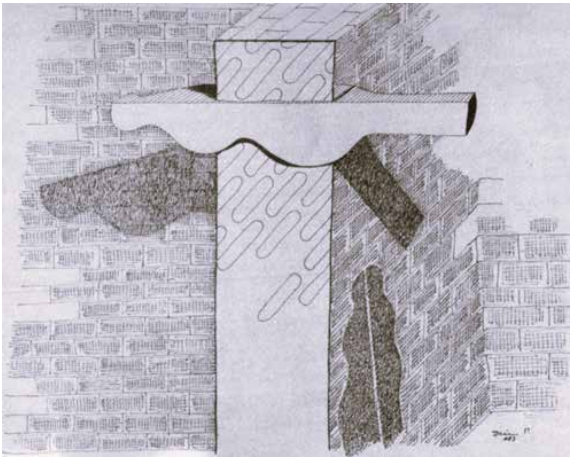


Figure 24. Pál Deim's work *The Kelemen Mason's Wife* (1983).
Source: "Mai magyar grafika" (1983, p. 14)

The artist succinctly emphasises what is most important in the sacrifice of the walled-up woman: "the wall and Kelemen Mason's wife, i.e., the inanimate and the living, the construction and the price of construction, the dramatic moment: the dilemma of human sacrifice determined by irreversibility, now sealed by action" (Wehner, 2012, pp. 58–59).

As in literary texts, Hungarian art also features works in which Kelemen Mason, rather than his wife, is walled up. An example of this is Péter Balogh's sculpture from the 1980s, *Új Kőmives Kelemen* [New Kelemen Mason], in which the woman actually does not appear (Figure 25). The drama concerns the husband; it is he who walls up and is walled up. Hungarian art critic Sándor Huszár, analysing Balogh's work, states:

> The artist brought an ancient legend closer to the present day. Because we still have to embed life in walls, in buildings, in works of art. We cannot do otherwise. Otherwise, there will be no permanence. Otherwise, everything will fall apart into its basic elements and become soulless. […] So what is Péter Balogh saying? He is simply saying things that are understandable; for example, that Kelemen Mason still exists. (Huszár, 1984)

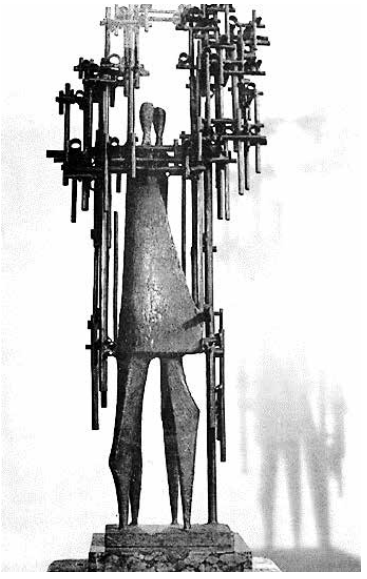


Figure 25. Péter Balogh, *New Kelemen Mason*.
Source: Huszár (1984)

Anikó Szöllősy, a sculptor working in metal and wood, dedicates one of her wooden sculptures to Kelemen Mason (Figure 26). The 30-centimetre-high, strictly formal composition conveys a very succinct yet emotionally charged message. The spouses are one. Each has their own world in which they live, yet they complement each other. The woman's world is marked by reliefs in the sculpture. There are signs of a circle, symbolising time, human life, or existence in general. The second part of the composition is a pure construction. It symbolises the Great Architect, who is implementing his project: Kelemen Mason, absorbed in his work, but it lacks full value – it is incomplete. It can only achieve perfection with the help of a woman. The gap between the two blocks of wood must be filled by a woman ready to sacrifice herself. Her metaphor is a construct which, like the doll from Deim's work, is to fill the empty space and give it perfection.

In turn, András Buzás, a Transylvanian, showed his painting of Kelemen Mason's wife in 1978 (Figure 27). The woman occupies a central place, but she is assigned the same position as her son and the twelve bricklayers. They all fill the gaps in the wall; they are all its elements. "The figure of the woman is painted in a uniform shade of green, the figure of the child is painted in a uniform shade of red, and the figural background of twelve stone faces is integrated into the composition in the form of a wall. The painting is one of the most beautiful variations on the theme: the state after being walled up, mother and child together after death", says a journalist from the newspaper Utunk (Banner,

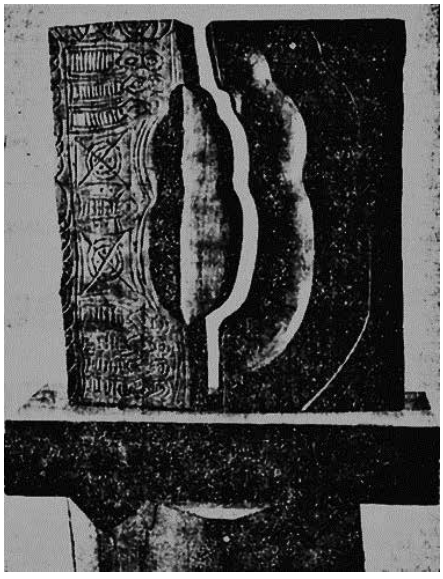


Figure 26. Wooden sculpture by Szöllősi Enikő, titled *Kelemen Mason*.
Source: A. Szöllősi (1972)

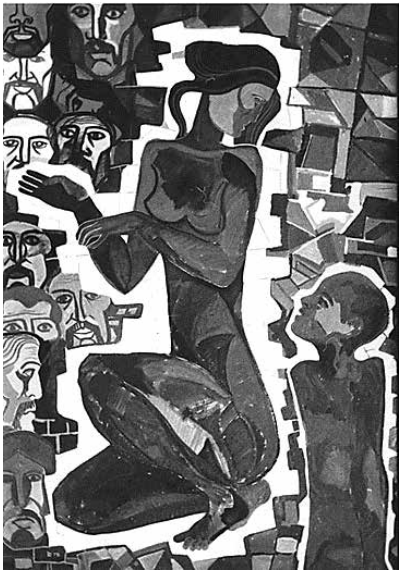


Figure 27. András Buzás's painting *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*.
Source: *Helikon*, *1990* (33), p. 12

1985). The green colour that distinguishes the woman should be emphasised, as if the artist were saying that she alone is an element of nature. The others are craftsmen locked in their work.

Work Ethos

Another Transylvanian artist, Eszter Gyovai, also created *Kelemen Mason* in wood. Her work shows the famous master builder at work (Figure 28). He is measuring a wall and supervising the construction, where one of the builders is busy carrying bricks. Perhaps this is the moment when Kelemen Mason is measuring the space to "conveniently" wall up his wife, while the other worker is gathering materials so that the whole operation can proceed quickly and efficiently. Kelemen's wife is nowhere to be seen yet. Perhaps she is saying goodbye to her friends and her son. The sculpture exudes an atmosphere of anticipation and calm, although at the same time everyone has pensive, sad faces.



Figure 28. Eszter Gyovai, *Kőmives Kelemen*, n.d.
Source: Budapest, *1971*(11), p. 12 (Arcanum Újságok)

Jenő Szervatiusz, a Transylvanian who preferred working with wood, dedicated several sculptures to Kelemen Mason's wife. His 1973 work titled *Kőmives Kelemen balladája* [The ballad of Kelemen Mason] shows a woman walled up in the foundations of a castle under construction (Figure 29). Above her are five bricklayers who, presumably, carried out the walling up, still resting, but work

is already going on around them. The act of sacrifice has been performed, and now the construction should proceed without any problems; the builders seem to be convinced, although they feel remorse for their deed.



Figure 29. Jenő Szervátiusz, a fragment of the sculpture *Kőmíves Kelemenné balladája* (1973).
Source: b.b.b. (1993)

Icon

In the prints by Győző Somogyi from the 1970s, the figures resemble icons:

> […] they stand or sit like poor people in front of a travelling photographer – stiffly and solemnly – mostly in a state of poverty that is inherited as original sin. Over several generations, this poverty distorts the silhouette and posture, making the forehead narrow, the chin sharp, and the ears large. Only the eyes remain unaffected. They stay clear, even when looking at us from a deformed face. (Megay, 1989)

The works devoted to Kelemen Mason and his wife are no different from the others. In one of them, the builders are typical workers, wearing berets on their heads. They pose for a photo with a bottle and a cigarette. It seems that life passes them by. Behind this banal image lies the drama of everyday life: one of the men is beating a woman, another woman is screaming desperately in the distance. However, the figures in the foreground do not see this; they stand

emotionless, staring at the lens of an invisible camera. Here, Kelemen Mason is the most important character. Dressed in a workman's outfit characteristic of the mid-20th century, with a bottle of palinka in his hand, he is preoccupied with men's problems.

The image depicted in Somogyi's graphics appears on Hungarian stages in subsequent performances of the rock opera titled *Kelemen Mason*. For example, in the Pécs theatre production, directed by Viktor Nagy, palinka flows freely, and the workers walk around in characteristic work jackets.

In the illustration dedicated to Kelemen Mason's wife, we again see a group of people scattered in various places as if for another photograph. In the background, on a hill, stands a castle. Below, there is a characteristic church and rural houses from Hollókő, with women in folk costumes. The life of Kelemen Mason's wife is that of a rural woman who goes to church, raises children and meets with her female friends. She is responsible for household duties, while the man goes about his business. In this image, there is no physical walling up, but there is walling up in the structure of social duty, determined by the values of a patriarchal society. Although the castle has long been in ruins, life continues to follow its deeply entrenched path.

Mátyus Erzsébet, a representative of the naive art movement from Kisbéd, in a work published in *Ifjúmunkás* ("Kőmives Kelemen", 1974), depicts Kelemen Mason's walled-up wife as a figure on a stone altar, in front of whom stands her husband with his head bowed and his hands folded in prayer. Next to him stands their son, calling out to his mother. József Szilva, a Hungarian artist living in Slovakia, looks at Kelemen Mason's wife from a different perspective. Her large figure, with a typical rural headscarf, dominates over the bricklayers. It is in her – resembling a huge moon above their heads – that they are walled up (Figure 30).

Among almost a hundred works by Hungarian authors I found which drew inspiration from the topos of the walled-up woman, the works of artists associated with Transylvania dominate. These artists use various techniques and materials to tackle the subject. Their works, exhibited at prestigious exhibitions in the largest Hungarian galleries in the capital and in centres outside Budapest, have entered the national bloodstream of Hungarian culture. Their heroine – Kelemen Mason's wife – has entered this bloodstream mainly as an object: no longer as a human being, but as a structural element. As can be seen from the above overview, few Hungarian artists have taken an interest in the world of Kelemen Mason's wife (such as the graphic artist Somogyi), or in the question of whether her sacrificial death was necessary. Most of them focus on the non-negotiable duty of women. Her female body has value as a building material, and only rarely is her sacrifice seen as comparable to that of God himself (as we find, for example, in Deim's work).

The presented works deal with the artistic tension between text and visual image, which Walter Benjamin compared to "travelling between visual and literary studies" (after Bal, 2002, pp. 57–58). The woman in the artistic works

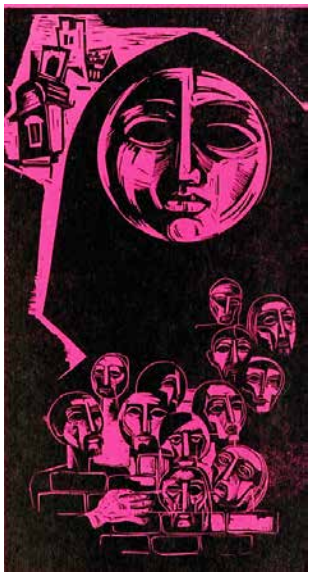


Figure 30. József Szilva, *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*.
Source: Szilva (1980)

dedicated to Kelemen Mason's wife is a metaphor for loneliness: a space of unhappiness and pain, of betrayal. She succumbed to male violence, did what she had to do, but lives on, still seemingly in disbelief at what happened. Living in a community, masons are also lonely. There are no signs of success in the world, no joy at overcoming obstacles or in the tasks completed by the builders, for which the performers await their well-deserved reward – "half a pail of silver, half a pail of gold." Sometimes, just behind a layer of bricks, not far away but not in direct contact, there is an orphaned child.

In some works, Kelemen Mason's wife is dehumanised; she still has a human form, but she is no longer actually human. As the ballad describing the process of her passing away would have it, her body decomposes. From a beautiful young girl, she transforms into a post-human being. Especially in sculptures, we can see how the "bond and sense of solidarity" with the human world is being severed and how she is "becoming part of the natural world" (Domańska, 2017, p. 202). Such a bodiless woman symbolically persists in Hungarian culture. As Roman Ingarden states in *Studies in Aesthetics*:

> […] the appearance of a specific thing, reconstructed in an image, is unique and, at the same time, if one may say so, solidified, immobilised. In contrast, in both pure literary works and theatrical (or film) performances, there is usually a whole multitude of appearances of the same object. These appearances are fluid, merging into one another, and often of different kinds. Therefore, in terms of the temporality of the objects depicted in it, a painting is, by its very nature,

> a momentary creation in which objects are always depicted at a specific moment of their presumed existence, if a moment in time is revealed in the painting at all. (Ingarden, 1966; as cited in Dylewska, 2018).

Horror Written in Musical Notes

The ballad about Kelemen Mason was introduced into Hungarian musical literature at the beginning of the 20th century by such great names as Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók. Both first encountered original folk variants of the ballad. They travelled around villages and recorded them, also with the help of phonographs. They then published them in scientific journals and drew inspiration from them for their own musical compositions. The piece entered the national musical literature. In addition to short forms, it also became an inspiration for heterogeneous works such as opera, oratorio, ballet and musical, in which, as Schopenhauer said, "music provides the very core that precedes all form, that is, the heart of things" (Schopenhauer, 1994, p. 406; cf. Guczalski, 2005–2006, p. 171).

Musical literature inspired by the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* maintains formal consistency with literary works. In both cases, the starting point is monologue-structured works, i.e., a ballad with its own narrative text and a musical sphere that forms the framework for the narrative. In compositions such as oratorios, ballets and operas, the music is based on a libretto, so the structure of the work transitions to a narrative based on dialogue. "A monologue is a one-sided way of conveying events: a narrative account of objective, external (epic) or subjective (lyrical) events" (Walczak, 2014, p. 98). The transition to dialogue as a verbal means of communication is necessary for a "verbal duel of characters" to take place (Walczak, 2014, p. 98).

Let us take a look at this "duel" using three works as examples: Ernő von Dohnányi's opera *A vajda tornya* [The voivode's tower] (Dohnányi, 1922), Zoltán Simon's ballet *Kőmíves Kelemen* (1974), choreographed by Ferenc Novák, and the musical *Kőmives Kelemen* (1981) by Levente Szörényi and János Bródy, based on a libretto by Csaba Ivánka (using excerpts from the play of the same title by Imre Sarkadi).

The Voivode's Tower (1922)

The history of *The Voivode's Tower*[38] dates back to 1913, when the authors of the libretto, Hans Heinz Ewers from Germany and Marc Henry from France, working in Albania, came across a ballad about the construction of a castle in Shkodër (Kugel, 1992, p. 179). They were so fascinated by this story that they

[38] The libretto: Dohnányi (1922).

wrote the libretto based on it[39] and asked Ernő von Dohnányi, who was then lecturing in Berlin, to compose the music for it. It is worth noting that Giacomo Puccini had previously rejected this proposal. The Hungarian composer quickly agreed but also realised that the Albanian ballad had a variant known in Hungary. This prompted him to begin work on "Magyarising" the text[40]. The result was an opera conceived by the author as a national epic, which, as Hungarian researcher Ákos Windhager points out, constitutes a conscious and modern continuation of the style tradition of the era of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss (Windhager, 2017, p. 97). As in the plays by Kárpáti and Vajda, the action takes place in the Székely setting in the 11th century, when the threat from the Pechenegs is growing. The construction of a defensive tower is underway, but it drags on indefinitely because whatever is built immediately turns to ruin. Finally, the Mountain God, Nemere, tells the builders that the structure will only become durable when the first woman to appear on the bridge leading to the tower is walled up inside it. The voivode, who is supervising the construction, agrees to make such a sacrifice but orders all the men working on the construction to keep this decision secret, under threat of a curse.

At the centre of the libretto are two female characters: Etele, a Hungarian woman married to Kund, the eldest son of the Voivode who rules the Székely community, and Iva, a girl from the Székely people, wife of the younger son, Tarjan. These two women symbolise two different characters. They are united by one thing: their love for Tarjan. Iva is the type of woman idealised by the Romantics: beautiful, kind, sensitive and affectionate. A loving mother and faithful wife, she is ready to support her husband at every moment of his life, including, in accordance with ancient customs, on the battlefield. Etele is her complete opposite. She is a calculating woman, her relationship with Kund is purely business, intended to help her achieve her main goal of gaining power

[39] The first version of the libretto was titled *Turm von Kroja* [The tower of Kruja] and referred to the former capital of Albania, a sacred place associated with the national hero, Skanderbeg. According to Ewers, this is also where the variant of the ballad that inspired the libretto's creators originated. There is a very competent article on the history of the opera's creation by Tünde Katolatszegi-Linnemann (Kalotaszegi-Linnemann, 2004, pp. 57–98). It is worth noting that the opera libretto also appeared under other titles, e.g., when writing about the opera in production in Hungary in 1919, the title *Zengő torony* [The playing tower] was used (Ródnai, 1919). In turn, as noted by the German Digital Library, where Ewers's work on the opera libretto is stored, it was also known under the titles *Der Turm von Kroja* [The tower of Kruja]; *Der Turm des Wojwoden* [The tower of the voivode]; *Die Burg des Woiwoden* [The castle of the voivode] *or Ivas Turm* [Iva's tower] (https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/E3B5D4M23YUYBHNZKP2MGKINVDH3BULC).

[40] The success of this "Magyarisation" was reported by *Pester Lloyd*, which published an excerpt from a review in the British newspaper *The Times* after the opera's premiere. The review emphasised that the plot was based on a Székely motif "full of a peculiar mysticism". The opera was described as a "dramatic masterpiece" with great power, "even if it seems a little brutal here and there" ("Die Times über den Turm des Woiwoden", 1922).

over the entire Székely people. She is the classic embodiment of the *femme fatale* of the early 20th century; she is like Herodias and her daughter Salome at the same time[41]. It can be said, following Nick Owen, that, like them, the heroine of Dohnányi's opera libretto is portrayed as a woman who, thanks to her beauty and sensuality, gains power over Kund. She is able to awaken desire in him and change the course of history (Owen, 2016, p. 25). When she manages to extract from her husband the information that the first woman to appear on the bridge leading to the tower will die, she sends Iva – who wants to beg her father-in-law to let her fight alongside her beloved man in the upcoming battle with the Pechenegs – there to her death.

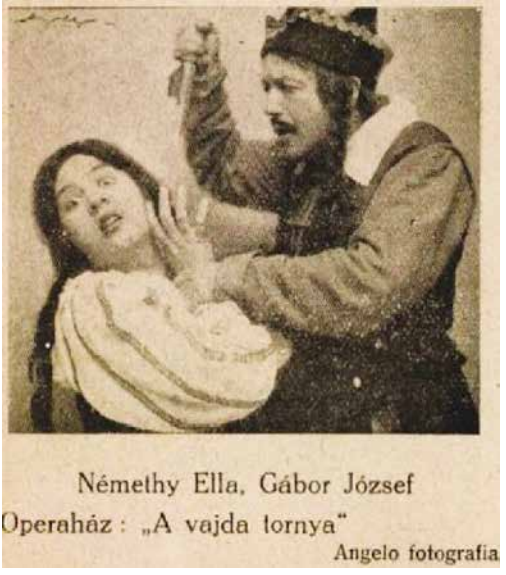


Figure 31. Scene from the opera Vajda tornya (The Voivode's Tower) by E. Dohnányi. Photo Angelo (Funk Pál).
Source: *Színházi Élet*, 1922, no. 13, p. 14 (Arcanum Újságok)

Iva is walled up, but the curse hanging over the Székelys is not completely lifted. Although they manage to finish the tower, they lose the battle with the Pechenegs. Kund also dies in the battle. Even though the tower stands, the people seeking shelter in it are in danger of dying of thirst. Due to the drought, there is no water. As it turns out, one more sacrifice will be needed. It will be Etele, killed by Tarjan when it comes to light that she knew about the curse of the Mountain God and sent his beloved wife to certain death. At the moment of

[41] Oscar Wilde's *Salome* was translated into Hungarian by Gyula Szini in 1903 (Wilde, 1903a, 1903b, 1903c) and premiered in Budapest in 1912 in a version translated by Árpád Pásztor (Kálmán, 1912).

her death, a life-giving spring gushes from the tower. Soon, news arrives that Hungarian troops are rushing to the aid of the Székelys.

In *The Voivode's Tower* there are thus two victims. The first is the result of a plot hatched by Etele; the second is her punishment for breaking ethical norms. Windhager draws attention to Dohnányi's interesting treatment of the theme of Ivy and her sacrifice in the opera score, emphasising that the two themes were composed as opposites.

> While the theme of Ivy evokes images of a long bridge descending downwards, the motif of sacrifice conjures up the image of a bridge rising upwards, supported by a pillar. Although Hungarian literature draws attention to the significance of the bridge motif, especially in the interpretation of Bartók's works, it is in this opera that it carries central symbolism. In addition to the aforementioned images of leitmotifs, the bridge plays a key role in the symbolism of the story. (Windhager, 2017, p. 94)

When writing about Ivy's sacrifice, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the ritual of walling her up, as depicted in the opera. The act is performed by Orbók himself, as the one responsible for the fate of the community he rules. While walling up his daughter-in-law, he experiences doubts and wants to give in to the girl's pleas for release. Ultimately, however, when the voivode explains that it was the Mountain God who demanded the sacrifice of the first woman to cross the bridge, and that otherwise the entire country would be lost, Iva resigns herself to her fate and encourages her father-in-law to continue his work. From that moment on, she forgets about herself and focuses her thoughts on her loved ones. She asks for two holes to be left in the wall of her stone prison through which she can breastfeed her child one last time. She also asks for these holes to be left at eye level so that she can see the path her Tarjan has taken. Finally, she asks for two slits to be made through which her tears can flow. As noted in the stage directions: at this point, Voivode Orbók places a large stone so that Iva is completely walled up, and he chisels only two slits into the wall. At the end of the ritual, the woman bids farewell to her tormentor, wishing him God's blessing. It is worth remembering that the form of sacrifice that appears in the opera, i.e., the walling up of a living woman, is very rare in Hungarian variants of the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife[42]. It is therefore possible that the walling-up procedure depicted in the opera is a remnant of one of the first versions of the work, which was based on the Albanian variant of the ballad and was retained during the process of its Magyarisation.

After World War II, four more oratorio-opera compositions devoted to the theme of the walled-up woman were created: by Mihály Horváth (1946), Rezső Sugár (1958), György Orbán (1962) and Sándor Szakolay (1972). Although

[42] As early as 1959, Lajos Vargyas argued that the dominant variant in Hungarian ballads is the form of murdering a woman, then burning her and mixing her ashes with mortar (Vargyas, 1959, p. 4). However, he suggested that the form of walling up a living victim may have been earlier than the version involving murdering her first (Vargyas, 1959, p. 45).

interesting from a musical point of view, they do not contribute much to the interpretation of the topos. Here, we can refer to the composer and conductor György Orbán, who in an interview in 1962 recalls his work on the oratorio Kőmíves Kelemen, which was his diploma thesis. In his composition, he focused on the character of Kelemen Mason (tenor), considering the plot of the father's return home after completing the construction and meeting his son to be of little importance (Simon, 1973). It seems that more important than the assessment of this early work by a well-known composer is his general reflection on the functioning of the ballad theme in Hungarian musical culture: "I realise that the choice of theme is not original, as almost every year we can find new works based on the ballad *Kelemen Mason*, and I am convinced that, in principle, all of them revolve around the need for sacrifice and the tragedy of victimhood" (Simon, 1973).

When writing about compositions based on the ballad that interests us here, it is worth mentioning the oratorio that Rezső Kókai had been working on since 1945. He returned to the subject several times, but ultimately, in 1947, his only composition was a song depicting the work of the bricklayers. According to the composer's notes (Kókai, n.d.), the reason for abandoning the work was the inability to find a rational explanation as to why the price of construction was the death of Kelemen's wife.

Ballet

Ballet is another type of theatrical performance that combines music with literary text. As Paulina Trzewikowska-Knieć emphasises, it is only successful when it draws on a certain idea from a literary work, which it then creatively develops in accordance with the requirements of ballet. Whether it will stand the test of time despite changing audience tastes, staging changes, and choreographic approaches depends on whether its dramatic form is well constructed (Trzewikowska-Knieć, 2010, p. 95). These criteria are certainly met by the ballet *Kőmives Kelemen*, staged in 1974 by Ferenc Novák (see Szántó, 2016), created for the Bihari 60 ensemble he founded. Composer Zoltán Simon translated the story of Kelemen Mason and his wife into musical language. He treated the melody line of the folk ballad quite liberally. Novák superimposed his choreographic code onto this musical code. The result was a vision that became a permanent part of Hungarian ballet classics. The ten-minute dance story is still performed today at various ballet evenings in Hungary[43].

The choreographer, who holds a degree in ethnography, defines his *credo* on the place of folklore in ballet as follows:

> […] we should not imitate peasant culture, but use elements of folklore to create works, as is done in contemporary film, visual arts, literature and music. This does

[43] For instance, Hagyományok Háza és a Nemzeti Táncszínház in 2016.

> not mean that I do not respect those who reproduce folklore, these treasures of dance, which are needed as a database – as achievements of the native language. But those who are choreographers or theatre directors should also have something contemporary to say. We wanted to create theatre, but our native language was not classical ballet or jazz ballet, but folk dance. (Jávorszky, 2001)

In accordance with the rules for constructing a libretto for this type of stage work, the ballet's plot is simplified and devoid of details (Reglińska-Jemioł, 2020, pp. 315–316), focusing on the construction of the castle. It tells the story of successive attempts at construction, the collapse of the walls and the walling up of Kelemen Mason's wife, which gives hope for a successful completion of the work. In the ballet, Kelemen Mason's crew is represented by five dancers. The story begins when the structure collapses once again and the bricklayers lie on the stage as if personifying the crumbling walls. Kelmen Mason is the first to recover, and he picks himself up and encourages the others to work. Their joint effort is symbolised by dance. Grabbing each other by the shoulders, the men form a circle that spins faster and faster, in time with the intensifying rhythm of the music, until suddenly there is silence. The bricklayers freeze, then break apart and fall to the ground, just as the castle wall collapses. Four times the builders gather to work, and four times their work is ruined. Then Kelmen's wife appears, trying to give strength to the workers and lift their spirits. She dances with her husband, expressing her desire to help. However, he is already bound by an oath with the other bricklayers: the woman must be sacrificed for the building to last. The woman is walled up; carried by the dancers, she is absorbed into the cold wall. At first, her husband cannot come to terms with the loss of his beloved, but his desire to finish the building he started prevails in the end. The dancers unite in their work. Their bodies spin faster and faster, and nothing interrupts their work until finally, the dancers – the working masons – are swallowed up by the darkness falling over the stage. As István Eörsi notes, dance enriches the ballad with a special feature in this micro-drama because it is living people who symbolise the crumbling walls (Eörsi, 1977). The dance recreates the building of a community and its collapse, and finally, through the sacrifice of a woman (presented as her husband's tragedy), the community is rebuilt and united in work.

It is worth recalling here the reflection of a reviewer of *Népművelés*, who draws attention to the dance formula used by Ferenc Novák in his choreography to tell the story of the bricklayers. This is the *kolo* dance, known from Balkan folk tradition, which may suggest Novák's reference to the roots of the ballad about the walled-up woman (Bőjte, 1975).

Musical

A new chapter in the musical career of the topos of the walled-up woman is opened by the musical *Kőmives Kelemen* by composer Levente Szörényi and

poet and bard János Bródy (Szörényi & Bródy, n.d.). Recalling the birth of this work, Szörényi points out that when the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* appeared in the United States, he and his colleagues began to consider presenting a Hungarian hero in a similar form. Several candidates emerged, and finally, after ten years of silence and anticipation, *Kelemen Mason* (Kunszabó, 1991, p. 37) was created in 1981.

Since its premiere, the musical, which in Hungary is mainly referred to as a rock opera or rock ballad, has maintained a presence in Hungarian culture, being regularly performed on almost all theatre stages in the country and abroad, particularly in Hungarian diaspora communities, and appearing on television programmes, radio programmes, and on the most popular websites, including YouTube. The songs from the musical have taken on a life of their own, both as musical compositions and as poetic texts.

The theme of the musical places it among horror stories, as suggested by the author of the poster for the 2012 performance in Márasvásárhely (Transylvania), which depicts the face of the main character modelled on the image of Dracula that has been encoded in world culture.

When analysing the musical version of the story about Kelemen Mason's wife, it is worth referring to the study by Tomasz Żaglewski, who states that there are virtually no musical productions that manage to maintain a balance between horror and entertainment. Musicals introduce us to a more pleasant world, far removed from simple escapism, and are set in areas closer to the cathartic concepts of horror stories, removing negative feelings from the audience's field of vision. As a result, there is a kind of power struggle, in which the musical convention usually prevails. In this way, the atmosphere of horror is broken (Żaglewski, 2013, p. 151). This is precisely the situation we encounter in the musical *Kelemen Mason*, which has led to suggestions that children in school should learn the ballad not in its original version, but in its musical version (e.g., in the singing lesson curriculum for seventh grade recommended by the Hungarian Ministry of Education; Rápli & Szabó, 2003, p. 3).

The musical is heavily based on excerpts from Imre Sarkadi's play, published in the early 1970s. As in the play and in Dohnányi's opera, there are two female protagonists. One is only known through the text of a legend told in a song as an evil mother who, having left her children in the forest years ago and exposed them to the wolves, brings a curse upon the area where the castle is to be built. She personifies evil, for which someone must pay in order for the world to regain its ethical balance. Kelemen Mason undertook the construction of the castle, and it is his wife, as a symmetrical sacrifice, who must pay for the evil committed by the other woman[44].

However, the authors of the musical devote little space to the two women who are key to the development of the plot, limiting their story to three songs.

[44] For a psychological explanation of crimes committed by women, see Brzezińska & Habzda-Siwek (2021), pp. 36–42.

The dominant theme is the ethical dilemmas faced by Kelemen Mason and his crew concerning the planned crime and their desire to complete a work that will bring them fame and fair payment. It is worth noting the connection between the fate of Kelemen Mason's wife and the evil woman in the musical layer. A common melodic line is woven into both the ballad about the mother who abandoned her children and the two songs about the Mason's wife (Kelemen's dream and a love song in the form of a dialogue between the spouses).

By analogy with the Polish scholar's interpretation of the relationship between horror and musical in Tim Burton's film *Sweeney Todd*, it can be said that the musical *Kelemen Mason* also employs an additional factor that binds the components of both genres: the skillful arrangement of the vocal numbers and the construction of the characters, ensuring that the musical parts naturally transition between individual songs and dialogues in the form of pseudo-songs (Żaglewski 2013, p. 153). This technique is used to construct the conversation between Kelemen Mason and his wife that is of interest to us here: it leads to a particular deconstruction of the element that arouses fear.

Writing about the role of music in musical theatre, Krzysztof Guczalski points out that the sounds themselves do not convey any emotions. Emotions are created by the context in which they appear (Guczalski, 1999, pp. 16–17). When listening to the music alone in the part of the musical concerning the murder of Kelemen Mason's wife, it provokes deep emotions.

In a musical dialogue with her husband, the woman reveals that she does not understand why he greets her coldly, so she blames it all on the hardships of construction and declares her willingness to help him. When Kelemen tries to tell her about the oath taken by the bricklayers, she encourages him to hug her, believing that this will help them both overcome their problems and forget about the world. But the love scene turns into a scene of great tragedy, as the dialogue between the lovers is also their farewell. The other bricklayers separate the lovers. The mood is set by the music alone. Against the backdrop of a disjointed, shapeless narrative, a sharp lead guitar solo stands out. It is like the last cries of pain uttered by a woman who is already being walled up. Then there is a sudden silence. The lights go out, and the song of the masons begins to resound in the darkness, communicating that they have returned to work. The viewer only learns what happened to Kelemen Mason's wife from the song that ends the musical, which reveals the ritual of sacrifice with striking brutality. The lyrics that carry across the stage are a modernised version of the ballad about Kelemen Mason and his wife. The ritual of sacrifice is a record of a brutal murder: the woman's throat was cut, her body burned, and her ashes mixed with mortar. Kelemen curses his work so that the sun's rays will never fall on the castle[45].

[45] I discuss the musical based on the libretto of the musical staged by László Vándorfi in 2019 by Pannon Várszináz in Veszprém (in the collection of Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet [the National Theatre History Museum and Institute] in Budapest).

The *Kelemen Mason* musical consists of lyrics, music, but also ballet, and here we encounter an interesting feature. The choreographer of the first versions of the performance was the aforementioned Ferenc Novák. He transferred to these performances a solution he had developed in his earlier ballets, i.e., building the artists' movements around the circumference of a circle. This is emphasised by the music, which refers to folk melodies with Balkan elements.

It is also worth noting the scenographic solutions of the theatrical versions of the musical, in which the construction of the castle plays a special role. An analysis of the available photographic and video materials leads to the conclusion that the vast majority of performances referred to the aesthetics of Poor Theatre, characteristic, for example, of the *25. Szinház Theatre*, which in the 1970s successfully staged, among others, László Gyurkó's play *Kelemen Mason*. The scenographic solutions developed at that time return in rock opera productions, in which no realistic elements or objects refer to the shape of bricks or stone blocks, but wooden poles and sticks are used to emphasise the conventionality of the story being presented, functioning like quotation marks enclosing the tale of the walled-up woman[46].

In this situation, the ethical problem related to the purpose of sacrifice comes to the fore. Yes, with the suppression of the entire ritual of sacrifice and the emphasis on the literalness of killing, death becomes a conventional category. We are approaching a situation already familiar from literature, where being walled up often means confinement within four walls, treated as something temporary. We are moving into a situation from a computer game, where each character has more than one life. Even a story as drastic as Kelemen Mason's song about murdering a woman and cursing a castle becomes unreal. We encounter the sacrifice as a symbol of a truth that is as universal as it is abstract: that the achievement of important goals requires sacrifice, and we should all be prepared to do this.

This tendency is well confirmed by the promotional material for the performance at the Pannon Szinház theatre in Veszprém (2019), in which the director of the performance, László Vándorfi, and the actor playing Kelemen Mason, András Koscsisák, speak. Both omit the issue of sacrificing the woman (the director talks about walling up a "person"), focusing on work ethos and the price paid for seemingly impeccable behaviour (see Pannon Várszínház, 2019). It is therefore worth recalling here the words of Polish writer Tadeusz Konwicki, who reveals the perverse transgressions in question:

> Sin has taken on the guise of virtue. The imponderables of morality have faded, and from beneath their outline have emerged […] the imponderables of amorality […]. Evil has become part of our ethical codes and has become good. A fatal, cancerous good. (Konwicki, 2001, pp. 170–171)

[46] According to László Vándorfi, director of the play performed at Pannon Varszínház in 2019, his play is constructed from bodies and a few objects (Pannon Várszínház, 2019).



Figure 32. Rock opera *Kőmives Kelemen*, dir. Viktor Nagy (2021).
Source: Pécsi Nemzeti Színház. Photo by Mihály László

It is interesting that at the end of the 19th century, a Hungarian folklorist, analysing the ballad, concluded that the driving force behind the bricklayers' actions was their dream of treasure, of the promised payment in silver and gold (Sarudy, 1899). Similarly, in the musical, a peculiar understanding of the economics of production prevails, which remains an ethical burden weighing on both Kelemen Mason and his entire crew. It is also a question addressed to Hungarian society about the limits of its conformism.

The Educational Dimension of the Topos of the Walled-Up Woman

Literary texts and works of art are only alive when we find traces of their presence in the life of a given community. They penetrate national culture with particular force when they are included in school curricula. In this part of my reflections, the material basis will be provided by state documents such as school textbooks and curricula. I will also refer to information booklets describing school life, memories from school days, and, finally, press materials recording the activities of children and young people in the community and beyond the school walls.

The obligation to publish these information booklets was introduced in 1875 (Iskolai értesítők az 1874/5-iki iskolai évről, 1875, pp. 577–581)[47]. This was

[47] I refer here to the *Annual Reports*, aware of their various shortcomings. As early as 1876, an anonymous critic of the programmes implemented by Hungarian secondary schools wrote the following about the programme publications in the Information Guides: "Here, the general nature of the programme proposals is copying and a lack of independence. What topics are chosen! It's unbelievable! And with such ignorance! If only I knew which monographs or specialist works could be used to develop a given topic

followed by the Ministry of Religion and Education of the Kingdom of Hungary taking up the issue of standardising school textbooks. In its official publication, the magazine *Magyar Tanügy*, it published reviews of newly introduced textbooks and analysed the functioning of the entire school system in Hungary.

Published in 1863 by János Kriza, *The Ballad of the Wife of Kelemen Mason* was included in the Hungarian school curriculum after about thirty years. However, it had been on the radar of Hungarian teachers long before that and was even discussed during lessons, as confirmed, among other things, by my analysis of annual school activity reports. It is worth noting that the subject of the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* first appeared in Hungarian schools in 1874 in an article by a teacher at the Catholic Gymnasium in Besztercebánya (now Banská Bystrica, Slovakia) on verbs expressing suffering (Katolikus Állami Főgimnázium, 1874, pp. 1–52).

Suffering is a theme that, as can be seen from previous analyses, is almost absent from interpretations of the ballad. For this reason, it is worth noting the account of Hungarian ethnographer Gábor Lükő, who, in 2000, recounted how he heard the ballad *Kőmives Kelemenné* in Bogdánfalva, performed by a female choir. This version is better known among the Csángó and differs from most Hungarian versions in that the living woman as a sacrifice is walled up in stages[48]. When the female choir singing about the sacrifice procedure reaches the moment when the wife is already walled up to her shoulders – that is, the dramatic climax of the ballad, the moment when the heroine realises that what is happening to her is not a joke but a terrible reality – the woman no longer speaks Hungarian, as before, but addresses her husband in Romanian: "Manole, Manole, zidul mă strânge, / viaţa mea se stinge." On the threshold of death, in pain and fear, the woman returns to her native language. She returns to her deepest "self", to her native language – the language of the heart (joejudge, 2015).[49]

Despite the drastic nature of the situation described, Kriza's *Wild Roses*, containing the text of the ballad about the walled-in woman, was included in the ministerial list of books recommended for school libraries in 1878, according to the monthly magazine on women's education, *Nemzeti nőnevelés* ("Utasítás a népkönyvtárak", 1880, p. 211). By the end of the 1870s, the work was already quite often discussed in lessons. Still, it was introduced into the school curriculum in 1899 by a decree of the Minister of Religion and Education, Gyuli Wlassics. This document, which reformed secondary education in Hungary, emphasises the need for better teaching of national subjects and for modifying

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without causing a scandal! But no; they copy their wisdom from the most common and popular works or encyclopaedias" (Iskolai értesítők az 1874/5-iki iskolai évről, 1876, p. 260). The publication of school reports continued in Hungary until the late 1940s.

[48] A version like this, but without the Romanian wordings, was published in 1864 (F. S. Szabó, 1864).

[49] Vilmos Tánczos drew my attention to this memory, which Gábor Lükő presented in a portrait film dedicated to him titled *…és rólam feledkezzetek el (Találkozás a 90 éves Lükő Gáborral)* […and forget about me (Meeting with 90-year-old Gábor Lükő)].

the Hungarian history curriculum to better fit within general history. The importance of language and literature teaching is stressed: "The most important goal of teaching the Hungarian language is to pass on to future generations the national feelings and thoughts that appear in a refined form in the eternal pages of our literature" (OKT, 1903, p. 4). The need to include folk poetry in the first year of secondary school is emphasised, including the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* (A középiskolai tanítás tervei, 1899).

At this point, it is worth noting two issues. My analysis of information brochures published by Hungarian schools between 1875 and 1948 shows that the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* was taught in various classes during this period, often in situations where government programmes required it to be taught mainly in the first year of secondary school. And so, although this was indeed the case most often between 1895 and 1938, in the curricula of some schools it appeared only in the second year (1902–1926), in others in the fourth year (1878–1914), and in others in the fifth year (1888–1933). In later information booklets on school activities in the 1940s, the year in which the ballad was analysed is often not specified. In more recent times, for example at the end of the 1970s, it was included in the eighth-grade primary school curriculum. Since 2006, it has been taught in the sixth grade, although in the meantime it was also discussed in the third grade (around the turn of the 1990s). Secondly, although the title *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* is given in the decree, textbook authors and teachers use different variants of it[50]. As a result, since the end of the 19th century, texts titled not only *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* but also *Kelemen Mason* have appeared in class[51].

An interesting example of the ballad's place in school curricula is its prominent position in a collection of folk poetry under the group *Reading on ethical and didactic issues*. This occurs in the *Official Journal* published in 1920 by the Ministry of Religion and Education, in the regulations for the training of folk schoolteachers, specifically in point III, which outlines the scope of teaching for teachers in six-year schools (Szabályzat a népiskolai tanitók..., 1920). It is also worth noting that the development of school curricula was accompanied by an analysis of the situation in the education systems of neighbouring countries. This is illustrated, for example, by the 1935 article *Felhőkarcolók a homokon* [Skyscrapers on sand], in which Géza Féja writes about the need for a more expansive approach to Hungarian education:

[50] In reports on the annual activities of schools, especially in the period up to the end of the 19th century, there are frequent references to the fact that the text of the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife was discussed without a textbook. This would mean that teachers had a great deal of freedom in choosing which variant of the ballad to discuss in class.

[51] An analysis of the school activity reports available to me indicates that the title of the ballad *Kelemen Mason* probably appeared for the first time in the curriculum of the fourth grade of the girls' school in Kolozsvár (now Cluj, Romania) in 1896 (Állami Felsőbb Leányiskola, 1896, p. 29).

> They are building (in Czechoslovakia and Romania – note: LH) plans for the future with all their might and with a clearly defined goal, while we were building walls in the manner of Kelemen Mason[52]. Although in the meantime Bálint Hóman's secondary school reform, one of the greatest achievements of Hungarian cultural policy, has been introduced, and knowledge of the country and love of the nation form the backbone of secondary education, we are already waiting for a great pace, a pace that will adapt all schools and cultural institutions to the realities of the country. (Féja, 1935)

The headmaster of the Premontrei Secondary School in Gödölő writes that the changes to the core curriculum introduced by Minister Hóman have brought about a profound reform of literature teaching and set it on a new course. At the same time, however, he sadly admits that this change, like the previous one, is *de facto* limited to grades VII and VIII. Sharing with readers various doubts about specific solutions, he concludes his argument as follows:

> A generation of dedicated and conscious teachers faithfully stands guard over the education of the nation and, with complete faith, undertakes the task of explaining the significance of Hungary's future. With complete dedication, they carve the granite blocks of their future building so that the superstitious, proud ghost town of Kelemen Mason, which he so often dreamed of, will finally be completed. They plaster each brick with mortar made from their own blood, and in reality it is not up to them whether it will be completed: they are not the manager, but merely a bloody, obedient executor of orders from above. (Szombách, 1942, p. 265)

In the 1950s and 1960s, teaching the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* became highly ideological. This is how a witness of that era, a Hungarian writer from Transylvania who worked in a school in the 1950s, recalls it:

> The ballad I was supposed to talk about (during the lesson – note by LH) was briefly described in the guidelines (see under "Message") as illustrating the cruelty of feudalism, because twelve bricklayers were forced by poverty and the urge to earn money to sacrifice one of their wives. (Czegő, 1998)

In 1976, an entire issue of the specialist educational journal *Köznevelés* was devoted to presenting the principles of the new literature curriculum for grades VI–VIII of primary school and grades I–IV of lower secondary school. The theme of the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* appears there when discussing the programme for grade VI, among the basic readings for the theme "From yesterday to today". As it was explained:

> The literary excerpts presented here reveal the inner landscapes of the soul. Decisions about "who am I and where am I going?" in private and public life (belonging, loyalty, self-sacrifice in love, family; spiritual greatness, humanistic-motivated right choices in difficult public situations, etc.). Even very honest, pure people can sometimes give discouraging answers in difficult situations. But those who fight for everything, even at great risk, respond to the challenges of the moment with conviction and through action. (Tantervi tervezetek…, 1976, p. 7)

[52] Kelemen Mason's manner in this case most likely means that it was not permanent and "what was built one day fell apart the next".

The section of the document concerning methodology states that, due to the specific nature of the age group (13–14 years old), discussing literature requires a multifaceted approach, leading students to realise, for instance, that although the definition of patriotism changes with the times, it is inextricably linked to love for one's nation and the idea of social progress. Here, a suggestion is made to use a historical approach when discussing literary works dealing with topics such as love, fidelity and mutual commitment (including *Kelemen Mason*; Tantervi tervezetek…, 1976, p. 9).

In the 1980s, educator Dezső Bujdosó outlined his vision of a school that, in his opinion, would better respond to the challenges of Marxism and Leninism. On discussing the ballad about the walled-up woman in school, he wrote:

> […] for the first time, this ballad can be introduced to fourth-grade primary school pupils with very good results and for many reasons. However, we will analyse it from the perspective of the complex subject of "existential knowledge", i.e., the general or universal theory of culture (cultural history) required in grades 9–12 […]. Firstly, we can analyse the topic […] from Greek mythology and drama (e.g., various adaptations of the sacrifice of Iphigenia) through Goethe's dramatisation to Sarkadi's, and even further, perhaps to rock theatre adaptations of the drama. In this way, we will almost spontaneously move from the sphere of literature to other artistic disciplines, and even more firmly into the hidden problem: What could have prompted authors from different historical periods to explore the nature of human beings ready for sacrifice? (Bujdosó, 1983)

Published in 2004, the *Curriculum for grades V–VIII in primary schools* includes the teaching of ballads in grade VI, in the section devoted to the topic of *Fairy tales, legends, and ballads* (*Az általános iskola*, 2004). At the time of the next change to the core curriculum, the thematic block "Ballad" included a reference to work in grade VI on two varieties of this genre: folk songs (*The Wife of Kelemen Mason* or *Kata Kádár*) and artistic ballads (which were cultivated by the outstanding Hungarian poet János Arany). It is worth noting that the lawmaker indicated ethical categories, sin, virtue, conscience, as common points of analysis[53].

According to the curriculum adopted in 2020, one of the goals of teaching grammar and literature is for students to be prepared to, as adults, "use their knowledge, culture, and acquired skills to enter the world of work, continue their education and become well-educated, committed people devoted to our nation". As before, the ballad was included in the sixth-grade curriculum in segment VIII, "Love of the Fatherland" (*Magyar nyelv és irodalom*, n.d., p. 7). However, in the literature textbook approved in 2021, it was included in the segment "Heroes".

[53] The curriculum was published in Annex 2 to Regulation No. 51/2012 (XII. 21.) of the Ministry of Human Resources (*51/2012. XII. 21. számú EMMI rendelet 2. Melléklete*, 2012).

Textbooks

As mentioned above, the ballad *The Wife of Kelemén Mason* probably first appeared in a Hungarian school textbook in 1865; it was a textbook on poetics for secondary school students written by László Tarkos[54], which was reprinted many times in subsequent years. Even before the decree introducing the work into the curriculum, the first part of *Readings for Public Schools and Secondary Schools* by József Mihály, a Budapest teacher, was published in 1887. Part VI of its second, revised edition included a version of the ballad published by János Kriza, alongside poetic works by Petőfi, Arany, and Kisfaludi ("Könyvpiac", 1887). After the publication of the decree, references to the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* appear not only in readers on the history of Hungarian literature, but also in other textbooks, including grammar books used to illustrate grammatical forms, as noted by Ágost Gyulai in his review of part I of József Balassa's first-grade secondary school grammar textbook, *Kis Magyar Nyelvtan* [Short Hungarian grammar] (Balassa, 1900; A. Gyulai, 1900).

The official journal of the Ministry of Religion and Education also published a review of László Négyesy's Hungarian literature textbook for lower secondary and public schools. Dávid Angyal, a secondary school teacher in Budapest who reviewed the compendium, notes that the section on fairy tales includes "the Székely folk ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, which is rather pagan but contains a seed of deep meaning, suitable for capturing the vivid imagination of children" (Angyal, 1900). It is worth noting that the ballad appears not only in Hungarian textbooks, but also in textbooks for national minorities in Austria-Hungary, including those written in Italian. This is noted in a review by Móricz Darvai, who emphasises that the ballad *Kelemen Mason* was included among the 22 texts dealing with Hungarian themes (Darvai, 1912).

At that time, however, there were voices questioning the appropriateness of discussing the ballad in lower grades. Among others, Sándor Péterfy expressed his satisfaction that in the new literature textbook for grades V and VI, Károly Deme had omitted several works that were included in the previous edition of the book, including the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, replacing them with other works that were "better suited to the intellectual development and mood of children aged 11–12" (Péterfy, 1897). In 1906, in the magazine *Magyar Pedagógia*, Albert Márkos questioned whether it was worthwhile to teach Latin to pupils in the first years of secondary school. He drew attention to the linguistic problems encountered by pupils when dealing with, among other things, old linguistic forms that have survived, for example, only in folk texts.

[54] In the textbook, the author limited himself to mentioning only three newly discovered "old Székely" ballads, including the ballad *Kőmives Kelemen*. This is interesting because, at the time of the textbook's publication, only three versions of the ballad were known, and each of them was published under the title Kőmives Kelemenné [The wife of Kelemen Mason] (Tarkos, 1865, p. 41).

As an example, he cites old verb forms found in the text of the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, which pupils may treat as Latin (Márkos, 1906, p. 360). In 1912, Jenő Szöllősi, author of an article on Hungarian education in industrial public schools, also raised doubts. Comparing the Hungarian system with others (e.g., the German system), he concluded that the Hungarian system needed reform, because instead of "instilling […] [into young people – note by LH] enthusiasm so that they would want and be able to work for this country and its greatness in the future […] the curriculum forces" the reading of books such as *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*. In conclusion, he states: "I ask all reasonable Hungarians whether it is enough for a future industrialist or merchant to set out into adult life filled with such stories about wolves and Hun-Hungarian battles. Can the Hungarian nation effectively compete with the nations of the world with such an education?" (J. Szöllősi, 1912, p. 341).

However, such voices were in the minority. In 1898, Lajos Komáromy, reviewing two volumes of Károly Deme's reader for the second grade of a bourgeois girls' school for the Hungarian Ministry, noted at the outset that although the work did not bring anything new to this type of literature and was a neat compilation of existing textbooks, he nevertheless admits that it is useful for the further education process in girls' schools. Komáromy's text is significant not because it approves of the place of ballads in school textbooks, but because it draws attention to a certain pattern of thinking that has become ingrained in the public consciousness along with ballads, and which, in his opinion, needs to be corrected. He expresses the opinion that the bricklayer's superstition did not, in fact, require the master's wife to be sacrificed on the construction site – it could have been any human being (Komáromy, 1898, p. 358). It is significant that none of the Hungarian textbooks I am familiar with raise the question of why it was the wife and not, for example, a member of the bricklaying brigade who had to be sacrificed in order for the construction to be completed successfully.

The situation is similar in school textbooks from more recent times. However, according to Lajos Sipos, a reviewer of school textbooks published by the Pauz publishing house in the 1990s, the ballad about the walled-up woman was "pushed into the background" by the authors. Seeking a way to change this situation, he states that "presumably, the folk ballad will gain new light if we focus our attention on the organisation of the text, using a good interpretation in the textbook" (Sipos, 1995). It should be added that the textbook includes a variant written down in 1968 and performed by an elderly woman who learned the "old song" in a dialect that is difficult to understand today when she was a little girl. The reviewer concludes: the ballad *Kelemen Mason* would be more vivid if students were introduced to the archaic text accompanied by music by Levente Szörényi, and also presented in dramatic form (Sipos, 1995). Sipos draws attention to the valuable initiative of the publishing house, which since 1993 has been adding teaching aids for teachers to printed textbooks, containing suggestions for lesson plans and recommending supplementary literature. As

an example, he cites the publisher's suggestion that when discussing the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, teachers should use the version recorded in Ajnád, in which the rhyming introduction is followed by a large fragment of the story written in prose, and which features a "happy ending"[55].

Publishing teaching aids as supplements to textbooks has become standard practice in the 21st century. In *Tanári útmutató* [Teacher's book] from 2007, it is suggested to begin the lesson by raising the issue of superstition, then, after analysing the content and structure of the work, to devote time to discussing the issue of work ethic, followed by a discussion on sin and punishment. The discussion of superstition is intended to lead students to the conclusion that, as a result of the course of events, Kelemen Mason also becomes a victim. The issue of work ethic is presented in reference to the biblical stories of Cain and Abel and the construction of the Tower of Babel. The conclusion is that Kelemen Mason's sin is not motivated by self-interest but by the interests of the community: "Punishment in biblical stories burdens society, humanity, while Kelemen Mason's punishment is individual, only he suffers due to it" (Fekete et al., 2007, pp. 48–49).

Not quite in line with this view is a lecturer at a Hungarian Catholic university, who wrote in 2007 in the magazine for teachers *Iskolakultúra* (Tarbay, 2007) that in the ballad it is a social group that makes the joint decision leading to the tragedy[56]. However, regardless of whether we are dealing with individual or group guilt, sin stems from the same motivation: the sacrifice of a human being is in the interest of the community. Here, a remark relating to contemporary times appears: the issue of bricklayers' wages, the fact that "work is associated with its material value". The author sees in this a "hunger for objects" that "destroys the hunger for love" (Tarbay, 2007, p. 234). Later, he compares Kelemen Mason's wife to Antigone, which leads him to conclude that both "are rather victims than true, active, tragic heroines". Kelemen Mason himself, on the other hand, is a hero who, "guided by an old non-Christian custom, sacrifices his wife, thereby contributing to the death of his son." Such a hero, like Sophocles's Creon, is doomed to loneliness (Tarbay, 2007, p. 234).

In her supplementary material for teachers teaching literature in the sixth grade, Ildikó Radóczné Bálint encourages teachers to go beyond discussing the structure and content of the work and draw students' attention to issues such as: "The woman sacrifices herself. She dies. In what way is this a family tragedy?", and "How do students understand the term 'sacrifice'?" (Radóczné Bálint, 2014, p. 47)

[55] "For seven years, the woman is walled up with her son, whom she feeds and raises. Then the walls open up, the woman finds herself at her husband's wedding, and when he sees her, he rejects his new fiancée, throws out all the wedding guests, and the two spouses live together again". This version was published in 1941 (Lajtha, 1941). The text was written down in 1912 by József Dobos.

[56] He is right insofar as the authors of textbooks (including the one from 2007) choose from the numerous variants of the ballad about the walled-up woman the one published in 1863, in which all the bricklayers decide to wall up the woman.

Published two years later, the exercise book for students accompanying the sixth-grade literature textbook (2016) offers a simplified analysis of the ballad, focusing on the problem of the fruitless efforts of the builders and then the success that comes when they follow superstition. This category is placed at the centre of attention. A crossword puzzle, the solution to which is the word "superstition", is intended to draw pupils' attention to the problem. They are also asked to explain the sentence "I am not superstitious" (*Irodalom 6. Munkafüzet*, 2016), but this is not accompanied by any reflection on ethical issues.

It is noteworthy that, in 2020 (in line with the 2020 ministerial regulation), another textbook for sixth grade was published (Radóczné Bálint, 2020b)[57] in which the ballad about the wife of Kelemen Mason was included in the chapter titled Hősök [Heroes]. It appears alongside legends about the arrival of the Hungarians in the Pannonian Plain, their domination over the Slavs (by giving King Świętopełk a white steed with a gilded harness and saddle), and the Magyar military expeditions to Germany and further west under the leadership of Prince Lehel (Radóczné Bálint, 2020b). In this publication, the author uses the version of the ballad published by János Kriza, but the starting point for her analysis of the work is the issue of the foundation sacrifice (Rádóczné Bálint, 2020a, pp. 20–22). Only later do the students move on to discussing the ballad as a literary genre (the structure of the work, the role of repetitions, etc.). They are given the task of describing "the characters and the relationships between them, indicating the emotions that drive their actions" (Rádóczné Bálint, 2020a, p. 24); however, there is no room for discussing the issue of murder. As before, the ethical dimension is almost omitted; it is limited only to whether the father did the right thing by not informing his son about his mother's death.

A year later, another literature textbook for sixth grade appears, in which the authors tell the pupils:

> The common message of the pieces is that everyone belongs somewhere, everyone must belong somewhere. […] This year, we will learn about heroes who dared to stand up for justice, helped the weak and defended their country. We want you to get to know them and then pass on their story to future generations! (Janik & Legeza, 2021, p. 3)[58]

In this textbook, the ballad also appears in the thematic group "Hősök az irodalomban" [Heroes in literature]. Here, work on the text begins with familiarising oneself with the content of the work, followed by an explanation of what a foundation sacrifice was. After a brief discussion of the characteristics of the ballad, the pupils are asked the following questions:

> 1. Why couldn't the masons build the castle? Come up with a few possible answers. 2. A promise is a promise. What are some examples of this in the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*? 3. Why does Kelemen Mason's wife ignore the carriage driver

[57] Approved to be used as a school textbook on 10 February 2021.

[58] While this textbook has been approved for use as a textbook until 2026, the one cited earlier did not receive such a time limit.

and return to the castle? 4. Why do the twelve bricklayers decide to make a human sacrifice? 5. Is Kelemen Mason right not to tell his son about what happened to his mother? (Janik & Legeza, 2021, p. 29)

It is only in the student workbook accompanying the textbook that ethical issues are addressed. The author recommends group work and suggests that students imagine a trial of Kelemen Mason and consider what punishment he should receive. Another task is to imagine oneself in the role of Kelemen Mason's neighbours in the given situation. How would they greet their neighbour, knowing what he had done? (Radóczné Bálint, 2020b, p. 13).

The Ballad About the Walled-Up Woman in Hungarian School Life

Included in the school curriculum and textbooks, the ballad about the walled-up woman became a very prominent feature of school life from the very beginning of pupils' education. It is discussed in lessons and written about in essays, and competitions are held for the best illustration to it[59]. It is also often included in school and after-school student performances. In 1883, a ceremony was organised at the Catholic Gymnasium in Budapest to mark the school's 25th anniversary and the end of the school year. The programme included, among other things, the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, recited by an eighth-grade student ("Iskolai ünnepélyek", 1883, p. 2). In April 1936, a local teacher gave a lecture in Kapasvár on *Images from the History of Music*. The musical setting for the lecture was provided by an orchestra conducted by a female teacher from the Catholic secondary school. The secondary school girls' choir performed a special programme, which included the ballad *Kelemen Mason* ("Népzene százhangú", 1936). In May 1939, seventh-grade students from the Private Girls' Secondary School in Pestszenterzsébet presented a charity performance for flood victims titled *The Poet and the Village*. Here, too, the ballad *Kelemen Mason* appeared in the programme (Pesterzsébeti Nyilvánosjogú Magán Leánygimnázium, 1939, p. 15).

Celebrations dedicated to Transylvania were a special occasion to commemorate the ballad. These were a permanent feature of social life in Hungary after 1920 and took on special significance during World War II, when part of Transylvania was re-annexed to Hungary. On such a celebration, on 8 December 1940, a ceremony was held in Nagykálló, during which students from the local secondary school performed a choral recitation of the ballad (Nagykállói Magyar Királyi Állami Szabolcs Vezér Gimnázium, 1940, p. 24). On 22–23 February 1940, the traditional annual concert organised by the Benedictine secondary school in Győr to celebrate the "return of part of Transylvania to the

[59] One such competition took place in Pápa, at the Benedictine Secondary School in 1939, as noted in the school's annual report (Pápai Szent Benedek-rendi Katolikus Szent Mór Gimnázium, 1940, p. 55).

motherland" took the form of an "Evening of Transylvanian Songs". A mixed choir performed, among other pieces, the "ancient Székely ballad" *Kelemen Mason*, in which the parts of the bricklayer's wife were performed by second and third year secondary school pupils (Szent Benedek-rendi Katolikus Gimnázium, 1940, p. 72).

One of the most interesting lectures referring to the topos of the walled-up woman, mentioned in school information guides, was influenced by the ideology of the time, emphasising the subordination of women to work, family, and community life. It was given by the eminent Hungarian intellectual János Hankiss, who spoke in December 1940, on the occasion of the Transylvanian Holiday, to female students of a Budapest school run by the New School Association. Hankiss spun a web of reductionist and disparaging concepts about the roles of women and men, arguing that:

> A woman […] lives in the real world, she is practical, […]; even amid the greatest tragedies and the most passionate joys, she knows that lunch, dinner, cleaning and other ritual events must never fail to take place […]. A man's work is a sparkling icicle or ice flower […] A man's celebration – the struggle with ideals; a woman's – an encounter with fate. Kelemen Mason's wife, seen from a man's point of view – the dominance of destiny over human life; seen from a woman's point of view – the dominance of life over destiny. (Magyar Új Iskola Egyesület Nyilvános Jogú Leánygimnáziuma, 1941, p. 41)

János Sebestény, a teacher at the Teacher Training Institute in Kőszeg, spoke in a similar vein in 1943 during a local parade of the Women's Volunteer Service. The school principal considered his speech so important for the school community that he published it in the annual *Information Booklet*. Sebestény began with a summary of the ballad about Kelemen Mason, then declaring:

> Oh, how wonderful it would be if all of us gathered here today to express our sincere respect, appreciation, and love for the heroic women who voluntarily undertook work in defence of their homeland could feel the deep symbolism conveyed by this sad yet beautiful Székely folk ballad! The symbolism of the ballad teaches us that it is futile to have bricks to build a castle: land, the riches of the mountains, the sweet water of the river, the wood of the forest. It is futile to have lime to bind the bricks together: order, discipline, law, administration. It is futile to have twelve bricklayers: a house, a castle, a country cannot be built without Kelemen Mason's Wives, Hungarian women, Hungarian wives, because without their blood, their lives and their work, a country cannot be built; it is from them that life is born! (Kőszegi Magyar Királyi Állami Líceum és Tanítóképző Intézet, 1944, p. 11)

The dominant theme here is the reduction of women to a pragmatic, almost mechanical function. Combined with the motif of duty and ritual, this way of thinking brings to mind an ideologised vision of women who not only organise and take care of the home but also serve the nation with their work and their bodies. What we see here is an image of women that has been present in Hungarian culture since the 19th century, in which their work and sacrifice are understood not only as a duty to others – family, society, and, in more radical systems, the state.

After World War II, the ballad continued to live on in the public sphere[60], serving as a regular feature of various performances and competitions for school children and youth in Hungary and in countries with Hungarian minorities[61]. It has also been a regular feature of school celebrations, as it was years ago, e.g., in 1948, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Kláuzal State Gymnasium, when a series of events were organised, including a particularly solemn one, as it was combined with the 100th anniversary of the Hungarian Spring of Nations on 15 March. The programme included a performance of the ballad by a group of fifth-year pupils (Szegedi Magyar Állami Klauzál Gábor Gimnázium és Általános Iskola, 1948, p. 25).

Theatre Productions

Young people have not only recited the ballad we are interested in, but also, as part of school theatre clubs, they have attempted to stage it, often with interesting results. For example, in 1936 in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș, Romania), young people from Catholic and Reformed schools prepared a gala for the "Ballad Evening". As part of the event, Ernő Ábrahám's play *Isten vára* [The castle of God], referring to the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, was performed[62]. The following year, in Kiskunfelegyegyáza, the ballad about the walled-up woman was performed by preschool children, little scouts. This is how the local newspaper describes it:

> It was a choral recitation of *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*. The ballad itself is a precious gem of Hungarian literature. Its tragic essence, when properly expressed, affects everyone. It was this potential that Antal Lőcsey, commander of the scouts, recognised with his keen aesthetic sense, transposing the entire work into a recitation choir. ("Cserkészelőadás", 1937)

In Budapest in 1939, female secondary school students wrote two plays, including one based on the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife. The summary in the school's *Information Booklet* shows how the theme of the ballad was used in the educational process in the 1930s and 1940s:

> The heroine of the seventh-grade performance is Kelemen Mason's wife, who is portrayed in the ballad as a superstitious tool in the hands of twelve ambitious men. She is guided by fate […], fate wants her to become a sacrifice, and in exchange for her life, the crumbling walls will be rebuilt. The seventh-grade girls elevated the passive heroine of the ballad to the heights of tragedy. The wife

[60] For instance, in 1947, in the artistic section on the pioneers' oath at the school complex in Pápa (Pápai Szent Benedek-rendi Katolikus Szent Mór Gimnázium, 1940, p. 55).

[61] For instance, a competition reported in the Budapest pioneers' magazine (Birkás, 1960).

[62] In the press release, the author is mistakenly identified as P. Ábrányi Ernő ("Páratlan erkölcsi", 1936).

> of Kelemen Mason knows that she must die if she goes to the castle, and she consciously accepts to make a sacrifice for the success of her master's great work. The seventh-grade girls' play is a true tragedy of women to the extent that there are no male protagonists in it. In all four scenes, it is women who live and suffer, far from the expectations of the great work of a man who, like a tyrant, desires their tears, their sighs, and also their lives. (Magyar Új Iskola Egyesület Nyilvános Jogú Leánygimnáziuma, 1940, p. 17)

Teachers' Materials

It seems that the ballad *Kőmives Kelemenné* is a work that requires special preparation on the part of teachers, as its theme is the death of a woman, a mother. However, it turns out that this issue is almost completely overlooked in the literature supporting the work of educators, even in works dedicated to the problem of tragedy and death. An example of this is the article by Lajosné Szikszay, published in 1992 in the magazine *Magyartanitás*, which supported the work of Hungarian language teachers between 1992 and 2010. The author, writing about the use of poems dealing with the issue of tragedy/death in the teaching process in grades III–IV, refers, among other things, to the ballad about the walled-up wife. The author is in favour of including such works in the school curriculum for the sake of children's mental development. She refers to the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (Kübler-Ross, 1997), who argues that a healthy child must learn about death. One of the examples Szikszay cites in her article is a conversation between a son and his father from the ballad *Kőmives Kelemen* (sic!), in which, at the child's request, the father reveals that his mother "is placed in a stone wall" (Szikszay, 1992, p. 12). However, Szikszay avoids giving specific didactic advice, focusing instead on the statement that experience suggests that children respond best when the teaching process includes references to the world they know. Hence the suggestion to talk about death/tragedy based on texts about the death of small animals, dogs, and cats.

Hungarian teachers will not learn how to talk about death from Jenő Alföldy's popular methodological aid to the sixth-grade literature textbook either (Alföldy, 2002). The interpretation of the ballad about the walled-up woman published there emphasises the strength of the woman, who accepts the men's decision and does not run away, but says goodbye to her friends and child, then returns to the building site and allows herself to be walled up. Alföldy also points to elements of the ballad that confirm the husband's great love for his wife, such as Kelemen's words to God, asking him to prevent his wife from coming to the building site. The author suggests that "from the couple's conversation, we can conclude that the bricklayer and his wife had a loving relationship. The husband addresses his wife gently, and his words show concern" (Alföldy, 2002), which he interprets from the words of the ballad:

> "Good morning, good morning, to you twelve masons/ And among you twelve masons, to Kelemen Mason!"/ "Good morning, good morning, my woman-wife, why have you but why have you come here, for your undoing?/ Now we are going to take you gently, throw you into the fire,/ We are going to mix your tender ashes with the lime,/ Only so can we make strong the tall castle of Déva,/ Only so can we win the rich price for it" (Leader, 1967, pp. 20–21).

Alföldy goes on to point out that Kelemen found himself caught between loyalty to his fellow builders and love for his wife and his family. He was punished for his decision with the death of his son. The author of the analysis suggests: "In his work, the interests of the community and the individual clash. The common interest wins because the woman's body is sacrificed for the castle. And yet the individual interest is more important because the power of love is greater, which is why the son dies in grief" (Alföldy, 2002).

The Topos in School Life Outside Hungary

The inclusion of the ballad about the walled-up woman in Hungarian school curricula contributed to its widespread spread in Hungarian culture. As György Beke pointed out: "A good example of this is the map of the initial spread of the folk ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*. Until school textbooks popularised it throughout the Hungarian world, the ballad was known only in the Székely Land and among the Moldavian Csángós" (Beke, 1995).

Ballads occupy a special place in Hungarian schools in areas that fell outside the country's borders after 1920. The magazine *Pro Minorite* discusses this situation, publishing a letter in 2002 from a Hungarian teacher working in the Csángó community[63]: "Recently, we have been learning classic folk ballads and having fun", reports the teacher; "for the talented Kelemen Mason, screaming little boys turn into crumbling walls" ("Egy Moldvában titokban", 2002, p. 3).

It is worth noting here that Hungarian children living in the diaspora learn about the issue of the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* from different perspectives. They use textbooks published not only by Budapest, but also by the ministries of education of the countries in which they live, where local variants of the ballad are often found. As a result, they gain a broader knowledge of the topos at school than children from Hungary. These differences are clearly visible, for example, in the case of schoolchildren from what is now Romania, who are introduced to the Hungarian topos of the walled-up woman earlier than to the Romanian ballad about Master Manole[64].

[63] The Csángós are a Hungarian-speaking ethnic group living in the mountainous regions of historic Moldavia (now in Romania). Unlike the Orthodox Christians who dominate the area, the Csángós are Catholic.

[64] This issue is discussed at length in the chapter of the publication concerning the Romanian variant of the walled-up woman topos.

Just comparing the graphic design of the ballad in the Hungarian and Romanian textbooks is interesting. For the sake of brevity, I will limit myself to the latest editions of the textbooks. In the textbook by Mária Janik and Márton Legeza, in which the topic of the wife of Kelemen Mason is treated very narrowly, students see only stone blocks prepared for the construction of a castle (Janik & Legeza, 2021, p. 25). The illustration of the ballad in Ildikó Radóczné Bálint's textbook, published in Hungary, is much richer, showing not only the hard-working Kelemen Mason and his co-workers (Radóczné Bálint, 2020b, p. 20), but also his wife rushing to the construction site (Figure 33). In the background of the latter illustration, there is also a high hill on which the castle is to be built (Radóczné Bálint, 2020b, p. 21).



Figure 33. Illustration for the literature textbook for grade VI by Radóczné Bálint.
Source: Radóczné Bálint (2020b), p. 21

The next illustration in the textbook also shows the castle wall, in which the outlines of a woman are visible (suggesting that she has been walled up). Kelemen Mason kneels in front of it, as if praying to her (Radóczné Bálint, 2020b, p. 22). These drawings are complemented by an aerial photograph showing the ruins of Déva Castle towering over the entire valley (Radóczné Bálint, 2020a, p. 23).

In turn, in the Romanian textbook for teaching Hungarian language and literature for seventh grade, published according to the 2017 curriculum (Tamás et al., 2017), the illustrations for the ballad about Kelemen Mason are dominated by the element of destruction. In the drawings, students first see a damaged section of the wall (Tamás et al., 2017, p. 64), then two water buckets, one filled with gold and the other with silver, showing how much the builders from the ballad "earned" (Tamás et al., 2017, p. 65), and finally photos showing the ruins of the castle in Déva (Tamás et al., 2017, pp. 67–68). The rest of the section focuses on the Székely dialect of Hungarian in which the ballad was written. This provides an opportunity to present a map of historical Hungary and show the dialects of Hungarian, which sometimes, as is particularly the case in Romania, extend far beyond the borders of the current Hungarian state. In their analysis of the work, the authors of the textbook first draw attention to the location where the castle is to be built and its price, and only later to the problem of the

foundation sacrifice that appears in the ballad and the ethical issues associated with it, such as the fact that the sacrificed victim is nameless[65].

In the workbook for teachers in the Hungarian diaspora in Romania, attention is drawn to extensive material relating to the issue of foundation sacrifice (Pap & Rus, 2023, pp. 87–91) and methods of offering such sacrifices; it emphasises that there have been no traces of human sacrifice in Europe for centuries and, therefore, the story told in the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* does not refer to a real situation. At the same time, the authors of this supplementary publication draw attention to a specific type of sacrificial offering in the culture of Transylvania: the walling up of a reed stick, which was used to measure the shadow of a person passing by the construction site. The students' workbook also encourages reflection on the sacrifice, the motivations of the bricklayers (were they only financial?), and the possibility of Kelemen Mason finding another solution to the problem. Attention is drawn to the old system that deprived women of their rights, and the question is raised as to whether Kelemen Mason's wife could have escaped from the building site (Pap & Rus, 2023, pp. 88–89). Among the tasks to be completed is writing a press release titled "Brutális gyilkoság Déván" [Brutal murder in Déva], explaining the motif of sin/crime in the ballad, and finally preparing an interview with Kelemen Mason which would include elements such as conspiracy, the murder of his wife, the death of his son, his remorse, and an assessment of whether he regrets what he did. Of the twenty tasks for students, more than half are related to ethical issues. The rest concern the meaning of numbers in the piece, folk vocabulary, and folkloric texts related to the construction of Déva Castle (Pap & Rus, 2023, pp. 88–91).

Compared to the issues discussed with Hungarian pupils at the Romanian school, it seems that at the Hungarian school, the theme of the ballad is motivated by an educational system developed in the 19th century and based on so-called "black pedagogy", which consists primarily of frightening children with supernatural monsters who act as "guardians" of norms. This was close to folk literature, which often referred to supernatural phenomena, extraordinary characters, and terrifying situations (Rudolf, 2001). However, in the case of the image of the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason*, which emerges from an analysis of Hungarian textbooks published in the area of the present-day Hungarian state, we are dealing more with an action aimed at "taming" fear and an atmosphere of terror in order to achieve the unachievable.

Finally, let us take a look at another website run by – as the hostess of this site introduces herself – a practitioner and teacher with nearly forty years of experience. She believes that in class "one can even discuss: who is the real victim, Kelemen's wife or Kelemen, who has to live in double mourning?" (Ho-

[65] In the ballad, the wife of Kelemen Mason says: "Mert a halottnak is hármat harangoznak,/Én árva fejemnek egyet sem konditnak!" [They ring three bells for the dead,/ but not a single one for my poor head!] (Faragó, 1999, p. 171)

ma-Móra, 2019). The author refers to other literary works, highlighting the division of roles between women and men, which, in her view, bears the hallmarks of a patriarchal order. To illustrate the topic, she cites a whole range of activities that characterise the patriarchal approach to women. She writes that women live in a world confined by the walls of their homes. Their basic duties are "feeding", "making the bed" and "household chores", and are characterised by a specific "female way of thinking", while men bring the outside world into the home and fill it with spirit (Homa-Móra, 2019).

School Trips

An important element in domesticating the national space and rooting the symbol of Déva Castle in it, apart from literature and art, is school education, including school trips to important places in Hungarian history. Already at the turn of the 20th century, Déva Castle appeared on the list of places that Hungarian youth should visit. Reports from such trips are provided in school guides, e.g., the 1909 guide for the school in Kiskunfélegyháza (Városi Katholikus Főgymnasium, 1909, p. 47).

After 1920 and the change of Hungary's borders, trips by students and adults to Transylvania, including Déva, took on special significance. The importance of Déva Castle as a symbolic place for Hungarians increased during World War II, when the idea of returning lost lands, including Transylvania, to the Hungarian state became particularly strong. These hopes were revived in 1940 when Hitler agreed to annex part of it to Hungary. It was then that, at the Sacred Heart School in Budapest, as part of a self-education circle meeting, three students performed texts dedicated to the main theme of the meeting, i.e., the self-sacrifice of women. One of them, a second-grade student, devoted her speech to *The Ballad of the Wife of Kelemen Mason*. Based on a trip to Déva Castle and a Székely ballad, she tells the story of the fate and devotion of a young woman who, living happily, sacrifices herself without hesitation "for a great cause, a great work that strong men built in vain. She was needed to maintain Déva Castle. She did it with joy. Selflessly, humbly". Further on in her speech, she referred to the current situation, stating that women are the silent heroes of the Hungarian land and are ready "for a new sacrifice that will ultimately lead the Hungarians to a better life and happiness!" (Szent Szív-társaság Nyelvmester Képzője, 1941, pp. 11–12).

Although school trips to Transylvania have been organised for a long time, it was not until 2010 that the Hungarian government's *Határtalanul* [Without borders] programme[66], came into force and within the first four years, around 40,000 pupils were able to meet their peers from the Hungarian diaspora.

[66] A programme financed by the Hungarian state to support school trips, aimed at enabling children from Hungary to meet Hungarians living in neighbouring countries

Visits to the castle are usually accompanied by a special atmosphere. Recordings available on YouTube show students performing a ballad with the castle walls in the background. A description of the specific ritual of such visits can be found in numerous reports, including those published in Hungarian magazines, where we can read, for example:

> The next day, the group arrived in Déva. The ballad lurks within the castle walls. Some students search the ruins for the ashes of Kelemen Mason's wife. The group dresses in white tights and vests. A photograph is taken. Suddenly, spontaneously, without prior agreement, the opening words of the ballad resound in the castle ruins, accompanied by a flute solo – the flute weeps, telling the ballad. A choir joins the solo, quietly at first, then with increasing intensity. Walking by tourists watch the performers open-mouthed… (F. K. Kiss, 1991, p. 28)

Summary

In the Hungarian-speaking cultural area, about a hundred variants of the ballad about the walled-up woman have been collected to date. Over ninety per cent of them are related to the construction of a tall castle in Déva (Transylvania, now Romania), and almost all of them feature the great builder Kelemen Mason and his wife[67]. However, there are certain differences between the individual variants of the ballad, which are reflected in the titles: it is either called *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* or *Kelemen Mason.* This difference shows that since the discovery of this folk song, there has been an internal debate about who is the more important character in the ballad: the woman who is sacrificed or the man who sacrifices her.

My journey in the footsteps of the ballad about Kelemen Mason's wife revealed surprisingly extensive areas of its use in various cultural texts. It also confirmed that the answer to the question of who is more important, which is provoked by the analysis of these texts, is not at all clear-cut.

The ballad quickly found its way into Hungarian schools. It became an important part of education. Its rapid establishment in school curricula was facilitated by the fact that Hungarian folklorists and literary historians considered this genre to be characteristic of Hungarian culture, and the Transylvanian region, where many Hungarian ballads originate, began to be called the land of ballads. The introduction of the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* into the school curriculum, where it remains to this day, had a significant impact on the

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at least once during the school year and to get to know the areas that were part of the Hungarian state until 1920.

[67] In other versions, especially those discovered in more contemporary times, if another name for the bricklayer appears (most often the names of the characters are anonymised and reduced to the form "chief builder" and his wife), it is the name known from the Romanian variant of the topos: Manole.

popularisation of the ballad, which crossed regional borders (i.e., primarily Transylvania) and appeared throughout Hungary and, by 1920, in so-called Greater Hungary, which also included the territories of present-day neighbouring countries. The fact that it was "born" in Transylvania provided an opportunity to change the approach to the entire work in the 20th century. It caused Hungarian culture to feed on the text with even greater commitment than was the case at the turn of the 20th century, using existing gaps, omissions, and ambiguities as a source of inspiration. The story of the walled-up woman was enriched with new elements and new meanings, which became particularly important when this topos was recognised as an interesting component of patriotic and ideological narratives.

Déva Castle, as a place of sacrifice, gained new significance and began to play an important role in shaping the Hungarian national landscape. While initially treated as one of the many places that make up the Hungarian community, after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, it has grown into a national symbol of Greater Hungary. Built on lost territories, it reminds of the times of the Hungarian state's greatness and its multiculturalism. The woman walled up in Déva Castle became a symbol of the sacrifice made on the altar of this great state. When the political system in Hungary changed, this symbol of Hungary's greatness naturally transformed into a symbol of the new regime. This transformation was facilitated by the socialist narrative, which from the very beginning referred to the topos of building the system. This style of narrative was characterised by emphasising the new system's attachment to folk culture. The folk ballad was like a gift from a previous era to the nascent new system. As a result, it not only became even more firmly established in the school system, but also became an inspiration for many literary, artistic, and musical works.

During school lessons in which the ballad *The Wife of Kelemen Mason* has been discussed since the end of the 19th century, the main emphasis has always been placed on its form and genre, while interpretation and the issue of sacrifice have been pushed into the background. Consequently, the issue of male violence and the ethical side of murder have been excluded from the curriculum to this day, and the world presented to students continues to convey "the presuppositions of patriarchal representation" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 93). The consequence of this state of affairs is the way the topos of the walled-up woman functions in the public consciousness. The negative symbolic coefficient separating women from men is still in force, which detrimentally affects everything they are and do. Here, we observe a dispute over who is more "holy": the woman who dies, or the man who kills his wife for the so-called higher good and, as a consequence, also loses his son.

Thus, two bodies are set against each other. One of them is the body of an ancient hero who has undertaken a task supervised by God himself (as in Ábrahám's play). He has great skills and is predestined to perform this "sacred task". The second body is a woman defined by her cultural gender – the guardian of the home, family, husband, and child, who is said to be ONLY a victim (although sometimes

this sacrifice is sacralised), while her husband is a great artist, a visionary, and also a victim, because he must sacrifice the one who is closest to him[68].

This approach leads not only to the suppression of Kelemen and his builders' guilt from the ballad's narrative, but also to the objectification/dehumanisation of his wife. In many artefacts, she is reduced to the status of a "miraculous mortar". This dispute over importance can be reconciled by adopting the view that any person is, symbolically, both Kelemen Mason and his wife: one must have the strength to make a sacrifice, but also to become the sacrifice.

The topos of the walled-up woman shows an essential aspect of how the world works. Today, the problem of female sacrifice appears in Hungary not only as an ethical problem, but also as a purely economic one. Her sacrifice is considered a certain commercial value that must/can be paid in order to accomplish a purely material task, namely the construction of a castle. She becomes part of a business calculation that is supposed to bring a given profit: "half a pail of silver, half a pail of gold". Interestingly, it is precisely this aspect that was highlighted in a 2022 selection of aphorisms shaping Hungarian national consciousness, edited by István Tózsa (2022)[69].

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[68] Emphasising the tragedy of the fate of Kelemen Mason, who first decides on the necessity of sacrificing a woman and then becomes a victim himself when it turns out that he must sacrifice his wife on the altar of construction. In addition, his son, Vargyas, states in 1959 that although the Bulgarians have preserved this course of events in several variants of their ballad, "not understanding the spiritual significance of this tragedy, they tried to diminish the importance of the master's decision by introducing the motif of betrayal of a secret" (Vargyas, 1959, p. 64).

[69] The main quote is "Tizenkét kőmíves összetanakodék, magos Déva várát,/hogy felépítenék, félvéka ezüstért,/ fél véka ezüstért, fél véka aranyért" [Twelve masons took counsel together/ That they would build the tall castle of Déva,/ That they would build it for half a bushel of silver,/ For half a bushel of silver, for half bushel of gold.], and supplemented with words expressing the futility of the undertaking: "Amit raktak délig, leomlott estére,/ amit raktak estig, leomlott reggelre" ["What they piled up by noon fell down by nightfall,/ What they piled up by nightfall fell down by morning"] (both translations: Leader, 1967, 19).

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Marzena Maciulewicz

Montenegro. The World Under Construction

Folk Art and the Redefinition of Montenegrin (Self-)identification

Examining the presence of the walled-up woman topos in Montenegrin culture necessitates a discussion of the status of Montenegrin folklore within the broader Yugoslav or Serbo-Croatian literary tradition, as well as the intricate processes that shaped Montenegrins' national and cultural (self-)identification.

In 2006, Montenegro declared its independence from Serbia, a date that marks a clear political caesura. However, as Krzysztof Wrocławski (2005, p. 166) notes, this process was the result of disintegrative tendencies within the Yugoslav federation, visible at least since 1990 (Wrocławski, 2005, p. 166). Prior to Montenegro's independence, the prevailing view on both sides – Montenegrin and Serbian – was that Montenegrins belonged to the Serbian ethnos, albeit as a somewhat distinct variation due to historical and anthropogeographical peculiarities (Miodyński, 2019, p. 152). During the time of Communist Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro were considered brotherly nations, united by language, religion, and shared alliances; any past disputes were forgotten (Wrocławski, 2005, p. 159). The reinterpretation of Montenegro's native history, literature, and national traditions in relation to the Yugoslav and Serbian cultural spheres has accompanied the region's socio-political changes. According to researchers, as a consequence of these changes, we are faced with a complex self-identification among Montenegrin citizens, who declare dual or triple identities as Montenegrins, Serbs, and Serb-Montenegrins (Gil, 2017, p. 223; Miodyński, 2019, p. 152; Wrocławski, 2005, p. 164). In addition to the so-called dual identity at the individual level, one of the key problems facing Montenegrins is considered to be identification at the national level, which results from the significant ethno-cultural heterogeneity of Montenegro's various regions (Gil, 2017, p. 223). In addition to the widely discussed and redefined relations between Serbia and Montenegro, relations with the ethnic minorities – primarily Albanians, Bosniaks, and Croats – who have inhabited Montenegro for generations and influenced its cultural traditions, are also important.

Although Dorota Gil distinguishes two cultural models that take into account Montenegro's cultural diversity (alternative and hybrid), she nevertheless states that the dominant model in the identity discourse – the reference point of the canon of cultural tradition constructed by the intellectual elite – is still the Serbian cultural model (post-Byzantine, Orthodox) (Gil, 2017, pp. 226–227). It is characterised by reference to tradition, which now serves as the foundation for both shared identity and polarisation at the same time: Orthodoxy (Orthodox Church, worship of saints), language, and history (national and folk heroes).

Polarisation is also evident in literary works in relation to the common basis of Yugoslav or Serbian identification. The political circumstances of the late 1990s intensified internal Montenegrin discussions around the revindication of cultural values recognised as their own, as exemplified by writers such as Miodrag Bulatović and Mihail Lalić (Wrocławski, 2005, p. 167).

The issue of the status of Montenegrin folk art within the broader tradition of Yugoslav or Serbo-Croatian literature was raised as early as the 1970s. In his introduction to the 1970 collection of Montenegrin epic songs, Radovan Zogović made the first systematic attempt to distinguish indigenously Montenegrin songs from the Serbo-Croatian tradition. He proposed that the Montenegrin element be taken into account and that academics speak about the Serbo-Croatian–Montenegrin epic (Зоговић, 1970, p. 7). He situates the functionality of Montenegrin song within the territory associated with the formation of Montenegrin national identity. Zogović stresses that isolating any song from the collection of Serbo-Croatian–Montenegrin creativity and assigning it to one of the national communities is complicated, as each criterion leaves certain doubts. For this reason, he considers several factors, including the origin of the "last storyteller" (the performer of the song), where the song was recorded, the protagonist's connection to the place, and the events that occurred there. It is worth noting that, based on these criteria, Zogović also considers *Zidanje Skadra* as part of Montenegrin heritage (Зоговић, 1970, pp. 149–154).

Radoslav Medenica, on the other hand, sees the Montenegrin tradition as being confined to the Montenegrin-Herzegovinian area, which includes old Montenegro, Boka, and Brdo, as well as areas of old Herzegovina that were part of Montenegro during the Ottoman Turks' rule. This area also extends to a small strip of eastern Herzegovina, reaching as far as the village line of Gacko-Nevesinje-Trebinje (along the route taken by the Turks moving from Mostar to Nikšić and continuing to Podgorica) (Меденица, 1975, p. 6). Medenica's 1975 publication, *Наша народна епика и њени творци* [Our folk epic and its creators], is a collection of Montenegrin epic songs drawn from various anthologies. The songs are organised primarily by the origin of the storyteller and, in a few cases, by the location of events mentioned in the songs when the author is unknown. Medenica notes the presence of Montenegrin songwriting in other traditions, e.g., in Vuk's compilation, Montenegrin

songs are said to make up half of the collection, with even more in the works of other collectors.

