

The Ballad of Immurement at Albanians and Aromanians in Albania

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Present Balkan areas draw the attention of the scholars also in the field of ballads. The ballads are distinguished for their motives, coexistence and varieties. Among them we will highlight the immurement ballad, which is known and practiced in various forms and variants by the people living in the Balkan peninsula. Their entire examination could throw light on many important problems relative to the age and origin of this motive, its coexistence, peculiarities, etc. To come to this point it is necessary that, besides the collection and examination of this ballad unilaterally, comparative multilateral studies by parties involved are to be made.

Generally, for their examination of the immurement ballad scholars initially had in their hands the Romanian, Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian variants. It is only relatively lately that Albanian and Aromanian variants have been collected and published. Thoughts expressed, have not enlightened fully the entirety of the problems of the immurement ballad in the Balkan level. This is not without a reason. Albanian variants, many in numbers and widely spread and identified as immurement in a bridge, castle and monastery, extend by much the practicing scope of the ballad, add to the Balkan information and show its individuality within the wide Balkan frame. Aromanian variants, although not entirely studied, depict the territorial extension and number of languages the immurement ballad is practiced, adaptability in the territories people have settled, and at the same time retain interesting individual characteristics. In view of the above ideas we will focus on the immurement ballad of the Albanians and Aromanians in Albania.

The ballad of immurement with Albanians is recorded and spread all over the regions inhabited by them. Although the recording of the ballads dates back to second half of the 19th century, the active and day-to-day life of the Albanians has allowed the recording of the immurement ballad. So far, from the files at the Institute of Folk Culture in Tirana, and Institute of Albanology in Prishtina and various publications, it results that more than a dozen variants of it have been recorded. Since the first publication in 1878 one finds it in the form of a song or narrative. Generally they tell of immurement in a bridge, castle or objects of cult. Although the oral tradition conveys the places the rite of human sacrifice occurred, we may say that the immurement in a bridge or castle, which is more ancient, is sung all over the Albanian regions, not clear-cut borders defined. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that apart from the intertwinement, there are also well defined areas, in the North or South, in the East or West, where the ballad is limited to the immurement in a bridge or castle.

Aromanians in Albania, not aiming here at their history, settled mainly in the middle or southern part of Albania, lived together with the Albanians, traded with them and were partly assimilated, but in general they preserved their identity, especially their language and cultural practices. Anyway, folk research about Aromanians has been very limited and casual. In 1988, during a folk expedition in the villages of a mountainous district (Gramsh) I was given the chance to work in a village inhabited by Aromanians. I got interested in their folklore and gathered that they had preserved something. Willingly they helped me record some of their folk creations, those being of different types and genera. Later I extended my studying efforts to Aromanians settled in different districts in Albania. Other colleagues have also made folk researches about Aromanians in Albania. Nowadays, efforts have been made to get better acquainted with their folk life and its intensity in Albania.

It should be said that, in general, the folklore of Aromanians in Albania has suffered an overall shrinkage. Actually the ballad of immurement exists in a narrative form and only rarely you may find aged people to sing it. In the variants recorded with Aromanians in Albania the immurement is made only in a bridge, generally in the Narta bridge. This is the level of our knowledge wherefrom we have tried to convey the ballad of immurement to Albanians and Aromanians in Albania.

While we can refer to studies of different levels been conducted for the Albanian ballad of immurement, we can not do the same for the Aromanian ballad of immurement; no such studies exist in Albania as of now. We also lack necessary examinations of its ratio relative to the Aromanian ballads in their entirety. In comparison with the same ballad published by G. Weigand in 1894 collected by Aromanians in Manastir, variants collected with Aromanians in Albania are presented with elements closer to the Albanian ballad in general. At present this population, once spread and living together with different nations, in certain cases appears to have more differences within itself and comes closer to the nations it coexists with. This at least holds true for the ballad in question. Even from the way it is sung we have observed that, in Albania the Aromanian population sings it the way the region they have settled in does. We think that this has influenced the content and structure of the folk songs.

Nevertheless, the Aromanian variants of the immurement ballad in Albania have their peculiar features, contributing, in this way, to the comprehension of the ballad of immurement at Balkan level. The enlightenment of Aromanian variants is of significant scientific interest, not concerning the ranking of the peoples relative to the creation of the ballad but in view of pointing out the traditions, peculiarities of every nation, folk "trade" or other communication processes.

Albanian variants of the ballad of immurement, collected up to now, speak of a practice that is fading. But in comparison with the Aromanian population in

Albania, we may say that this motive is somewhat practiced. It is not simply a record of the past, but a contemporary practice, although very confined.

In the Albanian and Aromanian variants in Albania, the ballad goes that there are three brothers (bricklayers) building. Their work is futile. In the Aromanian ballad the orders are given by an old lady, or a bird. Whereas in the Albanian ballad the order is also given by a holy religious man. In certain cases it is the dream telling the youngest bride what need to be done.

In the Aromanian variants, the baby of the youngest brother cries his eyes out during the night after which his mother will be immured. The hammer falls from the hand of the youngest brother when he sees his wife approaching. The youngest bride, not of her free will but forced by her brothers-in-law, gets immured. She leaves a will with each of the three brothers for her baby.

In the Albanian variants, the stress is on the keeping of "Besa" (oath) by the youngest brother. Generally, in these variants the youngest bride is conscious of the need to sacrifice herself. It seems these variants may have their origin in a time when human sacrifice was accepted as a necessity, as a rite against the wicked spirits, in the name of continuation of human life. The rite of human sacrifice is documented and practised in the present Albanian territories. The archaeological excavations in Albania attest that human sacrifices are very ancient rites and they have their origin from Illyrians. The folk creation process continually has added matter to these practices. The ballad of immurement, as an element of the Albanian ancient folk fund and, at the same time, as an element of common substratum of Southeastern European peoples, focuses on human sacrifice as a condition or requirement for the continuation of life in the broad sense of the question by opposing wicked spirits. In a narrow sense, the sacrifice in the ballad conditions the stability of the bridge, fortress or the object of cult. This prerequisite for the existence of the ballad is made to happen in different ways with different peoples, unfolding originalities of the Paleobalkan community.

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