I. FONDEMENTS

LATIN MYTHOLOGY AND ITS EUROPEAN REFLEXES

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Abstract

This paper tries to synthesise the evolution and specificity of Latin mythology. Its primitive forms were mostly rural, with minor indigenous deities, and consisted mainly of ritual for practical purposes (invoking protection for agricultural crops, wars and family). An absorption of the rich Greek and Oriental mythological corpus followed. In the imperial age, in Rome, "there are so many gods that it is easier to meet one than it is to find a man" (Petronius Arbiter). A large part of this heterogeneous and complex corpus was inherited by the European Romanic and non-Romanic peoples.

All around, written culture has copiously fed on traditional unwritten mythology.

Keywords

Mythology, Latin culture, orality, rituals, religions, written culture, spiritual heritage.

1. Defining the terms

By "mythology", we mean, first and foremost, the set of narratives rendering the beliefs, rituals and symbols which refer to the beginnings of the universe and of humanity, i.e. the folk explanations regarding the natural phenomena, man's relations to the universe, to divinity and to his own self, within smaller or larger communities. Secondly, the term "mythology" refers to the science that deals with the inventory, organization and interpretation of myths, within various currents and specialized schools.

In our definition, we have opted for the primary, etymological sense of the concept[1], because the Greek term μύθος means "tale" (and also "word" and "lie", cf. Bailly *s.v.*). Mircea Eliade considers that the narrative is only the outer condition,

[1] Half a century ago, specialists had recorded over 500 definitions of the concept of "*myth*", cf. V. Kernbach, 1982, *s.v.*

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the relatively coherently structured coat of the myth, for what is essential is the element of knowledge of the unwritten laws of the universe and the belief that the rituals reviving ancient archetypal gestures still have an effect on people's lives.

According to the abovementioned Romanian scholar, any myth presupposes three essential elements: a) *the system of explanations* of natural phenomena, of the birth of the universe and of the evolution of human communities; b) *the unfolding ritual scenario* rendering these explanations by means of symbols, allegories, metaphors; c) *integration into the "reality" of facts* and characters denoted by the respective representations[2], i.e. people's trust in the practical effect of returning to these scenarios, in more or less sacralised and more or less trivialized forms. Having become a definitive part of our daily routine, the respective gestures and verbal expressions may be reminiscent of the mythological background we have been incessantly feeding on. We should insist on the fact that, from this point of view, not only the (lay, pagan) superstitions and religious rituals passed by word of mouth or codified by sacred writings originate in *illo tempore*, in mythological times, but also some mere human gestures or speech acts in everyday communication. For example, the blessing given by the priest or by a parent to youths repeats the primordial ritualistic gesture of the supreme Creator's delivering his grace over to his offspring. Even more simply put, the usual greetings used in any human community rely on an ancient belief that uttering those particular salutes really does have an effect on beneficiaries. In both cases, it is all about faith in the ability to transfer unseen forces, energy from some beings to other beings. The utterance of curses, insults, etc. is also based on these considerations, except the intended effect is just the opposite. No matter how evolved human society may be, faith in these forces is still alive in people's minds and souls – and this is one of the reasons that *myth never dies*. According to the same logic, we assign unseen (or, as we sometimes say, magical) powers to natural phenomena, to primordial elements – light, earth, air, water –, as well as to various plants and animals, to stars, the moon, the sun. Naturally, science confirms, from a different perspective, the active forces, the effects which mythical narrations refer to. In other words, myths explain the empirical observation of the people of yore just as science explains, logically and practically, the same things. As expected, the two sets of explanations do not coincide in many cases. One thing is certain: there is a starting point of all facts and beings in the universe, which can be explained by no paradigm of modern science. Even the brightest minds were forced to admit that the idea-being which gave the

[2] M. Eliade, 1963, *Aspects du mythe*, pp. 16 *sqq*.

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first impulse (*primum movens*) in the organization of the primordial Chaos and its transformation into Cosmos (Lat. *Uni-versus*) cannot be perceived in terms of logical knowledge data. At that level of knowledge, the existence of a Demiurge – faceless, bodiless, or in the newer religions of mankind, embodied (in the form of celestial bodies or anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, etc.), whose origin is known to no one, remains the valid mythological solution[3]. This is the second reason – closely related to the former actually – that myth continues to survive in people's lives.

A second series of terminological clarifications that is required concerns the phrase "*Latin mythology*". The term "*Roman mythology*" is currently used, for the Latins are also considered the modern ones, i.e. what one scientifically calls "Romanic peoples", of Latin origin, from an ethnolinguistic point of view[4]. Otherwise, both the concept of *Roman* and that of *Latin* have so many various meanings in diachrony that the terms designating them are just as ambiguous. We have preferred the former because it is based more on the *Latin literature*, etc.[5] But our clarification regards a wider scope. Specialists have long established that the discussion about a national mythology or some kind of (temporal, geographical, mentalitarian) specificity aims only at aspects of detail – names of characters, frames of development, linguistic formulas etc. In fact, the great mythological themes, just as the motifs, symbols, compositional structures etc., have circulated in time and space, combining, overlapping, generating one another, so that it would be more appropriate to speak about a single mythology – of the entire humankind. Therefore, in this study, we shall deal with "Latin or Roman mythology" only in terms of the particular aspects mentioned above.

2. The concept of "myth"

According to most scholars, a myth can be defined in terms of five sets of organizational criteria: content, narrative, structure, expressiveness and social function. The role of each of these defining aspects changes from one myth to another or from a cycle of myths to another, as it overlaps and intersects with the others, in a dynamics specific to the evolution of myths, in general[6].

[3] For cosmogony and the paradigms of the onset of human societies, of the history of knowledge, etc. in Plato's works, particularly in *Cratylus* and *Timaeus*, cf. "În căutarea începuturilor. Paradigma cosmosului în dialogurile lui Platon", in: P. Gh. Bârlea, *Adevărul din călimară. Studii de literatură universală*, București: Editura Tracus Arte, 2019, pp. 21-48.

[4] For the evolution of the concept of Latinity, cf. P. Gh. Bârlea, 2019, "The concept of *Latinitas*. A diachronic approach", in: *Diversité et Identité Culturelle en Europe* (DICE), 16/2, București: Editura MLR, pp. 57-68.