Novak Kilibarda appears to pay special attention to the linguistic aspect. He notes that most of the storytellers from whom Vuk collected songs are from areas where the Montenegrin language is spoken and that these territories now belong to Montenegro. He argues for adding an extensive linguistic commentary to Vuk's work and for publishing an anthology of Montenegrin songs in Montenegrin according to current spelling rules (Kilibarda, 2012, p. 323).

The dominant variant of the topos of the walled-up woman in the area I studied is undoubtedly the epic song *Zidanje Skadra* [The building of Skadar], recorded by Vuk Karadžić in the early 19th century (Караџић, 1976, pp. 90–96). It has subsequently been reproduced in anthologies and educational materials and has served as a reference point in the creation of new cultural texts, including scientific, literary, and artistic works). Zogović, Medenica, and Kilibarda all include *Zidanje Skadra* among Montenegrin folk traditions. According to Medenica, songs such as this one confirm the existence of an established epic tradition in the area (Меденица, 1975, p. 96). Kilibarda, meanwhile, lists Starac Raško and Todor Ikov – authors of two variants of *Zidanje Skadra* – among the most important Montenegrin storytellers (Kilibarda, 2012, p. 321).

Zidanje Skadra is regarded as an example of the shared cultural heritage of the South Slavs. Considering the intricate processes of redefining cultural identities and merging epic traditions with various national cultures, the chapter on Montenegro and Serbia addresses both topics, treating the collected research material as the primary reference point.

Zidanje Skadra as Part of Montenegrin Cultural Heritage – Two Storytellers, Two Variants

Within Montenegro, the predominant work featuring the topos of the walled-up woman is the song *Zidanje Skadra*, first published in the collection *Српске народне пјесме* [Serbian folk songs] by Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864) in the early 19th century. This song is considered the most complete version of the legend of the walling-up (Стефановић, 1933, p. 29). Karadžić's collection contains two variants of *Zidanje Skadra*, both written down on the basis of performances by storytellers from Montenegrin territory: Starac Raško and Todor Ikov.

Just as knowledge of the existence of the second variant of the song in Karadžić's collection is not widespread, the story of its origin is also little known. The only researcher who refers to this variant is Nada Milošević-Đorđević, but in her publication she characterises the author as "an unknown storyteller from

Montenegro"[1] (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971, p. 335)[2]. Vuk Karadžić received a shorter variant of *Zidanje Skadra* from Petar Petrović Njegoš, along with 120 other songs. In the 1836 letter accompanying the shipment, Njegoš informed Karadžić that the collection also included works by a previously unknown storyteller named Todor Ikov Piper (Петровић-Његош, 1951, p. 342). Information confirming Ikov's authorship of the second variant of the song is also found in Volume 1 of the collection *Српске народне пјесме из необјављених рукописа Вука Стеф. Караџића* [Serbian folk songs from the unpublished manuscripts of Vuk Stef. Karadžić], published in 1974 (Караџић, 1974). Unfortunately, apart from a brief mention in the aforementioned correspondence, there is no further information about Todor Ikov, who most likely came from the Piper family in Montenegro[3]. Any information about him comes from a collection of songs he left behind, which may or may not have been selected by Karadžić for publication. Karadžić's collection is said to contain 47 epic songs and two ballads, as well as 16 shorter variants by Todor Ikov (Меденица, 1975, p. 167).

Ikov's variant of *Zidanje Skadra* is four times shorter than Raško's, and therefore it omits some of the themes, including the designation of the children – Stoja and Stojan – as foundation sacrifices. In this version, it is Gojko, not Vukašin, who learns through a dream that a sacrifice must be made.

Particularly surprising is the diametrically opposed ending in these two variants of *Zidanje Skadra*. In Raško's variant, although Gojkovica begs for mercy and tries to bribe the brothers, she eventually gives up in the face of their intransigence and accepts death. She does not forget about her child either. She asks Master Rade to leave openings for her breasts and eyes, so that through them she can see and feed her son Jovan. In Ikov's song, Gojko's wife not only rebels and strongly opposes the will of the brothers but also leaves chaos in her wake. She uses a ruse to force her husband to bring their son and kills the child, thus manifesting her defiance of the fate assigned to her by the men. She then curses her tormentors and heralds the imminent takeover of the fortress by the Turks:

He gave her the child without saying a word.
And she fed her son,
She then hit him against the stone wall,
His head cracked like a white egg.

[1] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Maja Jaros either from the Polish translation by Marzena Maciulewicz or directly from the original Polish text.

[2] A collection of previously unpublished manuscripts by Vuk Karadžić, in which the storyteller Ikov's name is mentioned, was not published until 1974, three years after Milošević-Đorđević's work.

[3] The lack of additional bibliographic data is emphasised by all researchers who have included an analysis of songs by Todor Ikov in their publications on folk art, such as Ljubomir Zuković and Radosav Medenica. On the other hand, Ikov is not mentioned by Vladan Nedić in his publication *Вукови певачи из Црне Горе* [Vuk's storytellers from Montenegro] (Недић, 1990).

Gojko's beloved then cast a curse:
"Build it, nine Mrnjavčevićs,
Build it so it can bring misfortune upon you,
So the Turks can take it soon!"
As she said, so it happened.
(Караџић, 1974, p. 30)

In Raško's variant, Gojkovica is much more docile and willing to accept the male sacrifice scenario: she feeds the child, becomes the foundation of a building to protect it against foreign invasion, and the liquid flowing down the wall is used by other women to give birth and feed the next generation. Her attitude enshrines the belief that sacrifice is necessary in the name of higher goals. The message is reinforced by Vuk Karadžić's commentary on the song's lyrics, according to which no meaningful structure can be erected without sacrifice (Караџић, 1976, p. 96). Ikov's Gojkovica not only refuses to build and perpetuate the current order, but by killing the child and casting a curse, she brings about the annihilation of the family.

So far, no work in which the motif of the walled-up woman constitutes the main theme has been identified in Sima Milutinović Sarajlija's anthology titled *Пјеванија црногорска и херцеговачка* (Montenegrin and Herzegovinian Songs) (Милутиновић Сарајлија, 1990), nor in the works of Petar II Petrović Njegoš, including the 1845 publication *Ogledalo srpsko* [Serbian mirror]. However, it is possible that the foundation sacrifice appears in another collection or under a different title. There is no information about this topos in the collections of Sarajlija or Njegoš, perhaps because the variants heard from Montenegrin storytellers were written down by Vuk Karadžić, or because their subject matter did not pique the collector's interest.

According to Ljubomir Zuković, Ikov preserved a picture of Montenegrin family life in his songs. He composed only one song that expressed nationalist or pro-state sentiments (Зуковић, 1988, p. 239). Njegoš probably excluded Ikov's songs from his collections, including *Ogledalo srpsko*, precisely because of the subject matter of his works. According to Zuković, Njegoš selected texts that depicted the history of the Serbian people. For this reason, songs that address internal family conflicts or the individual deeds of heroes were of no interest to him (Зуковић, 1988, p. 172).

Both variants of *Zidanje Skadra* performed by Montenegrin storytellers were identified during consultations at the Faculty of Montenegrin Language and Literature in Cetinje (Fakultetu za crnogorski jezik i književnost na Cetinju). This demonstrates the work's presence in literary circulation and in the consciousness of the academic community, as well as its recognition as part of the local culture. The value and Montenegrin pedigree of the *Zidanje Skadra* song are also emphasised by authors of scholarly publications on oral traditions. These authors point out the song's characteristic linguistic elements and the storytellers from whom Vuk heard it.

Radovan Zogović, in his 1970 collection *Црногорске епске пјесме разних времена* [Montenegrin epic songs from different times], states that the *Zidanje Skadra* song (which he counts as part of the Montenegrin heritage) was based on a legend or myth from a time when human sacrifices were offered to the gods. In his opinion, it combines old (barbaric) elements with new elements – description of lifestyle, relations in a rural community, dependencies in ancestral communities (*zadruga*), and relations between wife and husband. He argues that, due to its ambiguity, lyricism, and the motif of boundless maternal love, the work is closer to a ballad than an epic (Зоговић, 1970, p. 25). He has no doubt that the characters and names from the Mrnjavčević family are local/Serbian. Zogović points out that *Zidanje Skadra* is yet another song in the cycle about the Mrnjavčević family, placing them, and especially Vukašin, in a negative light. The author encourages readers to analyse all of Starac Raško's songs about this medieval family: *Uroš i Mrnjavčevići* [Uroš and the Mrnjavčevićis] and *Ženidba kralja Vukašina* [The nuptials of King Vukašin]. He claims that the series portrays the storyteller's critical attitude toward the rulers who allowed tsarism to collapse. Only the two eldest brothers, Vukašin and Uglješa, are portrayed negatively. Their characters are references to historical figures who were rulers with real power during the Turkish invasion. Gojko, created by folk tradition, is the only one who does not pursue wealth and power and is capable of keeping his word.

Similarly, in his work *Наша народна епика и њени творци* [Our folk epic and its creators], Radosav Medenica draws attention to the figure of the storyteller, his literary talent, and the interpretive significance of the song series about the Mrnjavčevićs (Меденица, 1975, pp. 94–101). In his opinion, in the collection of texts whose authorship is attributed to Starac Raško, the two outstanding classical songs are *Zidanje Skadra* and *Uroš i Mrnjavčevici*. Medenica argues that Raško is not only an artist and interpreter of ready-made poetic structures, but also an improviser and creator; he did not alter the base motif of the search for the siblings, Stoja and Stojan, but added the theme of the second victim. Due to the ingenuity of the songwriter, a song or legend containing a universal motif was linked to King Vukašin, while Raško's *Zidanje Skadra* confirms the thesis of a well-established local epic tradition. The author also notes that the song about the erection of Skadar in Raško's version was described as the best poetic form of this legend by one of the Grimm brothers, while Goethe considered it a barbaric representation (Меденица, 1975, p. 97).

In Adnan Čingić's introduction to the collection of Starac Raško's songs[4], recorded by Vuk Karadžić, a number of arguments from the fields of linguistic and cultural studies are presented to support the Montenegrin origin of *Zidanje*

[4] The collection of songs, with a critical commentary, was published as part of the PATRIMONIUM series covering editions from old Montenegrin literature, unpublished manuscripts, critical editions, selections of works, anthologies, and chrestomathies related to Montenegrin literature.

Skadra. The commentator emphasises that Ijekavian iotation is typical of all Montenegrin storytellers, that is, those using Montenegrin speech or language (Чиргић, 2015, p. 14). Linguistic and historical or social commentary on the songs is included at the end of the publication. Of particular interest is the mention of a well-known Montenegrin belief that walling up a child's shadow could lead to their death, so children were not allowed to enter construction sites. The author also discusses the symbolism of the names Stoja and Stojan, which are said to signify permanence and were traditionally given in families where children had previously died. In his view, *neimar* Rade is a figure symbolising an experienced builder rather than a specific individual. Čingić further explains that the terms *kraljica* [queen] and *nana* (denoting an elderly woman or grandmother) appear in the song because, in Montenegrin society, sisters-in-law did not address each other by name (Чиргић, 2015, p. 83). Finally, it is noted that some people still believe in the healing properties of the residue that appears on the wall (Чиргић, 2015, p. 84).

Reflection on cultural precedence has therefore attracted attention within Montenegrin scholarly circles. In his publication *Studije o starijoj crnogorskoj književnosti* [Studies on old Montenegrin literature], Aleksandar Radoman discusses the origin of the legend of the Skadar fortress construction and unequivocally attributes it to Montenegrin culture (Radoman, 2015). Regardless of the debates surrounding the authorship or precedence of the song, both versions of the *Zidanje Skadra* song, featuring the motif of the sacrificial burial, are recognised as part of the Montenegrin epic tradition. The marginalisation of Ikov's variant and the popularity of Raško's song are variously explained in the commentaries of oral tradition researchers. Among the key differences between the variants is the relationship between the motif of the foundation sacrifice and the motif of the curse. It is worth noting that the curse motif appears in other source-texts variants and in reinterpretations of the topos in contemporary Montenegrin culture. Thus, Ikov's marginalised or newly discovered version is part of the tradition of the realisation of the walled-up woman topos in the region.

Other Source Texts "From the Banks of the Bojana River": a Montenegrin Legend and an Albanian Ballad

The topos of the walled-up woman appears in two variants of other source texts, a legend and a ballad, both included in this analysis to illustrate Montenegro's specific cultural diversity. They are also significant because they contain motifs that appear in subsequent reinterpretations of the walling-up topos.

The legend *Зидање Скадра на Бојани* [The building of Skadar on the Bojana River] was published in the section on urban legends in Radoje Radojević's anthology *Вилина гора. Антологија црногорских легенди* [Mountain of the

vila: an anthology of Montenegrin legends] (1971). This variant differs from the *Zidanje Skadra* song in its inclusion of the ruler's crime, the origin of the foundation sacrifice from outside the family, and the presence of a curse.

The legend begins with a description of the crime committed by Vukašin. Source works related to the topos of the walled-up woman usually begin with an account of the construction process, which is disrupted for an extended period of time (often a symbolic three years) and for unspecified reasons. From the subsequent narrative, it can be inferred that construction failures are 'unregulated' relations with the supernatural, pragmatic considerations, or a combination of both. Usually, the characters' actions to maintain the foundations stem from a belief in the necessity of sacrifice to placate the gods or forces of nature, such as rivers. Construction failures may result from choosing an unsuitable site or from the actions of the founder. In the legend *Zidanje Skadra na Bojani*, both themes – contact with the supernatural world and pragmatic considerations – are expressed in the words of a *vila* foretelling the failure of a construction undertaken in a cursed location: "He began to build it in an unfortunate place, where a cursed road leads" (Радојевић, 1971, p. 60).

The construction of a stronghold was a central concern for medieval rulers. A fortress primarily ensured the security of the community and protected it from enemy invasion (sometimes the Ottoman Empire/Turks are directly mentioned, other times this is left implicit), making it essential for its survival. In addition, such structures historically served to legitimise and maintain power (Żyromski & Skoczylas, 2007, p. 99). They reinforced the authority of the king: a ruler capable of ensuring the welfare of his people was imagined by his subjects as enjoying special favour from the gods (Szczepański, 2010, p. 19). Leaving behind a legacy in the form of a building that served the community also allowed rulers to make a lasting impression on the collective memory of the people.

In the legend, the main motivation for building and making a foundation sacrifice is not to protect the community's threatened existence, but to serve the interests of a vicious king who exploits the power and position granted to him. Vukašin's attempt to cleanse himself of the sin of crime is both the primary impetus for the construction of the fortress and also his ultimate failure. The negative portrayal of King Vukašin in the legend is reinforced in relation to the song *Zidanje Skadra*, which details his crimes and acts of violence against his subjects, and through numerous epithets revealing his despicable character. There is no mention of Vukašin's family in this variant, which only underscores the fact that all the ruler's actions are subordinated solely to his personal interests.

Vukašin contacts the supernatural world at key moments through an elderly man and woman. After committing the crime, an old man – an emissary of God – appears to him in a dream and, under threat of a curse, instructs him to atone for the "mortal and unforgivable" sin (Радојевић, 1971, p. 59) by building a city on the site where he killed the young servant girl. Upon waking, Vukašin gathers a thousand builders and begins construction at the site indicated by the old man.

While overseeing the construction, Vukašin encounters various characters on three separate occasions, each warning him that building a stronghold in this place will be difficult. In the first scene he meets a hermit, whom he disregards; in the second, a girl who, seeing the tired king, offers him water, but she too receives only a cold stare in response; the last, an elderly woman, wishes him good luck with the construction, but the king casts her an evil glance and threatens her with death. Despite the efforts of Vukašin and the builders he employs, the fortress collapses into ruins each night. After repeated attempts to rebuild the foundations, Vukašin is again advised, in a dream, by an old man to contact the elderly woman he had met earlier. The scene of the old woman dreaming of the *vila* is repeated three times, each time revealing to her what the king must do for the construction to be completed. She instructs him twice to cross the Bojana river: the first night by swimming, the second by boat. Despite the king's efforts, however, each night the city turns to ruin. The motif of crossing the river as a test of the founder or builder also appears in the source texts concerning the construction of the bridge in Višegrad. On the third night, the *vila* orders the mother of a slain woman to be walled up in the foundations.

With a heavy heart, Vukašin carries out this order as well. The woman, already walled up in the foundations, asks that her daughter and son be brought to her so she can feed them. After doing so, she turns to stone and her milk begins to flow down the wall of the castle. The children faint with despair. The foundation sacrifice is the mother of the young murdered woman, who is at the same time also mother to an infant son and daughter. This victim thus brings together the characteristics of various foundation sacrifices: a young woman, a mother, siblings – brother and sister – and embodies the potential of foundation sacrifices occurring in different variants across the region. Uniquely, she turns to stone after nursing the children.

After the stronghold is completed, the *vila* speaks: "Vukašin, Vukašin! You are not able to build Skadar". The phrase *nijesi kadar* seems to be more than just a clever rhyme (*kadar* – *Skadar*). It points to a deep-seated inability, a lack of predisposition, or proper character in the builder – Vukašin in this case (Радојевић, 1971, p. 60). From the first words of the *vila*, we can infer that his efforts were doomed from the start, and that the actions of supernatural forces ordering him to continue building are a punishment for the crime he committed. Both the building and he himself were cursed. The appearance of further figures and the trials he was subjected to could have been opportunities for the redemption of his sin, which Vukašin, however, failed to seize. In the course of the construction, he commits further acts of violence, culminating in the walling up of the mother of the murdered girl and the sentencing of her children to death.

The legend interweaves elements of pagan and Christian beliefs, which are expressed through the presence of the *vila* alongside saints, as well as themes of curse, sin, and redemption. While the curse is a legacy of the pre-Christian era (Engelking, 2010, p. 20), it also forms part of the cultural context of the folk

worldview. The sin of murder committed by Vukašin creates the threat of being cursed, but there is also the possibility of redemption through the construction itself and the circumstances surrounding it. Following the *vila*'s orders to cross the river, Vukašin prays to God and St. Nikola (protector of sailors and seamen, who, according to folk belief, performed miracles and could, like Christ, calm the stormy sea). Ultimately, it is by the "will of God" that the Bojana River flows in the place of the former stream. The legend explains the origin of the names Shkodra for the city and Bojana for the river, which were said to have been stained with the blood of the murdered woman (*srb. boja* – hue, colour).

Although in the identity discourse that forms the basis of the canon of cultural tradition constructed by the intellectual elite, Montenegrin-Serbian relations and the Serbian cultural model remain central, the picture of Montenegro's cultural richness would be incomplete without considering alternative identities, which also form the basis for the identification of minorities such as Albanian, Bosnian, and Croatian. As mentioned above, Dorota Gil distinguishes two cultural models that account for Montenegro's cultural diversity: alternative and hybrid (Gil, 2017, p. 227). She writes:

> The first of these – here called the hybrid identification model – represents phenomena based on Western, i.e., Latin, Italian, or Dalmatian-Dubrovnik cultural sources (dominant in the region to this day) and the Roman Catholic religion, covering the Adriatic coastal areas (primarily the Bay of Kotor). However, it is also associated with the ethnocultural amalgam of the southeastern borderlands of the country (the Ulcinja region), with a predominantly Albanian and Muslim population (Catholics also live here alongside the larger group of followers of Islam). On the other hand, the alternative cultural model to the Orthodox and "Montenegrin-oriented" centre – and the predominantly Catholic and Latin-rooted culture of the Adriatic coast – was formed in eastern Montenegro, in the area of the so-called Sandžak (today divided by the border between Montenegro and Serbia). In this region, the dominant code of cultural (self-)identification of the Bošniaks, who live in this area and identify with the Muslims of Bosnia, is Islam. (Gil, 2017, p. 227)

In view of the above, I found it necessary to include in this analysis an Albanian ballad and information on reinterpretations of the topos of the walled-up woman in translation from Albanian, indicating the universality of the motif and the interdependence of Albanian and Montenegrin culture. In Montenegro, collections of Albanian folk works published in Pristina during the socialist Yugoslav era are available (see Бован, 1976; Мићовић, 1981), as well as anthologies of contemporary Albanian poetry and prose (see Baškim, 2009; Đurković et al., 2011; Malići, 2016). These include a poem titled *Rozafo!* by Frederik Rreshpja, translated from Albanian by Muja Ćazim, and discussed in this monograph in the chapter on Albania.

The topos is present in a ballad published in a 1976 anthology of Albanian folk ballads, the first in a series of collections of Albanian folk tales (Бован, 1976, p. 9). The Albanian variant translated by Esad Mekuli, *Pala magla na Bojanu* [The fog has fallen on Bojana], is most likely the ballad *Rozafat*, which

first appeared in the second volume of the *Visaret e Kombit* [Treasures of the nation] series edited by Bernardin Palaj and Donat Kurti (Palaj & Kurti, 1937, pp. 243–245). This work was later reprinted in the collection *Balada dhe Legjenda* [Ballads and legends] published in Prishtina in 1974. It is considered the most complete text of the song about being walled up in the walls of the Skadar fortress. Although it is unclear where this variant of the song was first recorded, the presence of local toponymy (the Buna River and Valdanuz Mountains), points to Shkodra or its environs. Rigels Halili argues that this variant should be regarded as the most important canonical text, forming the basis for almost all subsequent references and discussions around the walling-up topos in modern Albanian culture, as discussed in the chapter on Albania.

In an anthology of Albanian ballads, a translation and discussion of the ballad *Pala magla na Bojanu*, in juxtaposition with Starac Raško's song "about the construction and demolition of a castle and about a young woman carrying dinner" (Бован, 1976, p. 12) appears first. From the introduction by Vladimir Bovan, a literary historian, we learn that this is no coincidence, as the motif is one of the oldest in folk art. Bovan stresses that the motifs appearing in Albanian works are very well known from South Slavic and Balkan traditions, and all of them constitute "a common good of oral literature" (Бован, 1976, p. 10). The congruence of compositional and thematic elements allows for a comparative interpretation of Albanian translations and Serbo-Croatian variants from Vuk Karadžić's collection. The collection of songs was further supplemented by a bibliography of studies on foundation sacrifice in Slavic cultures.

Bovan's introduction is significant in that it does not focus on establishing the "precedence" of a particular variant, but rather on its artistic value and, above all, on introducing a comparative perspective:

> Both songs, Serbo-Croatian and Albanian, are like carved from a single stone in terms of content. They are made according to a well-considered concept, grounded in faith in tradition or in historical reminiscence of legendary figures, from a deeply human, ethical position, embodied in the virtue of the youngest brother who keeps his promise, in the sacrifice of his beloved, and also in the condemnation of older brothers and their beloved. (Бован, 1976, p. 13)

According to the author, the differences are minor and discernible only in small details: the presence of nameless brothers as opposed to the brothers of the Mrnjavčević family; the presence of fog and its absence at the beginning of the piece; the advice given by a saint as opposed to that given by a *vila*. In the Albanian version, the mother-in-law designates the woman who will go to the construction site, whereas in the Serbian version, the women themselves determine the order. The Albanian version also omits the search for Stoja and Ostoja, as well as information about the healing properties of the liquid flowing from the wall. Moreover, the entire passage concerning Gojkovica – her reaction and the emphasis on the sacrifice made by the young woman – is missing. Bovan also sees a difference in the structure of the text and character construction. In

his opinion, the Serbo-Croatian version is more lyrical than the Albanian, and its passages could function as independent parts. He argues that characteristic elements of Albanian works include the subordinate position of women in a patriarchal society and the depiction of the relationship between man and nature.

The author also addresses the intertextuality dimension of works employing this motif, stressing that the legend of walling up inspired artists in much the same way as the legend of selling one's soul to the devil inspired Goethe to write *Faust*, or as a ten-line poem about the construction of a bridge in Višegrad by Andrić inspired him to title his novel *Na Drini ćuprija* [Bridge on the Drina].

A comparison of the song *Zidanje Skadra* and the ballad *Pala magla na Bojanu*, as translated from Albanian by Esad Mekula is also undertaken by researcher Novak Kilibarda in his text *Odnos opšteg i posebnoga u usmenome književnom tekstu* [Relationship between the general and the specific in an oral literary text] (Kilibarda, 2012, pp. 29–40). The text is worthy of attention in several respects, although its analytical value may be open to criticism[5]. In the introduction, the author notes the interdependence of the two main universal motifs present in the works – foundation sacrifice and betrayal – and their embedding in the local and national context. Of particular importance to him are the religious, ethical-psychological, and ethical-ideological aspects that shape the creative choices of the storytellers. According to Kilibarda, in both cases the relationship between the individual and the community is of great importance. In the amorphous Albanian version, respect for order and customs comes to the fore, alongside themes of maternal grief and sacrifice; however, these appear subordinate to the sanctity of the given word (*besa*) and the interests of the community (*zadruga*). In *Zidanje Skadra*, by contrast, the focus of the plot on the negative character of King Vukašin and his portrayal as a usurper causes the national theme to dominate over the universal one.

One of the main differences between the works is the construction of the characters. In the short Albanian ballad, the characters are nameless, which reinforces the ethical and educational nature of the message. In the elaborate song transcribed by Vuk Karadžić, Kilibarda draws attention to the characters – the *vila*, Desimir's servant, King Vukašin, and his court – with special emphasis on Gojko, whose attitude is contrasted with that of Vukašin. The author advances the thesis that the key characters are constructed in relation to Vukašin's defining traits, resulting in a predominance of an ideological rather than an ethical message, unlike in the Albanian version. While *besa* is central in the Albanian version, the Serbian version is dominated by the national theme.

Finally, Kilibarda highlights the different attitudes of the victims, suggesting that the differences between the cultural backgrounds of the variants can be

[5] A critical analysis of this text is presented in an article by Marko Vešović (2005, pp. 453–490). The author of the article points out linguistic and logical errors in Novak Kilibarda's argument, both in the comparative text discussed above and in his other works.

identified on this basis. In the work *Pala magla na Bojanu*, the strength of the moral code within a patriarchal society and the conviction that one's fate must be accepted without opposition are unquestionable. In Kilibarda's view, the victim's acceptance of a tragic fate underscores the stigmatisation of those who break their word (*besa*) and thus undermine the interests of the community. By contrast, the heroine of *Zidanje Skadra* initially disbelieves her tormentors but later negotiates with them. The motif of maternal love and concern appears in the relationship between Gojkovica and her mother: the young wife is convinced that her mother can save her. Gojkovica offers the goods that her mother possesses and later also offers another person in her place. Interestingly, Gojkovica, like the Albanian heroine, does not question the necessity of making a sacrifice for the building, which functions as a metaphor for the state and the nation.

In the Albanian ballad, as in in the Montenegrin legend, elements of pagan and religious beliefs interact in various ways with the principles of customary and state law.

The heroine of *Mythical Decameron* walled up in a song

One example of an original prose text that references, among other things, *Zidanje Skadra* is the collection of short stories *Митски Декамерон* [The mythical Decameron] by Čedo Vuković (1920–2014). Vuković's work, like Ivo Andrić's novel, engages with folk art, proposing a new reading of a legend closely tied to local culture and history.

Each chapter, featuring a tale inspired by indigenous literary tradition, is preceded by a dialogue between two blind men, Bjelota and Stanko, who travel together through time and space, guiding the reader through successive tales. Both the characters of the blind men and some of the story's figures evoke folk storytellers.

Although the reference to Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* is evident on many levels – the title, the book's structure, and the plot – I have not encountered a single research paper on the piece *Митски Декамерон* containing a reference to Boccaccio's work. For reasons that are unclear, this publication is largely dismissed or forgotten, despite Čedo Vuković's impressive output (Радоњић, 2021) and the recognition his work has received. It has attracted little scholarly attention: in the numerous texts consulted, only four publications mention it.

Unlike the authors other works, the collection of short stories discussed here was published only once in 1991, near the end of Vuković's creative life, and was not included in the author's collected works published in 2000. Sofija Kalezić-Đuričković, author of one of the few articles referring to the work *Митски Декамерон*, points out several possible reasons for the works negligible

reception. In her opinion, it may have remained, as it were, in the shadow of the author's previous and more important novels; its fall into 'oblivion' may also be a consequence of the author's choice of atypical mythological subject matter (Kalezić-Đuričković, 2014b). Radomir Ivanović also writes about the distinctiveness of this work, arguing that Vuković's output can be divided into three groups: historical, revolutionary, and social novels. By contrast, the atypically structured work *Митски Декамерон*, in which well-known myths and legends are transposed, falls outside this categorisation (Ивановић, 1992).

According to the literature on the subject, *Митски Декамерон* is clearly rooted in localism and is even described as an indigenous work. This is indicated by references to local legends, myths, and folktales presented in the form of new and original variants, as well as by the language used to describe the fictional world and employed by the characters. According to Sofija Kalezić-Đuričković, the text reflects the various dialects of Montenegrin reality, from the northern regions to the Bay of Kotor. The language is not uniform; rather, it conveys the regional lexical specificity, from personal names and decorative elements to loan words, mainly Turkisms and Italianisms (Kalezić-Đuričković, 2014a).

In the introduction to *Zidanje Skadra*, the aforementioned Bjelota and Stanko meet an old builder, the *neimar* Rade. In light of the source texts, it is particularly noteworthy that in *Mythical Decameron*, the story of the stronghold's construction on the banks of the Bojana River is presented to wanderers and readers from the perspective of the chief builder (*protomajtor*). Rade is summoned by King Vukašin to build the fortress immediately after the completion of the church in Ravanica. The old builder states that although he has erected numerous buildings over the course of his life, this one holds special significance for him, and so he begins his story.

Essentially, the story is based on the motifs of *Zidanje Skadra*, and two of its passages concerning the order to make a foundation sacrifice appear unchanged in the prose text. The inspiration for writing this story, however, derives not only from the song *Zidanje Skadra* itself, but also from a broader body of folk works with which Vuković was familiar. This is evidenced by references to other epic songs about the Mrnjavčević family and to various legends, such as those about the white *vila* building a fortress and the legend of the walling-up of a shadow, which Rade recalls while preparing the site where he is about to wall up Novka. The story also contains several elements identical to those found in the previously discussed Montenegrin legend *Zidanje Skadra na Bojani*: the murder committed by Vukašin and the resulting curse, as well as the consequent shift in the motivation for building the fortress. Unlike in the legend, however, his crime is not revealed immediately. Instead, the story begins, as does *Zidanje Skadra*, with information about the commencement of construction.

In comparison with the version of the legend in Radoje Radojević's anthology, Vukašin's negative characterisation is intensified, contrasting with the portrayal of his youngest brother, his wife, and the chief builder. Vukašin is depicted as a ruler who uses violence not only against his subjects but also

against members of his own family. Cunning, selfish, and stingy: "he cuts down the tree to pluck the cherry from the top" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 192). The story evaluates Vukašin's actions negatively, which is made evident in the comments of both the narrator and the characters in the story, including the builder Rade.

The characterisation of the builder Rade and King Vukašin, as well as the relationship between them, recalls the contrasting characters of the founders and the builder Rade in a variant of the song *Како се оградила ћуприја на Вишеграду* [How the bridge in Višegrad was built] by Petranović (discussed in the chapter on Bosnia and Herzegovina). In both cases, morally corrupt and ruthlessly violent founders cooperate with the chief builder Rade, who sheds tears over the subsequent victims of the bridge and castle construction. In the Petranović variant and in the Radojević legend discussed earlier, the founders' moral attitude leaves much to be desired, which prevents them from appeasing the divine forces of nature and completing the construction. Their venture therefore seems doomed to failure. When the foundations of a fortress are destroyed every night, Vukašin strongly objects to insinuations that this might be divine punishment: "Silence! May your teeth turn to stone! My court did not bring God's punishment upon itself with the sins it committed!" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 184). In the story, as in the Montenegrin legend, there are predictions of construction failure as a consequence of Vukašin's actions: "As a result of shrewd and treacherous deeds, no lasting stronghold will be built" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 186).

A significant section of the text is devoted to the brothers' mutual relations and their relationships with their wives. This section reinforces the negative characterisation of the characters of Vukašin and Uglješa, and indirectly of their wives as well. After Vukašin informs his brothers of his decision to wall up one of the women, each proposes a different solution; they do not openly oppose the king's order, but they tacitly distance themselves from it. Uglješa proposes a roll of the dice, while Gojko proposes telling the wives everything and leaving the decision to them. Vukašin eventually orders them to keep quiet and leave matters to fate. Of the three brothers, Gojko is the only one who does not break his word.

In Vukašin's conversation with his wife Jevrosima there are clear references to other folk songs from the pre-Kosovo cycle, especially Ženidba kralja Vukašina, in which Vukašin's deceit leads to the death of Jevrosima's brother Momčilo. Vukašin cannot accept the fact that Momčilo becomes the hero of the song when Jevrosima compares one of their sons, Marko, to him. Finally, Vukašin breaks his word and reveals the secret to his wife. Jevrosima demands that he stop building, but when he stays his course, Jevrosima curses him for breaking his word and for his past transgressions. The narrator confirms this negative assessment of Vukašin's character: "He plunders and chops – never with his own hand – in front of all the people" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 192).

This portrayal is consistent with the chief builder's assessment of both the rulers and their wives. Rade becomes acquainted with the women when they

bring food each day, while the brothers regularly supervise the construction. Rade is most fond of the beautiful Novka (Gojko's wife) and regards Gojko as the best of the brothers, as he is the only one who asks about the workers' needs.

The distinctive element of the story with the topos of the walled-up woman is the elaborate characterisation of Rade. Numerous descriptions of the chief builder's feelings and reflections expose his sensitivity, moral dilemmas, and sense of responsibility. Rade's hair turns completely white on the night after the *vila* orders that the children be walled up. Disbelief and shock accompany him when he learns from the old man about the murder committed by Vukašin, and when he receives an order from Vukašin to wall up one of the brothers' wives. The narrative reaches a climax when he realises that he must wall up Novka. The entire walling up scene brims with descriptions of emotions, dilemmas, and reflections on the burden of building. By presenting the story from the builder's perspective, the focus shifts away from describing the emotional reactions of Gojko and his walled-up wife towards Rade's dilemmas. When Gojko realises that it is his wife who is to be walled up, he bids her farewell and quickly departs, leaving her with the builders. Ultimately, it is Rade who leads Novka to the site where she is to be walled up. Neither Gojko nor King Vukašin, who ordered the walling up, is present. Rade doesn't reveal his true intentions; in a way deceiving himself as well, he lets her think that it's a game until the last moment. While Novka is still laughing and joking, the *neimar* feels the weight of the stone and personifies it, stating that it is apparently resisting, as it does not want to enter this "foul wall" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 200). Laying more stones, he questions Vukašin's command and considers stopping his actions, transferring his responsibility to others, and confessing the truth to Novka. Ultimately, however, he keeps quiet and accepts responsibility for her death:

> Only in my hand did she see the criminal intent. Only I was to blame for her suffering and downfall. Only in my hand did she see the power that determines life and death. I, however, was only a submissive, poor servant of a foreign power and a servant of death. And above all, a servant of a mindless impulse – to build, to put up walls, to climb to heights through sweat, blood, and death! (Вуковић, 1990, p. 201)

He is snapped out of his reverie by Novka's screams as she begs for mercy, calls out for Gojko in vain, and asks for openings to be left in the wall for her eyes and breasts. Rade speaks of the relief he feels while removing the stones to comply with her request. After Novka is walled up, no one eats; the food is taken by animals and beggars. After a week, Novka falls silent, but little Jovo still receives milk.

As in the source texts, the figures of the old man and the *vila* function as intermediaries. While the figure of the *vila* as a link to the supernatural order does not differ significantly from the source texts, the elaborate plotline involving the old storyteller playing the *gusle* – as well as the figures of the blind men Bjelota and Stanko and the figure of the chronicler – introduces a theme of sustained reflection on the importance of folk art.

The chronicler, whom Bjelota and Stanko meet at the beginning of their journey, calls the blind men far-sighted because they are able to see into the infinite. Blindness appears, on the one hand, as a limiting circumstance (like the plague in Bocaccio's *Decameron*), but on the other as liberating and "eye-opening" to a reality overlooked or ignored in everyday life. They travel through their country deprived of their sight, but open to listening to the legends of the chronicler and the stories of the people they meet. The chronicler is the first of the characters to point out the responsibility and momentousness of the act of creation: "I am not a sorcerer, I bring light out of the primordial darkness, I write" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 9).

In Vuković's *Zidanje Skadra*, the old man is of momentous significance. He reveals the crime committed by Vukašin (who mutilated and threw a young servant girl into the Bojana River), thereby revealing the real reason for starting the construction (in order not to be cursed he must build a fortified town and an Orthodox church on the Bojana River). Rade suspects that the old man is a storyteller: "A face from the present, a voice from the past. As if it were the voice of that blind gusle player, but I wouldn't bet my life on it" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 186). The sound of the *gusle* is heard at key moments associated with the walling up. It reverberates when the foundations fall with a bang and the *vila* appears, ordering the foundation sacrifice; it can also be heard during Novka's walling up. The storytellers fall silent when the woman realises her imminent death. The old man appears at the construction site immediately after the walling up, where he composes a song about the events he has just witnessed. He returns later, accompanied by pigeons that settle on the site of Novka's walling up. All this suggests that the storyteller is the figure capable of saving her from oblivion. The story ends with an account of the silence at court surrounding Novka's deception and death, implying a suppression of the memory of her death and the crime that necessitated it. The only remaining trace of her sacrifice is a three-leaved lily carved in stone, symbolising her purity and youth. This aspect of the story is another example of the negative portrayal of Vukašin, a ruler who uses violence to shape both his vision of the past and his image. Vukašin's possible prohibition against talking about Novka's death may be evidenced by his earlier reaction to the mention of Jevrosima's brother Momčil, who, although defeated by Vukašin, became a hero of collective memory. The presence of the storyteller signifies that the song can save Novka from oblivion and "bring her out of the darkness of the past", as the chronicler describes his role. In folk art, the storyteller not only records events, but also shapes the fate of his characters – granting them a chance to exist, endowing their deeds with meaning, and sometimes even saving them from ultimately disappearing into oblivion. This is an instance of the causal power of the word, which can overcome time and death, making the hero eternal, if only in the sounds of the song and the memory of the listeners.

As central figures of the tale, the storytellers and the builder determine the interpretation of the works' walling-up motif in the context of the creation myth

and the process of creation. According to Miloš Vulević, the proper theme of the story concerns one of the most important issues of Vuković's aesthetics – the issue of the act of creation. According to Vulević, the work is a kind of essay on art and creation (Вулевић, 1998), in which the stone serves as a symbol. The symbolism of the stone is connected with primordial beginnings, primeval causality, and foundations; it is an element involved in the original creation of the cosmos (Kopaliński, 1990, p. 136; Wawrzeniuk, 2010, p. 29). Already in the very first scene, Rade introduces an analogy between the erection of buildings and the process of creation: "In vain I flee from the stone – it creeps in between the words, and only about it, about the stone, I tell" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 177).

Stone expresses the burden of responsibility inherent in creating, building, and crafting, and is the central motif of the story. A reflection on the literal and metaphorical binding of fate to stone opens the story, and a confession full of guilt over Novka's walling up, preceded by thoughts of anguish and the burden of creation, brings it to a close. Rade begins his dialogue with the blind men with a story about building with stone, explaining how fate becomes bound to it. From his account, we also learn that the *neimar*, *zidari*, *klesari* – all workers regardless of specialisation – dream of stone and of erecting buildings. Stone weighs down or becomes light depending on Rade's actions while walling up Gojkovica. Building and creating constitutes the meaning of the *neimar*'s life: "My entire life is about just that – to transcend myself, to look at the beauty of a new building, to inhale the smell of stone dust, plaster, and hewn oak" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 182).

In Vuković's novel, stone serves many purposes and has diverse functions and symbolic meanings: it is material for the erection of significant and lasting structures, a place of death (tombstone) and, at the same time, life (monument), and a metaphor for words and creation, which constitute the meaning of the builders' lives. Different types of stone are also evoked: smooth and unhewn stone, amethyst, white stone, and rock. It is impossible to discuss the symbolism and meaning of each individually. Within the context of the walled-up woman topos, those aspects of stone symbolism that seem most relevant relate to creative potential, memory and memorialisation, life and death, and the passage between worlds.

A grave, a monument, and a song are forms of existence that endure – of Novka in this story, and of the builders and founders in other variants. They are the place and space of death, but also of "life after life", forgetting and commemorating at the same time. In the story, Rade contemplates building a stone tomb for himself, but also laments that, at the end of his life, he came to build a tomb for Novka. The stone foundations of the stronghold, in which the young woman is walled up alive, become her grave. Stone functions as a symbol of the grave and is commonly used in burial practices, in the form of tombstones, as a medium for commemorating the resting place of the deceased (Brzozowska, 1996 p. 356; Kopaliński, 1990, p. 137). Thus, it holds momentous significance in the culture of memory, serving as an archetype and a symbol of the perpet-

uation of memory (Zaborski, 2006, p. 317). From stone, Rade erects structures that become permanent monuments commemorating both builders and founders. In this case, the "cursed town" of Skadar/Shkoder becomes a rather dubious monument to Vukašin, recorded in the collective memory as an anti-hero. Novka, by contrast, is commemorated, as evidenced by Rade's words: "And so I walled her up in a song" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 205).

The symbolism of stone is also related to the transformative potential of the event for the chief builder, as actions related to change or the anticipation of change occur upon stone (Brzozowska, 1996, p. 349). The introduction provides information about the many structures that the builder has erected for the rulers and the church. A longer section of the story focuses on characterising the builders' labour, their dedication, and their continued work at the king's behest despite the victims. Rade even observes that cities stand on the shoulders of poor people, indicating that he is aware of the indispensability of sacrifices in construction. At the same time, however, he confesses that he has never walled up even the shadow of a human being, let alone a child. After walling up Novka, he no longer wants to touch stone, vowing never to erect either a stronghold or a temple. Is he exhausted and crushed by the weight of the enormous responsibility he has taken on all his life, or does Novka's sacrifice – towards which he felt a profound emotional connection – not justify the construction of a cursed stronghold? It is certain that he feels complicit in her death, and his final words can be read as an expression of condemnation of all involved in the walling up, "for there is no stone without sin" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 205).

The Despairing Skadar

New interpretive tropes related to the topos of the walled-up woman are introduced in the poem Очај [Despair] by Vitomir Vito Nikolić (1934–1994), first published in the volume Друмовања [Wandering] in 1962 (Николић, 1962). This work is significant both because of the author's biography and his importance to the culture of the region, and because of the poem's popularity in contemporary culture, as evidenced by its inclusion in high school literature textbooks (including as a context for the song *Zidanje Skadra*) and in contemporary interpretations of Nikolić's poem by, among others, one of Montenegro's best-known actors – Danilo Čelebić (see Crna Gora od Iskona, 2020).

Vito Nikolić is widely recognised as one of the most important and popular Montenegrin poets of the 20th century (Rakočević, 2012). On the one hand, his artistic qualities are appreciated, and although some note inspiration from the poetry of Sergei Yesenin, Draško Došljak states that Vito Nikolić's opus cannot be ascribed to any of the known literary trends; in his opinion, the writer's style is so original that it can be termed Vitomirism (*vitomirisam*) (Перошевић, 2016). On the other hand, Nikolić's poetry is popular among contemporary au-

diences of different layers of culture, including popular culture. There is a film about Nikolić, *U trag zaboravu* [On the way to oblivion] (2016), directed by Maja Janjušević, and a biography by Maksim Vujačić (2012). Celebrations commemorating his life and work attract representatives of the local elite; a promenade in Nikšić has been named after him, fragments of his poems appear in urban spaces, and a mural with his likeness has been painted on a building.

Nikolić's poems address difficult existential moments and the feelings that accompany human crises and the transience of existence. The poet describes a lonely man in a constant struggle with the world and himself, doomed to repeated breakdowns, ultimately left only with his own sadness (Rakočević, 2012). The work Очај combines universal themes but is, at the same time, firmly rooted in local culture. Rajko Cerović argues that Одметање and Очај are examples of "untranslatable" works by virtue of their association with local folklore and cultural models. In his view, even providing a parallel translation of the epic song *Zidanje Skadra* and a study to accompany Nikolić's poem would be insufficient for audiences from French or Anglo-Saxon cultures to understand the meaning of the character of young Gojkovica (Церовић, 2022). Elements that are identical to or derived from folk art are evident at both the compositional and thematic levels of the poem.

Despair
The day rises and I – Skadar,
evil forces have
turned me
into heaps,
crushed to the foundation.
For three years they
have broken me thus,
and I can no longer
keep building myself up
and falling
down the cliffs.

Gojkovica,
Young Gojkovica… (Николић, 1991)

Unlike the ten-verse source epic, Очај has no fixed metrical structure, which makes it structurally reminiscent of folk poetry rather than epic. However, Marija Knežević points out that the last two lines together form a ten-line stanza, keeping the piece within the space of epic tradition (Кнежевић, 2018). The subject matter reinforces the lyrical dimension, making the poem an original combination of epic and lyrical inspiration drawn from folk art.

Skadar [city of Shkoder] is the lyrical subject: a person, a man, an artist, a poet confronting "evil forces". Like the medieval town, the lyrical subject has

been repeatedly destroyed over time. His essence is dispersed, at once a constantly crumbling and rising fortress on a hill, as well as any rock falling along the slope ("I fall down the slope"). As in the source texts with the topos of the walled-up woman, the "builder" repeatedly realises the destruction of the "foundations" that condition his existence. The lyrical subject is convinced of the inevitable failure of his efforts; he lacks hope and strength. He believes that he is not up to the task – whether because he does not feel capable or strong enough, or because he is unsuitable, undeserving, or unworthy. It is impossible to determine clearly what the "evil forces" are, which drives the lyrical subject to despair. Perhaps his condition is the result of illness, the loss of a loved one, some form of impotence, or other traumatic event (not necessarily played out solely at the individual level) that has rendered his existence unbearable[6].

The phrase "I can no longer build (myself)" – in the original: "*a ja više nisam kadar da se zidam*" – brings to mind the words spoken by the *vila* at the end of the aforementioned Montenegrin legend: "*Vukašinie! Nijesi kadar sazidati Skadar!*" (Радојевић, 1971, p. 60). The analogy to King Vukašin, who is cursed for committing murder, opens up further paths of interpretation. An additional circumstance conditioning the lyrical subject's situation may be a crime committed earlier, weighing heavily on his existence.

The state of breakdown or despair has been going on for three years – the same length of time as at the beginning of the song *Zidanje Skadra*. At this point, we learn of the failures of the three brothers in relation to the construction of the building, but the necessity of making a sacrifice remains a matter for the future. Faced with failure, the brothers in *Zidanje Skadra* decide to wall up one of the wives who comes to the construction site the next day with food, while the cursed Vukašin from the ballad *Zidanje Skadra na Bojani* commits further acts of violence, culminating in the walling up of the murdered girl's mother and the condemnation to death of her children. The question arises as to whether, after three years of attempts, the lyrical subject wants to give up because he realises that sacrifice is inevitable, and despair stems from knowing that an innocent being must pay the price. This question, however, remains unanswered.

An original feature of the poem in relation to the source text is the personification of the stronghold and the construction of an erotically charged relationship between it and the young Gojkovica, expressed in the last two stanzas (Кнежевић, 2018). The lyrical subject appears to evoke Gojkovica, and in Danilo Čelebić's interpretation, this passage is accompanied by a heavy sigh. However, it is not clear exactly who Gojkovica represents – perhaps the personification of unhappy love, loss, or a muse. Similar questions arise in relation to Shkoder-Gojko: the nature of his relationship with Gojkovica remains

[6] The extra-literary context suggests all of the above reasons. Nikolić spent six years of his life in hospital being treated for tuberculosis. He was born in Mostar, where his father served in the army, and during World War II he emigrated with his family to Nikšić. He lost his father at an early age (Rakočević, 2012; Vujačić, 2012).

unresolved. It is possible that he cannot cope without her support, or that he feels that he is failing the "young Gojkovica" (unable to protect her from suffering), yet he will not rise up, he will not liberate himself, he will not succeed without sacrificing her.

Nikolić's poem opens at least two interesting interpretative paths concerning the topos of the walled-up woman and foundation sacrifice, and the issue of male and female creative potential. Alan Dundes, in his monograph *The walled-up wife*, presents an alternative to the theory linking the mythical-ritual sacrificial rite with variants of the ballad, emphasising gender relations (Dundes, 1996, pp. 185–206). His proposal allows the folk text to be interpreted and reinterpreted from the perspective of female and male capacities for procreation and creation. In the context of the erotic relationship between man (Skadar-Gojko) and woman (Gojkovica), the nightly destruction of the foundations may express the male's inability to procreate, while the relentless pursuit of construction – even if it requires the sacrifice of Gojkovica – represents an attempt to compensate for this impotence. According to Dundes, "the ballad represents wishful thinking on the part of males, that they can create remarkable edifices just as women procreate, but the sad reality is that the male hubris brings only death to the female" (Dundes, 1996, p. 201).

The destroyed foundations may also symbolise the creative crisis of the builder, artist, poet, or creator. The lyrical subject may be creatively infertile, incapable of creation, or tired and burdened by responsibility for previous works and actions, similarly to *neimar* Rade in *Mythical Decameron*. In this interpretation, Gojkovica may symbolise a supportive element, providing respite or inspiration, often at her own expense. The lyrical subject, Skadar, in this reading, is a despairing man suffering from poetic or artistic impotence. In this context, Dundes' interpretation of the topos, distinguishing between female and male perspectives, provides an interesting analogy between Nikolić's poem and Desanka Maksimović's poem *Гојковица* [Gojkovica] (Максимовић, 2012). In both cases, the central character is an artist reflecting on the creative process, the meaning of existence and the existential situation. The difference lies in the diverse attitudes (resignation against activity) of individuals towards the symbolic building being destroyed (by time or evil forces): in Nikolić's poem, creation is presented exclusively as a source of crisis and suffering, while in Maksimović's work, it can also be a source of freedom[7].

Nikolić's poem offers numerous interpretive possibilities and allows for different readings of the topos of the walled-up woman. The metaphor of a crumbling, unfinished, failed construction – a project requiring innocent victims and sacrifice – can also be perceived as a reflection of the human condition, marked by deep existential crisis.

[7] A detailed discussion of Desanka Maksimović's poem can be found in the section devoted to the presence of the topos of the walled-up woman in Serbian poetry.

A Radio Play about a Terrifying Country

An example of a recent reception of the song is an episode of the radio play *Zidanje Skadra* from the series *Zemlja naša strašna* [Our terrifying country], "inspired by Montenegrin oral literature" (after Mijović, 2020, p. 1). The initiative was carried out in cooperation with the Montenegrin National Theatre in 2011, with funding from the Montenegrin Ministry of Culture as part of a programme to support independent artists and mitigate the consequences for the cultural sector of the coronavirus pandemic[8].

The plot of the contemporary adaptation does not differ significantly from the original song, but introduces new, seemingly minor characters (e.g., the servant Ivša) and the distinctive motif of a curse. Ivša's monologue opens and closes the radio play. Responsible for delivering water to the construction site, the servant talks to himself and, despite the apparent insignificance of his character, witnesses key events: Vukašin's conversations with the *vila*, the walling up, and the aftermath of Gojkovica's death.

As in the previously discussed works, Vukašin is portrayed negatively. The radio play begins with a conversation between the *vila* and Vukašin, who attempts to talk his way out of the crime he has committed and his responsibility for the failure of the construction. He also hides the real reasons for the destruction from his brothers, framing his actions as a response to an external threat: "That is why we must strengthen the bulwark and protect ourselves from the Turks, who are just waiting to conquer us. Without a fortress and a city, we and our subjects will turn to dust" (Mijović, 2020, p. 9). The king's youngest brother disapproves of Vukašin's rule, which he expresses in conversations with his wife. Gojko is furious at Vukašin for killing Desimir after his failed mission, fears for his own fate in the event of further opposition, and undermines Vukašin's authority by questioning his title and leadership skills. Gojko states that he has become a slave to the king, his own brother, who will stop at nothing to complete the construction: "He will imprison us in its foundations, even if it means walling us up" (Mijović, 2020, p. 7)[9].

Another interesting theme is Vukašin's relationship with the river/*vila*, who takes the form of a young woman[10]. The *vila* is presented in the radio play in

[8] Recording available on YouTube. See (rakoč, 2020). A total of ten episodes of the radio play directed by Zoran Rakočević were broadcast. The text for the episode *Zidanje Skadra* was written by Bojana Mijović based on "an epic folk song of the same title" (Mijović, 2020).

[9] The analysis uses an unpublished typescript by Bojana Mijović prepared for the recording of the radio drama *Zidanje Skadra. Radio drama po motivima epske narodne pjesme*, from the series *Zemlja naša strašna* (2020). The text was made available by Bojana Mijović.

[10] *Vila* translated into English as a 'nymph' or 'fairy' is a complex figure from supernatural order. Veselin Čajkanović argues that when her genealogy is fully examined, vila emerges as a divinity of nature and natural phenomena, inseparably and intrinsically

line with her original function as a personification of natural phenomena – with rivers, forests, and other bodies of water – as her natural habitat. Adnan Čirgić, considering theories about the origin of the *vilas*, agrees with Kulišić, who links them to the representation of nature demons in animism (Čirgić, 2021, p. 191). Nymphs frequently appear in oral traditions about the creation of ancient strongholds and cities (Čirgić, 2021, p. 204). Based on the analysed material, *vilas* are therefore inextricably linked to the motif of the foundation sacrifice. It should also be noted that it is a complex figure, being at the same time a river, a demon or deity, and a woman, combining multiple characteristics and evoking different reactions from the characters.

The Bojana River is a source of water, life, wisdom, and power; a witness to key events and a permanent element of everyday life. However, it is not always identified with the *vilas*, as evidenced by Gojkovica's words: "The river flows even when everything else stands still. Neither the words of man nor those of the *vilas* mean anything in this regard" (Mijović, 2020, p. 15; trans. MM). This is also reflected in the actions of Vukašin, who turns to the river for help: "Oh, Bojana, help me. What should I do? […] against the night, against you, dark and unfathomable force, we are powerless" (Mijović, 2020, p. 2; trans. MM). He calls the *vila* a witch. Gojko, meanwhile, states that *vilas* are cunning, dangerous, and unpredictable: "Today she demands one thing, and tomorrow something completely different" (Mijović, 2020, p. 5).

In response to Vukašin's pleas, the sound of water, laughter, and the voice of a young woman are heard. The *vila* does not reveal herself despite the king's demands, instead provoking him by reminding him of the crime committed against a young servant girl: "You are guilty, Vukašin, innocent, young blood has tied a noose around your stronghold. Around the stronghold, around your neck" (Mijović, 2020, p. 3). She admits that she has waited a long time for this day and seems to take pleasure in Vukašin's suffering. During their exchanges she is carefree – laughing and kicking her feet in the water, reminiscent of a child's play – while giving their interaction a flirtatious element. Laughing, she encourages him to enter the water, at times even pulling him towards it: "Come, king, we will bathe together, come closer, don't be afraid […] Come, come, you will talk to the fish a little" (Mijović, 2020, p. 3, 7). At the same time, the *vila* reminds him that his crime is not time-barred – the spillage of innocent blood never is – calls him a cheat, a godless man, and a liar, and ultimately threatens him with death: "Go now, before I call my sisters, because then you really will talk to the fish" (Mijović, 2020, p. 9). Although Vukašin gives as good as he gets, responding with threats of revenge, he ultimately complies with her demands. The *vila* instructs him first to wall up the siblings Stoja and Stojan in the foundations and, in their final conversation, orders the sacrifice of one of the three wives.

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connected to the forest, to streams and lakes, and to the clouds. Nevertheless, he asserts, vila can also take the form of a woman, among others (Чајкановић, 1973, p. 278).



Figure 1. Still from the video for the radio drama *Zidanje Skadra*, 2020. Text: Bojana Mijović. Visual design: Milena Vukoslavović, Director: Zoran Rakočević. Source: zoran rakoč (2020)

The radio play is accompanied by sketches by Milena Vukoslavović, depicting two scenes of walling up. In the first scene (Figure 1), negotiations are underway before Gojkovica is walled up. In the foreground, the youngest wife is surrounded by two brothers and probably Rade. In the distance, a man wearing a crown is turned away, looking in another direction. Compared to the drama of the events taking place before the walling up, expressed in the acoustic and verbal layers, the visual interpretation is exceptionally static. In Mijović's interpretation, Gojko's reaction is particularly violent. He falls into despair, offers himself as a foundation sacrifice in place of his wife, and curses the king, his family, and the building itself: "Slaughter me and everything that is mine, but punishment will still reach you. No tower, no city will accept such a sacrifice, for it will bring misfortune upon them – both upon the city and upon those who rule it" (Mijović, 2020, p. 16; trans. MM).

Gojko regretfully recalls the words with which Gojkovica urged him to remain loyal to the king and obey his brother, citing the king's unquestionable authority and the nobility of his family: "As long as we live, the king is king. […] You can be angry a hundred times, but he is the king, mine, yours, and of all his people, who are waiting with us for the city to be built. […] Hold on, Gojko. For Jovan, for all his brothers and sisters who will be born. We are of noble birth and will remain so" (Mijović, 2020, p. 7).

Gojko expresses regret that he did not break his word to the king, thereby betraying himself and Gojkovica:

> You said – do not betray. The king is king; there is something more important than us. I did not betray him, but I betrayed myself and you. May his construction be cursed along with me from today until eternity. Do you hear me, brothers? King! Let everything be cursed since the best has been taken from me (Mijović, 2020, p. 16).

In her conversation with Vukašin, Gojkovica also refers to these and other exchanges with Gojko in which she persuaded her husband to respect the king's

authority. Confronted with the king's ruthlessness, she ultimately curses him and his loved ones: "Vukašin, be cursed, you and all your loved ones. May you choke on your own blood if God wills it" (Mijović, 2020, p. 18).

Terrified by the prospect of being walled up alive, Gojkovica begs Vukašin, Rade, and Ivša for a swift death. She instructs Rade to wall up her hands but to leave an opening for her breasts so that she can feed Jovan one last time. Unlike in Raško's version, she does not nurse her child until her death; unlike in Ikov's version, she also does not kill him. The illustration accompanying the second walling-up scene reflects her request (Figure 2), depicting Gojkovica with her head and left arm exposed up to her chest. Once again, the emotions accompanying this scene stand in contrast to the static image. Before her death, she is delirious, thinking she is talking to her son, expressing the hope that Jovan will live as far away from this place as possible.



Figure 2. Still from the video for the radio drama *Zidanje Skadra*, 2020. Text: Bojana Mijović. Visual design: Milena Vukoslavović, Director: Zoran Rakočević. Source: zoran rakoč (2020)

Ivša fulfils Gojkovica's request the next day. The servant is present in the final scene, accompanying the woman at the moment of her death, and in the epilogue, he recounts what happened after she was walled up. He is one of the few characters who do not perish in the storm that breaks out after the young wife is walled up. The stronghold is completed, but Vukašin loses his family: "Lightning killed all members of the royal family, including his young children and wife. He was above the level of the Bojana River and was saved. The city will endure, but he will never know happiness again" (Mijović, 2020, p. 21).

The motif of the curse appears in Montenegrin culture in combination with the topos of the walled-up woman from the source song. Using Anna Engelking's concept of the roles of participants in the curse ritual (Engelking, 2010, p. 291), it may be noted that the object of the ritual – that is, the cursed figure – is always the ruler Vukašin. The performer of the ritual, the one casting the curse, varies depending on the variant: it may be the walled-up woman herself, her loved ones or companions, or a figure from the supernatural world – a *vila*. In Ikov's

variant, the walled-up woman curses her tormentors and heralds the imminent takeover of the fortress by the Turks: "[…] may it bring you misfortune, may the Turks take it over quickly!" (Караџић, 1974, p. 30).

In Radojević's legend, the *vilas* announce the defeat of Vukašin's construction and confirm the power of the curse. Although the fortress is built, he suffers defeat both as a ruler and as a man: "Vukašinie! Nijesi kadar sazidati Skadar!" [Vukašin! You are not able to build Skadar!] (Радојевић, 1971, p. 60). Vuković's collection of stories contains references to the cursed land and mountains of Prokletije[11], and in the final scene of *Zidanje Skadra*, *neimar* Rade feels the power of the curse weighing on all those responsible for the walling up: "After Skadar, we are all cursed, not to mention me, and I never want to build a city or erect a temple again, for there is no stone without sin" (Вуковић, 1990, p. 205). The curse is carried out by God, through forces of nature or earthly mediators, who often function simultaneously as executors and perpetrators of the curse. In this sense, the curse is usually understood as a form of divine punishment for sin.

In Mijović's reinterpretation, the motif of the curse is particularly vivid. Not only is it irrevocable, but it is also pronounced by two key characters, and in the end it comes true. The combined curses of Gojko and Gojkovica fulfil the worst possible fears: the fall of the ruler Vukašin himself, but also the loss of his legacy, both in material form (the loss of his stronghold, captured by the enemy) and in immaterial form (the death of his family and the fall of his dynasty). The curse is neither reversed (as is customary in Greek, Romanian, and Bulgarian variants), nor transformed into a blessing. Instead, it is executed through the forces of nature: a storm and thunderbolts kill Vukašin's family, signalling divine intervention and thereby validating those who cast the curse. As Anna Engelking points out, a curse, like any ritual act, is intended to maintain order and, as a tool in the hands of "pious people", serves to protect against evil (Engelking, 2010, p. 294). In this context, divine intervention as the consequence of the curse clearly indicates that walling up is a sin, against which sanctions must be applied to restore the balance between good and evil.

Concluding Reflections on Power Relations and Creation

The analysed material points to two dominant interpretative paths related to the topos of the walled-up woman: creation and power relations. A characteristic feature of Montenegrin variants and their reinterpretations, however, is

[11] The name Prokletije (Albanian: *Bjeshkët e Nemuna*), introduced by Jovan Cvijić to describe the mountain range from Lake Skadar to the Ibar River and Metohija, means "cursed" or "forbidden". In relation to the mountains, this name has a double meaning: it symbolises the natural features of the landscape (severity, wildness, impassability) and the socio-historical conditions that prevailed in this area.

undoubtedly the combination of the motif of the foundation sacrifice with the motif of the (irreversible) curse, which significantly reshapes the message concerning the necessity of sacrifice in the name of a higher good.

Word and stone are the main tools of creating tangible and intangible heritage in the form of permanent buildings and songs, which men – builders and artists – pass on to subsequent generations. The story of the walled-up woman presents a world ruled by men, narrated predominantly from a male perspective: that of storytellers and chroniclers, builders, rulers, and creators, the challenges they face, their dilemmas, and their emotions. Figures such as Rade, Vukašin, Gojko/Skadar, Stanko and Bjelota, and the old man build structures out of stone and create history with words. Female creative power, by contrast, remains in the sphere of procreation or passive participation in the male creative process. Novka is commemorated in the collective memory, it is Rade who immortalises her, literally walling her up in song. Female agency, most often personified in the figure of the *vila*, remains restricted to the magical world. The continuing relevance of the topos and its numerous reinterpretations in contemporary culture lies in its potential to express the painful experience of enslavement or interdependence in the relations between women and men.

Related to this are issues of power and its abuse, particularly embodied in the figure of the ruler, as evidenced by the negative portrayal of the character of Vukašin. In the source texts and their reinterpretations, themes of abuse of power, manipulation, brutality, lies, violence, and innocent victims powerless in the face of (male) authority recur without exception in an increasingly vivid form.

The title of the song has entered colloquial language in the context of the abuse of power, primarily with regard to embezzlement of public funds and corruption. The expression (*ko/kao*) *zidanje Skadra* (*na Bojani*) [like the building of Skadar on the Bojana] refers to a protracted construction or investment project, usually a public one. Most examples of its usage appear in the press in connection with the renovation or construction of streets, bridges, and public utility buildings (see agencija JUGpress, 2019; Prijatelji zivotinja Podgorica, 2021; Radio-televizija Vojvodine, 2015; Stojanović, 2021). This comparison is also used in Montenegrin political discourse to describe the condition of democratic institutions and of the state as a whole: "Montenegrin democracy is an architectural complex resembling the construction of Skadar" (Бабовић, 2020). Metaphors of unfinished construction and sacrifice are used to describe contemporary reality fraught with internal political conflict. Here, the main interpretive approach is repurposed to reflect on contemporary culture by linking the motif of construction with the formation of a community within a nation-state. The narrative challenges governmental authority, denounces current politicians, and critically examines the suffering and sacrifice of innocent victims "in the name of the community", while simultaneously highlighting their marginalisation.

As a result of the introduction of the motif of the curse in the variants discussed, the walled-up woman is no longer a meek victim who unquestioningly follows orders and lacks all agency. For believers, cursing is an act of speech

that expresses emotions and endows words with imagined, and thus causative, power (Engelking, 2010, p. 238). The walled-up woman breaks with the previous inclination to reinforce the belief in the necessity of sacrifice in the name of higher ideals. A pronounced curse is an expression of rebellion against a reality in which it is considered necessary, while a fulfilled curse means recognising the use of violence as unjustified, thus undermining the foundations of that reality.

The motif of the curse, together with the adjectives *cursed* and *terrible* used to describe the country in reinterpretations of the topos, correspond with Montenegro's self-image as a harsh and ruthless country. In the collection of short stories *Митски Декамерон*, the blind men Bjelota and Stanko, as well as Rade himself, speak of the Prokletije mountains (a harsh, wild, and demanding landscape) as an integral part of their journey. "Cursed land" is a term deeply rooted in historical context, often used in literature, history, and popular culture in reference to Montenegro. It encapsulates the geopolitical conflicts and harsh living conditions that have shaped the inhabitants of this region over centuries. As a metaphor, it evokes the challenges that the Montenegrin people have faced since times immemorial; challenges that have shaped them and generate both pride and grievance. The term "cursed country" is also invoked as a critical expression of the complex political and social situation in which Montenegro currently finds itself.

Contemporary interpretations of the song about the walled-up woman criticise the socio-political reality. The walled-up woman represents marginalised individuals or groups subjected to violence and deprived of agency. Unequal power relations manifest themselves through the (co)dependence of women and men, rulers, and subjects, the strong and the weak. Resistance – whether in the form of a curse or of creative expression – is an attempt to regain agency and restore justice to those from whom it has been taken.

Finally, the profound significance attributed to source songs within the discourse on the contemporary canon of national tradition, together with their pervasive presence in contemporary culture through reinterpretation, underscores the paramount importance accorded to the epic tradition. This allows us to conclude that contemporary culture remains deeply rooted in folk tradition, recognises its formative potential, and engages in dialogue with the ways it is present in contemporary social and cultural reality.

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Sylwia Siedlecka, Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa

North Macedonia. Circles of Melancholy

Walling Up in Macedonian Folklore. Old and New Interpretations

Starting in the mid-19th century, the Macedonian emancipation process was characterised by asymmetry in the cultural and linguistic versus political and state spheres. The twists and turns of history meant that it was not until after World War II that a more holistic approach to Macedonian cultural heritage began to emerge. In terms of folklore studies, Macedonian folk tradition was subject to various classifications, which were often accompanied by symbolic violence, and then this tradition was first considered Slavic, then Bulgarian, and then Bulgarian-Macedonian (Miodyński, 2019b, p. 117). An important factor in the emancipation process was the lack of permanent links enabling continuity in the transmission of culture from neighbouring countries. Serbia, not without aspirations to extend its influence to these areas, was outside the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century. The Bulgarians, who gained independence in 1878, long defined the Macedonians as their subethnos (Miodyński, 2019a, p. 44). This placed researchers who recognised and valued local specificity in a situation where they had to seek a necessary balance, especially in their interpretations of the genealogy of the cultural phenomena under study. Michael Herzfeld's category of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 2007) could prove to be "liberating" for the entire Balkans. However, in practice, this perspective proved quite shaky, even on academic grounds. Despite the spectacular success in the region of the documentary film by Bulgarian researcher and director Adela Peeva, *Чия е тази песен?* [Whose Song Is This?] (2003)[1], there is still rivalry over the ownership of the song and its seniority. Moreover, the need for a common consensus on the existence of a multi-layered common cultural heritage in the Balkans is still not universal.

When it comes to the role of the walled-up woman in Macedonian culture, which is our point of interest here, this issue takes on the character of an interesting contradiction: on the one hand, folklore studies emphasise the richness

[1] The first Bulgarian documentary nominated by the European Film Academy.

of folk culture, and the struggle for its international recognition continues; on the other hand, this particular topos has no place in school textbooks, nor does it attract much interest from writers.

The topos of the foundation sacrifice in Macedonia is most clearly present in folk songs about the walled-up woman, but traces of it can be found in folk songs and customs accompanied by the motif of transformation or initiation. This refers especially to the feast of Vodici (Epiphany), commemorating the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan (Китевски, 2022, pp. 35–56) and the custom of Perperuna (Dodola)[2] (Китевски, 2022, pp. 99–132). Records of the ballad about the walled-up woman can be found in several collections: *Народне песме македонски Бугара, Книга прва: Женске песме* [Folk Songs of the Macedonian Bulgarians. Volume One: Women's Songs] by Stefan I. Verković (Верковић, 1860); *Български народни песни* [Bulgarian Folk Songs] by Dimitr and Konstantin Miladinov (Миладинов & Миладинов, 1861); *Обычаи и песни турецких сербав* [Customs and Songs of the Turkish Serbs] by I. S. IAstrebov (the Sofia reprint from 1893 is titled *Сборникъ отъ старонародни песни и обичаи в Дебарско и Кичевско* [Collection of Old Songs and Customs of the Debar and Kichevo Regions]) (Ястребов, 1886); *Сборникъ отъ македонски български народни песни* [Collection of Macedonian Bulgarian folk songs] by Naum Takhow (Тахов, 1895); and *Вградена невеста* [The Walled-up Woman] by Mikhail Arnaudov (Арнаудов, 1920).

According to folklorist Marko Kitevski, legends containing the motif of walling up are mentioned by Marko Cepenkov in *Македонски народни умотворби во десет книги, Народни приказни (Реалистични приказни) книга петта* [Macedonian Folk Works in Ten Volumes, Folk Tales (Realistic Tales), Volume Five] (1972) and Kuzman Shapkarev in *Избрани дела, том петти, Приказни* [Selected Works. Volume Five. Fairy Tales] (1976). In the magazine *Македонски преглед* (III, 3, Sofia, 1927) there is a legend *Каменик мост на Брегалница* [Kamenik Bridge on Bregalnica] (Китевски, 1989, p. 79). Newer versions of Macedonian songs and legends about walling up can be found in the archives of the Marko Cepenkov's Folklore Institute in Skopje (Архив на ИФ, л. 1537 и 1033 [songs] and 1969, 822, 2092 [legends]). Todor Mollov also cites several variants of the ballad in the online database *Български фолклорни мотиви. Т. II. Балади* [Bulgarian Folk Motifs. Vol. II. Ballads] (Моллов, 2006–2011).

Noting the presence of Macedonian songs in such diverse collections, Marko Kitevski believes that the underestimation of their actual number is the result of an appropriation (especially by Bulgarian folklorists) of Macedonian cultural heritage, expressed in the treatment of songs from the Macedonian region as Bulgarian (Китевски, 1989). However, given the multitude of factors deter-

[2] Dodola is a ritual aimed at summoning rain during a drought. The staging of the sacrifice involves the leading girl in the procession, and the purpose of the sacrifice is to appease the god Perun and to bring rain. As for the feast of Epiphany, a priest throws a cross into a river or lake, which the faithful try to retrieve by jumping into the water. The very presence of the cross transforms the status of the water by sanctifying it.

mining the genealogy of folk songs, establishing the origin of even one of the key variants of songs from the Bulgarian-Macedonian borderland – about the bridge over the Struma River – does not provide such a clear answer. The Struma River flows through the town of Strumica in eastern Macedonia, therefore the Macedonian genealogy would be supported by the fact that the bridge is located in the territory of North Macedonia. The ballad about the walled-up woman, on the other hand, is included in the Miladinov brothers' collection *Български народни песни* [Bulgarian Folk Songs] (Миладинов & Миладинов, 1861). The song itself was recorded in the village of Kilkis (Macedonian/Bulgarian: Кукуш) in Aegean Macedonia, i.e., in Greek territory. Macedonians and Bulgarians claim this village to be, respectively, Macedonian and Bulgarian. Another factor to consider is the ancestry of the Miladinov brothers, who called themselves Bulgarians but came from Struga in what is now North Macedonia (Dushi, 2023, p. 281).

Structural regularities allow us to see the specificity of most Macedonian variants. Among other things, they are connected by the fact that the building is always destroyed during the night, and the sacrifice is made of the youngest wife of the brothers involved in the construction. Apart from killing the heroine by walling her up, there are other ways of making a sacrificial offering, such as throwing her into a river or walling her up without her head, which her husband takes with him (Китевски, 1989, pp. 80–81). In individual variants, the type of structure that the men aspire to complete differs: sometimes it is a bridge, other times a wall, in yet another case it is a fortress or a well (in this case, shadows are walled up), and a house also appears as a construction goal. However, the most common feature is a bridge, but it can also be a fortress or a monastery, and, least often, a well, which in turn often appears in variants from India. If we treat the fortress as a symbol of isolation and the bridge as a symbol of communication, then both of these symbols manifest the specificity of Balkan neighbourly relations, stretched between coexistence and conflict, communication and isolation (Dushi, 2023, pp. 285–287).

Apart from the ballad about the walled-up woman, other ballads that use the motif of transformation include well-known South Slavic songs about a sinful *haiduk* and about a sick *Dojčin* (*Болен Дојчин*). Lidia Stojanoviḱ considers these to be Christian texts of a moralising nature, containing the theme of the main character's sin, followed by God's punishment, and finally Christian metanoia (Стојановиḱ, 2018, p. 115). Dojčin has been in an agonal state in bed for nine years, until grass grows from between his bones. The hajduk's illness is the result of a curse by his mother, who learns of the monstrous crimes her son has committed against innocent people (including infanticide and forcing people to cannibalise). When the hajduk returns to the scene of the murder after three years, he finds a beautiful Orthodox church and a spring (*češma*) there; in another version, an apple tree, vines and basil grow at the site of the execution (Китевски, 2022, p. 289). Some variants of the song identify Dojčin's sin as necrophilia against the bodies of three saints lying in coffins in the church (Стојановиḱ, 2018, p. 114).

It is worth noting that Dojčin's illness is a time of male initiation, temporary death (during which his sister takes care of him), and of preparation for the decisive battle with the Black Arab, who threatens his sister's honour. The Arab embodies all that is negative, and his attributes in songs are three heads, blackness, and knowledge of sorcery. He is a character with variable functions in Macedonian folklore, undergoing transformations into historical negative characters: Turks, Gypsies and Albanians (Стојановиќ, 2011, p. 200).

Epic songs, including those about sinful *haidutins*, take place on both planes: human and divine, showing heroes overcoming their own limitations, passing through stages, from an unformed person to the male initiation of the hero as a warrior (Стојановиќ, 2018, p. 121). As already mentioned, the caregiver of the sick Dojčin is his sister, not his wife (the latter appears in the two oldest variants in the Miladinovs' collection and in Verković). And because the sister is threatened by the Black Arab, Dojčin attains heroism as the defender of her honour and thus the honour of the entire family (Стојановиќ, 2018, p. 118). Only after a victorious battle, requiring superhuman effort and serving as an act of redemption for his sins, can the hero die in peace. Here we find a record of a pre-modern world in crisis, where honour is the highest value and its opposite is shame (Стојановиќ, 2018, pp. 119–120).

Another type of song employing the motif of transformation and a structure that rises at the site of a violent death is *Имала Јана два мили брата* [Jana had two kind brothers] from Verković's collection (Китевски, 2022, p. 290), corresponding to a song recorded in the village of Smolichano in Bulgaria (see the chapter on Nevestino in Bulgaria titled *The Healer*). The song about Jana that is included in the cycle of women's songs has a different dynamic than the hajduk songs, in which a man redeems himself, kills an Arab (or Turk), and his previous victims are transformed into material objects: a *češma*, a plant or a church. Jana is an innocent victim who dies at the hands of her brothers due to intrigue. And, in accordance with the logic of a magical fairy tale, a temple appears at the place of her death (Китевски, 2022, p. 290).

These motifs seem peripheral to the topos we are interested in here, but they provide a specific context for its Balkan variants, which are characterised by strong emotional charge, tragism, and humility in the face of fate (Agoston-Nikolova, 1994). There is a certain paradox associated with the role of women in the ballad about walling up. She appears as a newcomer/stranger in her husband's family, yet at the same time she guarantees the existence of the family line by giving birth to new members. However, the woman's position remains a function of loyalty between brothers, which is the highest virtue – fratricide in archaic culture was understood as taboo, and only in later texts was it justified as a crime of passion (Agoston-Nikolova, 1994). In the South Slavic ballads, the family is presented as the highest value, which must be protected at all costs. Thus, there is a need for the wife to be socialised within the new community and to prove her loyalty in a situation where the bonds between men are the strongest and those between women the weakest (Agoston-Nikolova, 1994).

Ethnologist Józef Obrębski, who carried out research in Poreč, Macedonia, in the 1930s, analysed, among other things, the status and role of women in this region, considered the quintessence of Macedonian tradition. The first of these roles (motherhood) manifested itself physically through childbirth and breastfeeding. The mother's position was high in domestic life and in the early stages of a child's upbringing: "A child without a father is a half-orphan; without a mother – a whole orphan" (Obrębski, 2022b, p. 272). However, Obrębski emphasised that the relationship between mother and child is fragile in legal terms and is severed by the death of the father. In contrast, the death of the mother does not sever the relationship between the father and children. A widow who remarries leaves the home of the deceased and his children (Obrębski, 2022b, p. 272). The mother sacrifices her blood, life and health for the child, while the father sacrifices his work, property and name. The inequality between the position of women and men is sanctioned by a myth (of alleged Serbian genealogy) which proclaims that in the past it was men who gave birth to children, but this passed on to women through women's own fault:

> According to this version, [once upon a time] the maternal role fell to men. One of them climbed a pear tree during labour. She [a woman] saw him, rushed after him and barely managed to spread her apron and catch the baby before it fell to the ground. God saw this and condemned the woman for lacking faith in divine providence. So he decreed: "Since you are afraid that the child might lose its life, from now on you women will give birth." And since then, motherhood has been the lot of women. (Obrębski, 2022b, p. 267)[3]

Marriage changes the status of a woman, who enters a "foreign" family group and becomes subordinate to her husband's authority. The husband's relationship with his parents becomes the primary focus in this new arrangement. He divides his attention between his parents and brothers, with his wife coming second. Their relationship develops unofficially and in secret. Because the wife shares her home with sisters-in-law who are strangers to her, this leads to arguments and intrigues, which are also the main source of conflict between the husband and his brothers. Due to his wife's potential scheming, the husband's attitude towards her is only manifested in private as intimacy, while in the family forum he remains authoritative. The husband's position is ambivalent, expressed in his vacillation between love and contempt, depending on how he directs his feelings, which may lean towards his wife or his former family (Obrębski, 2022b, p. 274). However, as Elka Agoston-Nikolova writes, in Macedonian epic songs, the role of wives as mediators between brothers is also important as they are often forced to resort to trickery to save their husbands. Women do not represent stable values, but thanks to the fact that they act on several fronts, they may help the family maintain the desired unity, and

[3] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Agnieszka Piskozub-Piwosz either from the Polish translation by the Authors or directly from the original Polish text.

sometimes they direct events in such a way as to avert conflict and avoid fratricide. Maintaining family unity requires much effort and flexibility. The woman is aware that the situation requires disregarding one obligation in order to maintain another, for example, the love between brothers (Agoston-Nikolova, 1994). The role of the wife is strengthened over the years, when the husband and wife become the highest authority in the home, which is actually ruled by the wife, who focuses its entire life around herself. The husband is the one who leaves and returns home, while the woman is there all the time. The wife, therefore, has an advantage over him in the home, and signs of this power are already evident during wedding ceremonies in the brides' rituals to gain power over their husbands (Obrębski, 2022b, p. 275).

The ambiguity of women's status, and especially the relationship between husband and wife, is also evident in songs about walling up. The youngest of the builders' wives loses her life early in her marriage, when her position in the family system is still the weakest, unprotected by the status of head of the household. Agoston-Nikolova, referring to the way the victim is chosen in the ballad, states that the brothers may not even have known which of the wives would bring food the next day and thus become the victim, as they did not participate in household matters organised by women (Agoston-Nikolova, 1994). In legal terms, the wife of the youngest brother resembles a *homo sacer*, a naked life outside the law (Agamben, 2008), and the relationship between the spouses is subordinate to the husband's relationship with his brothers. Emotional relationships are manifested only in secret, not in public. In the Macedonian variants, there is also no element of scheming on the part of the youngest wife that could direct either the other characters' (including her husband's) dislike towards her, or – in the extra-textual dimension – the audience's dislike. She does not threaten the stability of the family structure; on the contrary, she is humble and hard-working, and as such she is killed. Her exemplary attitude triggers mechanisms of mimetic rivalry among the other wives and her emergence as a scapegoat (Girard, 1986).

Lidija Stojanoviḱ-Lafazanovska, a folklorist from the Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore in Skopje, conducted detailed research on the ballad about sacrifice in the Macedonian context. In her book *Танатолошкиот правзор на животот. Феноменот на жртвувањето во македонската народна книжевност* [Tanatological Vision of Life. The Phenomenon of Sacrifice in Macedonian Folk Literature] (Стојановиḱ-Лафазановска, 1996), the author examines the phenomenon of sacrificial rituals in Macedonian folk tradition, emphasising its correlations with creative acts. Based on phenomenological analysis, the author shows that the brutal act of killing a human being, such as a sacrificial ritual, also has a soteriological aspect. Using methodological foundations (Husserl, Heidegger, Fink, Bachelard), she finds a possible explanation for the primal human need to make sacrifices as a manifestation of divinity in human nature, embodied in the mystery of birth, death and rebirth. Starting from the sacrificial ritual, through myth and its transpositions, Stojanoviḱ analyses Mace-

donian folk songs, which she considers to be genealogically linked to the culture of farmers because, in agricultural civilisation, killing ceased to be associated with violence; quite the opposite, the death of the seed enabled new birth and the mystery of the cyclical renewal of the world. It is only in late folk culture that the motif of the dragon slayer appears, which is a paradigmatic example of the struggle against sacrifice. In her book, Stojanoviќ devotes a chapter to the foundation sacrifice itself, focusing on images and symbols that are accessible through tradition and beliefs. The author emphasises that poetic works whose motifs and themes are based on the topos of foundation sacrifice are in fact a reminiscence and transposition of the ritual; in all the cases analysed by the author, forced or voluntary death has a creational character. In one chapter, Stojanoviќ also examines the motif of the initiation sacrifice, which is widespread in Macedonian folklore. The initiation sacrifice also has a creational character as it signifies a transition to the next, higher stage of a person's existence. The folk motifs analysed in connection with initiation include weddings but also practices such as anthropophagy and the ritual of sparagmos (ancient Greek σπαραγμός), i.e., the ecstatic act of tearing apart the bodies of animals and humans, stemming from the need to get closer and unite with the deity (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 1996).

In the 1990s, Stojanoviќ-Lafazanovska conducted field research on the reception of the topos of walling-up in the Kumanovo region of Northern Macedonia (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 2000), and in her article *На кое верување се темели „Баладата за вградената невеста"? Кон историчноста на толкувањето* [On Which Belief is "The Ballad About the Walled-Up Wife" Based? Towards the historicity of interpretation] (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 1997), the scholar proposes looking at the ballad from the perspective of Jauss's "reception theory". She argues that the topos of walling up often becomes an object of instrumentalisation by supporters of patriarchal social systems. The author analyses the connections between the ballad and conservative models of life in her article *From Walled-Up Wife To a "Room of One's Own": Gender and Migration Among Macedonians in Germany* (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 2006). Focusing on the relationship between migration, space and gender, she uses the results of her own field research from 2003 among Macedonian emigrants in Hamburg as research material. For Stojanoviќ, the metaphor of walling up becomes a symbol of the patriarchal order, and emigration is presented as a factor triggering cultural change.

The researcher uses two metaphors as key figures for Macedonian migrant women: the one of walling up taken from folklore, namely "building in", and Virginia Woolf's "a room of one's own", which is a metonymy for a woman's own space, sphere of freedom and autonomy. Stojanoviќ's work is a highly critical commentary on the position of women in Macedonian society. By recalling the experiences of emigrant families, especially young Macedonian nurses in Germany and their husbands, who, joining their wives, were forced to change their status and "domesticate" themselves, the researcher shows the complex

process of redefining roles in families. She looks at the transformation of habits and the departure from rigid conservative hierarchies and values towards the loosening of these structures. The researcher points to changes taking place under the influence of a new socio-cultural context, which in this case is emigration to Western Europe. Stojanoviќ's research shows a correlation between education and the tendency for women to break free from traditional roles, especially in the case of expert emigration, mixed German-Macedonian families, and second- and third-generation emigrants (Stojanović, 2021).

In her research, Lidija Stojanoviќ emphasises the need to interpret variants of Macedonian songs about walling up through the prism of pan-Balkan folklore (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 1996, p. 48), recognising it as an important aspect of the "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld, 2007) of the inhabitants of the Peninsula. According to the researcher, the positioning of man in the ballad as a builder, a causative agent, is particularly important as it distinguishes this work from other ballads with the motif of a foundation sacrifice, especially those about the building of a city by a nymph, i.e., a fantastical creature from outside the human world. The second important distinguishing feature of the ballad about walling up is the connection between the cosmogonic sacrifice and initiation, which is expressed in the fact that a young woman is chosen as the foundation sacrifice (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 1996, p. 49).

"The Bridge Wants Sacrifices". A Case Study from Macedonia

Built in 1833, the Radin [Rada's] Bridge in the town of Kratovo is one of the most emblematic architectural structures in North Macedonia and its history is intertwined with the legend of the walled-up woman. Kratovo, located in the crater of an extinct volcano, is commonly referred to as the "town of bridges and towers". Among its monuments, there are several stone bridges with a light, arched line, built in the Ottoman style. The Radin Bridge seems to be a less successful architectural work, but it is associated with the most famous legend. According to legend, the wife of one of the builders was walled up in one of the spans as a foundation sacrifice – an act intended to ensure the successful completion of the construction.

Like other bridges in Kratovo, the Radin Bridge was built in a wave of growth in local crafts, trade, and mining to improve communication on both sides of the river. It was funded by Hıfzı Paşa, an Ottoman military officer and administrator who ruled the Skopje Sanjak, including Kratovo. The bridge is therefore sometimes named after him. There is another version of the name of the bridge, which is said to have been derived from the Byzantine Radina. Radina was supposed to have built the bridge on behalf of the people of Dubrovnik (Figure 1) who settled in Kratovo after the earthquake in Dubrovnik (after 1667, a centu-

ry and a half before the bridge was built) and needed it to transport precious metal deposits (Коцевски, 2003, p. 106). In any case, the bridge was built by constructors from nearby villages with a long tradition of stonemasonry. Particularly famous for this was the nearby village of Šlegovo, whose masters and apprentices enjoyed a good reputation and were employed by the Ottoman authorities to build mosques and public buildings. This group of builders consisted mainly of Orthodox Macedonians but also included settlers from Saxony who came to Kratovo alongside the development of mining. (Коцевски, 2005, p. 55)



Figure 1. A resident of Kratovo holds a sign with the name of the now non-existent Dubrovnicka Street.
Photo by Sylwia Siedlecka, 2021

Radin Bridge is the southernmost bridge in Kratovo, located 400 metres from the centre. It remains the most important tourist attraction in Kratovo, as well as one of the main attractions mentioned in tourist brochures and promotional materials for the town, where the legend of the walled-up Rada is included. Local guides also tell this story; during a tour, one of them showed me a gap in the wall of the bridge, saying that it was the same one that Rada had asked to be left so that she could feed her child (С. Доневски, personal communication, September 23, 2021).

The bridge's popularity comes not from its aesthetic value: it is one of the youngest bridges in Kratovo and no longer resembles a 19th-century structure due to several renovations that did not take conservationists' recommendations into account. In the opinion of the local community, the bridge renovations

resulted from corruption and non-transparent tendering procedures. Since the completion of the last renovation in 2002 – asphalted and flanked on both sides by metal posts – it more resembles an industrial road than its Ottoman prototype (Figure 2). The noise of trucks and exhaust fumes make it difficult to associate it with a famous historical and tourist attraction, especially since the only information about the bridge is a small plaque with the inscription "Радин мост" [The Radin Bridge], which also indicates the patronage of the Open Society Macedonia Foundation and the Friends of Kratovo Society. The three medieval towers that support The Radin Bridge, serving as spans, are subject to regular erosion due to the passage of heavy vehicles. The highest of them is 21 metres high. The height at which the Radin Bridge spans the two banks is its most distinctive feature.



Figure 2: The Radin Bridge in 2021.
Photo by Sylwia Siedlecka, 2021

Kratovo, one of the oldest Macedonian towns and an important medieval mining and trading centre, has been a place of coexistence of many cultures for centuries: colonies were established here by the aforementioned merchants from Dubrovnik, miners from Saxony, Jews and Turks. Thanks to lead, zinc, gold, copper, iron and silver deposits, silver coins were minted in the 15th and 16th centuries at the local mint, one of the most important in this part of the Ottoman Empire. Kratovo's crisis period coincided with the Austro-Turkish War (1680–1690) and the local peasant uprising of Karpoš, during which the town was destroyed and the mines were closed. In the 18th century, Turks from Asia Minor began to settle here. When the nearby town of Zletovo became a mining centre at the beginning of the 19th century, Kratovo lost its status in this area but nevertheless experienced a second boom. When the French traveller Ami Boué visited Kratovo in 1836, he wrote that this town of 7,000 inhabitants was one of the ten largest in the central part of European Turkey (Митевски, 1997, p. 89). The presence of the Turks influenced the urban infrastructure, as was reflected, among other things, in the number of mosques and towers (Митевски, 1997, p. 84). Bridges began to be built as trade flourished in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and their construction was directly related to the

need to improve communication between parts of the city on both sides of the Manceva and Kratovska rivers and the surrounding villages (Митевски, 1997, pp. 94–95). At the end of the 19th century, Kratovo had a population of 4,500, largely consisting of Turks, who left the town after 1912, which led to a radical decrease in the number of inhabitants. The town currently has a population of about seven thousand; Macedonians dominate, and there is also a small Roma settlement. Kratovo faces several issues: the outflow of population, especially among the younger generation, high unemployment, and economic collapse, so severe that pensioners are said to keep the economy afloat. There is a network of underground corridors beneath the town, the construction of which was linked to the town's mining tradition and the local mint – one of the routes was said to lead to the bridge span where Rada was walled up.

The Radin Bridge in Kratovo became widely known in the second half of the 20th century thanks to the famous singer Vaska Ilieva, who popularised the song *Мост ми зидаја девет мајстори* [The Bridge Was Built by Nine Masters] in Yugoslavia during the communist era. The song was often broadcast on television along with a music video in which Ilieva performs the song against the backdrop of the bridge in Kratovo (Китевски, 2009). Although officially anonymous, this version was the singer's own composition, based on earlier variants, including the song *Струмица невеста* [Strumica Bride] from the Miladinov brothers' collection (item 162). Ilieva referred to The Radin Bridge, Kratovo and the Manceva River in her song.

Ethnologist Lidia Stojanoviќ-Lafazanovska, who researched the ballad's prevalence in the Kumanovo region (where the Kratovo variant dominates) between 1992 and 1997, noted the song's great popularity among her informants. Both men and women recounted the same version of the song, but their interpretations differed: men focused on the tragedy of the youngest brother. In contrast, women sympathised with the mother and wife who had been sacrificed. Their assumptions about the credibility of the ballad also differed: while women admitted that Rada's story could have really happened, men denied this possibility, considering it to be "women's fantasies" (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 2000).

Lidija Stojanoviќ-Lafazanovska told me (SS) that while researching songs about the walled-up, she noticed that performances of songs about Rada are full of sadness, evident in their melody, rhythm, colour, articulation and dynamics (Л. Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, personal communication, September 25, 2021). Referring to Vladimir Dvornikovic's 1925 essay *Psiha jugoslovenske melanholije* [The Psychology of Yugoslav Melancholy], Stojanoviќ-Lafazanovska described this manner of performing and interpreting songs about walling up as an expression of Yugoslav melancholy, which, according to the researcher, is most clearly manifested in folk songs and emerged as a strategy for coping with accumulated suffering – expressing it in songs is supposed to bring relief. Performing these songs replaces the anguish with pleasure and the sweetness of pain itself, but this creates a vicious circle: there is neither relief nor liber-

ation because the escape from suffering is so enchanting that it only causes a deeper immersion in the state from which one wanted to escape. This peculiar imperfection of melancholy stems from the fact that the deeper the song is supposed to express suffering and allow one to free oneself from it, the more one becomes immobilised in an overwhelming state of sweet pain. Melancholy: elusive, monotonous and stifling tears emanate from the miserable, smoke-filled *mehan* (taverns) in Sarajevo, Vranje and Skopje, becoming an object of incomprehensible fascination for visitors from outside the region. Dvorniković writes that the intensity of this state is particularly high in Macedonian songs, seeing them as the cradle of Yugoslav melancholy (Dvorniković, 2008). The author stops at this observation. However, one may ask to what extent this melancholy is a factor that broadens the interpretation of Macedonian variants of the ballad about the walled-up woman, and how the practices centred around The Radin Bridge in Kratovo can be interpreted through the prism of the circular figure of melancholy.

Macedonian variants of the song about the walled-up woman are so similar that they can be considered part of a single invariant (Китевски, 2009, p. 260). In most cases, the woman, realising what awaits her, asks the men for mercy, rebels, and curses the builders. In one variant, the builders do not wall up the woman but throw her into the river; in another, the woman's head is cut off before she is walled up. These are late variants that allow us to trace the process of transformation of the victim from a human being into an animal whose head was walled into the newly constructed building (Китевски, 1989, p. 78). In Macedonian folklore, the motif of the necessity of human sacrifice is present not only in the ballad about the walled-up woman, but also in stories about the construction of a monstrous city by *samovila*, who uses human bodies, including children's heads, as building material. However, the ballad about the walled-up woman features two fundamental differences: it makes a human being, not a fantastical character, the perpetrator of the event, and it individualises the victim herself, giving her a name and identity (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 1996, p. 41), which personalises the story, includes details, and sharpens individual scenes. Perhaps it is precisely this drama of individual experience that makes Rada's story inspiring to contemporary audiences and leads it to be eagerly reinterpreted in academic works and artistic projects. The second important issue mentioned by Stojanoviḱ-Lafazanovska is the internalisation of the walled-up history, telling it as a familiar story (Л. Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, personal communication, September 25, 2021). It is not only the walled-up woman that becomes close, but also the violence, whose mechanisms are triggered not in a distant, abstract world, but within a community of people connected by social and emotional ties.

During field research in Kratovo in September 2021, I (SS) had the opportunity to talk to the town's residents, for whom the legend of Rada is such an everyday experience that it remains largely unreflected upon or polished with conventional phrases, as if taken from a brochure for foreign tourists. My ac-

quaintance with Stevče Donevski, a guide and owner of the local hostel where I stayed during my visit to Kratovo, greatly facilitated my contact with the locals. This avid amateur historian and collector of Kratovo artefacts became my "gatekeeper" in the town's community and introduced me to many people, including the residents of the houses right next to The Radin Bridge. I travelled to Kratovo from Skopje with Gordana Janakievska, a long-time tour guide and very active media personality who has been promoting tourism in North Macedonia for several decades using Macedonian and Balkan legends, often interpreted with a view to glorifying Macedonian history and emphasising the role of Macedonian history and culture in the Balkan region. Janakievska is, among other things, the author of the Kingmarkoland project, which refers to the character of Prince Marko and promotes the tourist potential of North Macedonia.

As for The Radin Bridge, Janakievska considers it one of the sites with the greatest tourist potential in Macedonia. On our way to Kratovo, she wanted to learn more about the Dubrovnik colony established there in the 17th century. She hopes that Kratovo's somewhat faded tourist potential can be revived by bringing the descendants of the former owners of houses on the former Dubrovnik Street, which is located next to the Radin Bridge, to the town. She reduces the content of the legend about the walled-up Janakievska to a joke, stating that the people of Ratovo and Kratovo have a reputation for being pranksters, and that it was the builders of the bridge themselves who, wanting to show that they were good craftsmen, created the legend of the walling up, drawing on their knowledge of the practice of animal sacrifice during the construction of a house or public building (Г. Јанакиевска, personal communication, September 23, 2021). According to this interpretation, the legend of the walling up is a fiction, based on later practices of *kurban*, but the guide emphasises that this is her individual interpretation, based on speculation due to the lack of written sources on the subject.

Although the Radin Bridge is the town's main tourist attraction, the tourist discourse proved to be less relevant in my research, especially since the strict COVID-19 pandemic regime meant that there were virtually no tourists during our stay in the town. Paradoxically, the standstill in which the town found itself due to the pandemic allowed for better contact with the residents, who were quite open to contact and gave me plenty of time to talk. This standstill only affected tourists, not the daily lives of the residents, which continued at their own pace: during my visit, Kratovo was preparing for winter, and carts loaded with fresh wood constantly passed me on the narrow streets.

The most inspiring aspect of the field research was the importance of the bridge in the local community and the way in which events and situations centred around it capture the imagination of the town's residents. The significant role of the bridge in the life of the local community is expressed in a phrase used by interviewees: "the bridge still wants sacrifices". In conversations with residents and in the writings of local authors associated with the city, there are references to regular accidents on the bridge, the victims of which are people

from Kratov. This leads to the contamination of the legend of Rada with stories of cyclical collisions and suicides associated with the structure.

For instance, in his popular publication about Kratovo, Bogoljub Zlatanski recounts an unfortunate fall from a bridge that took place in the first half of the 20th century, involving his schoolmate named Rada:

> There have been more victims named Rada on this bridge. This incident took place in my time. Some young ladies and gentlemen were walking across the bridge, and we children were running around them. Suddenly, there was a loud noise. My school friend, Rada, fell from the right end of the bridge. But she fell onto soft plants, rolled down and survived. The bridge wanted sacrifices. (Златански, n.d.)

In this account, the bridge is given a human character, and the information about the need to repeat the sacrificial ritual echoes one of the Macedonian variants of the ballad about the walled-up woman, where one of the builder brothers says: "The bridge wants a sacrifice from me, / when there is a human sacrifice / then the bridge will stand" (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 1996, p. 51). A significant element is that the women involved are named Rada, as if the name triggered the sacrificial mechanism. However, in contemporary accounts, men are also victims, as I discovered during conversations conducted during field research. Dragan Georgievski, director of the Ethnological Museum, who has lived in Kratovo for 30 years, links suicides committed on the bridge to the legend of Rada, but also points to men as victims:

> Dragan Georgievski: Every 5 to 10 years, someone jumps off The Radin Bridge. The last victim was a 52-year-old man a few weeks ago. He was in a deep mental crisis.
>
> SS: Are these people from Kratovo or visitors?
>
> DG: People from Kratovo, locals. Everyone here knows about it.
>
> SS: Do you think there is a connection between the legend of the walled-up woman and these incidents?
>
> DG: I believe there is, and I say this as an ethnologist. Why don't they throw themselves off other bridges? There are several others in the city. In my opinion, the bridge wants sacrifices. (Д. Георгиевски, personal communication, September 24, 2021)

For the record, it is worth noting that Radin Bridge is the highest bridge in the city (30 metres above ground level, measured from the bottom of the riverbed). The other bridges are too low, which may influence the choice of location by people in a suicidal crisis. As a result of climate change, the riverbed is dry and the stony bed is overgrown with tall weeds. Interviewees mention that the person comes to the bridge and walks across it before committing suicide, familiarising themselves with it and preparing for what is to come. Sudden deaths always happen to the town's residents, which means that the story of the bridge should be treated as a story set within the local community. Although the victims of the bridge decide to take their own lives, they do have specific sacrificial signs, which include mental crises, divorce, the death of a loved one, and the loss of a job and economic status. These people are the weak links of the community and have been weakened by a crisis:

> Sickness, madness, genetic deformities, accidental injuries, and even disabilities in general tend to polarize persecutors. […] The very word abnormal, like the word plague in the Middle Ages, is something of a taboo; it is both noble and cursed, sacer in all senses of the word. […] Disability belongs to a large group of banal signs of a victim […] The further one is from normal social status of whatever kind, the greater the risk of persecution. (Girard, 1986, s. 18)

For decades, Kalina Čukčukovska has lived in a house located right next to the bridge, on a slope leading down to the riverbed. In her account, a recurring theme is the (also unsuccessful) suicide attempts she has witnessed: "People have problems, they have no money, they lose their jobs, their families – and they throw themselves off. In my time, two women and one man have died. One person fell into nettles and survived; she was so pale. Another died on the spot" (К. Чукчуковска, personal communication, September 24, 2021). The interviewee refers to the words of her much older husband, who was said to have known Rada herself. Her husband told her that the brothers who built the bridge had left for America, and that Rada's son, whom she fed through a window in the wall, was a blacksmith.

The character of Rada's son contains elements from the life of St. Georgi Novi, known as Kratovski, a martyr from the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, who came from Kratovo and moved to Sofia, where he worked as a goldsmith. The Turks unsuccessfully attempted to convert the young Christian to Islam, and they burned him at the stake when he refused to renounce his faith. The connection between Rada's son's biography and Georgi Kratovski (there is an Orthodox church dedicated to this saint in the city) is primarily based on the analogy of their professions – goldsmithing and the local tradition of coin minting. At the same time, the interviewee firmly denies that Rada was walled up in the bridge, emphasising that she was buried in a nearby Christian cemetery. The interviewee's emphasis on the significance of this fact may stem from the fact that the Radin Bridge is located in a place which, in the layout of the town and in relation to where my interlocutor lives, constitutes the so-called *orbis interior*, a space in which everyday life is materially experienced. Set on a rocky slope descending to the riverbed, the house of my interviewee is located very close to the bridge and even closer to its pillars, where the foundation sacrifice supposedly took place.

Because the bridge forms part of the nearby residents' landscape – literally the view from the window – there is an attempt to symbolically organise this space, driven by fear of the unknown and the need to maintain the so-called "comfort zone", distinct from the *orbis exterior*, described as "the holder of power and the sphere in which hopes for change are placed" (Wenska, 2015, p. 164). Thus, contact with this sphere offers an opportunity to benefit from its power, but in order to prevent possible negative consequences, restrictive rules must be followed. Contact with the *orbis exterior* can be established at moments and in places of mediation; during ritual chaos and inversion, the "untamed" may appear unexpectedly or be summoned in a ritual manner (Wenska, 2015,

p. 164). The power that is an indispensable feature of the *orbis exterior* can manifest itself as an "ordering principle" or an "entropic principle". The former works to the benefit of humans and the domesticated world, strengthening its order and filling it with the power it needs. The "entropic principle" causes chaos and destruction of the orderly *orbis interior* (Wenska, 2015, pp. 117–137).

The bridge that "wants sacrifices", though located in the heart of the town, opens a gap in familiar space; it belongs to the *orbis exterior*, and its power manifests as an entropic principle. In the case of the suicides in Kratovo, we can therefore speak of the activation of a machine of violence, manifested in the vicious circle of sacrificial ritual – the bridge still "wants sacrifices", as if the tragic history of Rada were not enough. If we invoke the figure of melancholy, the vicious circle – imprisonment in suffering from which there is no escape because every attempt only intensifies it, as Dvorniković described it – then the sacrificial ritual would constitute precisely such a mechanism. The externalised power of the bridge, which chooses its sacrifices and is the agent, also means that the person whom the bridge calls upon as its sacrifice is deprived of agency.

In Kratovo, right next to the Radin Bridge, there is yet another place commemorating a sacrificial act. The street perpendicular to the bridge is named after Josif Daskalov (1868–1909), a teacher and activist of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation, who was born in Kratovo. Daskalov became a local hero also because of how he tried to end his life. In 1897, during the intensification of anti-Turkish activities, he fell into the hands of the Turks, but not wanting to betray his comrades and the location of the weapons cache, he threw himself off the Radin Bridge. Macedonian writer Pavel Šatev writes that Daskalov, who was supposed to lead a Turkish gendarme to the location of his organisation's secret archive, decided for himself which bridge to jump from and where his future grave would be. As he jumped, he tried to pull the guard who was watching him with him, but ultimately he fell alone into the rocky riverbed. Daskalov survived and was imprisoned in Rhodes, where he was horribly tortured and died only after several years, poisoned by the Macedonian wing of supporters of the alliance with Bulgaria. In this narrative, the bridge becomes an apology for self-sacrifice in the name of a higher goal and an example of how "sweet it is to die for one's nation and homeland" (Шатев, 1934, p. 35). Daskalov, who has a street named after him, is singled out from among other anonymous people who died on the bridge because of his myth-making potential. And although his jump was not fatal, the gesture itself has solidified into a myth, becoming the culmination of his entire biography. Performed in the name of the nation, it overshadows the anonymous jumps of despair that continue to this day in Kratovo. In Daskalov's biography, the Radin Bridge is a space where loyalty and desire to preserve the continuity of the nation are manifested. Framed in a nationalist context, suicide is elevated as a welcomed act. The phrase "the bridge wants sacrifices", repeatedly mentioned here, means "the homeland wants sacrifices" in this case.

Macedonian folk culture is marked by the assumption that achieving higher goals and the common good requires sacrifice, which is often a prerequisite for the survival of the community. And since sacrifice is necessary, violence is also necessary. When this violence or injustice is inflicted in a ritual form, it means that the act of violence is preceded by tradition and an awareness of the significance of the wrongdoing, as well as strategies to justify the necessity of these actions. Macedonian folklore, which echoes historical experience, contains an economy of violence, showing the antinomy of various existential situations and the resulting questions about the necessity of sacrificing one person for the sake of the whole community (Ќулавкова, 2019, p. 103).

Regarding the regularly repeated phrase "the bridge wants sacrifices", we can talk about the creative role of words and the material effects of their use, which are characteristic of a curse, i.e., of magical thinking. Magic is a system in which causal and symbolic relationships overlap, and symbols are treated as signals (Buchowski, 1986). Words become an act of readiness, a potential: whoever utters them sets powers in motion. Words no longer merely symbolise death – they are metonymically linked to death because by informing about it they simultaneously come into contact with it, touch it, bringing misfortune (Engelking, 2000, pp. 72–74). Every magically used name is a vocative (Engelking, 2000, pp. 84–85) in the sense that the belief that the bridge wants sacrifices evokes reality and perpetuates the tradition of the cursed place among more people.

In Macedonian folklore, curses play an important and extensive role, often involving not only language but also certain actions. Curses can be a form of revenge for wrongdoing, even in situations where the perpetrator has not been caught or punished. One of the actions taken in such situations was to throw a stone at the place where the reprehensible act took place, but where balance had not been restored in the form of punishment and compensation. Passing by such a place, a curse or a spell was cast, asking God or the saints to right the wrong that had been done. After some time, the stones formed a pile that no one had the right to disturb (Китевски, 1997, p. 8). Curses are the domain of women, who are also much more creative in inventing them, and the heaviest possible curse is that uttered by a mother against her child (Китевски, 1991, pp. 14–15).

An example of narratives and artefacts built around curses is a tourist attraction in the municipality of Kratovo called *Камени Кукли* [Stone Dolls]. It features rock formations whose origin in folk culture is attributed to a legend about a curse placed by a bride on her wedding guests. The disappointed girl fell victim to a cunning boy who made two girls fall in love with him and announced two weddings on the same day but decided to choose the richer of the two. The abandoned woman cast a curse on the wedding guests, turning them into stones. To this day, guides point to rocks with human shapes and smiles frozen on the faces of petrified figures. In this case, the force that sets the curse in motion is the injustice suffered, and the curse becomes a means of revenge

and something more than just restoring balance, as all the wedding guests are punished, not just the unfaithful boy. In this sense, the curse is an eternal eruption of anger, with no element of restoration, just multiplied suffering.

However, it should be emphasised that while in Kratovo the bridge is a cursed place, no curse is pronounced by Rada in the ballad about the walling up, as is the case in some Balkan variants. The woman does not curse her tormentors but accepts death, asking only for her last wish to be granted, which arises from her concern for her child. Considering the woman's attitude, Rada's last minutes can be understood as a kind of self-sacrifice. Suicide can also be an act of self-sacrifice, which is not an act of collective violence, but a voluntary action.

Rene Girard, referring to an Aztec myth about the creation of the sun and the moon, speaks of a nuance, which is the compulsion of the victim to sacrifice himself. This voluntary compulsion appears in the case of the god Nanauatzin, who does not volunteer to sacrifice himself, is silent and stands aside when the gods are choosing a victim but willingly agrees when the gods select him to throw himself into the fire. This god has sacrificial marks (pimples on his face) and it is likely that if he had not agreed, he would have been thrown into the fire anyway because of these distinguishing features (Girard, 1986, p. 58). The voluntary nature of the act of self-sacrifice contains an element of coercion that makes this god a scapegoat. As Girard writes: "*crisis, crime, criteria, critique*, all share a common root in the Greek verb *krino*, which means not only to judge, distinguish, differentiate, but also to accuse and condemn a victim" (Girard, 1986, p. 22).

The cyclical suicides committed in Kratovo intensify this ambiguity of voluntariness and coercion because the point that establishes the tradition is the collective murder of Rada, who becomes the scapegoat of the community for the sake of achieving a higher goal. Rada bears the marks of sacrifice as the weakest link in the family community; she is a daughter-in-law and the wife of the youngest of the brothers, therefore her status in the family is the lowest. In time of crisis, she is the most vulnerable member of the family community. But Rada does not come last because the repetition of the sacrificial ritual maintains the existing order, which is not set in stone; perhaps this is where the belief that the bridge wants sacrifices comes from.

In a broader sense, the Radin Bridge can be treated as one of many legendary "suicide bridges", whose popularity is measured by the number of victims. In the case of both the Piłsudski Legion Bridge in Płock and the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, we can talk about urban legends that have grown up around these structures, emphasising the theme of fatal charm and the power with which bridges "attract" people in mental crisis and "force" them to jump. These legends reflect, but also perpetuate, the fatal reputation of cursed places, and they also employ magic, if magic is understood as evoking a future state of reality. The example of the Radin Bridge in Kratovo is exceptional in that the curse is based on the founding story of the bridge's first victim, thanks to whom it was built. The belief that the bridge requires further sacrifices and that the

founding act was not enough and must be repeated cyclically is a belief in the permanent crisis of reality itself.

As a space for the manifestation of the walling-up legend, the Radin Bridge is part of the cultural landscape of Kratovo and a vital impulse that sets in motion an interpretative machine, offering insight into a complex network of images projected onto the imagined figure of a woman walled-up in the bridge. This impulse is not only sustained by narratives for tourists visiting Kratovo but also constitutes an important topos for the residents, who have their own ways of processing the legend and understanding the practices centred around the bridge. The bridge accumulates meanings related to crisis, and within this crisis, mechanisms of violence, stigmatisation, but also helplessness, despair and compassion. If the Radin Bridge is cursed, one may ask to what extent it is possible to reverse the curse as a way of breaking the vicious circle of tragic repetitions, verbalised in the formula "the bridge wants victims". Insight into ways of reversing the curse or weakening its impact could lead us to restorative scenarios.

Mythopoeia

Until recently, the topos of the walled-up woman in Macedonian culture remained an element of folklore and popular culture, enjoying a privileged status in the country (Martinoska & Jakimovska-Toshic, 2016). In changing political conditions, it enjoyed the support of the state, which since Yugoslav times had cultivated folklore as a ludic tool for shaping the system of values and attitudes. Thanks to that patronage, folk festivals and songs popularised by the mass media could feed the collective imagination to such an extent that, as Lidia Stojanoviḱ-Lafazanovska claimed in an interview with me (GSG), the education system didn't need to intervene for the topos of the walled-up woman, along with other leitmotifs, to become embedded in the collective memory of Macedonians[4]. However, the researcher emphasises that the significance of the topos for the Macedonian mentality remains unrecognised, while academic studies highlight above all the polysemy of the motif, which is a function of various scientistic modalities. Macedonian folklore studies are dominated by descriptive approaches (Kitevski), seeking historical determinants of the symbolic articulation of collective trauma (Ḱulavkova) and those focused on tracing the changing reception of the motif, dependent on the historical, cultural, and ideological context changing over time (Stojanović, 2021).

Macedonian writers and artists were not as interested in this topos as folklorists were. Although there was no shortage of literary works (especially plays) devoted to gender relations and based on the metaphor of women's imprison-

[4] See the Macedonian variant from Kratovo: (Dojcinova, 2020; Goce Media 2022; blagoj iliev, 2024; Ogikor, 2009; Efendikajmakam, 2012)

ment (Чернодрински, 1900/1976; Чашуле, 1967; Петровски, 1997) or their organic unity with the home (Владова, 2001), there were no direct references to the topos of the walled-up woman or its allusive representations in these literary fictions. Thus, it has not yet had the opportunity to enter the canon of national culture, be included in school textbooks, or serve as a pretext for broader discussions about its place in the collective imagination. In the process of cultural animation, it has remained largely in the hands of local urban culture activists, among whom the case of Kratovo, discussed earlier, stands out.

It was not until the 21st century that this topos, understood as a metaphor for the role of women in the family and society, became the subject of in-depth reflection in three texts: Katica Ќulavkova's 2019 academic essay *Ритуалот на жртвување и економијата на насилството (низ примери од македонските народни легенди и опусот на Марко Цепенков)* [The Ritual of Sacrifice and the Economy of Violence (based on examples from Macedonian folk legends and the work of Marko Cepenkov)] (Ќулавкова 2019, pp. 95–103), in Frosina Parmakovska's novel *На враќање* [On the Way Back] (Пармаковска, 2020), and in Ivana Trajanoska's novel *Деса* [Desa] (2021) (Трајаноска, 2021), which won the Macedonian Pegasus Award. These texts, diverse in genre, are united by the authors' sensitivity to the universality of human experience, as revealed in their local dimensions. For both of them, the story of the Radin Bridge in Kratovo becomes a starting point for reflection on the ethical aspect and culture-creating potential of this folk tale. Ќulavková is primarily interested in the community's interpretation of its meaning, as preserved in folklore, while Trajanoska is interested in the intimate female experience.

In her essay, Ќulavkova attempts to organise the sacrificial motifs characteristic for Macedonian folklore in a mythopoetic spirit, while deciphering the collective creator's ethical attitude towards two types of crimes against a nursing mother. The author uses the concept of the scapegoat and founding violence, which, according to René Girard, lies at the heart of every new social order (Ќулавкова, 2019, p. 97) and is motivated by the "common good". Ќulavkova introduced a distinction between violence commemorated in folklore as "necessary/justified" and "unnecessary/absolute". As an example of the violence justified in folklore, she used the topos of a woman walled up alive, whose death was supposed to serve the welfare of the community and was treated as an inevitable necessity:

> Macedonian folklore preserves many accounts of brutal sacrificial rituals. One of them is related to bridge building. For example, there is a legend about the construction of the Radin Bridge in Kratovo. It is a historical local variant (the bridge was built in 1833 on the Manceva River) of the archetype of embedding a living breastfeeding woman in a bridge's foundations to make it eternal. "What is necessary is not difficult", says a proverb. It is this fatalistic and religious context that gives violence a sacred dimension (higher will). In this case, it concerns nine mason brothers building a bridge and the youngest brother's wife, Rada. The irony of fate is that everything is seemingly left to chance. However, all the brothers

> warned their wives not to bring them lunch the next day; only the youngest brother honestly fulfilled the agreement and did not tell his wife what would happen to her if she came with lunch. The story is dramatised by the fact that the young mother is a nursing mother, so she begs the masters to leave one breast out of the wall so that she can breastfeed her child. The mythical image of a woman "walled up alive" arouses an irrational fear of walling up a person's shadow, which is why people kept away from the walls being built. In this tradition, God's will is conveyed in a random manner. The "game of luck" turns into a "game of misfortune". A violent sacrifice is made in the form of a traditional mystical pagan belief that absolves the actors of their guilt. The ritual therefore serves a purifying and moral function – it justifies violence. (Ќулавкова, 2019, pp. 100–101)

At the antipodes of this sacrificial motif, Ќulavkova placed a folk tale about Prince Marko (the hero of South Slavic epic poetry) building a fortress in Prilep (known as Маркои кули [Marko's Towers]). It was written down by Marko Cepenkov and titled *Маркои кули и Кукул* [Marko's Towers and Kukul] (Цепенков, 1980, pp. 136–138). The author interprets the description of the extraordinary and forced involvement of the people in collective work, based on hyperbole typical of folklore, as a form of criticism of the ruler, especially in light of the fate of nursing young women and their children. According to legend, in order to fulfil their labour obligations on the construction site, mothers left their infants in the care of nannies, who were clumsy due to their age. The old women assigned to this role were unable to care for all the children entrusted to them (one hundred per nanny), so the children starved to death while their mothers died of exhaustion.

Ќulavkova emphasises that in *Маркои кули и Кукул* the folk artist notes the violence used under the guise of concern for the common good (defence against the Turks) and perceives it as inhuman, unjustified, senseless, "uneconomical" (Ќулавкова, 2019, pp. 102–103). He finds no justification for it. Although this interpretation echoes the leftist belief in the self-awareness of working people, the author's reflection is primarily focused on capturing the ethical criteria for classifying violence motivated by collective interests. By directing the reader's attention to the universal aspect of the questions posed by the folk authors of Macedonian "mythical history", Ќulavkova brings out its ethical assumptions, which can be recognised as New Testament ones. The author does not quote the relevant verses from the Gospel of St John (John 11:50–53), but uses a paraphrase of the words of the high priests who condemned Jesus to death:

> They show the antinomy of certain existential situations that raise questions about coercion and priorities: whether to sacrifice one person or sacrifice the entire community (people, city, state)? (Ќулавкова, 2019, p. 103)

Thus, Ќulavkova formulates the idea that the mother "walled up alive" can be seen as a Christomimetic figure, endowed with sacred sanction and high "economic" status. Her sacrificial death – although preceded by the conspirators' lies – makes sense because it serves the common good and, at the same time,

does not prevent the woman from fulfilling her motherly nurturing mission. Meanwhile, in the case of Prilep's victims, the folk artist does not see any collective benefits that could offset the losses incurred. The number of unnecessary deaths speaks for itself, and women's nurturing mission is rendered impossible.

Feeding a Viper

Ivana Trajanoska's novel also explores the issue of the pointlessness of sacrificing women's lives. Although the work reflects the author's aversion to cultural and biological determinism, it is accompanied by conflicting emotions: compassion for the powerlessness of women oppressed by an androcentric social contract, and fascination with their vitality and generosity. The writer seems to remain within the circle of Hélène Cixous's thinking, accepting that the "mother" is above all a source of goods. Although she remains a multidimensional being, "There is always within her at least a little of that mother's milk" (Cixous, 1976, p. 881), and this can be expressed in many ways. Trajanoska problematises feminist ethics of care as an inalienable feature of motherhood (Wodzik, 2011, pp. 91–104; Łamejko, 2003, pp. 193–208), while also considering the problem of the (self-)destructive role of women-mothers in the system they co-create. The writer's thought is in constant relation to the tradition of the feminist (liberal) emancipation movement and to local Macedonian cultural archaism.

Polish cultural anthropology has the privilege of having one of the most interesting and profound analyses of the culturally conditioned dynamics of relationships in the traditional Macedonian family of the interwar period, provided by Józef Obrębski's study *Organizacja społeczna i rodzinna wsi poreckiej* [Social and Family Organisation in the Village of Poreče] (Obrębski, 2022a, pp. 60–225). It is based on the material collected by the researcher in Macedonian Poreče (in the 1930s), but many of his findings are of a supra-local nature. Particularly noteworthy are the ethnologist's observations on the position of the woman-mother in the family, who, on the one hand, is subordinate to the man, but on the other hand, is dominant due to her proficiency as a nurturer and domestic doctor, as well as the "priestly" (as Obrębski has it) functions she performs:

> The female *sacerdotium* is very broad in scope. It includes supervision of the holiday calendar, initiating work bans […], rituals marking the beginning of seasonal economic activities, advising […] on ritual and sacred matters, and finally arranging and performing family rituals (weddings, births, funerals) in accordance with tradition and ritual rules. Priestly functions (of the housewife) give her a wide sphere of authority, thus providing some compensation for the restrictions and curtailment of women's privileges and rights brought about by patrilineal filiation and patrilocal marriage in the patriarchal system of Macedonian society. (Obrębski, 2022a, p. 251)

Additional disruptions to stereotypical conceptions of the subordinate position of women/mothers are introduced by the dependence of their status on their stage of life and the phenomenon of witchcraft studied by Obrębski. In the past, folk culture attributed magical abilities to women; today, Macedonian popular culture does the same. The vitality of such concepts means that they can coexist in the mental space with contemporary politicised models of femininity and motherhood: traditionalist, neo-traditionalist, modern and postmodern[5].

Among others, the feminocentric works of Ana Martinoska (Martinoska, 2012) and Aneta Svetieva, inspired by Obrębski (Светиева, 2003,), discuss aspects of the positioning of women in Macedonian families which seem to confirm the seemingly trivial fact that folk culture has its own surprising (and often sophisticated) mechanisms for regulating gender relations and moderating issues of transvestism[6] or gender transgression.

Modern concepts pale in comparison to these resources. This is all the more true given that, as early as the 1950s, some branches of feminism began to lose their revolutionary and emancipatory potential and shifted to conservative positions in line with the spirit of patriarchy. As early as the 1960s, Betty Friedan (Friedan, 2012) and later Élisabeth Badinter (Badinter, 2013), among others, fiercely criticised these tendencies. Over time, this ideological formation became correlated with the resurgence of naturalistic thinking with its ecological ideas (issues of contraception, infant care, healthy living, breastfeeding, etc.) and ethological ideas (the return of evolutionary biologism, the idea of the "maternal instinct" and the physical "bond"). The fascination with gender differences gave rise to, among other things, essentialist feminism (sometimes characterised by gender exclusivity), with its ethics of care. According to Badinter, the growing importance of motherhood (as a form of femininity) and the placement of the child at the centre of a woman's life have led women to

[5] "Traditionalists represent a continuum of the established historical model of women as mothers of large families (three or more children), who link their identity and development to raising children and running a household. Traditionalists give up work and find fulfilment as mothers and guardians of the home. Although contemporary women who adhere to the first model favour a traditional division of roles with their partner, they are far from accepting the patriarchal order. This novum is probably a consequence of several decades of feminist ideology. Neo-traditionalists are mothers of two children for whom work and professional fulfilment are an important part of their identity. However, this group still prioritizes family. The situation is changing for modern women who, in an effort to reconcile the idea of 'being a mother' with professional work, place greater emphasis on their careers and are willing to give up having more children in favour of individual development. At the other end of the continuum from traditionalists are postmodernists. These are childless women who place great emphasis on individual development and professional careers. They are most often representatives of business, politics and the liberal professions. Most importantly, for postmodernists, childlessness is a conscious and desired choice" (Michna, 2014, pp. 140–141).

[6] Obrębski's doctoral thesis on the phenomenon of *kuwady* (men in childbirth) is noteworthy here.

abandon the idea of equality in favour of maternalism and babycentrism as determinants of the patriarchal order (Badinter, 2013, p. 110).

The classifications presented here, based on studies of liberal Western societies, are an essential point of reference for reflection on the status of motherhood in Macedonia, whose society reproduces Western models and develops its own currents of feminism (Kolozova, 2000; Spasovska, 2017) but also draws on local historical experiences – left-wing authoritarianism in the second half of the 20th century and the subsequent political transformation after the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, in which gender equality was proclaimed in propaganda, but male domination persisted in the sphere of habitus (Lóránd, 2018). The facade of authority of powerful female workers and mothers building socialism was confronted in everyday life with modern forms of misogyny and the legacy of patriarchal tradition, which had a powerful symbolic base in the archaic folk culture mentioned here. These often conflicting ideological resources were reflected in women's literature, where they were sometimes reduced to a dualistic opposition between the patriarchal and the modern (Карамиколова, 2014).

Trajanoska's novel transcends this outline. It is an example of a concise (only 78 pages long) work of an epic scope, presenting the history of two families against the backdrop of dynamic political, social and economic changes in Macedonia during World War II and the first post-war decades. The fate of the main character (an unfulfilled pianist and conductor, cast in a full spectrum of family roles: mother of three children, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, sister, sister-in-law, grandmother) seems typical of many women in socialist Yugoslavia who wanted change but were powerless in the face of the power of internalised cultural gender patterns.

The main character of the novel is Desa, a musically talented girl from Kratovo who leaves this small town to study at the conservatory in the capital. Despite her prospects for artistic development, she gives up her professional career and chooses family life. Her husband, a well-known doctor in Skopje, is a man shaped by patriarchal culture who feels respect for his parents but lacks warm feelings towards them. He understands his life as a duty without love (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 54). In keeping with expectations, he gives them control over his and his wife's lives, succumbing in particular to his despotic mother, who unabashedly exercises her traditional privileges as the "priestess" of the household. As a result, Desa's existence, reduced to childbirth, miscarriages and everyday worries, seems poor, incomplete, and at times even tragic. Desa regains some independence only after the destruction of her oppressive in-laws' house when it is reduced to rubble during a historic earthquake. However, the change comes too late: Desa is already a woman who is tired of life and has lost most of her illusions but has retained the memory of family relationships based on the psychological violence and traumas she has experienced (body deformation, miscarriages, childbirth, loss of her daughter's love, loss of professional prestige, which her rejected lover involuntarily reminds her of). For her, everyday life is a sphere of practising survival strategies in a world that is difficult to

accept but necessary. In her case, the compensatory mechanism (pride in being a mother and wife) only works incidentally, allowing her to overcome her sense of marginalisation. Neither the son, spoiled by her in-laws, nor the rebellious and alienated older daughter, nor the disabled younger daughter bring her any comfort. The memory of her traumas reinforces Desa's feeling of being an inadequate person who has failed in all her roles. Her act of love towards her daughter, whom she entrusted to her mother's care to rescue the little girl from the hostile guardianship of her Skopje mother-in-law, is also an act of her own capitulation in her role as a nurturing mother. Her inability to fulfil a mission so highly valued not only in Macedonian culture (Obrębski, 2020a, pp. 449–450) is one of the reasons for the protagonist's feelings of insecurity. This cannot be changed by the external trappings used by Desa, which make her resemble the heroines of American women's magazines, once fiercely exposed by Betty Friedan (2012) in her iconoclastic 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*:

> Desa's heavily backcombed hair was pinned up, generously sprayed with hairspray, curled with a curling iron, the last strands touching her neck, one falling slightly over her forehead. She wore a pink headband, the same colour as her dress – a pink shirt dress with a flared bottom, below the knees in length. (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 59)

Styled in accordance with magazine fashion, Desa seems to be a freedom-deprived imitator, and her domain remains artificiality and inauthenticity, which she senses (though she is unable to conceptualise it) and hides from the world. This is one of the reasons why she values her relationship with Stepan, who never asks her about her personal affairs, but because of this, he can be so distant that sometimes (as is the case just before the earthquake) he reminds her of a reptile or a stone lying next to her (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 66).

Trajanoska, revealing the mechanisms of the patriarchal apparatus of oppression (also regarding fertility and reproduction), points to a peculiar synergy between women and a system that is hostile to them, but which they actively contribute to. Successive generations participate in the transmission of cultural patterns, incorporating into their children models of behaviour considered appropriate for their gender. Trajanoska portrays this formative sphere as a meeting place for conservative patterns (those connected with the Orthodox Church and folklore, or those influenced by Western fashion) and socialist patterns (imposed by the Yugoslav state), but the object of her most careful observation is primarily the circulation of folkloric imaginaries.

In this context, the popular in Kratovo (the birthplace of the protagonist and of the book's author herself) legend of Rada[7], who was walled up in one of the pillars of the bridge, is crucial to the semantics of the novel. This story about the dramatic fate of a woman-mother corresponds in the book with two other legends which also link the symbolism of women and stone in an inseparable semantic knot. These narratives visualise a microcosm whose symbolic layer is

[7] See Goce Media (2022); Dojcinova (2020).

co-created by stone (the eternity of non-life) (Bartmiński, 1999, pp. 235–246) and the female body (the fragility of life). The female characters in the novel identify with stories that incorporate neo-pagan mysticism, which they believe reveal something about themselves.

And so, Desa's mother, Magdalena, visualises her own unpleasant experiences from her youth spent in Kumanovo through a natural sculpture depicting the so-called Stone Wedding or *Камени Кукли* [Stone Dolls] mentioned earlier. This rock formation, resembling a wedding procession, is located in the vicinity of Kumanovo (and Kratovo). In the legend associated with this place, an abandoned girl casts a curse on her unfaithful suitor and his fiancée, turning the wedding guests into stone. This materialised folk tale serves as a warning against both the unpredictable consequences of infidelity and the magical power of women, who can transform life into non-life with a single word (Engelking, 2000).

The image of the Stone Wedding returns to the thoughts and dreams of Desa's otherwise gentle mother at all stages of her life, reminding her of the power of her anger towards the boy who once mocked her feelings, and the shame that accompanied her humiliation. This resentment is conditioned by an earlier experience of infamy, which in Magdalena's childhood affected the whole family after her mother's (and Desa's grandmother's) body was found in the crevices of the ancient astronomical observatory of Kokino (a pagan rock temple on the summit of *Татиќев камен*) (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Temple in Kokino.
Photo by Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybow, 2024

Due to the specific nature of this pagan place of worship, the community of Kumanovo accused the deceased woman of witchcraft[8] and, as a result, her husband deemed it necessary to leave the town with his children. The decision to move to Kratovo was accompanied by fear of judgement and uncertainty in assessing the situation; only Desa's extravagant aunt remained in Kumanovo; she did not get married, but she also did not show any fear of the town's inhabitants, and her mocking response to her neighbours' taunts was truly lewd behaviour: loud farting (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 20).

Embedded in magic, the women's stories could inspire respect for them as potential perpetrators of harm. Desa's husband often expressed this, warning his children about their mother and grandmother from Kratovo, whom he half-jokingly, half-seriously accused of witchcraft. Desa enjoyed the fact that, at least in this form, he attributed some kind of power to her (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 25); in difficult situations (including forcing him into marriage), she herself sought the help of a well-known Kratovo abortionist and witch (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 37).

However, the folk legend that played a formative role in Desa's life was the story discussed earlier about Rada, whom the builders had embedded in a pillar of the bridge in Kratovo so that it would last. Along with the meal forced upon her by her mother, the girl absorbed the story spun by her, unknowingly preparing herself for the matrilineal inheritance of trauma and female behaviour patterns. Years later, Desa used the same strategy with her own daughter, but the girl, who hated milk, also hated the stories that accompanied feeding, which translated into her relative independence from traditional cultural gender patterns; she raised two children on her own. In her case, the balance of non-conformism was tipped by a dream, which was a contamination of the legend of Rada and the Stone Wedding. In her childhood dream, the petrified bride retained a living breast, from which milk gushed straight into the girl's mouth, causing her violent nausea (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 47).

Meanwhile, little Desa, more susceptible to suggestion, eagerly asked her mother for details of the story, such as the reasons for the men's complete indifference to Rada's suffering. In doing so, the girl provoked responses that could be a projection of Magdalena's personal trauma and evidence of her matrilineal inheritance. Desa's mother modified the folk tale by introducing a volitional aspect that seemingly changed the balance of power, turning the woman's presumed submissiveness into a tool of her hidden power, capable of structuring reality:

> She went down there herself. If I remember correctly what my mother told me, she suggested it herself. She only asked to have her right breast left intact so that she could feed her newborn baby. (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 17)

[8] This is consistent with the widespread belief in Macedonia that only women practise witchcraft (Obrębski, 2022b).

Her mother's observations prepared Desa to humbly endure suffering, regardless of its source. This manifested itself in a fatalism stemming from the belief in the inevitability of the biological and cultural determinants of a woman's fate: "We say that when a girl is born, even the thatched roof cries. But let her be alive and healthy" (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 44). In such a world order, the only certainty was the nurturing mission of women, corresponding to traditional social expectations. The only person capable of opposing this determinism was Desa's feminising sister-in-law, who, after the earthquake, chose to live alone in London, bringing upon herself the infamy of being an "unfit mother".

Desa, submissive to social norms, is aware of the influence of legend on her ideas about her own role in society. Interestingly, the narrative that destroys her in real life also reveals its subversive potential in the novel's world. Trajanoska shows this complexity, and then her variation on the topos of the walled-up woman takes the form of a nightmare that haunts Desa throughout her life, in which the walled-up Rada breastfeeds not a child but a viper:

> She listened to the murmur of flowing streams and suddenly found herself under the Radin Bridge. In the right pillar of the bridge, she saw Rada, as big as the pillar, mighty and white, dressed in a white shirt. Rada was sobbing, but her crying could not be heard because of the sound of the river. Her face was grey, wet with tears, yellowed with sadness. Through her tears, she said to Desa: "Little one, give me the baby, I will put it to my breast." Desa looked around and saw the baby on the rocks by the river. She took it in her arms and even heard its heart-rending cry. When she looked inside the swaddling clothes, there was no baby, but a viper. Desa screamed and almost dropped the strange bundle from her hands. Rada repeated: "Little one, give me the baby, I will put it to my breast." Desa handed it over, and the viper began to suck loudly on the right breast of the walled-up mother…
> And at that moment, she woke up… (Трајаноска, 2021, p. 17)

This raises questions as to whether, in Trajanoska's novel, Rada's breast, full with milk, is a symbol of the triumph of "feminine" ethics of care over "masculine" ethics of heroism, or perhaps of nourishing milk over spilled blood. Is the viper greedily sucking on the woman's breast a symbol of the Other, who (even when he is a beast) expects and even demands unconditional generosity? Does Rada's kind response to this call make her responsible for the consequences of a terrifying interspecies transgression? Or is it just a shocking metaphor for the non-negotiable fate of women, determined by biological conditions and social habitus?

Although the novel offers no clear answer to these questions, it seems that the dream haunting the protagonist is, above all, a surprisingly coherent fiction generated by her mind, inviting her to live a more conscious life. However, Desa does not take advantage of the inspiration her subconscious provides for her. She remains trapped in her mental habits. She recognises the dream as a warning, but in her interpretations she focuses mainly on the symbolism of the viper as evil, which she equates with changing external threats: her mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, children, husband, and her own illness. She hides from

herself her inner discomfort, and even more so the evil resulting from her mental condition. She is unable to confront the phantasm of her monstrous mother, as depicted by Rada. Having once chosen a museum of petrified thoughts and survival strategies, she loses herself in concerns for the well-being of her family. She becomes like the heroine of her dream, no longer expecting clear confirmation from her children that they belong to the world of values she professes.

Thus, in the world presented, the subversive potential of the topos is immobilised. Rooted in the collective subconscious, the internalised model of femininity condemns Desa to a fatalistic understanding of her identity as a creature trapped in biological realities and cultural phantasms, which internally make her a frighteningly consistent person, possessed by a maternal mission of nurturing (Cixous, 1976, pp. 881–883). However, Trajanoska's woman "feeding a viper" also seems to be a dark shadow of a benevolent giver of goods: by analogy with the folk prototype, she retains her desire to show care but is conceived as a monstrous creature inhabiting the worlds "in between", being an anomaly, at the same time personalised and petrified, which Rosi Braidotti once wrote about (Braidotti 2009, pp. 120–121).

Thus, Trajanoska, through the motif of a mother feeding a viper, highlights the anachronisms rooted in common thinking and provokes their re-evaluation, exposing not only the power of traditional patriarchal cultural patterns, but also their subversive potential, which gives her approach an innovative and polemical character in relation to existing cultural gender patterns. The writer's bold transformation of the motif of the walled-up Rada, which transgresses social taboos, extrapolates content that cannot be expressed within contemporary maternalism. However, the subversive potential of this motif remains untapped.

Returning Home. The Therapeutic Power of Folklore

In the novel *На враќање* [On the Way Back] (2020), penned by Frosina Parmakovska (Пармаковска, 2020), who is fascinated by magical realism, the main character (bearing the significant name Emanuel: Hebrew for "God with us") gradually reveals the twists and turns of his transformation from the very first pages of the story about his life (written into two characters). The first-person narrative serves to explain his inner experiences, but before they can be integrated and become psychologically coherent, they scatter into thousands of pieces as fragments of memories, recurring obsessions, metaphors, vague associations, dream visions, reminiscences of past events and delusions about them.

The protagonist experiences a midlife crisis in all aspects of his existence – professional, marital and parental. Uncertainty about his feelings and choices causes him to distance himself from his loved ones to devote himself to his greatest passion – writing – and, at the same time, to re-evaluate his life. In the structure of the text, this is illustrated through the *homo viator* narrative. The

banality of modern means of transport (train, car) goes hand in hand with fairy-tale fantasy (stork wings, flying carpet), and the journey into the past becomes a journey into the future. The way in which he travels this road only seemingly verifies the poetics of confession.

The protagonist (the writer-narrator and his alter ego Emanuel II, understood to be one person) represents a personality type that fits Taylor's concept of the "porous self" (Taylor, 2007). He feels vulnerable to external forces that infiltrate his being, taking hostile control of his life. This leads the protagonist to fatalism, and although he realises the source of his own superstitions, he is unable to correct his fearful attitude. In the novel, this state of submission to Fate is symbolised by the character of the Gypsy woman, who appears several times and forever terrifies Emanuel because, as a little boy, he refused to let her into his flat and give her the bread she asked for. Since then, he has lived in the shadow of the words she spoke to him at the time: "May you never have anything, may you search your whole life and never find it" (Пармаковска, 2020, p. 22).

Although the protagonist's mother tried to free her son from his fear, their joint search for the Gypsy woman to give her gifts and thus persuade her to lift the curse came to nothing. It was only the Gypsy woman's appearance on Emanuel's wedding day that created a new situation. Although the protagonist initially took this as a bad sign, he took action: he attempted to bribe the woman and persuade her to remove the power from her bad words. The Gypsy woman, taking advantage of the opportunity to earn money, did not fulfil this expectation; nevertheless, the very possibility of offering her a gift gave Emanuel the illusion that he had gained control over his own life. The character of the Gypsy woman reappears at the end of the novel, when the protagonist, having undergone a spiritual transformation, can see the meaning of what happened in the past, which helps him overcome his hostility towards his father (Пармаковска, 2020, p. 218).

In constructing the plot of the novel, Parmakovska entangles her protagonist in a web of significant places and characters with magical powers, among whom Master Manole plays a special role. He first appears in the first part, titled *Train Journey.* Summoned by the protagonist-writer, who is taking an imaginary flight, he is tasked with breathing life into the ruins of a small Orthodox church he encounters. He is characterised as follows:

> Master Manole is not only a great builder, but also a great man whose suffering soul well understands death, loss and human cruelty; before the word is spoken, he begins his work, stone by stone, piece by piece, building a wall up to the highest point; with hands that can hold load-bearing beams and a breath that straightens leaning towers, he gives new life to the sad ruin and flies away to his beloved, without boasting or enjoying gratitude. (Пармаковска, 2020, pp. 44–45)

In the fictional biography of Emanuel II which the narrator recounts to his son, the motif of Master Manole reappears when the protagonist experiences

a breakdown after the father of his beloved girlfriend (who, significantly, is a Muslim) moves his daughter to Istanbul, thereby destroying the young couple's plans for a life together. Unable to obtain any information about Tulai's fate, and after waiting in vain for news from her, Emanuel II, deeply affected, decides to cut himself off from all feelings related to this story. He ritualises his desire for separation from suffering by symbolically burying his love. This act is fundamental to the protagonist's future life, as he builds himself a house on the site of the symbolic grave:

> […] he wrapped [in foil – GSG] the entire month and a few days before, starting with the downpour right after his grandmother's funeral. After making sure that no air was escaping from anywhere, he put it in a black suitcase […] and zipped it up. He dug a hole two metres deep, like you would dig for a coffin when burying someone, and buried the suitcase at the bottom of the hole. Then, after some time, the earth levelled out, grass grew there, and it was impossible to tell that there was anything underneath. Emanuel II built a house on this spot, not just a structure, but a real house, a house where he still lives today, believing that the foil, the suitcase, the deep hole, the earth in it, and the house on that earth are enough for him to sleep peacefully, as the danger of ghosts showing up has been averted. (Пармаковска, 2020, pp. 104)

The narrator, caught by his son in the confessional tone of this story, denies that the story refers to him, yet from that moment on, in the eyes of the reader, the narrator's own fate and that of the pseudo-hero of his fiction intertwine into a single story about a man who first wants to regain a lost opportunity, then to understand the motivations behind his own actions, and finally to learn the truth about himself.

The sequence of internal experiences appears to be an almost clinical record of the individual phases of the process of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1979) unfolding in the protagonist's psyche. Within this framework, the recurring topos of the walling up of a woman plays a vital role as a tool for illustrating the power relations in the protagonist's life. It is worth noting that Parmakovska refers not to the local Macedonian legend of walling up (associated with Kratovo), but to the more elaborate Romanian version of the story of the construction of the church in Curtea de Argeș, of which she creates her own syncretic variant.

In the world of the novel, this topos appears in an extended version – as a kind of mirage – during the protagonist's quarantine due to COVID-19, which he had to undergo after a risky trip to Istanbul, where he hoped to meet his former beloved Tulai at a presentation of the translation of his book organised by a Turkish publisher. The event did not take place due to the pandemic, but the protagonist, hoping for a miracle that would renew his romantic relationship, made a series of imaginary trips to Tulai's house. All of them ended in failure. When, tormented and humiliated by the failure of his plans, he returned to his country, he found himself entering a new reality in which the familiar order of the world had been invalidated. In its place was a dystopia that had been unimaginable just the day before.

Being stuck at home deepened the main character's mental crisis, but it also turned out to be an opportunity. Isolation created endless possibilities for imaginary journeys on a "flying carpet", and the accompanying excitement drew Emanuel's attention to everything he had recently considered secondary – home, family, marriage. The protagonist begins to contrast his search for the "depressing drags of existence" (Bollas, 2018, p. 123) – wallowing in a sense of defeat, deriving perverse pleasure from paranoid and suicidal fantasies – with the vision of, first, total collapse, and then of the abandonment of his own refuge of negativity. This process is accompanied by a retreat from the protagonist's intellectual horizontalism (Bollas, 2018, pp. 61–62), which amounted to the disappearance of any hierarchy of thoughts in favour of their equivalence.

Significantly, Emanuel's guide through the meanders of his fragmented inner life was none other than his namesake, Master Manole, who is sometimes identified in the novel with the Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan. When he listens to Sinan's suggestions to save the building under construction by, God willing, walling up one of the bricklayers' wives in its foundations, Emanuel experiences the whole story from Manole's perspective. He sees the world through his eyes, as it were (Пармаковска, 2020, pp. 203–207). It is therefore not surprising that in the world presented, it turns out to be his wife who is walled up, and he himself contributes to the murder:

> Irina places the bowl in the middle of our circle; I pick her up and pretend it's a game. She doesn't resist, but joins in the fun with a laugh, so I place her on the foundations with which she will soon be united. My brothers quickly enclose her with stones, stone by stone up to her knees, stone by stone up to her waist, stone by stone up to her head, a hundred stones and the job is almost done. I can hear her still laughing inside, and I can no longer see even the smallest part of her. But in the next moment, I can no longer hear her, because she has realised that this is not a game, and I cannot imagine how scared she is, and yet, so gentle, she never once expresses hatred or curses me. (Пармаковска, 2020, p. 205)

When, in a moment of enlightenment, the protagonist realises that all these events were not God's will but Sinan's satanic trickery, it is already too late (Пармаковска, 2020, p. 205). In his dreamlike visions, he experiences incarnation into various characters, starting with a folk tale hero who, turned into a stork, cannot return to his human form because he broke a vessel containing a magical potion. He then throws himself into the abyss, just like the Romanian Manole, turns into Irina, and finally shatters into thousands of pieces. This visualisation of the protagonist's mental defragmentation and multiplication is, for Parmakovska, the beginning of his internal integration process. The next images that pass before the eyes of the protagonist (and the reader) are the liberation of the heroine of the Romanian (sic!) version of the ballad, Ana, from the wall; the joint flight of the spouses; and the fall of Manole. The emergence of a source of healing water in that place (Пармаковска, 2020, pp. 214–215) is accompanied by Emanuel's gradual return to reality, marked by increasingly

appropriate reactions in his relationships with his wife and son, and even with his deceased father, whom he had been unable to forgive for so long. These reactions herald the protagonist's return home, understood not only as a return to his loved ones, but above all to himself.

It is interesting that the protagonist's coming-of-age story essentially stabilises the female character within a cultural stereotype (Аврамовска, 2020). Patient and gentle Irina embodies the virtues imposed on women by patriarchal culture. Above all, she waits, which gives the man a sense of security. Perhaps this is why the protagonist's inner peace comes only when he frees himself from the obsessive image of the beautiful, aggressive Tulai, who stares him in the eyes. He wants this image to crumble to dust like other illusions, personified by the architect Sinan, the builder Manole, and the stork-man Siljan (Пармаковска, 2020, p. 215). The final liberation from obsession comes with Tulai's sudden transformation into a terrifying old woman who gradually dissolves into the darkness, leaving behind a memory of the terrible fear aroused by her bony hand, capable of ripping the protagonist's heart out of his chest. Tulai is not life, but death (Пармаковска, 2020, p. 216).

Thus, Parmakovska's novel above all highlights the therapeutic potential of folkloric narratives which explain the most complex human problems and strategies for solving them. Several folk motifs are woven into Emanuel's story: a curse, a woman being walled up, and a man-stork. In a functional sense, they complement each other as tools for restoring a person's ability to have meaningful relationships with others. However, this only becomes apparent when the anamorphic image (Ogden, 2019, pp. 199–213) of the inner journey of this *homo viator* is recognised as a distortion, a deformation of something which, as already mentioned, can ultimately be recognised as the process of positive disintegration, long described in psychological literature (Dąbrowski, 1979).

Summary

During the Yugoslav era, folklore was a tool for shaping values and attitudes, and thanks to state patronage, numerous festivals and songs constantly broadcast in the media were able to fuel the collective imagination. Thanks to these forms of transmission, the topos of walling up a woman was popularised in the common social consciousness, but it did not receive in-depth reflection in either folklore or artistic and literary circles. The significance of the topos for Macedonians remains largely unrecognised, not least because of its modest representation in modern culture: the small number of literary texts that revitalise it, the paucity of evidence of its reception, the absence of the motif in school education, and the lack of lively interest in this particular topic among Macedonian artists.

If we stick to motifs close to the topos of immortality, we can note such details as the relationship between man and stone: anthropomorphic rock formations

in the vicinity of Kratovo have been immortalised in paintings (Алексовски, 2016) and inspired Aleksandar-Aco Filipovski to create a whole series of neo-impressionist and neo-modernist images imbued with magic. They show the mysterious unity of the human world with the world of seemingly inanimate matter, symbolised by its most lifeless object – stone (Филиповски, 2018). The series includes several paintings of stone bridges, but none of them is the Radin Bridge, and none of them refers to the motif of walling up. The theme of chaos accompanying the construction of the city is evident in the work of caricaturist Sunčica Božinovska, who references the well-known folk ballad about the inept construction of the city of Samovila, which the artist uses to critique the political authorities (Божиновска, 1994, pp. 5–6).

The silence surrounding this topos in the Macedonian cultural canon may largely be due to its polysemy, which makes this topos difficult to exploit for political purposes or ad hoc interventions. However, the revival of narratives and practices centred around the motif of walling-up takes place in Macedonian culture at the local level, the most striking example being Kratovo and its Radin Bridge. The story of Rada becomes overshadowed by the utility imperative of the bridge used as a road for lorries. However, it unexpectedly undergoes secondary semiotisation at the local level. The inhabitants contaminate the dark legend with the phenomenon of accidents and suicides that take place on the bridge. The repeated phrase about "the bridge wanting sacrifices" acquires new meanings related to the crisis and to strategies for resolving it, as it is continually linked to new incidents on the bridge.

The aforementioned revitalisation of the topos in contemporary Macedonian culture includes Ivana Trajanoska's novel *Деса* (2020). This novel, using the motif of the walled-up mother anchored in the legend of the Radin Bridge in Kratovo, highlights the durability of traditional patriarchal cultural patterns, but also their subversive potential. In Frosina Parmakovska's novel *На враќање* (2020), the motif of walling up plays a vital role in the protagonist's mental life, providing him with patterns for acting in a crisis.

What is striking in both novels and in the academic essay discussed above is the presentation of the motif of walling up a woman in its relation to other active elements of the folk and national imagination. As nurturers and sustainers of everyday life, women remain at its centre, but this does not mean they are freed from the constraints of duty. Macedonian artist Angel Dimovski Čauš expresses this intuition in a highly vivid manner, albeit ironic and formally unrelated to the topos discussed here. In his triptych titled *Македониум* [Macedonium] (2008), he places at the centre the figure of the Great Mother mentioned in the introduction, whose womb is both a home and a source of light (Figure 4).

The other two parts of the triptych feature angels, or rather archangels, which are an artistic replica of a 12th-century fresco from the Orthodox church of St. George in Kurbinovo, where they are depicted worshiping the Mother of God. In Čauš's work, they are frozen in the same gesture of adoration for the Great Mother, and the details reinforce the effect of bricolage in the background:



Figure 4. Македониум triptych by Angel Dimovski Čauš. Mixed technique. Source: Димовски-Чауш. Текст Дора Андонова Фот. Музей на град Скопје, 2011. Photo by Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2024

a fallen antique column, a shining sun with ten rays and… a Schengen visa. In this case, Angel Dimovski draws on images primordial to the social imagination, visualising the mythologems of the national imagination (Вренцоска, 2020, pp. 65–100), in order to subject them to ironic commentary. The extent to which this concerns the position of women in this configuration must remain without a definite answer at this stage of research.

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Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, Kazimierz Jurczak

Romania. Within the Monastery Wall

The Obsession with Uniqueness. The Topos in Cultural Studies

Our starting point for analysing the topos of the walled-up woman must be a seemingly banal reminder of the late emergence of modern Romanian culture. The absence of strong state structures meant that, up until the 19th century, efforts to build high culture were sporadic and limited to circles of power and, occasionally, to (Orthodox) church circles. Regarding the Wallachian-Moldavian Middle Ages (extending well beyond the 15th century), one can speak of little more than a written tradition (chronicles, princely chancellery documents) using various languages: Slavic (including Polish), Latin, Modern Greek, and, from the mid-16th century onward, Common Romanian (Proto-Romanian). Thus, in what is known as the *epoca veche* [the old epoch], oral folk culture predominated – regionally diverse (Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania) and naturally subject to processes of cultural interference.

For the generation of modern state builders, the greatest cultural challenges were related to the codification of the language and the establishment of reference points for original artistic creation (defining national specificity). Throughout much of the 19th century (roughly from the 1820s to the 1870s), a debate unfolded between those advocating for the making up of historical ground through imitation of Western cultural values (the Springtime of Nations generation) and proponents of so-called autochthonism, passionately seeking indigenous inspiration for high culture. Ultimately, the latter orientation prevailed, and oral traditions and subsequently folk culture became not only central themes of public debate but also ideological and political tools. This was because the earlier written corpus, modest in volume and heterogeneous, could not serve as an inspiring and aesthetically valuable heritage for original artistic expression; in contrast, the extraordinarily rich folklore could. However, the elites of the emerging state quickly deemed national specificity and interest to be matters of state, and folklore was thus subjected to "nationalisation", which affected the hermeneutics of the already recorded folk tales, legends, and beliefs, at times with unfortunate consequences.

Vasile Alecsandri (1818?–1890), a poet and playwright representing the transitional phase from classicism to romanticism in Romanian literary history, was the first writer to use folk tales and legends as literary material. His two-volume work *Poezii poporale. Balade (Cântece bătrânesti) adunate și îndreptate* [Folk Poetry. Ballads (Old Songs) Collected and Corrected] (1852–1853) essentially inaugurated Romanian literary folklore. However, it also marked the beginning of interpretive difficulties for later ethnography and folklore studies, as Alecsandri's canonical poetic versions were often mistaken for genuine folk creations.

Alecsandri, who initially wrote in French, published *Ballades et chants populaires de la Roumanie (Principautés Danubiennes)* [Ballads and Folk Songs of Romania (Danubian Principalities)] in Paris (1855) in his own translation, providing Romanian material to a growing number of European folklorists interested in the Balkans. He also popularised two folk legends: *Legenda Meșterului Manole* [The Legend of Master Manole] and *Mioriţa* [The Little Ewe Lamb], which would soon become emblematic of Romanian spirituality, frequently analysed, commented upon, and adapted in literature.

In the preface to a later edition of *Poezii populare* [Folk Poetry] (1867), Alecsandri places the legend of Master Manole within the "rich tradition of folk superstitions regarding construction" (Alecsandri, 1908), while also attempting to connect it to the semi-mythical origins of the Principality of Wallachia (with one of its founders responsible for establishing the monastery in Argeș as well). At the same time, contemporary folklorists (Alexandru Odobescu, Gheorghe Enăceanu, Grigore Tocilescu, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, and others), more attentive to historical realities, associated the legend with the historical figure of Neagoe Basarab, a Wallachian prince from the early 16th century who founded the church in Curtea de Argeș, and with Matei Basarab a century later, who renovated and possibly expanded it.

19th-century scholars and cultural figures initiated a long tradition of linking the folk ballad to historical events and locations; as a result, the legendary Master Manole (Manoli, Manea, Manuil) would be indelibly associated with the church and monastery in Curtea de Argeș, which in the 20th century became the necropolis of the Hohenzollern Romanian rulers. The early phase of interest in the ballad was marked by an academicising approach to the subject – partly out of the necessity to (re)construct national history, and partly under the influence of Western positivism. Authors analysed the architectural details of the building, speculated on the origin of Master Manole (Armenia? Georgia? Constantinople?), and discussed such issues as Neagoe Basarab's patronage, incoming cultural influences on Wallachia, and aesthetic inspirations in sacral architecture. The prevailing scientism left little room for interpreting the characters' motivations, symbolism, or the universal dimension of their choices. Over time, from the early 20th century onward, the approach began to change, yet Romanian scholars consistently focused on the figure of the legendary Master Manole as a symbol of creative labour and determination in pursuit of an

artistic goal. What mattered was the creative imperative, the willingness to sacrifice other values, and the significance of the completed work for national culture. The foundation sacrifice of the Master's wife (named Ana or Caplea in different variants of the ballad) was consistently portrayed from the husband's perspective – as HIS sacrifice, born of love for a cherished woman, offered on the altar of art for the good of the community.

It should be noted that Romanian researchers have, from the outset, situated the ballad within a broader Balkan cultural context. From the 19th-century essayist Alexandru Odobescu, interested in historiography and art history, to the ethnologist and Slavicist Petre P. Panaitescu, and the polymath and founder of professional national historiography Nicolae Iorga, all have analysed the Romanian ballad in relation to its variants: Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Hungarian, and Albanian. It would also be standard practice to emphasise Romanian distinctiveness (e.g., the building of a church instead of a bridge, castle, or fortress) and the superiority of the native artistic form. This latter point led Mihail Arnaudov to question the folk nature of the Romanian ballad, considering it a product of high culture, and therefore indirectly a creation of 19th-century literati rather than an anonymous folk author from an earlier time. This provoked a rebuttal from Dimitrie Caracostea (published in 1942), whose central argument and conclusion he included in the title itself: *Material sud-est european şi formă românească – Meşterul Manole* [Master Manole: Southeastern European Material and Romanian Form] (Caracostea, 1942/1969). Defending the authenticity of the Romanian variant and explaining its artistic superiority over the Balkan versions, Caracostea stated: "Nowhere in Bulgaria have I encountered a version that simultaneously emphasises the master's love for his craft and the mutual love between husband and wife, which gives the ending its tragic dimension" (Caracostea, 1942/1969, p. 201).

Caracostea addressed the controversial issue of the originality and folk character of The Ballad of Master Manole at a peak moment in both public and scholarly narratives saturated with nationalist chauvinism; the notion of artistic/literary/cultural superiority over other national versions of folklore was not to be questioned. For this reason, the author issued the categorical judgment:

> In comparison with all other Southeastern European variants, the ballad created by us and for us naturally stands at the forefront. […] Through its humanistic perfection, it gives the most complete shape to the common Balkan material and provides a rationale to treat it as a symbol of a unique artistic calling. (Caracostea, 1942/1969, p. 201)[1]

He concluded: "Literature that develops organically maintains continuity between folklore and learned poetry. All great literatures that have evolved organically […] have elaborated folk myths, elevating them to the level of eternal symbols" (Caracostea, 1942/1969, pp. 220, 223).

[1] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Kalina Iwanek-Malinowska either from the Polish translation by the Authors or directly from the original Polish text.

Caracostea's study almost overlaps chronologically with a lengthy essay by Mircea Eliade, published in 1943 under the title *Comentarii la Legenda Meşterului Manole* [Commentaries on the Legend of Master Manole] (Eliade, 1943). The two texts align in terms of the presented ideas, though not in terms of substance. Eliade's essay – erudite, original, and marked by a strong ideological undertone – would become a major point of reference for subsequent decades of scholarship, setting a new interpretive path for the ballad.

As Eliade himself revealed, the essay was a written record of his lectures delivered to philosophy students at the University of Bucharest in 1936–1937. It offered a reading of the legend of Master Manole through the lens of archetype theory – an original and, at the time, novel interpretive approach in Romanian studies, shifting the discussion from ethnographic analysis to the field of cultural anthropology.

Eliade did not disregard prior research. Though he began with a declaration that he was not interested in the "history of the ballad, but rather in the study of the world it reveals", (Eliade, 1943, p. 17) he discussed the Balkan variants and supplemented them with examples of foundation myths from Estonia, France, Russia, North and South America, and India. These examples served as illustrative material aligned with his core thesis, which he articulated as follows: "We shall soon see that The Ballad of Master Manole is itself a cosmogonic type of folk creation, because the foundation sacrifice is a human imitation of the primordial gesture of creating worlds" (Eliade, 1943, p. 55). He clarified: "[…] the original meaning of this sacrifice was not about infusing spirit into objects, but about the belief that this was how it had to be done, because this is how it happened in the beginning, at the dawn of the world. Only in this way can something truly be spiritualised, given reality and permanence" (Eliade, 1943, p. 64).

At this juncture, referring to his earlier works (including *Mandragore et l'Arbre de Vie* [Mandrake and the Tree of Life]), Eliade formulated the central idea and key interpretive principle of his reading of the ballad:

> Only the "violent death" of a deity or an exceptional being (a fairy, a hero, etc.) is a creative death that completes reality. A life that spins its thread to the end and concludes naturally bears no fruit; it does not transform into another living form. In other words, a natural end is barren. Conversely, every life offered in violent sacrifice, before exhausting all its potential, transforms into a new form of life […]. A person who dies here on earth does not vanish without a trace, does not turn to dust, but is integrally united with the Anthropocosmos. (Eliade, 1943, pp. 92–93)

Eliade's interpretation of the wife's sacrifice in *Master Manole* is highly erudite and intellectually stimulating, and it could well stand on its own. However, it is difficult to overlook the historical moment in which it was formulated. Eliade delivered these university lectures during the height of popularity of the Iron Guard – a movement he was fascinated with, which led to his internment when King Carol II cracked down on the organisation in 1938. In discussing "creative death", Eliade provided, by no means unwittingly, a scholarly argu-

ment for the Iron Guard's death cult. Violent death, he suggested, was sacred. Just like war, in which such death was most readily found (Eliade, 1943, p. 109). His study was published shortly after the Axis defeat at Stalingrad, a catastrophe for Nazi Germany and its allies, including Romania. It is hard not to sense that Eliade, then working in diplomatic service (effectively propaganda) for Marshal Antonescu's regime, was not opposed to endowing his essay with a resonant and politically current message.

Eliade noted that the Romanian version of the ballad "revives, or perhaps rather reveals" the rich motif of Manole's Icarian flight. Trapped on the roof of the church he built at the jealous prince's command, Manole attaches wooden wings and leaps to his death, thus reuniting with his wife, now walled up in the church wall ("reaches the same level of cosmic existence"; Eliade, 1943, p. 99). The author again emphasised that only a violent death grants this privilege. Without it, Master Manole would not have reunited with his wife as the woman did not truly die but merely changed her form of existence: her soul left her flesh-and-blood body and took residence in the stone body of the church. To achieve cosmic union, her husband's body took the form of a spring that flows beside the church wall. The literary beauty of this motif, so evocatively described by Eliade, belongs to the interpretive tradition that sees in the Romanian ballad a model of artistic completeness and perfection.

The reflections offered by the author at the conclusion of his essay, though tinged with a certain note of grandiloquence, move the discussion beyond the narrow confines of an ethnographic study, foreshadowing the later works of Eliade: world-renowned historian of religions, scholar of religious studies, Indologist, and historian of ideas; at this point, however, still painfully entangled in the ideology of his era:

> […] When [true – KJ] mysticism is overthrown (as in the USSR), we witness the birth of the mysticism of the tractor. The Absolute cannot be eradicated – it can only be degraded. The archaic spirituality of which I have spoken until now, the thirsty for onticity, has survived into our own time. Not as an act, not as a real possibility for human self-fulfilment, but as a creative nostalgia generating autonomous values represented by art, science, and social mysticism [sic! KJ], etc. (Eliade, 1943, p. 143)

Eliade would later return to the subject of foundation sacrifice in the study *Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God*, published in Paris in 1970 (US edition 1972; first Romanian edition 1980). This volume consists primarily of essays on proto-Romanian history (Dacian rituals and beliefs) and Romanian folk culture (folk cosmogony, the foundational myths of the Moldavian state, and folk ballads). The scholarly method employed by Eliade, already visible in the 1943 essay and supported by his erudite analysis of archaic beliefs, compels him to inscribe Romanian folklore into a broad prehistoric, historical, and geographical context, with particular emphasis on cosmogonic imaginings (for example, among Altaic, Mongolian, and Iranian peoples).

An introductory note, though not directly related to the theme of foundation sacrifice or the legend of Master Manole, illustrates the ideological entanglements of Romanian cultural anthropology and historiography. Despite its erudition, Eliade's book may provoke unease. The titular Zalmoxis (or Zamolxis), a god of war in Thracian mythology, is presented as the supreme deity of the Dacians – even though knowledge about Dacian tribes is extremely limited and based on a handful of references in Herodotus. As such, the entire discussion is essentially a historical- and anthropological-cultural speculation. Eliade likely did not foresee (though this cannot be stated with certainty) that Ceaușescu's communist regime would, in the 1980s, develop a new "inclusive" version of national history, encompassing even the prehistoric period of Dacia and Roman Dacia, and celebrating the 2,050th anniversary (sic!) of the Romanian state. Eliade's reflections on Dacian beliefs and spiritual culture would be accepted as historically validated truth and frequently cited (the Romanian translation of the book – arguably not coincidentally – appeared in 1980).

Unlike the study on the Dacians, the chapter devoted to the folk ballad about the church's construction and the sacrifice of the builder's wife – *Meșterul Manole și Mănăstirea Argeșului* [Master Manole and the Argeș Monastery] reads like a dry report on the state of research. Eliade does reference his 1943 essay, calling it "the first exegesis of the spiritual universe present in the famous Romanian ballad" (Eliade, 1970/1995, p. 171), but then proceeds as if entirely disconnected from his wartime work. In the subsection *Poezia populară și folclorul religios* [Folk Poetry and Religious Folklore], he outlines the possible research perspectives for analysing the problem: (1) aesthetic (analysing the literary value of the texts), (2) historical (the motif's circulation in Southeastern Europe, the interpenetration of variants, etc.), (3) folkloristic (comparing analogous legends and beliefs among other European nations), (4) ethnological (examining construction-related rituals within specific "cultural structures"), and (5) historic-religious (studying the "existential situations" that gave rise to the ideologies and rites associated with construction). He then presents two versions of the ballad: a French translation by Nicolae-Alexandru Gheorghiu, and the canonical version by Alecsandri. The next subsection briefly, if not superficially, addresses numerous Balkan versions of the ballad (Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian, Albanian, and Hungarian), followed by a list of key scholars in the field (Șăineanu, Arnaudov, Skok, Vargyas, Caraman, Cocchiara, Caracostea, Găzdaru, and Taloș) and the titles of their main works. The next section, equally concise, discusses foundation rituals (emphasising their archaic nature) and their connection to cosmogonic myths.

In line with his scholarly convictions, Eliade interprets the "Balkan-Danubian ballads" as modern versions of a primordial myth, where primordial denotes a spiritual culture of prehistoric times (palaeolithic agricultural societies). He admits, however, that the paths by which this "mythic-ritual scenario" reached Southeastern Europe remain unstudied. In his view, understanding the primordial spiritual universe from which religious beliefs emerged – and from

these, "superstitions" and folk beliefs – is more important than analysing historical events. Through such understanding, he argued, one gains access to the "spirituality of the autochthons". This is the statement of a historian of religion primarily fascinated by cosmogonic myths.

Notably, Eliade entirely omits the mystical dimension of the foundation sacrifice to which he devoted so much space in 1943 (violent death as the only form of "creative death"). This omission tacitly confirms the ideological and propagandistic character of the earlier essay (sacrificial mysticism promoted by the Iron Guard, with which Eliade had ties), now effectively renounced through the dry, academic tone and the exclusion of controversial, extra-scholarly themes.

Eliade's exegesis of the ballad through the lens of cosmogonic myth and archetypal symbolism would shape scholarly reflections for decades, though some later interpretations from the communist period would prove astonishing. Traditional research into the ballad's variants, motif geography, textual sources, and evolution is continued (notably by Ovidiu Papadima, Adrian Fochi, Gheorghe Vrabie, Ion Taloş, and Ovidiu Bârlea). After 1945, literary essays emerged in increasing numbers in which authors, often opportunistically, sought new layers of meaning in the ballad's symbolism.

In the 1930s, Mihai Beniuc, one of the leading figures of socialist realism, reflected on the character of Master Manole as "a creator of culture, a creator of new forms of Life" (Beniuc, 1934, as cited in Cordoneanu, 1980, p. 244). He concluded that the creation of any work of art requires renunciation and the abandonment of life's biological pleasures and constraints – an anti-heroic model.

In the 1960s, Dan Botta wrote about the church at Curtea de Argeş as the material form assumed by the soul of the sacrificed wife. Based on this, he generalised: "Architecture is human expression enchanted into stone, it is the abstract figure of man" (Botta, 1968, p. 88).

In the same decade, Liviu Rusu, in the spirit of ideological optimism, interpreted the Ballad of Master Manole as bearing a "positive ideal for future life" (Rusu, 1967, p. 295), which he identified with "the ideal of creative labour". He argued that man's inner creative imperative renders even God powerless. A great work demands sacrifice, and Manole is willing to make it. However, in Rusu's reading, the builder is not confronted with a tragic dilemma of "art or love". Instead, love is subsumed into the act of creation itself, articulated in the formula "art through love".

Even before the publication of Eliade's book confirming his continued interest in Romanian themes (despite his status as an emigrant and his scholarly work in the United States), communist Romania in the 1960s had experienced a revival of folkloristic research – previously stifled during the Stalinist era by a crude, class-based interpretation of all forms of culture, including folk culture.

In 1966, Gheorghe Vrabie published *Balada populară română* [The Romanian Folk Ballad], which opens its section on "ballad-legends" (*balade legendare*) with a chapter titled *Jertfa zidirii sau Meşterul Manole* [The Foundation Sacrifice or Master Manole]. The author begins by stating that this ballad – alongside

Călătoria fratelui mort [The Journey of the Dead Brother] – is characteristic of the Orthodox-majority Southeastern Europe, and unknown among the Catholic peoples of the north. The reasoning for this claim is not entirely convincing: "[…] By transferring legends and beliefs into the narrative sphere of heroic poetry, Carpatho-Danubian bards – along with those from other parts of Southeastern Europe – endowed them with a didactic and educational dimension. They [thus] became educators of the people […]" (Vrabie, 1966, p. 68). Incidentally, the author also undertakes a rehabilitation of the Orthodox Church, describing it as "an active force in the struggle of the popular masses against the «pagans»", which would have been unimaginable just a few years earlier.

The main chapter, dedicated to the *Legend of Master Manole* opens – just like in Eliade's work – with a presentation of scholars who have studied the theme (Syrcu, Schladenbach, Dietrich, Sartori, Krauss, Politis, Cocchiara, Vargyas, and others). Notably, Vrabie references Eliade's 1943 work, perhaps as a sign of the partial lifting of the "Iron Guard" stigma from him, or of a return to interpreting the foundation sacrifice in terms of Prometheanism (an individual sacrifice, albeit involuntary, offered for the fulfilment of a collective ideal), or to a conception of sacrifice as essential to achieving an aesthetic ideal (no great art comes without sacrifice). Vrabie continues his reflections by presenting – echoing Eliade – examples of foundation sacrifice legends from outside Southeastern Europe: ancient Palestine, Phoenicia, Great Britain, Germany, and Siam.

The next subsection, *De la legendă la cântec sau baladă* [From Legend to Song or Ballad], contains the author's reflections on the imagined or historical nature of the "legendary ballad". Here, Vrabie distances himself – albeit without directly polemicising – from Eliade's religious and cosmogonic interpretations, asserting that this legend, like other Romanian legends, is grounded in specific historical realities. He thus follows the path laid out by the interwar poet G. Coşbuc, whom he quotes: "The people do not celebrate in song, because they cannot, in song, celebrate invented events; this is why there is not a single rhapsody in their entire literature whose theme is a pure product of the imagination" (Vrabie, 1966, p. 76). He adds that for a ballad to emerge, the legend or myth must feature concrete "names of peoples and places", before concluding: "It is impossible to assume that the ballad of Master Manole could have emerged in any other era than the one in which the awe-inspiring structure in Argeş was built" (Vrabie, 1966, p. 76). The author therefore assumes it as obvious that the ballad is associated with the figure of Voivode Neagoe Basarab and the church he founded in Curtea de Argeş. This constitutes a rather radical and thus controversial act of historicising a product of folk culture, one that may be explained both by the imposition of Marxist historical materialism on scholarly reflection, and by the concurrent emergence of a national (in fact, nationalist) interpretation of folk culture. A natural consequence of this line of reasoning is Vrabie's claim that the legend "eventually" became part of the national epic repertoire, whose bards provided material for the 19th-century poet Alecsandri and other folklore collectors. This chronological logic would

be entirely acceptable were it not for the fact that Vrabie engages in a rather unsubtle overinterpretation concerning Romanian cultural history, which lacks a true national epic – unless one considers the literary works of professional authors from the 19th century as such.

The next chapter, devoted to an "analysis of epic elements" and forming the substantive core of the study, applies a comparative perspective to various issues: the characters' proper names, including the builder's name (Manole / Manoli), the name of the female figure (Ana, Caplea, Vilaie), and the children's names (Ivănel, Vancea, and Iorguleț), the choice of the building site, the mystery and nature of the construction's failure (when and for how long the walls collapse), the circumstances of the builders' oath to keep secret from their wives the plan to wall one of them in, the first wife's sacrifice (its course, participants, and specific variants), the completion of the construction (the builders' deaths ordered by the jealous prince, Manole's "Icarian flight", and the gushing of the spring).

Vrabie compares the Romanian ballad to Greek variants (which he deems pioneering), Serbian and Bulgarian versions, and briefly mentions Aromanian and Albanian ones. In his conclusions, he reiterates the thesis from the introductory part of his study:

> I emphasise that the legendary motifs, common to all of humanity […], evolved into the form of heroic poems and narrative poetry only in the southeastern part of Europe. Due to the specific function fulfilled by the ballad in this region, folk singers felt the need to construct complex plots with a conflict thread that highlighted the heroic profile of the master builder and his wife, and also the need to select from among the numerous ballads those that contained the most existentially meaningful content; in this way, they elevated to the level of a symbol the sacrifice made by the famous master builder. (Vrabie, 1966, p. 107)

What stands out is the objectification of the walled-up woman; the subject is Manole, the loving husband who sacrifices his wife for the sake of achieving an artistic goal. This interpretive approach is typical of all Romanian scholars at least until the 1990s and the emergence of feminist studies.

Shortly after Gheorghe Vrabie's study, Ovidiu Papadima's monograph (Papadima, 1968) offered a shift in emphasis and an implicit polemic with the above-discussed text, thus warranting attention. In the chapter *Neagoe Basarab, Meșterul Manole și «vânzătorul de umbre»* [Neagoe Basarab, Master Manole and the "Shadow Seller"], the author refers to Ion Taloș's article, which discusses seventeen previously unknown Transylvanian variants of the ballad, raising the total number of known versions in Romania to thirty-one (excluding central and northern Moldova). The specificity of the Transylvanian variants, combined with common elements across all national versions, leads Papadima to believe that the ballad has an older genealogy than is commonly assumed and is not necessarily connected to the monastery church in Curtea de Argeș founded by Neagoe Basarab (as Vrabie and others claimed). Most of the Transylvanian

variants (except those from the southern part of the region) are not associated with Curtea de Argeş or even with the building of a church; instead, they speak of constructing a bridge or a fortress. This, according to Papadima, supports the view that the ballad predates the historically documented foundation by Basarab. Another argument is that in the northern Transylvanian variants, the master builder does not bear the name Manole, but rather Siminic, Petru, Miclăuş, or remains anonymous. The author concludes, therefore, that these versions need not be linked to specific historical events in Wallachia, where Curtea de Argeş is located, but rather draw upon a universal "substratum of beliefs and superstitions associated with the human sacrifice required for the durability of a structure" (Papadima, 1968, p. 606).

Papadima's reasoning regarding the scene in which the builders eat a meal before the master's wife is walled in is particularly interesting. He refrains from interpreting this scene as a ritual meal preceding a bloody sacrifice; however, he reads the builders' calm while eating as a sign of complete submission to the power of superstition, which, in his view, again proves the ballad's archaic character – prehistoric rather than historical.

Equally compelling is Papadima's reflection on the ending of the ballad, which in most cases (thirteen out of the seventeen variants cited by Taloş) shifts the focus from the drama of the Master and his wife to the tragedy of the orphaned child, who is henceforth to be cared for by Mother Nature. The attention of the anonymous authors of the ballad is so strongly directed toward the child that, as Papadima states, "you get the impression that the child becomes the main character of the epic story" (Papadima, 1968, p. 607). From this, the author draws the conclusion that *Master Manole* is thematically akin to the epic ballads found in the folklore of Western European nations, which also revolve around foundational sacrifice. He disputes the widespread thesis in Romanian folklore studies that "the prehistoric and universal layer of beliefs associated with this sacrifice attained artistic expression only in Eastern and Southeastern Europe" (Papadima, 1968, p. 607). Referring to the research of R. Köhler, Papadima lists German ballads linked to the construction of Harzburg and Henneberg castles, the fortress of Magdeburg, and the towns of Halle, Plesse, Erichsburg, and Stargard, which – though not identical, he notes – are to varying degrees similar to texts from Southeastern Europe. Along the way, Papadima dismisses as unconvincing the hypotheses of Vargyas Lajos concerning the existence of a single source for Eastern European ballads on this theme.