[5] We have actually considered an unscientific reason, a graphical detail: in young researchers' works, *roman* 'Roman' and *român* 'Romanian' are written without diacritics, which leads to irritating confusions.

[6] Cf. P. Gh. Bârlea, 2007, pp. 39-42.

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2.1. *Content* means, first of all, the *theme*, i.e. the general idea of a simple fantastic narrative, without very precise determinations regarding the place and time of action (the latter being placed, by definition, in a very distant past, which scholars refer to as *illo tempore*), whereas the protagonists are typical characters, with supernatural powers, whom only the name differentiates from one cultural space to another. Theoreticians speak about the "mythological theme" in terms of *generative structures*, such as "fate", "birth", "death", "ancestors". They manifest themselves antagonistically, in the midst of the primordial chaos and mythogony, that is, through confrontations between various types of characters – individual or grouped in small communities. We are referring to theogony, cosmogony, anthropogony, ethnogony, erotogony, etc. Gnoseologically speaking, all these types of mythogonies are, in fact, the *integrative structure* of the myth[7]. An integrative structure is defined, first of all, by the *motifs* of mystical valorisation: the creation (of the universe, of gods, man, miracles, plants, etc.), the creators (gods, demigods, heroes, communities, totemic animals, objects, etc.) as well as all their characteristics.

2.2. *Narrative* is the verbal, or plastic, musical, choreographic account of the "action". They often combine through rituals, in which something is said, in a solemn tone, in verse or prose, with sacred formulas, but in which there is also singing, symbolic gestures and movements are made, particular props are used, etc. In any case, the action thus interpreted proves that *any myth is a creation*, whether its goal is constructive (arch-myths) or destructive. In the beginning of all beginnings, various types of creations must have occurred, as Mircea Eliade puts it, at material and spiritual level. It is the archetypes which the great myths of nations render: cosmogonies, theogonies, geneses, gigantomachias and all aforementioned antagonisms. One should note that everywhere there is a struggle (Gk. *ágon*), i.e. the clash of forces representing the good and the evil. In the oldest and best case, it is the relationship between uncreated and created, between disorder and order. Chaos is worked and replaced by the cosmos. Then conflicts between kindred deities, between generations, etc. arise. Whether the deeds aim at constructing or destroying, the outcome is always the same: a new beginning.

The Nordic ethnologists Stith Thompson and Lauri Honko resume the concept of myth "content" in terms of operative criteria: the information about the events presented, about the decisions of mythical protagonists and about the results of their antagonistic manifestations, on the one hand, and the function of myth, that is, the explanations those particular narrations provide regarding the universe, the

[7] R. Vulcănescu, 1985, p. 51.

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world and life, on the other hand[8]. Therefore, these scholars combine two distinct features (theme and function) into one (integrative structure).

The defining component of the *formal expression* remains independent, unless the structure is tautological.

2.3. The *compositional structure* of myths is never simple, because it is not stable. In terms of the formal aspect of rendering the theme, early and modern researchers prefer to speak about *themes*, more precisely about *thematic sequences*. For example, let us take the case of the nymph *Anna Perenna*, whom we have referred to elsewhere[9], as representative of the Romans' mythology. The central theme may be the "cyclical regeneration of life". But it is illustrated only partially in the various adaptations of the ancient legendary narratives (in Ovid, first of all), for the protagonist's development, the trials he undergoes also describe the theme of creation, the theme of the narrative, that of death and of love, with the corresponding motifs (the motif of metamorphosis and so on).

More simply put, *a myth is usually an association of accounts*; when these accounts acquire consistency and some stability, in the sense of repeatability within relatively easily predictable frameworks, one speaks about a *thematic cycle*.

The mythological dynamics relies on a permanent change of the central theme, of the mythical core. In various times and various geographical areas, importance is given to some event or another, of the recurring ones, as a character may be privileged over another, who had occupied a central place, in an earlier phase, in the same "logic", while the unfolding scenario may change radically as well.

The causes of these changes are, first of all, historical. The evolution of human society, the ethnolinguistic, socio-political changes, the successions of religions entail changes of mentality, which require the thematic and structural reorganization of myths. G. Dumézil, according to whom these thematic dislocations and regroupings are the most obvious phenomenon in the history of world mythologies, notes that the phenomenon is to be nevertheless encountered, in various proportions, in everything that means oral or cultivated artistic tradition[10]. The most common example one finds in theoretical approaches is that of Christianity, which absorbs and changes, sometimes radically, the pagan mythological legendary tradition of nations adhering to the faith in Jesus Christ.

[8] S. Thouston, 1956-1958; L. Hanko, 1972.
[9] Cf. P. Gh. Bârlea, 2007, p. 39; 154-155 *et passim*.
[10] Georges Dumézil, 1924, p. 1.

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In traditional terminology, the efforts to classify myths from this generative thematic perspective have produced the following operational concepts: *prototypes*, *invariants*, *types*, *variants*, *doublets*, *isolated versions*. It should be noticed that the terms of mythological metalanguage are in the plural, because there is always a plurality of manifestations at each of these chronological functional levels of myths.

Keeping the chronological perspective, but highlighting the functional and structural component, the modern research of myths launches a new set of terms, with the same characteristic of defining pluralism: *arch-myths*, *myths*, *neo-myths*, *mythologems*, *mythoids*, etc.[11]

Actually, none of the terms of the two lexical sets exempt the researcher from the danger of ambiguity, in that it is difficult to find an example that should completely and accurately be covered, logically and semantically, by one of these words. In practical analyses of any field of research, widely acceptable conventional values are commonly assigned to a metalanguage element, for purely methodological reasons. Thus, the "prototype" and "arch-myth" might naturally regard the "non-standardized archaic form". The problem is that, in an effort to search for the origins of myth, it is hard to establish which of the layers that have reached us descends directly from the deepest areas of human consciousness. Common sense, on the one hand, and the relevance theory, on the other, entitle us to assume that the simplest and most generally human themes – such as *creation*, *the struggle for survival*, *death*, *knowledge* – must be the oldest ones.