Continuing his discussion of the circumstances under which the legend of Master Manole became associated with the building of the church in Curtea de Argeş, Papadima turns to the best-known poetic version of the ballad, authored by the Moldavian writer Vasile Alecsandri (1852–1853), asserting with certainty that the poet drew his material from Wallachia. At the same time, he questions why, in Alecsandri's version, the founder of the church appears as Negru-Vodă (a mythical figure) rather than Neagoe Basarab (Neagu-Vodă), who ruled Wallachia between 1512 and 1521, even though the latter does appear

in an earlier ballad by the Wallachian poet Cezar Bolliac (1847). Papadima concludes his reflections with the following statement:

> We devote so much attention to these details in order to demonstrate how ancient and universal is the set of beliefs from which the poetic theme of the foundational sacrifice emerged, whether in the form of a legend, carol, or ballad. It follows that it is impossible to determine the historical moment in which this motif appeared in our folklore; at most, we can reflect on when the Wallachian variant linking this motif to the construction of the church in Curtea de Argeș came into being. (Papadima, 1968, p. 615)

In the conclusion to his study, Papadima expresses his support for the thesis of the 19th-century scholar and writer Alexandru Odobescu, who believed that the ballad of the master builder (like other folk ballads) was brought to the Romanian banks of the Danube by "a Serbian guslar" sometime in the 17th century – that is, nearly two hundred years after the construction of the church founded by Neagoe Basarab. Papadima's final remarks may come as a surprise, but they reaffirm his commitment to an original, personal interpretation of the subject:

> The prestige enjoyed by the master builder among the people made him the central figure of the ballad and elevated him to a high level of artistry. In the text, the master becomes a lofty symbol of the necessity to sacrifice what is most precious in the name of creating a work of art. Through the ballad, the humble mason from among the people becomes a symbol of the brilliant artist. Prehistoric superstitions associated with the craft of masonry are thus sublimated and purified, taking the form of a literary masterpiece. (Papadima, 1968, p. 618)

It was not until the 1990s that studies emerged focusing on the figure of the walled-up wife in the legend of Manole. Of particular note are the essays of Mihaela Miroiu[2] (1998, 2006, 2015, 1997/2018, 2020), leader of the Romanian feminist movement, who repeatedly deconstructed in her writings the ideal of the "self-sacrificing woman", and one who "represses her own needs" for the sake of others – a model deeply ingrained in Romanian society. She traced this ideal in part to the text of the ballad, which for decades had been interpreted by the education system and the broader culture from a male-centered perspective focused on the dilemmas of the creator (Manole) and his sacrifice for the sake of art, while ignoring the perspective of the victim. In Miroiu's erudite analyses, Ana from the legend became a symbol of the oppression of all Romanian women, and, more broadly, of society under totalitarian rule, where supererogatory acts came to be equated with mandatory ones under an oppressive regime. Although the Romanian feminists' revisionist approach to female figures in Romanian literature and to the national literary canon undoubtedly contributed to the greater presence and visibility of women in the literary field after 1989, the topos of the "walled-up woman" itself did not prove to be particularly fertile in terms of literary output.

[2] For more on the role of the ballad of the walled-up woman in the development of Romanian feminist thought after 1989, see Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2023b.

Tracing the Paths of Material Culture: Adapting the Topos of the "Walled-up Woman" to the Rules of Romanian Historical Politics in Curtea de Argeș

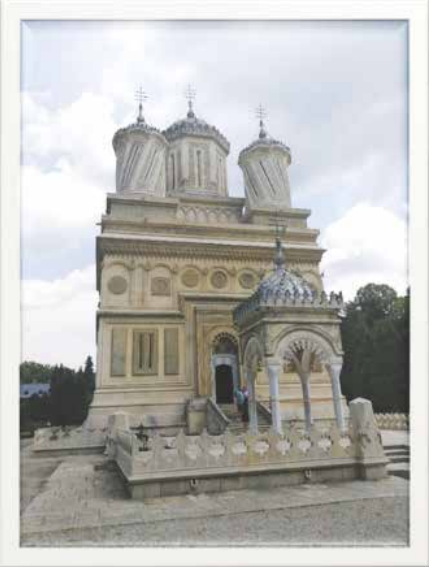


Figure 1. The Metropolitan Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Curtea de Argeș, front view.
Photo by Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2022

The most prominent preserved object of material culture associated with the topos of the "walled-up woman" in Romania is the Metropolitan Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Curtea de Argeș[3] (Figures 1–3). According to legend, it was to complete the construction of this church that Master Manole sacrificed his wife in a foundation ritual.

Contemporary historians, particularly those affiliated with the city of Curtea de Argeș, such as Ștefan Dumitrache (Centrul Cultural Pitești, 2021), base their narratives about the site largely on the findings of 19th-century historian Grigore G. Tocilescu. It was Tocilescu (1886) who hypothesised that some of the labourers working on the church were of Muslim origin (based on inscriptions carved into the church's façade), thereby confirming Neagoe Basarab's ties with the Ottoman court and the architectural inspiration drawn from early Ottoman classical styles. This theme aligns with Dumitrache's account (Ș. Dumitrache, personal communication, July 6, 2022) which claims that the Wallachian build-

[3] In the following text, this site will be referred to as the Argeș Monastery or the Argeș Church.

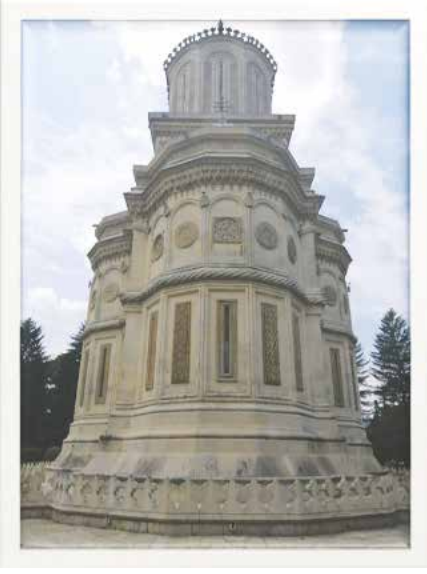


Figure 2. The Metropolitan Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Curtea de Argeș, rear view.
Photo by Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2022



Figure 3. The Metropolitan Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Curtea de Argeș, south wall.
Photo by Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2022

ers were jealous that Muslim master craftsmen were working on the Orthodox church and that the entire project was being overseen by a foreign architect. For this reason, they ignored Manole's instructions and did not follow his directives properly, which resulted in the walls collapsing every night. Manole, unaware of the cause, worked himself to exhaustion until one evening, as he fell asleep over his plans, a candle set light to the parchment, causing a blaze in which his and Ana's child perished. In this version, Ana is Neagoe Basarab's milk sister, who had intended to become a nun, but her encounter with Manole derailed those plans – the enamoured architect married the would-be nun.

After the tragic death of the child, Manole travelled to Târgoviște (Bulgarian Търговище) to obtain funds to continue construction. There, Neagoe Basarab's wife, Milica Despina, sold her jewellery to support the church's completion. This act is sometimes interpreted as a material sacrifice made by the ruler's wife (a spiritual sacrifice, in turn, would be made by another woman – Ana). While Manole was in Târgoviște, the jealous masons working in Curtea de Argeș plotted their revenge. Following an old Balkan tradition, they agreed to wall in the shadow of the master's wife[4] to ensure the church's durability. When Ana learned of this, she was horrified, knowing that stealing one's shadow was equivalent to stealing one's soul. She fled the builders, climbed the scaffolding, cried out, "Better to die than to have my shadow stolen"[5], and then jumped from the wooden structure to her death. Notably, in this story, Ana gains agency, though illusory, shaped by traditional cultural expectations of the woman as sacrificial, devout, and prudent. Ana's decision, in fact, stems from a deeply Christian conviction: believing that a human sacrifice would desecrate the holy place, she chooses to take her own life (a paradoxical solution, given Orthodoxy's view of suicide as a sin).

When Manole returns from Târgoviște with his assistant from Brașov – the historically attested master Vitus – and discovers what has happened, he imposes strict discipline on the site. Wracked with guilt, the workers labour tirelessly, and the church is completed in under five years. Manole walls in the bodies of Ana and their child at the base of the church's two towers, symbolising the "ascent" or spiritual elevation of their souls. This narrative shifts the traditional interpretation: we are no longer dealing with a foundational sacrifice, but with a burial and the respectful honouring of the dead. The victims' bodies do not bestow metaphysical or creative power upon the church walls; their sacred interment is instead ennobled by the sanctity of the building itself.

[4] The last historically documented case we have been able to trace of stealing someone's shadow for the purpose of walling it up in the foundations of a church under construction occurred in the village of Al. I. Cuza, in the commune of Fundulea, Călărași County, in 1967, and was described by Ion Ghinoiu in the book *Lumea de aici, lumea de dincolo* (see Ghinoiu, 1999, p. 47).

[5] The quotation comes from oral accounts collected during fieldwork in Curtea de Argeș in July 2022 (OBN).

Some versions of the tale also mention the burial of Manole's dog (killed by jealous builders) beneath the church threshold. Such beliefs, held among others by Eliade, are part of ritual tradition and represent one of the "countless forms of sacrificial substitution (walling in an animal in the foundation or near the main entrance of a house)" as a blood sacrifice was always believed to guarantee the building's strength and durability (Eliade, 2002, pp. 171–172). As for Manole himself, some versions claim that he and his builders died at the hands of a jealous prince who imprisoned them on the church roof to prevent them from creating an "even brighter, more beautiful" temple. Other accounts are far more mundane: his pathologically jealous lover, Zorza, sent him a love potion, but Manole's rival for her affection, the logothete Horvath, is believed to have replaced it with poison and dispatched a servant to deliver it to the architect.

The chronological distance from the events described and the gaps in historical sources require that Dumitrache's tale be told in the conditional mood, firmly situated within an oral storytelling tradition marked by numerous caveats and question marks. The narrative is syncretic: it aims to stir listeners' imaginations while creating the illusion of historical truth and rational order. Though labelled as historical truth, it is in fact a kind of pseudo-historical reconstruction that generates even more speculation and blurs the line between fiction and fact. This local narrative tendency arises partly from a desire to rationalise the legend and partly from the use of fictional elements as a remedy for the gaps in historical discourse. These elements also serve as a foundation for storytelling that crafts a compelling narrative around the legendary sites and thereby attracts tourists.

The most representative examples of this strategy include: the imprint on the church wall where Ana was supposedly walled-up (Figures 4–5), which has no historical basis and was created during the 19th-century renovation of the church by French architect André Lecomte de Noüy to emphasise the link between the site and the ballad.

This attraction has now devolved into a cheap spectacle, devoid of deeper reflection on the ethical, cultural, or social dimension of the "foundation sacrifice"; the Master Manole Fountain[6] (Figure 6) described as a spring with clear, salty (from Ana's tears) water, which supposedly burst forth at the site of Manole's fall. In reality, it is merely a regular well connected to the city's water system. Some tourists believe it to be a cișmea (a deep spring-fed well, from the Turkish

[6] In Romanian, the primary meaning of the word *fântână* is well/artesian well/spring, and it should be understood in this sense here. Interestingly, in certain Balkan variants of the legend, the walled-up woman asks that one of her breasts be left uncovered so that she might nurse her child, and shortly thereafter a fountain of milk gushes forth from it (see, e.g., Eliade 2002, p. 163). Only in the Romanian variant does a life-giving spring gush forth at the site of Manole's tragic death – the hero of the legend having plunged to the ground after a failed flight from the roof of the church, where he had been imprisoned by Prince Negru-Vodă, jealous that an even more beautiful church might someday be built.



Figure 4. The Metropolitan Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Curtea de Argeș, presumed site of Ana's walling up from the Legend of Master Manole, south wall. Photo by Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2022

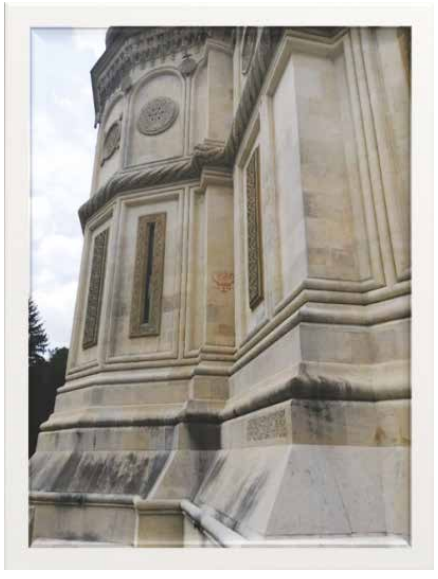


Figure 5. The Metropolitan Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Curtea de Argeș, presumed site of Ana's walling up from the *Legend of Master Manole*, south wall. Photo by Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2022

çeşme, Bulgarian *чешма*) and attribute healing or magical properties to it. At the bottom of the fountain lie small coins (a modern "offering" meant to bring luck or fulfil a wish), and beside it, the town has installed a portable photo booth where visitors can commemorate their visit to the site.



Figure 6. The Fountain of Master Manole in Manole Park, Curtea de Argeş.
Photo by Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2022

The fountain is located in Manolo Park (Parcul lui Manole, founded by king Ferdinand II in the interwar period), within walking distance of the metropolitan church. It was originally built in 1800 at the behest of Bishop Iosif. The presence of a well at this location is already attested by historical sources from 1524, dating back to the period of the actual construction of the church. Scholarly hypotheses suggest that the existence of natural springs in this marshy, waterlogged area is likely, hence the appearance of such a motif in the folk legend. Just a few dozen meters from the fountain there is also the restaurant *Fântâna lui Manole* [Manole's Fountain][7] serving traditional Romanian cuisine.

Historical narrative also constitutes the most important pillar of the tourism policy of the city of Curtea de Argeş. In 2010–2011, the municipal government carried out the project *Curtea Domnească de Argeş – capitală a turismului românesc* [The Princely Court of Curtea de Argeş – the Capital of Romanian Tourism], within the framework of the Regional Operational Programme, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (Municipiul Curtea de Argeş, n.d.).

[7] See the restaurant in Charmanli described in the chapter devoted to Bulgarian culture.

The aim of the project was to promote local traditions, crafts, and arts, as well as the history of the city as the first capital of Wallachia (Țara Românească) and the cradle of Romanian identity, a status formally confirmed in 2014 by former King Michael I, who conferred on Curtea de Argeș the title of "royal city" (Oraș Regal). To this day, the inscription Oraș Regal is displayed at the entrance to the City Hall and on the road signs at the approaches to the town. The title is intended to underscore the "spiritual, historical, cultural, and identity-forming bond" between the historic capital of the Wallachian rulers and the Romanian monarchy, inaugurated by the accession to the throne of Carol I of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen dynasty in 1881 (having been Prince of Romania from 1866 to 1881). In a symbolic gesture, King Carol I chose the church of Curtea de Argeș as the royal necropolis (Figure 7), while the Romanian episcopate, by way of exception and in order to honour the undisputed merits of Romania's first king, allowed Catholic rulers to be interred in an Orthodox church[8]. Buried in the Metropolitan Church are King Carol I, Queen Elisabeth I, King Ferdinand, and Queen Marie. Thus, the royal dynasty that ruled the modern Romanian state came to be laid to rest in the same sanctuary that houses the tombs of rulers of the Basarab dynasty: Neagoe Basarab, the founder of the church, his wife Milica Despina, and their four children. Hence, the church acquired new significance, reshaping both the social perception of the sanctuary and of the city as a whole.

According to local guides, King Carol I travelled throughout the country in order to better acquaint himself with its people, and when he reached Curtea de Argeș he declared that he had found "un loc de trăit și un loc de murit" [a place to live and to die][9]. Importantly, the royal necropolis at Curtea de Argeș appears to provoke no political controversy in the symbolic sphere; the monarchy generally enjoys a good reputation and is not currently a source of historical dispute. On the contrary, this materially preserved *lieu de mémoire* increasingly provides space for retrotopian tendencies among sections of society, serving as a symbolic stronghold that nurtures hope for a return to realities perceived as safe, intelligible, stable, and predictable. The not-so-distant period of Romania's monarchy seems to fit paradigmatically into Bauman's notion of retrotopia (see Bauman, 2018): many Romanians nurture fantasies of a better time before communism, of which the kings reigning at the time were the emblem. These times appear as proven by experience, and thus desirable, protective against the

[8] It should be noted here that the Byzantine idea of the symphony between the church and secular authority is one of the dogmas of Orthodoxy: secular power represents the authority of God on earth, is chosen by Him, and therefore must be respected by both the Church and by the state. This idea continues to shape relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian state today (see Bănică & Mihăilescu, 2017, pp. 135–139). This awareness helps in understanding the narrative of the Argeș Monastery and the interpenetration of national and religious ideas within it.

[9] These are the words used by local tour guides such as Ștefan Dumitrache, among others.



Figure 7. The tombs of King Carol I and Queen Elisabeth, Metropolitan Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Curtea de Argeș. Photo by Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2022

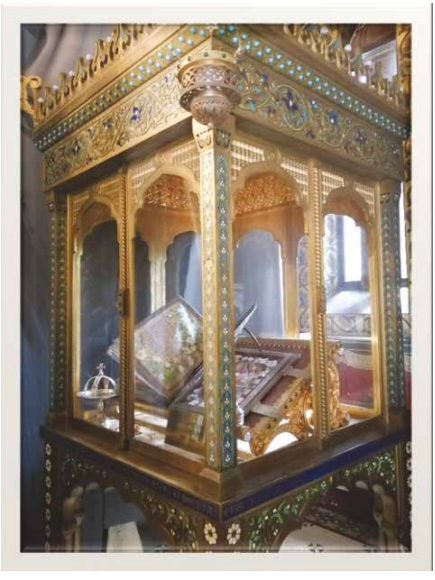


Figure 8. The Gospel for Maundy Thursday and Holy Saturday, handwritten and decorated by Queen Elisabeth, Metropolitan Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Curtea de Argeș. Photo by Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, 2022

uncertainties of the future. A return of the monarchy would be seen as a remedy for the turbulences of a globalised world.

Another symbolic object on display at the Argeș Monastery, housed in a special glass case, is the original Gospel for Maundy Thursday and Holy Saturday, handwritten and decorated by Queen Elisabeth (Figure 8), who was, incidentally, a great admirer of the legend of Master Manole.

These symbolic gestures were continued through the joint initiative of the Archdiocese of Argeș and Muscel and the Romanian royal family that, between 2009 and 2018, resulted in the construction of a new archiepiscopal cathedral, which also became the new royal necropolis, situated a few hundred metres from the Metropolitan Church. King Michael I and Queen Anne are buried there, as well as the remains of King Carol II and Queen Helen, which were brought from Lisbon. The cathedral was designed in the Byzantine style, intended to evoke the long history of Christianity on Romanian soil, emphasise its ties with Constantinople, and serve as both an aesthetic and symbolic reference to the architecture of the princely church founded in Curtea de Argeș by Basarab I in the 14th century. Another aspect that will certainly enhance a form of tourism popular in Romania and still developing, namely pilgrimage tourism, is the placement in the new cathedral of the relics of Saint Philothea of Argeș. Born in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, in 1206, Philothea died at the age of only twelve, killed by her own father for giving to the needy the food and clothing she had been told to bring to him while he worked in the fields. After her death, her body became so heavy that it could not be lifted; terrified by his deed, her father and the clergy who undertook to help him began to invoke her name in monasteries and churches on both sides of the Danube to see where the "little saint" would find repose. Only when her name was given to the princely church on the Argeș River did Philothea's body become light again. A letter was immediately dispatched to the then (legendary) Voivode Radu Vodă (also called Negru), who promptly sent for the saint's body and placed it in the church. The relics were subsequently transferred to the Argeș Monastery, and since 2018 they have been displayed in the new archiepiscopal cathedral. Saint Philothea is regarded as the patroness of the city, and its inhabitants affectionately call her Sfântuliță ("the little saint"). Her relics are surrounded by profound veneration among the faithful of the Romanian Orthodox Church, who make special pilgrimages to Curtea de Argeș on 7 December, the feast day of the martyr according to the Orthodox calendar. What we encounter here, therefore, is the metaphysics of the constant presence of a woman – the city's patron saint, whose relics possess agency and perform miracles (protecting against illness, poverty, and the harm caused by others).

The tangible presence of Saint Philothea's relics seems to stand in contrast to the intangible presence of Ana's remains within the walls of the Argeș Monastery. Both, however, are tied to the history of this place; both have shared this place for centuries; both are heroines of semi-legendary events; and both were killed by men close to them. Both were also endowed by the cultural imagina-

tion with otherworldly, extraordinary power (Ana saved the monastery walls from collapse through her sacrifice, while Philothea began to work miracles after her death), thereby inscribing themselves into Eliade's earlier theory of violent, creative death (Eliade 2002; 1943/2004).

The figures of Ana and Philothea represent two different cultural approaches to the dead body: Philothea's preserved remains have been harnessed, symbolically and materially, in the service of historical politics and religious ritual[10], whereas Ana's never-recovered, phantasmagoric remains have endured in legend as the necessary element of Master Manole's sacrificial act, without which the Argeș Monastery would never have been built. Paradoxically, despite their agency, they remain overshadowed by the androcentric legend of creative genius.

At the same time, when we think of relics that often turn out to be the remains of more than one person, or of legends suggesting that the remains of the foundation sacrifice victim ought to exist somewhere, we see that "the meaning of corpses has more to do with the way people think about them than with their tangibility. Corpses are not significant in themselves but through culturally defined attitudes toward death and through the (various) ways of constructing the status of a given deceased" (Verdery, 2015, p. 42). Verdery further reminds us, drawing on Claude Lévi-Strauss, that they are "good to think with" as symbols (Verdery, 2015, p. 42). In the context of the Argeș Monastery, it seems significant that the remains belonging to three different symbolic orders simultaneously constitute the central set of reference points used in shaping the narrative of this site:

– the mythical narrative, rooted in folk beliefs about cosmic order, reinforcing the mythical idea of the creative dimension of the foundation sacrifice as an expression of Romanian creative genius (the legend of Master Manole);

– the national narrative, emphasising the continuity of the Romanian state and the uniqueness of this place (the tombs of the Basarab family and the necropolis of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen kings);

– the religious narrative, affirming the high position of Orthodoxy in shaping Romanian identity and the symbolic authority of the Romanian Orthodox Church (the relics of Saint Philothea).

There also exists an alternative narrative linking the legend to the princely Church of Saint Nicholas in Curtea de Argeș, a site of extraordinary value from the perspective of art history. Such a hypothesis is advanced in an article by Cristian Cocea (2015), tellingly titled *Întemeierea Țării Românești prin Arta Masonică* [The Founding of Wallachia through Masonic Art]. Beyond not entirely convincing historical arguments, the author focuses on the symbolic interpretation of the legend, whose principal aim, as one can quickly discern, is to highlight the uniqueness of the Romanian nation:

[10] Of course, as is often the case with relics, we have no guarantee that these are the remains of a single individual.

> Manole's Ana is a *Shekinah* [in her, God reveals himself and enters into relation with the work of creation; OBN's note], "*Sophia*"[11], the eternal virgin, the feminine form of divinity. For the wheel of History to turn, sacrifice is indispensable. Yet for the new cycle of incarnation to endure, for the nascent state to survive, what is needed is not only Beauty but also Wisdom. Thus, Manole himself, along with the other craftsmen, is sacrificed by Voivode Negru. It is easy to guess that the attribute of the ruler is Strength. Wisdom-Strength-Beauty, these are the three points that determine the plan of entry into the history of the Romanian state. Did Negru-Vodă, Manole, and Ana really exist? That is irrelevant. What matters is the effect – we (Romanians) exist! (Cocea, 2015, p. 15)

The entire text is written in the tone typical of proponents of theories asserting the superiority of Romanian culture and tracing the nation's origins to the Dacians as its founding creators. This current of national exaltation is an outgrowth of the 19th-century foundational myth, which led to a fundamental revaluation of the question of Romanian origins. The myth was propagated by traditionalists in the interwar period and consolidated by the communist ideology of protochronism. The aforementioned Grigore Tocilescu, the historian who recorded the history of the Argeș Monastery, presented in 1876 at the University of Prague his doctoral thesis *Dacia înainte de romani* [Dacia before the Romans], which was awarded by the Academic Society. Published in 1880, it became the first treatise in Romanian historiography devoted to the history and civilisation of the Dacians (Boia, 2003, p. 122). In this context, it is hardly surprising that the history of the Argeș Monastery, and the legend associated

[11] A reference to Sophia, the central figure in one of the mythological currents of ancient gnosis and Gnosticism – above all in the Valentinian system of the second century CE (see Quispel, 1988, pp. 136–149) – and/or to the sophiological current of philosophy that flourished in the sphere of Orthodox spirituality and theology, whose best-known representatives are the Russian thinkers Sergei Bulgakov and Pavel Florensky. Sophia, the embodiment of Divine Wisdom, constitutes the mediating sphere between the Absolute and the created world, the "fourth hypostasis" that transcends the concept of the Holy Trinity. The inspiration for the author of this article appears to be Lucian Blaga, who, in his *Trilogy of Culture*, polemicised with the Russian philosophers, accusing them of understanding Sophia in the spirit of the Platonic concept of the world of ideas, and contrasting this with his own conception of "sophiology" as "transcendence" consonant with the Orthodox spirit. In Orthodoxy, transcendence – heaven (that is, Sophia) – "descends" to earth (in contrast, for example, to mystical conceptions in which man ascends to God). This concept is present not only in religious literature but also in folk creativity: Blaga cites as examples the Ballad of the Little Sheep, *Mioriţa*, and the *Legend of Master Manole*. According to Blaga, that Manole sacrifices his wife in order to build the church-temple constitutes a "sophianic" sublimation of an incredibly cruel, archaic motif: "In one place a human sacrifice must be made to build a fortress, in another – a bridge, in yet another – a city [...] Only the Romanian people believed that the sacrifice counterbalances the heavenly act. [...] How deeply rooted the sophianic orientation must be in the Romanian soul, since it was effectively able to transform a motif with which all its neighbours struggled in vain, constrained by an approach that was either too practical or heroic in the medieval manner" (Blaga, 1944/2011, p. 230).

with it, were politicised from the very outset and exploited in the construction of the national myth.

Another work on this theme, promoted by local institutions in Curtea de Argeș, though approached from the perspective of esoteric philosophy, is Gheorghe Șeitan's book *Meșterul Manole – o creație criptată. Sensul figurat al jertfei zidirii și Zalmoxis, ctitor al unei case de cult* [Master Manole – A Secret Creation. The Figurative Meaning of the Foundation Sacrifice and Zalmoxis, Founder of a House of Worship] (Șeitan, 2022). The author sets himself the task of uncovering the sacred concealed in Romanian folklore, identifying its archaic background and Dacian traditions. His intellectual patrons include, among others, Lucian Blaga, citing the poet's 1921 article in "Gândirea"[12], *Revolta fondului nostru nelatin* [The Revolt of Our Non-Latin Background]; Mircea Eliade; Vasile Lovinescu[13], philologist, esoteric philosopher, and disciple of René Guénon; and Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, the first to attempt a reconstruction of the ancient Romanian civilisation by tracing its origins to Dacian roots. Hasdeu also initiated the linguistic search for Dacian words in the Romanian language (Boia, 2003, pp. 120–121)[14].

Șeitan synthesises the work of many scholars – Mircea Eliade, Ion Taloș, Simion Florea Marian, Mihai Bălăianu, Victor Kernbach, Andrei Oișteanu, and Sabina Ispas – subordinating their claims to his own research aim: unveiling the mythical-symbolic motifs and meanings underpinning traditional Romanian culture. He works with numerous variants of the legend (drawing on the canonical compilation by Taloș, 1973, 1997) and employs comparative analysis using the sacred Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita, in an attempt to trace parallels between Indian and Danubian mythology. He also juxtaposes Wallachian legends with the Ramayana. Șeitan ultimately locates the origins of the foundation sacrifice in the Orphic tradition, while recognising the Thracian deity Zalmoxis as the archetypical priest-king.

The landscape of Curtea de Argeș has been overlaid with a network of socio-cultural meanings and national values, marking the space in a specific way as the historical capital of Wallachia – the cradle of the future modern Romanian

[12] This text is, moreover, regarded as the founding manifesto for one of the programmatic currents of the entire aesthetic group centred around the journal *Gândirea* [The Thinking] – the current concerned with the discovery of mythical Romanian time, the prehistory prior to Roman colonisation, and the values from that period preserved in Romanian folk tradition. The inspiration for a parallel programmatic current was Nichifor Crainic's 1923 text titled *Sensul tradiției. Isus în țara mea* [The Meaning of Tradition: Jesus in My Country], which emphasised the spiritual and Orthodox dimensions of the entire movement.

[13] Vasile Lovinescu is the author of the book *Interpretarea ezoterică a unor basme și balade românești* [Esoteric Interpretation of Romanian Fairy Tales and Ballads], published by Cartea Românească in 1993.

[14] Contemporary linguists have largely refuted most of Hasdeu's theories; the principal argument demonstrating the weakness of his etymological proposals is the absence of sources in the Dacian language.

state – and maintaining symbolic continuity through the establishment of the royal necropolis in the metropolitan church. This site was not chosen at random but emerged from the wave of 19th-century folkloristic discoveries and the elevation of the Romanian peasant as the custodian of the nation's most essential and noble qualities. The combination of ancient history (the distinguished ruler Neagoe Basarab), modern history (King Carol I and the dynasty he founded), and a masterpiece of oral literature, which, according to canonical interpretations, bears witness to the Romanian creative genius, appears to offer an ideal formula for constructing a symbolic image aligned with Romanian historical politics, regardless of the era (interwar period, communism, or the post-communist present).

How to Turn a "Cultural Myth" into Literary Material: The Topos in Literary Fiction

Our considerations should begin with two reservations. The first one concerns the circumstances under which the ballad of Master Manole[15], where the topos in question is found, entered the Romanian cultural sphere. Although the ballad's origins are clearly rooted in folk tradition, its popularisation was due to the efforts of the writer Vasile Alecsandri, a playwright and poet and a central figure of 19th-century Romanian literature. In 1852–1853, he published two volumes of folk songs (*doinas*) and legends that he had transcribed (Alecsandri, 1852–1853). The title of the anthology – *Balade (cântice bătrâneşti) adunate şi îndreptate de Vasile Alecsandri* [Ballads (Old Folk Songs) Collected and Corrected by Vasile Alecsandri] – says everything about his method: these were *cântice bătrâneşti* (literally, "songs of the elders" or "ancestral songs"), "collected and edited" by the poet. One can infer that by "edited" Alecsandri meant reshaping the orally transmitted legend into a literary form of its own. From that moment, the popular legend began its extraordinary journey and, alongside *Mioriţa* [The Little Ewe Lamb], also in Alecsandri's version, became one of the most important cultural myths in Romanian society.

The second reservation is related to the reception of the foundation sacrifice motif, which in Romania has been dominated by an interpretation centred on the creative dimension of the ancient ritual. This means the focus has been placed on the work that demands sacrifice and on the creator's dilemmas (Master Manole), rather than on the sacrifice itself (the wife of the creator)[16].

[15] The authors of this article used the masterly Polish translation by Jerzy Ficowski (Czara-Stec, 1962; Ficowski, 2004). The present translation necessarily relies on *The Ballad of Master Manole*, the only available English version of the ballad, rendered by the poet William D. Snodgrass (see Snodgrass, n.d.).

[16] An example of this approach is provided by the literary historian and folklorist Dumitru Caracostea (1879–1964), who, in his review of Petar Skok's 1929 work, wrote:

A key element that complements this interpretation is the very structure whose completion requires a human sacrifice. Unlike other Balkan variants, which typically involve secular buildings such as bridges, castles, or fortresses, in this case, it is the Orthodox church of Curtea de Argeș[17], a building that plays a vital role as a royal necropolis. The association of a Christian sacred structure with a pagan ritual gives rise to a perception of cultural syncretism, which is easier to understand if we remember the role of tradition in Orthodoxy, which (especially in its Romanian form) incorporates folk beliefs of non-Christian provenance as part of the "ancestral heritage" (tradiție strămoșească). From a strictly doctrinal standpoint, sacrificing a human life to construct a Christian temple is a sacrilegious act, yet it fits within the logic of popular belief. The acceptance of this contradiction by Romanian scholars[18], along with the recognition of Alecsandri's version as the canonical one, laid the foundation for an interpretive approach that highlights the uniqueness of the Romanian variant and the superiority of the native artistic form.

The Master's Dilemmas and the Shadow of a Woman's Sacrifice: The Topos in Dramatic Art

Drama was the first literary genre to draw upon the topos of the foundation sacrifice, also known as the "walled-up woman". Its beginnings were modest, marked by amateur productions. Just a few years after the publication of Alecsandri's *Ballads*, the National Theatre in Iași staged a musical play *Meșter Manole sau Fundarea Curții de la Argeș, dramă cu cântece în 5 acte și un prolog* [Master Manole or the Founding of Curtea de Argeș, a drama with songs in five acts and a prologue], likely an anonymous adaptation loosely based on Alecsandri's text. Little is also known about *Meșterul Manole* staged a year later in what was then Austro-Hungarian Cluj, apart from the fact that it was performed by an amateur theatre troupe (Roman, 1940, p. 7, as cited in Cordoneanu, 1980,

"[…] an exploration of the aesthetic form of the Romanian version [of the ballad] shows that it is not the mysticism of death nor the persistence of superstition, but the creative imperative, with all its tragic dimension, that constitutes the axis around which Romanian functional expression has crystallised" (Caracostea, 1969, p. 186).

[17] 19th-century folklorists (Alexandru Odobescu, Ghenadie Enăceanu, Grigore Tocilescu, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, et al.), attentive to historical context, associated the legend with the Wallachian voivode Neagoe Basarab (r. 1512–1521), who founded the church in Curtea de Argeș, and with Matei Basarab (1632–1654), a century later, who restored and probably expanded it.

[18] At the end of the 19th century, the philologist, literary historian, and folklorist Ovid Densușianu, in his review of Kurt Schladebach's work, merely stated the situation without perceiving any dissonance: "It is interesting that only in the Romanian ballad of Manole is a pagan belief linked to a Christian act – the construction of a church. […]" (Densușianu, 1896, as cited in Cordoneanu, 1980, p. 143).

p. 269). The first spontaneous and artistically unspectacular phase of interest in the motif was symbolically capped – due to the author's social status – by the play *Meister Manole* by Elisabeth of Wied, wife of King Carol I of Romania, under the literary pseudonym Carmen Sylva. Written in German and performed in 1892 by Vienna's Burg Theatre (Roman, 1940, p. 7), the play did not resonate with the Romanian elite of the time. One of its members, Barbu Delavrancea, a playwright and short story writer associated with peasant-centred national-patriotic circles, wrote scathingly and with no deference toward the author:

> […] Carmen Sylva turned Florika into a sinful wife, transformed the tragic act of her entombment into a Spanish-style revenge by Master Manole, and reimagined Neagoe Basarab as a Don Juan whose desire transformed the unfortunate Manole into a ruthless Othello […]. Carmen Sylva modified the product of popular imagination so radically that, where the collective creator had seen purity – jealously guarded for four centuries – this grand poetess saw guilt and sin; where the legend had a dying mother with thoughts of her newborn child […], she placed an adulteress walled into the monastery walls, justly and sternly punished, as was fitting for the bloody and cruel customs of those times… Carmen Sylva wrote in a majestic palace. The people created while holding a sword in one hand and a plough handle in the other. Carmen Sylva had read countless dramatic works. The people's only reading was their own heart". (Ştefănescu-Delavrancea, 1889/1891, p. 2, as cited in Cordoneanu, 1980, p. 269)

It is highly likely that the Romanian intellectual elite's unfavourable attitude toward the queen's work contributed to a sort of deliberate silence surrounding this dramatic text, as it was never translated into Romanian. Instead, what emerged was a rather peculiar "critical commentary" (a summary and review at once) signed by Ştefan Velescu and published in 1891. The author makes a conscious effort to situate the play within the historical context of European drama, invoking French classicism, Shakespeare, and Byron. He emphasises the artistic merit of the text, for which the folk ballad, with its "unbelievable and unnatural" plot (Velescu, 1891, p. 14), serves merely as a source of inspiration. His conclusion is unambiguous: "Carmen Sylva masterfully sets the tangled, fantastic ballad within a rational and aesthetic framework" (Velescu, 1891, p. 15). Velescu's interpretation is unique for its time and stands in stark contrast to the widely accepted view of the aesthetic and ethical superiority of the folk version over its reinterpretation within high culture.

Carmen Sylva's play may indeed have irritated the contemporary intellectuals who were experiencing a wave of patriotic-nationalist fervour. The protagonist of the drama, Pietro Manole, is Italian (sic!), as is his wife, Maria Gianetta. Among the central characters are Lady Despina, wife of the church's founder Neagoe Basarab, and Dimitri – a Greek courtier and schemer in love with Maria Gianetta. The only native Romanian character, aside from the princely couple, is Busuioc, portrayed unfavourably as a "dim-witted shepherd"; it is he who suggests to Manole the need for a human sacrifice to complete the construction. In Carmen Sylva's version, Manole vacillates between love, jealousy, and fidelity to

his vows. After entombing Gianetta, he kills Dimitri, then loses his mind and dies on the steps of the church. The author thus abandons the canonical ending of the ballad, where Manole, driven by creative pride after completing the church, tells the voivode he could build an even more beautiful one. As punishment, he is left stranded on the roof from which he leaps, and a salty spring bursts forth at the site of his fall.

As the 19th-century reviewer noted, Carmen Sylva indeed attempts to rationalise the content of the folk ballad by providing her characters with psychological motivations. The credibility and coherence of events, largely irrelevant in the source folklore material, take on importance in her version. However, by focusing on "humanising" the story of the ill-fated builder and his wife, the author also engages in the desacralisation of the folk text. Whereas Alecsandri's literary version of the ballad is imbued with romantic spirit, the drama written by the queen-poetess reflects a positivist worldview and understanding of humanity. This, among other things, is the root of the conflict between the artistic vision offered by Carmen Sylva and the mythologised folk culture that triumphed in 19th-century Romania.

In light of these remarks, one cannot fail to mention the figure of Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940), the creator of the Romanian historiographical school, who did not shy away from literary ambitions and was, above all, the founder and patron of the peasantophilic current in culture (the "Sower's Movement", mockingly called the "Pasture Movement" by its opponents). Iorga, who viewed literature through the lens of didacticism and prioritised its educational value over its aesthetic qualities, freely took on the role of playwright, writing historical dramas about major Romanian figures (Constantin Cantemir, Michael the Brave, and Tudor Vladimirescu), and he also addressed the story of Master Manole. The one-act play *Zidirea mănăstirii Argeș* [The Building of the Argeș Monastery] was written by Iorga for a congress of the Cultural League held in Curtea de Argeș to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the death of Wallachian ruler Neagoe Basarab. The play was thus an occasional improvisation based on the folk ballad, with a strong emphasis on the historicity (reality) of events and figures: the main protagonists are the princely couple, not Manole and Ana; the suggestion of a human sacrifice does not come from supernatural forces but originates with Basarab's wife, and so on. An interwar critic described the play as lacking "dramaturgy and poetry" (Roman, 1940, as cited in Cordoneanu, 1980, p. 270), and a modern literary historian, despite his evident respect for Iorga's achievements, assessed his dramatic works as "voluminous but formless" (Zaciu, 2000, p. 405), not even mentioning the construction of the Curtea de Argeș Monastery. Nevertheless, Iorga's case is significant for our discussion as an example of using a folk legend to reconstruct or affirm important historical events while simultaneously attempting to suggest that products of folk imagination possess a rational core. Here, the literary form is clearly of secondary importance.

In his reading of the folk legend, Blaga – a philosopher by education and a cultural theorist by passion – proposes a synthesis of theological and moral themes rooted in Eastern Christianity, with references to the ancient opposition between the Apollonian and Dionysian spirit. The play's characters form a distinct ensemble, divided into principal and background figures. The main group includes the Voivode/Hospodar (a rather underdeveloped figure), Manole, his wife Mira (a name evoking both the Latin "miraculous" and the Slavic *mir* – "peace"), the monk Bogumil (an overt reference to the Bogomil sect), and the old man Găman, tormented by prophetic dreams and representing a primordial world and chthonic forces. Also included in this group are the nine masons, the first four of whom are partially individualised (former shepherd, fisherman, monk, and a convict) – a device that is not entirely clear in purpose and has no real impact on the plot – while the rest remain anonymous (the fifth, sixth, etc.). Nonetheless, all of them actively participate in the drama, engaging in dialogue with Manole. The second group consists of individuals (a courtier, a messenger, a halberdier) and collective subjects: helpers, cart drivers, monks, women, serfs, common folk, and so on. This subjectification of secondary characters seems to serve more of a structural function (animating the action) than a philosophical one; ultimately, the principal characters symbolise the elemental forces that set human life into motion. It is precisely the clash of these forces that propels the dramatic conflict, rather than the characters' psychological or social motivations. The time and place of the action are defined by the author through references to the ballad ("the lower course of the Argeş River") and a quasi-scientific term ("Romanian mythical time") (Blaga, 1927/1970, p. 208).

In contrast to the source ballad, Blaga's play emphasises the religious dimension of the conflict between the nature of the artist, who exists in two realms: the divine (chosen by virtue of his genius) and the human (where divine gifts bring suffering, misunderstanding, and a curse). The religious perspective is also more literal. In Blaga's version, Master Manole is tormented by doubts rooted in human reason: "Who demands this unimaginable sacrifice? The God of light cannot demand it, for it is a blood sacrifice; nor can the dark spirits, for the sacrifice is aimed against them" (Blaga, 1927/1970, p. 216). Elsewhere, even more bluntly, he declares: "It was once carved in stone: thou shalt not kill. And no lightning has struck since to erase that commandment" (Blaga, 1927/1970, p. 211).

Initially, Manole appears as a rational figure, the embodiment of the Apollonian spirit, who trusts his measurements and calculations. But over time, he succumbs to the urgings of the fanatical monk Bogumil, who persuades him to abandon architectural science and instead listen to the whisperings of hidden forces demanding a life sacrifice: "Stop measuring. […] Only in hell do they keep calculating. […] In the kingdom of God, measuring [everything – KJ] is a sin lighter than violating the Sabbath, but heavier than breaking the sixth commandment" (Blaga, 1927/1970, p. 210). After much internal struggle, Manole undergoes a kind of apostasy, betraying himself by entertaining the idea of entombing

a loved one, thereby acknowledging the existence of primal, cosmic, mysterious forces and submitting to their irrational demands (a clear nod to the cult of Dionysus). In creating the demonic figure of the monk Bogumil, whom Mira describes as a "monk without God" and a "hermit-devil" (Blaga, 1927/1970, p. 223), Blaga explicitly points to a Bogomilist context, and by extension to Gnosticism and Manichaeism[19]. Notably, however, the playwright does not shy away from framing Manole's act as heretical. In the final scene, boyars and Orthodox clergy arrive to admire the finished church, only to demand the Master be tried for his crime, seeing the newly erected church as the "first sanctuary of the Antichrist" (Blaga, 1927/1970, p. 202). Manole's "apostasy" is not unequivocal, however, even though the death he inflicts is irreversible. His love for his wife compels him to beg the masons to stop their work during the entombment, and his suicide leap from the tower is a clear expression of grief over her death: "[…] My memories won't fade. My eyes know no rest. The nightmare still rings in my ears. I am a belated tear longing for the repose of stone" (Blaga, 1927/1970, p. 289).

What must not be overlooked in this dramatic reinterpretation of the legend of Master Manole is the portrayal of Mira – Ana from the ballad. Most striking is her full subjectivity, whereas in folk tradition she had a secondary role: a heroine and yet a background figure, a symbol of love and devotion, but ultimately just a tool in the realisation of artistic (male) aspirations. In Blaga's work, Mira is a fully fleshed-out character: beautiful and wise, warm and witty, and most importantly, a true partner in dialogue with her husband. She perceptively reads his inner turmoil and counters it with common-sense, rational thinking; never losing her trust in him or her willingness to make a sacrifice – for him, not in the name of imagined, abstract ideals. This portrayal of a female character might seem surprising from a writer and philosopher so captivated by both German idealism and Eastern mysticism – the creator of the concept of the "cultural matrix", which in its abstract formulation envisioned only one collective subject: the nation. Yet in Blaga's oeuvre, literature, including works inspired by folklore, is a meaningful extension of his philosophical essays.

Victor Eftimiu (1889–1972), one of the most prolific Romanian playwrights of the 20th century and an active figure in theatrical life, began his literary career with a cycle of "Romanian legends", inaugurated by the play *Înșir'te mărgărite* [Pearls on a String] (1911). This series, inspired primarily by national history and steeped in patriotic didacticism, also included the play *Meșterul Manole*, first published in 1925 (Eftimiu, 1925). Eftimiu's version, which diverges significantly from the original ballad and presents a kind of time-space syncretism, casts Manole as a member of a Masonic lodge, even though the action is set during the reign of Voivode Neagoe Basarab (early 16th century).

[19] In the essay collection titled *Spațiu mioritic* [Pastoral Space], first published in 1936 and later included in the volume *Trilogia culturii* [Trilogy of Culture] (1944), Blaga wrote extensively about "descending transcendence" and the "Sophian perspective ", which leads contemporary literary criticism to interpret the drama written a decade earlier through a mystical, Orthodox lens (Blaga 1944/1969).

The dramatis personae are exceptionally numerous; they include the Grand Master of the Lodge from the "Temple of Hiram" and his entourage, nine masons named individually (Bucşan, Oprea, Neguţ, etc.), Voivode Basarab and his wife Despina, an Orthodox metropolitan, guild elders, "knights, clerics, boyars, merchants, peasants, porters, beggars", and, of course, Manole and his wife, who in this version bears the name Rândunel – a rather ornate neologism reminiscent of *rândunică* ("swallow").

Upon taking the Masonic oath in the Temple of Hiram, Manole utters the words that will echo throughout the play and accompany the masons in their work: "of stone, lime, and blood / through life, through death – we build!" (Eftimiu, 1925, p. 16). This phrase, however, does not indicate a readiness to create at the cost of human life. When Manole is urged by the mysterious Baba Sura to make a sacrifice, he vehemently protests:

> Madwoman, begone along with your law! / A custom that commands killing? No, I cannot […] / I refuse to heed tales of ancient, bloody ways! / We come from a world where different laws rule / Upon our foreheads the words of Scripture are inscribed / Our custom makes the heart grow and the mind awaken… / Let others kill as they once did / My edifice will rise toward the heavens through me. (Eftimiu, 1925, p. 88)

The grandiose, declamatory style of Eftimiu's characters strips them of psychological credibility and weakens the symbolic force of their actions. When, during the entombment of Rândunel, Manole tries to save her and orders the masons to cease their work, it is the wife who takes charge. Calling her husband mad, she commands the workers to finish the task so she may become "an icon and apparition". Her final words, a kind of justification for her decision, are steeped in martyrological and religious overtones:

> Praise be to you, Jesus! Blessed are you, immaculate and ever-virgin mother! / All of you, chained and thrown to the lions / Be praised, apostles of great Galilee / […] Seal the wall! …, a fiery cloud rises and consumes me / Sing!…, oh pure and immaculate virgin / I see you…, open the heavens! Receive me there… (Eftimiu, 1925, p. 130)

The ending proposed by Eftimiu is rather unexpected: Manole's wife is not sacrificed on the altar of art by force but voluntarily becomes a Christian martyr. But in the name of what? The possible interpretations are vague at best. Juxtaposing the scene of entombment with the earlier scene of the Masonic oath in the Temple of Hiram – thus suggesting a contrapuntal framing device that emphasises the symbolic value of Rândunel's Christian sacrifice – does not help clarify the author's intent. Nor does the ornate consecration of the church, during which, at the invitation of Neagoe Basarab, such guests appear as "the patriarch of Carigrad" (i.e., Constantinople), and hierarchs from "Mytilene, Ohrid, and kindred Serbia" (Eftimiu, 1925, p. 147) – a metahistorical phantasmagoria likely intended to bolster patriotic pride among citizens of the newly unified Greater Romania, established after World War I.

The topos of the walled-up woman, or in the modern Romanian variant, the myth of a sacrifice made on the altar of art, also drew the interest of Octavian Goga (1881–1938), a Transylvanian poet, prose writer, playwright, and politician, known in Romania primarily for his literary work but abroad mostly as the prime minister responsible for introducing antisemitic legislation in 1938. Goga's poetry, traditional in imagery and subject matter (its main themes include the countryside, nature, the hardships of peasant life, and national history), would suggest a similarly traditional approach to the Master Manole story – especially since such readings dominate Romanian modernist literature of the 1920s and 1930s. And yet, Goga's three-act play from 1928, which shares its title with the ballad, takes place "in contemporary times" (Goga, 1928, p. 1), within the milieu of the era's social elite (the landowner Brăneanu, Count Mușat, Colonel Dabija, and the banker Goldman, etc.) and artistic circles (the writer Balteș, the sculptor Galea, and the architect Scarlat), and offers a modern variation on the idea that art demands sacrifice.

In this play, the counterpart of Master Manole is the sculptor Andrei Galea, who has been working for years on his Atlantis, a piece he cannot seem to complete. It is possible that he is hindered by his love for Ana, the wife of wealthy landowner Vlad Brăneanu, with whom he is friends. The love is mutual, but Ana, torn by guilt, cannot bring herself to leave her husband. When Brăneanu discovers the affair, he challenges Galea to a duel and wounds him, though not seriously. The sculptor's convalescence heals not only his body but also his soul, freeing him from the grip of doomed passion. Ana visits Galea on the day of the vernissage preceding the public presentation of Atlantis (hailed as a masterpiece) to declare her unwavering love and readiness to leave her husband, but he refuses. Passionate love (which violates social conventions) is defeated by artistic vocation.

The banality of the plot, the static nature of the characters, and the unconvincing portrayal of their emotional dilemmas suggest that the author might be engaging in a kind of parody, or perhaps pastiche, of the folk original, which by then had entered the national literary canon[20]. However, another interpretation seems more plausible. Here, a writer deeply rooted in the peasant universe, shaped by rural sensibilities and a traditional value hierarchy, produces a textbook "bourgeois play", especially in its stylistic layer. A canonical theme of "healthy" (folk) provenance is set against modernist backdrops, sometimes yielding comic effects – whether intended by the author or merely the by-prod-

[20] The only thread that seems not to fit into this scenario is the attempt to separate "constructive" art, which leaves behind a lasting material trace (architecture, sculpture), from the ephemeral art of the word (literature). The writer Balteș describes his profession in the following way: "I, with my books, upon which the dust of antiquarian bookshops will settle – what am I? A poor traveller, a passerby, a strange fruit of premature birth somewhere in the mountains of Gorj, a luxury instrument in a society driven by healthy, primitive instincts, a Robinson Crusoe without the Anglo-Saxon sense of conquest, a wretched former possessor of a great, misused talent…" (Goga, 1928, p. 24).

uct of juxtaposing the lofty pathos and tragedy of the original with the triviality and banality of contemporary emotional entanglements. Goga may refer explicitly to the legend of Master Manole, but only to contrast it with the technicised, metaphysically stripped modern world[21].

A particularly curious example is the 1957 dramatic poem *Eu, Meșterul Manole* [I, Master Manole] by Gheorghe Magheru, illustrating one way in which the topos was adapted by literature aligned with the aesthetics of socialist realism. Surprisingly, the ideological bent of this work is rather discreet. The author skilfully navigates the ideological requirements of the 1950s and the stylistic demands of dramatic writing. Magheru refers to the canonical version of the legend, unlike Maniu and Blaga, who significantly expanded or modified the cast of characters, and unlike Goga, who radically contemporised the narrative. The principal figures of the legend – Master Manole and Ana – remain, and the nine masons are given names (in the ballad, they are anonymous), ranging from Russian-sounding ones (Boris, Nikita) to Byzantine (Theophanes) and biblical (Symeon). There are also exotic-sounding names (Ien) and familiar ones (Lup, meaning "Wolf"). The dramatis personae are rounded out by the shepherd Pătru, the monk Avacum, Metropolitan Naum, the Painter, and the ruler Negru-Vodă.

The shifts in narrative emphasis appear subtle at first glance. The monk Avacum is portrayed in a sinister light ("a monk like a raven driving its claws into the dead body of the church"; Magheru, 1957, p. 14). He does not urge Manole to offer a human life to guarantee the building's completion. Instead, he insists that the construction site is cursed because a former temple with a sacrificial altar once stood there, and the blood shed long ago is what causes the walls to collapse. In response, the builder declares

> Enough! In this place the vault will rise […] / The church is within me! And within me the walls ascend! / […] Miserable worm who lives for the moment and longs to cling to the ages! / You dangle by a thread above the void!… Here on this sun-scorched ground I bind myself to all of history! / Eternity dwells within me… (Magheru, 1957, p. 17)

The fate looming over the builders' work causes Manole to suffer internal torment and persist in his doubts. Help arrives in the form of the shepherd Pătru, the voice of folk wisdom and common sense, who first remarks, "As for now, I get along fine with God / I haven't seen Him, and He hasn't noticed me", and then advises Manole, "You must believe in yourself! / Build towers of brick in the field and within yourself, and the wall will hold!" (Magheru, 1957, p. 24). Manole overcomes his doubts and addresses his companions with a similarly

[21] "Ana: I never understood the ballad of the monastery at Argeș. Mr. Scarlat, as an architect, do you feel like an heir to the tradition of your predecessor? / Scarlat: No, dear Mrs. Brăneanu, my professors in Berlin never explained to me the formula of Master Manole. A modern architect adheres to pure geometry and expects from his wife cooperation only in less dangerous tasks" (Goga, 1928, p. 43).

reproachful appeal: "You lack faith in the strength of the arm that lifts the lime, and that's why the vault collapses…" (Magheru, 1957, p. 26).

There is no doubt that the author "disenchants" the situations described in the legend, rejecting their metaphysical dimension and centring human agency in a world without God. This, however, is a risky move, as Magheru at the same time does not abandon the fatalistic and irrational thread of life-sacrifice being required for the building to succeed. Ana is walled in, even though she is pregnant (the author here draws on one of the legend's variants), and after completing the construction, Manole throws himself from the church tower, driven by longing for his wife and the desire to join her in death. This final gesture is difficult to reconcile with his earlier manifestation of pride derived from Marxist rationalism and the Promethean belief in the possibility of creating a perfect work (a building, a society):

> Look, voivode! […] / Your wall sinned through weakness! / Mine grows ceaselessly! / With the trowel in hand I will build its vault / That will endure here and in me! / Not for the glory of a god, but for the people's enlightenment / Awakening their hunger for beauty and greatness. (Magheru, 1957, p. 69)

Of course, the entire play could be interpreted as a statement about the necessity of sacrifice and dedication, without which no great work can be achieved (a message consistent with the work ethic promoted at the time); the author indeed seems to lean in that interpretive direction. Yet he does so inconsistently, mixing orders: the metaphysical and the materialist. Nevertheless, Magheru manages to preserve several elements of the former order, condemned and rejected by communist ideology, whereas contemporary poets, despite eagerly referencing the folk ballad, saw in Manole only an embodiment of human genius that the material world could not resist.

In the same year, 1957, the Military Theatre in Bucharest staged (though never published) a play by Laurențiu Fulga under the same title as the ballad. This drama, much more schematic than Magheru's work, represents an attempt to fit metaphysical themes into the aesthetic framework of socialist realism. It is a rather desperate attempt, revealing only the dilemmas faced by the new regime and its affiliated writers, who tried to reinterpret the "unorthodox" content of folk tradition (which had been recognised as one of the foundations of national identity) in ways that would not conflict with the materialist ideology then in force.

A little over a decade later, the same issue of ideological constraint emerged again with the publication of *Meșterul Manole* [Master Manole], by Valeriu Anania (1968) – a writer, Orthodox priest, and former political prisoner. This time, however, the context had changed. The work appeared during the brief political thaw accompanying Nicolae Ceaușescu's rise to power. These new circumstances allowed Anania to publish a dramatic work infused with Orthodox mysticism while continuing the tradition of reading folklore through a nationalist lens; this is most evident in the construction of the character of the ruler, Neagoe Basarab.

We shall return to these last two dramatic texts later.

An original post-1989 dramatic reinterpretation of the walled-up woman topos is the theatrical play *Ana și Satana* [Ana and Satan] by Crisula Ștefănescu, written in 1999. The play significantly diverges from the earlier interwar and communist-era dramatic works inspired by the legend of Master Manole. The very setting of the action is surprising: it takes place in the 15th century, first in Hungarian Visegrád and only later in Wallachian Curtea de Argeș. Moreover, it presents a unique temporal shift in relation to the legend itself: the events unfold after the foundation sacrifice has been completed and the monastery has been built. The text thus features Ana after she has already been walled in; she has fused with the church walls while retaining consciousness and subjectivity, entering a new form of existence in unlife. Ana's presence is essential to the structure's stability. She undergoes a material/biological fusion with the church walls and a non-material/spiritual fusion with the energy of the cosmos [22]:"I don't know what is happening to me. It's as if I am both in the world and beyond it. I feel centuries passing, and I remain young. My body feels like stone, as if I've been buried alive within the walls" (C. Ștefănescu, 1999, p. 21).

The story of her walling up is revealed in a dreamlike flashback, clearly referencing Manole's visionary dream in the legend, where he realises the necessity of a foundation sacrifice. Ana's dream recounts events that have already occurred. Crucially, this scene is narrated from her perspective, as she recalls the thoughts and emotions that accompanied her on that day, thus restoring to Ana her own narrative, reclaiming what had previously been taken from her – her voice, her dignity, and her autonomy. After all, the one who tells the story holds the power.

Another surprise is the play's choice of main character: the historical figure Vlad Țepeș (the Impaler), son of Vlad Dracula (Vlad II, the Devil). This is no coincidence: according to historical sources, Țepeș's father was connected to the monastery in Curtea de Argeș, as he is believed to have founded the cathedral whose ruins Neagoe Basarab commissioned the famous church upon between 1517 and 1522. However, in her drama, Ștefănescu follows the fictional chronology of the source text, dating the church's construction even earlier, to the 13th century, during the reign of the mythical Wallachian ruler Negru Vodă.

Moreover, the introduction of Țepeș – popularly associated with the vampire Dracula – adds a crucial dimension to the plot, as one of the central dramatic aims of the work is to explain how the Wallachian ruler became a vampire.

[22] The highlighted biological, material dimension of death may acquire new, ambiguous, and intriguing meanings in the context of the concept proposed by Ewa Domańska in her book *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała* [Nekros. An Introduction to the Ontology of the Dead Body] (Domańska, 2017). In this work, Domańska develops the notion of so-called necrovitalism, i.e., the idea of life emerging from matter that is dead (in the case of foundation sacrifice practices, "life" assumes a non-anthropocentric form and is equated with the "life" or durability of the building), as well as the extraction of vital forces and resources necessary for life from what is dead (Domańska, 2017, p. 71).

According to the play, the voivode succumbed to temptation and made a pact with the Devil, gaining immortality. However, to fulfil the demonic pact, he had to persuade Ana to become the wife of Satan, who was in love with her. Ţepeş lures her from the church walls with the promise of returning her to her former, human state, at the cost of surrendering her soul to Satan. At the last moment, Ana realises the consequences of this decision and resists the temptation; she refuses Satan's proposal and returns to her place in the wall, once again saving the church from collapse (as the structure begins to crumble when she leaves). Ana is aided by Manole, who appears in Ştefănescu's play as a spring – according to legend, the form he took after falling from the church roof in his Icarian-like flight. The renewed walling up, this time being Ana's conscious decision, may be interpreted as her reclamation of subjectivity and bodily autonomy – a deliberate acceptance of her own sacrifice. On the other hand, it remains a consequence of the circumstances imposed on her by the men who controlled her fate.

Ştefănescu's play is eclectic and multilayered, combining Faustian pact and foundation sacrifice toposes with Luciferian and vampiric motifs. Yet it never entered the mainstream literary canon; there are no known theatrical productions of it in Romania, nor any critical reviews. Tellingly, the text did become the basis for the script of the short American film *Birth of the Vampire* (2003), directed by Monella Kaplan, which focused, unsurprisingly, on the vampiric thread – one with vast Hollywood potential.

On the Dilemmas of the Contemporary Human: Novelists' Struggles with the Topos

The mention of Mircea Eliade as one of the first prose writers whose work can be connected to the legend of Master Manole should hardly come as a surprise. In early 1939, his novel *Nuntă în cer* [Marriage in Heaven][23] was published, and four years later came the aforementioned study *Comentarii la legenda Meşterului Manole* [Commentaries on the Legend of Master Manole] (Eliade, 1943), comprising reflections written between 1936 and 1937. Of course, these two publications should not be directly linked; rather, the point is to demonstrate Eliade's sustained interest in the theme of the foundation sacrifice as a significant element of his "metaphysical theory focused on rituals, symbols, cosmogonies, and myths" (Eliade, 1943, p. 6). Eliade does not offer a paraphrase of the folk ballad, as playwrights of the era tended to do, but instead proposes a literary association of its motifs with subject matter fundamentally different

[23] Eliade wrote *Nuntă în cer* [Marriage in Heaven] in autumn 1938 during his internment for his Iron Guard sympathies. In our text we use the Polish translation *Wesele w niebie* (Eliade, 1977). An English translation by M. L. Ricketts is known to exist, though it has never been issued – translator's note.

in tone. Admittedly, the female protagonist of the novel (Ileana / Lena) explicitly references the folk legend, but this functions more as an authorial "textual marker" than as something meaningfully tied to the narrative.

At its core, the novel is a love story with a nested structure. Two male narratives about the same woman (a fact that is only revealed gradually) provide the framework for a meditation on ideal love, which cannot be realised under earthly or human conditions (hence the titular "wedding in heaven"), as well as on vocation and the willingness to sacrifice for one's profession or beloved. In contrast to the balladic Ana, the female character in Eliade's novel is a fully-fledged partner to the man rather than a passive victim of male ambition – and it is she who ultimately ends the relationship. Eliade does not offer a psychological analysis of human motivation, nor does he construct a captivating plot. In keeping with his scholarly fascinations, he seeks to lend a mystical dimension to feminine behaviour, striving to define a "timeless femininity" (which may explain his choice to present one woman as the object of two distinct male narratives). The male protagonists, in turn, are intended to embody typical (in the author's view) masculine attitudes. The writer, Andrei Mavrodin, symbolises the pride of the artist who values his personal freedom above all else, while the engineer, Barbu Hasnaș, represents the archetypal romantic who initially approaches emotional commitment with detachment but, upon falling truly in love, transforms into a devoted "master of the house" for whom family and children are paramount.

Both breakups are essentially caused by the irreconcilability of the woman's vision of love – demanding total devotion and the idealisation of emotion – and male vanity, which refuses to give up either personal freedom or self-centred priorities. Eliade's protagonist, like the balladic Ana, sacrifices herself for her husband; but unlike Ana, she sacrifices not her own life, but that of her unborn child (which Mavrodin does not want), and when she finds she cannot forget this decision, she leaves. In her second incarnation, Lena is unable to bear the pressure from her husband to give birth to a child (the narrative implies she is now infertile as a result of the abortion) and again chooses to leave.

Eliade's novel is replete with interpretive cues and literary-cultural associations (the androgynous myth, the sacred-profane relationship, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, etc.). Thus, the reference to the legend of Master Manole does not constitute any thematic core around which the narrative is organised; instead, it exemplifies a creative use of folk material, which serves as inspiration rather than a mere source for imitation.

The novel *Bietul Ioanide* [Poor Ioanide] by the prominent literary critic George Călinescu (1899–1965), although published only a dozen years later (1953) than *Wedding in Heaven*, clearly belongs to a different historical and political epoch. Written in the early stages of the communist dictatorship, it is a chronicle of political events during earlier dictatorships – royal, Iron Guard, and military (1938–1941). The titular Ioanide is a renowned architect, a member of the Bucharest elite, and father to two nearly adult children (Pika and

Tudorel), both of whom are drawn to the ideology of the Iron Guard and ultimately pay with their lives (his daughter is shot by Siguranţa agents, and his son is sentenced to death). Before these tragic events unfold, Ioanide leads a life in which his professional passion overshadows family concerns, and his romantic escapades are handled with emotional detachment, posing no threat to the orderly structure of his life (Călinescu,1973).

The irony with which the author portrays the characters from Bucharest's high society[24] undoubtedly helped him sidestep the traps of communist censorship, for which any reference to "bourgeois-landowner" times could have been considered a serious offense. Literary critics typically identify two main thematic threads in the novel: "timeless femininity" (the same motif as in Eliade) and "spiritual creativity" (Petrescu, 2000, p. 104). The latter is arguably more important, as suggested by the characterisation of the titular protagonist (his profession, worldview, and behaviour). Ioanide divides creative individuals into "metaphysical" artists (who reject the mundane and accidental) and those attached to the phenomenological, accepting the logic of daily life; naturally, he considers himself among the former (he doesn't read newspapers, misses the outbreak of World War II, etc.). Călinescu does not avoid contradictions: while he displays sympathy toward the protagonist's stance, he is ideologically obliged to condemn it, "in accordance with the prevailing ideology, the History present in *Poor Ioanide* condemns anyone who disregards it" (Petrescu, 2000, p. 105).

The death of his daughter – an act he perceives as a meaningless and futile sacrifice – coincides with an offer from city officials to have Ioanide design a new church. Devastated by the loss, the architect resolves to commemorate his daughter – not physically, but at least symbolically (designing a stained-glass window bearing her likeness). However, the resulting structure is not well-received by society:

> People claimed that Pika's death was treated as a sacrifice demanded by the heavens of the new Master Manole – that is, himself – and that he intended to bury Pika beneath the church wall. Thus, the basilica was essentially a private chapel. Others maintained that the church was being built with the tacit support of the Movement, to which the architect had long belonged (Călinescu, 1973, p. 386)

Călinescu, like Eliade before him, does not modernise the balladic narrative but instead employs its core motifs to explore the dilemmas of the contem-

[24] Ioanide's reaction to the news of his daughter's death is, in this regard, more than telling: "Ioanide listened to this with sadness and disgust. He considered it a comedy in poor taste […]. The architect had a lofty conception of life and would not acknowledge its dark, absurd sides. He regarded it as "frivolous" for someone to hide in the cemetery or for agents to shoot at a tomb in order to capture a scoundrel who had fancied herself capable of a political coup. Ioanide considered Pika's death under such circumstances a misguided ending. Subconsciously influenced by Romanticism […] he would have preferred Pika to fade away on her bed among chrysanthemums, exhausted by slow tuberculosis" (Călinescu, 1973, p. 325).

porary individual, suggesting their universal and timeless significance. The message of the novel offers an expanded interpretation of the myth of human sacrifice: it becomes the price of talent and artistic fidelity, no longer demanded by mysterious forces but by the frailty of human character; death loses its fatalistic quality and becomes mere coincidence – an absurdity.

Florin Horvath's 2001 novel *Voievodul Albastru* [The Blue Voivode] (Horvath, 2001) seeks to recreate the historical events surrounding the construction of the Argeș Monastery and thus fits into a long-standing tradition of interpreting literary fiction as a source of historical knowledge – an outcome of the historicisation of folk cultural artifacts[25].

The novel's main characters include the titular voivode Neagoe Basarab (depicted as a wise, kind, and prudent ruler), Master Manole, Ana (who appears at the beginning as the nun Theophana, whom Manole takes from the convent, later revealed to be Basarab's milk sister), the breathtakingly beautiful Zorza (her beauty being considered her greatest asset) as Manole's great love, and the logothete Horvath, his chief rival for Zorza's affections. Interestingly, Ana is not Manole's greatest love in this story – she wins his heart through trickery, slipping a love potion into his wine prepared by a witch from the Poienari region. In this way, she manages to marry him and bear a child, who later tragically dies in a fire. Manole buries the child in the monastery tower's foundation, hoping such a sacrifice would ensure the successful completion of the building.

Unfortunately, the construction fails due to intrigues by unruly craftsmen and also Zorza's jealous interference (still madly in love with Manole, who reciprocates her feelings once Ana's love potion's effect fades, and he betrays her with Zorza). The builders, out of spite, plan to entomb Ana's shadow. Upon discovering this, Ana throws herself from the scaffolding and dies instantly. Meanwhile, Zorza commissions two potions from the witch – a love potion for Manole and a poison for Horvath, who wishes to marry her, though she wants nothing of a life with him. Tragically, she mixes up the vials, and Manole dies having drunk the poison delivered to him by a messenger – much to the horror and grief of his lover. A spring bursts forth where he dies, which is the only plot element that aligns with the original legend.

After reading Horvath's novel, one gets the impression that Manole has fallen victim to female intrigues and that he, in fact, makes the greatest sacrifice. The following quote from the novel's conclusion encapsulates this interpretation:

> [Neagoe Basarab to Manole, after the master hands him the completed monastery – OBN] I understand, Master. And from what I understand, this temple will remain exceptional. If in order to create, you must sacrifice the submission, patience, and trust of a dog [the dog was the first creature walled-up in the wall, followed by the body of Manole's dead child, and ultimately his wife, Ana – ed. OBN], the fresh outlook on life of a hopeful child, and above all, the love of

[25] It is worth noting that the story recounted by Horvath is identical to the account of Ștefan Dumitrache, the local historian from Curtea de Argeș cited above.

> a mother who holds the power to bring life into the world, then it means that in the end you are left with nothing – you are robbed of patience, hope, love, and the longing to create beauty. (Horvath, 2001, pp. 246–247)

Thus, the novel's message does not significantly depart from classic interpretations of the legend – Manole's suffering takes centre stage, while the beings who sacrificed their lives for the creation of the temple (dog–child–woman) are objectified and reduced to symbols of the master's lost human values (trust–hope–love). It is a loss perceived entirely from Manole's point of view.

The women in the novel are portrayed as irrational beings, blinded by violent emotions and resorting to magic to achieve their goals at any cost. The men remain central, driving the action, creating great works (in this case, the church at Curtea de Argeș) and making key decisions, including those affecting women's fates. Women, meanwhile, are pushed to the narrative's margins: conspiring in revenge, invoking curses and magic, or suppressing their anger and sinking into sorrow, unheard and misunderstood by the community around them.

Another early 2000s novel worth mentioning is *Meșterul Manole* [Master Manole] by Emil Rațiu (2014), a writer born in Chișinău in 1935, during the period of Greater Romania (a relevant detail in the context of the book). He lived in Bucharest from 1940 and, since 1969, has resided in exile in Italy. Rațiu's works, which often draw on Romanian foundational myths (as in the novel *Miorița* [The Little Ewe Lamb] or *Dumnezeu s-a născut în Dacia* [God Was Born in Dacia]), are not part of the Romanian literary canon, though they likely have a loyal readership – the publishing house Ideea Europeană, which has released many of his books, has been active on the Romanian market for two decades and enjoys a solid reputation.

Meșterul Manole aspires to be a parabolic novel. The text has characteristics of a moral (even moralising) and didactic tale. The recurring motif of sacrifice for creativity is meant to depict the archetype of a man who dedicates his life to his craft. Yet, unlike Manole, the modern man no longer sacrifices loved ones or himself in the name of Beauty or God, but in the name of Freedom. The main character, Virgil Nan, is a Romanian living in exile in Italy and pursuing a promising career as a physician. At one point, he is accused of murdering his wife, Anna (although the narrative suggests that she most likely committed suicide, unhappy and lonely, as her husband was too absorbed in his work and emotionally absent). His status as an immigrant only deepens the Italian authorities' suspicion. References to Master Manole appear throughout the novel, reaching their fullest expression in the first chapter of Book Four (the novel comprises six books), titled *Judecata lui Manole* [The Judgment of Manole], which serves as the story's climactic moment. Here, we read a manuscript written by Nan in solitary confinement – likely on the eve of his own trial, the full details of which unfold in the next chapter, *Procesul* [The Trial]. Nan's manuscript presents a vision of a trial of Master Manole conducted by various historical figures (including Machiavelli, Lenin, Nietzsche, Marx, the Sophists, Dadaists, and Con-

stantin Brâncoveanu) in a timeless, ahistorical, and undefined space. These figures deliver speeches in Manole's defence or prosecution, drawing on their respective philosophical and religious doctrines.

The entire scene, dreamlike and unsettling, is thick with symbolic allusions. Virgil Nan observes the trial, clearly seeing himself reflected in Manole. The most interpretively challenging element of the scene is its ending: the final word of the trial – seemingly the verdict – belongs to the Marshal (*Mareşal*). Though Rațiu provides no specific name, it can be reasonably inferred that this refers to Ion Antonescu, who ruled Romania from 1940 to 1944. Antonescu remains a polarising figure – regarded by most historians as a war criminal but considered by many Romanians to be a national hero credited with preserving the country's sovereignty during World War II (Deletant, 2010, p. 15). The political foundation of Romanian popular opinion on Antonescu is rooted in nationalism heavily promoted by the anti-Soviet Ceauşescu regime, which included the Marshal in its national pantheon, presenting him as a symbol of resistance against the USSR and the embodiment of popular aspirations to reclaim Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina (Deletant, 2010, p. 15). In Nan's vision, the Marshal delivers a tirade about the "Law" as an emanation of the Romanian spirit, encompassing the territory from the Dniester to the Tisza and the Danube (the borders of Greater Romania), and manifesting in the subordination of the individual to the good of the "Nation", the rejection of "foreign influences", the renunciation of self-determination, and the merging with the "Law", which – in his view – is equivalent to the highest form of freedom:

> The Law – our national essence, our soul, which we cannot sell! I fought for that law, for its continuation – not for the myth of liberty and the non-existent democracy, for the barbarisation and dictatorship of the masses that turned our people into rabble! I fought so that the wondrous fruits of that law – Putna, Voroneț, the church of Argeş – might exist and multiply, and so that another Manole, suckled at the breast of this people, might raise them again on the sacred soil of a free Romania of tomorrow! (Rațiu, 2014, p. 245)

The Marshal is accompanied by figures such as Ion Vodă, Michael the Brave, Horia, Cloşca and Crişan, Tudor Vladimirescu, and many others enshrined in the Romanian pantheon of national heroes, all associated with the struggle for independence. This scene most directly and explicitly reveals the nationalist and conservative nature of Rațiu's literary project. The West is portrayed as the embodiment of "sovereign stupidity", the myth of misguided "freedom" and "progress" (Rațiu, 2014, p. 244), and the only way to overcome the stagnation of contemporary life is to sacrifice oneself for national values.

Here we are presented with a contemporary ideological appropriation of the Master Manole myth: the novel's protagonist sacrifices his life in the name of rebuilding inner freedom, a quality his nation has lost through historical events (and which he himself lost through false accusation and the civilisational transformations of modernity), yet one that can be reclaimed, as it is embedded

in the very essence of the Romanian spirit. For it is the Romanian nation that serves as the custodian of the aesthetic and ethical ideal most fully expressed in the ballad of the Argeș Monastery; it is the Romanian nation that is capable of the highest form of sacrifice. Unfortunately, Virgil fails in his endeavour, a failure that becomes evident to him upon hearing the words of a professor friend at the end of the book: "You lost your trial at Yalta. That's when you lost your dignity, your Homeland" (Rațiu, 2014, p. 471).

Another controversial idea found in the novel is the belief that Virgil's downfall is the fault of his wife, Anna. This explanation is voiced in the defence attorney's closing statement at the trial of the main character. The lawyer calls Nan's wife a "dark spirit", a "phantom" (*stihie*), who ruined his life and thwarted his dreams of freedom – the dreams of a man who had fled a totalitarian state. Responsibility is also attributed to modern Western society (of which Anna is presumed to be a "product") – a society not only secularised but also one that promotes gender equality, which, according to the narrative, disrupts the natural balance and harmony of traditional cultures. Anna in Rațiu's novel is the antithesis of the idealised woman from canonical interpretations of the legend: "on the sacrifice of Manole's woman, beauty and form are built; Anna Pascoli's life brings only destruction and chaos" (Rațiu, 2014, p. 277). Notably, Anna is Italian, symbolising the corrupt West, whereas Ana, being Romanian, belongs to a nation whose identity is said to have been founded on a proper value hierarchy.

There is no doubt that the creative myth from the ballad of Master Manole represents, for Rațiu, an ethical ideal of self-sacrifice for God equated with Beauty – an ideal degraded and unattainable in the contemporary, desacralised world dominated by individual narcissism. It serves as a symbolic structure supporting a traditional worldview perceived as safe, predictable, hope-inspiring, and in stark opposition to modernity. Unsurprisingly, Rațiu invokes the vision of Greater Romania as a utopian space of national fulfilment, which is still mythologised by many Romanian circles to this day. Within this imagined space, there is also no room for women's emancipation, which, according to the guardians of patriarchy, threatens the traditional order.

It is difficult to find a counter-narrative to the "walled-up woman" motif in contemporary Romanian prose. It seems this theme has been claimed by literary circles operating on the fringes of the mainstream, promoting conservative, esoteric, Romania-centred content, often locating the essence of the Romanian spirit in Dacian prehistory, Romanian Orthodoxy, and the nation's exceptional historical mission. This interpretive line, in the spirit of Călinescu and Eliade, androcentric and glorifying Romanian creative genius, is carried forward consistently. It is a thematic domain with little appeal to post-1989 prose, which has focused primarily on grappling with the social aftermath of Ceaușescu's regime and depicting the harsh realities of the 1990s. For the youngest generation of writers, the *Ballad of Master Manole* is seen as an anachronistic text, if remembered at all, associated with early school years and irrelevant to today's reality.

The Walled-Up Woman in the Spotlight: Reclaiming the Female Figure through Poetry

Since 1989, poetry has emerged as the most favoured medium for revitalising the myth of the walled-up woman, within which the character of Ana most often regains her subjectivity and voice. The explanation seems quite straightforward: poetry offers a literary form well suited to the thematic and emotional weight imposed by the ballad, enabling the expression of difficult emotions, the questioning of conventional narratives, and freeing the writer from the need to construct long, complex storylines. It is also worth noting that writing poetry is much more common than writing prose (not to mention drama) among amateur authors from the Argeș region, many of whom contribute to the motif's continued presence in literature, treating it as a natural source of inspiration.

One of the most intriguing publications in this area is the 2019 anthology of Romanian poetry *Lacrima Anei* [Ana's Tear] (Păun, 2019), which features poems by 113 authors engaging with the theme of the heroine's sacrifice. It is a local publishing initiative from Curtea de Argeș, conceived and edited by Gheorghe Păun, who is also the editor-in-chief of the monthly journal *Curtea de la Argeș*, in which all the poems were first published in a column of the same name. In the editor's note, Păun states that "this book is a tribute to Ana" (Păun, 2019, p. 5) and adds, "half-joking, half-serious, I said that Ana is the one carrying the monastery walls on her shoulders, while Manole receives all the praise […] Ana's tears flow into the fountain" (Păun, 2019, p. 5).

The volume includes poems by canonical Romanian poets from before 1989 (such as Marin Sorescu, Ana Blandiana, Nichita Stănescu, Nina Cassian, Ileana Mălăncioiu, and Traian T. Coșovei), but also many contemporary local poets from the Curtea de Argeș area, including Păun himself. The only selection criterion was the appearance of the character of Ana in the poem, which does not always imply a female poetic perspective. Often, the lyrical "I" is associated with Manole, and the poem may take the form of a love lyric or a confession of guilt. The anthology is not intended as a revisionist rereading of the ballad, but rather as a tribute to the woman who made a noble sacrifice in exemplary fulfilment of her social role. Some poems in the collection even reinforce the stereotype of the self-sacrificing woman – a notion that Romanian feminists such as Mihaela Miroiu have fervently critiqued (e.g., Adrian Păunescu's *Ana contra femeilor* [Ana Against Women], 1996). However, in many poems – especially those by women poets – Ana's perspective is strongly emphasised, sometimes serving as a universal experience shared by other women. Noteworthy here is the poem *O țară aparte* [A Country Apart] by the aforementioned Crisula Ștefănescu, in which the author names all women in her country "Ana" and all men "Manole", thus suggesting that the hierarchical relationships of domination and subordination described in the ballad are culturally and systemically determined and still persist in today's society.

The anthology's editor notes in the foreword that he has merely collected "raw material" suitable for further literary analysis. The poems are presented alphabetically – an intentionally neutral arrangement – with no biographical notes on the authors. They originate from various volumes and years (the earliest from 1964, the latest from 2018), and some had never been published before. The collection clearly demonstrates a disparity in the presence of the topos in communist-era versus contemporary poetry, with the latter lagging both quantitatively and qualitatively. References to the Master Manole ballad appear especially often in the work of the so-called neomodernist poets who debuted in the 1960s during the relative thaw of Ceaușescu's early regime. These poets formally and aesthetically drew from Romanian modernist poetry in an effort to distance themselves from the crude, ideologically constrained aesthetic of socialist realism, making it unsurprising that they attempted to reinterpret a text recognised during the interwar period as one of the foundational myths of Romanian culture. For Romanian neomodernists, the motif of "creative genius" and the quest for the essence of artistic creation also proved thematically attractive.

After 1989 and the lifting of censorship, poetry – similarly to prose and theatre – became significantly more socially engaged. The raw, often brutal language it adopted no longer required intertextual references or elaborate metaphors to depict the challenges of the post-communist transformation. The *Ballad of Master Manole*, along with the other three "great myths" in Călinescu's classification, came to be associated with folk literature exploited by protochronist propaganda, and thus ceased to be an attractive point of reference. It has remained, however, a natural motif for writers from the Argeș region. Notable contributors to the anthology include George Baciu, Ion Ene Fripcea, Carolina Ilica, Alexandru Mărchidan, Gheorghe Păun, Paula Romanescu, Vasilichia Sinescu Tudose, Ion C. Ștefan, Ion Țoanță, Maria Mona Vâlceanu, and Ilie Vodăian.

The walled-up woman motif also appears in the work of writers living in exile (such as Crisula Ștefănescu, Eugenia Bulat, Emil Rațiu, Andrei Codrescu, and Mihaela Moscaliuc), which may suggest that the Ballad of Master Manole continues to resonate within the collective cultural consciousness. Exile literature often serves as a litmus test in this respect, drawing on themes vital to national culture and reconfiguring them through the lens of a new, external perspective. One notable example is the poetic dialogue between Mihaela Moscaliuc and Andrei Codrescu, both Romanian-born, living in the United States, and writing in English[26]. Codrescu published his poem *Master Manole to Ana*. *A retelling for Mihaela Moscaliuc* in the Great River Review in 2011 (Codrescu, 2011). In this text, the lyrical I laments the decision he was forced to make, yet underscores its inevitability and the necessity of sacrificing the one he loved most. He is acutely aware of the moral ambiguity of his act: "I am a mason and a liar and I will

[26] For a detailed analysis of the poem under discussion, see Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev (2024b).

always be one/ I am the wall that will not stand unless I build my love within" (Codrescu, 2011, p. 33). At the same time, he is tormented by the absurdity of the situation and admits his inability to explain his actions ("Anna walled-up cries Why? /Anna walled-up makes no room for answers I don't have /Anna walled-up I have no answer to your Why"; Codrescu, 2011, p. 33). Moscaliuc responded to Codrescu in 2014 in *The American Poetry Review* with a poem titled *Ana to Manole. A retelling of a Romanian folk ballad, for Andrei Codrescu, in response to his "Master Manole to Anna"* (Moscaliuc, 2014). The lyrical monologue in Moscaliuc's work is conducted from Ana's perspective, exposing the cruelty and absurdity of the foundation sacrifice and explicitly naming the experience of female suffering. In the final stanza, which may be interpreted as a kind of feminist mini-manifesto, Ana seeks to give meaning to her sacrifice, offering herself not to the walls of the church and the permanence of the sacred edifice, but to her excluded, voiceless sisters, whose right to speech and visibility has been denied by patriarchy:

> Take me in, mute sisters, mute sun bright.
> I'll sweep the closets, break the glass slipper, tie our umbilical cords into a magic broom.
> Whisk my blood, swallow me, I am yours. (Moscaliuc, 2014, p. 27)

Such reinterpretations of the walled-up woman topos reveal its immense emancipatory potential, enabling readings that move beyond the dominant interpretation in Romanian culture: one that centres on the creative power of the foundational sacrifice.

To conclude these reflections, we must mention what is perhaps the most subversive reference to the topos, found in *Levantul* (The Levant), a 1990 masterpiece by Mircea Cărtărescu (1990/2012), widely regarded as one of the most important contemporary Romanian writers. Often described by critics as a "postmodern epic" or "the first epic in the history of Romanian literature", *Levantul* is an erudite, intertextual tour de force that plays masterfully with the Romanian literary tradition. Cărtărescu alludes to the Ballad of Master Manole, albeit indirectly, by casting Apollodorus of Damascus – a military engineer in Trajan's army who built the bridge over the Danube during the Second Dacian War – as a parallel to Manole. According to the narrator, Apollodorus enabled the Roman conquest of Dacia by sacrificing his wife and walling her up in the bridge's foundations, thereby making the Romanian nation possible. This fusion of foundational myths – one literary and one historical – clearly offers an ironic commentary on the national narratives of the 19th century and later, which sought to build a homogeneous Romanian identity rooted in Roman and especially Dacian heritage.

By transplanting the foundation sacrifice motif from the dawn of Wallachia to the Roman conquest of Dacia, Cărtărescu highlights the narrative flexibility and constructed nature of origin stories. His use of the legend as a narrative structure underscores the role such myths play in shaping collective identity, constantly reimagined in accordance with contemporary needs.

National Canon and Ideological Entanglements: The Topos on Stage

The most frequently staged dramatic adaptation of the ballad of Master Manole remains the eponymous play by the poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga, first published in 1927 (Blaga 1927/1970). Just two years later, in April 1929, it premiered at the National Theatre in Bucharest, directed by Soare Z. Soare. The following year, the National Theatre of Cluj-Napoca also staged the play (1930, dir. Ștefan Braborescu); the theatre is now named after Lucian Blaga[27]. The theatres' interest in Blaga's text was not guaranteed, given that *Meșterul Manole* belongs to the category of non-theatrical poetic drama (alongside *Zamolxis, Children's Crusade, The Resurrection, Whirling Waters*, and others). However, this interest can be explained by the rise of expressionist theatre at the time – a style well suited to Blaga's poetic drama – and by the popularity of themes rooted in national history and mythology (of which the Ballad of Manole is a clear example). The next major production came in 1968, when the Odeon Theatre in Bucharest mounted the play (dir. Dinu Cernescu). Two subsequent stagings were realised by the National Theatre of Cluj-Napoca (1973, dir. Alexa Visarion) and the Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj (1983, dir. Tompa Gábor, translated by Béla Markó). In 2006, it was staged by the Fani Tardini Drama Theatre in Galați (dir. Cătălin Vasiliu), and the most recent production, in 2018, again came from Cluj-Napoca (dir. Andrei Măjeri).

The 1928 play by Octavian Goga, which bears the same title as the ballad but only superficially references Manole's dilemma, is intriguing. Goga, a poet deeply invested in themes of peasant life, wrote this piece in the vein of a classic "bourgeois drama". It was first staged in 1932 by the National Theatre of Cluj-Napoca (dir. Zaharia Bârsan). Surprisingly, the play – hardly aligned with the aesthetic and ideological expectations of communist Romania – was revived by the Constantin I. Nottara Theatre in Bucharest in 1967 (dir. Ion Olteanu). The communist authorities had forgiven the author's pro-fascist and antisemitic views and incorporated him into the literary canon as a celebrator of the rural world. This production was likely enabled by the brief ideological thaw that followed Ceaușescu's rise to power. After that, however, Goga's play was never staged again – even after the political shift of 1989.

A decade earlier, the same theatre staged *Meșterul Manole*, a play by Laurențiu Fulga, borrowing its title directly from the folk ballad (1957, dir. Gheorghe Jora). This dramatic text is unique in that it was written during the era of officially mandated socialist realism (applied quite literally), making it an attempt by a "socialist writer" to artistically engage with the metaphysical and fantastical content of the ballad while still adhering to the materialist ideology and class doctrine imposed at the time. Another important aspect of this play is that it was granted the privilege of theatrical production shortly after it was

[27] The information concerning the theatrical productions came from the website of the National Heritage Institute (Institutul Național al Patrimoniului).

written (and, incidentally, this would remain its only stage production), whereas a contemporary dramatic poem, *Eu, Meșterul Manole* by Gheorghe Magheru, was never given such an "honour" – neither then, nor later.

The review of Fulga's production by Emil Mandric (Mandric, 1958) is a telling artifact of that time. The reviewer begins with a ritualistic denunciation of prewar playwrights, accusing them of obscurantism, mysticism, and fatalism (Blaga, Maniu) or of bourgeois moral decay (Goga), before declaring that Fulga's interpretation of the ballad represents "an attempt to present artistic questions in light of their relationship to the aspirations of the people as a fundamental condition for those questions to be deemed valuable and honest in their message" (Mandric, 1958, p. 27).

While Mandric appreciates the author's intentions, he remains unconvinced by the new reading of the folk ballad, in which Manole does not build the church to satisfy the vanity of its patron prince but rather to fulfil an artistic ideal, symbolised by his beloved Ana. In this version, it is Manole himself (not some mystical force) who tears down the walls in dissatisfaction with the result, and ultimately, he does not allow his wife to be walled-up. The whole plot aims to deliver the message that "art should be created in the name of life and love" – a message the reviewer deems misleading. He criticises the author for failing to resolve the dilemma of sacrifice that all creative work demands. It must be acknowledged that the reviewer (engaging polemically with the play itself, rather than with its theatrical staging!) rather deftly highlights the ideological and logical inconsistencies of the text, while at the same time, surely against his own intention, revealing the uncomfortable truth that it is not enough to "demystify" the ballad by stripping it of its mystical dimension in order for the sufferings of the exploited people to take the place of the artist's creative torments. Equally noteworthy is the reviewer's sceptical attitude toward the construction of the female character, who in the playwright's vision serves as an aesthetic ideal for the builder's artistic endeavours. In contrast, the theatre chronicler observes, "Ana offers [Manole – KJ's note] her love, but she is not able to give him the strength to complete the work he has begun" (Mandric, 1958, p. 28). In the value hierarchy of that time, a woman who failed to provide effective support (a new understanding of inspiration) for the man – the builder of the new order – apparently did not merit attention.

A particularly notable theatrical case, due to the identity of its author, is *Meșterul Manole* by Valeriu Anania (1921–2011) (Anania, 1968), a high-ranking cleric of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania, who concluded his ecclesiastical career as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Cluj, Alba, Crișana, and Maramureș (under the name Bartolomeu). Imprisoned by the communist authorities from 1958 to 1964, Anania composed and memorised his "dramatic poem" during his final year of incarceration at the Aiud penitentiary. The eight-scene poem with an epilogue was published in 1968 and was almost immediately (January 1969) adapted for Romanian Television Theatre. In March of that year, it premiered on stage at the Alexandru Davila Theatre in Pitești (dir.

Marietta Sadova), and later that same year it was performed by students at the National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest (under Prof. Ion Olteanu). This unusual – though brief – wave of popularity can largely be attributed to the political thaw of the time (the author, until recently a political prisoner sentenced for his youthful fascist sympathies, was now symbolically rehabilitated). There is, however, another reason for this temporary recognition. Anania's dense, symbol-laden dramatic poem, populated with many characters not found in the folk original, actively engages with earlier dramatic interpretations of the ballad (by Nicolae Iorga, Lucian Blaga, Adrian Maniu, Victor Eftimiu, and Ion Luca), explicitly referencing Mircea Eliade's conceptions of myth, smuggling in biblical undertones (Anania was, after all, a clergyman), and most significantly, elevating the character of Prince Neagoe Basarab to a role equal in narrative weight to that of Master Manole. This final narrative manoeuvre – resonating strongly with the then-renewed interest in historical-national symbolism after years of Stalinist suppression – did not go unnoticed.

Compared to theatrical productions of dramatic works that directly reference the legend of Master Manole, the list of performances that employ the folk topos merely as a pretext is much shorter. One such example is *Scrisoare către Meşterul Manole* [Letter to Master Manole], a one-act play by little-known debutant Hristu Limon, staged in 1978 by the State Theatre in Constanța (dir. Constantin Dinischiotu). Among its three characters, the most prominent is the Engineer, who is constructing a new and better world – socialist in name, technocratic by nature – far from his home in the mountains. A Doctor visits his remote shelter to inform him of his wife Ana's death and assumes the role of therapist, urging the protagonist not to lose hope and to interpret Ana's death as a sacrifice made on the altar of professional duty. The play bears all the hallmarks of the so-called "production play" typical of the Stalinist era, which, even in the context of the "Ceauşescu epoch", rings hollow – a grotesque attempt to transpose the drama of Manole and his wife into contemporary times.

A completely different case is the modern play *Meşterul Manole sau drumul spre Europa* [Master Manole, or the Road to Europe] by Viorel Cacoveanu, staged in 2013 by the Northern Theatre in Satu Mare (dir. Andrei Mihalache). This "tragic comedy", as the author calls it, seeks to depict the convoluted Romanian path to capitalism but focuses primarily on the negative experiences of the transition. Cacoveanu appears obsessed with the issues of privatisation and the restitution of property to former owners – a sentiment shared by a large portion of the population. Despite its one-sided treatment and overly literal associations, one reviewer succeeded in compellingly linking this contemporary social issue to the folk ballad referenced in the play's title:

> The myth embedded in the phrase "what is built during the day collapses at night" nowadays does not concern the fate of a brilliant builder, but that of society as a whole. Manole, with his wooden wings strapped to his back, falling from the church tower, no longer reminds us of Icarus but of a fallen angel. […] [Manole – ed. KJ] no longer walls up his wife but persuades her. And anyway, he no longer erects

> monumental buildings, but works off the books for a day's wage on European construction sites. (Mihalache, 2013; the quote from a theatre leaflet without page numbers)

Contemporary Romanian theatre seems to be losing interest in classic literary texts about Master Manole and the walled-up wife, and the topos itself rarely serves as a source of inspiration for today's playwrights.

From Illustration to Frescoes. The Topos in Painting

Book illustrations, fine art painting and, to a lesser extent, sculpture and applied arts, are the realms of visual art in which the topos of the walled-up woman appears – inseparably linked in Romanian culture with the Legend of Master Manole, the mythical builder of the church in Curtea de Argeș. Among the renowned painters of the late 19th and early 20th centuries – both those associated with neoclassicism and academicism, as well as with modernist movements (Grigorescu, Luchian, Aman, Tonitza, Petrașcu, Pallady, and others) – we find little interest in this thematic motif. However, in the late interwar period, interest begins to emerge, likely due to the intensive use of the topos in literature – particularly in drama – as well as its exploration within the fields of religious studies and anthropology (Mircea Eliade).

One of the first to engage with this motif was Ion Vlasiu (1908–1997), a sculptor and writer, who placed a colour drawing depicting the walling-up scene on the cover of his 1941 novel *Poveste cu năluci* [A Tale of Phantoms] (Figure 9). The scene draws on naïve art, using metaphorical simplification and a lack of detail. At the same time, it offers a modernised and somewhat timeless version of the balladic motif. Manole wears a garment resembling an apron, making him appear more as an artist-sculptor than a builder, while his long hair evokes the image of a romantic creator. Similarly, the building itself is portrayed in a minimalistic way, with little emphasis on its sacred nature. The figure of the walled-up woman, on the other hand, is rendered in a traditional manner; her arms crossed over her chest suggest Ana's complete sacrifice and devotion to her husband.

Associated with the modernist milieu, Micaela Eleutheriade (1900–1982) created the graphic design for the 1949 English-language edition of the ballad [*The Story of Manole – A Romanian Legend*]. The illustrations contain elements typical of children's fairy tales of the time, but also clear inspirations from naïve painting. The folk costumes worn by Manole and Ana draw particular attention, suggesting the illustrator's adoption of the folkloristic aesthetic widely present in the communist period (though not unfamiliar in the interwar years), while simultaneously emphasising the autochthonous character of the ballad. What may surprise the viewer is the way the two main figures are depicted: Manole is shown with his face turned away, rendering him anonymous – as if overcome

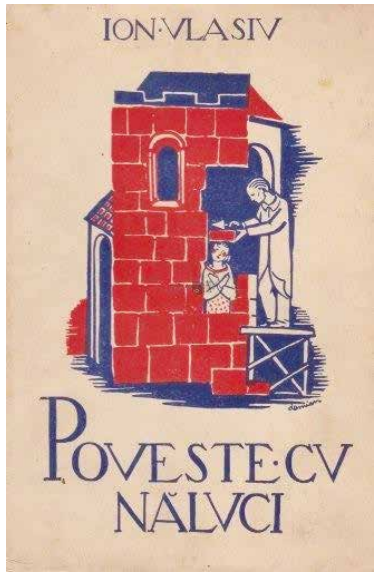


Figure 9. Cover of the novel *Poveste cu năluci* by Ion Vlasiu, Bucharest, 1941. Source: *Meșterul Manole* (n.d.), retrieved August 3, 2026, from https://www.postmodernism.ro/mesterul-manole/

with shame or sorrow over his deed – while Ana lifts her clearly drawn face upward, as if seeking help or an answer to the question "why?", her posture expressing dignity and calm. The illustrator's portrayal of the sacrificial woman, placed at the centre of the scene and nearly dominating it, is a rarity in Romanian artistic interpretations of this topos (Figure 10).

In contrast, the illustration by Anastase Demian for the volume *Balade populare ale romînilor* [Popular Ballads of the Romanians, 1966] depicts a structure stripped of any sacred elements, reflecting the kind of universalisation characteristic of communist-era aesthetics. At the same time, however, Manole bears a resemblance to Christ in a peasant's garb, two of the masons evoke images of the apostles, and Ana's depiction does not diverge much from that of a suffering Madonna (Figure 11). What also stands out is the overall atmosphere of melancholy and sorrow radiating from the builders, for whom the scene of walling up appears to be a source of pain. This interpretation of the ballad, imbued with grief rather than triumphant creative fervour, is quite rare for a period largely dominated by creative triumphalism.

It is difficult not to associate the way the walling up scene is portrayed in the next edition of the Manole ballad (Figure 12) with the volume's editor. Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga, a professor at the University of Bucharest and a distinguished scholar of Romanian literature and comparative studies, maintained close ties with the Romanian Orthodox Church – an exceptional fact within



Figure 10. Illustration for the English-language version of the ballad of Master Manole [*The Story of Manole – A Romanian Legend*], by Micaela Eleutheriade, Bucharest, 1949. Source: *Meșterul Manole* (n.d.), retrieved August 3, 2026, from https://www.postmodernism.ro/mesterul-manole/



Figure 11. Illustration by Anastase Demian for *Balade populare ale romînilor* [Folk Ballads of the Romanians], Editura pentru literatură, Bucharest, 1966. Source: *Meșterul Manole* (n.d.), retrieved August 3, 2026, from https://www.postmodernism.ro/mesterul-manole/



Figure 12. Illustration for the 1976 edition of the ballad *Meşterul Manole*, edited by Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, Editura Albatros, Bucharest. Author: Emil Chendea. Source: *Meşterul Manole* (n.d.), retrieved August 3, 2026, from https://www.postmodernism.ro/mesterul-manole/

the context of Romanian communism – and ultimately ended her life as Sister Benedicta at the Văratec Monastery. The illustrator, seemingly inspired by the editor's spiritual sensibilities, adopted an overtly religious key to depict the legend's main characters. The hieratic poses of Manole and Ana, their biblical stylisation, and the puzzling presence of stars – one of which strongly resembles the Star of Bethlehem – make the illustration resemble a Christmas postcard. Moreover, the gesture of rejection by the Master Builder, who appears to disavow responsibility for the woman's sacrifice, distances the scene from the dramaturgy of the original ballad. While the flowers surrounding Ana – rendered in a kitsch aesthetic – suggest her posthumous glorification, they bear little relation to the ambivalence of sacrificial gestures and the inner turmoil of the ballad's protagonists.

In Teodor Bogoi's illustration for the volume *Monastirea Argeşului. Balade populare româneşti* (1984), the treatment of the balladic theme is highly synthetic – almost schematic – and although it accompanies a collection of folk texts, it diverges significantly from traditional folkloristic interpretations (Figure 13). The composition evokes a Renaissance tableau: the Artist, pensive and troubled, occupies the foreground; Ana, depicted in a dynamic pose suggesting refusal or dissent, takes the middle ground; in the background, builders toil on scaffolding. Each of these three planes, rendered with a bold and expressive line, conveys a distinct symbolic charge: the Artist's creative torment, the drama of a woman sacrificed against her will on the altar of art, and the arduous labour of craftsmen battling the resistance of matter.



Figure 13. Illustration by Teodor Bogoi of *Monastirea Argeşului* in the volume *Balade populare româneşti*, Editura "Ion Creangă", Bucharest, 1984.
Source: *Meşterul Manole* (n.d.), retrieved August 3, 2026, from https://www.postmodernism.ro/mesterul-manole/



Figure 14. Brăduţ Covaliu, *Meşterul Manole* (oil on canvas), 1967.
Source: *Meşterul Manole* (n.d.), retrieved August 3, 2026, from https://www.postmodernism.ro/mesterul-manole/

The topos of the walled-up woman, always associated with the legend of Master Manole, also appears in easel painting and other forms of visual art.

Brăduț Covaliu (1924–1991), a painter whose artistic oeuvre frequently engaged with Cubism, was nonetheless valued by the communist authorities of Romania primarily for his alignment with the tenets of socialist realism. His 1967 oil painting *Meșterul Manole* incorporates the fundamental elements of his characteristic artistic style (Figure 14). The space is densely composed, filled with geometrically stylised figures whose poses suggest hieratic rigidity and a strong dramatic charge, at least in concept, since the execution tends toward schematic representation. Noteworthy is the depiction of the male figures, led by Manole, who face the woman entombed within the wall. Their stances convey sorrow and a nearly religious solemnity, while the woman's expressive figure suggests resistance against the imposed and cruel necessity. Rather than portraying a sacred edifice, Covaliu presents a modernist structure resembling a residential apartment block, which aligns with the dominant 1950s-era interpretation of the balladic motif as a metaphor for a necessary sacrifice made in the name of socialism's grand constructions. The painting thus serves as a tribute – consciously or not – paid by the artist to the ideological narrative imposed by the regime.



Figure. 15. Sabin Bălașa, *Legenda Meșterului Manole*, one of the frescoes created between 1968 and 1978 in the Hall of the Lost Footsteps in the main building of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași.
Source: *Meșterul Manole* (n.d.), retrieved August 3, 2026, from https://www.postmodernism.ro/mesterul-manole/

Sabin Bălaşa (1932–2008), sometimes regarded as the "court painter" of the dictator Ceauşescu, described himself as a creator of cosmic romanticism. This aesthetic also defines his fresco *The Legend of Master Manole*, located in the Hall of Lost Footsteps at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iaşi (Figure 15). The fresco depicts a grief-stricken Manole facing the wall that now contains the image of his beloved wife, walled-up within it. This rendering marks a departure from traditional interpretations, which rather paradoxically reconciled the architect's determination to sacrifice his wife in pursuit of artistic perfection with the enduring anguish caused by that act. In Bălaşa's version, Manole's suffering dominates the entire composition. Particularly striking are the figures crowning the scene – gesturing upward in a pose reminiscent of a Roman salute – who form an arch above Ana's figure, suggesting a promise of ascension or apotheosis. Ana herself, in contrast to the tradition that typically stripped her of any trace of sensuality, is here portrayed with a hint of eroticism. This further accentuates the romantic nature of the couple's relationship, isolated from the folkloric narrative of the ballad.



Figure 16. Ion Stendl, *Legende românești*, fresco in the Hotel București (currently a Radisson Hotel), 1982.
Source: *Meşterul Manole* (n.d.), retrieved August 3, 2026, from https://www.postmodernism.ro/mesterul-manole/

Another painting featuring the motif of the walled-up woman, created by Ion Stendl (b. 1939) using the tempera-on-wall technique, can be found in the Hotel București (currently the Radisson Hotel), which opened in 1982 (Figure 16). The work is titled *Legende românești* [Romanian Legends], a somewhat misleading name, as the mural also includes historical figures – voivodes such as Stephen the Great and Michael the Brave. In the section devoted to legends, located on the right side, we see the figure of Ana, whose walling up is only suggested by symbolic and conventional means, along with Master Manole lying at

her feet, remnants of wooden wings still attached to his shoulders. The scene, rendered in a classical-romantic aesthetic, thus references two threads of the balladic narrative. However, it is not the woman's walling up that carries the greatest dramatic weight, but rather the fall and death of the Artist.



Figure 17. Stamp issued by the Post of the Republic of Moldova, 1997.
Source: *Meșterul Manole* (n.d.), retrieved August 3, 2026, from https://www.postmodernism.ro/mesterul-manole/

Master Manole, this time depicted as a solitary Icarus, also appeared on a postage stamp issued by the Post of the Republic of Moldova in 1997 (Figure 17). It is noteworthy that out of the entire folk tale, this particular episode – featuring Master Manole as the central figure, with no Ana and no walling up scene – was selected for representation. This choice may reflect a (post)modern deconstruction of traditional motifs, drawing on them without regard for the original folk narrative's meaning. However, it may also simply be a manifestation of the enduring legacy of a male-centred interpretation of the legend, in which the walled-up woman is typically relegated to a secondary role – merely a bystander in the drama of creative achievement.

From Radio Plays to Internet Jokes: Pop-cultural Readings of the Topos after 1965

The multiplicity and richness of transformations of the "walled-up woman" myth beyond the traditional arts (understood here as literature, visual arts, theatre, classical music, opera, and film) may come as a surprise. This section will briefly present various practices of myth revitalisation, both from the Ceaușescu era (radio theatre, rock music, and festival performance poetry) and

from the post-1989 period, most of which are now accessible online. These include contemporary music, humorous sketches, cartoons, references in the press, children's board games, and even the branding strategies of companies using the figure of Master Manole.

It is important to note that popular culture cannot be defined in identical terms within communist and capitalist societies. In both cases, however, our aim is to adopt an approach that avoids hierarchical distinctions, dichotomies such as "high (elite, canonical) culture vs. low culture", and value judgments. Given that defining "popular culture" remains a major challenge for cultural anthropologists and is still the subject of unresolved academic debate (see Fiske 1989/2011; Burszta, 2004; Krajewski, 2005), we shall not attempt a theoretical synthesis here, as this would go beyond the scope and limits of this text. Instead, we will refer to a definition that best aligns with our adopted research perspective. This was proposed by Wojciech Burszta, who draws on the work of John Fiske, a foundational figure in the field, emphasising the anthropological dimension of the term: "Popular culture is not so much the culture of artistic objects and images as it is a set of cultural practices through which art permeates everyday customs and living conditions" (Fiske, 1997, p. 175, as cited in Burszta, 2004, p. 46). Burszta later adds:

> Popular culture is a form of praxis, but so too is the effort to describe and interpret it. I refer here to the understanding of the term as the totality of cultural actions, both individual and collective, that constitute human social existence […] Culture with the adjective "popular" is not a coherent whole that can be objectively divided into separate fields. It is rather a collection of events and processes that can be captured discursively. […] Popular culture is not a system, a set of beliefs, or a set of values; nor is it a coherent "way of life", but at most an element of such a way of life". (Burszta 2004, pp. 47–48)

By adopting this perspective, we avoid equating popular culture with specific genres, which would be a difficult and problematic task (cf. Krajewski 2005, pp. 23–24). It also allows us to avoid reducing pop culture solely to a product of the culture industry – a view that is not always accurate and is often unfair, as it implies mass production, the maximisation of profit, and viewing audiences merely as consumers. In turn, we also avoid conflating the terms "popular culture" and "mass culture". Viewing popular culture as a form of cultural activity embedded in social existence allows us to interpret all the artistic practices analysed in this text – those using specific media – as reflections of the tastes and interests of cultural participants, who, in the view of the cited anthropologists, are also its co-creators. We have selected manifestations of artistic activity that are closely connected to everyday human experiences and are disseminated through the most common and accessible communication channels – radio, television, press, and the internet (which now encompasses all three). We will examine the strategies adopted by pop culture creators, asking to what extent pop culture replicates the patterns established by so-called elites and to what

extent it generates its own. How much of it is imposed by institutions and media, and how much stems from grassroots initiatives rooted in specific tastes, customs, and habits? And how – if at all – does it engage with the socio-cultural imaginary in which the legend of the Argeș monastery plays a defined role and holds a dominant interpretation?

Even though we will be treating popular culture as an autonomous phenomenon, we cannot overlook the fact that it can also serve as a tool of ideological domination – something particularly evident during the Ceaușescu regime[28]. For the purposes of our analysis, the period following 1971 is of key importance. This is when, after several years of relative liberalisation, the dictator introduced the so-called "July Theses", which announced heightened state control over culture and marked the beginning of the era of so-called national communism and Romanian isolationism. Crucially for our context, the July Theses imposed "a nationalist ideological stance in art and the promotion of mass culture, carried out particularly through festival forms of expression such as ideologised folklore[29] or light music" (Preda, 2017). Artistic representations of national myths – those contained, according to George Călinescu's canonical *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [The History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to the Present] (Călinescu, 1941) in four foundational texts: *Trajan and Dochia*, *Zburătorul*, *Mioriț*a, and *The Monastery at Argeș* – were in alignment with the Party's ideological line.

Communist mass media, operating under the strict control of censorship, provided a culturally domesticated and institutionalised message. At times, this "massification" (understood simply as "popularisation") had a positive impact, as in the case of radio plays. Although such artistic endeavours are difficult to classify unequivocally as part of popular culture, we will devote some attention to them due to the nature of the medium, which gave them widespread popu-

[28] In our study, we decided to mark the year 1965, when Ceaușescu came to power, as a turning point, because we believe that during the earlier Stalinist period, the dominant form of culture was mass culture, used by the totalitarian regime to disseminate ideology. It was only with the early 1960s thaw that Romanian society became open to Western trends, also enabling grassroots initiatives and freer circulation of popular content among audiences. All of this, of course, occurred under conditions of censorship and top-down cultural policy, which, however, tolerated to some extent artistic activities considered by public opinion to be relatively autonomous.

[29] This primarily refers to the national festival *Cântarea României* ("In praise of Romania"), which debuted in 1976 and existed until 1989. It was established by a decision of the Council for Socialist Culture and Education and aimed to open the path to artistic creation for the working masses of Romania. On the festival stage, representatives of various artistic fields performed: painters, sculptors, poets, folk artists, musicians, writers, sports dance ensembles, and so on – on both professional and amateur levels (emphasising the egalitarian character of the event), from among whom the best creators in the country were selected. All of this was intended to reflect the wealth and progress of Ceaușescu's Romania and constituted a carefully staged spectacle in honour of the leader and the regime.

larity and accessibility – even in rural areas – in contrast to traditional theatre performances, which are discussed elsewhere in this volume.

Radio plays, which first appeared in interwar Romania, remained popular after World War II. It was not until the late 1950s that the rapidly developing medium of television began to eclipse radio. From the outset, radio plays were intended to serve both entertainment and educational purposes. These initiatives can thus be seen as institutional attempts to use mechanisms of mass culture to disseminate high culture and make it accessible to a broad audience. The plays featured renowned and respected actors, were professionally produced, and maintained high production standards. Their repertoires consisted mainly of adaptations of classical dramatic works. In the case of the Master Manole legend, radio plays were produced based on three of the best-known dramatic texts: *Meșterul Manole* by Lucian Blaga (1967, dir. Dan Nasta), *Meșterul* by Adrian Maniu (1973, adapted and directed by Constantin Moruzan), and *Meșterul Manole* by Octavian Goga (1981, radio adaptation by Leonid Efremov, dir. Cristian Munteanu). In 1970, Titel Constantinescu also adapted the ballad itself from Alecsandri's collection for radio. These adaptations did not provoke controversy, as they aimed to faithfully reproduce the literary source material. Of course, due to the time constraints of radio formats, the texts had to be appropriately condensed, though this did not compromise the integrity of the originals. For example, in the adaptation of Goga's *Meșterul Manole* (Goga, 1928), the focus is placed on the relationship between the two main characters – Ana and the sculptor Andrei Galea – while less essential dialogue is omitted.

The most prominent and widely attended phenomenon of popular culture under the Ceaușescu regime was without a doubt the *Flacăra* [Flame Literary Circle], active between 1973 and 1985. It was founded by poet Adrian Păunescu, who, after being appointed editor-in-chief of the weekly Flacăra, began organising a series of performance events with sung poetry at the Ion Creangă Theatre. It can be said that this was a grassroots initiative emerging from the needs of young artists and their audiences[30], who flocked to the concerts in large numbers. In addition to drawing on the classics of Romanian poetry (especially Mihai Eminescu and Nicolae Labiș)[31], a significant portion of the repertoire featured Păunescu's own poetry. One of his most popular poems was

[30] See Bogusławska & Grębecka (2010). To understand the crowds and emotions generated by the Flacăra concerts throughout Romania, one should watch the film footage shot in 1982–1983 at the request of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Union by director Cornel Diaconu (Andrei Păunescu, 2020). The film, ultimately banned by the authorities and secretly edited by the director in 1985, was not released to the public until 2008.

[31] This process of appropriating patterns developed by the elites and adapting them to the sensibilities of the mass audience would itself merit separate analysis. In Romanian society, there still exists a blind cult of Eminescu, associated with the most precious and refined national values. *Flacăra* most likely contributed to the consolidation of certain cultural models within Romanian society.

Ana lui Manole [Ana of Manole], written in 1980, which was set to music and performed by Mirela Atudorei (Păunescu, 1980/2019).

Ana from the legend appears as the lyrical subject of Păunescu's poem. She laments to Manole and the other craftsmen who walled her into the monastery walls, stating that although they did the labour, it is she who makes the ultimate sacrifice: "It is I who die here / I am your offering, I am the one who perishes" (Păunescu, 1980/2019, p. 158). While they embark on their journey to paradise, she remains eternally imprisoned within the cold, unfeeling bricks: "And I remain here forever / Trapped between cold bricks, in despair" (Păunescu, 1980/2019, p. 158). She adds that her death is the result of a "foolish bet": "You don't know that I know / That I die because of a foolish bet" (Păunescu, 1989/2019, p. 159), and mocks Manole's idea of crafting wooden wings. Mirela Atudorei's musical arrangement is fully in line with the poem's emotional content: minor harmonies, a plaintive female voice, and a sparse musical setting accompanied only by guitar enhance the drama and authenticity of the performance.

Păunescu's interpretation is by no means groundbreaking; it fits into a broader trend of poetic engagement with the topos, particularly in the work of Romanian neomodernists. Ana's perspective had already begun to emerge in their writing. However, this should not be mistaken for a feminist turn in Romanian literature (which did not begin until after 1989), but rather as a result of a shifting interpretative focus allowed by the poetic liberalisation of the 1960s. This period fostered greater emotional expressiveness and encouraged addressing difficult experiences, moral dilemmas, suffering, and absurd existential choices – topics unwelcome during the height of socialist realism. Moreover, the communist period saw the emergence of more women writers who naturally gravitated towards the figure of Ana to explore themes of unhappy love or suffering through sacrifice. In doing so, they drew upon the well-known Romanian cultural symbolism of the "creative sacrifice" myth, which allowed them to craft a clear and emotionally charged poetic message.

Rock Music

The legendary Romanian rock band Phoenix[32], founded in Timișoara in 1962 during a brief period of relative liberalisation that temporarily opened Romania to Western influences, including rock music, decided to propose their own interpretation of the legend of Master Manole. Rock music, subversive by nature, quickly fell under suspicion and censorship, particularly after 1971, when the country's cultural policy took a nationalistic turn and censorship institutions were reinforced. Nicu Covaci, Phoenix's leader and guitarist, recalls in his autobiographical book that Ceaușescu's July Theses directly influenced his artistic

[32] For a detailed analysis of the rock opera discussed here, see Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev (2023a).

choices: "[Ceaușescu] wants folklore? Then folklore he shall get! From that moment on, I immersed myself in studying authentic, traditional folklore – ritual music, pre-Christian music, music that once governed time and life" (Covaci, 1994, p. 219). This led to the 1972 release of the album *Cei ce ne-au dat nume* [Those Who Gave Us Our Name], inspired by Romanian traditional music and national myths (one song was titled *Negru-Vodă*, for instance), marking Phoenix as pioneers of Romanian ethno-rock. Around the same time, the band conceived a far more ambitious project – a rock opera inspired by the legend of Master Manole. However, this initiative was suppressed at the outset, and the libretto written by Victor Cârcu (2014) was reportedly "lost" by the censorship office of the County Committee for Culture and Socialist Education in Timișoara. Most likely, the authorities were not sure how to deal with the text – on the one hand, it aligned ideologically with the party's line (Cârcu stated he deliberately removed any potentially religious references; see Cârcu, 2014, p. 11), but on the other hand, the very format of a "rock opera" raised concerns. Rock was associated with the "decadent West", and such a musico-dramatic hybrid could be a vehicle for subversive strategies that might influence the content's message and, by extension, the behaviour of (surely numerous) potential listeners. Phoenix was forced to abandon the opera project but did release the piece *Meșterul Manole, uvertură* [Master Manole, Overture] in 1973 on an extended play record, accompanied by two older tracks. Curiously, and still without explanation, the libretto manuscript resurfaced in the early 1990s in the possession of Phoenix's lead vocalist Mircea Baniciu (Covaci, 1994, p. 237).

In 2013, Josef Kappl, Phoenix's former bassist, revived the rock opera idea by composing music to Victor Cârcu's (2014) libretto. He enlisted the Banat Philharmonic and the "Ion Românul" Choir for the project. This production was part of a broader campaign to promote Timișoara as a candidate for the European Capital of Culture (a title the city eventually secured), and the symphonic rock opera premiered on 30 November 2013, at the Banat Philharmonic. Nearly ninety musicians performed on stage, including the Ion Românul Choir and the Symphony Orchestra conducted by Radu Popa. Guest artists included Mircea Baniciu, former Phoenix drummer Ovidiu Lipan Țăndărică, mezzo-soprano Mihaela Ișpan (as Miruna), and baritone Dan Patacă (as Manole). It's important to note that the event took the form of a concert (with the orchestra on stage) rather than a traditional operatic performance. There were no actors, dancers, stage design, or lighting effects, so the stage directions from the libretto were not used as scenic cues. This absence created a space of imagined possibilities – never realised in production but still contributing to the libretto's atmospheric depth.

Cârcu's (2014) libretto was inspired by the canonical/literary version of the ballad by Alecsandri and a lesser-known 1883 version by Gheorghe Dem Teodorescu, reportedly collected from a singer in the Brăila region and believed to be closer to the original oral variant. The libretto also draws on Lucian Blaga's classic drama, featuring a character named Miruna (referencing Mira, "the

bringer of peace") and the *Trei Stihii* [Three Spirits], supernatural entities who persuade Manole to make a sacrifice (analogous to the character Bogumil in Blaga's play). The most significant deviation in Cârcu's version from the traditional text is the omission of the final scene. There is no confrontation between Prince Negru-Vodă and the craftsmen, nor does Manole leap from the roof of the monastery. However, the master's death is implied in the closing passages of the libretto. The text was published in a bilingual Romanian-German edition by the Heidelberg WaRo-Verlag (Cârcu, 2014).

The overall message of the libretto does not differ significantly from traditional interpretations of the legend. It emphasises the tragic dimension of creation, which demands sacrifice, and the central theme remains Manole's internal struggle. The man is portrayed as a creative being, while the woman's role is to offer support and self-sacrifice. The musical layer likewise draws from predictable sources: numerous folk-inspired motifs evoke the ballad's folkloric roots, and the rock passages are reminiscent of harmonies found in symphonic metal – a genre known for its emphasis on narrative and text, which, like rock opera, fits into the tradition of conceptual albums. The project's strongest revitalising force lies in the intermedial space it creates – a space in which literature, classical and rock music, and operatic and rock vocals interact. All of this comes together as a cohesive whole. The concert was met with enthusiastic acclaim from the audience at the Banat Philharmonic (Varga, 2014, para. 2). Since its premiere, the concert has been performed three more times: again in Timişoara in 2018, as part of Romania's Great Union Centennial celebrations (with the opera's staging aligning with the event's ideological framework), at the TAM-TAM Festival in Braşov in 2022, and at the Ploieşti Philharmonic in June 2023.

Another rock band that engaged with the legend of the Monastery at Argeş is *Celelalte Cuvinte* [The Remaining Words], founded in 1981 in Timişoara. Their debut album from 1987 features the track *Fântâna suspinelor* [The Fountain of Sighs] (CEA MAI BUNĂ MUZICĂ ROMÂNEASCĂ, 2015), which can be classified as progressive rock: the piece is nearly ten minutes long, stylistically diverse, with shifting rhythmic and harmonic patterns, and combines electric instruments with acoustic flutes. These flutes bring a "folk" quality to the piece, echoing the musical approach taken by Phoenix. Progressive rock often embraces complex texts with philosophical, religious, or mystical themes, and this is also the case here; the titular fountain is the spring said to have emerged where Manole fell to his death. The lyrics speak of a "source that carries the weight of experience, containing salty (implied as being from tears), warm, and bitter water. The track begins with a spoken-word segment, setting a foreboding tone that introduces the ominous tale of the spring – a haunting reminder of a tragedy from centuries past. The next vocal section adopts a different lyrical mode, plaintive and melodic, with a male voice that reaches falsetto at times. The lyrics explicitly mention "a wall that appeared in daylight" and "the crying and sobbing still echoing from the monastery Manole desired, and beside the wall he raised, the fountain of sighs flows, overflowing with tears".

The band Celelalte Cuvinte only alludes to the ballad. They never mention Manole, Ana, or Curtea de Argeș by name. The central metaphor remains the spring, presented as a material testament to sacrifice and the suffering it entails. The track is musically sophisticated – instrumentally rich, surprising, suspenseful, and influenced by the best traditions of rock.

After 1990, music undoubtedly remained the pop-cultural medium most inclined to engage with the topos of the walled-up woman. This was not limited to folk music[33], still frequently used to perform the ballad in traditional settings (a folk singer in traditional dress reciting the ballad to the accompaniment of instruments like the cimbalom), but extended also to rock, alternative, pop, *muzică lăutărească*, and even *manele* (the Romanian cultural counterpart to Bulgarian *chalga* or Polish *disco polo*). The ballad's form and prominent prosodic qualities likely make it especially suitable for musical adaptation, just as its alignment with the structure of a tragedy explains its appeal for literary dramas and stage productions (Bădescu, 1986, p. 103). The genre seems inherently connected to music.

The fusion of words and music allows each piece to affect its audience both emotionally and rhetorically. In these cases, music becomes the dominant medium, adapting the literary text through its own expressive tools. On the debut album *Oferta specială* [Special Offer] by the band Supermarket, released in 2000, we find a track titled *Mănăstirea Argeșului* [The Monastery of Argeș]. The band's name, an ironic reference to the free market and Romania's growing capitalist economy, may be easier to explain than its inspiration for referencing the ballad. Perhaps the intent was a tongue-in-cheek marketing ploy, or maybe a surprising musical take on a legendary text? In this piece, isolated lines from the ballad are sung (and even rapped at one point) over lively, upbeat funk music, without any nod to traditional Romanian folk sounds. It may also be a sort of homage to Phoenix's 1973 rock adaptation of the same legend.

Alternative / Jazz Music

The *Ana & Rozafa* musical project (curated by Diana Gheorghiu) is an initiative encompassing a series of concerts organised by the Union of Interpretive Mu-

[33] It may be regarded as part of popular culture, as noted by Simona Ștefănescu, who studied manifestations of "traditional culture" in communist-era Romania: "In this paper, we use the term traditional culture as the equivalent of the English term folk culture. In British cultural studies, which provide the framework for our research, folk culture refers to a distinct and significant part of the concept of popular culture. What is emphasised here is the continuity between folk culture and popular culture. The concept of popular culture, in the broader sense employed in cultural studies, does not denote what lies outside the reach of elite culture, but rather what is produced by and for the people, including the products, artifacts, and practices of traditional culture that constitute recognised forms of human expression. From this perspective, traditional culture is part of popular culture" (S. Ștefănescu, 2010, pp. 235–236).

sical Creation of Romanian Musicians (*Uniunea de Creație Interpretativă a Muzicienilor din România*) in collaboration with the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (*Administrația Fondului Cultural Național*). Project partners include the Rrok JAKAJ Association from Albania, the Municipal Museum of Curtea de Argeș, the National Museum Complex Curtea Domnească in Târgoviște, and the Mioritics Association. The project featured six festival concerts in Romania (July–August 2022) and two in Albania (September 2022).

The project idea was born in 2021 during a visit by Romanian music organisers to Rozafa Castle in Shkodra, where they learned of the Albanian legend of Rozafa, often associated with the Romanian variant of the tale, though the Romanian title usually emphasises the male figure or the act of constructing the monastery. The Romanian organisers, therefore, saw the potential for a meaningful project that could broaden public awareness of the ballad's content. A key objective was to draw attention to female figures and their role in the narrative of walling up.

It is worth noting that for all members of the Ana & Rozafa project, the legend and its foundation sacrifice topos served as a pretext for drawing on traditional music from Romania and the broader Balkan region interpreted innovatively yet still within the cultural framework set by folklore. Interestingly, none of the performers directly used the original ballad text, even though such a strategy could have opened new avenues for interpretation, dialogue between the Romanian and Albanian versions, and reflection on both their similarities and differences.

Another compelling project is the bilingual Romanian–English concept album *The immured woman*, created by Francesca Jandasek (2018) in collaboration with Dan Istrate and Jessika Soza. The 40-minute album contains eight tracks intended to be listened to in the sequence suggested by the artist, as only then do they form a cohesive whole. As the title suggests, the focus shifts from Manole to the walled-up woman, Ana. The central composition, *The Legend of the Walled-up Woman*, subtly but powerfully reframes the narrative. The 11-minute piece features a male narrator telling the legend in English, in his own words, accompanied by an evocative instrumental background. The song ends with a pointed question: "How, then, should we remember this legend? Should we remember the builder of the monastery who sacrificed his pregnant woman, or the one who was sacrificed […]? The legend of Master Manole and the Argeș Monastery, or the legend of the walled-up woman?". These questions challenge the listener to consider how collective memory works, and how dominant narratives may impose a certain understanding of history on entire generations, often excluding the voices of the weak, the marginalised, or those silenced in patriarchal social arrangements.

The next track, *Shadow*, features a recurring poem by Jandasek herself (Jandasek, 2018), and also refers to Romanian cultural memory. The folk belief in walling up a person's shadow into a building's foundation to ensure its durability inspired the artist to reflect on her own fears and personal shadows. Just as shadows in folk tradition ensure the structure's stability, her inner shadows support the architecture of her body and spirit. She attempts to name and

trace them, questioning whether she generates them herself, and whether these shadows will be what remains of her, offering a kind of immortality.

Francesca Jandasek, a Czech-born interdisciplinary artist based mainly in the United States, but collaborating internationally (particularly drawn to Eastern European cultures), presents a deeply modern and poignant reinterpretation of the foundation sacrifice topos. Though her version draws on the Romanian legend of the Argeș Monastery, the album's concept can be seen as a universal meditation on the walled-up woman. It centres on female suffering, fear, and the absurdity of ritual sacrifice, while also showing acute awareness of the mechanisms that shape shared cultural spaces, invoking questions of memory and the ways in which cultural narratives are preserved and transmitted.

Her interpretation is particularly compelling for the way it uncovers an underexplored potential of the Romanian "creation myth" – namely, its implications for women as creators and artists facing their own dilemmas. Whereas traditional readings focus on Manole the creator, here Ana's sacrifice gains generative power – she seems to reclaim agency. Can a woman achieve immortality not only through childbirth, but also through artistic creation? Can these two realms be equated, or even compared? In Jandasek's vision, the ideas of "suffering" and "sacrifice" are replaced by the vitality of creation. Echoes of Horace's *non omnis moriar* and the internal drive to leave something behind in the mortal world resonate.

Jandasek's case is also significant because she is the only foreign artist among those presented here. Unbound by the symbolic structures of Romanian culture, she brings a fresh and original perspective.

Pop Music

The remaining musical pieces we identified are no longer parts of cohesive musical projects; rather, they are individual songs drawing on motifs from the legend. Unsurprisingly, pop and manele music frequently evoke the theme of unhappy love and the suffering it entails – genres that inherently rely on straightforward emotional associations. In the 2016 song *Ana și Manole* [Ana and Manole], popular Romanian dance-pop singer Caitlyn (RotonMusicTV, 2016) sings of her "enslaved love", comparing herself to Ana and her lover to Manole, who "walled up years, days, hours, and the love of his beloved", turning her into a wounded "prisoner of love". The music video has nearly three million views on YouTube, with many commenters praising the emotional depth of the metaphor (easily recognisable to all Romanian listeners), though others criticise the lyrics for their grammatical flaws and lack of coherence.

In a 2022 manele track titled *Meștera Manole* [Mistress Manole], performer Cocoș de la Călărași [The Rooster from Călărași] (Balkanika TV, 2022) introduces a bold interpretive shift by replacing Manole with a female figure, "Meștera Manole" (the noun changes to the feminine form, while the proper name re-

mains the same). However, this inversion is not meant to empower women; rather, it becomes a rhetorical device to accuse her of ruining the relationship, lying, and being materialistic: "I build, and you tear down / What I loved for so many years / You destroyed for money" (Balkanika TV, 2022).

Critics of manele – a controversial genre in Romanian society – often accuse its artists of misogyny and the objectification of women, both lyrically and visually. This song is no exception and reflects a common manele trope: depicting women as unfaithful and calculating, and men as victims of heartbreak. The ballad metaphor is used only to emphasise the woman's destructive impact on the relationship – disregarding the original legend's symbolism, where Manole is not the destroyer of the church walls but the ultimate embodiment of sacrifice. When Manole is cast as a woman, the figure morphs into a femme fatale. Thus, the legend is reduced to simplified binaries – construction versus destruction – and shaped by a misogynistic interpretive lens.

Lăutărească Music

An unexpected adaptation of the legend is found in the song Meșteru Manole from the 1998 album *Dumbala Dumba* by the band Taraf de Haidouks. This group, known for performing traditional *muzică lăutărească*[34], hails from Clejani in southern Romania. They were introduced to wider (especially Western) audiences by Swiss ethnomusicologist Laurent Aubert and later promoted by Belgian musicians Stéphane Karo and Michel Winter. The song *Meșteru Manole* is performed by guest vocalist Viorica, a Romani singer, and is musically haunting – largely due to her emotive vocal style. It features a characteristic Romani lamenting voice, sometimes bordering on wailing, evoking sorrow and hardship. In this version, the speaker is the walled-up woman herself, mother to a son named Ivanică, who weeps bloody tears at the thought of her fate. She sings of Manole and the masons of Poienari (a village near Curtea de Argeș), who entomb anything living into the monastery's foundations. Despite her tragic role, the woman retains agency: at the song's end, she calls upon God – whom she addresses as her brother – to take away the builders' ladder, forcing them to leap to their deaths from the monastery roof. This motif of a curse cast by the walled-up woman appears in local variants of the ballad from the Drăgășani-Argeș and Gura Teghii regions (Taloș, 1973, p. 243), although it remains largely unknown to the average Romanian listener.

[34] *Lăutari* (sing. lăutar) were once itinerant folk musicians; today, the term refers to professional musicians performing live at social events (weddings, christenings, funerals) and in restaurants. *Muzică lăutărească* ("lăutari music") is typically played by performers of Roma origin. Traditional instruments include the violin, accordion, cimbalom, and clarinet, though modern ensembles often use the synthesiser as well. A characteristic feature of lăutari performances is the so-called "dedications", in which men tip the musicians to request a specific song dedicated to a chosen person (a loved one, family member, etc.).

Satire and Comedy Skits

The legend of Master Manole also possesses substantial satirical potential. This has been tapped into as early as the 1990s, notably by the Romanian comedy troupe Divertis, which, in 1998, staged a sketch titled *Legenda Meșterului Manole* [The Legend of Master Manole] (Grupul Divertis, 1998). This was by no means an adaptation or reinterpretation of the ballad itself, but rather a use of its elements for comic effect. The sketch served as a satire of Romanian politics and society in the 1990s. It included the names of real-life politicians and businessmen who had amassed wealth under the conditions of "wild capitalism". It mocked corruption, government incompetence, the failure of effective political reform, the collapse of industry, trade, and agriculture, rising unemployment and poverty – as well as the advertising, loans, and credit that fuelled the illusion of a better life. In the skit, Manole "walls in bank after bank" in an effort to fund new construction sites – something not difficult in the 1990s, when the construction sector was unregulated and plagued by corruption and cowboy builders. Fully understanding the jokes and ironic references requires a detailed knowledge of the political and social context of that period.

In a similar vein, the figure of Master Manole continues to appear in modern satirical media – particularly in commentary on unfinished, problematic, or crumbling construction projects (a common occurrence in Romania's infrastructural landscape; see, e.g., Foltea, 2023). The image of Master Manole is also used by the construction industry itself, where he serves as a symbol of craftsmanship and durability. Numerous construction companies bear the legendary builder's name as a marker of quality workmanship.

At times, the legend becomes the premise for internet jokes or memes, such as:

> Ana: How do I look today, darling?
>
> Manole: With that look, your success is set in stone! (Smarandache, 2015, p. 116; or see other humorous illustrations and comics inspired by the theme)

The figure of Master Manole is used in a similar way in contemporary satirical press.

The ballad also served as a pretext for popular comedian Sorin Tănase to parody the Hungarian accent in the Romanian language. The performer, a native of Baia Mare and a speaker of Hungarian, delivers this stylisation convincingly. The parody does not simply consist of reading the ballad with the appropriate accent: Tănase recounts the legend in his own words, speaking Romanian but incorporating Hungarian-derived regionalisms to capture the speech style associated in Romania with Hungarians or with dialects from Romanian-Hungarian border regions. He also uses musical fragments linked to the region. In doing so, he employs classic humour based on linguistic comedy and the playful use of cultural stereotypes. The monologue also contains an element of surprise, as the audience cannot predict how the text will be altered, while the evocation of familiar linguis-

tic stereotypes and cultural imagery provokes laughter. It is worth emphasising that this parody is not aimed at Hungarians; rather, it fits into popular humour strategies often used in Romanian media that highlight (auto)stereotypes associated with particular regions of Transylvania, Moldavia, and Wallachia.

The fact that the ballad of Master Manole is used in cabaret sketches, the press, and satirical cartoons proves that the legend is widely known – meeting a key requirement for generating comic effect. The creators draw on a shared cultural code shaped by years of education and reinforced by an institutionally imposed canon. The original text is not treated here as a national myth or a repository of traditional national values, but as a source of characters symbolising unambiguous attitudes, preserved in the cultural imagination in such a way that they can be used without further explanation to ridicule a phenomenon, draw attention to certain aspects of it, or simply construct a situational joke.

Board Games

The final example of how the legend of Master Manole can be adapted in popular culture that we discuss in this text is a children's board game produced by D-TOYS[35]. As stated by the producer, one of the reasons to buy this game for children is "the opportunity to tell them the legend of Master Manole and, in line with their cognitive abilities, to talk about values such as love, family, sacrifice, and perfection". The aim of the game is to free Ana from the church wall. Each player receives a small hammer and takes on the role of Manole, who – unlike in the ballad – wishes to save his wife. In this way, we can "give a happy ending to this sad story".

It must be admitted that this rather controversial entertainment for the youngest not only appears to support harmful stereotypes present in culture (woman = victim – man = rescuer / woman = passive, powerless – man = active, brave) but also reinforces problematic thought patterns, suggesting, on the one hand, that true love requires the greatest sacrifices, and on the other, that an exceptional work demands the highest price, thus making it an act that generates suffering. We should also note that the description of the game itself is addressed primarily to boys, making it a toy that promotes rigid assignments of children to specific social roles.

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After 1990, when the postmodern paradigm firmly took root in Romanian culture, imposing a decentralised, fragmented, and incoherent image of the world, there was an ever-greater diversity in the ways the legend was used, a multi-

[35] See: https://business.roovi.com/romanian-game-the-manole-master/p/ and https://www.roovi.ro/joc-romanesc-mesterul-manole/p/

plicity of media, and a change in the registers in which it functioned. During the communist era, there was no room for humour, jokes, or parody; media conveyed a unified, solemn interpretation of the ballad as a "national treasure", a story about sacrifice for a work being created, sacrifice for love, and the particular "philosophical disposition" of Romanians. Furthermore, all media were subject to censorship, making it difficult to speak of artistic autonomy.

The post-revolutionary relaxation of constraints allowed for a change in approach to myths and canonical texts. Gradually, free play with tradition, the mixing of styles, and artistic strategies became possible. The topos was also disseminated across the media, and not only through the diverse artistic endeavours already discussed, but also through dozens of grassroots initiatives made possible by contemporary technology. On YouTube, one can find dozens of videos drawing on the legend (animated collages, photographs or video footage from visits to the monastery of Curtea de Argeș), accounts of the church's history, school performances, and folk ensembles reenacting the ballad's plot.

An analysis of the manifestations of the ballad of Master Manole in contemporary Romanian popular culture suggests that, in most cases, its message has been trivialised, reduced to what is at times a frightening, and at times comical or absurd, "walling up story". A frequent phenomenon is the instrumental use of a text considered the "essence of the Romanian soul", without any critical commentary attempting to explain how a product of folk culture was transformed into a national myth. The genres that seem to treat the subject most seriously are those regarded as more demanding for audiences and more ambitious in formal terms (such as the symphonic rock opera, jazz, or alternative music cited earlier), as though a form of music perceived as more complex required more sophisticated content.

In capitalist reality, the commercial potential of the symbolism found in the text has also been recognised – the "Master Manole" brand does not need to be built from scratch; its symbolic capital can be used without cost, which may facilitate a business launch and potentially translate into a better product.

The Topos as Part of the Canon: The Ballad in School Textbooks (1863 –1948)[36]

The ballad of Master Manole has been present in Romanian curricula from the very beginning, which, following Alina Pamfil and Ioana Tămăian, we date to

[36] See also Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev (2024a). The materials were collected during library and archival queries at The Institute of Linguistics and Literary History of The Romanian Academy of Sciences "Sextil Pușcariu", The Library of Babeș-Bolyai University and The Library of The Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca (Romania). During my research, I also used the online collections of the BCU in Cluj and the digiteca "arcanum". I would like also to thank the researcher Ioana Tămăian for her invaluable help in gathering the right source texts.

1864 – the year when the first school programs written exclusively in the Latin alphabet appeared (Pamfil & Tămăian, 2005, p. 12).

The text *Negru Vodă si Mannole seaŭ Mînœstirea Arg̃esĭuluĭ (bœladœ)* [The Black Voivode and Manole or Argeş Monastery (ballad)] in Alecsandri's version already appears in the first anthology of Romanian texts (*Lepturarĭŭ rumînesc*, vol. 2, 1863) compiled by Aron Pumnul and published in Vienna in 1862–1865 in the so-called transitional alphabet (*alfabet de tranziţie*). Some of the texts in the collection are still in Cyrillic, while others are already written in the Latin alphabet. Pumnul's anthology became the foundation for the creation of school programs and textbooks later adopted in the most important educational centres at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, both in the United Principalities of Romania (later the Kingdom of Romania) and in Transylvania, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (including the Greek Catholic gymnasium in Blaj, the central Transylvanian hub shaping Romanian identity, as well as the Greek Catholic gymnasium in Beiuş, the Saint Sava College in Bucharest, the central girls' school in Bucharest, and the Greek Catholic gymnasium in Braşov). It constituted the first attempt at establishing a distinct canon of Romanian literature.

Vasile Alecsandri and his editions of folk legends account for a significant portion of the texts published in the first textbooks, the so-called *cărţi de citire* [readers][37]. This attests to the author's prominent position in the emerging literary canon. The Alecsandri texts most frequently reprinted are those capable of shaping students' patriotic attitudes and national identity: works containing idyllic descriptions of Romanian nature, as well as references to the heroic deeds of Moldavian and Wallachian rulers (including Stephen the Great, Constantin Brâncoveanu, and Michael the Brave), *haiduci* (Bujor, Corbea, Pintea), and fairy-tale characters (the zmei, zînele, and Făt-Frumos). The biography of Alecsandri himself, along with his patriotic stance during the 1848 Spring of Nations, was also significant. The ballad of the Monastery at Argeş, when it does appear in the readers, is usually presented precisely in its historical context (see Adamescu, 1899, p. 91). According to the 1895 school program drawn up by Virgil Oniţiu, the author of widely used language and literature textbooks at the turn of the century (see Ghibu, 1913), the ballad appears in the list of works for recitation in the second year of gymnasium, as well as in the reading list for the fourth and eighth years (in the latter case, as a written assignment on the theme of the foundation sacrifice in three Romanian folk ballads: *The Monastery at Argeş*, *Master Manole*, and *Zidirea podului dela Narta* [The Building of the Bridge over Narta] – an Aromanian variant)[38].

[37] In addition to *cărţi de citire*, in the 19th century pupils also had at their disposal, at earlier stages of education, so-called *bucvare* and *abecedare* (primers), which served mainly to teach reading.

[38] Even today, some Romanian anthologies of folk ballads publish textual variants under different titles; see, for example, *Balade populare româneşti* (2018), where *The Monastery in Argeş* is Alecsandri's version, *Master Manole* is a piece from the Făgăraş

The development of Romanian didactic literature in the 19th century is inextricably linked to the historical-political context of the era. The basis for learning to read and write was provided by religious texts, and the next step was the analysis of literary works whose content was intended to shape students' patriotic and moral attitudes. In such conditions, the ballad *The Monastery at Argeş* had to be read from a historical perspective as evidence of the continuity and greatness of the Principality of Wallachia, and from a spiritual and aesthetic perspective as evidence of the "specificity" and uniqueness of the Romanian spirit, capable of sacrifice in the name of higher ideals.

This approach to teaching literature was continued in the interwar period, as indicated by the analysis of major textbooks used at various educational levels at that time (see Adamescu & Dragomirescu, 1921, Adamescu & Dragomirescu, 1925, 1929a, 1929b; Selăgian et al., 1914; Bogdan-Duică, 1924a, 1924b). A good point of reference is provided by Gheorghe Adamescu's popular textbooks for grades III–VI (Adamescu & Dragomirescu 1921, Adamescu & Dragomirescu 1925, 1929a, 1929b) of coeducational secondary schools. These textbooks are descriptive in nature, corresponding to the teaching methodology of the period, and in form they resemble a combination of literary history and a poetics manual. The curriculum for each grade included the reading of works belonging to folk literature (*literatura poporană*) and old writing (*literatura veche*), which were predominantly poetic works: *doinas*, pastels, and songs. Importantly, the division used by Adamescu signals a distinction still present in Romanian literary studies today between folk literature (*literatura populară*) and belles-lettres (*literatura cultă),* a division incorporated into the curriculum both before and after 1989.

Based on the materials analysed, we know that in the interwar period the ballad of the Monastery at Argeş also appeared on the list of works for the baccalaureate exam, as it is included in Mihail Dragomirescu's 1927 textbook preparing students for the exam according to the official curriculum. There we find an interpretation that has been repeated in various forms to the present day: "Through the monastery at Argeş, the poet succeeded in conveying one of the most sublime ideas in belles-lettres. To attain his artistic ideal, Master Manole, with a clear conscience, sacrifices all that he holds dearest in life (his wife and child), while at the same time this very artistic ideal condemns him to death". (Dragomirescu, 1927, p. 25).

From the outset, exegetes thus imposed two main interpretive directions: the historical context and the theme of the foundation sacrifice, associated with the figure of Master Manole as someone capable of the greatest sacrifices in the name of realising an artistic ideal.

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region recorded by Ion Taloş, and *The Bridge in Arta* comes from the *Anthology of Aromanian Poetry* compiled by Hristu Cândroveanu.

Textbooks in the Stalinist and National Communist Periods: in the Service of Ideology

During the Stalinist period, Alecsandri's name was placed on the list of banned authors, along with the works of Eliade and Blaga. At the time, literature glorifying the greatness of the Soviet Union, the ideals of international communism, and the "new man" was promoted. After 1953, during the so-called de-Stalinisation and superficial thaw, certain classics were rehabilitated, including Alecsandri, and Romanian folk literature was reintroduced, selecting works that could be incorporated into the so-called "combative current". These were mainly texts describing the deeds of great Romanian heroes rebelling against the boyars who exploited them (see the 1956 textbooks)[39]. For example, the 1953 school curriculum (Ministerul Învăţământului Public, & Institutul de Ştiinţe Pedagogice, 1953) included the ballad in the seventh-grade syllabus, drawing attention to its historical context, the creative talents of the Romanian people, their diligence, and their inclination towards sacrifice. The figure of Master Manole was supposed to symbolise the Romanian nation and its love of work, while it was contrasted with the ruler Negru Vodă, who inspired people's hatred. The ballad was thus interpreted in terms of class struggle, meeting the ideological requirements of the era.

In the second half of the 1950s and the 1960s, greater emphasis was once again placed on Alecsandri himself. For instance, in a 10th-grade textbook from 1968 (Viorel, 1968, pp. 91–95), we find an extensive biography of the poet in the context of the Spring of Nations and the efforts to unite the Romanian principalities, highlighting the patriotic dimension of his activities and works. The ballad about the Argeş Monastery does not appear in this textbook; instead, much space is devoted to socially and patriotically themed poetry, legends (especially those recounting the heroic struggles of Romanians from different historical periods), and prose; the book ends with an excerpt from a short story describing the beauty of Moldavia's landscape (*O plimbare la munţi* [A Walk in the Mountains]). Changes in the official state ideology become apparent, as, after Ceauşescu came to power, it shifted toward national communism. The Law on Education and Schooling (No. 28) of December 21, 1978, supplemented the 1968 law by introducing a hierarchy of disciplines and a mandatory principle of integrating schooling with production, leading to even greater politicisation of the teaching process, which unquestionably served to implement the ideas and directives of the Party. The mission of the school was emphasised as fostering youth in the spirit of dialectical materialism and creating the "new man", devoted to the homeland and the ideology of communism.

[39] Textbooks from that period were not signed with the names of individual authors.

In textbooks accredited on the basis of programs introduced by the Ministry of Education and Schooling in the mid-1970s[40], the ballad of Master Manole began to occupy a more prominent place on the reading list, as evidenced by the extensive teaching materials accompanying it. This resulted from the increased interest in Romanian folk creativity in accordance with the July Theses of 1971, which radically politicised folklore. In the 1972 curriculum (Ministerul Educaţiei şi Învăţământului, 1972), Lucian Blaga's 1927 play *Master Manole* (the author having been rehabilitated after his death in 1965) appeared for the first time and would remain a fixture in Romanian curricula thereafter. At that time, a certain teaching model was established that is still applied today – the ballad in Alecsandri's version is discussed in the context of folk literature, while Blaga's play is presented as the finest example in belles-lettres of the "sacrifice for art" myth. This concept ("*mitul jertfei creatoare*"), coined and introduced into circulation by G. Călinescu through his *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present] (Călinescu, 1941), remains to this day the central idea in interpreting the ballad. Both texts are studied at a relatively late stage of education, i.e., in high school (first the folk ballad, and later its literary reinterpretations, exemplified by Blaga), and are accompanied by in-depth analysis of the text and historical context. Below are the central issues addressed in textbooks from the 1970s and 1980s:

- The ballad serves to discuss topics in the scope of poetics (features of the text that are specific to its genre) and literary history (the immense aesthetic and moral value of folk literature); Blaga's play, meanwhile, is used as an example of Expressionism in literature.
- Placement of the ballad in its historical context – a strong emphasis is placed on the figure of Neagoe Basarab and the church in Curtea de Argeş that he founded; this is evident not only in supplementary materials for ballad analysis, but also in the illustrations included in textbooks – often photographs of the monastery or historical portraits of Neagoe Basarab and his family.
- A mention of the foundation sacrifice as an ancient custom present throughout the Balkans, which in Romania evolved into the myth of artistic fulfilment, underscoring the uniqueness of the Romanian variant of the ballad.
- Introduction of George Călinescu's classification of national myths as a central point of reference: the text of the ballad becomes a "new aesthetic myth", with the motif of sacrifice and the human suffering required by artistic creation emphasised.
- In all interpretations, the focus remains on the inner struggles of Manole, who is sometimes presented as the archetype of the "man of the people" (Gheorghiu et al., 1978–1988); Ministerul Educaţiei şi Învăţământului, 1972; Minis-

[40] The textbooks from the 1980s, which constitute the source material for the present study, were created on the basis of curricula from the 1970s; subsequent editions essentially reproduce the content originally published.

terul Educaţiei şi Învăţământului, 1977; Ministerul Educaţiei şi Învăţământului, 1981; Ministerul Educaţiei şi Învăţământului, 1987).

All student assignments (such as preparing written essays) revolve around the topics outlined above. The main task for students is usually to reflect on Manole's ethical dilemmas and on his inner conflict between love and sacrifice for his work.

The topos of the walled-up woman is virtually absent from Romanian textbooks. All of them emphasise the perspective of the main hero, while Ana is described through expressions pointing to her devotion to the man: *iubirea curată a Anei* ("Ana's pure love"), *devotamentul neţărmuit* ("unwavering devotion"), or *simplicitatea* ("simplicity"). Mira in Blaga's play is presented in a similar way as the embodiment of beauty and purity. Manole is forced by a capricious fate to choose between the church – a symbol of artistic fulfilment, and Mira – a symbol of life, love, and moral purity. In this way, "the church and Mira become two inseparable halves of the hero. Deprived of either, the master loses his humanity" (Olteanu & Pavnotescu, 1983, p. 22). The woman here is not portrayed as a separate being but as a symbol of life values that ennoble Manole's character. The man, on the other hand, is compared to a tragic hero facing an insoluble dilemma.

In the mid-1970s, illustrated stories for students were also produced in the form of filmstrips projected from a slide projector, created by the AnimaFilm studio as part of the *Basme, Povestiri şi Legende* [Fairy Tales, Stories, and Legends] series with the support of the Ministry of Education and Schooling – Central Office for Teaching Aids. This initiative can thus be considered part of the broader educational program. The interpretation proposed in these filmstrips does not deviate from the approach in textbooks – here too, the emphasis is placed mainly on the historical dimension of the ballad and its status as "a priceless treasure of the Romanian people", a perfect product of folk literature.

Textbooks after 1989: Old Content in New Packaging

The first school curricula after 1989 indicated the need to revise the existing content, but for organisational reasons, it was impossible to carry out this process immediately and comprehensively in the early 1990s. Therefore, in the first years of the transition, students still used textbooks based on programmes from the 1980s. Gradually, this situation began to change: the range of textbooks expanded, they became richer in content and visual materials, and more colourful. Language and literature textbooks were prepared by leading Romanian literary scholars (Eugen Simion, Mircea Martin, Eugen Negrici, and Nicolae Manolescu). However, the interpretation of the ballad about the Monastery in Argeş did not differ significantly from that proposed in the textbooks of the 1970s and 1980s. From a substantive point of view, the main theme of the ballad discussed in school remained the theme of "sacrifice for the realisa-

tion of a work"; the topos of the walled-up woman was a secondary motif – her sacrifice was still read in relation to the dilemmas of the male protagonist and in the context of Ana's moral virtues. Blaga's drama continued to be treated as a complementary text to the ballad.

Compared to communist-era textbooks, the new teaching materials offered a more thorough structuring of knowledge, while also providing more information and interpretative suggestions. Already in the first textbooks from the 1990s, prepared according to the new program (Ministerul Învăţământului şi Ştiinţei..., 1991; Ministerul Învăţământului, 1993; Ministerul Educaţiei Naţionale, 1999), an interpretive framework appeared that would be repeated (in various configurations and with modifications) in subsequent years, essentially to this day. First and foremost, the ballad was used for exercises in vocabulary, grammar, orthography, and stylistics, and it also served as an example for discussing the features of the folk ballad as a literary genre. Interpretative analysis, the second step in working with the text, revolved around discussion of eight central motifs identified in the ballad (Anghelescu et al., 1996, pp. 121–125):

– The motif of the empty walls (*motivul zidului părăsit*), indicating the generational dimension of sacrifice for art; the craftsmen discover the ruins of an old church, on the site of which, in continuation, a new building is to be erected.

– The motif of the collapsing walls (*motivul surpării zidurilor*), which forms the main axis of the plot. At the same time, the uniqueness of the Romanian variants is emphasised, highlighting the psychological dimension of the conflict. It is not so much the fact of spontaneous destruction that matters, but rather Manole's inner dilemmas: he must sacrifice his beloved and himself to halt the process.

– The motif of the dream (*motivul visului*), which brings the solution to the problem and points to the necessity of making a foundation sacrifice.

– The motif of the walled-up woman (*motivul femeii destinate zidirii*), described as the motif with the greatest "aesthetic implications", through which the two most important characters of the ballad are portrayed: Manole, who is subjected to a great trial, and Ana, who overcomes obstacles to reach the construction site with food for her husband (the explanation of this motif is rather unclear and focuses on the male character and the tragic decision he is forced to make).

– The motif of gradual walling-in (*motivul zidirii treptate*), revealing Manole's inner drama and Ana's suffering. During the act of walling-in, carried out gradually, the "moral profiles" of both characters are revealed. Ana is defined by her "spiritual delicacy" and "naivety", resulting from adopting an "attitude of abnegation" and renouncing herself in favour of Manole and his artistic ideal. Manole is described as a "self-assured" man of strong character.

– The motif of the feudal conflict (*motivul conflictului feudal*), emphasising the ethical dimension and showing the opposition between the ideals of the artist and the selfishness and pettiness of the medieval ruler.

– The motif of Icarus (*motivul lui Icar*), which "increases the coefficient of sacrifice" (all the craftsmen perish) and proposes a mythical conclusion to the

love story, ensuring that Ana and Manole remain together for eternity united within the church walls.

– The motif of the well (*motivul fântânii*), once again emphasising the Master's personality, which can also be interpreted as a symbol of an eternal, inexhaustible source of creative inspiration.

Regardless of the modifications introduced to the above classification by subsequent textbooks, the main message remained unchanged: Manole is the central figure of all analyses, while Ana is meant to embody stereotypical feminine qualities of delicacy, moral purity, self-sacrifice, and self-renunciation for the sake of higher goals pursued by a man. Student assignments refer to the issues identified in the above-mentioned motifs; they are to reflect, among other things, on the relationships between the characters, on Manole's inner conflict, and on the significance of the main character's dream for the plot. Questions about Ana revolve either around her physicality ("Find a metaphor that describes Ana's physical beauty") or her exceptional moral qualities ("What character traits does Ana demonstrate when she shows that she is not afraid of evil spirits and does not turn back from her path?").

The central interpretive key in all textbooks remains the repeatedly invoked myth of sacrifice for a work of art. The woman functions as a figure who sacrifices herself for the man and his ideals.

Such an interpretive model, which fits into the framework of a patriarchal order fulfilling fantasies of feminine submissiveness in support of the development of male genius, seems increasingly common in textbooks from the early 21st century. In the early 2000s, interpretations of the ballad appear to encourage identifying the traits of an "ideal relationship" based on the relationship between Ana and Manole, while relying on culturally entrenched models of "femininity" and "masculinity".

Ana is usually portrayed as "a being endowed with intelligence, a proud spirit, and the generosity of a loving woman who does not oppose her husband's decision" (Simion et al., 2001, p. 81). Although nature has endowed her with wonderful gifts – youth, beauty, a happy relationship, and motherhood – this did not stop her from "a voluntary act of sacrifice" (Simion, 2001, p. 81). The culmination of this interpretation, which uncritically perpetuates cultural stereotypes related to passive femininity (invariably associated with youth, physical attractiveness, fulfilment in a relationship with a man, and fertility – all "gifts" bestowed by a higher power) and active masculinity (despite the intervention of a higher power, Manole is internally driven), is embedded in students' written assignments: "A monument more lasting than bronze – an ambivalent story of male genius and female devotion; write an essay on the ideal relationship (Manole – Ana).

An analysis of other textbooks from the 2000s (e.g. Costache et al., 2006; Crişan et al., 2006; Dobra et al., 2008) shows that they replicate the same interpretive pattern, mainly also adopting a comparative perspective: the ballad versus Blaga's drama (for advanced-level classes). The most frequently anal-

ysed variant is that of Vasile Alecsandri; the version by Gheorghe Dem Teodorescu, considered closer to the original (e.g., in textbooks published by BIC ALL in 2006 and by Art in 2006; Costache et al., 2006; Ionescu & Lişman, 2006; Martin, 2006), is sometimes also examined, but this does not affect the way the content is interpreted – the two variants do not essentially differ in plot or main message.

Contemporary textbooks (based on the 2017 school curriculum, Ministerul Educației Naționale, 2017)[41] occasionally attempt to adapt the interpretation to current realities, but they do not do so convincingly. An interesting example is an eighth-grade textbook from 2020, which analyses Blaga's drama in a chapter devoted to vocation, career choice, and work. The interpretive proposals focus on the issues contained in the lesson's titular theme, namely professional passion and the necessity of sacrificing something in the pursuit of one's goals. The module includes numerous group work suggestions (in line with the principles of modern teaching methodology), one of which is to prepare a presentation encouraging tourists to visit the monastery in Curtea de Argeș (Norel et al., 2020). Although the 2020 textbook strives to modernise the ballad's text as much as possible, trying to adapt it to the rules of today's labour market (sic!), it does not, in fact, depart much from the traditional interpretation.

The only truly significant interpretive difference we observed in our analysis of textbooks from the communist period and from after 1989 concerned the perception of the other nine craftsmen. In communist textbooks, their failed flight and death are usually seen from the perspective of the collective or the community, and their fate is compared to that of Master Manole (often presented as the archetype of the Romanian peasant). Their tragic but heroic death is contrasted with the figure of the voivode, whose vindictiveness and pettiness led to the tragedy. Here we can see a conflict emerging between the owner, the powerful man, the representative of the elite, and the exploited worker, who morally surpasses the former. In contemporary textbooks, however, the uniqueness of the individual, i.e., Manole, is emphasised, while the other craftsmen are shown as traitors (having broken their oath by warning their wives in advance) or as those who are not true artists, as they are not willing to make the great sacrifices that the Master does. Their flight, ending in death, is interpreted as punishment for betrayal, whereas Manole's flight, ending in a fall and transubstantiation (the transformation of the man into a spring), is seen as a symbolic attainment of immortality by the master. It thus appears that the political transformations and the related emergence of a cult of individualism, as well as the responsibility and sovereignty of the individual (characteristic of capitalist societies), have also influenced the direction of the ballad's interpretation.

[41] 2024-2025 – A new phase of curriculum reform was launched through the RECRED project, focusing on the modernization of upper secondary education curricula and the further development of a competency-based educational framework. The implementation of the revised curricula is currently underway (Eurydice Romania, 2026).

Conclusion

The analyses of the topos in Romanian culture conducted in this study present a picture of typical tendencies. The sacrifice of a woman's life, necessary to complete the construction of a building, was part of the popular imagination, for a long time (it is impossible to determine exactly how long) sustaining the oral folklore of the area north of the Danube (Wallachia), thus adjacent to the Balkans. The legend of Master Manole, the mythical builder of the monastery in Curtea de Argeș, began its extraordinary career in modern Romanian culture when a 19th-century poet flirting with Romanticism gave it his own artistic form and introduced it into the canon of high, ergo national, literature. This latter mechanism, by no means obvious, was the consequence of the late emergence of Romanian belles-lettres, whose beginnings date back to the late Enlightenment. It is therefore hardly surprising that the cultural creators of the time regarded folklore as part (for some, a privileged, even the most important part) of the national heritage.

The Ballad of Master Manole did not immediately become part of official culture and a source of inspiration for writers and artists. The belated Romanian Romanticism (the 1870s), represented by the national poet Mihail Eminescu, valued folk creativity, yet did not grant the ballads *Miorița* and *Meșterul Manole* the status of works foundational to national culture; this occurred only in the 1930s and 1940s. At the same time, the first artistic use of the ballad about Manole and his walled-up wife (in the 1890s), authored by Carmen Sylva (a German and royal consort), placed the woman's drama in the foreground rather than the artist's struggle with recalcitrant matter; nor was the motif of the building itself emphasised, although soon it would become as much a part of the national history as of the national-religious mythology of the Romanians. Carmen Sylva's dramatic work, highlighting the individual dimension of the sacrifice and drawing on artistic models from world literature, diminished the significance of the male creative struggles and the Artist's renunciations, and essentially ignored the communal symbolism (the sacred building as an expression of national genius). For this reason, it met with a reluctant and even hostile reception from critics. This, in turn, means that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the ballad was already being read through a national-religious interpretive lens, one that sought everywhere for evidence of Romanian uniqueness in the Balkan context. This interpretation was imposed by the generation of state-builders in Romania and subsequently taken up and "creatively" developed by their successors.

This interpretation was ultimately recognised as canonical in the interwar period, mainly – paradoxical though it may seem – through the achievement of Romanian modernists (Adrian Maniu, Lucian Blaga, and others), who, while seeking modern means of artistic expression, simultaneously upheld the traditional hierarchy of values and meanings expressed in the triad: Artist, Work, Sacrifice. In modernist dramas, the female character is portrayed positively, yet she is still deprived of subjectivity: she is gentle, faithful, devoted, and passive.

The folk ballad was thus assigned the status of a foundational text of national literature, one that could be referenced, but whose message could not be modified. This became especially true once George Călinescu recognised the ballad as one of the four Romanian cultural myths (Jurczak, 2023). The ideology of national communism adopted these assumptions and further limited the possibilities for new readings of the text, especially with regard to the female figure, whose presence is indispensable in the dramatic structure of the ballad, but who was simultaneously considered a secondary character. A male-centred mode of interpretation – tinged with elements of misogyny – became the standard for more than one hundred and fifty years of the ballad's presence in Romanian culture. The ballad about Master Manole, the monastery in Curtea de Argeş, and Ana's sacrifice was not the cause of this cultural misogyny, but rather its product.

Postscript. Un-walled? The Position of Women in Romanian Literature after 1989

Romanian literature (including that rooted in the oral tradition) and, more broadly, culture, does not lack strong female characters – yet their presence is not distinctly marked in the so-called canon, which was shaped under conditions of patriarchy that programmatically excluded women from prominent positions while often negatively stereotyping notions of femininity or modelling them after male fantasies. An attempt to introduce systemic changes in the Romanian literary field (and, more broadly, in Romanian society) became possible only with the political transformations after 1989. This was also when the first Romanian feminist movements emerged, initiated by the aforementioned Mihaela Miroiu[42]. Significantly, the literary character who became the first symbol of resistance to the oppression of women and to the entrenched image in Romanian culture of the woman who sacrifices herself for others and places her own needs last, was none other than the "walled-up" Ana from the *Legend of Master Manole*. She even lent her name to the first Romanian feminist organisation, *AnA – Societatea de Analise Feministe* [Association for Feminist Analyses], founded by Miroiu, Laura Grünberg, and nineteen other activists. As Miroiu declared in the founding issue of the journal Revista Ana, in a text bearing all the hallmarks of a manifesto:

> [Contemporary Anas – ed. OBN] no longer allow themselves to be led astray. They no longer let themselves be led in between the walls. They see the difference between a game and the act of being walled-up. They no longer even try to tempt Manole or use women's cunning to have him walled-up in their place. Instead, they encourage the creation of joint plans, so that together they can resist the temptation of obedience and domination. (Miroiu, 2006, p. 100)

[42] For more on the history of the feminist movement in Romania see, e.g. Mihăilescu (2002; 2006); Miroiu (2015); Pasti (2003).

In the 1990s and early 21st century, the ideological and literary landscape underwent gradual changes, also visible in literary studies. This was when, among other works, Liana Cozea's monograph on Romanian women prose writers (Cozea, 1994), Elena Zaharia-Filipaş's studies on women's literature (Zaharia-Filipaş, 2004), and Bianca Burţa-Cernat's monograph on interwar women writers (Burţa-Cernat, 2011) appeared – all efforts aimed at restoring to history the literature written by women, ignored for decades, and helping all the forgotten Anas regain their voices and subjectivity. Since then, gender studies have enjoyed growing popularity, with an increasing number of scholars devoted to this field, alongside the emergence of numerous NGOs[43].

The 2000s were also important for literature written by women – it was then that poets of the so-called "generation 2000" debuted (among them Elena Vlădăreanu, considered the leader of the new movement, as well as Miruna Vlada and Ruxandra Novac). While they valued the legacy of poets from the communist period (invoking, for example, the work of Angela Marinescu and Nora Iuga), they proposed their own bold aesthetic – poetry focused on the relationship between the psyche and the female body at various stages of life, often employing brutal metaphorics rooted in autobiographical experience. The uncompromising work of this younger generation of poets ushered in a new era for women's writing in Romania, culminating in a symbolic gesture: in 2018, at the initiative of Elena Vlădăreanu, the Sofia Nădejde Literary Prize [44] was established, awarded to literature written by women. Contemporary authors (such as Medeea Iancu and Cătălina Stanislav) continue the work of their predecessors, offering a more radical poetic discourse influenced by the latest trends in Western feminist thought and leftist circles, leaning towards ecofeminism and queer feminism, and exposing patriarchal patterns and class divisions still resonating strongly in Romanian society.

Despite numerous ideological transformations, the position of women in the Romanian literary world remains weaker and less visible than that of men, as evidenced by the sobering conclusions drawn from a survey conducted by the poet Ruxandra Cesereanu among female authors, writers, and literary critics, published in *Steaua magazine* in 2017[45]. The majority of respondents adopted a pessimistic tone, unanimously pointing to gender-based discriminatory practices and to problems with lack of recognition and respect in the field. Notably, the respondents were women with substantial symbolic capital and high

[43] The most important organisations are: Asociaţia FRONT (www.feminism-romania.ro), Centrul de Dezvoltare Curriculară şi Studii de Gen – FILIA (www.centrulfilia.ro), Fundaţia Centrul Parteneriat pentru Egalitate (CPE) (www.cpe.ro), Asociaţia pentru Şanse Egale (www.sanseegale.eu), Fundaţia Pro Women (www.prowomen.ro), and Asociaţia Femeilor din România (www.afr.ro).

[44] Sofia Nădejde (1856–1946) was a Romanian novelist and journalist, one of the first Romanian feminists, known for her activism in promoting women's emancipation.

[45] The same topic has also been taken up by other Romanian journals, including *Observator cultural*, *Scena 9*, and *DLITE. Blog de literatură german-român*. It is therefore an issue present in Romanian public debate.

professional standing, which suggests that debut authors begin from an even more disadvantaged position. An analysis of school curricula, in turn, reveals that the canon still lacks female figures, and textbooks at all levels of education reproduce stereotypical gender representations, adversely influencing the socialisation of the youngest generations (see, e.g., Rughiniș et al., 2015).

Mihaela Ursa locates the source of the problem in the fact that, in the Romanian public debate, "there is still a lack of any specific awareness of the political nature of artistic production […]. Writers, female writers, literary critics, and other agents operating in the literary field do not always react […] to the ideological colouring of [representations present in the text]" (Ursa, 2019, p. 43). Any change capable of producing real social effects should begin with the introduction into schools of a new methodology for teaching Romanian language and literature, one based on the awareness that literature is a carrier of ideology and that literary fiction often shapes social behaviours. This could be aided, among other measures, by contextualising required readings, interpreting them through the lens of identity politics, uncovering strategies of instrumentalisation to which a given text has been subjected, opening to the European and world canons, and fostering in students' empathy and sensitivity toward the characters and problems depicted in the text (see Ursa, 2019, pp. 49–64).

In 2019, Mihaela Michailov and Laura Sandu founded the platform *Literatură și feminism* [Literature and Feminism], whose team – composed of women writers, publishers, translators, artists, and cultural workers – aims to support feminist activism. The platform's activities respond to the contemporary challenges faced by organisations fighting all forms of discrimination. The activists describe their feminism as intersectional, queer, decolonial, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist. As part of the project, a publishing house was also established to support queer and feminist literature. In 2020, it published a high-school graduation exam guide containing feminist analyses of canonical Romanian novels (i.e., those studied in high school), thus creating space for new, alternative readings of works that had long functioned in the Romanian cultural universe within the same male-centred interpretation. The project thus responds to Mihaela Ursa's postulates, treating literature simultaneously as a cultural and social phenomenon. Unfortunately, such initiatives remain marginal and have yet to influence the educational system's approach.

Nevertheless, it may be felt that Romania is on the path toward changing the traditional paradigm of patriarchal dominance, already visible in the aforementioned literary and publishing initiatives, supported by the sociological turn currently underway in literary studies. The new generation of theorists who debuted in the 2000s (including Mihai Iovănel, Adriana Stan, and Ioana Macrea-Toma) have moved away from the aesthetic formalism entrenched in Romanian literary studies and have focused on the social contexts of literature. The scholarly work of this group is gradually raising awareness of the political nature of artistic production, which – if reflected also in school curricula – may, in the longer term, become a catalyst for deeper transformations. Perhaps.

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Marzena Maciulewicz

Serbia. The Dynasty in the Leading Role

Interest in folklore in the Balkans dates back to the 19th century. Collecting tendencies were part of the pan-European trends of Romanticism at the time, and foreign authorities' interest in the folklore tradition was also significant. As a result of widespread collecting, folk art, which had previously existed solely in oral tradition, started to be recorded in writing. The socio-cultural context and the intricacies of modernisation and politics must be taken into account in order to understand the status of folk art in this cultural sphere.

Undoubtedly, the 19th century was a period of enormous political and social changes resulting from shifts in the balance of power and the gradual withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkan Peninsula. The culture-creating aspirations of activists working for nation-states were expressed, among other things, in shaping national literatures and absorbing the oral creativity of a given area as their own. A correlation can be observed between the struggle for a nation-state (and thus the processes of creating or redefining cultural identity) and the interest in research on oral traditions. This is evidenced, among other things, by the publication dates of key collections of folk songs, starting with Vuk Karadžić's *Mala prostonarodna slaveno-serbska pesnarica* [A Little Slaveno-Serbian Folk Songbook] (1814) and ending with Konstantin Hörmann's *Narodne pjesne Muhamedovaca u Bosni i Herzegovini* [Folk Songs of the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina] (1888).

It is essential for our considerations that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Serbia and Montenegro (unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina) already had their statehood. Their struggle for independence and territory was initially marked by wars with the Ottoman Empire, and after its defeat, with newly formed or emerging neighbouring states (Jelavich, 2005, pp. 16–21). It also had a cultural dimension. Propaganda activities included initiatives related to the collection of cultural works and the systematisation of national languages. This is evidenced, for example, by the heated discussion among scholars about the origin of the song *Zidanje Skadra* [The Building of Skadar] in Vuk Karadžić's collection, initiated by Nikola Andrić's article *Otkud Vuku "Zidanje Skadra*"? [Where did Vuk get "Zidanje Skadra"?] (see the chapter on Croatia).

On the peninsula, the 19th century was a time of modernisation at varying speeds (Жанин-Чалић, 2004), considered necessary but also causing internal

disputes and fears of losing one's cultural identity. This was accompanied by urbanisation processes, which affected the way rural populations perceived urban areas. During the Ottoman period, the Balkans saw the construction of many cities dominated by Muslims, while Christians mainly inhabited villages. Cities could therefore be seen as a symbol of cultural appropriation, first by Islam (Jawoszek, 2018), and then by the so-called corrupt West. With the development of nationalist ideas, rural areas became associated with the concepts of "national purity" and tradition, while cities were associated with foreignness and oppression (cf. Konstantinović, 1981).

All this means that in the region in question, we are dealing not only with a fascination with folk art, but also with its elevation to the status of a key component of national tradition. The position of folklore and the epic folk song tradition, which, alongside religious tradition, constitute one of the basic components of Serbian identity (Gil, 2005, p. 47), was strengthened in the 19th century to the detriment of the Orthodox Church tradition (Gil, 2005, p. 150). A new vision of culture based on folk tradition was developed by Vuk Karadžić (Gil, 2005, p. 35), and folklore, as a vehicle for transmitting heritage, was elevated to the status of a national canon (Rapacka, 1995, p. 13). Rapacka emphasises that, despite successive rebellions by Serbian intellectuals with a Western orientation, folklore has retained its position to this day, and in certain circles, oral tradition plays an important role as a source of information (Rapacka, 1995, p. 13).

Folklore was perceived as a phenomenon with a long tradition, cementing the community around the "wisdom of the ages", which should be protected in a dynamically developing world. Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864) argued for the collection of folk art and warned against the threat posed to it by new Enlightenment trends (Karadžić, 1821, as cited in Mladenović Mitrović, 2021, p. 98). Similar views were held by the historian and politician Stojan Novaković (1842–1915), whose approach to the study of folklore developed under the influence of romantic nationalism and fear of the disappearance of folk culture resources (Mladenović Mitrović, 2021). The collection of folk art in the local language was motivated by research, but it also served political purposes, as part of efforts to maintain the unity of the newly formed territories and consolidate their cultural community. Thus, folklore collectors, who also acted in their own economic interests, did the newly formed states a favour in at least two ways: by contributing to the defence of national integrity and by protecting local creativity.

The aforementioned historian Stojan Novaković, founder of the ethnographic collection of the then Royal Academy of Sciences (now the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, SANU), was one of the first to collect folk art under institutional patronage. As early as the second half of the 19th century, he postulated the need to continue the collecting work of Vuk Karadžić, emphasising his contributions to lexicography and grammar research. Among those who responded in the largest numbers to Novaković's invitation to collect folk art were teachers, priests, merchants and diplomats. As a result, he had no shortage

of material. The problem, however, was the quality of the texts submitted: they were collected mainly by amateurs using inconsistent classification criteria (such as genre and language), uneven methods of recording and description, and varying degrees of acceptable intervention by the collector in the content and form of the texts they heard. It should be emphasised that the way a given song was recorded (including choices regarding linguistic nuances) was not only important for study but also had a significant political dimension. An example of a discussion on this topic can be found in the exchange of views between Kosta Hörmann and Vatroslav Jagić in connection with the publication in 1888 of the first volume of Hörmann's collection *Narodne pjesne Muhamedovaca u Bosni i Herzegovini*. The institution Matica hrvatska, which offered payment for work done, was, in a sense, in competition with the Academy of Sciences, which allegedly influenced the process of collecting folk material. References relating to collectors who were willing to sell epic material in Serbian from Bosnia and Croatia to the Croatian Motherland, or who sold material to both institutions, provide fascinating material showing the realities of the academic and collecting "market" at the time (Mladenović Mitrović, 2021, pp. 111–112).