But these are dispersed everywhere, as we have already pointed out, in extremely complicated and dynamic mythical structures. At an even more abstract conceptual level, the "good/evil" relationship is equally valid in myths in any historical stage. Apart from these, another term, such as *mythoid*, could also be considered suitable to designate the items of the beginnings, the ancestral themes. Its separate and cautious usage is due to the fact that, as the "core of a new myth", it suits any genealogical layer – whether ancient or recent. As regards other terms, such as *variants* and *doublets*, their denotative specialization may only be achieved according to the criterion of hyponymy, in that one cannot speak about "variants" or "invariants" of integral myths or mythological cycles, but only about a component of the narrative structure, about motifs, etc.: the *different manner* in which the same deed of the same character is rendered can be referred to as "variant", whereas the *(almost) identical manner* in which the same deed of the same character is depicted leads to the occurrence of "doublets". However, such

[11] R. Vulcănescu, 1985, p. 41. See also the terminology of the Group of Liège.

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situations are extremely rare, as is well-known. It is difficult to determine whether those particular representations emerged successively or simultaneously. Most likely, they were copied (almost) identically – which particularly happened after the appearance of writing, used as a tool to save and disseminate myths. In the overwhelming majority of cases, at least one of the three elements establishing the framework, character-deed-narrative, changes. For example, in the motif of the dragon killed by a saviour, the latter may be a god, a hero or a saint. But, the setting of the action, the historical context, the meanings, the characters' names constantly change. Even in Christian mythology, which is relatively well codified through specific writings, etc., the slayer of the dragon may be St. George, but also St. Basil and so on. In all these cases, we would rather refer to *invariants*.

Therefore, from all this web of terms which try to bring some kind of order in the polymorphism and excessive dynamism of myths, one retains a defining relationship based on at least four concepts: 1. *Substance*; 2. *Form*; 3. *Meanings*; 4. *Functions*.

Synthesizing this relationship, in terms of various researches, we shall try to propose a new definition of the concept under discussion:

Myth is an ***account****, whether folk or cultivated, of some* ***remarkable deeds****, carried out by* ***characters with superhuman qualities****, which illustrates* ***principles and values of the*** *human* ***spirit****, in general, or of a community, in particular, with a view to* ***creating models of human behaviour****.*

The paradigm of a myth may be as follows:

Action
(creation, making, etc.)

Account
(verbal, musical, choreographic, plastic, etc.)

Dramatization
(ritual, reciting, invocation, etc.)

Symbolization
(metaphor, allegory, symbols, etc.)

Effect
(psycho-social, religious, civic, etc.)

Re-elaboration

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2.4. The *expressiveness of myth* establishes the connection between elements of content and those of form. It is provided by a whole arsenal of expressive means functioning according to special laws in mythical structures, which is why the usual *stylemes* are referred to, in the analysis of myths, as *mythostylemes*[12]. Experts on mythological lexicology mention a very rich set of mythostylemes: *emblem*, *attribute, analogy, metaphor, parable, apologue, symbol*, etc.[13] Treatises on general mythology reduce them, in principle, to three essential expressive structures: *metaphor, allegory, symbol*[14]. It is on these that we shall briefly dwell on here.

a) ***Metaphor*** indicates a transfer of meaning (Gk. *meta-phorein* "to move/carry over") between two terms which have a common element. Unlike the *simile*, which describes the same type of association, metaphor operates with a single element, whereas the other one is implicit: *Fata cântă* ***ca o privighetoare*** ('The girl sings **like a nightingale**') = simile; *Fata* ***este o privighetoare*** ('The girl **is a nightingale**') = metaphor. Along with its simpler derivatives – *attribute* (the wings), *emblem* (the flag, the pigeon); *metonymy* (the half-moon), synecdoche (the home) – the metaphor is a form of knowledge:

"…*metafora capătă un caracter rectificator al adevărului mitic, ca procedeu al gândirii abisale*."[15] ('Metaphor acquires a rectifying character of the mythical truth, as a process of the abysmal thinking').

Several scholars, from Max Müller and his school of linguistic mythology[16] to modern researchers, such as T. Vianu or J.A. Cuddon[17], believe that the raison d'être of metaphor is mythological, in other words, that *metaphor is the essence of a myth*. T. Vianu's famous phrase "metaphors are small myths" was resumed in the studies on M. Eminescu's style[18].

The goddesses of motherhood, of the perpetuation of the species, of food and immortality are examples of complex metaphors, in that, their name and divine authority rank change, but the subject remains the same in the special and chronological dynamics of peoples: the goddess *Isis* in Egyptian mythology is *Io* in Greek mythology and *Anna* in Latin mythology.

[12] In this subchapter, we shall summarize the presentation of P. Gh. Bârlea, 2007, pp. 41-46.
[13] Jean Chevalier; Al. Gheerbrant (coord.), 1993-1994, *Dicționar de simboluri*, 3 vol. Traducere de Micaela Slavescu și Laurențiu Zoicaș, București: Editura Artemis.
[14] R. Vulcănescu, 1985, pp. 35-36.
[15] L. Blaga, 1994, vol. III, p. 84.
[16] On M. Müller's theory regarding the metaphor-myth, cf. P. Gh. Bârlea, 2007, pp. 22-23.
[17] Cf. T. Vianu, 1975, pp. 289-290.
[18] Cf. J.A. Cuddon, 1982, p. 35.

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b) ***Allegory*** relies on the same mechanisms of implicit comparison as the metaphor, but the difference is quantitative, in that the analogy is an extended metaphor or, more commonly, a succession of metaphors. One is familiar with the "death-wedding" allegory in the ballad *Mioriţa*, which is the literary concretization of the myth of pastoral existence of the Romanian people. The burial ritual is depicted as a wedding ceremony by means of several metaphors (*preoţi-munţii mari* 'priests-the mountains high', *paseri-lăutari* 'birds-fiddlers', *stele-făclii* 'stars-torchlights', etc.), given the fact that the respective series of symbolic elements is used in both rituals. Moreover, an allegory absorbs *analogies* in its web ("the wrath of God" or the frequent furies of gods in the Greek pantheon are invoked by analogy with the humans' states of mind) as well as *parables* (the good seeds thrown on the barren soil – *id est*: "the parable of the sower" in the biblical text), the *apologue*, i.e. the didactic fable (the fable about the saving of the snake and its being warmed at the bosom – of international circulation), and other kinds of mythological and general systems.

Since the relation to the metaphor is more than obvious, it was but natural that the allegory should also be considered myth-producing:

"Much myth, for example, is a form of allegory and is an attempt to explain universal facts and forces."[19]

Expressing "something through something else", the allegory reveals a different side of things, the common method being that of shaping ideas, qualities, facts by human, vegetal, animal incarnations. *Janus Bifrons* in Roman mythology is described as having two faces precisely because it represents a dual perspective – the past and the future, the ways in and out, the beginning and the end. As in any form of figurative knowledge, the unknown is suggested by the known, the abstract by the concrete, the negative by the positive and so on: *the winged woman* is the allegory of Victory and Freedom, *the cornucopia* is the allegory of "prosperity".[20]

c) ***Symbol*** also relies on a comparison, except that it is no longer explicit, as in a common simile, nor is it implicit, as in metaphor and allegory, but encrypted or "skew", as Karl Jaspers put it.

Originally, the symbol was also a sign, as metaphor or allegory, and very concrete at that. *Symbolon* (Gk. 'token, emblem, proof') was at first an object made up of two complementary halves, used for recognition in various circumstances.

[19] J.A. Cuddon, 1982, pp. 25 şi 672.

[20] The examples and explanations were taken by P. Gh. Bârlea, 2007, p. 43, with references to Chevalier- Gheerbrant, *loc. cit.*, in: R. Vulcănescu, 1985, p. 37 e.a.

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The method is still used in the world today, as we know. Then, shells or various pebbles served as "ballot" in *ecclesia* 'the general assembly' of the Greeks. White and black balls, chess pieces, etc. are also symbols. Therefore, convention and analogy, the rendering of the abstract by means of the concrete, of the invisible by the visible also function here. The difference lies in the fact that the relationship between the two entities is very homogeneous and full of meanings, however arbitrary the initial associations might have been. Symbols form and deform images until they become opaque or even grotesque, but those that have entered the circuit of human knowledge remain perennial and universal: the graphical symbols of the alphabet and of punctuation and orthography, the signs in algebra, geometry, trigonometry, physics, chemistry, logic, etc. have acquired such a status. In other words, the symbol may go from the non-figurative to the figurative and back again, to the non-figurative, from abstract to concrete and then to abstract again, including metaphor, allegory and all the other figures of speech in its functioning mechanisms. The great minds of the world have pointed out the superiority of the expressive and essentializing force of human thinking expressed by the symbol. Fr. Hegel, for instance, states that allegory is to symbol what semiology is to semantics, namely a primary, simplified ("emptied", as the German philosopher puts it) form of the former, while elsewhere he defines allegory as a "cold symbol".[21]

Bearing such a suggestive load, it was normal that the symbol should be even more rightfully considered as a form of manifestation of myth, if not the very *essence of myth*. Indeed, it is enough to discuss the *symbol of the sun*, present in the spiritual manifestations of people worldwide, to notice that the *solar myth* is one of the best represented in the entire history of universal myths. Moreover, great 19th-century specialists, such as O.V. Cox or M. Müller, had reached the conclusion that sun-worship lies at the basis of all myths, beliefs and religions of the world. [22] In fact, all celestial bodies – the sun, the moon, the stars – produce myths, just as the trees, the plants, the entire vegetation have their own mythology. Similarly, there is a mythology of animals, birds, insects, etc.[23] Objects, characters, landforms are fertile symbols in the structuring of myths, also including metaphors and allegories in their genesis. For example, the *loom* is an attribute of women's status in traditional societies; the Greek Penelope and the Roman Cornelia are symbols of

[21] G.W.Fr. Hegel, 1966. The symbol is generally discussed on pp. 311-322; as for the allegory, see considerations on pages 406-415.
[22] Cf. P. Gh. Bârlea, 2007, pp. 25-26.
[23] Cf. for example, Angelo de Gubernatis, Plant Mythology, 2 vol., 1882, Paris: Rain Waid, as well as Angelo de Gubernatis, *Zoological Mythology*, 2 vol., 1872, Trübner & Co.

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chastity, faithfulness and devotion to the cause of the family. The fir tree, the laurel, the olive, the apple, the grapevine are symbols of life, in various hypostases.

All the expressive elements of myth – in the categories discussed here – share the feature of *sign*. They emphasize, mirror, denote representations of human thought and imagination.

2.5. The functions of myth are, in principle, cognitive, practical and social. The fundamental function of the myth is, as Mircea Eliade stated long ago, that of *archetypal model* for any kind of significant human activity. One might say that a myth is not only the story of a beginning, the sacred history of a being that created everything[24], but the story shaping the beginning of all our deeds and experiences. Rituals performed in modern societies on important occasions – birth, marriage, death, the beginning and end of agricultural cycles, the start of construction of a house, the commencement and completion of cycles of study, of professional activity, anniversaries, commemorations, integration into various communities, etc. – resume, without explanations[25], the archetypal models.

By acknowledging this truth, we are compelled to return to an aspect of defining myth in terms of its function. We have shown above that myth is the fabulous, irrational, naïve explanation of phenomena, processes, states, feelings. Myth is an explanation devoid of logical arguments – we often repeat this definition.

But it is an *explanation*, i.e. an *instrument of knowledge*, with all that this means, in the theory of Aristotelian causality: facts, agents, circumstantial conditionings (space, time, relations etc.), effects, models. It is from this perspective that we should understand M. Eliade's statement according to which myth, as an archetypal model, is already "an incipient form of rationalism"[26]. Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, believes that myth is "the product of the creative imagination of primitive man, whose savage thinking builds logical models of knowledge and integration through knowledge in the life of nature". [27]

Any account of facts, however improbable for the modern Cartesian thought, is an impulse of thinking, be it critical, and a challenge of imagination. Critical, lateral thinking is represented, as we well know, by the renunciation of linear formal logic – it is, actually, completing it with the attributes of overcoming

[24] This is one of the 500 definitions of myth retained by Pierre Brunel, 1978, pp. 7-15, who synthesizes the paradigm: myth – tale – dynamism – (symbols) - creation.
[25] In traditional societies, the explanation is short and ambiguous, formulated almost in a standardized manner: "This is good!", "That is the right thing!".
[26] M. Eliade, 1963, pp. 14 sqq.
[27] Claude Strauss-Levy, 1988, p. 73.