Songs containing the motif of foundation sacrifice were already included in the first collections of folk songs. Moreover, the song *Zidanje Skadra* attracted the special attention of Vuk Karadžić's foreign colleagues and consultants. During my research, there were repeated references to a letter by Jakob Grimm, in which the German philologist raves about the song *Zidanje Skadra*, considering it the most moving song of all time (Мојашевић, 1976, p. 109).

From Oral to Written Culture. The Medieval Family's Leading Role

The most widespread variant of the song about the walling up of a woman in Serbia is *Zidanje Skadra* [The Building of Skadar], heard from Old Man Raško (Starac Raško) from Kolašin, published among the oldest heroic songs in Vuk Karadžić's collection *Српске народне пјесме књига друга у којој су пјесме јуначке најстарије* [Serbian Folk Songs, Volume Two, Containing the Oldest Heroic Songs] (Караџић, 1823, pp. 10–20). *Zidanje Skadra* has been classified as a song from the so-called pre-Kosovo cycle, i.e., it describes events prior to the Battle of Kosovo Field in 1389 and concerns the Nemanjić and Mrnjavčević families[1]. Subsequent collections of songs and anthologies contain this variant

[1] Various forms of the Mrnjavčević family name appear in the source texts. Even in the two variants recorded by Vuk Karadžić, different forms can be identified: in Ikov's – Mrnjavčić (1974), in Starac Raško's – Mrljavčević (1976). In historical sources, however, Mrnjavčević is used (Бербер, 2002; Рудић, 2001). Researchers' opinions on this issue are divided. Dundes explains that the correct form is Mrnjavčević and believes that Vuk preserved a local error by leaving it as Mrljavčević (Dundes, 1996b, p. 11). Mojašević,

of the song (Ђурић, 1969; Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 2001; Чајкановић, 1925), followed by textbooks and educational materials.

In addition to the widely known version of the song *Zidanje Skadra* mentioned above, which over time became the main point of reference for further culture texts, Vuk Karadžić's collection also includes a second version of the song with the same title, published in 1974, in a collection of previously unpublished manuscripts *Српске народне пјесме из необјављених рукописа Вука Стеф. Караџића* [Serbian folk songs from the unpublished manuscripts of Vuk Stef. Karadžić] (Караџић, 1974). Both texts are recordings of variants performed by singers from Montenegro: the aforementioned Old Man Raško, as well as Todor Ikov (see the chapter on Montenegro). They differ mainly in the song's ending. In Raško's variant, Gojkovica agrees to die following negotiations and feeds her child until the very end, thus becoming the foundation of a fortress protecting against foreign invasion and a source of life-giving fluid for future generations. The message reinforced in Vuk Karadžić's commentary is that no significant building can be erected without sacrifice. In the Ikov variant, on the other hand, Gojkovica opposes her brothers' will, kills her son, curses her tormentors, and foretells the imminent takeover of the fortress by the Turks. She cannot, therefore, become a symbol of the values that cement the patriarchal community.

The third variant of the song was published in Manojlo Kordunaš's *Српске народне пјесме* [Serbian Folk Songs] in 1891 as part of the first edition of the series *Збирка српских народних умотворина* [Collection of Serbian Folk Art] (Кордунаш, 1891). The songs collected in this volume are described as Serbian folk songs of a mythical nature. From the introduction, we learn that the recordings were made between 1885 and 1888 by singers from the region of present-day Croatia bordering Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, it is not known which of the singers mentioned performed the song *Zidanje Skadra*. This song differs from the Raško's variant in its ending and in the depiction of the relationship between Gojkovica and her mother-in-law. When the brothers' mother sees that none of her daughters-in-law is willing to go to the construction site, she decides to carry the meal herself. However, Gojkovica stops her and, wanting to protect her family from sin and shame, decides to take her place:

> Not mine by birth, yet as if mine!
> It is a great sin against God
> And a shame before the world
> You have three daughters-in-law, and you carry dinner
> Take care of my beloved child

---

on the other hand, argues that it is not without reason that Mrnjavčevici became Mrljavčevici in the song (Мојашевић, 1976, p. 111), as the pejorative meaning of the root *mrljav* (lit. dirty, stained; weak; morally flawed) seems significant (Вујанић et.al, 2007, p. 738). Apart from referring to the source form in the text, I apply the form used in historical sources, i.e., Mrnjavčević.

I will go to white Skadar
And carry lunch to the builders[2]. (Кордунаш, 1891, p. 141)

In this version, less than a year after Gojkovica's death, retribution follows: three thunderbolts fall from the sky, one striking the fortress at Bojana, another killing the wives of the elder brothers, and the third killing the brothers themselves.

For a miracle, and also for medicine
To this day milk is there
Not a year has passed
Not a year, not even half a year
A great miracle happened
The clear sky suddenly became cloudy.
Three thunderbolts fell from the sky.
The first struck Skadar in Bojana;
The second killed two young sisters-in-law;
And the third killed two unfaithful brothers.
O unfaithful ones, may God kill you,
Had you been good, you would not be here! (Кордунаш, 1891, p. 144)[3]

As for the ending of the song, in which the woman feeds her child and her running milk becomes a medicine for the people, Kordunaš's variant falls between Raško's version (in which the sacrifice is practically sanctified) and Ikov's (in which the walling up is condemned). The motif of the curse is introduced in Kordunaš's variant indirectly, as it were. The song contains the words "Unfortunate foundations were laid / And cursed Skadar was built" (Кордунаш, 1891, p. 144), but none of the characters – including the heroine – casts a curse. The tormentors are punished anyway, the act of walling up is condemned, and justice is brought about by God himself. The author of the collection notes that such an ending is not found in Vuk Karadžić's work and comments: "[…] The time of the people's judgment is coming. God's omnipotence punishes: it overthrows sinful deeds and kills unbelievers with thunder" (Кордунаш, 1891, p. 144).

Of interest are texts featuring the walled-up woman topos and a plot similar to the *Zidanje Skadra* variant, and which also refer to other locations such as Belgrade and Ohrid. The text *Gradnja Beograda* [The Building of Belgrade] from the collection *Narodno blago. Zbirka narodnih pjesama i poslovica* [Folk Heritage. Collection of Folk Songs and Proverbs][4] was most likely written down

[2] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Agnieszka Piskozub-Piwosz either from the Polish translation by Marzena Maciulewicz or directly from the original Polish text.

[3] The original transcript has been preserved, and the fragment in bold was also highlighted in the 1891 edition.

[4] The text has been classified as part of a collection of works on the subject of family (*porodične*). The first edition was published in 1910. In this chapter, I refer to the 1923 edition (Raić, 1923, pp. 15–16).

by K. Romić in Subotica (Raić, 1923, pp. 15–16). The song *Gradnja Beograda* belongs to a shorter version (63 lines), was written in Latin script, in decasyllables, and contains Turkish words (e.g., "pendžer" instead of the Slavic "prozor" to describe a window). The women remain nameless, while the brothers have different names: Rojla, Manojla and the youngest, Radojla. After three days (instead of three years) of construction, the brothers learn from a mysterious voice from underground that Belgrade will not be built without a sacrifice, and they ponder who should be sacrificed. Then something speaks from underground:

> You will not build Belgrade
> Until you wall up something alive,
> Anything alive in the city's foundations. (Raić, 1923, pp. 15–16)

They cannot wall up their mother because it would be a sin deserving divine punishment. They cannot sacrifice their sister, again because of their mother and the relationship between them. Finally, they decide that it should be one of the wives – whichever wife brings the meal to the construction site the next day. They all swear to keep this secret, but the youngest brother is the only one who doesn't break his word. The next day, the brothers' mother asks each daughter-in-law in turn to take the meal, but they all make excuses, including the youngest at first, but out of respect for her elders (similar to Gojkovica in Kordunaš's version), she then says she will go in her place. The mother's status as the organiser of family life comes to the fore here – she is the first to be considered a sacrifice, and then the fate of the potential sacrifice depends on her approval.

The youngest wife is walled up by her brothers-in-law, and they are instructed to leave holes in the wall so that the woman can see her orphaned child. At the end of the song, there is no mention of the healing properties of the liquid flowing down the wall, only that Radojla (the youngest brother) looks after the child. There is also no mention of the building's fate. However, at the end of the collection, in the editorial commentary to the song *Gradnja Beograda*, there is a note emphasising the importance of foundations in a literal and metaphorical sense: "The main idea: only honest, sincere citizens can form the foundation of a city – Radojla and his wife. Liars and weaklings do not make foundations" (Raić, 1923, pp. 15–16).

In turn, the piece *Грађење Орида* [The Construction of Ohrid] from the collection *Песме и обичаи укупног народа српског* [Songs and Customs of the Entire Serbian Nation] from 1869 is a short text with a limited plot (97 lines), written in decasyllabic verse in Cyrillic. In terms of plot, it is similar to *Zidanje Skadra* in that it features a *vila* who descends from the mountains and issues two warnings that the castle will not be built. What Manojlo builds during the day, the *vila* destroys at night. The city is being built on the orders of Tsar Siniša, who is described as "cursed" (this is a possible reference to the character of Symeon Uroš Nemanjić). Unlike in *Zidanje Skadra*, the foundation sacrifice is to be children. The *vila* instructs the bricklayer to find a brother and sister with

similar names (Stoja and Stojan, Milo and Milena) and wall them up in the eastern tower. After Manojlo informs Siniša of the *vila's* demands, he sends people with money to search for them. However, Siniša's emissaries fail to find any siblings to buy, for which they are all sentenced to death, and the castle is not built.

The topos of walling up is associated in this region with the construction of buildings important to the community (mainly fortresses or towers) and/or the construction of towns or strongholds. The potential victims of foundation sacrifices are mainly children (but also the mother or sister of the builders), and ultimately it is the youngest of the wives who is walled up in the foundations. Works that remain thematically and formally within the orbit of *Zidanje Skadra* are characterised by differences in the location of events, endings, and thus messages. It must be clearly stated that they are much less popular than the song about the construction of Skadar, which undoubtedly dominated the image of foundation sacrifice.

Literacy Over Orality: A Song Older Than Us, But Still Ours

In the Serbian context, the first texts discussing works with the topos of the walled-up woman date back to the early 20th century. Comments on the song *Zidanje Skadra* appear in the texts of Tomislav Maretić, a polyglot and linguist belonging to the circle of the so-called Croatian Vukovci (i.e., activists for the standardisation of the Croatian language based on the New Shtokavian Jekavian dialect, which Vuk Karadžić advocated in relation to the Serbian language), and the historian Jovan Tomić (Maretić, 1909; Томић, 1908). The subject of the analysis is mainly Raško's variant from Karadžić's collection mentioned here. There were no studies found that take into account the variants of Ikov or Kordunaš. There are certain interpretative tendencies in the Serbian scholarly tradition that should be mentioned. Analysing the academic and para-academic texts that interest me here, several recurring issues intersect, depending on the study. These are: (1) the primacy of a given variant, which leads to considerations about the processes of oral transmission and text evolution, but also often fuels ideological disputes; (2) literary contexts, including other songs from the pre-Kosovo cycle or, occasionally, folk art more broadly, ancient mythology, the Bible, or variants containing the topos in other languages; (3) the issue of sacrifice, one of the most important interpretative issues, linked to the categories of ritual and the sacred; (4) the issue of genre, from legend to epic song, which is linked to the question of the transformation of narrative and literary forms in the oral tradition; (5) the historicisation of elements of a literary work, i.e., the attempt to place the plot components of a song in a specific historical context, which is often an essential point of reference in Serbian studies.

An interesting commentary can be found in Veselin Čajkanović's publication *Петнаест српских народних песама* [Fifteen Serbian Folk Songs] from 1925,

which includes Old Man Raško's version of the song *Zidanje Skadra* and his commentary on the belief, prevalent among people at the time, about the need to make a sacrifice in order to construct a building and the threat resulting from walling up someone's shadow. In his discussion of the legend, Čajkanović refers to earlier studies on the motif (including those by Arnaudov, Maretić and Tomić) and other variants (Greek, Bosnian-Herzegovinian, Hungarian-Romanian), concluding that one of these traditions served as a model for the legend. The author was trained in the classics and therefore drew attention to the presence of the mythological motif of the dead nursing mother, which has its prototype in the figure of Aerope, daughter of Cepheus, who died while giving birth to her son, but continued to nurse him after her death. In his opinion, the Mrnjavčević brothers were introduced into the Serbian version because they were already heroes of Serbian heroic tales (Чајкановић, 1925, p. 172). He also draws attention to the significance of the names Stoja and Ostoja, linguistic elements characteristic of the Serbian language, and the character of Rade *neimar*, whom he associates with the builder of the monastery in Ravanica – Rade Borović.

Petar M. Božović's 1926 record, published in Pavle Popović's collection *Прилози за књижевност, језик, историју и фолклор* [Contributions to Literature, History and Folklore], is more ethnographic than literary in nature. The author focuses on the ethnographic aspects of the motif of sacrifice in the construction of the fortress in Shkodra. Božović quotes an excerpt from a textbook found in Albania, which describes the story of three Illyrian brothers who unsuccessfully attempted to build a castle. Only after sacrificing a woman was the construction completed. The author emphasises that the elaborate elements from the Serbian version of this song are missing here and thus describes this variant as simplified and anonymous. Božović also describes his visit to the site, noting a mysterious milk-like substance oozing from the rocks. The author – one of the few to do so – juxtaposes the literary work with the place to which it refers. He also quotes accounts from Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims who talk about the healing properties of the white liquid, sharing stories of women who have experienced its effects. Thus, his ethnographic approach shows how the legend functions in living folk tradition and how elements of the myth connect with local beliefs about the healing power of the milk-like substance emanating from the rocks (Божовић, 1926).

Among the most comprehensive comparative studies is Svetislav Stefanović's 1928 text *Легенда о зидању Скадра* [The Building of Skadar]. The author analyses numerous variants of songs and legends throughout the Balkan Peninsula, referring to key motifs in other cultures, both from a diachronic and synchronic perspective. Characteristically for texts of this period, he also addresses the issue of the genealogy of the song and the primacy of one of its versions, engaging in a polemic with Arnaudov and questioning his thesis that all variants are secondary to the Greek version. In Stefanović's work, the Serbian version, i.e., *Zidanje Skadra*, is presented as the most complete, having significant artistic value and a wealth of motifs (Стефановић, 1928, p. 29). Based on the multitude of variants, the author distinguishes the following elements of the plot:

(1) Construction of a building that is destroyed by supernatural forces.
(2) Command to make a human sacrifice.
(3) Children are sacrificed.
(4) The sacrifice is a woman – the wife of the founder or master builder.
(5) The husband does not reveal the secret to his wife, and it is she who comes to the building site the next day with a meal.
(6) After noticing his wife, the husband cries and talks about the loss of a ring or a golden apple.
(7) As the woman is walled up, she turns to her husband, brothers-in-law or builders with a curse or a request.
(8) The woman asks for holes to be left so that she can feed her young child.
(9) The woman feeds her child even after her death.
(10) A source of healing water springs up at the place where she is walled up.

In Stefanović's opinion, motifs 1, 2, 4 and 6 should be considered permanent and common to most variants, while the remaining motifs occur sporadically or not at all. The researcher concludes that the Serbian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian versions, compared to the Greek variants, should be placed at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of their presentation in folk tradition. The Greek version is characterised by the great importance of locality, the absence of main characters, the curse by the walled-up woman, and the presence of a bird as a harbinger of the need to make a sacrifice. In the Macedonian and Bulgarian versions, children do not appear as potential foundation sacrifices. Similarly, in the Albanian version, a woman immediately features as the sacrifice, typically an old man appears instead of a *vila*, and the location is precisely specified. The Bosnian-Herzegovinian variants constitute a separate, self-sufficient group, without the features typical of works centred on a woman as a foundation sacrifice. Notably, only *Zidanje Skadra* includes all the key compositional elements and motifs, and, above all, it is the only version that mentions two victims of the foundation sacrifice: a child and a woman. The presence of the motif of a child sacrifice suggests that this song has a long tradition. The special value of the Serbian variant is evidenced by its recording as a song and by its being the only variant written in decasyllabic verse.

Stefanović also attempts to align the world presented in the song with historical facts, arguing that certain key motifs are mythological in nature and much older than the history of the community (he refers to this as "our history"). He refers, among others, to the aforementioned Aerope and to Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon. In his view, these motifs existed in folk beliefs and legends even before the time of King Vukašin. Therefore, according to the researcher, the question of when the song *Zidanje Skadra* was written should be kept separate from that of the motifs appearing in the song. In his opinion, King Vukašin and the Mrnjavčević family appear in the song because of the legendary potential of the family's history and its place in the cycle of pre-Kosovo songs. According to Stefanović, the motif of walling up children is older than that of walling

up women and has a longer literary tradition (he cites Celtic mythology as an example), and in ethnographic and folkloric terms, it is more primitive and more widespread. Moreover, it is mythological in nature, while, according to the scholar, the motif of female sacrifice and its presentation are romantic or even realistic. The mythological motif, which is more primitive, harsh, and corresponds to folk tales, has elements that limit its epic presentation. The motif described as "romantic" has greater potential for an epic work, a potential for which the researcher seeks support in depictions of a nursing mother. In view of the above, he concludes that works with the motif of walled-up children cannot be seen as a later variant of songs about walling up, and he considers the motif of female sacrifice to be secondary, a feature characteristic of the folklore of the Balkan Peninsula. In this context, the researcher identifies two main types of songs: Bosnian-Herzegovinian (with walled-up children) and Greek (with a walled-up woman), within which he further distinguishes a Serbian-Albanian subtype (with the Skadar fortress as the central location) and a Macedonian-Bulgarian subtype (with Master Manole as the common hero). Ultimately, however, Stefanović refrains from making a definitive judgement as to which of these should be considered older.

One final pre-World War II text displaying comparative ambitions should be mentioned: Ilija Živančević's article *Срби и Румуни поводом легенде о Зиданју Скадра* [Serbs and Romanians in connection with the legend of *The Building of Skadar*] from 1937. The author writes about the secondary nature of the northern versions in relation to the Serbian one (he also mentions Greek, Albanian and Bulgarian variants) and considers the relationship between the Romanian and Armenian variants[5]. The song itself seems to be merely a pretext for him to present the history of Serbian-Romanian social and political relations, where Serbia is held up as a model, and the song remains a testimony to Serbian genius (Живанчевић, 1937, p. 15).

In turn, analyses and commentaries on song collections published after World War II tend not to address the issue of the seniority of specific variants, which was so important to researchers seeking "evidence" that the ballad originally belonged to a specific country or people (Dundes, 1996a, p. 185). Scholars instead focus on literary values; the relationship between historical facts (events and figures) and the reality presented in folk songs; the ideologisation of folklore; linguistic issues; and the very process of collecting songs, including the role of the songwriters.

One of the most comprehensive studies of *Zidanje Skadra* is found in the monograph by the literary historian and renowned researcher of Serbian

[5] Both versions refer to the same place – the Orthodox church in Argeş. However, they differ in at least two important respects: the builder and the foundation sacrifice. The Romanian version mentions the builders Rade and Manole, and the sacrifice is the wife of Master Manole. In the Armenian version, however, the builder is only Manole or Manuel, and the walled-up sacrifice is a girl – an orphan sold by her aunt (who is ultimately turned into a raven).

folklore, Nada Milošević-Đordević, *Заједничка тематско-сижејна основа српскохрватских неисторијских епских песамаи прозне традиције* [The Common Thematic and Plot Basis of Serbian-Croatian Non-Historical Epic Songs and Prose Tradition], published in 1971. The author highlights the presence of the motif of walling up in other cultures long before the appearance of written evidence of its existence in the Balkans. To support her thesis, she cites numerous examples and variants corresponding to the topos of the walled-up woman, including animal and child sacrifices. In her assessment, in the local tradition[6], the motif of walling up – developed into a complex plot and shaped as an epic song – appears in two main forms. The first case concerns the construction of a building whose collapse can only be prevented by walling up children and offering goods to the river; this variant is represented by the text about the construction of the bridge in Višegrad. The second centres on the walling up of a woman who brings a meal to the builders (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971, p. 335). This interpretation emphasises the fact that the woman who feeds her tormentors becomes the sacrifice.

According to Milošević-Đorđević, unlike the marginalised versions concerning the bridge, the text *Zidanje Skadra* has over time gained the status of the primary source in the Balkan region. She notes that most scholars consider the variant about the construction of the bridge to be secondary, although in her opinion it is merely another manifestation of the same tradition of mythological imagery (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971, p. 340). It is worth recalling that Stefan Stefanović presents a completely different perspective, considering the bridge variant to be the original one.

Like many other researchers, Milošević-Đorđević concludes that Raško's version is the richest in motifs and the most valuable artistically. She notes that many researchers examining the song of the walled-up woman focused on its origin and national or regional "primacy", as well as the ways and dynamics of its spread (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971, p. 340). In this context, the literary originality of Raško's version was the main argument in favour of the primacy of this epic song (and thus culture) over others. However, Milošević-Đorđević emphasises that her intention in highlighting the distinctive elements of the Serbian-Croatian version in her work is not to identify the relationship between Raško's variant and other versions present in the Balkans, but to study this motif within the prose tradition (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971, p. 342). In her view, the interpretative process must take into account the various literary forms that contain the topos in question: folk tales, ballads, and epic songs. The internal change in the nature of a cultural text, especially the transition from orality to literacy, as is the case with folk tradition, requires special attention in order to understand its significance in the local literary tradition, as the researcher discusses in her article *Проблеми проучавања српске народне*

[6] The author uses the phrase *na našem području* [in our area], which most likely refers to the region of the former Yugoslavia.

(усмене) књижевности [Problems of Studying Serbian Folk (Oral) Literature] from 1996. Milošević-Đorđević draws attention to the role of literature during the period of Ottoman rule and to the fact that written literature draws on oral tradition, with oral works containing symbols and characters from medieval literature. She also emphasises that folk literature is not only an act of creation, but also an act of memory, often tinged with resentment. In her opinion, prose forms preceded the emergence of epic songs, and folk literature preserves those elements that are necessary for the survival of an ethical, religious community (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1996).

Among contemporary studies, there are others that focus on the literary qualities of the song and point to the relationship between its structure and oral tradition. Boško Suvajčić, in his article *Гојковичин смех. Поетика жанра у усменој књижевности* [Gojkovica's Laughter. The Poetics of Genre in Oral Literature], published in 2011, draws particular attention to the role of the singer, Old Man Raško, in shaping the compositional structure of the song, as part of his comparative analysis of the works *Zidanje Skadra* and *Vila zida grad* [Vila Builds a City] (Сувајџић, 2011). In his opinion, *Zidanje Skadra* is a genre-unstable variant, partly due to the strong influence of the singer-storyteller. Raško masterfully stylises successive themes, dynamically changing the modes of presentation, moving from simple accounts of external events, through the psychological and emotional states of the characters and descriptions of their internal conflicts, to the inclusion of mythological elements in the tale.

Raško thus acts as a creative mediator between tradition and his own interpretation, consciously modulating the narrative. His role goes beyond the passive reproduction of motifs; through his masterful use of rhythm, linguistic registers and dramatic tension, he gives the song a dynamic character. The singer's agency is not merely a mechanism of oral transmission, but a creative process that redefines the meanings of the story each time, adapting them to the audience's expectations and the context of the performance.

In her article *Понављања као основ значења у песми "Зидање Скадра"* [Repetitions as the basis of meaning in the song *Building of Skadar*] from 2010, she hypothesises that the main compositional elements of the song are repetitions visible at the level of the verse, individual segments, and the entire work, inextricably linked to the creation of the most important motifs: construction, the foundation sacrifice, family relations and motherhood (Пешикан-Љуштановић, 2010). It is worth adding that one of the author's motivations for writing this text was to support the teaching process at school.

The issue of human sacrifice remains a subject of interest for researchers of folk art, anthropologists, cultural studies scholars and cultural historians (Pavlović, 1987; Делић, 2011; Ђерић, 1997; Јанићевић, 1986; С. Петровић, 1992; Питулић, 2017; Тројановић, 1911; Шутић, 2001). Among the interpretations of this motif, the mytho-ritual theory stands out, according to which the legend of *Zidanje Skadra* derives from archaic sacrificial practices aimed at appeasing supernatural forces. This perspective allows for comparative research, pointing

to the existence of similar stories in different cultural circles (Dundes, 1996a). However, with regard to the song *Zidanje Skadra*, researcher Milošević-Đorđević notes that it is not the supernatural aspect that plays the main role, but interpersonal relationships. In this variant, the fate of the victim and the drama of the individual in the community take centre stage, while the sacred and mythological elements serve only as a narrative framework (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971). This means that the song does not focus on the mythical origins of the ritual, but on the ethical and psychological dimensions of the story, revealing the mechanisms of loyalty, betrayal and sacrifice. The clash of these two perspectives – mytho-ritual and anthropological-literary – reveals the multi-layered nature of the work. On the one hand, it functions as a reminiscence of ancient beliefs and rituals, and on the other, as a narrative about the social and emotional consequences of sacrifice, reflecting folk values and norms.

Particularly noteworthy is Gordana Djerić's monograph *Смисао жртве у традиционалној култури Срба. Антрополошки оглед* [The Meaning of Sacrifice in Traditional Serbian Culture. An Anthropological Perspective] (Ђерић, 1997), in which one chapter focuses on human sacrifice. Here, we find a direct reference to the song *Zidanje Skadra*, as well as to folk tales about walling people up in bridges. Her work is based on researching theoretical ethnographic literature, mainly concerning (Serbian) paganism, the results of field research conducted in Serbia, and analyses of folk texts recorded mainly by Karadžić and his companion, linguist and collector Vuk Vrčević. In the introduction, the author notes that there is little interest in the subject of sacrifice in Serbian culture. She links the phenomenon of human sacrifice directly to the development of beliefs and religion; among its causes, she highlights the need to maintain contact with the supernatural world, to experience catharsis, to avoid or combat chaos, and to maintain a balance between internal and external authority. Following Eliade, the author links the walling up of a human being to ensure the stability of a building with the belief in the revitalising potential of this act, which entails giving a soul to an inanimate object. The victim in the act of sacrifice takes on the community's sins and gains supernatural power; the weaker they were before the act of sacrifice, the stronger they become. She points out that, according to belief, the first sacrifice must be the greatest; therefore, a human being is walled into the foundations, and depending on the size of the building, it may be necessary to make more than one sacrifice (as, for example, in the bridge near Niš). She notes, for this reason, in the song *Zidanje Skadra*, it is only after several years of unsuccessful attempts – culminating in the walling up of Gojkovica – that the castle is successfully built.

Djerić refers to Girard's opinion that, generally, married women were not sacrificed to avoid retaliation. The example of Gojkovica contradicts this. Sreten Petrović refers to the same observation in his article *Антропологиа жртвеног обреда* [Anthropology of the Sacrificial Ritual] (1992). Apart from Gojkovica in the work *Zidanje Skadra*, Petrović gives other examples of sacrificed women (drowned or burned widows). In the same article, Petrović again refers to Gi-

rard's work and his description of the practice of sacrificing representatives of the *pharmakós* group (potential human scapegoats) when disaster threatened the city (С. Петровић, 1992, p. 1749). Petrović's paper includes the first reference to a source text where Gojkovica urges the sacrifice of a slave in her place. In searching for the reasons behind human sacrifice, the researcher concludes that it may have been a means to maintain order and balance within the community, thereby preventing bloodshed and violence[7].

When analysing the issue of sacrifice, it is impossible to ignore its significant relationship with mythology, the leading theme in many works (Džadžić, 1992; Kovačević, 2006; Кулишић et al., 1970). In the article *Приношење људске жртве у епском и драмском књижевном делу: текстуални и сценски аспекти српске народне песме "Зидање Скадра" и Еурипидове "Ифигеније у Аулиди"* [Human sacrifices in epic and dramatic literary works: textual and scenic aspects of the Serbian folk song "Zidanje Skadra" and Euripides' "Iphigenia in Aulis"] (2001), Miloslav Šutić refers to the character of Iphigenia from the previously mentioned tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis*, linking her to the song *Zidanje Skadra* solely by analogy to the motif of human (female) sacrifice. The author conducts a comparative analysis of both works, suggesting a shift from the motif of sacrifice itself to a focus on the aesthetic values of the texts and their dramatic potential (Шутић, 2001).

In his 2012 publication *Херменеутика књижевности* [Hermeneutics of Literature], Šutić, prompted by the divergent opinions of foreign scholars in the distant past on the song *Zidanje Skadra*[8], continues the considerations outlined in his earlier article and formulates a thesis about two interpretative perspectives: the aesthetic (focused on the analysis of creative activities) and the anti-aesthetic (focused on the barbaric motif of sacrifice). After a brief theoretical introduction on the ritual of foundation sacrifice, which he attributes to an animistic view of the world, the author proceeds to analyse the aesthetic creative activities. However, his focus on the figure of the tragic hero means that he does not abandon the issue of sacrifice. Šutić pays significant attention to high-ranking men whose decisions shape not only their immediate surroundings but also the wider community's fate and their position within the patriarchal order. In this context, he also raises the issue of being entangled in history.

The main point of reference in the analysis of the song *Zidanje Skadra* is Greek tragedy, or more precisely, the figure of the tragic hero. In the author's

[7] In the educational and teaching material *Epske narodne pesme o Mrnjavčeviciama i Nemanjiciama* [Folk epic songs about the Mrnjavćević and Nemanjić families], intended for 5th-grade pupils, the presented thesis is that the main reason for the failure to build the fortress is not a *vila* or any other external factor, but the discord between the brothers. A sacrifice within the family is therefore necessary to restore balance. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the introduction to the text emphasises their kinship (three brothers), and as the plot develops, their differences in character become apparent (Сувајџић, 2019).

[8] Namely of Goethe, Grimm and Hegel.

opinion, this title is deserved by the husband, Gojko, and by Gojkovica, whom he compares to Agamemnon, Iphigenia, Antigone, and even to the biblical Abraham. The author devotes significant space to the psychological aspects of the characters' experiences and to the aestheticisation of the act of walling up, an aspect emphasised by the singer as well. Šutić also analyses the character of Gojko in a religious context, as a hero of faith who acts in accordance with his moral principles and for whom a given word has the power of a divine command. This is also confirmed by Pavlović's conclusions on the heroic concept of the world, in which the religious component is weak (Pavlović, 1987, p. 109). An example illustrating this concept of authority is Šutić's presentation of Gojko's motivation: he considers the existence of a fortress city essential for the community's survival.

Šutić is the only researcher to draw attention to the similarities between the process of walling up and wedding and funeral rituals in a patriarchal world. These parallels appear in elements such as bathing, awakening, dressing the woman in folk costumes, leaving the family, receiving guests, the division of the victim's property among them, bowing to her parents to receive their blessing, placing a mourning robe on her, putting her in a coffin, and carrying her to the site of the building where she is left in a grave. The song highlights the moment when the brothers-in-law take Gojkovica by her hands and take her away from her family. During the wedding ritual, this is a symbolic moment marking the beginning of a new life. However, the men lead her to her place of death.

Šutić notes that the song's plot is shaped by a shift from the mythical realm to human relationships. For instance, the *vila* merely mediates the archetypal pattern and leaves the decision of who will be sacrificed to the brothers. Milošević-Đorđević emphasises that the original element of Raško's variant lies precisely in the placement of the victim at the centre of the action (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971, p. 344). In this configuration, the supernatural serves merely as a framework to depict the drama of human emotions and experiences, portraying Gojko as a tragic victim of his older brothers. In Šutić's opinion, this tragedy dominates the barbaric severity of the archetypal pattern of the foundation sacrifice. Gojkovica, in turn, does not expect to be mistreated, which proves her innocence and goodness; she is aware that she will die through no fault of her own and has no idea that her brothers and their wives have betrayed her. The author compares her fate to that of Iphigenia (who is spared by the will of the gods) and Antigone (who takes her own life).

In the case of *Zidanje Skadra*, there are numerous deviations from the universalist assumptions about human sacrifice. Sima Trojanović claims that in primitive cultures, it was the ruler who made the sacrifice in the name of the people, the head of the tribe for the whole tribe, and the head of the family for the family (Тројановић, 1911, p. 5). This does not correspond to the situation in the song, where Gojko, not Vukašin, makes the sacrifice in the name of the community. In this context, Miodrag Pavlović identifies three types of heroism: (1) the stronger sacrifices others; (2) the honourable sacrifices himself (char-

acteristic of the Kosovar cycle); and (3) the wisest survives others (Pavlović, 1987, pp. 111–112). Vukašin's behaviour in both the song *Zidanje Skadra* and the other works in this cycle corresponds to the first type.

Another exception concerns the character of Gojkovica and her status in the family. Djerić and Petrović note that, according to Girard, married women could not be victims (Girard, 1990, as cited in С. Петровић, 1992, p. 1752; Ђерић, 1997, p. 36). Why, in this case, are we dealing not only with a married woman but also a nursing mother? The lack of consent to a substitute sacrifice is also interesting, as it may indicate collusion within the community. The purpose of the sacrifice was to relieve tension in interpersonal relations, control chaos and restore balance, which should result in the successful completion of the construction. While in Raško's version the castle is built and other women benefit from the healing properties of the liquid flowing down the walls, in the other versions the act of walling up is not successful: the fortress is not built or is taken over by the enemy, the brothers' relationship does not improve, and even the "tormentors" die. Following Šutić's interpretation, we can see that in the text of *Zidanje Skadra*, the tragic connotation arises because of the brothers' lies and the limited role of the supernatural. However, this is not synonymous with condemning the folk truth about the necessity of sacrifice. What is significant and functional, however, is the marginalisation of variants that do not condone the foundation sacrifice and that question supernatural authority when the sacrifice violates the established order (expressed by the killing of one's own child and the casting of a curse).

In her article *Moral Vision in the Serbian Folk Epic: The Foundation Sacrifice of Skadar* (Devrnja Zimmerman, 1979), Zora Devrnja, like Šutić, addresses the issue of collective consensus on the necessity of offering sacrifices and the cultural determinants of ethics. She points out that at the end of the song *Zidanje Skadra*, immoral behaviour is rewarded (the wives of the older brothers live, and the construction is probably completed) and moral behaviour is punished (Gojkovica dies and Gojko sinks into despair). However, the situation is reversed if we consider how these characters have been preserved in cultural memory, as both Gojko and Gojkovica are rewarded after death. The moral of the story is that evil is an inherent part of human existence, and those who rise above greed and selfishness may be exploited by others but can count on posthumous honour in the collective cultural memory. According to Devrnja, this is the best example of the transformation of historical experience into symbolic experience, which fits into the cultural model characteristic of Serbian tradition, valuing the fate of the hero-victims, who, although they die (usually tragically), can count on the "kingdom of heaven" (cf. Gil, 2005, p. 27; Rapacka, 1995, p. 15).

Devrnja does not doubt that the beliefs reflected in the song written at the beginning of the 19th century are a mixture of Christian and pre-Christian mythology. The song reinforces the Christian belief in the ultimate reward for suffering and in the triumph of good over evil. The miracle in the form of a life-giving liquid, described at the song's end, sanctions suffering and confirms that

an innocent victim experiences a transformation from sacrifice to redemption in an unexpected way. In turn, within the historical references, the walling up (interpreted in relation to Ottoman domination) may symbolise the sacrifice of the Serbian nation, and the survival of the infant – its ultimate salvation (Devrnja Zimmerman, 1979, p. 379). However, the religious themes and values in the song *Zidanje Skadra* function subtly within the context of prioritising history over ethics, and only by considering them can one fully interpret the work.

An original element of the source variant is the introduction of historical figures into the epic work. At this point, it is worth referring to the conclusions of those scholars who pay particular attention to the involvement of the hero-ruler in broader history and to the correlation between history and myth in folk songs, where historical figures often become "sacrificed" in the interpretative practices of folk artists. Commentaries frequently limit themselves to pointing out the fictional nature of folk songs and illustrating discrepancies between historical facts and the creation of events and characters in songs.

Thus, from the introduction to the collection of songs *Зиданје Скадра на Бојани и друге народне пјесме* [The Building of Skadar on Bojana and Other Folk Songs], published in Sarajevo in 1953, we learn that the reality depicted in the song *Zidanje Skadra* is a figment of the folk singer's imagination. The author of the commentary points out the lack of connection between the characters in the song and historical figures and events: not only did the brothers not build a castle in Shkodra, but the area was not under their control, and Gojko is not a historical figure (*Зидање Скадра на Бојани и друге народне пјесме*, 1953, pp. 61–62). A similar observation is made by Vojislav Đurić in his commentary on the anthology of texts *Антологија народних јуначких песама* [Anthology of Heroic Folk Songs]. Đurić points out that Shkodra was never under the rule of King Vukašin and that the fortress was built long before the appearance of the Mrnjavčević family (in the song – Mrljavčevici) (Ђурић, 1998, p. 703). Milošević-Đorđević points out that initially this motif is embedded in family or clan relations and then enriched with historical elements using patterns of heroisation and feudalisation (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971, p. 331). By assigning the heroes the names of well-known epic characters and emphasising Vukašin's betrayal more strongly than Uglješa's (it is Vukašin who demands that his brothers give their word, and it is he who is the first to break his oath; he is also the first to show through his actions that he puts his own good above the needs of others), the singer historicises the content of the song. Vukašin is presented in accordance with his image in folk tradition (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971, p. 344)[9]. Referring to the differences in the portrayal of Vukašin as an imaginary and historical character[10], Milošević-Đorđević concludes that in the Serbian

[9] Vukašin's image as a traitor and murderer of Tsar Uroš, the person responsible for the fall of the medieval Serbian empire, is also present in other epic songs, such as *Uroš i Mrljavčevici* and Ženidba *kralja Vukašina*.

[10] The assessment of King Vukašin in historical discourse was identical to his negative image in folk tradition, but the situation changed at the end of the 19th century with

collective imagination, poetic representation consistently prevails over historical facts, even dominating them. She emphasises that Vukašin Mrnjavčević is neither a traitor nor the murderer of Tsar Uroš but has been immortalised as such in popular memory (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1996, pp. 6–7).

Milan Mojašević, in his article *Зидање Скадра. Један покушај тумачења* [Zidanje Skadra. An Attempt at Interpretation] (Мојашевић, 1976), does not restrict himself to identifying the discrepancy between historical facts and the creation of events and characters in folk art. Instead, he places the work *Zidanje Skadra* within the broader narrative of the Nemanjić dynasty, and thus within the golden age of medieval Serbian statehood. In his opinion, Vukašin, like the "accursed" Jerina[11] or Vuk Branković, became a victim of this very narrative, as he was blamed for the fall of the state. According to Mojašević, in the song about the construction of the castle in Shkodra, the shift from Mrnjavčevici to Mrljavčevici (from Serbian *mrljav*, meaning dirty) is not accidental, with the youngest of the brothers, Gojko – the only entirely fictional character – as the hero. Like Milošević-Đorđević, Mojašević notes that the negative portrayal of Vukašin is evident in other songs from the pre-Kosovo cycle. Mojašević asks a series of rhetorical questions about the influence of historical studies on the assessment of heroes in folk art, noting the insignificance of attempts to rehabilitate historical figures such as Branković, Jerina or Vukašin: "What does it matter that Vukašin Mrnjavčević did not kill Uroš, the last Nemanjić, that he himself died in the battle of Marica, fighting the Turks, and that this occurred before Uroš's death?" (Мојашевић, 1976, p. 112). In his opinion, the heroes were slandered in folk tales, as reflected in songs, and he doubts they will ever be rehabilitated in literature, as they have been in historical studies.

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the appearance of works by, among others, Ljubomir Kovačević (Ковачевић, 1886) and Ilarion Ruvarac (Руварац, 1879), who argued that King Vukašin could not have killed Tsar Dušan. It seems that the discussion on this topic is now closed, as evidenced by subsequent historical studies. However, there are voices calling for a reconsideration of Vukašin's possible involvement in the death of Tsar Uroš (Бербер, 2002).

[11] According to historical sources, Jerina Branković was Irena Kantakuzena (Greek: Ειρήνη Καντακουζηνή), a member of the Byzantine aristocratic family, who married Đurađ Branković in 1414 (Maretić, 1909, pp. 111–113). Vuk Stefanović Karadžić collected several Serbian folk songs in which Jerina is mentioned (Караџић, 1976). According to Milo Vukčević, she is mentioned in twenty folk songs, and her image varies from very positive (she was described as a supportive wife and mother) to negative (she becomes accursed) in epic national poetry (Вукчевић, 1934, pp. 12–62). In folk songs and folk art, she is known as *Prokleta Jerina* [Accursed Jerina] or *Despotina Jerina* [Despot Jerina]. In folk songs, she was accused of the most terrible deeds: she was said to force people to do hard labour, which often ended in death; she was accused of having many lovers, whom she killed after spending the night with them; she was capable of murdering her own sister, and of handing over her own daughter to the Turks in order to maintain power. The reasons for "cursing" Jerina can be attributed to her involvement in politics and to her origins; she was accused of transmitting Byzantine traditions and supporting the Ottoman Empire (Maretić, 1909; Вукчевић, 1934).

Literary Texts: From Historisation to Reflection on the Human Condition

Serbian literary scholarship lacks publications that organise literary material referring to the topos of walling up women, not to mention comprehensive studies of this issue. Attempts to systematise sources (including literary ones) appear in a few articles or chapters of thematic monographs. Some of these have been discussed in the section on folklore. Two Belgrade publications are particularly noteworthy for addressing the theme of *Zidanje Skadra* and contain an extensive bibliography of texts with the motif of walling up: the monograph by Nada Milošević-Đordević *Заједничка тематско-сижејна основа српскохрватских неисторијских епских песама и прозне традиције* [The common thematic and plot basis of Serbian-Croatian non-historical epic songs and prose tradition] (1971) and *Indeks motiva narodnih pesama balkanskih slovena* [Index of folk motifs in Balkan Slavic songs], compiled by Branislav Krstić (1984).

Compared to other cultures, the literary material relating to the topos of the walled-up woman, collected and described below, is rather modest. The sources are presented according to literary genre, and in cases where genre identification proved problematic, additional comments have been included. The structure of the study reflects the chronology of the works' appearance, allowing for the identification of potential intertextual relationships. This study draws attention to the place of publication of individual works and, where the source material allows, to extra-literary contexts, mainly related to the authors' biographies. Among the works published by Serbian authors (and/or in Serbia) containing the topos of the walled-up woman, dramatic and poetic texts predominate. Ivo Andrić's novel *The Bridge on the Drina*, which functions on the borderline of several cultures of the region, is discussed in the chapter on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Drama – Reinforcement of Political Themes

Among the dramatic texts dealing with this motif, two texts published in Novi Sad in the second half of the 19th century should be mentioned: *Зиданъ Скадра на Бояни: жалостно позориє у три дѣйства* [The building of Skadar on Bojana: a dramatic play in three acts] (Николић, 1861) by Atanastasije Nikolić, and *Зидање Скадра на Бојани: позоришна игра у четири чина* [The building of Skadar on Bojana: a play in four acts] (1887) by Đuro T. Petrović (Ђ. Т. Петровић, 1887). Three further plays were written in the 20th century: Mirko Korolija's drama *Zidanje Skadra: dramski poet u 3 čina s epilogom* [The building of Skadar: a dramatic poem in three acts with an epilogue] (Korolija, 1920), published in Zagreb and discussed in the chapter on Croatia; Mikadim

Sušičanin's *Зидање Скадра на Бояни: трагично предсказање у 4 дејства* [The building of Skadar on Bojana: a tragic play in four acts] (Сушичанин, 1969), published in Niš; and the most recent, and at the same time most distant from the source text, Zorica Simović's *Zidanje Skadra* [The building of Skadar] (Simović, 1989). The most recent reinterpretations of *Zidanje Skadra* took place at the Dorćol Theatre (2019) and the Bitef Theatre (2023) in Belgrade.

In all cases, the reference point is the song *Zidanje Skadra*, as indicated by shared motifs, titles, and quotations from Raško's variant. However, direct quotations from the folk song appear unchanged only in the dramas by Nikolić and Petrović; Nikolić incorporates roughly one third of the decasyllabic verse in his adaptation. Božidar Kovaček, referring to the criticism of Đorđe Maletić, even speaks of plagiarism from folk songs in Nikolić's dramas, which refer to this epic tradition (Ковачек, 1985, p. 221). In Petrović's work, song fragments were incorporated into the verse drama, which alternates between six-, eight- and decasyllabic verse. In terms of language, Nikolić's drama, published in Slavo-Serbian, and Simović's drama, written in Latin script instead of Cyrillic, stand out.

Different editions of the plays are not usually accompanied by visual representations. The exceptions are the plays by Mikadim Sušičanin (Figure 1) and Mirko Korolija (Figure 2). In both cases, a single-colour sketch of a fortress was placed on the cover. The main difference concerns the (non)presence of the "walled-up" woman: only in Korolija's work are openings visible at the base of the structure, revealing the woman's closed eyes and, beneath them, her breasts. The figure of the walled-up woman is barely perceptible; the central element of this representation is the foundation of the structure, of which the walled-up woman is an integral but barely visible part.

The socio-political context in which the 19th-century dramas emerged is significant. The second half of the 19th-century was a period of gradual withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the region, struggles for nation-states, but also internal disputes over their form. It was a time of dual power and, consequently, strong politicisation of literature. Significant changes were also taking place in the socio-cultural sphere, with the formation of a unified education system, the establishment of new educational and cultural institutions (including theatres), the creation of a linguistic standard (although at that time, Slavo-Serbian was still the language of literature alongside the standard introduced by Vuk Karadžić), and the emergence of a new social structure and, consequently, a new urban audience for literature and theatre performances. At the time when both plays were published, nearly all of the most important collections of epic folk literature were already in circulation. However, this does not change the fact that the authors of the dramatic texts were mainly inspired by the song *Zidanje Skadra* from Vuk Karadžić's collection.

The author of the first published drama, Anastasije Nikolić (1803–1882), is regarded as an important figure in Serbian history who left his mark on Serbian culture and literature (Ковачек, 1991, p. 220, with great contributions



Figure 1. Cover of Mikadim Sušičanin's book, *Зидање Скадра на Бојани: трагично предсказање у 4 дејства*, published in Niš in 1969 (Сушичанин, 1969).
Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz



Figure 2. Cover of Mirko Korolija's drama *Zidanje Skadra: dramski poem u 3 čina s epilogom* (Zagreb, 1920). Cover illustration by Tomislav Krizman (Korolija, 1920).
Photo by Marzena Maciulewicz

to politics, history, education, and the economic development of Serbia[12]. He wrote poetry, prose, and plays, and was also a translator. His poems on historical themes were written in a decasyllabic metre characteristic of epic songs. He was also a collector of folk art, but Vuk Karadžić criticised his recording methods, arguing that the language Nikolić used was neither the language of the people nor the language of folk tales. In addition to adapting the song *Zidanje Skadra*, Nikolić also wrote other plays based on epic songs: *Женидба цара Душана* [The Wedding of Tsar Dušan], *Краљевић Марко и Арапин* [Prince Marko and the Arab], *Зидање Раваницe* [The Building of Ravanica] and *Краљевић Марко и Буча ђенерал* [Prince Marko and General Buča]. Terms such as "dramatisations of Nikolić's folk songs" or "Atanasije Nikolić's theatre" appear in historical and literary studies (see Ковачек, 1985, 1991). He began his adventure with the theatre in the 1820s, appearing in the role of Vukašin in Stefanović's play *Smrt Uroša Petoga* [The death of Uroš V] (1840). In 1841, he co-founded a theatre in Belgrade and directed its work.

Nikolić's drama was staged only once at the Belgrade theatre, in November 1863 (Илић Киш, 2021, p. 76). Its central theme is the struggle for power, with political intrigues and conspiracies forming the main axis of the plot – here, even a *vila* has a political position. The work contains many moralising comments, mainly on the ambition of rulers and the destructive struggle for the throne. The first two acts begin with a conversation about the fall of Dušan's kingdom and the planned intrigue against Vukašin, while the last act opens with a monologue by the *vila* about Vukašin's imminent downfall. Nikolić problematises his character, showing his transformation under the influence of the struggle for the throne and the actions of the malicious advisor Žarko Ognjanović, the Serdar, described as "Vukašin's protégé". He is an intriguer who mediates contacts with other dignitaries, ready to betray as soon as he realises that the scales of victory are tipping in favour of the enemy. Interestingly, Vukašin is aware of Žarko's disloyalty. The other earthly rulers of Zeta (Rašković Djuro, Djaković Janko, Zlatnokosić Golub, and Doljančić Mirko), who seek to deprive Vukašin of power, play a significant role in the drama. This plot line is crucial, as the conspirators against Vukašin intend to use the failed construction and the act of walling up as arguments for removing him from power. In addition, the character of the *vila* is quite peculiar in this context; she acts as a defender of justice and advocates for the legitimisation of the Nemanjić dynasty's power in the person of Uroš. The characters in the drama also include the wives of the three brothers (Jevrosima, Bosiljka and Ljubica), Rade and his assistant Miloš, and Desimir. This is the only drama that mentions the involvement of

[12] Anastasije Nikolić was the founder of the first art school in Novi Sad, the first secondary school in Kragujevac, where he worked as a mathematics teacher, and the first business school in Belgrade. He was an author of textbooks and an engineer (author of hydrotechnical projects and designer of a railway route). He took part in military operations and was a diplomatic representative (he collaborated with Ilija Garašanin in talks with Russia and France).

women in political intrigues (e.g., Queen Jevrosima speaks of plans to talk to Ruža Zlatnokosić, the wife of one of the Zeta governors). The emotional aspect of walling up the youngest brother's wife has been pushed to the margins here, as indicated by the removal of the scene between Gojko and Gojkovica and the reduction of Rade's role to that of a construction manager. The burial of the youngest wife in the foundations serves to prove Vukašin's ruthlessness and his inability to rule the country.

The last scene contains a significant fragment from the source song, but the ending of the drama is different. It is closer to the variants of the song collected by Manojlo Kordunaš and found in Croatian territories. Although Gojkovica initially treats the situation as a joke, then begs for mercy and asks for the openings in the wall to be left unsealed (as in the dominant variant of the song), the drama ultimately departs from the traditional narrative: after she is walled up, a thunderbolt strikes, killing Žarko, the advisor, and striking the two elder brothers. At the end of the drama about Vukašin's downfall, the *vila* pronounces: "Heaven shows mercy towards temptation; but when wickedness is not restrained by mercy, it sends thunderbolts to overcome wickedness. Vukašin! This is the foundation of your glory, but also of your downfall" (Николић, 1861, p. 115).

The intervention of the supernatural and, as a result, the death of those complicit in the murder of young Gojkovica testify to the otherworld's negative judgement of this act. The sacrifice made does not lead to reconciliation, appeasement of the deity, or easing of tensions in the community. The fate of the building itself is sealed by the words of the *vila*, who says that the foundation of the fortress, which was supposed to secure Vukašin's power, becomes the cause of his downfall.

Đuro Petrović's drama is similar to Nikolić's adaptation in many respects. The sequence of events is similar, and in this case, the power struggle is the work's main theme. King Vukašin remains at the centre of events, accompanied by Uglješa and Gojko and by their wives, who are named in this version: Jevrosima, Bosiljka and Ljubica. Interestingly, Rade has his assistant Miloš, and the other workers are mentioned by name: Spasoje, Milovan, Aleksa, Jovan, Radovan, and Momčilo (the text includes dialogues expressing the builders' dissatisfaction with their meaningless work and the accusations levelled against them). Although the names of the rulers of Zeta who threaten Vukašin (Rašković Djuro, Djaković Janko, Zlatkokosić Golub, and Doljančić Mirko) also appear, none of the scenes (as in Nikolić's drama) contain discussions between them. The drama begins with a monologue by Vukašin, who laments the fate of Serbia and speaks of the need to overthrow the Nemanjić dynasty and remove Uroš from the throne. The best way to demonstrate power is to build an impressive castle. The storyline of Vukašin's relationship with his brothers indicates Vukašin's superior position and the role of his brothers as advisors who usually acquiesce to his will. A *vila* is also involved in the political struggle for the throne and seeks to deprive Vukašin of power. In the drama, she appears through fragments of

folk songs, in the characters' conversations, and as an independent character. The vila's monologue is heard in the first act, where she clearly presents her attitude towards the political situation and talks about the decline of Serbia since Dušan's death:

> The Serbian land has no tsar!
> Its tsar slumbers on the throne!
> The Serbian land mourns and suffers,
> For there is no one to rule it! (Ђ. Т. Петровић, 1887, p. 22)

The *vila* shows hostility towards Vukašin, calling him cursed and an animal. In the second act, addressing Uroš, she asks a rhetorical question about whether he sees the negative effects of his kindness, which has led to the transfer of power to Vukašin. In this scene, she even prays to God to strike Vukašin with lightning. The *vila's* commentary in the final scene of Act IV wraps up the drama.

Unlike in Nikolić's adaptation, the relationship between Gojko and his young wife is highlighted in Petrović's drama. When Gojko realises his loss after the death of his beloved, he compares his wife to the sun. Petrović does not invoke her comparison to the golden apple from Raška's variant, but both symbols refer to solar semantics and testify to the mythical nature of the motif. According to Natko Nodilo, the appearance of solar motifs is one of the arguments in favour of interpreting the song in terms of the vegetative cycle (Nodilo, 1884/1981, p. 170). In the last scene, Gojko rebels and wants to take his own life in order to join his beloved. A dramatic scene unfolds between Ljubica and Gojko when Ljubica calls to Gojko as she is being walled up, and he runs to join her against his brothers' will. The themes of betrayal, the breaking of a promise by brothers, and the subsequent sentencing of Gojkovica to death by the wives of his older brothers also appear in this drama. However, two differences should be noted. Firstly, as soon as Uglješa's wife learns of the brothers' plan, she realises that her husband has broken his oath and condemns him for it, even expressing her willingness to sacrifice her life if it would change the course of events and protect him from breaking his word. The second change is the introduction of the brothers' mother (referred to as "Vukašin's mother" or "Starica"), who (probably unaware of the conspiracy) tries to send each of her daughters-in-law with the meal, starting with the eldest, Jevrosima, and ending with the youngest, Ljubica. The ending of the work is similar to Nikolić's version: thunder strikes from the sky and Vukašin is punished, while Uglješa remains in shock. The *vila*, leaning over Vukašin, instructs him:

> Vukašin, know that there is a God,
> One who sees everything, who hears everything,
> Who sends thunderbolts from on high
> Against the unjust! (Ђ. Т. Петровић, 1887, p. 66)

The plays presented here differ significantly from the original folk text in their attitude towards the message of the necessity of making a sacrifice. This

act is treated as a sin, the guilty are punished, and the building remains unfinished. Both texts serve a moralising function, pointing to preferred patterns of behaviour and an accepted system of values.

The dramas develop a political theme, which is already present in Raško's song and made explicit by the introduction of the Mrljavčević family in place of universal heroes (Милошевић-Ђорђевић, 1971, p. 331). In the dramatic texts, the issue is not merely the presence of political and historical elements, but a complete shift in meaning. The topos serves to show undesirable behaviours: betrayal, lies and greed. The failure of the construction and, consequently, the senselessness of the act of walling up are to serve as an argument for removing Vukašin from power. An interesting device is the introduction of the *vila* as a political actor. On the one hand, as in the song, she belongs to the magical world and mediates communication between the earthly and supernatural orders, yet in the dramatic texts she also has clear political preferences, enormous power and decides on the balance of power on earth. The strengthening of this character is also important in the context of building the image of female in the reinterpretations of the song *Zidanje Skadra*, which I discuss in more detail later in this study.

The dominant motif in Mikadim Sušičanin's drama is the mother figure. At the beginning, the author even includes a dedication and photograph of his mother, under which there is a text partly written in verse and the caption: *Твој благодарни СИН – првенац* [Your grateful SON – firstborn] (Сушичанин, 1969, p. 6), which suggests that the work is a tribute to her. The text of the drama contains many passages referring to motherhood, the role of the mother, maternal love, and the bond between the child and the (birth) mother, which do not appear in the song or in other theatrical adaptations or works containing this topos. Among the characters in the play is Gojkovica's mother, Anđelija, who plays a significant role as a participant in the events – she opens and closes the play. The first act begins with a conversation between three wives: Jevrosima, Jefemija and Gojkovica. While Jevrosima and Jefemija complain about their husbands and responsibilities, Gojkovica talks about her happiness as a wife, mother, and daughter. She does not understand Jefemija, whose children are raised by servants:

> A stranger mother does not cling to a stranger child.
> The hand is a stranger, the child is a stranger.
> This hand does not know where it hurts.
> It is not the real hand, the sacred one,
> The beloved mother of her own child. (Сушичанин, 1969, p. 13)

Gojkovica's mother lives with her daughter's family, comments on her relationship with her husband, and intervenes in her relationship with her sisters-in-law. One of the scenes in the third act is devoted to a conversation between Anđelka and Gojkovica about the happiness of motherhood. Anđelka considers raising a child a beautiful commitment, comparing the experience to building a monument:

Is there a monument more magnificent than when you lift a child
and help them to stand up?
A stone plaque with the image of the deceased,
under which they rest, brings no glory,
but a living person brings glory. (Сушичанин, 1969, p. 49)

Once again, this reinterpretation develops the theme of female creativity, as pointed out by Alan Dundes (1996a). Gojkovica's mother, who represents the patriarchal model of femininity, values parenthood and the life potential of future generations more than any other achievements that could bring glory and be immortalised in the form of a tombstone. She also exercises considerable authority in the home; she makes important decisions, such as which woman will go to the construction site with the meal, and supports her daughter in her assertive attitude towards her younger sister-in-law. Gojkovica initially refuses Jefemija's request to help the queen, but after her apology, she agrees to carry the meal.

In the drama, as in Manojlo Kordunaš's song, there is a storyline involving a mother who, unaware of her sons' decision, attempts to replace one of the younger women. Anđelka declares that she will take the meal to the construction site herself, but her daughter stops her and, to Gojko's despair, fulfils the task herself[13]. The play ends unusually compared to the source text, and its message concerns the role of the mother. Gojko laments his son's loss:

Jovan, my son, my little orphan,
Jovan, my son, your mother's only child!
[…]
My son, your beloved mother
Sacrificed her life on the altar of truth (Сушичанин, 1969, p. 86)

Uglješa, trying to minimise Gojko's loss, assures him that the child can be raised by a foster mother, and even offers examples of such behaviour in the animal world. Gojko, however, compares the role of a mother to that of the heart in the human body:

Can one live without a heart?
Can a child sleep without its mother? (Сушичанин, 1969, p. 74)

The dramatic scene of Anđelka's encounter with the walled-up Gojkovica begins while her daughter is still alive, and her mother (trying to respond to her cries for help) makes futile attempts to save her. The "birth" and "cursed" mother (as she calls herself) invokes thunder and storm to break down the wall, begs people for help, and is ready to sacrifice her life for her daughter's. She fails to do anything, however, because her body refuses to obey her. Unable to

[13] In Kordunaš's variant, in the absence of her daughters-in-law, it is the mother-in-law who wants to take the meal. She is stopped by Gojkovica, who, wanting to protect her family from sin and shame, categorically states that she will replace her (Кордунаш, 1891, p. 141).

reach her daughter's body, she kisses and embraces the wall. The scene contains Anđelka's long monologues filled with exclamations and repetitions, as in the case of her farewell to her already dead daughter:

> Oh, my child, how cold your lips are!
> Your mother warms them with her kisses… (She kisses the wall)
> Your mother kisses your rosy cheeks!… (She kisses the wall)
> Your mother kisses your beautiful, wonderful eyes!… (She kisses the wall)
> Mother kisses your wise forehead!… (She kisses the wall)
> Oh, how cold your forehead is, ice-cold.
> Cold, my daughter, as if it were dead!…
> Mother will take off her dress right away
> to cover and protect my child!… (She takes off her robe and covers the wall)
> Here, here… Now you are warm… Sleep… […] (Сушичанин, 1969, p. 85)

Alongside the themes of motherhood and family relationships that focus on women, considerable attention is given to the relationships between the brothers, which mirror the relationships and attitudes of their wives. Gojko (like his wife) is guided by values that differ from those of the rest of the family and is also marginalised, with the greatest sacrifice being demanded of him as well. Just as the wives distance themselves from Gojkovica, the brothers deceive Gojko. The first confrontation occurs because of a construction failure. Vukašin claims that the *vila* Zagorka is behind it and mentions beliefs about the sacrifice of a human or animal during the construction of a building. Uglješa wants to cense the building, bring in clergy and appease the *vila* with prayer. Gojko, by contrast, suggests resisting the *vila*, as he does not believe Vukašin's stories; however, he ultimately submits to his brothers' will.

The drama also develops threads related to the builders, both the chief constructor Rade (the only one who is not anonymous) and the other builders (described by numbers I–IV). An interesting character is Master IV, who probably sabotages the construction at the order of King Vukašin. However, Rade defends the masons against such accusations and, to justify their failure, mentions a singer telling a story about a *vila* destroying the castle; nevertheless, the *vila* belongs to the world of imagination and does not appear as a stage character.

When the builders become executioners, a tearful scene takes place. They ask their victim for forgiveness and grant her requests (to leave openings in the wall for her breasts and eyes, as well as a free place at the table so that they will remember her). Gojkovica promises that her spirit will be with them and asks them not to shed tears but to dance the *kolo*[14]. After Gojkovica is walled

[14] A group dance usually performed to music and song, during which the participants hold hands, or hold each other around their shoulders or around their waists: they move in a circle, performing various steps (Вујанић et al., 2007, p. 554). The kolo dance is deeply rooted in Balkan tradition and plays an important role in the social and cultural life of the region.

up, only Vukašin's saboteur, Master IV, remains on the scene; driven by remorse, he takes his own life. Gojko delivers a solemn speech to his beloved wife and son, Jovan; a storm can be heard in the background.

The text of Zorica Simović's play *Zidanje Skadra*[15] was made available courtesy of the Šabac Theatre [*Šabačko pozorište*], where it was performed under the direction of Vladimir Lazić. The premiere took place on 25 April 1989. On 24 September 2020, the play premiered on Radio Belgrade's second channel (*Radio Beograd 2*, n.d.)[16]. The script differs from the original work. Among the new and significant characters, Dario Demetrić (a merchant from Dubrovnik) and Prince Marko (Vukasin's son) are particularly noteworthy. Characters who are anonymous in the song gain subjectivity in the play, including the builders and the wives of the Mrnjavčević brothers. An interesting twist is the appearance of the youngest brother's beloved, Selena Atlantova. In many ways, she does not resemble the earlier creation of Gojkovica but rather brings to mind the previously described character of the "accursed" Jerina (Branković). The blind singer Hrusa plays a significant role in the work. He is not an episodic character but enters into a relationship with the characters of the drama and evaluates their actions, including the decision to choose a location for the construction of the castle: "You don't build a house in a place where even a dog won't lie down, where there is no spring water and where no sacred tree has been planted!" (Simović, 1989, p. 4). The Mrnjavčević brothers are presented through the prism of their political functions: Vukašin bears the title of King of Serbs and Greeks, co-ruling with Tsar Uroš, Jovan Uglješa is the despot of the Serbian district, while Gojko is presented as the Macedonian prince. According to the introduction, the action of the play takes place in Shkodra, the fictional capital of the Mrnjavčević family in the late 1370s.

The motif of walling up the youngest wife appears only in Gojko's imagination, as he is far from home when the tragedy unfolds (despite Selena's pleas, he does not take his pregnant wife with him to Macedonia). Gojko's dialogue with his servant introduces two conflicting versions of Selena's fate. According to Gojko, she was walled up in the fortress, as he unexpectedly claims in one of the last scenes: "Selena is walled up in Shkodra on the Bojana" (Simović, 1989, p. 60), while the servant claims that the king expelled her in her husband's absence. Finally, the last scene reveals that Selena drowned in the Bojana River.

Selena Atlantova is the central character of the drama. She speaks out on political and social issues, is beautiful, and, besides Gojko, attracts the love of

[15] Zorica Simović (1954), playwright and screenwriter, graduate of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, born in Gornji Milanovac/Lipovac.

[16] During my research, I came across a rather sparse review of Zorica Simović's play *Zidanje Skadra*, directed by Vladimir Lazić, published in the magazine "Politika" on 1 December 1989. In the reviewer's opinion, the motif of building a castle, the completion of which is to confirm the power and strength of King Vukašin, fades into the background. Instead, the viewer's attention is drawn to events at court, which is caused by Gojko's dream or the conversations between Jefija and Dario (Путник, 2010).

his older brothers, Uglješa and Darko. She is adored by the workers and even by young Marko, Vukašin's son. The character of Selena in the drama is modelled on a lunar deity from ancient mythology. In Greek mythology, Selena was considered a goddess regarded as the personification of the Moon, although her cult was rare (Kopaliński, 2003, p. 1170); she was also identified with the Roman Luna (Kopaliński, 2003, p. 1170; Kubiak, 2003, pp. 47–48; Parandowski, 1988, p. 74). The ancient Greeks believed she travelled across the night sky in a silver chariot drawn by a pair of white horses (or mules or cows), which shone brightest during the full moon (Kubiak, 2003, pp. 47–48). At that time, her power was said to be at its greatest, and her light became an omen for people (Parandowski, 1988, p. 74). In addition, Selena is the daughter of Atlantus, whom Gojko presents as a sculptor specialising in working with onyx. Her father's name may also refer to one of the Titans from Greek mythology – Atlantus or Atlas, condemned to hold up the vault of heaven on his shoulders.

Vukašin blames Selena for the failure of the construction project. In the scene *Lost Peace*, Vukašin states: "Just as order and freedom cannot go hand in hand, Skadar and Selena cannot be together" (Simović, 1989, p. 55). Selena most often appears at moments of failure and growing tension, which contributes to her association with the unsuccessful construction works. She appears the most foreign; her attitude is perceived as a lack of respect for faith and tradition (expressed, among other things, by her negative attitude towards a church wedding), and she is accused of paganism and betrayal of good manners. Adored and hated by men, she finds no support from the women of the family. Selena is a transgressive character – she crosses the boundaries set by the patriarchal order, which provokes both fascination and aggression. Jefemija and Jevrosima reinforce the traditional model instead of supporting her as a woman. Their jealousy and resentment suggest that women in patriarchal systems often become its guardians, replicating patterns of exclusion and control.

This emancipated and independent character is also linked to biblical themes that have not previously appeared in the works mentioned here. The comparison of Selena to Mary Magdalene opens up a new field of interpretation – both in the context of punishment (stoning as an act of patriarchal revenge) and her potential relationship with Christ. Is Selena, like Mary Magdalene, a symbol of sinfulness or rather of rejected truth? This can also be read as emphasising her unorthodox but strong spirituality.

Similarly unusual is the setting of one of the scenes on Christmas Eve. This introduces additional symbolism as a moment of transition, miracles, and revelation, as well as tension between the old and the new.

Vukašin's plot against Selena is revealed through her conversation with Dario, who is in love with her. The merchant confesses that Vukašin ordered him to slander Selena and tarnish her good name in Gojko's eyes, allowing the king to get rid of her from the court. Dario confesses that he wants to "save her from Serbian intrigues and Turkish lawlessness" (Simović, 1989, p. 31) by taking her with him. Selena, however, does not agree to this proposal, refusing

to "be saved". Dario's comment also highlights the opposition between two systems of oppression: "Serbian intrigues" (i.e., local political mechanisms) and "Turkish lawlessness" (a reference to Ottoman rule, perceived as brutal and unjust). Selena thus finds herself caught between these two orders yet refuses either of the paths imposed on her.

The negative character of Vukašin is constructed by depicting his relationship to Selena, but also in his confrontation with his family (his son Marko, his brother Uglješa, and his wife Jevrosima) and in the assessments of outsiders (the singer Hrusa). Hrusa and Jevrosima refer to the tragic fate of Jevrosima's brother, Momčilo. At the beginning of the drama, the blind Hrusa asserts that there is nothing more fleeting than the fame of the Mrljavčević family and that Vukašin lost his honour when he decided to kill Momčilo's wife, Vidoslava. In his opinion, Vukašin married Jevrosima only because he feared revenge for Momčilo's death. In a conversation with her husband, Jevrosima reproaches him for murdering Vidoslava and admits that she has not experienced love in this false relationship.

The motif of dreams recurs throughout the drama's text and highlights the utopian nature of the idea of building a castle. Two scenes depict the erotic dreams of Uglješa and Rade, which are linked by the character of Selena. Others bring to mind the structure of dreams, such as those involving the *vila* or the scene *Agony of the Dying One*, depicting conversations between three brothers and their wives taking place simultaneously in three different spaces. The scene of the castle being captured by foreign troops, which concludes the work, appears to Vukašin as madness in the waking world. The final scene, on the other hand, depicts a peculiar, dreamlike celebration of success by the lonely Vukašin, who calls himself the founder of a new Serbian dynasty, but no longer has power over the guard or his subjects, and instructs the singer Hrus to erase the tragic fate of Gojko and Selena from the story. The drama ends with the invasion of foreign troops and the image of Uglješa lifting the dead Selena from the water, a symbolic culmination of the story.

The stage interpretation of *Zidanje Skadra* was presented as part of the Zmajski sinovi festival at the Dorćol Theatre [*Dorćolsko narodno pozorište*] in 2019. Four performances based on folk songs were featured: *Banović Strahinja*, *Miloš Obilić*, *Zidanje Skadra* and *Kosovka Devojk*a. Filip Gajić was the director of the adaptation of *Zidanje Skadra*, as well as the organiser of the festival. According to his statements to the press, the performance is less about the construction of a castle than about the creation of a state – one that remains under construction today, is being destroyed and repeatedly demands new sacrifices. As in the song, the children – Stoja and Stojan, Gojkovica and Gojko – are innocent sacrifices, losing their lives in its name (Cukić, 2019).

The latest adaptation of *Zidanje Skadra* premiered in August 2023[17]. The dance performance, produced by the Bitef Theatre, was first staged in Budva

[17] See https://teatar.bitef.rs/Predstave/830/ZIDANjE-SKADRA.shtml (*Zidanje Skadra – Predstave*, n.d.).

as part of the "Ćirilicom" [In Cyrillic] festival, and subsequently in Belgrade at the Bitef Theatre. The concept and choreography was created by Miloš Isailović, whose approach is original in at least two respects: its ballet-inspired form and its interpretative path, which remains close to the original story. It appears one of the few theatrical works that radically departs from the conventions of an epic text, and the only one in which dance functions as the dominant means of expression. According to the creators, the central conflict, which is never revealed in the song and its reinterpretations, is the conflict between the *vila* and Gojkovica, between the being who demands everything and the one who gives everything; between the almighty god and the sacrificed son, the boundless sky, and the fertile earth. In this view, all other characters are merely background figures or pawns on a chessboard. Isailović's interpretation eliminates the historical dimension while the issue of everyday human relationships based on trust, love, hope, and suffering comes to the fore.

The dramatic texts prompt reflection on at least two important issues: the constant presence of political themes and the dynamics of female character development. Male characters – whether marginalised or prominent, builders but above all rulers and governors – remain integral to the world depicted, which is based on a patriarchal order. The main theme is their dilemmas, decisions, political intrigues, and behind-the-scenes conversations. However, a significant shift is evident in the creation of female characters. Alongside passive, dependent women-mothers, there are heroines who express their opposition to the patriarchal order and speak out on political issues. Yet these women often appear as unnamed characters or are defined by their status as wives and dependent on the decisions of men (husbands, rulers, older brothers). In line with the principles of the patriarchal world, there is also the maternal figure, ready to sacrifice herself for the sake of her family, thinking only of the fate of her own child at the moment of death.

In later works, however, new female characters appear who gain personhood and agency on various levels: from having their own names to exerting influence in politics. An interesting example is the creation of the *vila*, who, already in the source text, is the only female character to influence reality significantly, yet belongs not to the earthly patriarchal world but to the supernatural realm. In addition, the *vila* is also demonised, a phenomenon that extends to all female characters who act against the rules of the patriarchal world. There is an extreme transformation in the recreation of the character of the former Gojkovica – Selena in the play – where she openly defies the established rules and challenges authority. It is worth noting that this is the only text written by a female playwright. Selena confronts not only male representatives of authority (primarily Vukašin, who blames her for the failure of the construction), but also women who uphold the patriarchal order, the unhappy wives of the older brothers: Jefemija and Jevrosima.

In all cases, the dominance or clear presence of political themes is noticeable. The negative assessment of the act of the walling up is linked to the negative

portrayal of King Vukašin, who is responsible for making this decision. The topos of the walling up serves to show Vukašin's inability to exercise power, becoming a symbol of political violence and terror.

Poetry – Towards Reflection on the Human Condition

Poetic material referring to the topos of the walled-up woman is scarce on Serbian soil. Among the poems identified are texts written in Cyrillic and Latin script, in free verse and in syllabic metres (from eight to fourteen syllables), and of varying lengths. Most of the titles refer directly to the source song (*Zidanje Skadra*, *Ljubavni rastanak*. *Zidanje Skadra* or *Zidanje kuće*) or to its walled-up heroine (*Gojkovica*). They evoke key motifs: day and night as spaces of creation and destruction, evil and good, light and darkness; the symbolism of numbers, the act of feeding; building in the literal sense (a temple, a house) and in the metaphorical sense (a home, a family, relationships, a community); and the sacrifice demanded by the reality being built or created, in both literal and metaphorical senses, from women and from men.

The character of Gojkovica is the main point of reference in two poetic works: *Гојковица* [Gojkovica] by Desanka Maksimović and *Икона Гојковица* [Gojkovica – the icon] by Milica Kralj, but she also appears in the poems *Зидање Скадра (Дуго путовање у ноћ)* [The building of Skadar (a long journey into the night)] by Gojko Janušević, and *Očaj* [Despair] by Vita Nikolić [see the chapter on Montenegro].

The poem *Gojkovica* was published in the poetry collection *Ничија земља* [No man's land] (Максимовић, 1979). Although Desanka Maksimović's works are widely known[18] and have been extensively analysed, neither this collection nor the poem mentioned here attracted significant interest from readers.

Gojkovica
Time is walling me up,
but poetry opens the tower window
and with its magnetic needle
I pull in the gold of the stars
and touch the high sky
with its antennas.

[18] Desanka Maksimović (1898–1993) is a well-known poet and writer who played an active role in the cultural life of the country for over seventy years. Successive generations have become acquainted with her works during their school education. After World War II, she published several patriotic poems, which were included in textbooks (the best known are *Spomen na ustanak* [Monument to the Uprising], *Srbija se budi,* [Serbia is Awakening], and *Krvava bajka* [Bloody Fairy Tale]). Her works have been published in numerous anthologies of Yugoslav poetry (Hawkesworth, 2017, p. 174). The importance of her work is evidenced by the establishment in 1993 of an institution commemorating her achievements: *Zadužbina Desanka Maksimović* (http://zdm.nb.rs/).

Time is walling me up,
But with poetry I transform the stone tower
Into a winged household
And from which on a rainbow I plan meetings
As if on a beam.

Time is walling me up,
But with folk poetry
Deep underground I dig
Myself corridors of liberation
As if with a pickaxe. (Максимовић, 2012, p. 600)

The topos of walling up is the central motif of the work; the process itself is not a one-off act but a continuous process, an inseparable element of existence, essentially linked to time. Walling up is enslavement, imprisonment, and loss of agency. Metaphorically, time "is walling up" the lyrical subject, limiting and confining it within a specific framework. This state can be interpreted in several ways, both in the context of passing, old age and death, as well as in the socio-cultural framework determining the enslavement of the individual. The lyrical subject's agency manifests itself only in creativity, and then her position in the network of relations with the world changes: "but I, with poetry, transform a stone tower into a winged household, and I, with folk poetry, deep underground, dig corridors of liberation".

The perception of time corresponds to the overtone of the poem *Немам више времена* [I Have No More Time] (Максимовић, 1973), in which transience is presented as a fundamental poetic experience and an expression of awareness of existence, rather than a longing for lost time or a liminal situation (implicating fear of death) (Бошковић, 2005, p. 57). The lyrical subject's time has not expired; the text affirms the value of life and responsibility for the decisions made. There is no more time for unimportant, redundant, or unnecessarily difficult matters. Both the tone of *Gojkovica* and *Nemam više vremena* indicate deep self-reflection and a sense of agency. In *Gojkovica,* further connotations are evoked by the motif of the tower (*kula*), which is part of a stone fortress, stable and protective, but at the same time, Gojkovica's prison. Does the tower symbolise marriage? This interpretative possibility indicates a structural similarity between the act of walling up and the rituals of marriage and funeral, which Miroslav Šutić (Шутић, 2001, p. 346) discusses in his reflections on the meaning of Gojkovica's walling up in the song *Zidanje Skadra*.

Celia Hawkesworth, author of the book *Glasovi u senci. Žene i književnost u Srbiji i Bosni* [Voices in the shadows: women and literature in Serbia and Bosnia], describes Maksimović's interpretation as an alternative, feminist reading, implying the poet's confrontation with the dominant heroic ethos. Hawkesworth notes that in her collection *Тражим помиловање* [I ask for for-

giveness] (Максимовић, 1964), which functions as a kind of polemic with the *Code of Dušan* (a legal document issued in the 14th century by the Serbian tsar), Desanka Maksimović gives voice to the hidden, silent figures of medieval women. In her view, since Maksimović had already proven her devotion to her homeland (and had become, in a sense, a champion of patriotism), she could allow herself to present an alternative image as a model that could coexist with the dominant ethos that excludes all alternatives (Hawkesworth, 2017, p. 176). In the poem *Gojkovica*, the poet gives voice and agency to the heroine of an epic song, making her the work's central character, although, in accordance with tradition, she is made to bear her husband's name.

Slobodan Marković observes that Maksimović dwells on key moments and historical figures; he notes that the poet recognises the boundaries that divide eras and sees their challenges, but at the same time, as illustrated by the poem *Gojkovica*, she expresses her faith in the power of poetry: "Time walls me in, / but poetry opens the tower window" (Марковић, 2005, p. 76). The existence of limitations is undeniable, but in Desanka's poem, poetry becomes a means of overcoming them. Although time is limiting, poetry enables the woman to symbolically open the window, travel and fulfil her dreams (touching the stars and the sky), create a home from the tower and get to know herself (liberation by digging corridors in the rock, breaking through them with a pickaxe). The poet's creativity and imagination become a gateway to freedom and a source of happiness despite limitations and the passage of time.

This brings us to the issue of female creative potential, which, according to Alan Dundes, differs markedly from that of men (Dundes, 1996a). An excellent illustration of this can be found in the poem *Očaj* [Despair] by Vitomir Vito Nikolić [see also the chapter on Montenegro], in which motifs from the source song are used to depict the creative crisis of a builder, artist, and poet who, in his helplessness, invokes Gojkovica, which may indicate his dependence on women. While in Nikolić's work the destroyed foundations may be interpreted as a metaphor for artistic impotence, the walls of the tower in *Gojkovica* provoke the release of the heroine's creative potential; she asks no one for help but overcomes the crisis herself in an act of liberation.

The figure of the woman appears in the aforementioned poem by Gojko Janušević, *Зидање Скадра (Дуго путовање у ноћ)* [The Building of Skadar (A Long Journey into the Night)] (Јањушевић, 1969) as a subject who supports a man in a creative process (or existential crisis). The lyrical subject is a man who unsuccessfully attempts to create or build an undefined reality. Skadar is built here at night, from shadows and stars that disappear into the abyss. Gojkovica supports the builder and heals his wounds. Although she is not a foundation sacrifice, she is accompanied in the poem by the oxymoron "struck/pierced by light", which evokes an act of sacred violence and allows "light" to be interpreted as a sacred burden or curse.

The topos was also used to show the creative potential of women in Milijana Sete's poem *Зидање Скадра* [The building of Skadar][19]. The lyrical subject is a woman who does not erect a particular building but creates a world. This is indicated by the cultural connection between lunar and fertility symbolism and the female sphere in the poem. The poem also features a reversed motif of day and night as spaces of creation and destruction. The lyrical subject creates the world through metaphorical building and gathering, but also through giving birth: "At night I give birth to one sea". The destructive force, on the other hand, acts during the day, turning against nature: "[…] during the day, a mad apparition destroys the dams, it will not allow them to bloom" (Сете, 2017, p. 139). The reality created by the lyrical subject is transcendent in nature, as indicated by the mention of making a covenant and keeping a secret: "At night I build one covenant". The covenant has religious connotations, referring to the Bible and pointing to the pact between God (the metaphysical realm) and his people. In Serbian culture, two covenants – operating on the biblical model in literary tradition and on collective memory – provide an important interpretative context: the Kosovo Covenant [*kosovski zavet*] and the Svetosavski Covenant [*svetosavski zavet*] (Gil, 2005, p. 26). While both covenants refer to key figures in cultural history who complement and intertwine with each other – St. Sava and St. Prince Lazar – the theme of sacrifice associated with the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 seems more essential in this work. According to legend, just before the battle, a falcon (alternatively, the prophet Elijah in the form of a falcon) appeared to Tsar Lazar and gave him a choice between victory in battle and securing an earthly kingdom for his people, or defeat and securing glory in heaven and eternal life for his people. Lazar decided to die as a martyr and secure the kingdom of God for his people. This covenant marked a new, martyrdom-filled chapter in the nation's history and remains the main point of reference in the nation-centred narrative to this day. The reference to the covenant indicates the lyrical subject's contact with the supernatural world, the creation of something that connects the human being with the metaphysical space, while remaining deeply rooted in the native culture.

The return to the figure of sacrifice, with references to Marian worship, accompanies the black-and-white depiction of Gojkovica in Milica Kralj's poem *Икона Гојковица*. A cold and dead landscape unfolds here: without flowers or sun, flooded with tears and black snow, it is shrouded in wind. The impression of coldness and tension is reinforced by the interplay of black and white colours: the snow is black, the tears are white, the milk is black, the breast is white. Matter changes from solid frozen snow to liquid milk and tears. Young Gojkovica feeds a Lamb (written with a capital letter, indicating the figure of Jesus) from her white breast. Exclamations heighten the tension:

[19] The poem is included in the collection *Књига уздисаја* [Book of Sighs], published in memory of Vladislav Petković Dis. About a hundred artists were invited to collaborate on the project, guided (as we read in the introduction to the collection) by Petković's idea of saving important historical figures and heroes from oblivion.

From a white breast – black milk!
From black milk – a white tear! (Краљ, 2015, p. 144)

Gojkovica breastfeeds a child doomed to suffering and death; her black milk foreshadows the child's tragic fate. The mother is aware of this and sheds tears. Considering the title of the work, it may be justified to compare Gojkovica's despair to the suffering of the Virgin Mary, who was aware of Jesus's fate. In this context, the figure of Gojkovica is sanctified, as indicated not only by the analogy with the Virgin Mary, but also by her inclusion in the tradition of sacred images – icons, so important in Serbian Orthodoxy. With regard to the landscape, the motif of dreaming reappears: Skadar falls asleep in the sadness of (her?) body; the cold and dead landscape also remains unchanged and falls asleep.

Dragica Stojanović's poem *Zidanje Skadra* (1995) is one of the few works in which the man becomes the sacrifice. The lyrical subject is a woman who builds a house with her beloved man. As a result of an unfortunate accident, the man loses his health and his life; the poem refers to the cutting off of his hands, which symbolises the loss of creative power and powerlessness. The woman addresses her beloved directly, expressing regret for what has happened, convinced that it was her dreams of a home and a life together that led to the tragedy: "Why didn't the brick kill me before the idea of building a house came to my mind?" (Stojanović, 1995, p. 44). The woman is ready to give her life. In the last part of the poem, there is a direct reference to the motif from the source song – bringing a meal to the builders. Although the protagonist is not a typical foundation sacrifice, he fits the pattern of a man-chief builder who makes a sacrifice for the sake of construction. This motif is also present in Ivo Andrić's story *Most na Žepi* (Андрић, 1925), in which the shadow of the main *neimar* is walled up. It is interesting to present the story from the perspective of a woman who, although she does not become a foundation sacrifice, expresses her willingness to make such a sacrifice in the face of her beloved's tragedy.

The poem *Zidanje kuće* [Building a house] by Ilija Sanski Klepić (1990) subtly refers to the source song. It features the motif of preparing a meal and describes the stages of constructing a building. As in Dragica Stojanović's poem, a man makes a sacrifice; in Klepić's poem, the narrator is the man building the house. He observes all folk and religious practices and rituals aimed at ensuring the successful completion of the construction, but ignores the fact that snakes appear to him in the initial stage of construction. The snake is an ambiguous symbol, and in folk beliefs there are both good and evil snakes, some even performing protective functions for the house (Кулишић et al., 1970, pp. 155–157), but their appearance at the beginning of construction always heralds misfortune. Although after the construction is completed, the protagonist meets a beautiful woman who gives birth to his strong son, yet he is still unhappy. The images of a wolf, a dog and a shadow refer to the process of the man's transgression, his dehumanisation, and his gradual transformation into an animal. His son is

born of a wolf, the man describes himself as a dog[20], though in the end, as it turns out, he becomes merely his shadow, to whom the woman throws food as if he were a dog. She seems to be the beneficiary of the situation. The man, on the other hand, slowly disappears.

Male creative potential finds expression in Stanoje Makragić's diptych *Dve pesme* [Two songs] (Makragić, 1981), which consists of the poems *Zidanje Skadra* (shorter) and *Veliki otac* [Great Father] (longer). In the first, the collective lyrical subject builds a structure during the day, which "someone" destroys at night. Unlike the source song and local contexts, the structure being built is not a fortress, bridge, or tower, but a temple – most likely, in this cultural area, an Orthodox church. It is worth noting that the sacred object appears in combination with the topos of a walled-up woman in other variants of the song (e.g., Romanian) but is not characteristic of the Serbian-speaking region. Changing the object to a temple opens up interpretative possibilities for entities such as the family or community (including political communities). The construction of the temple forms part of the local tradition of *zadužbina*, meaning the legacy left to future generations. In this song, the builders (*majstori* and *zidari*) express their concern about who is destroying the building, probably voicing their doubts to someone supervising the process. In the song's second part, the father figure appears, visualised through eyes emerging from the darkness and a long white fang – a marker of animal ferocity. He observes those guarding the temple at night and turns out to be the bearer of characteristics typical of evil forces that destroy buildings and threaten people[21]. The figure of the father

[20] On the one hand, guarding against demons, on the other, announcing death or war with its howling (Толстој & Раденковић, 2001, pp. 417–418).

[21] The poem *Veliki otac* [Great father] intensifies the significance of the figure of the father and the creation of one's own identity in relation to family heritage (which may be symbolised by the aforementioned *zadužbina* in the form of a temple). Although the work does not directly refer to the motifs of *Zidanje Skadra*, in many places one can notice important cultural contexts accompanying the topos of the walled-up woman. From the very beginning, the poem is stylised as a work characteristic of folk art: a fairy tale. The presented world is located in an unspecified time and space: beyond seven mountains and forests. Another example is the introduction of three brothers who set out to search for their roots (literally, their father). As in the fairy tale *Aždaja i carev sin* [The Dragon and the Tsar's Son], the youngest brother is the last to return from his journey. In the fairy tale, the older brothers are kidnapped by a dragon during a hunting trip. The youngest brother is the last to go in search of them, and by deciding to take a different course of action than his two older brothers, he ultimately saves them both. In recognition of his slaying of the dragon, he receives the hand of the princess, the tsar's daughter. In the poem *Veliki otac*, the brothers' return is not successful; the eldest returns from his journey pale and mute after three years, and the middle brother returns as a beggar after seven years of fruitless searching for his father. After ten years, the youngest brother finds himself in a magical land, where he meets *vilas* combing their golden hair and dragons emerging from lakes (as in many fairy tales, including *Aždaja i Carev Sin*). He meets his mother (whose characteristics refer to solar and lunar symbolism) personified

can be considered in many dimensions – familial, religious, and political; he is a parent who fails, but also a severe Old Testament god who demands sacrifices and is ready to oppose human plans, as in the Tower of Babel described in the Book of Genesis. Finally, this is the only poetic work in which it is justified to interpret the motif of building Skadar as a contemporary political allegory, hostile to Josip Broz Tito, the post-World War II leader of Yugoslavia until his death in 1980.

In Bojan Jelić's work *Ljubavni rastanak. Zidanje Skadra* [Lovers' breakup. The building of Skadar] (2007), the construction of a fortress in Shkodra is likened to the relationship between two people who are falling apart. The first point of analogy is the choice of location, a "never-dried swamp" where, according to the lyrical subject, walls should never have been built. The place is not fertile enough, unsuitable for creating relationships, and shows no potential for development. However, the walls have been erected, decisions have been made, and there is no other option but to accept the reality as it is. The foundations (of the relationship, of the building) presented in the poem as a wall (or walls) do not signify connection but destruction, alienation, and separation. It is about the necessity, the inevitability of accepting what is given. Words and symbols intertwine in the poem, intensifying the suffering: "Words drip like foam from the mouth of an angry vixen" (Jelić, 2007, p. 22). These may be the words of unhappy lovers or hurtful keywords. An ambiguous symbol is the body, which is to be devoured (*by the ravens of the present moment*) (Jelić, 2007, p. 22), with its bones scattered by jackals (*physiology on all eight sides of the world*) (Jelić, 2007, p. 22). The lyrical subject expresses the will to destroy them. The poem invokes the symbolism of the wolf and the jackal, predators that feeds on carrion, among other things, and which, in folk beliefs, were perceived as half-human (Кулишић et al., 1970, pp. 92–93). The symbolism of the raven, heralding worse times, bad weather, winter and rain, is also significant in emphasising the deadly combat scene or the battle's aftermath[22]. The last part of the poem describes the act of self-harm by the lyrical subject, who cuts the words "death

in the wind, sun, and moon, but he does not find his father. He returns from his search as the last surviving brother, blind and lame. After years of fruitless searching beyond seven mountains and rivers, the father arrives in the form of a wolf, causing unrest. His arrival is associated with anxiety, the unknown, and with nature; wolves (*kurjaci*) barking in the vicinity of the village, intensify the fear experienced upon his appearance. Two terms for wolf are used in the poem: *vuk* and *kurjak*. While *vuk* has positive connotations (it can be the personification of an ancestor, the supernatural world, it is treated as the personification of a demon, but also a chthonic deity), the term *kurjak* has clearly negative connotations (Кулишић et al.?, 1970; Толстој & Раденковић, 2001).

[22] The raven is a harbinger of misfortune and death, bringing news of defeat in battle (Толстој & Раденковић, 2001, pp. 107–108). The symbolism of the raven in descriptions and depictions of the Battle of Kosovo Field imposes itself as a reinforcing negative message rooted in folk art. Similarly, the reference to the song *Smrt majke Jugovića* [The Death of Jugović's Mother] from the cycle of Kosovan epic songs evokes the *barjak* [banner], which in the poem is left "without a hero".

to spiritual fascism" into his hand with a razor blade (Jelić, 2007, p. 22). He has gone through many hardships to get to this point. Walls separate people; they separate couples. Like any structure, a relationship requires sacrifice and involves suffering, but such efforts prove futile; a structure built in the wrong place, and a relationship built on weak foundations, have no chance of survival.

* * *

In poetic works, the variability of foundation sacrifices is presented differently from the source songs, in which children or women had to be sacrificed in order to complete the construction. Death accompanying the erection of a (material or immaterial) building becomes the lot of both women and men. Interestingly, the male builder may experience either a sudden or a slow death (this motif corresponds to the belief about the fate of a man whose shadow was walled up). The figure of the builder and initiator of the construction is also ambiguous; it can be a woman, a man, or a group of people. Given the dominance of political themes in other literary works, especially dramas, and the constant presence of members of the Mrnjavčević family in the source songs, the complete omission of these characters in poetry, along with the emphasis on different interpretative themes, is noteworthy: the only example of a return to current political and historical issues is *Dve pesme*, a poetic diptych by Stanoje Makragić (1981).

It is worth noting that, although the above-mentioned works do not directly refer to historical characters in the source song and are not dominated by religious themes, they are deeply rooted in folk tradition. The dreamlike images are rich in cultural symbols corresponding to the tradition of folk songs, especially the cycle of Kosovar epic songs. The issue of family relationships is also invariably present. Furthermore, although the thematic focus has indeed shifted to existential issues, the cultural foundations remain intact: folklore, the patriarchal world, and spirituality. The contemporary context and new literary forms continue to draw on folk art, testifying to its internalisation at both individual and social levels.

Education: Dominance of Tradition

Using a topos in education means ideologising it and its participation in the reproduction of power relations (Apple, 2012). Considering the semantic potential of the topos and the dominant interpretative approaches in the analysis of curricula and teaching materials, attention is drawn to the use of the topos in conveying messages about ethnic/national and gender issues. The presence of this motif in textbooks depends on the region and date of publication, but everything indicates that it is most prominent in Serbia in the post-Yugoslav region. *Zidanje Skadra* has been a constant feature of Serbian language and

literature curricula since the late 19th century[23], and most importantly, it remains included in contemporary textbooks, usually as a compulsory rather than a supplementary item in the curriculum[24]. The topos of the walled-up woman is currently taught to pupils in literature and language classes in the fifth grade of primary school.

For the purposes of this study, textbooks and additional teaching aids (written texts, audio-visual works) used by teachers and students in the state education system were analysed. In Serbia, the *Центар за развој програма и уџбеника Завода за унапређивање образовања и васпитања* [Centre for Programmes and Textbooks of the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Upbringing] is responsible for preparing the core curriculum and textbooks. The use of textbooks and teaching materials (including those in minority languages) that have not been accredited by the central authorities is prohibited; a list of approved materials is published annually on the Ministry's website[25]. All the resources used here have received such accreditation.

[23] Among the materials at my disposal, I found a mention of the presence of the work *Zidanje Skadra* in a textbook published in Belgrade in 1851. *Primeri poetiki sastava, za mladež u IV gimnazijskom razredu, pregledani i odabrani školskom komisijom* [Examples of poetic works for fourth-year secondary school students, evaluated and selected by the school commission], a discussion of the work, classified as sentimental, can be found in the section *Epska poezija – Poetike pripovetke* [Folk poetry – the poetics of storytelling] (Матицки, 2005, p. 64).

[24] In Montenegro, the motif of the walled-up woman, as evoked in Zidanje Skadra, appears in textbooks from 1996 and 1997, but is absent from textbooks by the same author from 1993–1994. See Ратковић (1997). Subsequent editions of the textbooks also do not include the song referring to the motif of the walled-up woman. The motif is absent from textbooks published in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; in the latest editions, Mehmed-beg Kapetanović Ljubušak appears alongside the character of Vuk Karadžić. See Rebronja and Ništović (2020). In Croatia, the song Zidanje Skadra is discussed in the subject Serbian Language and Literature/Culture in the first year of secondary vocational school and lower secondary school in Serbian minority education. See Predmetni kurikulumi (n.d.).

[25] In accordance with the Textbook Act [Законом о уџбеницима], each school selects textbooks for a period of four years based on a decision by the teaching council. Information on approved additional teaching materials is published regularly on the website of the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Upbringing under the title: List of additional teaching materials, teaching materials and teaching game resources [Листа додатних наставних средстава, дидактичких средстава и дидактичких игровних средстава]. The same rule applies to textbooks and other teaching materials published in minority languages (Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak, and Croatian) and in Serbian for pupils belonging to minorities (who follow the programme within the subject Native Language/Speech with Elements of National Culture [Матерњи језик/говор са елементима националне културе]). See Министарство просвете (n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

The Topos of the Walled-Up Woman in Contemporary Teaching Materials – Selected Examples

The song *Zidanje Skadra* is presented in textbooks within the section on epic folk works, classified either as a song from ancient times, from the pre-Kosovo cycle, or as a song about the Nemanjić and Mrnjavčević families – most often, the Mrnjavčević family. As such, it is also discussed together with other songs from this period or with similar themes, e.g., Ženidba *Dušanova* [The wedding of Dušan], *Ženidba kralja Vukašina* [The Wedding of King Vukašin], *Uroš i Mrnjavčevići* [Uroš and the Mrnjavčević's], etc.[26] The teaching materials use Raško's variant from Vuka Karadžić's collection *Српске народне пјесме* (Караџић, 1976). This variant is quoted in its entirety or in fragments (the part about searching for twins as a sacrifice is omitted). The text is accompanied by a marginal or footnote dictionary explaining lesser-known or unfamiliar words.

In the textbook *Похвала: читанка за пети разред основне школе* [Praise: Reader for the 5th Grade of Primary School] (Божић et al., 2018), the piece is discussed in the chapter *Похвала наслеђу* [Praise of the heritage], in the subchapter: *Народна епска песма о Мрњавчевићима: Зидање Скадра* [A folk epic song about the Mrnjavčević family: the building of Skadar]. In the textbook *Расковник: читанка за пети разред основне школе* [Raskovnik: reader for the fifth Grade of elementary school] (Мркаљ & Несторовић, 2021), the piece is included in the chapter *Моја земља* [My country] under the title *Народне епске песме старијих времена (избор): Свети Саво, Женидба Душанова, Зидање Скадра* [Folk epic songs of old (selection): *Saint Sava, The Wedding of Dušan, The Building of Skadar*]. Both textbooks address the issue of sacrifice, as well as the characteristic features of epic works, including the occurrence and function of (fixed) epithets and the specificity of decasyllabic verse. The 2018 textbook expands on the historical context, including information about the rulers Vukašin and Uglješa and an excerpt from the Mrnjavčević family tree.

Of particular interest to researchers are the recommendations concerning the teaching process, as well as the educational, didactic, and functional objectives in the materials for teachers (Јоксимовић, 2019, pp. 124–128; Станковић-Шошо, 2012, pp. 293–295). Among the educational objectives in the analysed materials, the need to develop positive feelings (love) towards folk literature is highlighted. In addition, attention is also drawn to the need to strengthen students' literary sensitivity (Јоксимовић, 2019, pp. 124–128), enabling students to experience and understand all the key elements of folk epic songs (Јоксимовић, 2019, pp. 124–128), cultivating positive emotions towards the surrounding world (Станковић-Шошо, 2012, pp. 293–295), stimulating students to comment on the act of sacrifice, and drawing attention to the suf-

[26] Occasionally, teaching materials refer to contemporary works involving the topos of a foundation sacrifice: Ivo Andrić's novel *The Bridge on the Drina* (Божић et al., 2018) and Desanka Maksimović's poem *Gojkovica* (Станковић-Шошо, 2012, p. 295).

fering of Gojkovica, as well as her husband Gojko (Станковић-Шошо, 2012, pp. 293–295). The teaching objectives primarily concern imparting knowledge to students about the specifics of folk art (types, characteristics, and thematic division of epic works), as well as its artistic values: recognising motifs, poetic images, song composition, stylistic figures (comparisons, fixed epithets, and personifications) and their function in the work. In addition, the need to prepare students to analyse characters and evaluate heroes' actions from a moral point of view is highlighted. One of the textbooks also includes among its teaching objectives the need to familiarise students with deviations from historical facts in the work in question (Станковић-Шошо, 2012, pp. 293–295). Among the functional objectives, students are encouraged to express their thoughts and develop critical thinking skills in analysing literary works (Јоксимовић, 2019, pp. 124–128; Станковић-Шошо, 2012, pp. 293–295), and to understand and remember terms related to folk literature (folk epic song, collective work, anonymous author, oral tradition, etc.) (Јоксимовић, 2019, pp. 124–128).

The common guideline for a lesson is to read the work and discuss the students' impressions, paying attention to the elements of composition and the specificity of the folk epic. One of the textbooks for teachers pays particular attention to discussing historical facts about the Mrnjavčević family (Станковић-Шошо, 2012, pp. 293–295), while another emphasises the interrelationships between the characters in the pre-Kosovo cycle of songs and the evaluation of their attitudes (Јоксимовић, 2019, pp. 124–128). As homework, it is suggested that students memorise selected fragments of songs or supplement their knowledge of other works from the cycle by reading songs that were not discussed in class. Students are encouraged to use additional materials or dictionaries on art or history (e.g., of mythology) to enrich their knowledge.

Online lessons available to both teachers and students are also used. All materials used have been created relatively recently, probably for two reasons: the declared desire to use new technologies and communication channels in the teaching process, as well as the introduction of remote working during the pandemic. Although online lessons do not make it possible to familiarise yourself with the entire lesson and follow its dynamics (there is no interaction with students), they do allow you to analyse the message prepared by the teacher and the materials they use.

Zidanje Skadra is discussed in two online lessons: *Преткосовски тематски круг: "Зидање Скадра", "(обрада)"* [Pre-Kosovo thematic cycle: "Zidanje Skadra", "Obrada"]; and *"Зидање Скадра" и систематизација преткосовског тематског круга (утврђивање)* ["Zidanje Skadra" and systematisation of the pre-Kosovo thematic cycle][27], prepared for the "Moja škola" [My school] portal for online teaching by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia.

[27] The platform was created to provide additional support to students using lessons broadcast on RTS and RTS Planeta channels. See https://mojaskola.gov.rs/. The materials are available on YouTube: OŠ Stevan Nemanja – Stenjevac (2021a, 2021b).

Lesson 91 begins by situating the work within the context of folk epic literature and presenting the relevant historical background (Vuk's work, the Mrnjavčević family). The teacher uses visual aids such as a map and photographs of the fortress walls in Shkodra and encourages students to search for and use other materials available on the Internet. The part of the lesson devoted to the issue of sacrifice is particularly interesting. Pupils learn that the custom of walling up living beings in the foundations of buildings appeared "before the Common Era" and that in folk art (referred to as "our folk/national literature") this practice appears in two variants: the walling up of children to prevent the destruction of a bridge, or the walling up a woman who brings food to the builders. The teacher emphasises that in the second case, more attention is paid to the tragic fate of the young woman and her husband. Few materials mention that the work should be interpreted metaphorically rather than literally. The teacher repeatedly stresses the necessity of sacrifice, saying: "it is difficult to achieve great goals", "great goals require great sacrifices", "sacrifice is necessary to accomplish great deeds", "as soon as we have a meaningful goal, sacrifices are inevitable". An important point of the lesson is the characterisation (using fixed epithets) of negative characters (Vukašin, Uglješa) and positive characters (Gojko, Gojkovica, Desimir, the builder Rade).

Lesson 92 introduces students to the broader context of folk art, focusing on the remaining works from the pre-Kosovo cycle and the relationships among its characters. The negative character of Vukašin is highlighted against the backdrop of the positive figures of Miloš Vojnović and Momčilo. Of particular note is the lengthy discussion of female characters, including the comparison of the young mother – Gojko's wife from the song *Zidanje Skadra* – with Jevrosima, the mother of King Marko from the song *Ženidba kralja Vukašina*. Both heroines are contrasted with the anonymous wives of Vukašin and Uglješa, as well as with Vidoslava from *Ženidba kralja Vukašina*. As in other materials, attention is drawn to the comparison of Gojko's young wife to a golden apple; in this case, an additional explanation clarifies that this metaphor signifies "great, irreplaceable love", emphasising the significance of Gojko's sacrifice.

According to the information on the "SuperŠkola" [SuperSchool] platform, the materials posted there are intended to be used by students (and parents) as supplementary resources[28], but they may also serve as inspiration for teachers and may have been used by them, especially during periods of remote learning (e.g., during the pandemic). *Zidanje Skadra* appears on this platform as part of the lesson *Narodne epske pesme starijih vremena – Srpski jezik za 5. Razred* [Folk songs of old times – Serbian language for 5th grade] (SuperŠkola, 2019), devoted to discussing a cycle of songs from the so-called old times, together with the

[28] The educational portal "SuperŠkola" contains about seven hundred video lessons in Serbian, mathematics, physics, and chemistry for grades 5–8 of primary school. The video lessons have been developed in accordance with the official programme of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia and are an example of the use of modern technologies for educational purposes. See https://www.superskola.rs/.

songs *Ženidba Dušanova, Ženidba kralja Vukašina,* and *Uroš i Mrnjavčevići.* At the beginning, the teacher reminds the students of the characteristics of folk epic songs and the period to which the pre-Kosovo cycle refers. She points to their "objectivity", the development of patriotic feelings, the elaborate plot, and their emphasis on heroes and events. The teacher assumes that the pupils are already familiar with the content of the works and announces that she will focus on the characteristics of the protagonists and identifying the underlying message in the songs of the pre-Kosovo cycle. The material draws attention to the historical context and the negative portrayal of King Vukašin in the other works of the cycle as well. In the song *Zidanje Skadra*, Vukašin (like his brother Uglješa) fails to keep his word, in the song *Ženidba kralja Vukašina*, Vukašin betrays Vojvoda Momčilo, while in *Uroš i Mrnjavčevići*, he is portrayed as a self-righteous ruler who seeks to gain the tsar's throne. When discussing *Zidanje Skadra*, the teacher also draws attention to the character of Gojkovica, the passage comparing her to a golden apple, and the ending of the work. Another important element is the reference to the belief that no building can be erected without human sacrifice.

The last of the online materials worth noting is a lesson titled *Narodna epska pesma Zidanje Skadra* [The epic folk song *The building of Skadar*], prepared for the subject *Srpski jezik i književnost* [Serbian Language and Literature] for the first year of secondary school in Croatia for Serbian-minority education (i-nastava, 2022). The lesson contains standard elements: information about folk art and the song's place within it, historical context, and discussion of poetic images and the characteristics of its protagonists (positive and negative). The message of the work is presented to students directly, as the necessity of making sacrifices to complete the construction, because great deeds require sacrifice. The teacher reads excerpts from the song and explains lesser-known words. This material includes a unique reference to Ivo Andrić's work *The Bridge on the Drina*[29]; from the commentary, we learn that the name Stojan is an old Slavic-Serbian "protective name". Uniquely, in this online lesson, the teacher explains that walling a woman into the foundations of a fortress symbolises the role of women as the support and foundation of the home and family. Few materials refer to the musical context; in this case, students are informed that the songs were performed to the accompaniment of a *gusle*. In addition, we also learn that the numbers 3 and 9 have magical significance, and to confirm this, the teacher quotes a folk saying: (*kako narod kaže*): *tri puta Bog pomaže* [(as people say): God helps three times]. Finally, students are encouraged to think about the kind of sacrifice they encounter today and in which situations.

The numerous theatre performances staged for students – and in which they sometimes participate – based on the play *Zidanje Skadra*, are also worth

[29] One of analyzed textbooks quotes an excerpt from the novel *The Bridge on the Drina*, which summarises the legend of children being walled up in a bridge in the context of the belief in *vilas* (Божић et al., 2018, p. 93).

mentioning, including those at *Bitef teatar* (Belgrade)[30], the Pozorište mladih Zvornik theatre (Zvornik, Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Narodno pozorište Sombor theatre (Serbia), and the JU Kulturni centar "Nikola Đurković" Kotor cultural centre as part of the *4th Festival lutkarstva "Lutvid fest"* in Bijeljina (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Based on the analysis of selected teaching materials, it can be concluded that their content is consistent and covers several dominant themes: the presence and significance of supernatural forces, the necessity of sacrifice, historical context, characterisation (often based on contrast), the artistic value of epic works and folk art, and their significance for national culture. A large part of the materials is devoted to describing the characteristics of folk art. Students learn that the decasyllable (folk epic or heroic decasyllable) is one of the most popular verses in folk songs, and that fixed epithets and repetitions are among the characteristic elements of such songs. This analysis focuses more on the merits of the written text and its classification within the literary and historical context than on the approach proposed by Pešikan-Ljuštanović as a characteristic element of oral tradition (Пешикан-Љуштановић, 2010). Ample class time is spent reading or narrating the songs to explain unfamiliar words and discuss individual scenes.

Each message also includes a reference to "folk wisdom", whether in the form of a mention of Vuk Karadžić's commentary on the text of the song or the generally accepted belief that a building cannot be durable without making a sacrifice. This message is reinforced by the universal observation that great goals require great sacrifices:

> The construction of Skadar: the song is based on the folk belief that in order to erect significant constructions, great sacrifices must be made, even in the form of human life. (М. Вучковић, 2008, p. 48)

> It has become a common belief that no significant building can be erected without first making a sacrifice. The folk singer linked this belief to the founding of the city of Skadar (Мркаљ & Несторовић, 2021, p. 65).

Supernatural elements and the ritual itself are associated with paganism and the pre-Christian era (Божић et al., 2018). Only in this context are variants in other cultures sometimes mentioned. The *vilas*, on the other hand, are usually portrayed as ruthless characters with enormous power and destructive force: "According to folk belief, *vilas* could destroy everything that humans built (bridges, cities) until a human sacrifice was walled up in the foundations of the structure" (Божић et al., 2018, p. 93).

[30] Following its premiere in 2017, the performance was staged in numerous schools and cultural institutions, e.g., as part of the BAŠTeAtar festival, *Festival profesionalnih pozorišnih trupa i nezavisnih produkcija* [Festival of Professional Theatre Companies and Independent Productions].

An obligatory part of each lesson is the characterisation of the protagonists and reference to the moral message of the work, which in the song *Zidanje Skadra* is related to the relationship between the brothers. One of the textbooks begins with information indicating the main line of interpretation and the desired moral attitude:

> Of all moral values, honour and dignity are among the most important. […] That is why those who are willing to make the greatest sacrifices in the name of honour and dignity are held in high esteem among the people. […] The epic song of ancient times, *Zidanje Skadra*, tells a tragic story. Read it and learn about the value of honour and keeping one's word in human life. (Божић et al., 2018, p. 89)

The analysis examines Gojko's moral dilemma and his brothers' betrayal (Божић et al., 2018, p. 92; Стратијев, 2020, pp. 7–8). Students are asked to evaluate their actions: "Compare the actions of Gojko and the other brothers. Who do you think made a mistake?" (Божић et al., 2018, p. 92). Gojko is evaluated positively, and his feelings about the loss of his wife are discussed: "Underline the passages in which Gojko speaks when he sees his beloved. What feelings does he express?" (Божић et al., 2018, p. 92); or such a discussion is proposed (Станковић-Шошо, 2012, p. 294). In one of the online lessons, the teacher highlights that Gojko's comparison of his beloved to a golden apple signifies his immense love for his wife, emphasising his suffering and irreparable loss (see Moja škola, no. 92; OŠ Stevan Nemanja – Stenjevac, 2021a, 2021b).

In most cases, the view that sacrifice is necessary is emphasised, and the proof that Gojko made the right decision is presented as the "reward" in the form of a life-giving liquid that will serve future mothers. The instruction given to the pupils: "Think about and explain why sacrifice is rewarded with a miracle in the song" (Божић et al., 2018, p. 92) indicates a positive assessment of the act of walling up. On the other hand, according to some materials, the lack of mention of the permanence of the structure can be interpreted as an indication that the fortress was not built despite the sacrifice. However, interpretations of the work that question or reject the act of human sacrifice are not common.

It is also worth mentioning that the analysed materials do not mention other versions of the song, in which Gojkovica does not accept her fate, but curses her tormentors (as in Ikov's version) or, as a result of being walled up, her tormentors die (as in Kordunaš's version). Gojkovica is portrayed as the ideal wife and mother: beautiful, innocent, loving unconditionally, ready for the greatest sacrifice in the name of her family (Станковић-Шошо, 2012, p. 294). Students are asked, among other things, to mark the verses in the work that confirm the power of her maternal love (Божић et al., 2018, p. 92). If questions about Gojkovica appear in the teaching materials, they do not concern her feelings (as in the case of Gojko), but her relationship with family members and with Gojko: "What does Gojkovica's reaction tell us about her attitude towards family members?" (Божић et al., 2018, p. 92). In the case of both male and female characters, students are encouraged to identify with

morally unambiguous, black-and-white heroes, leaving no room for the complexity of human affairs.

Another important issue raised in the analysed materials for teachers is the historical context and correlation of the lesson topic with the subject of history. From the research, it appears that the period covered by the song's plot is only discussed in the sixth year of primary school. This means that pupils first learn about the folk song and only a year later about the historical facts. Usually, pupils learn that there is a large discrepancy between the events presented in the song and the historical facts, e.g., that the construction of the fortress in Shkodra took place before the appearance of King Vukašin's family, that only two of the three brothers are historical figures, that the only positive character – Gojko – is a fictional character, that King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa were the sons of Mrnjava, and that both died in the Battle of Marica in 1371, etc. It is important to mention the discrepancy between the creation of the character of Vukašin in folk art and the historical facts, which clearly show that Vukašin did not kill King Uroš (Станковић-Шошо, 2012, p. 294). Attention to historical aspects is commendable, provided that such reflection fosters the development of critical analysis skills and the ability to read the work in context. An important thread for understanding medieval realities and adequately interpreting the work would be, for example, drawing attention to the process of constructing buildings, especially defensive structures such as fortresses, which were of great military importance (protecting against enemy invasions) and symbolic importance (signifying the permanence of the state and the continuity of power)[31]. Information given on historical themes is often contradictory: on the one hand, it is said that epic songs reflect the medieval history of Serbia (Сувајџић, 2019, p. 5), while on the other hand, the inconsistency of historical facts with the world presented in the song is emphasised (Мркаљ & Несторовић, 2021, p. 66). Linking the legend of *Zidanje Skadra* with medieval Serbian families may lead to the conflation of folk art with a single national culture. Moreover, it reinforces the belief in a direct link between the nation in its contemporary understanding (modern nation states established in the 19th and 20th centuries) and the political and social structures formed in the Middle Ages. The identification of the work with a single national culture is also fostered by emphasising its traditional origins through the use of the term "our" in the studies and the lack of mention of the song's existence in other language variants. Patriotic themes are not directly addressed in the analysed teaching materials, but they appear indirectly in the message about the need for sacrifice for the community (im-

[31] One of the publications aimed at students mentions the importance of sacred objects in the context of creating heritage: *zadužbine* (Сувајџић, 2019). Miloslav Šutić writes about the importance of building a medieval town/fortress as a determinant of Gojko's actions. In his opinion, Gojko perceived the existence of a stronghold as a fundamental condition for the survival of the nation, motivated by the idea of a city-fortress as an essential refuge, a place without which both defence and attack were unthinkable in the ruthless Middle Ages (Шутић, 2012, pp. 89, 92).

plied: national community), the introduction of historical figures and thus the connection of the topos with the cycle of pre-Kosovo songs and the history of medieval Serbia, and the emphasis on the importance of Serbian folk tradition within Serbian national culture.

The analysed materials lack reflection on the use of violence against women and their status in the social structure. The sacrifice-affirming interpretation of the work *Zidanje Skadra* may reinforce students' belief in the necessity of sacrifice (by women) and the inevitability of fate, instead of fostering a sense of agency in girls and motivating them to seek other solutions. Female characters appear in education mainly as part of the patriarchal world of heroes and traitors; they are innocent victims and ideal mothers or unfaithful wives and schemers. Regardless of their role, they are part of a male-centred perspective. Prioritising the values of the community (family, local, national) over one's own needs and those of one's immediate family is viewed positively. When faced with a moral dilemma involving a choice between duty and love, positive characters choose to keep their word, while negative characters choose their own lives or those of their loved ones.

Opet to, ali drukčije – Contemporary Alternative Variants

A characteristic feature of transcribed oral texts is their variability. Vuk Karadžić himself reflects this specificity by including more than one version of a given song in his collection, usually adding the subtitle *Opet to ali drukčije* [Again, but differently] and the place of origin (e.g., *Opet to ali drukčije (iz Crne Gore)*), or *Opet* and the title of the song recorded first (e.g., *Opet Sveti Savo*). The variability of the transcribed texts is also pointed out by Miodrag Maticki in his article *Вукове народне песме у српској периодици, хрестоматијама и уџбеницима до 1864. године* [Vuka's folk songs in Serbian periodicals, anthologies, and textbooks until 1864], which examines the publications and reprints of Vuka's works until 1864, i.e., during his lifetime (Матицки, 2005, p. 60). The reproduced and circulated texts encouraged the collection of songs and their variants, which consequently led to the accumulation of many different versions in written form. Vuk Karadžić was not the only professional engaged in the search for and recording of folk oral creativity, but thanks to his pivotal influence on the reform of the Serbian language and literature, he remains the leading authority on these matters to this day.

The teaching materials discussed above rarely pay attention to the specific nature of the oral transmission of folk art. There is a comment on this subject in the article *Тумачење песме Зиданје Скадра у V разреду основне школе* [Interpretation of the song *Building of Skadar* in the 5th grade of primary school], where the author emphasises the importance of the act of transmission itself, rather than the question of the authorship of the work (Алексић, 1984, p. 564). During the online lesson, the teacher mentions that the songs were performed

to the accompaniment of a *gusle* (i-nastava, 2022). This information is repeated in one of the textbooks (Станковић-Шошо, 2012, p. 295). Among the functional objectives of the lesson is the need for students to understand and remember terms related to folk literature: folk epic song, collective work, anonymous author, and oral tradition (Јоксимовић, 2019). Students are mainly familiarised with the text of the song, and even when audio materials are provided as supplementary materials, they contain the text of the song read by a narrator, rather than a performance accompanied by music. The lack of sufficient attention to the specificity of oral transmission compared to the author's text is problematic, especially in the context of the dispute over the cultural heritage of individual nations and ethnic groups in the region. In most cases, the teaching materials repeat the same version of Raško's *Zidanje Skadra*. There does not appear to be any mention of other versions of this work in Serbian or other languages. However, the custom of human sacrifice is discussed in a broader comparative context.

A collection of contemporary stories *Ko se boji vuka još? Moćne priče za odvažne i radoznale: priručnik za rodnu ravnopravnost, mirovno i inkluzivno obrazovanje* [Who Is Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? Workbook for Peace Education, Interculturality and Gender Equity] (Izgarjan & Milojević, 2012) contains a reference to Vuk, highlighting the variability of the collected texts. The publication is part of the project *Кроз моћ приче ка родној равноправности, културном плурализму и креативном решавању конфликта* [Through the power of storytelling towards gender equality, cultural pluralism, and creative conflict resolution], approved by the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Upbringing of the Republic of Serbia (Република Србија – Завод за унапређивање образовања и васпитања, 2010)[32]. The authors note that in traditional stories, violence against women is normalised and conflicts are resolved through fighting. Unlike male characters, female characters are usually nameless and passive victims who wait to be rescued, mainly through marriage. In their opinion, such messages, which reinforce social hierarchies and gender, racial and nationalist stereotypes, can have a destructive effect on students (Izgarjan & Milojević, 2012). Their collection includes stories referring to native folk art *(Kosovka devojka i Kadira iz Izmira, Kosovka devojka i život majke Jugovića)* [The Kosovar Girl and Kadira from Izmir, The Kosovar Girl, and the Life of Jugović's Mother], but also other literary characters such as Little Red Riding Hood and Snow White.

The collection includes two stories based on the topos of the walled-up woman that refer to the work *Zidanje Skadra: Slobodankino zidanje Skadra* [Slobodanka builds Skadar] about the construction of a fortress/city on the Bojana River, and *Opet to, ali drugačije. Zidanje Skadra i vila Zagorka* [Again, but differ-

[32] Information about the project can be found on the website: https://tales.metafuture.org/tales-metafuture-org-inspirations/ (*Inspirations – The heroine's journey: Futures tales for all ages*, n.d.).

ently. The building of Skadar and the *vila* Zagorka]. In the story *Slobodankino zidanje Skadra*, Gojko (described as the bravest and most talented son) died in the war, leaving Slobodanka (the name speaks for itself – *sloboda* means freedom) alone. The remaining brothers, Vukašin and Uglješa, have been unable to build a castle for several years, which causes their father to doubt their ability to take power and to consider handing its construction over to Gojko's wife and her son, Jovan. The threatened brothers decide to get rid of Slobodanka and devise a plot with the *vila* in the leading role. Since no one believes their claims, they stage the *vila's* appearance and her alleged demands to sacrifice a woman from the family. They reinforce their story with threats to destroy houses and kidnap the children of the inhabitants if the *vila's* demands are not met. All the men find a way to save their wives; only Slobodanka remains without a husband to defend her. Upon hearing about the planned walling up, the woman asks the brothers and the other residents for a week to solve the problem of the unfinished building, as well as the opportunity to say goodbye to her son and arrange for his care. To the dissatisfaction of the brothers, the others agree to her request. Slobodanka goes to the construction site, demonstrates her knowledge of chemistry, mathematics, and logical thinking, and discovers the brothers' deception and the reason for the failure of the construction. She quickly finds a new location for the fortress, organises a group of workers and prepares a construction plan. The brothers try to thwart her efforts, but she is helped by her friends (who have meaningful names – Spasenija [Saviour] and Saveta [Advisor]) and the workers, whom she treats with respect. The plot to eliminate Slobodanka and the brothers' father (we learn that Vukašin tried to poison his father) is revealed. The brothers are punished, and Slobodanka proves herself as a builder and becomes involved in the construction of further buildings throughout the country.

The story *Opet to, ali drugačije. Zidanje Skadra i vila Zagorka* begins with an account of three brothers who, because of their lack of knowledge and experience, fail in their attempts to build a city. Unwilling to admit his own failure, Vukašin blames supernatural forces and informs his brothers that a *vila* requires a sacrifice. Despite their doubts, they believe Vukašin. Desimir, who was instructed to find children for the sacrifice (Stojana and Stoja), fearing direct confrontation with the king, lies and does not carry out the order. Vukašin invents a new story and informs his brothers that the sacrifice will be one of their wives, the one who brings in the meal the next day. As in the legend, only Gojko keeps his word, but this time it is his sisters-in-law (played by Spasenija and Saveta) who inform Slobodanka of everything. The women discuss what to do and cannot believe the cruelty of their husbands. Zagorka, the *vila*, helps them. Slobodanka appears at the construction site and responds to Gojko's words of despair: "I'm not worried about the apple; I have no doubt that you will soon find another, better apple. You can have as many apples as you want. You'd better pray to God for your mental health […]" (Izgarjan & Milojević, 2012, p. 24). The brothers wall up Slobodanka and, at her request, leave openings for

her eyes and breasts so that she can feed her son. Gojko, at his wife's request, sends his son abroad to Slobodanka's mother. The women keep Slobodanka alive, leading her out of the building through tunnels, and throughout the year they pour a liquid onto the walls to remind people of the great injustice that befell the walled-up young woman and mother. Slobodanka secretly joins her mother and son; she wants to raise him to be a man who will be able to defend his wife in the future. Gojko takes his own life, Vukašin is taken prisoner, and Uglješa leaves his country. Skadar is taken over by another family (the Svađalovići – a significant family name, *svađa* – meaning quarrel) and the construction is never completed.

In the preface, the authors announce that readers will find familiar heroines and heroes (in that order: *junakinje and junake*) in these stories but presented in a completely different light (Izgarjan & Milojević, 2012, p. 7). The only thing that remains unchanged is the negative portrayals of the Mrnjavčević brothers. The female characters, on the other hand, gain agency (princesses no longer wait for others to solve their problems, understanding that they must face them themselves) and propose alternative solutions to conflicts (instead of arguing and fighting, they choose conversation and negotiation). Women are no longer nameless but have strong and meaningful names that speak of the values they cherish – providing unconditional help and good advice. All the heroines are characterised by a sense of responsibility, justice, intelligence, and sensitivity to the fate of others. The women show solidarity, cooperate with each other, and support each other. The versions presented above also reverse the image of a ruthless *vila* who uses her magical powers to cause pain to innocent people. Both variants break with the belief in the indispensability of "walling-up" women and end positively for Slobodanka: in the first, she succeeds as a builder, and in the second, she contributes to the punishment of the brothers and reunites with her son. The collection is an important and painful diagnosis of contemporary Serbian society, but it also encourages readers to seek new solutions and create alternative histories.

* * *

The analysis of teaching materials suggests at least two interpretative trends regarding the topos of the walled-up woman. The dominant trend focuses on analysing the topos exclusively in written form and in close connection with medieval history and the history of Serbian families. There is a weak alternative trend, a contemporary proposal for interpreting the source text, which pays attention to characters marginalised in traditional interpretations, draws on critical, feminist, and anti-violence trends, and focuses on individuals as part of a community, on their competences and on their status. However, none of these trends highlights the specificity of oral folk art and the socio-cultural context of its creation and literary origins. Nor do they address the issue of the existence of other variants.

Undoubtedly, the issues surrounding this theme are very complex, and communicating them to primary school pupils is a major challenge for many reasons. Young audiences do not have a developed cognitive apparatus and are still building their critical thinking skills. They need to access a combination of content about medieval realities and their own lived experiences. Lesson time frames and curriculum requirements limit teachers. It is possible that teachers pay more attention to the specificity of oral communication and use teaching materials – as well as literary or artistic forms – that can be classified as alternative. The distance between the epic world presented and our contemporary reality creates a risk of simplification and generalisation, potentially resulting in ignorance, misunderstandings about the relationship between history and literature, and the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudices. New interpretations of the topos create the possibility of including marginalised themes or elements of an interpretative trend – tentatively called "alternative" here – which takes into account contemporary social changes such as globalisation, individualisation, women's emancipation, and shifts in communication channels.

Visual Representations of the Topos

Visual representations of this topos most often appear as illustrations for texts on this subject, particularly in song collections, but also in school textbooks and teaching materials. These illustrations usually depict a scene of walling up, showing a female foundation sacrifice alongside fragments of a building or wall (Figures 3 and 4). In older textbooks, there is usually only one depiction accompanying the text.

In textbooks published before the 1990s, the songs are accompanied by black-and-white sketches depicting the scene of the walling up. The visual element aligns with the modest colour scheme of the textbook (Figure 5). Newer editions feature colours, but this change is not accompanied by a compositional reorganisation of the representation. The sacrifice remains at the centre. The entire figure of the woman is visible, her body bricked up to the waist, or fragments of her body can be seen through holes left in the wall. Various stages of the walling up are shown, from the moment the woman is forcibly led to the site to the completion of the work, evidenced only by her visible eyes. In one case, the process of walling up is shown almost step by step (Figure 8): the image is divided into parts resembling comic book panels, each showing the subsequent stages of work – from hands lifting stones, to stones at the level of the feet, then the knees. The posture of the woman being walled up indicates various emotions. In the 1953 textbook, anger and disagreement are clearly visible; in the 1991 textbook, despair; and in the 1993 picture, calmness, and sadness, indicating acceptance of her fate. The images from 2018 and 2021 emphasise the mother's relationship with her child and the sacrifice of parting with her infant (Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 3. Illustration in the song collection *Зидање Скадра на Бојани*, Sarajevo, 1953. Authors: Милан Васиљевић and Марио Микулић. Source: *Зидање Скадра на Бојани и друге народне пјесме* (1953)



Figure 4. Illustration in the song collection *Није благо ни сребро ни злато: неисторијске народне песме: народне песме о Немањићима и Мрњавчевићима*, Novi Sad, 1991. Author: Мирко Стојнић. Source: Клеут (1991)



Figure 5. A gloomy illustration in a reading book for the fifth grade. Source: *Сребрна грана: читанка за V разред основне школе*, ed. Миленко Ратковић., Podgorica, 1993. Author: Витомир Лекић. Source: Ратковић (1993)



Figure 6. Illustration in textbook *Raskovnik. Čitanka za V razred osnovne škole*, 2021. Source: *Расковник: читанка за пети разред основне школе*, ed. Зона Мркаљ і Зорица Несторовић. Author: Тихомир Челановић. Source: Мркаљ & Несторовић (2021)



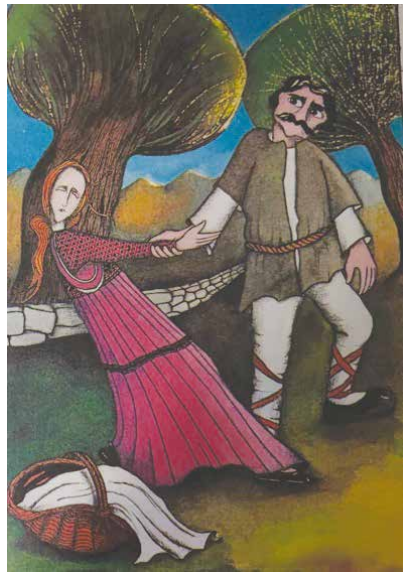
Figure 7. Illustration in textbook *Pohvala. Čitanka za V razred osnovne škole*, 2018. Source: Похвала: читанка за пети разред основне школе, red. Снежана Божић et al. Authors: Зоран Пешикан, Ђорђе Петровић, Нада Серафимовић. Source: Божић et al. (2018)

Only one of the images presented above shows Gojko (Figure 5), positioned in the foreground on the right, hunched over, with his back to the wall and his head bowed, immersed in despair. Gojko and Gojkovica are depicted statically, their posture indicating their position as victims and acceptance of their tragic fate.

Current aesthetic trends undoubtedly influenced the development of these representations, as can be seen in the example of a sketch from 1953 (Figure 3). It can be interpreted in the context of the aesthetics of socialist realism in the art of the 1950s, which aimed to shape a positive image of the working class and promote communist ideology. The socialist realist character of the composition is indicated primarily by the muscular silhouettes of the men, depicted in a heroic manner, which corresponded to the official iconographic standards of the period. These figures are shown not in an individualistic way, but as the embodiment of strength and collective work, aligning with the contemporary model of depicting workers as builders of a new society. In addition, clearly emphasised attributes, such as a trowel or a characteristic work apron, underline their working class identity and highlight the work ethic, which was a key element of socialist realist iconography.

It is worth noting that such representations had not only an aesthetic function, but also a propagandist one – they aimed to shape social consciousness by presenting workers as the driving force behind progress and modernisation. The stylisation of the figures and the choice of props therefore reflect not only artistic solutions, but also the ideological assumptions of the era in which they were created.





Figures 8 and 9. Illustrations from the collection *Narodna epska pesma. Zidanje Skadra*, ed. Zagorka Ilić, Kraljevo/Gornji Mladenovac 1988. Source: *Зидање Скадра: народна песма*, ed. Загорка Илић. Горњи Милановац: Дечје новине, 1988. Author: Лидија Тарановић. Source: Илић (1988)

Only in the case of the publication *Narodna epska pesma. Zidanje Skadra* is the visual aspect not limited to one or two representations. Apart from scenes related to the walling up (Figures 8 and 9), several other scenes are included in the text of the song: (1) construction site and map; (2) workers dressed in white clothes, surrounded by a multitude of stones; (3) three wives, two of whom clearly indicate their distress; (4) two images of night-time conversations between the older brothers and their wives, and a third image of Gojko alone in bed; (5) an image of the brothers with their backs turned and a woman in a white robe hovering above them, most likely a *vila*. At the end of the song text, after two scenes related to the walling up, there is a small image of an empty cradle. The images accompanying the text serve an interpretative and complementary function: they not only help the reader understand the content but also visualise elements that are difficult to imagine, enriching the message with a symbolic and emotional layer.

Another image that caught my attention was an illustration accompanying the text *Zidanje Skadra*, published in 1952. It occupies a separate page in the book and stands out in terms of both composition and technique. While researching the topos, few depictions of the *vila* were discovered, and when she did appear she was either in the water or depicted as part of it; she was not a central figure, and her hostility towards buildings and builders was never

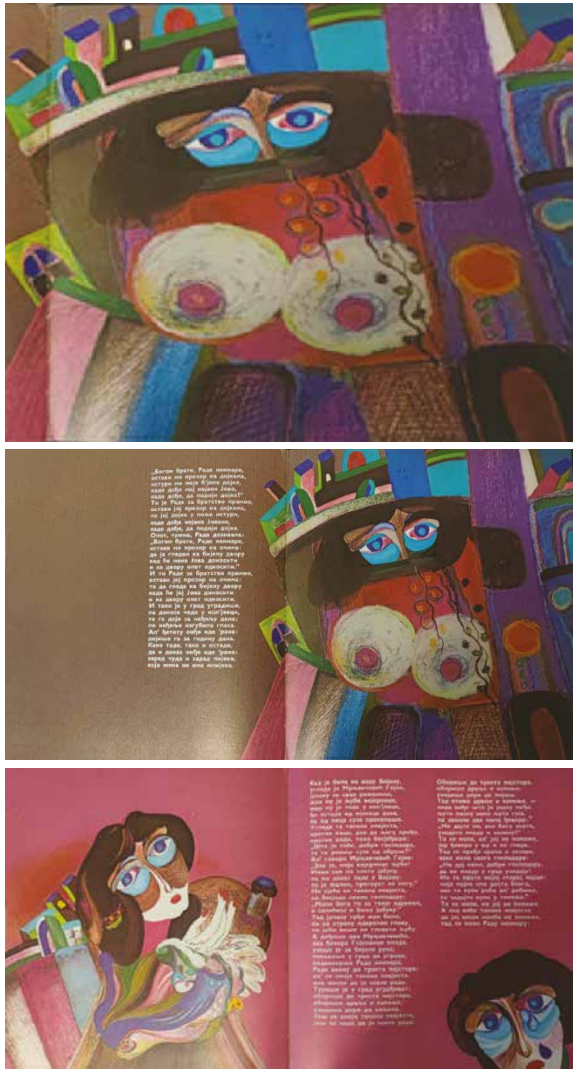


Figure 10. Illustration by Filip Vuković from the publication *Zidanje Skadra*, Beograd, 1952.
Source: Ф. Вучковић (1952, p. 8)

portrayed as vividly as here. In this scene, the *vila* holds her hand raised high, clenched into a fist, seemingly directing this gesture towards the workers on the left in the background. A fortress-like structure is faintly visible on a hill in the distance. The workers' posture indicates fear, with one of them appearing to dodge the blow that awaits him. The *vila* is portrayed as a strong, young woman with long hair braided at the back of her neck. She wears an impressive floral dress, which emphasises her femininity, and her connection to the natural world. As she is situated on a plane closer than the workers, she appears larger and stronger. At the top of the painting is a huge cloud. The painting is a black and white sketch, with light tones in the central part and around the workers, while black dominates at the edges of the painting.

The illustrations accompanying the publication of two songs, *Зидање Скадра* and *Женидба краља Вукашина* (Кнежевић, 1975), are an exception in terms of aesthetics. Unlike most other publications, the texts are accompanied by multiple illustrations of various scenes from the song, constituting an equally important element of the publication. The images are colourful and surrealistic, psychedelic in style, probably inspired by the psychedelic art of the 1960s and 1970s. The deformed body is distinguished by unnaturally enlarged eyes, and in the scene symbolising the walling up of the woman, also by breasts, round and swollen with visibly emphasised nipples, in natural colour (Figures 11 and 12). In this depiction, it is primarily the woman's face that is walled up; only

her blue eyes and a fragment of her nose are visible through the dark-edged opening. The intense and contrasting colours heighten the drama of the scene and emphasise the asymmetry of the figures that make up the structure, ultimately giving the impression of chaos and instability.



Figures 11, 12, and 13. Кнежевић Миодраг, *Зидање Скадра. Женидба краља Вукашина: народне песме*, Нолит, Београд-Милано 1975.
Source: Кнежевић (1975)

During my online explorations and search for visual representations of the topos of walling up, I came across two images that are not formally related to the text, occurring outside of it but clearly referring to it: the illustrations *Zidanje Skadra* (Figures 14 and 15).



Figure 14. Dušan Pavlić, *Zidanje Skadra.*
Source: Pavlić (2013)

Dušan Pavlić's interpretation focuses on the space in which the drama unfolds. The painting is dominated by the empty expanse of the sky and the natural landscape; even the fragments of the crumbling fortress blend into the mountains. The reeds in the foreground indicate the presence of water nearby; it might be a view from the other side of the river. The only figure in the painting is a *vila*, who floats horizontally above the mountain and holds out her hand towards the site of destruction. The *vila* is a young, slender woman dressed in a flowing blue dress. Instead of depicting the dynamic scenes described in the work – the fervour of construction and the tension accompanying the building of Shkodra – the artist presents a melancholic emptiness and a vision of a space haunted by ghosts and spectres.

In turn, the composition by Jovan Ukropina is dominated by the tower of the building, which occupies almost the entire background of the painting. This effect is enhanced by the vertical layout of the illustration (Figure 15). In the foreground, a man is carrying a sack of cement. Apart from him, only two other people are visible, both involved in the construction: a man at the bottom clearly communicating with a man operating a crane at the top of the tower. The male-centred perspective of the narrative is further emphasised by the phallic symbol of the tower, which reinforces the hierarchy of power and the masculinised nature of the presented world. A large part of the image is dominated by a cloudless sky, indicating good weather conditions. The image lacks a foundation sacrifice; the main theme is the construction of the building and the labour of the workers. The image is in subdued colours, with only the red shirt of the worker in the foreground and the blue sky standing out. The soft and gentle comic-style lines used here contrast with the brutal message of the tale, camouflaging its story.



Figure 15. Jovan Ukropina, *Zidanje Skadra.*
Source: Jovan-Ukropina (2010)

Another realistic work is the light-coloured plaster bas-relief by Olivera Grbić *Zidanje Skadra* (Figure 16). The work shows a bust of a young, beautiful woman against the backdrop of a stone wall. Beyond the wall, her head is tilted towards the child in front of her, with her one arm, breasts, and part of her shoulders visible. The infant she is feeding is supported by the wings of a two-headed eagle.



Figure 16. Olivera Grbić, *Building of Skadar*, plaster bas-relief, 2020.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

This depiction is available on YouTube, accompanied by a short text linking the sculpture to the song *Zidanje Skadra* and clearly identifying it with Serbian culture: "The Building of Skadar / Serbian epic song / motifs from the Serbian

song / one of the most moving / songs of all nations, of all times / the building of Skadar / Serbia" (Grbic, 2020). Although this is a somewhat Passion-like situation (the woman has just been sentenced to death), the delicate and mystical representation evokes typical Christian depictions of the Madonna, which emphasise the perfect love between mother and child.

The connection between the title of the source song and the theme of prolonged construction, expressed as *(ko/kao) zidanje Skadra (na Bojani)* [like the building of Skadar on Bojana], appears in contemporary colloquial language [see the chapter on Montenegro]. This theme is also visible in Andrej Momčilović's 2009 work *Zidanje Skadra* (Figure 17).



Figure 17. *Zidanje Skadra* by Andrej Momčilović (2009).
Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/hsub/3788562792/

The black-and-white photograph shows a contemporary construction site with a crane in the foreground and the rebar of what is most likely a multi-storey building. The photo was taken from the perspective of someone observing from the ground, which is why the sky takes up a significant part of the background. The photograph was probably part of an exhibition, but unfortunately, the artist is no longer alive. His friend, in a conversation about this photograph, brought up the myth of Sisyphus: "[…] through the motif of Sisyphean construction, he wanted to express a reflection on the deepest fear humans face – the fear of existential meaninglessness (life as a cyclical and pointless construction and deconstruction)" (communication via author's profile in social media, 19 July 2023). This is an interesting combination of a motif expressing the hopelessness and helplessness of human existence (similar to Vito Nikolić's work) and the potential resulting from the relationship between the motif of sacrifice and that of construction or creation.

Since most of the visualisations presented come from educational, didactic, or literary materials, in which they serve as illustrations for song lyrics, they

constitute a rather homogeneous collection. The representations tend to focus on the main or key scenes from the source work, especially turning points and climaxes of the action. In most cases, this is the scene of the walling up (especially when the text is accompanied by a single image), sometimes also the characters' dialogues or encounters with the *vila*. In most cases, the techniques used are predominantly traditional sketches and watercolours, as well as realistic representations. Recurring motifs include the sacrificed woman and construction work (fortresses and other architectural projects).

Summary: Two Perspectives – Two Cultures?

The dominant focus of my research is the epic song *Zidanje Skadra*, recorded by Vuk Karadžić in the early 19th century, then reproduced in anthologies and educational materials, and serving as a reference point in the process of creating new cultural texts (scientific, literary, artistic, etc.). The other variants are practically unknown and remain outside the mainstream of artistic inspiration and scientific discourse. There is also a dominance of written culture over oral culture, which is supported by the greater importance of Vuk Karadžić as a collector of oral tradition. The low variability of source texts related to the fortress, compared with texts related to the bridge, indicates effective cultural unification within the Serbian space and cultural diversity elsewhere.

In the Serbian culture, my studies suggest that the introduction of historical figures into the song *Zidanje Skadra* is an original element, while the topos of the walled-up woman itself is secondary (or marginal) here and is not as significant as the topos of sacrifice in the epic works of the Kosovo cycle.

It would appear that the topos of the walled-up woman is currently being revitalised in Serbia as part of two distinct trends, tentatively identified as traditional and critical. The traditional approach, evident in formal knowledge transfer (e.g., schools and academia), is based on nineteenth-century sources and the conventional reception of the topos as a literary text, ignoring the specificity of the oral culture from which it derives, and without considering the specificity of contemporary culture in which it currently functions. The critical approach is mainly visible in poetry, theatre, and performance, as well as in their intersection with education. Contemporary texts created in this vein give new meanings that depart from the reality of the feudal world and reveal the contemporary human condition – its powerlessness in the face of the world (then: magic and the patriarchal system; now: chaos and loneliness) – and a shift in social roles.

Contemporary Serbian culture, although in some respects critical of the national narrative and the world order it presents, still recognises the formative potential of the folk-epic tradition, and engages in polemics with its manifestations in contemporary socio-cultural reality.

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Maciej Olszewski

Slovenia. Echoes of a Lost Topos in Children's Play

Folkloristics and Cultural Anthropology on the Topos of the Walled-Up Woman

In Slovenia, scholarly interest in the phenomenon of the walled-up woman dates back to the second half of the 19th century. Early individual press publications that referred to the motif of the foundation sacrifice include the article by Davorin Nemanić which appeared in the journal *Ljubljanski zvon* in 1884, discussed in more detail below (Nemanić, 1884). This motif also appeared in published collections of folk cultural texts, such as the works of Štefan Kühar, *Narodno blago vogrskij Slovancof* [National Treasure of the Hungarian Slovenes] from 1910 and 1914 (Kühar, 1910, 1914)). In the 1930s and 1940s, the research of ethnologists France Marolt (1936) and Boris Orel (1936, 1942) focused on rituals, folk dances and children's games referencing the motif of the foundation sacrifice; these were later expanded by, among others, Zmaga Kumer (1963), Marija Šuštar and Valens Vodušek (Šuštar & Vodušek, 1963), as well as Mirko Ramovš (1991).

In the post-war period, the most significant publications on this subject include the article by Ivan Grafenauer (1957) devoted to the foundation sacrifice in Slovenian folk culture, presenting the phenomenon within a broader historical and geographical context; publications by Monika Kropej Teleban (e.g., Kropej 2011, 2012) on legends connected to architectural constructions, including the motif of the walled-up woman; the works of Ambrož Kvartič (2017, 2019) on folk culture and urban legends; and the unpublished diploma thesis of Urška Jernejc (2006), in which she analyses the Romanian ballad of Master Manole. More recently, a Slovenian translation of *Zidanje Skadra* [The Building of Skadar] by Nebojša Pop-Tasić, accompanied by his commentary, has been published (*Zidanje Skadra na Bojani*, 2022). One should also mention the folkloric material collected over the last century and a half by folklorists such as Karel Štrekelj, Jakob Kelemina, Marija Stanonik, Marija Cvetek, and Barbara Ivančič Kutin, as well as research conducted outside the Slovenian context – for example, that of Matija Murko, discussed in more detail by Rigels Halili in the chapter on Albania in this volume.

Walled Up as Punishment

Slovenian folk narrative tradition, however, does not contain legends or ballads concerning the walling up of people as a foundation sacrifice (Kvartič, 2019, pp. 221–222). Accordingly, the following analysis of folkloric material refers primarily to distant echoes of this phenomenon, or to the topos of immurement as a form of punishment, which is a fairly common motif in Slovenian texts. It also includes references to other types of folkloric motifs associated with construction. Attempting to conceptualise these references presents certain difficulties, as they are usually only loose allusions to specific elements present in narratives about the foundation sacrifice or the walled-up woman. Some aspects, however – such as the type of character being walled up or the sequence of building construction across the narratives – make it possible to situate them within a broader context. As the material below demonstrates, those who are walled up are most often women – wives, daughters, nuns, or female subjects – dependent on men within a patriarchal narrative. Significantly, the reason for the immurement is usually not specified in the preserved cultural texts.

A recurring motif in several cases is that of a wife being walled up by a cruel husband. In 2018, Barbara Ivančič Kutin[1] recounted events said to have taken place at Slovenska Bistrica Castle. According to these accounts, the castle used to be owned by a merciless count who tormented his subjects, especially his wife. One day, he ordered her to be walled up alive inside a column, which was then part of the chapel of St. Anne, and is today one of the columns in the castle courtyard. The walled-up countess was fed through an opening left in the column for as long as her voice could be heard from within. The countess's ghost is said still to be perceptible at that spot. Many claim that she appears at night as a figure dressed in white. In this and similar accounts, it is notable that the reasons for the victim's immurement remain unknown. The only apparent explanation seems to be the count's cruelty. Thus, the only point of convergence with the motif of the walled-up woman (understood as a type of foundation sacrifice) is the fact of a woman – the wife – being walled up.

In folkloric texts, immurement often appears as punishment for rejecting romantic advances or refusing to accept a prospective husband imposed on a daughter. The victims are young women of a lower social status than their oppressor, or daughters of a man in authority. Thus, instead of the husband–wife relationship presented above, the relationship here is between an older man and a young woman. Two variants of such a narrative were collected in the

[1] The accounts were collected from multiple sources living in the region of Slovenska Bistrica and are held in the archives of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. They have not been published, but they served as the basis for a short story by Dušan Šarotar, included in the volume *Živa coprnija Pohorja in Istre. Izleti po poteh pripovednega izročila* [Living Magic of Pohorje and Istria: Trips along the Paths of Lore] (Cunta, 2019) and in the digital application *Živa coprnija* [Living Magic]. I discuss this material in more detail in the chapter devoted to contemporary cultural texts.

early 2000s by students of the University of Maribor, Franja Senčič and Lucija Mestnik, during the course of a seminar led by Professor Marija Stanonik. The first concerns Hrastovec Castle and Count Herberstein[2]. The count was said to be greatly enamored of young women, and when one of them refused to yield to him, he ordered her to be walled up alive in a chapel in the forest. After a year, a spruce tree was said to have grown atop the stone chapel[3]. The second story tells of a wicked count who wished to marry the beautiful daughter of a nobleman. Yet again, his advances were rejected. Enraged, the count ordered the girl to be taken into the mountains and walled up in a standing position so that only her head protruded. The count hoped the girl would change her mind, but she preferred to die of hunger and thirst[4].

The story from Hrastovec Castle also appears in the article *Narodne pravljice o hrastovskem gradu* [Folk Tales of Hrastovec Castle], published in 1898 in the journal *Slovenski gospodar* (G. J., 1898)[5]. These versions of the story concern the origin of a roadside stone cross, whose deterioration prompted the writing of the article. According to one version, the cross was erected where the local count had ordered his daughter to be buried alive because she refused to marry the suitor he had chosen for her. Another version states that the count ordered her death in this way because she had helped rescue a man wrongfully imprisoned by the count and was too kind to "simple" folk – thereby troubling the count's conscience. In gratitude, local peasants were said to have erected the cross. Other accounts, however, claim that the cross was placed at the site where a witch was burned. The article also contains a version very similar to the one noted in Professor Stanonik's research, though it concerns a different stone cross in the vacinity. This cross was said to have been erected by the fiancé of a girl buried alive there as punishment for resisting the count. A spruce tree was said to have grown on the cross, regenerating itself despite successive renovations[6].

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[2] The Herbersteins were an aristocratic family from Styria who played a significant role in the territories of present-day Slovenia. Many of its members also became part of Slovenian cultural history and appear in various Slovenian cultural texts.

[3] Unpublished. Recorded in Jakobski Dol, 2006/2007. Narrated by Karl Vršič (Spodnja Velka; born 1920 in Slovenske Gorice). Transcribed by Franja Senčič, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. Archived by Marija Stanonik, Archive of Slovenian Literary Folklore, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), call number 12835.

[4] Unpublished. Narrated by Marjeta Deželak (Celje; born 1957). Recorded by Lucija Mestnik, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. Archived by Marija Stanonik, Archive of Slovenian Literary Folklore, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), call number 12441.

[5] The author also mentions several other legends concerning the local malevolent count who, according to these stories, was known to feed the fish in his pond with human flesh.

[6] At this point, one may consider the possible influence of press publications dating back to the late 19th century, as well as Ožbolt (Ožbalt) Ilaunig's novel *Črni križ pri*

Another story of a father punishing his daughter is found in an account recorded by Vinko Möderndorfer in Slovenian Carinthia (Möderndorfer, 1924, pp. 29–30). It tells of a count whose daughter became pregnant by a servant but, despite being tortured, refused to reveal who the father of her child was for fear of endangering her beloved. The count decided to imprison her in a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, especially built for this purpose, and ordered the only key to be thrown into a pond. The clever servant, however, managed to make a copy of the key and was thus able to bring food to his beloved. Years after the girl's confinement, the father – due to an elaborate ruse devised by the servant – found the key inside a fish. He decided to open the church and remove his daughter's remains, but instead found her alive, accompanied by a seven-year-old boy who claimed that all those years he had survived on his mother's milk. Overjoyed at the miracle, the count allowed his daughter to live as she pleased, gave her his entire estate, and she chose the servant as her husband.

The motif of a father punishing his daughter also appears in the song of Saint Barbara walled up in a tower. The collection *Slovenske ljudske pesmi* [Slovenian Folk Songs] (Kumer et al, 1981, pp. 526–541, p. 590, pp. 659–660) contains 21 variants of this song recorded between 1845 and 1969 (plus one song from the mixed Croatian–Slovenian territory recorded before 1838). In these accounts, Barbara's immurement is punishment for refusing to marry any of the kings seeking her hand. The suitors are described as Austrian or Turkish rulers, but most often it is the King of Spain[7]. The punishment is usually ordered by Barbara's father. Her refusal is motivated by her wish to dedicate herself solely to Jesus. She asks the masons to leave three openings in the tower – in different versions either so that she can see the sun when it rises, is at its zenith, and when it sets, or because the openings symbolise the persons of the Holy Trinity. Some versions end with Barbara being walled up, but in most, she is found alive and released after one, three, or seven years. Her survival is explained by the miraculous appearance of the body and blood of Christ in the tower. Depending on the variant, the ending differs: Barbara either forgives and reconciles with her father or falls prey to his wrath and is beheaded.

Hrastovcu [The Black Cross at Hrastovec] (Ilaunig, 1928) – which I discuss in the chapter devoted to literary works – on the corpus of material collected in the early 21st century. The most recent press publication concerning this motif – located thanks to the kind assistance of Professor Stanonik – refers to a chapel in Zamarkova, which, according to local lore, was built on the site where a young woman, Len(i)ka, was walled up because she refused to yield to the lust of a local count (Štefanec, 2000, p. 7). This version appears to merge two narrative threads found in Ilaunig's novel.

[7] Ivan Grafenauer interprets this as evidence of the ballad's archaic character, placing its origins in the 13th century. The "Saracen king" is identified as a representative of Spain rather than Turkey, which would have been the expected association in ballads created after the Ottoman incursions into Europe (see Kumer et al, 1981, pp. 540–541). In later variants, a "Lutheran" (i.e., perceived as non-Christian or pagan) king also appears as a rival to the Christian ruler.

The song's recorded versions come primarily from central Slovenia, though it was known across most of the Slovenian linguistic area. It was also known in Croatia and in the German-inhabited regions of Kočevje. The preservation of the motif was influenced by the spread of the cult of Saint Barbara, the legends associated with her, and her iconography – most notably the tower and the chalice. This cultural motif persists to this day, as evidenced by the availability of recordings of the song about the walled-up Barbara on YouTube[8]. What connects this story to the topos of the walled-up woman discussed in this volume is the act of walling up itself and the request to leave openings in the structure for her (although the underlying motivation for leaving openings differs between cases).

The narrative axis in the accounts described above unfolds along the line of an older man and, typically, a young woman. By violating the rules of the patriarchal order – whether by refusing to yield to a feudal lord, acting against her father's will, or becoming pregnant out of wedlock – the woman exposes herself to the punishment of immurement. This punishment is intended to make the woman change her mind, to separate her from society, or to kill her. Significantly, as in the case of Barbara, it makes no difference that the woman's motives may be purely religious. Breaking the established order, in which a daughter is subject to her father's will, must be met with consequences. Immurement itself symbolically restores the established social order.

The reasons for the walling up are not given in the accounts concerning the nun at Turn Castle (some accounts speak of multiple nuns). She was said to have been walled up alive in the castle's kitchen area, where residents claimed to have seen the nun's bones, hair, and rosary. She was also said to haunt the site, preventing a wall in that room from remaining standing – the masonry would always collapse – which may be viewed as an echo of the topos of the walled-up woman[9]. In contrast, the legend associated with Melje Castle near Maribor concerns a walled-up monk, the Hospitaller Walther, who was confined in the dungeons for falling in love with a beautiful vineyard worker (Puff, 1847/1999, p. 95). Here, the only similarity to the topos is the act of walling up itself; what differs entirely is that the victim is male. It is nevertheless significant that both stories concern monastics – individuals living on the margins of society. Walther's guilt is clear: by falling in love, he broke the social order and thus had to be punished. As in the earlier examples, immurement here is

[8] For example, see Folklorno društvo Markovci (2021). A phonographic version of the song was also published on the audio record that accompanies the second volume of *Slovenske ljudske pesmi* (Kumer et al., 1981).

[9] More recent accounts concerning Turn Castle, recorded in the second decade of the 21st century, were published in the volume *Škalske zgodbe*, edited by Jože Hudales and Verica Pogačar, Škale, 2012 (Poles, 2012). Some informants mention the daughter of the castle owner rather than a nun. An earlier account referring to two nuns was recorded in 1936 by Janko Orožen and later published in *Šaleški razgledi 12: Razprave–Presoje–Akcenti*, Velenje, 1996, p. 41 (Orožen, 1936/1996).

simultaneously a separation from the rest of the community and a restoration of the disturbed order.

An intriguing transposition of the walled-up woman motif is presented by Davorin Nemanić in the article *Čegar sem bila lani hči, sem letos mati* [Whose Daughter I Was Last Year, I Am This Year His Mother], published in *Ljubljanski zvon* in 1884 (Nemanić, 1884)[10]. The author focuses on a case reported in the press that year: a mason from Málaga was allegedly transported, blindfolded so that he would not know the location, to a construction site and forced to wall up a living girl within the building. The mason, upon returning home, immediately went to the police, who were then tasked with searching for the perpetrators and attempting to determine their motives. This story reminded Nemanić of the Serbian song about the building of Skadar, which he decided to present to his readers. At the same time, he recalled a story told to him by a neighbor, a musician, during the second half of the 1860s. A man, punished for his offenses, was sentenced to be walled up, but an opening was left at the level of his mouth. The man's daughter, moved by pity for her father, came to the wall every night and, to prevent him from starving, nursed him at her breast as if he were her own child. While doing so, she sang a song: "Whose daughter I was last year, I am this year his mother; thank me, my son, husband of my mother"[11] (Nemanić, 1884, p. 166). As can be seen, this story is a distant echo and a complete inversion of the walled-up woman narrative: in this version, it is a man – the father – who is walled up, while the nursing daughter remains free. As in the case of the monk Walther, the victim is on the margins of society – in this instance, he is a convict. As in most Slovenian cases, immurement here serves as a punishment. The fact that the daughter nurses her father carries the subversive message of a life cycle closing in an unexpected and transgressive way.

Walled Up for the Common Good

In the Slovenian material, we occasionally encounter the sacrifice of an individual for the common good, which is one of the core elements of the walled-up woman narrative. In a tale from Melinci in the Prekmurje region, it is a child whose life is sacrificed. According to an account recorded by Štefan Kühar (1914), the village elders, in an attempt to prevent the village from being flooded by the Mura River, decided to bury alive a seven-year-old boy named Števek

[10] The same text is quoted from Nemanić by Jakob Kelemina (1930, p. 322), although he provides an incorrect year of publication for the newspaper *Ljubljanski zvon*. The story was presented in the form of a riddle: first, a fragment of the daughter's song was given together with a question about whom it referred to, and only afterwards was the full story revealed.

[11] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations were translated into English by Kalina Iwanek-Malinowska either from the Polish translation by Maciej Olszewski or directly from the original Polish text.

in the riverbank. The boy reportedly cried bitterly, but the villagers showed no mercy. After the sacrifice was made, the river receded. Years later, Števek was said to have appeared in a dream to a pious woman, asking her to exhume him; the elders agreed. However, the stench that arose when the exhumation began led the gendarmes to order its cessation. According to Kühar's account, some claim that a light appears at the place where the boy was buried[12].

Reference to the motif of sacrifice can also be found in a cholera legend from Mežica, included in the collection of Vinko Möderndorfer (1924, pp. 21–22). During an epidemic, guards were stationed outside Mežica with orders not to let people into the town; anyone who tried to enter was to be buried alive in a specially prepared pit. The beautiful daughter of a farmer named Kajžer set out for Mežica. The guards captured her and, despite her protests, buried her alive. From that moment, the cholera ceased, and the guards and local residents believed that the disease had taken the form of a beautiful girl and had stopped killing because she had been buried. In both cases above, the sacrificial victims are young individuals – a seven-year-old boy (the only case in the Slovenian folk-cultural material under discussion that involves the sacrifice of a child) and, presumably, a teenage girl. In both instances, the decision to sacrifice them is made by the community and for the benefit of the community. Neither sacrifice was voluntary.

Boundary Stones

The motif of death as the foundation of the established social order appears in numerous folkloric texts about boundary stones from the Bela Krajina region, most notably the stone from the Gorjanci Mountains, but also in narrative material from other parts of Slovenia. France Kotnik's story *Zakaj straši na Brezniku?* [Why Is Breznik Haunted?] (Kotnik, 1957, pp. 50–51, 1958, pp. 19–22;) recounts a version involving the setting of boundary stones between the pasture lands of Zahomce[13] and Žabnice[14] residents. A dispute broke out, during which a man from Žabnice killed the steward of a local estate, and a boundary stone was placed at the site of his death. For many years, the man's ghost haunted the local community, demanding a mass for his soul – a wish the locals fulfilled. The perpetrator, meanwhile, returned to Zahomce ten years later seeking forgiveness, claiming that since the day of the murder, he had had no luck and had become a beggar. One housewife recognised him and, in an act of revenge, poured boiling water over him, killing him. Thus, the determination of the boundary was ultimately founded on two victims from opposite sides of the dispute.

[12] This account was recorded in the Prekmurje dialect by Štefan (Števan) Kühar (1914, p. 23), and in standard literary Slovene by Jakob Kelemina (1930, p. 322).

[13] Zahomce/Achomitz, now part of Austria.

[14] Žabnice/Camporosso/Saifnitz, currently in Italy.

Boundary stones in Slovenian folklore are extensively discussed by Ivan Grafenauer in his article *Stavbna daritev* [Foundation Sacrifice] (I. Grafenauer, 1957, pp. 44–53), in which he identifies the related narratives as the only direct reference to the foundation-sacrifice motif in the Slovenian context. The first to draw his attention is the *Story of the Bloody Stone from the Gorjanci*, first published in 1838 in German in a semi-novelistic form (*Der Blutstein*, 1938), and later that same year in Croatian (*Kervni kamen*, 1838); ten years later it was published in Slovenian in a translation by Franc Malavašič. The basis of the story is a territorial division between the Uskoks – Slavic fugitives from Ottoman rule – and the local Podgorjanci/Kranjci. The boundary was to be determined by having three representatives from each community run toward one another; the point at which they met would mark the division line. The race went against the Uskoks, who then demanded a sacrifice as compensation: if the Kranjci were innocent and had not cheated, they should allow themselves to be buried alive, and their tombstone would become the boundary stone. The race participants agreed and allowed themselves to be buried alive – joined even by the sweetheart of one of the Kranjci, who had run on the Uskok side. Thus, these are voluntary victims – a rarity in Slovenian material. Grafenauer is critical of the legend, pointing out numerous inconsistencies in it and in later versions regarding whether the stone was indeed a boundary stone and whether the girl was buried beneath it as well[15]. The scholar argues against linking the story to actual border demarcations in the area, which were carried out at an entirely different institutional and political level (through the mediation and participation of Archduke Ferdinand I). He also notes similarities between this text and a Swiss pastoral legend. In another version of the Slovenian legend, recorded by Kelemina, in pagan times a young man and his beloved were sacrificed under the stone[16]. Grafenauer sees the legend more as an attempt to explain the "bloody stains" – red markings on the Gorjanci stone – than as a reference to historical boundary determinations[17]. Urška Jernejc, on the other hand, interprets the idea of sacrifices at boundary stones as reflecting the notion of offerings for the sake of social peace (Jernejc, 2006, pp. 61–62). It is worth noting that, regardless of the narrative type, the victims are once again exclusively young people, and – in variants where the Uskok girl chooses to

[15] For example, in Janez Trdina's version from the book *Izprehod v Belo krajino* [A Walk through Bela Krajina] (1873), at the bloody stone a brother kills his brother – both Croats – after being provoked by the wife of one of them who was a Slovene, whereupon he commits suicide. Both men are buried next to the stone. Multiple variants of this story can be found in Trdina's legacy.

[16] *Krvavi kamen na Gorjancih*, item no. 171 in Jakob Kelemina's collection *Bajke in pripovedke* (Kelemina, 1930). Kelemina refers to an 1858 note published in the periodical *Novice*.

[17] Another legend explaining the "bloody colour" of the stones is *Turki pod Žežljem* [The Turks at Žeželj], recorded in Ivan Šašelj's collection *Bisernice I* (Šašelj, 1906, pp. 225–226).

join her beloved – representatives of both sides of the conflict, so that the new order is founded on mutual sacrifice.

The motif of blood present in narratives about the Gorjanci stone also appears in T. Podgorelec's 1905 article *Stari grad* [Old Castle] (Podgorelec, 1905, p. 6). This story concerns the construction of a castle tower at Smlednik, in which human blood rather than water was allegedly used to slake the lime, ensuring the construction's durability and even indestructibility[18]. This is thus a direct reference to a foundation sacrifice, although the fragmentary nature of the account limits the possibilities for broader interpretation.

In research carried out under Professor Stanonik, an account was also recorded from the period of the Turkish invasions in which another male victim appears – this time an outsider. Negovski Castle is said to have been a refuge for the local population during times when the Turks abducted and raped women, stole cattle, and plundered the land. The castle walls were so strong that no attacker could breach them. When one finally succeeded, he was captured and walled up alive in the castle walls, where he is said to remain to this day[19]. Here, too, the only point of connection with the walled-up woman motif seems to be the act of immurement itself, although it can be assumed that the punishment was believed, in some sense, to strengthen the walls and their protective function.

Construction Site Accidents

An interesting motif in Slovenian folklore, which in some respects relates to the walled-up woman narrative, is the death of a builder, often as the result of a fall from a roof. In the costal Karst region of Slovenia, one finds stories about the tragic end of a man who fell during the construction of a church belfry. Depending on the version, the victim was the master builder, his son, or simply a worker who, while mounting a cross or a golden ball on the tower, fell to his death. There are variants in which he survived: in one, he erected an iron cross in another location in gratitude; in another, he merely became dizzy but never again dared to work at height[20].

Štefan Kühar records a similar story from Prekmurje (Kühar, 1910, p. 110): while placing a cross on a tower, the builder began to feel dizzy and, instead of seeing one opening for the cross, saw three. When he asked the master standing below the tower where he should place the cross, the latter advised

[18] The article mentions several other local legends, but they are not related to the central topic of this study.

[19] Unpublished. Narrated by Fran Duh (Maribor; born 1930). Recorded by Tamara Duh, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. Archived by Marija Stanonik, Archive of Slovenian Literary Folklore, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology (ZRC SAZU), call number 12577.

[20] The motif is described by Božidar Premrl (2011, pp. 45–46). According to the author, similar stories are told about the bell towers of churches in Biljana, Črni Kal, Log pri Vipavi, and Sežana.

him to use the middle opening, and then asked the assembled crowd to pray for the builder, who was in danger (a similar motif appears in one of Premrl's versions). People began to pray; the man fixed the cross in place, but lost his balance and fell directly onto a Jew – the only person who had not prayed for him. The Jew was killed instantly[21]. In this essentially antisemitic tale, the builder emerged unscathed. The story is also accompanied by a superstition concerning the start of construction: the first girl to bring mortar to the site would either live a very long or a very short life. No one wanted to bring the mortar, but when a girl finally agreed, the mason foretold she would live a hundred years in happiness (which was said to have indeed come to pass). In this case, therefore, beyond the death associated with construction, there is also a narrative thread concerning the changing fate of the first woman to appear at the site – a twist that parallels the legend of the walled-up woman, while paradoxically reversing its meaning.

A similar motif to that of the fall from a church belfry appears in the legend about the founding of the church in Ptujska Gora (J. St., 1883, p. 43). Two churches were being built at the same time – one in Ptujska Gora itself, the other in the village of Vurberg. The first was built by a master mason, the second by his apprentice. When both constructions were completed, word spread that the church built by the apprentice was the more beautiful. Bitterly disappointed, the master decided to jump from the belfry of "his" building, crying out: "Mary! If I have not built You a good church, then punish me now!" A miracle then occurred: the master was unharmed, and the stone upon which he landed left a hollow in the ground which, years later, when the world became godless, was said to have disappeared.

There are also legends of murdered master masons whose deaths altered the course of construction. For instance, the legend (Postanek cerkve sv. Duha nad Lužami, 1883) of the Church of the Holy Spirit situated on a sharp peak above Luče (also known as Ostri vrh) holds that it was originally intended to be much larger, matching the size of the surrounding walls. However, the master mason was murdered with an axe by a farmer who had hosted him and coveted his wealth (traces of blood are said to still be visible at the site). This halted construction, and ultimately, instead of one large church, two smaller ones were built within the originally planned footprint. Another version of the legend, published in Slovenski narod, claims that the blood of the murdered master spattered as far as the vicinity of Maribor (Beg, 1905). His grave is called the Giant's Grave, and legend has it that the mason will one day rise from it and build the church as it was originally intended. Until then, the townspeople must make do with what they have.

The common characteristic of all the above texts concerning accidents on construction sites – or otherwise linked in some way to construction – is that

[21] Prekmurje, the region where this story was recorded, was historically inhabited by a Jewish minority, which likely explains the presence of this reference in the local narrative.

the victims are, in some sense, outsiders in relation to the inhabitants of the places described. The builders' otherness is further emphasised by the fact that they lived with locals. Sometimes, however – as in Kühar's account – the victim's ethnic difference is stated explicitly.

Demolition and Reconstruction

Another element from the walled-up woman song that appears in Slovenian folklore is the motif of what is built during the day being torn down at night. This theme appears in numerous contexts. In two texts from the municipality of Dobrepolje recorded by Tone Ljubič (1944, pp. 16–19, pp. 90–93) – one being his own version of the legend, the other a version he heard on the radio in 1939, told by Miha Gale, a pupil from Mala Vas – a feudal lord decides to build a castle from which he can oversee his subjects. To this end, he brings in masons from Italy. What they construct during the day is destroyed at night by local peasants. When guards are posted at the site, the peasants frighten them by pretending to be the devil, ghosts, or witches, and in time the builders, the guards, and eventually the patron himself become convinced that evil forces are conspiring against them. In the end, the landowner abandons construction of the castle and instead builds a church, which still stands today.

The motif of building and demolishing is also recalled in an 1899 Zgodnja danica article citing 17th-century Slovenian polymath Janez Vajkard Valvasor (Levičnik, 1899). According to this legend, Rakovnik Castle (today a district of Ljubljana) gained its name from the way it was constructed. The patron was a very wealthy man with no children who wanted to give money to the people, but in such a way that they would earn it. Thus, the castle was built one day and torn down the next, ensuring there was never a shortage of work or wages. The castle acquired the epithet "crab-like" from its backwards–forwards pattern of construction, reminiscent of a crab's movements. In both cases, we see a complete transposition of the element from the walled-up woman story: it is no longer supernatural forces that hinder construction by destroying at night what was built during the day. In the Dobrepolje story, it is peasants masquerading as otherworldly beings; in the Rakovnik case, it happens with the patron's consent, with an old belief discreetly framing a charitable act.

The motif of building and demolishing – together with the idea of sacrifice – appears in a legend published by Venčeslav Winkler in 1931 in the periodical *Angelček* (*Angeljček*) (Venceslav, 1931, pp. 10–11). According to this account, in a remote mountain village, people wanted to build a church, but whatever they constructed during the day was destroyed at night. Even the guards posted there fled during the night. Heroes and wise men were summoned, but they too succumbed to fear of the shadows that came at night, demanding a ransom for allowing the church to be built. A monk came to the villagers' aid, offering himself as the ransom to the dark forces. In response, a voice emerged from the

light, ending the cycle of nightly destruction and saying: "Blessed are you who offer yourself". The next morning, the villagers found the church completed; the monk was still praying before the altar, and the building shone as if made of gold. Here, a rarely encountered element in Slovenian texts appears – the voluntary offering of oneself. As in the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac, such a sacrifice need not be "consummated"; the gesture of willingness is enough. Interestingly, in this case too, the potential sacrifice does not originate within the local community but remains an outsider to it.

A repetition of the construction–destruction cycle motif can be found in legends about the building of the church on Kureščekˢ[22]. According to a song published in Zgodnja danica, during the time of the Turkish invasions, the inhabitants of the area around Kureščekˢ wished to build a church for a miraculous wooden statue of the Virgin Mary, but whatever they built was found destroyed the following day. This continued until oxen hauling a cart of stones to the site without human guidance climbed to the top of the hill and refused to move. This was taken as a sign that construction should be moved there. A supernatural confirmation was said to have been given verbally by the Virgin Mary herself[23]. Indeed, at this location, construction proceeded without further obstacles.

The version of the legend recorded by Jan Plestenjak also refers to the period of the Turkish invasions and is much more narratively elaborate. In this version, the Virgin Mary is walking the earth during the invasions. Weary from aiding people, she asked the inhabitants of Zapotok for shelter, but they refused – primarily because they saw her as belonging to a higher social class and worried she might later inform on them to the feudal lords (this class-based aspect appears to be significant in the Slovenian context). The villagers sent her to Kureščekˢ, where she was taken in by a local charcoal burner. Mary instructed him to build a church and promised her support in this work. The construction went remarkably well, despite the fact that the man was building everything himself with his own hands. As the work neared completion, the people of Zapotok saw the building and decided to construct a church themselves. Men, women, and children all joined in the labor, but whatever they built during the day was destroyed at night. They were never able to complete their church and remained without one. A stone on the path to the church on Kureščekˢ, bearing the imprint of the Virgin Mary's hand, is said to be a relic from that time – a structure created through the cooperation of a socially marginalised charcoal burner and the Virgin Mary rejected by the people of Zapotok, a collaboration with a distinctly didactic meaning.

[22] Two versions of this legend were published: the first as a song in the journal *Zgodnja danica* (A. N., 1869, p. 239), and the second as a prose legend recorded by Jan Plestenjak and published in issue no. 5 of the journal *Vrtec* (Plestenjak, 1940, pp. 169–172).

[23] Regarding the choice of the construction site in narrative folk culture and its connection to the motif of immurement, see Urška Jernejc's discussion (Jernejc, 2006, pp. 21–24).

It should be noted that an analogous motif of building and demolishing appears in popular Slovenian folk narratives about the construction of bridges and churches (and, less frequently, other types of buildings), in which the devil offers his help with the construction in exchange for the soul of the first person to enter the church or step onto the bridge. The devil is then tricked after the building is completed and usually departs empty-handed. Monika Kropej (Kropej, 2011) examines in more detail the popularity of such narratives in the Slovenian context.

Varia

In the *Soča* periodical of December 24, 1885, a legend from the Ajdovščina area is recounted, according to which, at the so-called Rock of St. Paul, a pagan queen had herself walled in together with her family and treasures (Gradišče pri Sv. Pavlu nad Gojačami, 1885). In this case, the walling up served as a protective measure: the queen had set her entire army against invaders who had entered her lands. Since her soldiers were all killed, no one could return to release her from the wall, and thus she is said to remain there to this day, waiting for rescue. According to the article's author, the vitality of this legend is evidenced by the deep excavations in the area, carried out by local treasure hunters. In this story, the only element consistent with the walled-up woman motif is the act of walling up itself. The tale does, however, share with other Slovenian material the theme of separation from the outside world – although here the separation is voluntary.

The element of separation also appears in a legend about Gosposvetsko polje[24], which Josip Šašel relates based on an account by an informant known as "stari Rjavec" (Šašel, 1920–1921)[25]. According to the legend, a great pagan city once stood on Gosposvetsko polje, ruled by a king. When the king's daughter was born, he heard a prophecy concerning her fate: she would bring misfortune to the world, shame to her parents, and destruction to her native city. When the girl was a little older, the terrified father ordered her to be walled up in a solitary tower. From that moment, she was to have no contact with anyone, and food was passed through the bars by servants who were forbidden to speak to her. Only the father occasionally visited, trying to comfort her. The princess grew up in sadness, watching from the windows of her prison as other children grew up. Despite her many pleas, no one was permitted to visit her. One day, in her despair, she begged her father to at least allow her to keep one of his dogs in the tower. The king granted her request. The princess was overjoyed and devoted all her time to playing with the dog – leading to the fulfillment of the prophecy:

[24] Another form of the name *Svetasko polje/Zollfeld* (present-day Austria). The remains of the Roman town of Virunum are located there.

[25] A similar story was published by Simon Rutar in the journal *Ljubljanski zvon III* (Rutar, 1883, pp. 252–253), which differs in that the king himself fell in love with his beautiful daughter and kept her hidden from everyone in his version.

she became pregnant by the animal and gave birth to a monster – half human, half dog. The devastated king, however, did not dare to harm his grandson. The princess became the object of universal contempt, with food thrown to her only from a distance. She cared for her son, who grew quickly and soon fled south to a land where others like him lived. He became their king, returned to invade, and destroyed the city that refused to submit to him. According to some, the figure of the half-human, half-dog appearing in Slovenian cultural texts is identical to that of Attila (Rutar, 1883, p. 252). This identification is supported by the relatively abundant Slovenian folklore material concerning the leader of the Huns. In essence, the only element here corresponding to the walled-up woman motif is the act of immurement itself. It was carried out as a kind of sacrifice for the public good, since the isolation was meant to prevent the fulfillment of the prophecy, yet, as in the case of Oedipus, it paradoxically brought it about.

Veronika of Desenice

In Slovenian folklore material, one searches in vain for the motif of Veronika of Desenice. It is reasonable to hypothesise that this story entered the literary canon quickly enough that it neither took root nor survived in oral tradition. The only place where Veronika's story can be found outside literary narratives is on the website of the Veliki Tabor Museum (*Legenda o Veroniki Deseniški*, n.d.), according to which Veronika, although acquitted by the judges of accusations of witchcraft, was – on the order of her father-in-law, Herman II – walled up dead. She was buried within the wall connecting the tower to the entrance of Veliki Tabor Castle. Her crying is said to be audible there to this day. Veronika's skull was allegedly found during renovation work at the castle, although this does not appear to align with the current state of research on the fate of Frederick of Celje's second wife. References to folk-style accounts of Veronika can also be found in the reportage piece *Veronika Deseniška* by Januš Golec (1927), discussed more extensively in the section "The Topos of the Walled-up Woman in Modern Literature".