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the impossible. We should remember that in Plato's *Cratylus* and *Timaeus*, the dialogues on cosmogony and anthropogony, including those on human society paradigms, history and knowledge, would treat everything in a mythical mode, criticized by some contemporaries and successors. The philosopher would appeal to complicated mathematical calculations, to data from physics and all natural sciences, to astronomy, etc., but the origin of The One without beginning, of the god-idea could only be explained as a given passed on through myths. And none of his critics were able to provide an alternative solution. The philosopher from the Academy very well knew what he was doing when he decided to remain in the myth zone for his scholarly demonstrative construction. Even the formal imperfection of the two dialogues has a meaning in this respect and one well knows that Plato would never leave a single random word in the web of his studies.

The role of model, i.e. of example of semi-conscious, metaphorical, allusive guide, is shown by the way in which myths generate *ideologies* that sometimes take the shape of dogmas, influencing unconsciously, but also consciously, pragmatically sometimes, and people's behaviour. The myth of superiority of a race, people or social class, the myth of the divine origin of leaders, the myth of rapid success, of one's easily making a fortune, of eternal youth and so on and so forth contain both rationality and irrationality. One thing is certain: people need myths. People need to believe in the triumph of the good thought, in the supremacy of good, in the achievement of the impossible. And it so happens that many smaller or more reverberating events of everyday life confirm this belief. And even if this faith were not confirmed, they would still believe in myths. For myths have been created by people for people.

3. Latin mythology

More recent and less developed than the Greek mythology, the Romans' mythology has three features: a) the diversity of origins, the heterogeneity of national heritage formation sources; b) practical, concrete applicability; c) pronounced ritualistic manifestation.

a) *The system of autochthonous deities proper*, of great antiquity, of Indo-European origin, is located only at the level of small ritualistic acts, of totemic beliefs and faceless deification of actions, beings, phenomena, processes, feelings, etc.[28] Thus, the widespread totemic traditions about a *she-wolf* nursing Romulus and Remus, whose legend is related to the founding of Rome, or *geese* saving the Capitol, the hill upon which stood the most precious Roman temples, including the

[28] T. Vasilescu, "Mitologia romanilor", in: *Istoria literaturii latine. De la origini până la destrămarea Republicii*, București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1972, pp. 32-34.

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temple of Jupiter, during the battle against the Gauls in 390 BC, have survived since very ancient times. The symbolism of sacred animals is also present in the names of Italic gentes or tribes.

On the other hand, the ancient Romans believed that everything that existed and happened in everyday life was due to the power of unseen beings, which would spread positive or negative energy on people's lives. These are the minor deities[29] called *numina* that had no temples, shrines or statues dedicated to them. For example, land clearing was protected by the *numen Vernactor*, the second ploughing of the arable land was due to *Obarator*, sowing was supervised by *Insitor* and plant growth by *Premittor*. In other words, the Romans, a people of farmers, were convinced their work would be successful only if they received the benevolence of a dozen *numina* "specialized" in agriculture. Child-rearing was in the care of a different group of such guardian divinities (*Statulinus*, *Educa*, *Potina*, *Domiduca*, *Farinus*, etc.), whereas home and family were protected by the *genii Lares* and *Penates*, who were in charge of the dwelling and feed, while *Vesta* was the *genius* of permanent fire. For the latter, whose cult lasted a long time in the history of Roman beliefs, shrines and statues, maintenance rituals were created. As with the Greeks, beings are deified (the *genius* of men and women, the latter being later replaced by the goddess *Juno*). And just as the Greeks, the Romans worshipped abstract notions: *Spes*, *Honos*, *Fides*, *Salus* and so on.

Naturally, such proliferation would entail a list of names and duties of these minor divinities, called *indigitamenta*. The first priests to appear in the early Roman civilization were also in charge of keeping and reading these lists in public temples.

From what has been said so far, it is understood that people's relationship with these gods was practical, based on mutual obligations: people would invoke them, bring offerings within rituals (as today's Christians say a prayer, kneel, make the sign of the cross, sacrifice an animal, etc. before they start to plough the land or build a house), whereas the god had to ensure support or success in their actions. Scholars thus speak about a "contractual" relationship of Romans with the divinity, devoid of lyricism and, hence, of literary echoes[30]. When Latin literature came to attain the degree of maturity favourable to the integration of mythology into

[29] The Greeks surpassed the Romans in this respect as well, for in the Hellenic system of beliefs there were such minor deities for every object, being, process, phenomenon, feeling, sensation, natural element, etc.
[30] T. Vasilescu, *loc. cit.*

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important writings, the source of inspiration was to be mostly the Greek pantheon, possibly by finding Latin equivalents of names.

This pragmatism explains the almost total absence of cosmogonies and, by direct effect, of theogonies in Roman mythology. The only native god of supreme rank, father and master of all the other gods and men, is *Janus Bifrons*. A descendant of the archetypal Creator of the Universe, he acquires practical attributes, in accordance with the old Roman mentality. More specifically, he is the embodiment of "total vigil" – which is why he has two faces (*bi-frons*), one looking forward and the other backward. He protected the entrances and exits of the city, the temple doors, the beginning and end of wars and of all human deeds. Ovid would point out his Latin originality:

quem tamen esse deum te dicam, Iane biformis?
nam tibi par nullum Graecia numen habet,
ede simul causam, cur de caelestibus unus,
sitque quod a tergo, sitque quod ante, vides?
"Yet, what god am I to say you are, double-shaped Janus?
For Greece has no divinity like you.
Tell at the same time the reason, why alone of the heavenly ones,
You see both from the back and the front."
(Ovid, *Fastorum libri*, I, 89-92)

In the historical age, his role is taken over by *Jupiter* (*Jou-pater* "Father of light"), a Latin equivalent of the Greek *Zeus*, achieved nevertheless by syncretism, out of the symbols and features of several local gods in the Italic Peninsula.

b) *The classical Roman pantheon* formed by borrowings from the neighbouring Italic populations (first and foremost, from Sabines and Etruscans), but mainly from the Greeks. At a certain point, the assimilation of foreign gods became state policy, as it was part of the broader strategy of attracting (subduing and gaining the loyalty, associating, etc.) the population of the conquered territories. The results of this process are numerous. Syncretism is one of them. The divine personality of the god *Mars*, for example, combines attributes and names from *Maris*, the Etruscan god of agriculture, *Mavors*, the Umbrian god of field vegetation, and *Ares*, the Greek god of wars[31]. The other effects are eclecticism, the proliferation of divinities and codification of beliefs within the polytheism. Ancient beliefs would alternate with new ones, the European would mix with the Oriental, while the tolerance-intolerance dynamics would evolve from one age to another.