Urban Legends – Construction Site Accidents Continue

In the book *Pa se je to res zgodilo? Sodobne povedke v Sloveniji* [So, Has This Really Happened? Contemporary Legends in Slovenia] Ambrož Kvartič (2017) presents two[26] accounts that relate to the motif of the foundation sacrifice and the walled-up woman. The first concerns the construction of the Peračica

[26] As the author notes, these are the only accounts referring to relatively contemporary construction sites that he was able to collect. He also assumes that an active construction market – for example, the building of new motorway sections – may lead to the emergence of further accounts of this kind.

road viaduct, built between 1963 and 1966, and was recorded in the town of Kranj in 2011 in conversations with students (the narrator was a female civil engineering student born in 1989). During the pouring of the concrete pillars, several people were said to have fallen in, and it was "not worth trying to save them" – the concrete was too hot, and they sank too quickly to survive – so they were left inside the pillars. The account also states that something similar happens on every major construction site, and that, thanks to this, the pillars are stronger (a belief inconsistent with engineering knowledge but compatible with the idea of a foundation sacrifice) (Kvartič, 2017, p. 45)[27]. The second story, recorded in Žalec in 2012, was told by a man born in 1985 who claimed to have heard it from his father. It concerns the construction of a dam somewhere in Yugoslavia. In an accident, one of the workers is said to have drowned in concrete during construction work. The work was halted, but – since he could not be saved and the work needed completing – it was continued without removing the body. The narrator does not mention any impact the victim may have had on the dam's durability; he only says that it is a great monument to the worker who died tragically (Kvartič, 2017, p. 52).

In both of these stories about construction-site accidents, one can infer – albeit indirectly – the suggestion of the non-Slovenian ethnic origin of the victims, which would place them in the position of the figure of the Other, whose accidental sacrifice was not considered a loss to the local community. Kvartič also refers to speculation about the fate of a missing man from the Maribor area (Kvartič, 2017, p. 53). He was allegedly – due to a conspiracy by his neighbors – immured in concrete in a motorway viaduct. The author indicates that the main sources of this information are online publications (Andlovič, 2013).

As can be seen, motifs that evoke distant associations with the topos of the foundation sacrifice or the walled-up woman appear only rarely in Slovenian folk cultural texts. The victims in these stories – as in the narratives of walling up – are most often young women dependent on men (daughters, wives, subjects), or figures on the margins of society (a nun, a monk, a Turkish invader, or – in contemporary contexts – an immigrant or construction worker), all, in a sense, replaceable figures. A sacrifice for the good of the community is rare (the case of Števek from Melinci is more of an exception), as is voluntary sacrifice (the monk in Winkler's text or the Uskok girl). The motif of separation through walling up, intended to restore the order of things disrupted by behavior contrary to prevailing norms, appears to be characteristic (as, for example, in songs about St. Barbara, the legend of the Hospitaller Walther, or the story of the count's daughter who became pregnant by a servant). On the margins of the phenomena discussed, there also appears a class element (for example, in the story of the construction of the church on Kurešček), which I also refer to below in the context of ritual folk dances, and which seems to underscore the

[27] The author mentions that one of the people he interviewed claimed that a similar story concerned the construction of the Črni Kal viaduct (Kvartič, 2017, p. 53, footnote 52).

peasant character of Slovenian culture. It is difficult to determine whether the fragmentary occurrence of the walled-up woman motif is due to its absence in Slovenian culture, entering only through neighboring cultures, or whether it did exist but became blurred over time. Certain phenomena described below suggest that the latter hypothesis is more plausible.

Children's Games, Ritual Dances, and Folk Pastimes

Some Slovenian researchers – most notably France Marolt (1936), Boris Orel (1936, 1943), Zmaga Kumer (1963), Marija Šuštar and Valens Vodušek (1963), and Mirko Ramovš (1991) – have identified remnants of the motif of the foundation sacrifice in popular children's games connected with the bridge as a motif, as well as in pastimes or, more precisely, in folk dances that contain bridge-related references[28]. Mirko Ramovš refers to thirty-six variants of the "strong bridge" (*trden most*), a children's game documented throughout the entire Slovenian language area, archived in the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Ramovš, 1991, pp. 138-139). In most cases, the rules are similar. As this is partly a word game, differences arise mainly from variations in dialects and subdialects, and also concern the length of the text used in the game. A group of children asks whether the bridge is strong. The other group (the children forming the "bridge") replies that it is as hard as bone. The first group then asks whether they may cross the bridge, to which the second group agrees, but only on the condition that one person from the first group (the last in the column, often called "the last duckling") will be given to them. In some versions, there is also mention of the materials from which the bridge is built.

For example, the Ljubljana version:

First group: *Al je kaj trden ta vaš most?* [Is your bridge strong enough?]
Second group: *Kakor skala kost.* [Like a stone bone.]
First group: *Al gre lahko naša vojska skoz?* [Can our army pass through it?]
Second group: *Samo če nam zadnjega pustite.* [Only if you leave us the last one (soldier).] (Orel, 1943, p. 41)

The choreographic arrangement of the game is the same in all variants. Two of the largest children hold each other by both hands, raising them to form an arch – the "bridge".

[28] Noticing such connections is not unique to Slovenia. In 1905, Henning Frederik Feilberg published the study *Bro-brille-legen, en sammenlignende studie* [*Bro-brille-legen, a comparative study*], in which he collected, described, and analysed around 150 European variants of the children's game "bridge". Feilberg was the first to point out echoes of the foundation sacrifice motif within the game. In Poland, this topic was examined, among others, by Eugeniusz Piasecki in his book *Jaworowi ludzie. Studjum z pogranicza folkloru i pedagogiki* [People of the Sycamore. A Study on the Borderline of Folklore and Pedagogy], published in 1935.

The two leaders agree on which opposing groups they represent (these vary: apples or pears, heaven or hell, etc.). The other children line up in a column opposite them, holding onto each other's shoulders or waists. The children in the column ask the questions, while those forming the bridge answer. After the dialogue is completed, the column – also referred to as the "army" – runs under the bridge. Just before the last child in the column passes through, the children forming the bridge lower their arms to catch them and ask which they choose – for example, apples or pears. Depending on the answer, the captured child stands behind one of the two children forming the bridge. In the meantime, the rest of the column returns to the front of the bridge, and the game begins again, repeating as many times as there are children in the column.



Figure 1. Children playing the game "Is Your Bridge Strong Enough?". Photo by Helena Miklavčič, 1943.
Source: Muzejsko društvo Vrhnika in Zavod Ivana Cankarja za kulturo, šport in turizem Vrhinka https://www.kamra.si/mm-elementi/gradiski-otroci-se-igrajo-ali-je-kaj-trden-most/. Licensed under CC BY-NC

Over time, two columns are formed. At the end, the pair forming the "bridge" draws a line between themselves, across which the two newly formed groups attempt to pull each other. The side that crosses the line loses. In some variants, the last child from the original column runs under the bridge three times or, in some varients, as many times as there are days in the week, before being caught. Differences also occur in the final stage of the game – the tug of war.

Ritual folk dances featuring the bridge motif are primarily found in the Bela Krajina region of Slovenia, where three variants have been preserved that are still performed today by folklore groups: in Metlika (where the dance is performed by columns of couples), in Črnomelj (where it is danced in semicircles), and in Predgrad (where it is danced in two rows). Traces of this pastime can also be found in the towns of Kropa and Železniki in the Gorenjska region. Unlike the children's game, which was played year-round, adults performed it during the Easter season (in some variants up to Pentecost). In certain versions, the verbal

component is expanded compared to the children's version, including a dialogue about where the materials for building the bridge came from – a feature which, according to researchers, reflects a dispute between subjects and rulers and is considered a later addition to the game. In the ritual versions, the 'bridge' can be crossed only after a "black-eyed girl" has first passed beneath it. In the Metlika variant, for example, a selected girl must pass under the joined hands before the couples proceed to do so three times, marking the end of the dance.

This game is not unique to Slovenia; similar forms – both in the verbal and choreographic aspects – are known in most European countries, which, according to researchers, provides evidence of its Indo-European roots (Ramovš, 1991, p. 140). According to some, the game symbolises the cycle of life's renewal and also refers to the mythological bridge to the afterlife. Others view it as a survival of ancient rituals and sacrifices associated with the construction of bridges. For instance, Ramovš suggests that the verbal component most likely recalls rituals connected to bridge building; behind the game's simple words lies the following message: the victim departs from the community of the living and enters the world of the dead (Ramovš, 1991, p. 141). Boris Orel is more inclined to believe that the game and the ritual symbolise rebirth, with passing under raised arms serving as an allegory of birth and a rite of passage. Orel develops this interpretation using Slovenian and European material, and bases his analysis on the choreography, the verbal component, and the language employed in two works already mentioned here – *Mitos o mostu* [The Bridge Myth] (Orel, 1936) and *Al pejte, pejte trikrat skuz, zdignite gor visok roke* [Run, run three times, raise your arms high] (Orel, 1943)[29]. Zmaga Kumer to some extent combines both positions, seeing in the children's bridge game and its related rituals both an echo of sacrificial rites associated with bridge building and a recollection of offerings to water and fertility deities near bridges, as well as the idea of renewal manifested in the choreographic component. She also notes that water, fertility, and renewal are closely related in terms of meaning and symbolism. This could explain the springtime performance of the ritual game and its similarity to other seasonal rites. The author further observes that the children's game, in its particularly elaborate form, has survived in two locations associated with the cult of water: in the area of Kobarid, which has a spring considered sacred, and in Prekmurje, where in times of drought people would go to bridges to pray for rain, singing appropriate songs. Kumer speculates that ritual games associated with bridges once existed throughout

[29] Orel draws particular attention to the fact that in many cultures the game and the ritual are associated with a gate rather than with a bridge. According to Orel, this is confirmed by the choreographic aspect: the children playing the game – as well as the participants in the ritual dance – pass under raised arms, symbolically moving through a gate or portal. Interestingly, Orel's interpretation evolved over time. In his 1936 study he argued that such games symbolised foundation sacrifices or a transition motif between life and death. By 1943, however, he contended that they should instead be interpreted as allegories of rebirth.

Slovenia, not only in the regions where their remnants survive today (Kumer, 1963, pp. 477–478).

Rituals Related to House Building

From Vinko Möderndorfer's own notes from the years 1920–1946, as well as from accounts collected by other researchers[30] during roughly the same period in various regions of Slovenia and cited by Möderndorfer (1946, pp. 9–15, 79–81), it appears that, at that time, masons would occasionally, as a joke, tie up a passer-by near a construction site and pull the person toward it as if intending to wall them into the building under construction. Möderndorfer recounts the following testimony from a laborer and mason, Franc Erjavec from Grosuplje: when laying the foundations, the masons would find a person unrelated to the construction, surround them, and take their measurements; this custom was called *zažnurat* [to lace up], and the "victim" had to buy their release with alcohol. At least one person was said to undergo this ritual during the construction of every building.

In some regions, milk and salt were added to mortar to strengthen the walls. In certain areas, pieces of Easter palms (often previously shaped into crosses) were walled-up in the walls; in others, bottles of holy water, men's shirts (in buildings intended as taverns, as shirts were believed to attract young men), and coins (either in one corner of the house or in all corners, depending on the region). In Prekmurje, an anthill was walled up in the foundation of a pigsty so that as many pigs would be raised there as there were ants in the anthill.

In some places, the practice of immuring crosses made from palm branches could be replaced by sprinkling the foundations with alcohol. Ambrož Kvartič, in his previously cited article *Dajte stavbi, kar ji pripada* [Give the Building What Belongs to It] (Kvartič, 2019), shows that the practice of immuring objects was alive at least until the mid-20th century[31]. He provides, among other examples, cases of immuring coins, bottles, and notes containing information about the mason – a kind of mason's "signature" with details about himself[32],

[30] Both Mőderndorfer and Kvartič draw on, among other sources, the collections Fran Mlinšek compiled, beginning in the 1920s (incidentally, Mlinšek and Möderndorfer were schoolmates). These materials were later edited and published separately in 1991 by Jože Hudales and Ivo Stropnik (Mlinšek, 1991). One of the more curious accounts from this collection describes carpenters building a wooden house who refused the client's request to have an axe walled into the structure, explaining that after death they would be bound to guard it.

[31] Kvartič partially relies on the same sources as Möderndorfer, but also on later research, including his own fieldwork in the Šalek Valley (Šaleška dolina).

[32] According to the author, by embedding information about himself into the structure he is building, the mason becomes a voluntary prisoner of the building, thereby fulfilling the ritual logic of a construction offering.

the construction, and sometimes an unflattering remark about the building's commissioner. He also cites accounts of *zažnuranje* from the Šalek Valley[33]. He interprets the modern custom of placing information about the construction – typically within the cornerstone of public buildings – as an echo of earlier immuring practices. Examples include the construction of the fire station in Velenje, the cultural center in Šmartno ob Paki, and factories in this region (Kvartič, 2019, pp. 239–248). In earlier periods, animals were also walled-up, as evidenced by the desiccated remains of a cat found in 1884 in Maribor during the demolition of a building. These remains, hidden in a special recess, were accompanied by a note tied to the animal's neck stating that it had been walled-up in 1667. Beside them were copper coins of little value. The anonymous author of a newspaper report on this find wrote: "It was probably walled up alive by superstitious people, due to their beliefs" (217 letna mačka, 1884, p. 4).

The last reports of alleged human foundation sacrifices in the Balkans, described by Slovenian authors, concern events from the late 19th century[34]. Archaeological research also confirms the existence of foundation offerings, but by this time these are limited to objects, for example, a horseshoe left for good luck (Kvartič, 2019, p. 237).

The Topos of the Walled-up Woman in Modern Literature

The motif of the walled-up woman – or, more broadly, the foundation sacrifice – appears in Slovenian literary texts only in a fragmentary manner. Tracing it has something of the character of a detective investigation, unfortunately full of false leads and disappointed expectations. The modest material I have extracted can be divided into three parts: (1) works thematically connected with the fate of Veronika of Desenice; (2) works created for the purposes of the tourist industry; and (3) a separate category – literary *varia* – comprising three prose works containing references to walling up, as well as the only poetic text I have found.

[33] The same motif is discussed by Ivan Grafenauer (Grafenauer, 1957, p. 44), who cites a report from Gašpar Križnik of Motnik recorded by Janez Navratil in *Slovenske narodne vraže in prazne vere, primerjane drugim slovanskim in neslovanskim* (1896). "In Motnik, local (Slovenian) masons have a custom: when they build a new wall and someone comes to watch, they 'lace him up', that is, tie him with a cord; to free himself, he must buy them alcohol". Navratil interprets this as an echo of an ancient obligatory human sacrifice of the first person who appeared at the construction site and could not ransom himself in any other way. Grafenauer, however, sees the lacing with rope as a remnant of the practice of taking a person's "measure" with a cord, which would later be walled into the structure; the person from whom the measurement was taken was believed to die soon afterward.

[34] Božidar Jezernik mentions the case of a child's stolen remains being walled into a bridge over the Trebnjačica in the 1870s, as well as a story from Zakynthos, where, according to local accounts, Muslims or Jews were allegedly sacrificed during the construction of bridges on the island (Jezernik, 1998, p. 233).

Veronika of Desenice

Following Janko Kos (*Sociologija slovenske literature* [The Sociology of Slovenian Literature])(Kos, 2016)), I adopt the political watershed year of 1848 as the conventional starting point of modern Slovenian culture[35]. However, for chronological completeness, I also recall an earlier work referring to the story of Veronika of Desenice. I should note at this point that only two of the texts of interest to me contain the motif of walling up. I also discuss the historical novel *Črni križ pri Hrastovcu* [The Black Cross at Hrastovec] (Ilaunig, 1928), which partly relates to the Veronika motif and also contains a tale of being buried alive.

Veronika of Desenice (Veronika Deseniška)[36] was the second wife of Count Frederick II of Celje. According to the latest research, she came from the village of Desniche (today Dišnik) near Bjelovar, located about 100 kilometers east of Zagreb. Earlier historiographical and literary tradition, however, associated her instead with the village of Desinić near the Croatian Veliki Tabor. The exact date of her birth is unknown; she was likely born between 1380 and 1400. According to the Chronicle of the Counts of Celje – written in the 15th century and published in Slovenian in 1972 (see Grdina, 1990) – she was of knightly lineage, thus belonging to a lower social class than her husband, which was allegedly the cause of his conflict with his father, Herman II, as it disrupted the family's dynastic policy. In a letter to the Republic of Venice, Frederick described her, however, as a "lady-in-waiting of the King of Hungary" and "the daughter of one of the great Hungarian barons" (Grafenauer, 2013).

Frederick, born around 1365 (some sources also give 1379), married Elizabeth, daughter of Stephen Frankopan, in about 1405, with whom he had their only son, Ulrich II. Frederick's first wife died in 1422 or 1423, and – according to rumor – he himself had a hand in her death, as he was already in love with Veronika. Elizabeth's death caused conflict between the Houses of Celje and Frankopan, who accused Frederick before Emperor (then still King) Sigismund of Luxembourg – Frederick's brother-in-law – of her murder and demanded the return of the dowry estates. Sigismund requested that the matter be adjudicated by King Eric VII of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, who was present at the Hungarian court. Frederick was not convicted, which only fuelled further rumors, especially after reports of his marriage to Veronika, which apparently

[35] Kos views this date as the (conventional) moment when the bourgeois Slovenian community separated from the estate-based society, within which the formation of modern Slovenian culture began (Kos, 2016, p. 15).

[36] Both the story of Veronika of Desenice and the cultural texts related to it have been the subject of numerous scholarly, journalistic, and literary-critical studies in Slovenia. For the purposes of this chapter, I present the story of Veronika of Desenice based on the following sources: the entry in *Slovenska biografija* [Slovenian Biographical Dictionary] written by Bogo Grafenauer (2013), as well as Mojca Kovačič (2008), Oter Gorenčič (2020, 2021), and the documentary film produced by the Slovenian national television RTV SLO, *Veronika in Friderik* (Dvornik, 2008).

took place in 1425. This exacerbated the already tense relationship between Frederick and Herman II. Because of the conflict with his father, Frederick sought asylum in Venice, which the Venetian Senate refused. On Sigismund's orders, the lover was imprisoned and handed over to his father, who locked him in a tower in Celje – still known today as *Friderikov stolp* [Frederick's Tower]. Herman also ordered the destruction of Frederick's castle, Fridrihštajn. Veronika, who initially hid in the estates of Frederick IX of Ptuj, was imprisoned in Ojstrica Castle, where she was denied food and water. Herman then initiated a trial, accusing her of using witchcraft to bewitch Frederick, in what may have been the first witch trial in what is now Slovenia. To Herman's dissatisfaction – and thanks to the skillful defense mounted by Veronika's representative (according to some scholars, the then prior of the Carthusian monastery in Jurklošter) – the court in Celje acquitted her of the charges. Nevertheless, Herman again imprisoned his daughter-in-law in Ojstrica Castle with the same food and drink restrictions, and then ordered her to be drowned in a vat and buried in the village of Brašlovče. Frederick – released from imprisonment by his father in 1426 – several years later moved his wife's remains to the Carthusian monastery in Jurklošter, where she was reburied.

According to sources, Veronika died on 17 October 1425. Frederick planned to be buried next to his second wife, but was ultimately interred in the Celje family chapel in 1454. Despite extensive research conducted since the mid-19th century, the exact location of Veronika's grave remains unknown, though the latest work by Dr. Mija Oter Gorenčič (2020, 2021) has identified a likely site. Historiography points to various underlying causes for the Veronika-related conflict in the House of Celje, including damage to the Frankopan alliance caused by Elizabeth's death (whether or not at Frederick's hand), the thwarting of Herman's dynastic plans for his son's remarriage, the breach of socio-class hierarchy by Frederick through marriage to Veronika, and the breaking of the principle of filial obedience by the firstborn heir. Some researchers also detect an element of political intrigue by Sigismund of Luxembourg and Herman II, suggesting that they jointly orchestrated the affair to expand political contacts with the Republic of Venice. All these threads – albeit to varying degrees and in different variants – are reflected in Slovenian, Croatian, German, and Czech cultural texts[37]. Some add one more element, crucial from the perspective of this text: the claim that Veronika was walled up – either alive in a prison, possibly alluding to source accounts of her imprisonment without food and water, or posthumously in the castle walls. It should be added here that Veronika's

[37] It is worth noting that history and cultural texts include similar stories of which at least two are worth a mention: that of Albrecht III of Bavaria (who was, incidentally, related to the Counts of Celje) and the surgeon's daughter Agnes Bernauer, which took place in roughly the same years as the story of Veronika and Frederick, and the story of Inês de Castro and King Peter I of Portugal, called *the Just*, which took place about a century earlier (Kovačič, 2008; Hartman, 1977).

story is not the only motif connected with the House of Celje to enter cultural texts, but it is certainly the most popular.

Slovenian cultural texts connected with the Veronika of Desenice motif[38] are quite numerous: the 1817 play *Ulrich Graf Zellsky* [Ulrich, Count of Celje] by Matija Schneider; the 1851 short story *Nedolžnost in sila* [Innocence and Force] by Josipina Toman-Turnograjska; the **1863 epic poem *Veronika Deseniška*** by Jožef Iskrač-Frankolski; the plays *Veronika Deseniška* (1867) by Anton Turkuš and *Veronika Deseniška* (1880) by Josip Jurčič; the 1893 opera *Urh, grof Celjski* [Ulrich, Count of Celje] (libretto by Anton Funtek) by Viktor Parma; Marica Gregorič-Stepančič's play *Veronika Deseniška* (1909–1910); the dramatic cycle *Grofov Celjskih pentalogija* [The Pentalogy of the Counts of Celje] (1922–33) by Dragan Šanda; Oton Župančič's 1924 play *Veronika Deseniška*; Anton Novačan's plays *Herman Celjski* and *Celjska Kronika* [The Chronicle of Celje] (1925–1928); Januš Golec's **reportage *Veronika Deseniška* (1927)**; Rajko Vrečer's play *Ulrik grof celjski in Teharjani* [Ulrich, Count of Celje, and the People of Teharje] (ca. 1930); Bratko Kreft's 1932 play *Celjski grofje* [The Counts of Celje]; Ana Wambrechtsamer's 1940 novel *Danes grofje celjski in nikdar več* [Today the Counts of Celje and Never Again], translated into Slovenian by Niko Kuret[39]; Danilo Švara's 1943 opera *Veronika Deseniška* (a libretto based on Oton Župančič's play and the Croatian drama *Veronika Desinićka* [1909/10] by Josip Eugen Tomić); Franček Rudolf's (1968 and 1974) play *Celjski grof na žrebcu* [The Count of Celje on the Stallion] and comedy *Veronika*; Sandi Sitar's 1974 novel *Z Desenic Veronika z Desenic* [With Veronika of Desenice]; Matjaž Kmecl's 1980 play *Friderik in Veronika*; Jana Kvas's 1987 poem *Težko spanje Veronike Deseniške in vsake deklice, ki se po njej zgleduje* [The Heavy Sleep of Veronika of Desenice and Every Girl Who Takes Her as an Example] in the collection *Pripotovanje* [Arrival]; Bina Štampe Žmavc's 1993 ballad *Veronika*; Dušan Čater's illustrated children's story *Veronika Deseniška* (1996); Miha Alujevič's 1998 play *Angeli za Veroniko* [Angels for Veronika]; Helena Štefanič's 2006 children's tale *Grad nesrečne ljubezni: Friderik in Veronika na Fridrihštajnu* [The Castle of Tragic Love: Frederick and Veronika at Fridrihštajn]; Karel Gržan's novel *Friderik in Veronika* (2006); Lev Detela's 2008 novel *Tri zvezde* [Three Stars]; Ivan Sivec's (2016 and 2021) novel *Samotna divja roža* [The Lonely Wild Flower] and short prose collection *Zgodbe o celjskih grofih in knezih* [Stories of the Counts and Princes of Celje]; Leon Firšt and Janez Usenik's 2016 musical *Veronika Deseniška* (directed by Marko Plantan); Matej Krajnc's 2018 short story *Enajsti otrok Veronike Deseniške* [The 11th Child of Veronika of Desenice]; Juan Juvančič's 2019 comic *Friderik in Veronika*; a reader combined with teaching materials for learning Slovenian as a foreign language, created for the Center for Slove-

[38] The items in bold contain direct references to the motif of immurement

[39] The work by the German-language author is included in this list due to its significant resonance within Slovenian culture. Ana Wambrechtsamer also translated Župančič's drama *Veronika Deseniška* and Novačan's *Herman Celjski* into German.

nian as a Second and Foreign Language (*Center za slovenščino kot drugi in tuji jezik*) – *Veronika Deseniška* by Polona Liberšar, Karin Marc Bratina, Sanja Pirc, Eva Šprager, and Saša Poklač Vojtech (2023); and the song *Veronika* performed by Sara Briški Cirman, known by the stage name Raiven, who represented Slovenia at the Eurovision Song Contest in 2024.

Due to the focus of this study, I will concentrate primarily on two of the aforementioned texts that refer to the motif of walling up. They are of particular interest because the first represents one of the models of myth-making – let us call it the (Yugo)Slavic myth – centered around the Veronika motif, while the second demonstrates the confrontation of this myth with the historical and social reality. I also present them in order to show a variant of the transposition of Veronika of Desenice's historical fate in literature.

Veronika Deseniška. Epična pesem v XV spevih [Veronika of Desenice. An Epic Poem in 15 Cantos], published by Iskrač under the pseudonym J. Frankolski[40] in 1863 (Frankolski, 1863), is one of the earliest modern works narrating the fate of Veronika. The opening cantos depict an idyllic vision of the Croatian village of Desenice, home to a noble and renowned knight – a widower with a 16-year-old daughter, Veronika. She is the embodiment of beauty, kindness, piety, and innocence – in short, of all the "Slavic" virtues. Desenice is portrayed through the changing seasons, and it is the cycle of nature that leads Veronika to reflect on life and transience. These meditations are interrupted by her *rojenica*[41], who visits and announces her impending marriage in the coming spring, while also foretelling that rather than happiness, the union will bring her sorrow and hardship. In a magical mirror she shows the heroine her future husband – a handsome and celebrated knight. Once the embodiment of cheerfulness, Veronika now falls into melancholy. When spring returns, an unexpected guest – a lost hunter – arrives in Desenice, asking for shelter. In accordance with ancient Croatian customs – the "Croatianness" and attachment to tradition in Desenice are emphasised repeatedly in the poem – he is welcomed as a guest, and Veronika recognises in him the young man she saw in the enchanted mirror. He is Miroslav, the son of Count Herman of Celje. The two fall in love, and Miroslav asks for Veronika's hand; she leaves the decision to her father. He grants the couple his blessing – the poem repeatedly stresses the idea that a woman should have a companion, a principle that guides the father in this matter. Soon after, they are married in a church, followed by a traditional celebration attended by numerous neighbors. The detailed description of the wedding includes the songs sung during the festivities – about Matjaž the Hungarian (King Matthias Corvinus, who was in fact born roughly ten years after Veronika's death) and about the medieval Serbian ruler, Tsar Lazar. The

[40] This is a pseudonym derived from the name of the village Frankolovo, where the author was born. Iskrač partially sets the action of his work there as well.

[41] In Iskrač's text, the term *rojenica* appears interchangeably with *víla*, and I use it in the same way. According to Slovenian tradition, the *rojenice* are three mythical figures who determine a child's fate at the moment of birth.

couple moves to a white castle on the Sava. Veronika proves to be an exemplary hostess, admired by all as the ideal wife and woman. She and Miroslav live "like two angels" among their Slovenian subjects. Dark clouds gather, however, when a letter arrives from Herman, summoning his son to Celje to explain his marriage to a woman of lower birth. The letter contains the first insinuation that Veronika is a witch. Despite his misgivings, Miroslav decides to go immediately, as knightly honor demands. His departure is preceded by an ill omen – a crow. In the third month of Miroslav's absence, the ominous crow draws nearer to the castle, while all other birds vanish from the area. Eventually, a small bird returns, singing of Miroslav's tragic fate – he has been imprisoned by his father. The crow kills the brave songbird.

From this point on, miracles occur. Veronika, initially struck down as if by lightning, regains her strength thanks to water from a miraculous spring given to her by a *vila* (a Slavic fairy). She dons armor, and organises a military expedition to Celje to free her husband. The army consists solely of Slovenian subjects devoted to Miroslav. Herman is warned by the crows of the approaching forces. A battle ensues under the walls of Celje, its Slovene–German division (Veronika's troops against Herman's forces) clearly delineated. Veronika triumphs but suffers heavy losses, and Herman refuses to release Miroslav. The next day another battle takes place. Despite great heroism and the support of heaven and nature, Veronika and her entire Slovenian army are slaughtered. The fame of the wife spreads across the world; she herself is revived once more by her *rojenica* with magical water, enabling her to escape. Realising that his daughter-in-law's body is missing from the battlefield, Herman offers a reward for her capture.

The heroine wanders the land in peasant disguise before taking work as a servant in the household of a man named Bosač near the town of Frankolovo. There she again becomes a paragon – this time as the best worker and a pious, merciful Christian. Bosač falls in love with her and asks for her hand, but she refuses, saying she is wed to the Virgin Mary. He persists (his motives being purely practical), and the exhausted Veronika grows despondent and ill. She is about to die when, yet again, her *rojenica* saves her with magical water, after which they converse about Veronika's life. The conversation is overheard by Bosač, who tells a neighbor, who tells another, until the news reaches Herman, who sends soldiers to seize his daughter-in-law. Despite local resistance, she is taken to Celje and imprisoned in dreadful conditions (given only moldy bread and muddy water). Thanks to her clear conscience and the aid of her guardian angel, she does not lose heart, singing beautiful devotional songs about marital love. Her singing fills the surrounding area day and night.

When Herman learns that the singing is Veronika's, he again concludes that she is a witch. He convenes a court and orders the construction of a pyre to burn her. An immense crowd gathers in Celje for the trial, all convinced of her innocence – arguing that only an innocent person could sing so – and believing that spilling her blood will bring ruin upon the entire House of Celje. At the trial, Herman reads the indictment. Veronika remains silent, bathed in an angelic

glow. The judges – who, like the crowd, believe in her innocence – disperse without delivering a verdict. Enraged, Herman orders her walled up in a cell in the castle at Ojstrica to die of starvation. Yet in the darkness, Veronika lives happily, befriending the sinister serpents that dwell nearby. The *vila* brings her bread and water and tells her of Slavic peoples and lands: how the Slavs cannot unite, how they succumb to foreign influences, and how they have forgotten their traditions and symbols. They recall the glorious times of Samo, Prince Marko, and Tsar Lazar, prophesying that the dark age of the Slavs will last at least four hundred years, after which an era of happiness will come when the Slavic peoples finally unite. After a year, no one remembers Veronika – Herman believes she is long dead; her father has died of grief upon hearing of her fate; and Miroslav "prowls after another girl like a wolf after a sheep" (Iskrač-Frankolski, 1863, p. 75). Because of the large number of new prisoners, it is decided to unseal and clear her cell. To everyone's astonishment, Veronika is found in good health, immersed in prayer. On Herman's orders, she is drowned. Her soul rises to heaven amid the singing of paradisiacal birds, while her body is buried in Braslovče. Her faithful *rojenica* visits the girl's grave daily.

Each of the 15 parts of the poem concludes with religious–national–educational references concerning innocence, marriage, death, and duties toward the homeland. The entire work falls within the tradition of the persecuted virtue narrative, here identified with Slavdom, which underscores the formative and didactic nature of the text. Earlier works on Veronika, such as that by Josipina Toman-Turnograjska, displayed a similar character. In later periods, too, the theme of Veronika was used in myth-making efforts. Her story served to construct the so-called "Slovenian model", as in Župančič's drama (which he said he wrote in order to show the birth and growth of the Slovenian soul, and because the aim of his entire artistic work was to create the "Slovenian soul" and "Slovenian man"); the "Yugoslav model", as in Novačan; and the "class model" – or more precisely the "class–national model" – as seen in Jurčič or Kreft (Kmecl, 1974, pp. 119–122). The theme was thus inscribed into changing political and social circumstances and adapted to current needs.

I would like to juxtapose Iskrač's text with a memoir–reportage by Januš Golec – a Catholic priest and politician – published on 25 May 1927, in the weekly *Slovenski gospodar*[42] (Golec, 1927). Golec recounts two visits to the castle in Veliki Tabor (referred to in the text as "Naš Tabor" in line with the Zagorje tradition described by the author) and to Desinić, the first of which took place during his high school years. Fascinated by folk stories and literature about Veronika, he wished to visit the castle he often saw from a distance while travelling to his father's home region. One day, accompanied by the innkeeper from Desinić as his guide, he reached the castle, but he experienced great disappointment on seeing it. Instead of spacious chambers, he found rooms resembling prison cells; instead

[42] A conservative Catholic weekly that was published in Maribor from 1867 to 1941; between 1941 and 1945 it was issued under the title *Štajerski gospodar*.

of windows, there were only loopholes. The magnificent gardens from the tales about Veronika were nowhere to be found – indeed, there was not even space for them within the castle grounds. The guide pointed out the place where Veronika was walled up (in his version, she was walled up alive by her father as punishment when she returned from Herman of Celje), approaching it with reverent awe. Although the author already knew the true story of Veronika, he chose, out of respect for the guide, to make the sign of the cross at the indicated spot and feign sorrow. The visit shattered his fairy-tale vision of the past, yet strengthened his conviction of Veronika's uniqueness and his respect for the legend.

The second visit took place in 1917. At that time, rallies connected with the May Declaration were sweeping through Slovenian lands[43], there was pro-Yugoslav enthusiasm, and educated women were seeking a Yugoslav heroine who could serve as their role model. For Slovenian women – and especially for the inhabitants of the Solta Valley – Veronika of Desenice, whom they saw as a Yugoslav Joan of Arc, was the embodiment of that model. During one of the rallies, Golec – then a Catholic priest not yet thirty – proposed to the participants, appealing especially the women, an excursion to Veliki Tabor to see the place connected with their heroine. The enthusiastic women agreed to make the journey, which – much like the author's youthful excursion – turned into a disappointment. On site, nothing matched their expectations or imaginings, and the Slovenian women decided to adopt a different role model, as the image of Veronika lost all appeal when confronted with reality. Moreover, on the return trip, a wheel broke off one of the wagons they were travelling in, which the participants attributed to the workings of Veronika – the "witch". To make matters worse, due to the accident, the Slovenians found themselves dependent on the help of local Croats, which also exposed them to the locals' impertinence and drunken misbehaviour. Thus, their enthusiasm for the idea of national unity waned, and the trip ultimately brought nothing but disappointment.

Juxtaposing these two texts yields an image of myth-building that collapses when confronted with reality. The pious, tradition-bound Croatian woman from Jožef Iskrač's work – resigned to a fatal destiny, fighting for truth, innocence, and pure marital love, leading Slovenian forces against German troops – had existed in cultural circulation for more than fifty years by the second decade of the 20th century, and this was only one of many narratives on the subject. She had, as Golec's text shows, become an attractive model for the awakening Yugoslav consciousness of Slovenian women. Of course, the vision emerging from Iskrač's poem is somewhat naïve, filled on the one hand with piety, and on the other with references to supernatural and mythical figures. It is noteworthy

[43] The declaration announced on 30 May 1917 by Slovenian, Dalmatian, and Istrian politicians affiliated with the Yugoslav Club in the Viennese parliament, expressing their aspiration to create an autonomous administrative unit of the South Slavs within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. As part of the large-scale campaign that followed its proclamation, approximately 200,000 signatures in support of the declaration were collected within Slovenian territories.

that Miroslav – the son of the arch-German Herman – is essentially portrayed as a Slav, if not as a Slovenian. Either way, he is certainly not presented as a German. In this version, he is initially a bachelor, so the entire plot involving the killing of a first wife or being in conflict with her family is omitted. In fact, Miroslav does not seem to be a central figure at all. The principal actors in the conflict are Herman and Veronika. This dispute is about nationality: between the German element, Herman (male), and the Croatian–Slovenian element, Veronika (female). Interestingly, for a Slovenian author, the Croatian identity of Veronika and the Slovenian identity of her and Miroslav's subjects are strongly emphasised at the start of the text. Later, with reference to Veronika, this distinction fades. The nationality of the peasants among whom she hides after the lost battle is not specified, although their names and the toponyms clearly indicate Slovenian origin. However, the nationality issue is not the only fault line in the Herman–Veronika conflict. There is also a struggle of pure evil against good and innocence; a class conflict, for Herman demands that his son prove Veronika's noble birth; and finally – in a sense – a struggle against patriarchy. For while Veronika is fully obedient to her father in all matters, and the narrator repeatedly reminds the reader that a woman should have a male protector, she also disguises herself as a man to lead an army and is the driving force of resistance against Herman's patriarchal omnipotence. There is also the accusation of witchcraft, which here seems merely a pretext for concealing, among other things (and perhaps above all), a gender conflict – or, as Gunnar Heinsohn and Otto Steiger (1993) argue, a conflict within the changing late-medieval feudal society[44]. On all these fronts Herman appears to prevail, but in reality Veronika is the moral victor and "queen of the people's hearts".

As Golec shows, however, this is a shallow victory, at least among educated Slovenian women, as it cannot survive the collision of myth with reality. Yet one cannot escape the impression that Golec's barely concealed intention is to demonstrate something other than the fragility of the Veronika myth. When he describes his own youthful disappointment upon seeing the actual conditions of the supposed place of Veronika's confinement, he reinforces his conviction of the character's exceptional nature. He also shows the deep respect of the Croatian innkeeper guide – a representative of the Croatian people of that era – for Veronika. By contrast, the educated Slovenian women – despite genuine patriotism and commitment to the Yugoslav idea – abandon the myth and seek

[44] The motif of witches in Slovenian literature has been studied, among others, by Andreja Turk (*Motiv čarovništva v slovenski pripovedni prozi* [The motif of witchcraft in Slovenian narrative prose], unpublished diploma thesis, Ljubljana, 2002); Tanja Resinovič (*Čarovništvo in čarovniški procesi na Slovenskem ter motiv čarovništva v slovenski književnosti* [Witchcraft and witch trials in Slovenia and the motif of witchcraft in Slovenian literature], unpublished diploma thesis, Ljubljana, 1996); and Damijan Pesjak (*Polet iz Slivnice na Klek: Motiv čarovnice v slovenski dramatiki 20. stoletja* [A flight from Slivnica to Klek: the witches in Slovenian Drama in 20th century], unpublished diploma thesis, Ljubljana, 2011).

another at the first sign of cracks in their vision. It is hard not to discern here a reproach directed at his patriotic compatriots and a note of condescension. In that sense, could it be that Iskrač, presenting a vision of an imaginary yet undoubtedly patriarchal world in which a woman can be an agent of action, is more progressive than Golec describing his contemporary reality?

As for the walling up itself, in both texts it functions as a form of punishment and revenge. In Iskrač's version, the guilt is clear – in the eyes of the all-powerful Herman, Veronika is a witch who disrupts the established social order, and her very existence undermines his authority (all the more so because, in the eyes of the people, she is almost a saint). In Golec's account, the nature of the offense is not explicitly stated. However, one can surmise that the motives behind the walling up are similar to those presented in the epic poem.

A kind of transposition of the Veronika motif can be found in a work referring to the fate of another of the great aristocratic families living in Slovenian lands: the Barons of Herberstein. In his novel *Črni križ pri Hrastovcu* [The Black Cross at Hrastovec], published in Maribor in 1928, Ožbolt (Ožbalt) Ilaunig (1928) draws on legends from the vicinity of Hrastovec as well as historical sources to recount the love story of Ivan Friderik Herberstein and his wife, Agata. The events are set at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. Ivan Friderik, a half-orphan, lives with his mother, Margareta, who – before transferring her estates to him – wants to marry him to a neighbouring aristocrat. However, the young man is in love with Agata Mürnberger, a woman from a lower rank of the nobility. His mother refuses to hear of the match, primarily because of the class differences and also, albeit unjustly, because she suspects Agata of pro-Protestant sympathies. The narrative is thus given a confessional backdrop. Summoned to a campaign against the Turks, and fearing that his beloved might be in danger from his mother, Ivan Friderik secretly marries Agata in order to ensure her safety. This, however, proves to be her death sentence. Upon learning of the marriage, Margareta accuses Agata of witchcraft, leading to her arrest and condemnation to death. While in prison, Agata gives birth to a stillborn child, which for her mother-in-law serves only as further proof of her guilt (according to Margareta, Agata intentionally killed the infant to use its body to prepare a potion to help her escape prison). According to the death sentence, Agata is first to be beheaded and then burned at the stake. However, convinced of her innocence, the crowd at the execution prevents the second part of the punishment from being carried out. They wrest her body from the executioners and bury it on the hill that served as the place of execution, where they also erect the titular black cross. Unaware of these events, Ivan Friderik returns from the war, and when he learns of his wife's fate, he breaks off relations with his mother. She soon dies, and her ghost is said to haunt Hrastovec Castle for years. Ivan Friderik transfers the estates to his cousins and enters the Benedictine order.

Thus, as in the Veronika motif, the novel features a conflict between parent and son arising from the younger generation's breach of the class hierarchy; there is also a witchcraft trial and the causing of the death of a young woman

widely regarded as innocent. However, in Ilaunig's work, the *spiritus movens* of actions intended to preserve the class and patriarchal order is not a man/father, but a woman/mother. Ilaunig also introduces a number of new elements, such as the birth of a stillborn child in prison. Furthermore, the novel devotes considerable attention to the social and religious relations and transformations of the time, and to the conflicts associated with them: Catholics and Protestants, as well as the so-called "*Skakač*" sect[45], who are Catholic in essence. Although the Counter-Reformation ultimately prevails, some Protestants manage to survive, while the *Skakač* suffer total defeat.

Most significant for the subject of this study, however, is that the novel also contains a motif of the walling up/burial of a girl; although marginal in the novel, it is noteworthy in the Slovenian context. In describing the history of the chapel in which Agata and Ivan Friderik were married, the narrator recounts the story of earlier members of the Herberstein family. The chapel, it is said, was erected by the wife of one of them so that his soul might find peace after death, for he had been a licentious libertine during his lifetime. On one occasion he set his sights on Lenika, the daughter of one of his subjects, and when she rejected his advances, wishing to remain faithful to her fiancé, he ordered her to be buried alive. A cross was erected at the place of burial, from which – true to the logic of the magical tale – a pine tree grew. This was the sign Lenika had promised her fiancé as proof of her fidelity. The aristocrat himself is said to have met a wretched end: he lost his mind, was tormented by evil spirits, haunted by the vision of the buried girl, and, after his death, his body was carried off by the devil.

The story of the wicked aristocrat who ordered the live burial of a girl who rejected his advances (in some variants, it is a daughter defying her father) continues to appear in folkloric material from this region today (though it is worth asking whether this is not due to the influence of Ilaunig's novel); I discuss this more fully in the section on folk culture. The story of Agata and Ivan Friderik also seems to remain alive in the local community. To give just two examples: in 1936, at the initiative of the author of *Črni križ pri Hrastovcu*, a monument was erected at the site where the cross once stood, bearing a plaque in Agata's honor; in 2012, a three-minute film inspired by the tale appeared on YouTube, filmed in part at this very monument (see Kolarič, 2012).

Literature in the Service of Tourism

The motif of walling up is reflected in two short literary texts created for the promotion of tourism. Significantly, both are tied to Slovenian–Croatian projects

[45] Members of this medieval sect are referred to as *skakači* ("jumpers") after the jumps and dances they performed in religious ecstasy (*Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika*, n.d.).

and concern locations barely forty kilometers apart. The author of the first – by far the more literarily accomplished – is the writer Dušan Šarotar, whose works have been translated into many languages, including Polish. His text *Bela dama* [The White Lady] was written for the project and book *Živa coprnija Pohorja in Istre. Izleti po poteh pripovednega izročila* [Living Magic of Pohorje and Istria: Trips Along the Paths of Lore[46]] (Cunta, 2019).

This carefully prepared publication was conceived as follows: ethnologists Monika Kropej Telban, Barbara Ivančič Kutin, Tamara Nikolić Đerić, and Nikolina Rusac gathered folklore material – some already archived, some collected specifically for the project – from 20 locations, on the basis of which Dušan Šarotar wrote 20 short stories, accompanied by illustrations by the painter Tina Dobrajc. Each literary text is paired with descriptions of the history of the sites featured and practical tourist information.

The story containing the walling up motif, which opens the volume, concerns the castle in Slovenska Bistrica. Written by Šarotar, it is based on unpublished accounts recorded in 2018 by Barbara Ivančič Kutin and archived at the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. In Šarotar's narrative, a cruel count orders his wife to be walled up alive in a stone pillar so that she cannot escape him. She is fed through a narrow opening, from which – for a long time, even after her presumed death – a mournful song can be heard. The autumn wind is said to remind local residents of the voice and the tragic fate of the White Lady, as she is known, who is believed to still appear in the castle. The story offers no explanation as to why the woman was walled up; the relevant passage is limited to a single sentence: "There once lived a cruel count who ordered that his wife, the White Lady, be walled up in a tall stone pillar so that the poor soul could not escape him" (Cunta, 2019, p. 20). The accompanying folklore material offers little clarification: according to it, the count was generally cruel and treated people badly, and the walled-up woman in the pillar of St. Anne's Chapel (the chapel motif does not appear in Šarotar's text) was fed through the opening for as long as her voice could be heard.

It is therefore difficult to determine whether the walling up was meant as punishment for previous attempts to flee her husband, or simply the whim of a tyrant. The count's later fate is also unknown. The walling up episode is told almost in passing, serving merely as an explanation for the existence of the White Lady. The narrative focuses instead on the possibility of encountering her and on the locations where such an encounter might occur, as well as on the story of the castle's secrets as learned by the narrator. He recalls hearing the whole tale in his youth from an elderly woman at the Bistrica castle who – one might infer from the text – could have been a ghost, perhaps even the White Lady herself. Interestingly, this story is the only instance of first-person narration in the entire volume; whether this inconsistency is intentional remains unclear.

[46] In addition to the book edition, the text was also used in the *Živa coprnija* app and on the website http://zivacoprnija.com/.

The second text – published without attribution – appears in Slovenian on the website of Veliki Tabor Castle's museum in Croatia and presents a version of the story of Veronika of Desenice. According to this account, Frederick and Veronika fall in love and, against the will of Frederick's father, Count Herman, secretly marry. Pursued by Herman's troops, they are captured and imprisoned separately – Frederick for four years in the tower at Celje, Veronika in Veliki Tabor. She is accused by her father-in-law of witchcraft. Although acquitted by the court, she is, at Herman's request, drowned in a wooden vat in the castle courtyard, after which her lifeless body is walled up at the junction of the castle tower and gate. In this case, too, the victim's wailing is said to be audible when the wind blows.

The motif of Veronika's walling up in the castle walls is present in local folklore (as confirmed, for example, by Januš Golec's reportage described above, in which the legend is largely consistent with the museum's version). The local museum's promotional strategy also draws on it[47]. Visitors can even view the purported skull of Veronika (although historical sources indicate she was buried in Jurklošter, Slovenia). In this version of the motif, the walling up is clearly a form of punishment. Determining her guilt, however, is more difficult – especially in light of the judicial acquittal. Perhaps it lies in her defiance of the patriarchal social order and her choice to follow her feelings rather than the obligations imposed by feudal norms.

Varia

Other references to the motif of walling up in Slovenian prose appear only on the distant margins of the narratives. For example, in Maja Novak's 1996 short story collection *Zverjad* [Wild Beasts] (Novak, 1996), the 1992 text titled *Pisma bralcev* [Letters from Readers], set on a Caribbean island re-emerging after years of authoritarian regime rule, contains a summary of letters sent by a reader to the newspaper *El Derecho* [The Law]: "I am a democrat, my party has won the election, and therefore, in the name of democracy, I demand that all those who think differently from me be walled up alive in the foundations of the new cathedral of *Santa Maria de Siete Dolores* [Our Lady of Seven Sorrows]" (Novak, 1996, pp. 106–107). These letters are, in fact, never published, which forms the crux of the conflict in Novak's text.

In Andrej Morovič's 1997 novel *Vladarka* [The Ruler], a Dutch heroine, who has fled the shelling of Zadar for one of the nearby islands, visits a chapel in the local cemetery and learns the story of its origin (Morovič, 1997, p. 35): during

[47] The museum has published, among others, the brochures *Legenda o Veroniki Desenićkoj. Muzejsko edukativna i nagradna igra Iznenađenje: Veronika Desinićka – plemkinja, seljanka ili čarobnica?* (Škiljan, 2007) and *Legenda o Veroniki Desinićkoj – riječju i slikom* (Jagarčec, 2013), as well as a book by two authors, Rolanda Fugger Germadnik and Kristina Pavlović (Fugger Germadnik & Pavlović, 2018).

the rule of the Venetian doges, a wealthy merchant kidnapped children and drank their blood; for years, no one knew who was behind the disappearances. When the townspeople finally discovered the culprit, they burned him alive, and his ashes were mixed into the mortar used in the construction of the chapel "to give the devil back to Satan".

A third reference appears in Boris Jukić's novel *Nekdo je igral klavir* [Someone Played the Piano] (Jukić, 1997). The narrative incorporates numerous fairy tales and legends. In one of them, a count orders the walling up of a governess after the disappearance of his son during a hunt because she had persuaded him to allow the son to participate. The woman is walled in completely, up to her head, so that she can "eat, live, and suffer". She is also subjected to constant harassment from the count's subjects. After three years, when the young man is found, she is released and restored to favour (Jukić, 1997, pp. 158–160, 176). As can be seen, in each case we are dealing with punishment for (alleged) actions, with the first two examples referring directly to the idea of a foundation sacrifice. It cannot be ruled out that similar themes may appear in other Slovenian prose works, but I have not been able to identify them.

The only Slovenian poetic work I have found that refers to the motif of walling up is the 2006 poem *Pošast* [Monster], published on the amateur poetry portal pesnik.net. The author uses the pseudonym BigGreenCleanMachine.

Monster

In the wall of my room lives a monster, but thank God it is walled up and cannot be heard.

One dark night I was convinced it had escaped from its concrete shell and was now wandering around the room, looking for a victim.

I preferred not to turn on the light, because it could be terrifying, and I was too afraid to move. I blinked as rarely and as quickly as possible so it wouldn't notice.

The night was long, and the monster was persistent. I, poor wretch, eventually fell asleep.

In the morning it had left the room to look for another victim.

Not long after, a friend told me that a bricklayer had probably walled it up in their new house.

Apparently, it was walled up into the wall of his room. (BigGreenCleanMachine, 2006)

Here, walling up serves as a form of protection against the danger posed by the titular monster; thus, it does not directly relate to the motif of the walled-up woman. There is no mention of a foundation sacrifice, even though the monster is walled up within the walls of a newly built house, nor is it presented as a form of punishment or whim, as in Šarotar's short story. The reference to the poem *Pošast* is included here solely because of the presence of the walling up motif, which testifies to the author's individual cultural memory.

The Topos of the Walled-up Woman in Art, Popular Culture, and Education

As noted in the earlier sections devoted to literature and folk culture, in Slovenia – unlike in the other national cultures discussed in this monograph – the motif of the walled-up woman is, for all intents and purposes, absent. While in the fields of literature and folkloristics it is still possible to find distant allusions to it, in art, popular culture, and especially in school texts, such traces are virtually nonexistent. The following compilation of isolated instances identified during my research thus necessarily takes the form of a kind of lapidarium of cultural texts – unrelated to one another and not forming a semantically coherent whole.

In 2022[48], the association *Homo Narrans* published a translation of the full version of the poem *Zidanje Skadra na Bojani* [The Building of Skadar on the Bojana] by Nebojša Pop-Tasić, with an afterword by the translator and illustrations by Samira Kentrić (*Zidanje Skadra na Bojani*, 2022). This 20-page publication (in a print run of three hundred copies) is based on the variant collected from the storyteller Raško by Vuk Karadžić. In the accompanying text, the translator briefly introduces the phenomenon of Serbian epic songs, regarding them as a source reflecting the awakening national consciousness in the 19th century. He also presents the contexts in which both the content of the song and its first Viennese edition become relevant. He devotes space to the idea of the foundation sacrifice, especially to the choice of a woman, wife or child as the victim, explaining it through the patriarchal logic of replaceability – the sacrificer can marry again or father another child. He further points out that by sacrificing someone dear to him, the builder becomes both executioner and victim. Pop-Tasić also refers to variants that differ from the Skadar one, noting, among other things, the anonymity of the victims in most of them, and the exceptional nature of the *Curtea de Argeș* variant in this regard. He links the name of the Romanian walled-up woman – Ana – to the dedication of the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, into whose foundations she was to have been walled up. The translator sees here an analogy between the mother of Mary, Saint Anne, and the woman whose presence sustains the foundations of the church. He also suggests that the Romanian variant may have been influenced by the fact that Prince Marko, the son of King Vukašin, and Konstantin Balšić, son of the then ruler of Skadar, both fought on the Ottoman side at the Battle of Rovine in 1395 – more than a century before the cathedral was constructed in nearby Curtea de Argeș. He also refers to his own research inspired by the motif of three sisters appearing in the Greek variant, in which the eldest was said to

[48] A certain delay in the actual publication date may be indicated by the fact that, as late as November 2023, the integrated Slovenian library system still listed the book as "in print"; in January 2024, the status was changed to "in processing" in libraries. Nevertheless, since the publication itself states the year 2022, I use that date.

have been walled up in a bridge over the Danube, the middle sister in a bridge over the Euphrates, and the youngest in the bridge in Arta. Although he did not find legends about a Danube bridge, he cites tales of a Jewish girl named Delal being walled up in a bridge in the town of Zakho[49], in Iraqi Kurdistan, which to this day bears the name Delal Bridge. The translator emphasises the widespread occurrence of similar variants and characters, which he explains as the kinship of human experience in the face of the tragedy evoked by such works. Kentrić's illustration focuses on the depiction of breasts with milk flowing from them, which may also symbolise tears or rain.

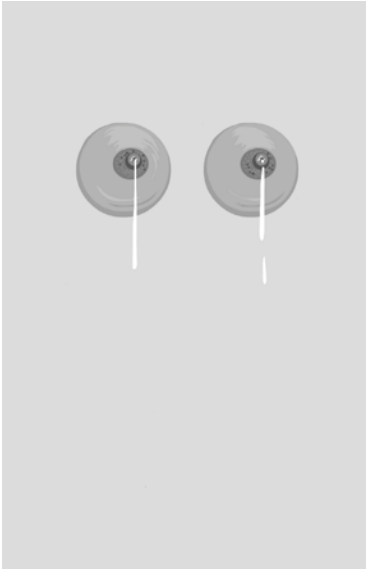


Figure 2. Illustration for *Zidanje Skadra na Bojani*, 2022. Author: Samira Kentrić

Although Pop-Tasić's translation is probably the first complete rendering of the Serbian variant of the song into Slovenian, the song was likely known to Slovenian readers from at least the end of the 19th century. It was summarised, for instance, by Davorin Nemanić in the article in *Ljubljanski zvon* cited above (Nemanić, 1884). The Romanian *Ballad of Master Manole* in Vasile Alecsandri's version has also been translated in its entirety into Slovenian. This translation, however, is not publicly available, as it appears only in the unpublished thesis of Urška Jernejc (2006, pp. 38–41). Jernejc notes that it is a philological translation. In the course of my research, I was unable to find Slovenian translations of other works on the walling up of women. When discussing Hungarian, Greek, Albanian, or Serbian works, Jernejc refers solely to translations or summa-

[49] Zakho is located on the Khabur River, a left tributary of the Euphrates, and the local legend to which Pop-Tasić refers concerns the bridge over the Khabur.

ries found in English- and French-language scholarship (primarily Seinen and Brewster).

In 2022 and 2023, primarily as part of the Storytelling Festival (*Pripovedovalski festival*), the *Homo Narrans* association staged several performances in which storyteller Irena Tomažin presented the Slovenian version of *Zidanje Skadra na Bojani* in Pop-Tasić's translation (these events took place before the translation entered the reading market). Some of these performances were accompanied by a lecture on the song given by the translator.

The motif of walling up is absent from the musical based on the story of Veronika of Desenice [whose songs are available in full on the YouTube channel of one of its authors, Leon Firšt (2021)], the song representing Slovenia in the Eurovision Song Contest, the story of the contemporary search for Veronika's grave, and the Veronika poetry award granted by the city of Celje. It is thus pointless to analyse them further in this book. In the sphere of tourism promotion, the walling up motif remains alive primarily thanks to the Croatian museum, Dvor Veliki Tabor, which seeks to reach Slovenian audiences with its offerings. The museum's website includes a Slovenian-language version of the legend of Veronika of Desenice, whose body was posthumously walled up in the castle walls. The film *Gradovi v službi turizma* [Castles in the Service of Tourism] (2015), produced by Slovenian public television to showcase the tourist offerings of several Slovenian castles, promotes this site, for example, by including the information that visitors can see Veronika's hair and skull.

The already-mentioned Slovenian-Croatian project *Živa coprnija*, intended to promote the Pohorje and Istria regions, refers to the countess walled up in the castle in Slovenska Bistrica. Besides the printed guidebook described earlier, the project includes a website, a mobile application, a Facebook profile (now inactive), and organised events. The legend of the walling up itself does not appear to be particularly attractive to the castle's administrators; the site's extensive website contains no direct references to it[50]. One might, however, detect an indirect reference in one of the workshops held at the castle under the title *Po poti bele dame* [In the Footsteps of the White Lady], which involves learning about former life in the castle, its secret rooms, and making the "White Lady's flower". Folklore material and Dušan Šarotar's text connect this figure and the story of the walled-up countess, but the castle's website makes no mention of it.

There are no discernible references to the motif of walling up in Slovenian drama, cinema, or visual arts. It is likewise absent at all stages of education. Interestingly, it has not survived even in the areas once covered by the Hungarian education system, where it had previously been present. To a scholar of the motif of the walled-up woman, certain inscriptions referring to Zoran Janković – the long-time mayor of Ljubljana – which appeared some time ago on the city's walls and fences might seem like an allusion to it. One inscription reads: "Zazidajmo Jankoviča" [Let's wall up Janković]. It would appear, however,

[50] See: https://www.zavod-ksb.si/

that these should rather be connected to Janković's own public statements, in which he openly admits to being troubled by undeveloped parts of the city and expresses his desire to have everything built over/walled up (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The phrase "Let's wall up Janković" on a city fence in Ljubljana. Photo by Maciej Olszewski, 2022

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Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa

Recapitulation. A Contribution to Circumstantial Cultural History

Our journey is nearing its end. We have written over one thousand pages in our effort to reconstruct the meandering intercultural and intergenerational wanderings of the folk topos of the walled-up woman. Knowing little about its origin and having only hypotheses on the subject, an attempt was made to organise a picture of its adaptation in the literature and arts of Southeastern Europe and Hungary. Our research has confirmed that in the 19th–21st centuries, in most of the Slavic cultures of the Balkans that were of interest to us, as well as in Albanian, Romanian, and Hungarian cultures, the topos has been and continues to be invoked and transformed with surprising frequency, as new variant narratives and visualisations arise from semantic, axiological, and structural shifts. These transformations speak volumes about the ways of interpreting the distant past (as its reading) and the future (as its design). Where such processes do not occur, a gradual petrification of the topos can be observed (as in Greece) and, in some cases, its annihilation (as in Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

We hope that the knowledge we have generated will fill the cognitive gap in the study of the "posthumous life" of the folk motif of the walled-up woman as documented in cultural texts, and enrich the current of scholarly reflection on modernity and postmodernity as a sphere of aporias resulting from the limitations of contradictory strategies for negotiating values with established tradition. We expect that the results of our research will provide an impetus for the intellectual history of the region, mapped out in a manner that departs from earlier practices. Contemporary studies generally favour either separate research of the Balkans and Central Europe, or integrated studies of Central Europe and the Western Balkans, while excluding the Eastern Balkans. We have breached this entrenched scholarly assumption. By proposing to study a (seemingly) marginal motif, we have shifted the focus from what is institutionally sanctioned within research to what transcends political and geocultural boundaries, as well as to the accompanying forms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2006).

The research we conducted confirms our hypothesis that, in a world understood in Benjaminian terms as a post-auratic reality (Benjamin, 2005, p. 493),

the archaic folk narrative of foundation sacrifice continues to evoke emotions that resonate with common experiences of socially and ontologically conditioned femininity. As a culturally entangled living being, a woman experiences not only social violence (both physical and symbolic) in this world but also violence inflicted upon her as a result of her bodily ("natural"?) predisposition to be an anomaly (Cixous, 1993). Thus – especially for a contemporary viewer equipped with a particular emancipatory sensibility – the ancient text of folklore, often blunt in its depiction of the female condition, reveals its diagnostic potential. This invites the question of whether premodern humans express, in accessible language, the kinds of observations that constantly recur in 19th–21st century literature and art. At the level of metareflection, these observations are conceptualised today primarily within feminist and gender studies.

A study of the modern cultures of Southeastern Europe shows that questions concerning the meaning of the folk topos of the walled-up woman continue to trouble artists across the region. Specific literary and artistic solutions allow us to discern the whole spectrum of possible modalities that accompany reflection on this subject. It is significant that these modalities reveal themselves with the greatest intensity at the margins of dominant currents (in texts that are sometimes unjustifiably well-known, but also in those that have been marginalised for legitimate reasons; in works that are graphomaniacal; in scattered allusions, impressions on local exotica, and similar forms) and, more recently, in the work of women.

Let us look at this from another perspective. In his essay *Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: clues and scientific method*, Carlo Ginzburg (following in the footsteps of Morelli, the Italian physician and creator of an original method of identifying forgeries of works of art) rightly notes that what is specific and individual in a culture is revealed through secondary details, in what is not carefully crafted, what belongs to trifles that are marginalised, and considered not important enough (Ginzburg, 1980):

> We have outlined an analogy between the methods of Morelli, of Holmes, and of Freud. We have mentioned the connection between Morelli and Holmes, and that between Morelli and Freud. The peculiar similarities between the activities of Holmes and Freud have been discussed by Steven Marcus. In all three cases tiny details provide the key to a deeper reality, inaccessible by other methods. These details may be symptoms, for Freud, or clues, for Holmes, or features of paintings, for Morelli.
>
> How do we explain the triple analogy? There is an obvious answer. Freud was a doctor; Morelli had a degree in medicine; Conan Doyle had been a doctor before settling down to write. In all three cases we can invoke the model of medical semiotics, or symptomatology: the discipline which permits diagnosis, though the disease cannot be directly observed, on the basis of superficial symptoms or signs, often irrelevant to the eye of the layman, or even of Dr Watson. (Incidentally, the Holmes-Watson pair, the sharp-eyed detective and the obtuse doctor, represents the splitting of a single character, one of the youthful Conan Doyle's professors, famous for his diagnostic ability). But it is not simply a matter of biographical

> coincidences. Towards the end of the 19th century (more precisely, in the decade 1870–80), this "semiotic" approach, a paradigm or model based on the interpretation of clues, had become increasingly influential in the field of human sciences. Its roots, however, were far more ancient. (Ginzburg, 1980, pp. 11–12).

The method of cultural cognition analysed in Ginzburg's article, based on the study of traces, clues, and indistinct peculiarities, is supposed to lead the explorer from what is known (and seemingly worthless) to what is unknown but cognitively valuable (Ginzburg, 2006, p. 64). This was the path we took; often against the advice of many scattered professional colleagues who discouraged us from this "outdated and exploited" subject. In a sense, they were right: we have not found the philosopher's stone, nor have we made subversive discoveries that would contribute something fundamentally new to the common knowledge of the androcentric nature of the cultures under study. And yet, it seems, we did something really important – we uncovered their monolithic subsoil, their powerlessness in the face of their own paradigms, their desperate persistence within certain symbolic orders that become a source of a special kind of oppression for people, described by Wojciech Burszta as "the prison of culture". As is well known, in a context marked by such a stabilised ontological and axiological order, one can at best change a square on the chessboard (Burszta, 2008, p. 164).

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Authors on the Topos of the Walled-Up Woman

Ana, the walled-up woman from the legend of Master Manole, is a largely absent and barely recognised figure in Romanian culture, which has foregrounded the male hero of the ballad and the myth of sacrifice for the sake of creativity, making these the central theme of most reflections and reinterpretations. This structural inequality aroused anger and frustration in me. However, I later realised that it must be understood as a literary reflection of the patriarchal past and, regrettably, of the present socio-cultural realities of Romania. For this reason, the topos should be described and analysed in detail, as such examination remains one of the most effective ways to understand and, consequently, dismantle and transform these fossilised patterns. Although few people remember this topos today, Ana from the folk ballad lent her name to the first Romanian feminist organisation after 1989 and became a symbol of socially marginalised people at the dawn of the women's revolution in Romania in the 1990s.

Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1332-2469
e-mail: olga.bartosiewicz@uj.edu.pl

Doctor of Literary Studies, Romanist, Romanianist, and translator; assistant professor at the Institute of Romance Philology at the Jagiellonian University; associate member of the Centre for Modern Literature Research (FIM) at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca; member of the Literary Translators' Association; and assistant professor at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences (2022–2023). Author of a scholarly monograph devoted to the work of B. Fundoianu/B. Fondane (Kraków, 2018) and numerous academic and popular-science articles in Romance and Romanian studies. Her research focuses on 20th- and 21st-century Romanian literature and culture, as well as questions of identity and the imaginative sphere of contemporary Romanian society. Between 2019 and 2023, she participated in the international project for translators and writers CELA. Her Polish translation of Adrian Schiop's novel *Żołnierze. Opowieść z Ferentari* received the 2019 "Literature in the World" Translation Award. She was a recipient of scholarships from the Romanian Cultural Institute (2014) and the New Europe College Institute for Advanced Studies in Bucharest (2014–2015), as well as a beneficiary of the residency programme for translators of Romanian literature organised by the FILIT International Festival of Literature and Translation in Iași (2017). In 2021, she was awarded an individual grant by the STAR-UBB Institute for Advanced Studies at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, where she developed a project examining representations of Romania in Polish literature after 1989.

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I was probably around eleven or twelve when I finally came across a well-thumbed and badly worn copy of Mitrush Kuteli's Tregime të moçme shqiptare [Old Albanian Tales]. There, I first read a slightly fictionalised story about a woman walled up in the foundations of a fortress under construction. I knew the story from other sources, perhaps from conversations and tales told here and there, and I had twice witnessed a hen being slaughtered on the commencement of major building projects while working on construction sites. However, it was only in Kuteli's book that I encountered the full narrative. In my first year of secondary school, I read the song in a publication titled "Folklore". I interpreted it as a story in which the sacrifice of a young mother, although tragic, serves the common good – and that is how it should be. Only now, years later, thanks to in-depth reading and work as part of this grant, did I recognise in this song not only a young mother but also a woman dying alone in the cold of a wall; not only her sacrifice for the common good, but also her existence as a victim of the common good. This duality of this perspective will remain with me forever.

Rigels Halili
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1439-2717
e-mail: r.halili@uw.edu.pl

Born in Gjirokastër, Albania. At the University of Warsaw, he studied Polish language and culture and cultural animation at the Faculty of Polish Studies, as well as international relations at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science. He completed his doctoral studies at the School of Social Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where he defended his doctoral thesis *Orality and Literacy: Folk Epic among Albanians and Serbs*. He conducted field research in Serbia, Albania, and Kosovo.

In 2004–2005, he held a scholarship at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University of London. From 2007 to 2010 he headed the Albanian studies programme as a *Nash Fellow in Albanian Studies*. From 2010 to 2015, he lectured at the Institute of Slavic Philology at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Since 2015, he has lectured at the University of Warsaw's Centre for East European Studies, where he leads the Balkan specialisation programme.

* * *

I once wrote a book commissioned by Nasza Księgarnia Publishing House to introduce young Polish readers to the history of Hungary, its customs and language, as well as shared moments in the history of the Hungarian and Polish nations. I framed my story in the structure of a popular Grimm fairy tale, creating my own postmodern story about Little Red Riding Hood (Hensel, 1987). The editors had one reservation. In my fairy tale, as in the Grimm brothers' fairy tale, the wolf was killed so that the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood could be saved. It was decided that children should not read such scary stories in which a human being kills a living creature, and a change to the ending was suggested.

I remembered the story when the idea of writing this book came to me. Although I knew the story of the walled-up woman from my Hungarian studies, at the time it had somehow been lost in the flood of other works of Hungarian literature. Re-

reading the piece shocked me. The shock was even greater when I learned it had been part of the school curriculum for years. Such horror – Why?

Leszek Hensel
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5707-667X
e-mail: leszek.hensel@ispan.edu.pl

Hungarianist; Doctor of Humanities; author of two academic books and several dozen publications on Hungarian literature and culture, Hungarian-Slovak relations, and Central European issues. His work has been published in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

From 1982 to 1990, he was a researcher at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. From 1990 to 2019, he served in the diplomatic service in Hungary (Head of the Consular Section of the Embassy, 1990–95), Slovenia (Deputy Ambassador, 1997–2001), Bosnia (Ambassador, 2001–2005), and Bulgaria (Ambassador, 2010–2014). In Poland, he worked as Deputy Director of the European Policy Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Coordinator of the Central European Initiative (2018–2019); Ambassador Plenipotentiary for Polish Diaspora Policy in the Department for Cooperation with the Polish Diaspora and Poles Abroad (2014–2018); national expert of the International Visegrad Fund (2006–2008), followed by service as its national coordinator (2008–2010; 2018–2019); coordinator of cooperation for the Central European Culture Platform (2006–2008); head of the Department of Personnel Movement and European Cooperation (2005–2006); and head of the Central Europe Division of the Europe I Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1995–1997).

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The Polish version of the Romanian ballad, translated by Jerzy Ficowski, follows the poetic, canonical version penned by Vasile Alecsandri (first published in 1852). Alecsandri's contemporaries made oral folklore an integral part of Romanian literature. The author himself linked the Balkan ballad about a walled-up woman with a specific building (a monastery) and place (Curtea de Argeș), predetermining later Romanian narratives on the topos, which can be characterised as follows: the cultural ennoblement of the folk motif is accompanied by the imposition of a one-sided interpretation dominated by national and patriotic content. With this approach, the individual drama of the walled-up woman (sacrificed on the altar of Art – or Idea?) became a secondary issue.

Kazimierz Jurczak
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7499-1466
e-mail: kazimierz.jurczak@uj.edu.pl

Professor of Romanian studies, philologist, and translator; head of the Department of Romanian Philology at the Jagiellonian University. He specialises in the history of Romanian culture, the history of ideas, and the culture of the Balkan–Central European borderland. He is the author of the monograph *Dylematy zmiany* [Dilemmas of Change] (2011), devoted to 19th-century Romanian conservative thought; co-editor of two col-

lective volumes on borderland languages and cultures; and author of approximately fifty scholarly articles and academic dissertations published in Poland, Romania, France, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. For many years, he has lectured at the University of Warsaw's Centre for East European Studies.

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In his monograph about "The Bridge of Arta" song and similar songs, Giorgos A. Megas cites several versions of the piece from different parts of Greece. He discusses the performance of this particular song: on the second day of Easter, the entire community performs a dance to this song called "the bridge" (literally "arch", in the sense of an "arched bridge"), in the square in front of the church, always in the early evening, at a slow pace, and without using any instruments. It is therefore one of the last versions that retains the movement component and is not just a literary text for study. It also contains a record of phatic interjections, probably added spontaneously by others in order to participate in the text.

This version is also a literary text, and by comparing it with the most popular version from the island of Lesbos – the canonical version – we can identify the differences and similarities: where it aligns rhythmically with the more common text, where it deviates, and what elements it adds to the overall narrative. For instance, the final verse featuring the laurel flower, which resembles – by chance? – well-known ancient motifs, is particularly noteworthy.

Przemysław Kordos
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6144-0243
e-mail: pkordos@al.uw.edu.pl

Professor at the University of Warsaw; literary scholar, and ethnographer. His research focuses on contemporary Greek and Cypriot culture, with particular emphasis on the relationship between popular and folk culture, as well as on contemporary literature in Modern Greek. He has published works on travellers to Greece, the specifics of realism in Greek literature, and, most recently, about fantasy, not limited to Greek works.

* * *

I first heard the legend in its Albanian version as an adult while visiting Shkodër. I learned about the song "Zidanje Skadra", written down by Vuk, a few years ago while preparing for our research. I was moved by the ending of this version, which reinforced my belief that sacrifice is necessary to achieve ambitious and important goals. The woman is walled up, and those responsible go unpunished. Moreover, her sacrifice not only causes no harm (she continues to feed her son for another year) but also serves the community (by strengthening the castle) and future generations (through the healing properties of milk). The intrigue surrounding the death sentence imposed on the youngest wife is shocking, but what struck me even more was the unquestioned agreement of all the characters on the indispensability of the sacrifice. In the world presented in the song, the authority of supernatural judgments (represented by a vila) and those higher up in the patriarchal world (the king, the

eldest brother, the husband) is absolute. Therefore, I was greatly moved to discover another variant of this song, virtually unknown until the 1970s. More on this in the rest of the monograph…

Marzena Maciulewicz
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7704-1412
e-mail: marzena.maciulewicz@ispan.edu.pl

Doctor of Humanities in cultural and religious studies; graduate of the Faculty of Artes Liberales at the University of Warsaw, the University of Warsaw's Centre for East European Studies, and the University of Warsaw's Institute of West and South Slavic Studies; Slavicist; and cultural studies scholar.

She has participated in the following scholarship programmes: Erasmus Mundus Action 2 Sigma Agile (University of Niš, 2015–2016); Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (CEEPUS, University of Pristina, 2017); International Visegrad Fund (University of Belgrade, 2017–2018); winner of a small grant competition for an intercultural project organised by the UN Mission in Kosovo as part of the Youth4Youth programme (2017); and exchange scholarship holder, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Croatia (University of Zagreb, 2008–2009).

Currently employed as an assistant professor at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences; head of scientific activity for the NCN Miniatura project *Komšiluk w wielkim mieście? Relacje sąsiedzkie w Nowym Belgradzie* [Komšiluk in the Big City? Neighbourly Relations in New Belgrade]; and executive researcher in the NCN OPUS grant *The Topos of an Immured Woman in the Cultures of Southeastern Europe and Hungary*, both affiliated with the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She also lectures at the University of Warsaw and supervises doctoral students at the Anthropos Doctoral School of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

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The topos of the walled-up woman in Slovenia exists only in fragments and in distant references. Even one of the first materials I encountered when I began exploring the walled-up woman motif was a complete inversion of the traditional narrative: there was a convict – the father – who was walled up and nursed by his daughter. I believe this captures the essence of the problems I encountered in my research: if this motif is present in Slovenian cultural texts at all, it is in a hidden, non-obvious, transposed form. This, I believe, is what makes my work an intriguing counterpoint to the other chapters of this book.

Maciej Bolesław Olszewski
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2184-6346
e-mail: maciej.olszewski@ispan.edu.pl

Slovenian language scholar; graduate of the University of Warsaw; doctoral student at the Anthropos Doctoral School of the Polish Academy of Sciences, affiliated with the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences (doctoral thesis project on the

figure of the mother in modern and postmodern Slovenian prose); translator of Slovenian literature; and expert on the prevention of money laundering and terrorism financing.

* * *

Holy indignation at the barbaric practices of the past separates us from songs that could help us understand the present. Today, sacrificial rituals have become more subtle, blurring the contours of violence with clever rationalisations, invoking respect, justice, and even love.

The most interesting questions that arise concern the final days of the woman walled up within a bridge span that became her death cell. What was she thinking as she died while feeding her child? Did she fantasise about revenge? Did she scream in rage and helplessness? Did she strive to escape? Did she negotiate with her tormentors? Did she sing to her child? Or did she lose her mind in terror? Who did the boy, who was breastfed through a hole in the wall, become? Will the story of his mother's life allow him to make choices different from those of his father?

Sylwia Siedlecka
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6425-4654
e-mail: s.siedlecka@uw.edu.pl

Cultural studies scholar, Slavicist, writer. She works at the Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies at the University of Warsaw; deputy editor-in-chief of the journal *Zeszyty Łużyckie. Czasopismo o mniejszościach* [Lusatian Notebooks. A magazine about minorities]; researches cultural performances, especially circuses in Central and Eastern Europe; and is the initiator of the book series *Circusiana* at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw.

She is the author of the monograph *Poganki i intelektualistki. Bohaterki Błagi Dimitrowej* [Pagans and Intellectuals. The heroines of Blaga Dimitriva] (Slavic Publishing Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2012); the collection of essays *Złote piachy* [Golden Sands] (Czarne Publishing House, 2019); the novel *Fosa* [The Moat] (W.A.B. Publishing House, 2015); and a volume of short stories *Szczeniaki* [Pups] (W.A.B. Publishing House, 2010). She co-authored *Leksykon tradycji bułgarskiej* [Lexicon of Bulgarian Tradition] (Slavic Publishing Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2011); and is co-editor of the collection *Zmiana ram. Instytucje po 1989 roku w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej i na Bałkanach* [Reframing: Institutions after 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans] (Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies, University of Warsaw, Libron, 2019). She regularly publishes popular science articles and interviews, including in *Gazeta Wyborcza, Pismo*, and *Przekrój*.

* * *

Racing against time. Efficient muscles. Precision of movement. An infallible daily routine. More, and more. Faster. More. And suddenly, immobility of the ankles, knees, and hips. A creeping sentence. Stillness. Stone. Breathlessness. Loneliness. No cry. The faces of the living. His tear. A child. Food. To give. Give more. Give at least one day of life.

Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3930-2084
e-mail: gszwat@ispan.edu.pl

Slavicist, historian of literature and culture; associate professor at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences; lecturer in South Slavic literature and culture at the University of Warsaw (1981–2013); member of the diplomatic service from 1994 to 1999. From 2006 to 2019, she was editor-in-chief of the journal *Slavia Meridionalis*. Author of numerous articles and books, including *W kręgu bułgarskiej groteski (o twórczości Jordana Radiczkowa)* [In the Circle of Bulgarian Grotesque (on the work of Jordan Radichkov)] (1991); *Haeresis bulgarica w bułgarskiej świadomości kulturowej XIX i XX wieku* [Haeresis bulgarica in Bulgarian cultural consciousness in the 19th and 20th centuries] (2005); co-author and scientific editor of *Leksykon tradycji bułgarskiej* [Lexicon of Bulgarian tradition] (2011); and *Leksykon idei wędrownych na słowiańskich Bałkanach* [Lexicon of wandering ideas in the Slavic Balkans] (vol. 1–10, 2018–2020). Since 2021, she has been head of the research project *The topos of an immured woman in the cultures of Southeastern Europe and Hungary* (NCN, Opus 2019, 2020/37/B/HS2/00152). Her research interests include the history of South Slavic cultures, the history of ideas in the Balkans, and problems of cultural transfer.

* * *

Sisterhood is a social construct.
Sisterhood is political.
Sisterhood is a choice.
The idea and practice of sisterhood is one way to break free from the constraints and corsets of patriarchy.

Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1594-3306
e-mail: ewa.wroblewska@ispan.edu.pl

Assistant professor at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences; cultural studies scholar; Slavicist. Author of the book *Sztuka marginesów. Chorwacki plakat polityczny* [The Art of Margins: Croatian Political Posters] (also published in Croatian as *Umjetnost na marginama*, 2019). Head of the research project *Wizualne artykulacje oporu politycznego w Serbii i Chorwacji po roku 2000* [Visual Articulations of Political Resistance in Serbia and Croatia after 2000] (SONATA NCN). As a laureate of the Foundation for Polish Science under the FOR UKRAINE programme, she co-leads the *Visual Narratives of Civil Society. The Modern Ukraine Project* programme. Her research interests include new social movements and visual culture, particularly in the Balkans and Central Europe.

Volume 11 of the series
Idee Wędrowne na Słowiańskich Bałkanach
[Migrating ideas in the Slavic Balkans]

South of Balaton, North of Arta
The Topos of the Walled-Up Woman in the Cultures of Southeastern Europe and Hungary

Authors of the volume:

Dr Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev
Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, Kraków, Polska
[Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Cracow, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1332-2469
e-mail: olga.bartosiewicz@uj.edu.pl

Dr Rigels Halili
Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa, Polska
[University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1439-2717
e-mail: r.halili@uw.edu.pl

Dr Leszek Hensel
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
[Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5707-667X
e-mail: leszek.hensel@ispan.edu.pl

Dr hab. Kazimierz Jurczak, Associate Professor
Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, Kraków, Polska
[Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Cracow, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7499-1466
e-mail: kazimierz.jurczak@uj.edu.pl

Dr hab. Przemysław Kordos, Associate Professor
Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa, Polska
[University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6144-0243
e-mail: pkordos@al.uw.edu.pl

Dr Marzena Maciulewicz
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
[Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7704-1412
e-mail: marzena.maciulewicz@ispan.edu.pl

Maciej Olszewski
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
[Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2184-6346
e-mail: maciej.olszewski@ispan.edu.pl

Dr Sylwia Siedlecka
Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa, Polska
[University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6425-4654
e-mail: s.siedlecka@uw.edu.pl

Dr hab. Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa, Associate Professor
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
[Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3930-2084
e-mail: gszwat@ispan.edu.pl

Dr hab. Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, Associate Professor
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
[Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1594-3306
e-mail: ewa.wroblewska@ispan.edu.pl

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Abstract

The book is the result of a research project titled "The topos of an immured woman in the cultures of Southeastern Europe and Hungary", funded by the National Science Centre [NCN] (2020/37/B/HS2/00152). It is focused on the adaptation of the wandering folk topos of the walled-up woman, which has spread from the oral tradition of Southeastern Europe and Hungary into the modern and postmodern national cultures of this area. The boundaries of the research exploration coincided with the boundaries of the occurrence of folk songs and legends about the sacrifice of a woman who, according to beliefs, was placed by builders in the foundations of a public building (bridge, fortress, fountain, temple) as a foundation sacrifice to prevent the collapse of their work. However, the ten-member research team, representing various research specialisations and disciplines, was primarily interested in the transformations of this ostensibly marginal fragment of European folklore in modern national literatures and art from the 19th to the 21st century, in theatre, film, performance, popular culture and education. In this monograph, we present the results of this original (given the sources) exploration and interpretation of cultural resources generated around the topos of the walled-up woman throughout the entire area under consideration, i.e., in Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, Slovenian and Hungarian cultures. We examine how this topos was integrated into various national canons and transformed into a versatile element of the national semiosphere, while questioning the uniformity of this process across different regions. We discuss the transformations of the topos in texts that are alternative to national canons, its functionalisation, and its strategies of adaptation to sometimes contradictory artistic, ideological, and mercantile needs. These transformations, which are the focus of our attention, provide clues to a deeper understanding of the cultures under study and the explicit and implicit axiological choices embedded in them (those that change over time, but also those that show unyielding presence and strength in every historical epoch).

The book is the most comprehensive and insightful compendium of knowledge on the subject on a global scale. Its message goes beyond the history of one popular wandering motif – it is an essential voice in the debate on the condition of women in the world.

Keywords: walled-up woman; folklore; modernity; tradition; Balkans; cultural transfer; cultures of Southeastern Europe; gender

Tom 11 serii
„Idee Wędrowne na Słowiańskich Bałkanach”

Na południe od Balatonu, na północ od Arty
Topos wmurowanej kobiety w kulturach Europy Południowo-Wschodniej i Węgier

Autorzy:

dr Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev
Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, Kraków, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1332-2469
e-mail: olga.bartosiewicz@uj.edu.pl

dr Rigels Halili
Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1439-2717
e-mail: r.halili@uw.edu.pl

dr Leszek Hensel
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5707-667X
e-mail: leszek.hensel@ispan.edu.pl

dr hab. Kazimierz Jurczak, prof. ucz.
Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, Kraków, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7499-1466
e-mail: kazimierz.jurczak@uj.edu.pl

dr hab. Przemysław Kordos, prof. ucz.
Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6144-0243
e-mail: pkordos@al.uw.edu.pl

dr Marzena Maciulewicz
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7704-1412
e-mail: marzena.maciulewicz@ispan.edu.pl

Maciej Olszewski
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2184-6346
e-mail: maciej.olszewski@ispan.edu.pl

dr Sylwia Siedlecka
Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6425-4654
e-mail: s.siedlecka@uw.edu.pl

dr hab. Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa, prof. inst.
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3930-2084
e-mail: gszwat@ispan.edu.pl

dr hab. Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, prof. inst.
Instytut Slawistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, Polska
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1594-3306
e-mail: ewa.wroblewska@ispan.edu.pl

Autorki i autorzy deklarują brak konfliktu interesów.

Abstrakt

Książka jest efektem projektu badawczego „Topos *wmurowanej kobiety* w kulturach Europy Południowo-Wschodniej i Węgier", sfinansowanego ze środków NCN (2020/37/B/HS2/00152). Poświęcona została problematyce adaptacji wędrownego ludowego toposu wmurowanej kobiety, który z tradycji oralnej krajów Europy Południowo-Wschodniej i Węgier przeniknął do nowoczesnych i ponowoczesnych kultur narodowych tego obszaru. Granice eksploracji badawczej pokrywały się z granicami występowania pieśni ludowych i legend o ofierze z kobiety, którą – według wierzeń – budowniczowie składali w fundamentach wznoszonej budowli użyteczności publicznej (mostu, twierdzy, czeszmy, świątyni) jako ofiarę zakładzinową, by powstrzymać rozpad swojego dzieła. Dziesięcioosobowy zespół naukowy, którego członkowie i członkinie reprezentują rozmaite specjalności i specjalizacje badawcze, interesowały jednak nade wszystko transformacje tego z pozoru marginalnego fragmentu europejskiego folkloru w nowoczesnych literaturach narodowych i sztuce od XIX do XXI wieku: w teatrze, filmie, performansie, kulturze popularnej i edukacji. W monografii prezentujemy efekty tego oryginalnego (z uwagi na źródła) rozpoznawania i interpretacji zasobów kulturowych wygenerowanych wokół toposu wmurowanej kobiety na całym założonym obszarze, a więc w kulturze albańskiej, bośniackiej, bułgarskiej, chorwackiej, czarnogórskiej, greckiej, macedońskiej, rumuńskiej, serbskiej, słoweńskiej i węgierskiej. Pokazujemy, w jaki sposób topos ten został wcielony w owe kanony narodowe i jakim przekształceniom musiał ulec, by mógł się stać elastycznym elementem narodowej semiosfery, a także, czy rzeczywiście wszędzie do tego doszło. Omawiamy przekształcenia toposu w tekstach alternatywnych w stosunku do kanonów narodowych, jego funkcjonalizacje, strategie adaptacji niekiedy do sprzecznych potrzeb artystycznych, ideowych, ideologicznych i merkantylnych. Stawiana w centrum uwagi zmiana udziela wskazówek do głębszego zrozumienia badanych kultur oraz wpisanych w nie jawnych i niejawnych wyborów aksjologicznych (tych zmieniających się w czasie, ale też tych, które wykazują nieustępliwą obecność i siłę w każdej epoce historycznej).

Książka jest najobszerniejszym w skali globalnej i najbardziej wnikliwym kompendium wiedzy na przedłożony temat. Jej przesłanie wykracza poza historię jednego popularnego motywu wędrownego – jest istotnym głosem w debacie na temat kondycji kobiety w świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: wmurowana kobieta; folklor; nowoczesność; tradycja; Bałkany; transfer kulturowy; kultury Europy Południowo-Wschodniej; płeć kulturowa