[31] The evolution of function is not really chaotic: the Etruscan and Umbrian agrarian gods would protect field owners in local battles against plunderers from neighbouring populations.

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However, there were more than 30,000 divinities in the historical age, which made one of Petronius' characters, a nonconformist and cynical student, state that there are more gods than human beings in Rome[32]. But the Romans' organized spirit brought order to this plethora. First, the officials established seven divine ranks[33], according to the roles of gods:

1. *The divine council* (*dii censentes*) comprised the 12 supreme gods, led by *Jupiter*: *Vesta, Juno, Minerva, Ceres, Diana; Venus, Mars, Mercurius, Neptunus, Vulcanus, Apollo*. They were also called *dei maiorum gentium*, "the gods of the great gentes", because they also had correspondents in the Egyptian, Syrian, Phoenician and particularly Greek pantheon[34].

2. *The subordinate gods*, of lesser peoples (*dii minorum gentium*), are recorded in large numbers, having various duties, some of them highly specialized, allegorical.

3. *The select gods (dii selecti)*, eight in number, were, together with the first category, the theological deities proper and usually originated in ancient autochthonous nominal principles: *Janus, Saturn, Ops, Genius, Sol, Luna, Pluto, Bacchus*.

4. *The demigods* (*semi dii*) were the offspring of gods and mortal human beings. The best-known are those who became heroes, such as *Hercules*.

5. *The topical gods* were cultivated through specific rituals only in certain places (in the field, before ploughing, by the water, in times of drought, etc.).

6. *The local gods* (*dii indigetes*) sprang from the beliefs of indigenous peoples who had preserved their mythology both in their province of origin and in the great cities where they were dislocated following the Roman colonization policies.

7. *The common gods* were thus called because they could be worshipped by any ethnical, linguistic and religious group and, in their turn, could protect anyone in any kind of trouble.

In the republican and imperial ages they were considered *patrii indigetes*, i.e. belonging to Roman ancestors since very ancient times, *Janus, Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus, Vesta*, although we have already shown that the history of mythology acknowledges only the first of them as indigenous. The last two come each from an ancient *numen*, as do those designating the spirit of the elements of the Universe: *Uranus, Terra, Oceanus, Chimera, Tritons*, alongside of demons (monsters) and zoomorphic representations.

[32] Petronius, *Satyricon*.
[33] For these classifications, cf. V. Kernbach, 1982, s.v. *mitologie romană*.
[34] The characteristics and personalities of the corresponding Greek gods are easily recognizable: *Zeus*, *Hestia*, *Hera*, *Athena*, *Demeter*, *Artemis*, *Ares*, *Hermes*, *Poseidon*, *Hefaistos*, *Apollon*.

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The pragmatic organization and reorganization of the Roman pantheon goes beyond ranking divinities and aims at the sacerdotal attributes and the encryption of rituals, which represented, through their established scenarios, another characteristic of Roman mythology[35]. In terms of the first aspect, professional temple servants emerged quite late; they were organized in colleges, confraternities, sects, etc. and specialized in types of services: the *haruspex* or *augurius* were in charge of predictions (*divinatio*), the vestals were the virgin priestesses who maintained the sacred fire, in general, and the entire temple of Vesta, the *flaminii* were priests serving in the temples of the great gods. Basically, the priestly hierarchical organization fell under the general administrative and juridical context, in that, in 104 BC, priests were elected by vote, as any state official, whereas the superior positions were occupied by high lay officials, the role of *Pontifex Maximus* being assigned, by tradition, to the emperor or to the dictator, as the case may be. The latter was often deified, temples and statues were erected and magnificent services were held in his honour, see older cases such as *Romulus Quirinus* and more recent such as *Divus Julius (Caesar)* or *Divus Augustus*.

This means that "there was no supra-state class of priests", not until Peter, the first archbishop of Rome, approximately between 57 and 67 AD [36].

The idea of a contract between humans and divinities, with clearly formulated mutual obligations, remained valid throughout the Roman history. Their entire existence was regulated by juridical common and written norms, grouped in *fas* (the divine law) and *jus* (the human law). Priests and official calendars would establish what was *fas* and what was *nefas*, i.e. what was and was not allowed "from Above", by the gods: when feasts, fairs and competitions could be organized, when wars could be started, when a great leader could be enthroned and so on. In various representations, the researchers give examples of invocations towards a god, such as "*Receive as a gift this wine I offer you*". The apparently redundant expression had a specific practical purpose: the god was given to understand that it was not all

[35] For example, the acceptance of gods of the newly conquered population, integrated into the Roman geopolitical, economic, social and spiritual structure, was acknowledged by edicts and other forms of legalization, doubled by a sumptuous ritual called *evocation*. The name of the foreign god was adapted by assimilation to the Roman god that was the nearest in terms of functions and symbolism; this process was called *interpretatio Romana*.

[36] The later history of Rome and the entire Europe would confirm the Romans' innate caution: the involvement of popes and other clergymen in political-economic conflicts, including by installing pontiffs in supreme state functions, often generated great social crises, see the disputes for political power between the Imperial Court and the Papacy, in the 13th-14th centuries, more specifically between Emperor Louis the Bavarian, on the one hand, and popes Clement V or John Paul XXII, on the other hand.

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the wine of the believer that was being offered to him, but only that in the goblet or the drops poured in the altar vessel. A quote from Plutarch's *Life of Numa*, XV, is used to show that sometimes the one praying to god would try to get more help in exchange for a lesser sacrifice[37].

In conclusion, the Romans were superstitious rather than believers, although the concept of *pietas* – essential for the Roman mentality – would also comprise the divine component, in addition to the other two – piety towards parents and towards ancestors.

The practical spirit leads to granting legal powers to the religious act, both in the human-divinity relationship (with clearly established mutual obligations), and in the human-human relationship. Along the same line, the actual help in everyday life was privileged to the detriment of the acknowledgment of the role of Creators of the Universe, which was of no interest to Romans. Among the help provided, *divination*, i.e. predictions and instructions regarding how one should behave in crucial circumstances (wars, treatises), acquired particular importance, entailing the emergence of professional priests. Magic was accepted only if it was related to divination. Thus, occult practices, séances, clairvoyance tests of those cultivating the teachings of the Pythagoreans, etc. were only allowed to a small circle around the emperor, as the other mortals were subject to harsh laws of interdiction.

The social integration of mythological resources, for various practical purposes, including political, administrative and diplomatic, brought about the refinement and canonization of rituals. From the old incantations originating in the primitives' ancestral pagan dances an entire scenography was reached – which is actually related to the nature of survival and evolution of myths (M. Eliade). The opinion of Michel Bréal, the official creator[38] of historical semantics and Max Müller's most competent successor in the research of comparative mythology from a linguistic perspective, is thus confirmed: each nation relates to myths according to their inner genius. Thus, the Greeks made literature and art out of myths, the Indians – philosophy; the Persians – metaphysics and religion, whereas the Romans

[37] The episode depicts the dialogue between the Etruscan King Numa (assisted by Egeria) and Jupiter. In exchange for his protection, the god demands, in his usual ambiguous language, "purification by heads" from the mortal nobleman. The king, humble here, pretends not to understand and suggests the sacrifice of onion heads, then of hair on human heads. They eventually come to an agreement and the god accepts that fish heads be sacrificed. Cf. J. Hubaux and P. Grimal, *apud* V. Kernbach, *loc. cit.*

[38] It is now known that, in fact, the father of historical semantics was Lazăr Șăineanu, who published the book *Încercare asupra semasiologiei limbii române. Studie istorice despre transițiunea cuvintelor*, București, 1887, ten years before Michel Bréal's *Essai de Sémantique. Science des significations*, Paris, 1997. As in so many cases in history, the poor circulation of the Romanian language obstructed an essential Romanian contribution to human knowledge.

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created religious rituals and national tradition in politics and religion, explaining their history through ancient myths.[39]

4. From Latin myths to the myths of the Romanic world

Just as Latin myths are eclectic in terms of origin and dissemination in time and space, the myths of Neo-Latin peoples may be found in the ethnocultural space of various other peoples of the world.

Among the fragments encountered in Latin writers' texts, *The Matron of Ephesus*, part of Petronius' *Satyricon*, is clearly a "Milesian fable", i.e. a combination of verse and prose, with various linguistic styles, which usually form an extensive folk species of the so-called *satira menippea*, with ironic and parodic content. The motif of the faithful and grieving wife, who is gradually persuaded by a charming, delicate and persistent man to give up mourning for her husband, is nevertheless universal, being attested even in the Chinese folklore. What we consider important for our study is its having been taken by the Romanic cultivated literature, La Fontaine's fable *La Matrone d'Ephèse* and a fragment from Voltaire's *Zadig* being some of the best-known in a very long series of adaptations.

Lazăr Șăineanu also mentions these correspondences, developing the idea of the circulation of Latin-Romanic mythical cores especially based on the episode *Cupid and Psyche* in books V-VI of Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*[40]. What the author himself calls *anilis fibula* "an old wives' tale" has been interpreted as "an *allegory*, the mystical union of the human soul with heavenly love". We have emphasized the term "allegory" in the assertion of L. Șăineanu, who constructs his analysis based on the idea that this narrative is a fairy-tale "in every sense of the word". In terms of composition, one recognizes the opening and ending formulas as well as the types of "trials" present in very well-known folk tales. The story of Apuleius' character starts as follows:

> *Erant in quidam civitate rex et regina. Hi tres numero filias, forma conspicuas, habuere.* "There were in a town a king and a queen. They had three daughters of remarkable beauty."

[39] Cf. Michel Bréal, 1877/2012, *Mèlange de mythologie et de linguistique*, Paris: Hachette/Nabu Press, pp. 3 *sqq*.

[40] Cf. L. Șăineanu, 1978, pp. 81 *sqq*. Șăineanu reproduces the entire story on pp. 81-86, in Romanian translation, with a very pertinent comment, as usual, on pp. 86-90.

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The central theme of the story is well-known in the history of oral and cultivated literature of people worldwide: the separation of a young couple due to the mistake of one of them (usually, the woman) and their reuniting after long suffering.

The characters resemble those in Romanian and European fairy-tales and tales from all over the world. The youngest daughter is even more beautiful than the others ("that the poverty of language is unable to express its due praise") and the young men worship her instead of paying homage to the statues of Venus, the goddess of beauty. The goddess becomes jealous and this triggers the first series of misfortunes upon the girl. The trials she is subjected to are similar to those in fairy tales worldwide. Just as in those tales, she is helped by an ant, a green reed, an eagle, etc. The enchanted palace, the dragon that turns into a handsome man, the other world, the water of the miraculous fountain, the payment for Charon are also common motifs.

Early researchers[41] relate this fairy tale to the Vedic myth *Purûravas and Urvaçî*, much older than the Greek-Roman one and the Greek legend *Zeus and Semele*, used by Apuleius. Other specialists make connections to more recent European productions: the legends included in the French novel *Partenopeus de Blois* (the 12th century), or the mediaeval legend in *The Beautiful Melusine* (the 14th century). Furthermore, the fairy tale under discussion is integrated in many folk novels of the 16th-19th centuries. Even in Latin literature there is a legend of the same mythological cycle, namely that about *Egeria, the divine wife, and Numa's oracle*.[42] What we find interesting is that the erudite folklorist of the 19th century finds so many common elements of the Latin story in the Romanian fairy tale *Domnul de rouă*, collected in Oltenia and adapted by D. Bolintineanu.

Naturally, if one considers the various mythical cores leading to extensive cycles (the bird cycle, the cycle of grateful animals, etc.) amalgamated here, one can make connections with much more numerous Romanic, Slavic, Germanic, etc. folkloric texts.

In the same study from *Basmele românilor*, the tireless scholar enumerates several mythical motifs found in *Historia Naturalis*, the encyclopaedic work of Pliny the Older. This genuine repertory of motifs allows L. Șăineanu to make associations with Romanian fairy tales, legends, stories and anecdotes:

[41] L. Șăineanu quotes, among others, the founders of mythological linguistics, namely Adalbert Kuhn and his *Mitologische Studien*, and Max Müller, *Essais de la Mythologie comparée*.
[42] Adapted, among others, by Ovid, in *Fastorum Libri*, III, vv. 258 *sqq*.

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- the curious natural phenomena, such as the rain of milk or of blood, of wool, bricks, iron remind him of a similar episode in the Romanian tale-anecdote *Femeia neroadă* or the Romanian expression "Pe când plouă acum cârnați" (roughly 'rain sausages');
- the strange beings, such as the barking or one-legged people, are to be found in the Romanian tale *Jumătate-de-Om*;
- the metamorphosis of genders (the girl who becomes a boy and *vice versa*) is found in the entire cycle of the "Fecioara războinică" ('Warrior Maid') - *Ileana Cosânzeana, Petrea Voinicul*, *Soarele și luna*, etc.;
- the motif of the feeling trees, discussed by Pliny in book XV of his *History*, chapter 33, starting from the two bushes of sacred myrtle on the Quirinus, is to be encountered all throughout the Romanic and Romanian folk literature.

A plant without name grows immediately after it is cut from the grave of *Tristan and Isolde* in the homonymous folk French novel. The Portuguese romance *Peregrina* is about wailing pine and reeds; *The Count of Nilo*, another Portuguese story, deals with a cypress and an orange tree, whereas the Norman song *Puymaigre*, collected by Beaurepaire, is about a pine and an olive.[43] In Romanian folk narratives, one may find an apple tree (*Petrea Voinicul și Ileana Cosânțana*, the fairy tale collected by Ion G. Sbierea), a willow (*Cele două sălcii*, the Muntenian fairy tale collected by D. Stăncescu), a rose (*Chiva*, a ballad collected by I. Pop-Reteganul), or firs, vines, etc. The examples may continue and it goes without saying that such motifs do not appear only in Latin-Romanic mythology. They may also be encountered in the ancient, mediaeval and modern Greeks, Slavs, Albanians, Germans, etc.

An image of the constant circulation of myths from the Latin Antiquity as far as the folklore with mythological substrate of Romance peoples, including the Romanian, can be created by analyzing any cycle of the common classifications of literary folklore, such as those due to Aarne–Thompson or L. Șăineanu. We shall further deal with the latter and return, for a single example, to the "Warrior Maid" cycle. The core of this series of mythical narratives is gender metamorphosis. In the old days, it is attested in the famous Indian poems *Mahābhārata* and *Ramayana*, as well as in the series *Panchatantra* from ancient southern India. The transformation of a woman into a man, more rarely the other way round, occurs either by the intervention of a divinity, of a demon, or by bathing in a miraculous water. One also

[43] L. Șăineanu, *op. cit*., pp. 91-94.

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finds the motif in the Arab Orient, in *The Tale of Sinbad the Sailor* and in the Greek legends adapted by Hesiod in *Works and Days* and *Theogony*.

In Latin culture, such transformations are mentioned in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as expected, and in Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, as previously explained. Of the Romance peoples, the Italians seem to cultivate this motif the most, subsuming it into the virgin warrior cycle. To the already mentioned examples one may also add the Piedmont tale *Pentamerone* or the poem *La Guerriera* from the same area, the fairy tale *Il drago* 'The Dragon' collected in Pisa, the Florentine tale *Fanta-Ghirò, persona bella* and the Tuscan or Sicilian versions of this fairy tale.[44] One may also quote the Breton tale *Le Capitain Lixare* in French culture or the Portuguese versified story *Donzella que vai á guerra*.

L. Șăineanu finds correspondences for all these and for others – in various spiritual areas (Balkan, Slavic, etc.) and groups them in two classes: the "one eye is laughing and the other is weeping" type of fairy tale and the "Legend of the Swallow" type of fairy tale, for which he inventories about six variants (*Tudoriță, Fata împăratului, Legenda rândunelei*), adding the series *Ileana Sânziana*, *Din fată-fecior*, *Crăiasa zânelor* and so on, gathered from all over the Romanian territory.

In all of them the metamorphosis of the human being (usually the girl) into birds, trees, cliffs, etc. also occurs, which confirms what renowned experts on mythology, such as Max Müller and Paul Brunel, would claim: there is no people in the world that should not have at least one tale about metamorphosis.

5. The dialectics of Roman heritage in the mythology of Neo-Latin peoples

When referring to legacies in the field of mythology, one should understand that the process is even more complicated than that related to the linguistic heritage, for the simple reason that the set of beliefs, superstitions – mentalities, in general – is less palpable and less organized, by definition, than the language system.

However, one may establish two relatively solid reference points in the process of transition from Latinity to modern Romanity in the field of myths. Both are related to the general dynamics of historical evolution, marked by a balanced relationship between *conservation* and *innovation*. The diachronic process, in the case of myths, is characterized, in our opinion, by several mechanisms specific to all great civilizations.

a) taking over secondary divinities, with small changes in terms of symbolism, rituals, etc.

[44] *Apud* L. Șăineanu, who makes reference to the studies of De Gubernatis or Gonzenbach, p. 348, n. 21-22.

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b) preserving the role of deities personifying the elements of the universe and of natural manifestations: *the Sun, the Moon, the Sky, the Earth, Water, stars, mountains*, various plants and animals, etc. The divinity representing the *Sun* remains at the core of all mythological structures, as in any other ancient or modern people.

c) innovations take place in the specific process of the "fall of the gods", entailed by major events in the life of entire civilizations – changes in the social order, historical ages, religious system, etc.

We shall briefly analyze them below:

a) Minor deities and heroes with divine attributes occupy a central place in Romanic peoples' mythologies, mainly due to the change of religious system. The transition from polytheism to Christian monotheism, almost completely dominant in Neo-Latin Europe, and, from here, in all the other Neo-Latin territories (South America), led to the establishment of a single supreme god – God – at the top of the mythological hierarchy. Furthermore, the oral circulation of Christian dogmas was doubled and surpassed by written Christian culture, which required the canonical interpretation of the system of beliefs, greatly weakening the power of circulation and oral regeneration of the old set of beliefs.

Consequently, fairy tales and legends rendering survivals of the pre-Christian corpus are populated by the descendants of nymphs and their ancient equivalents as well as by the legendary heroes embodying the virtues of the perfect being, touched by the divine wing.

The most common minor deities in the mythologies of all European peoples – mainly Latin, but also Anglo-Saxon, Slavic, etc. – are those protecting crops, animals' fertility, predicting destiny – of the category of what Romanians generically refer to as *fairies*. They usually appear in narratives with mythological substrate, in groups of 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, showing up on full moon nights or at daybreak, on the night of the summer solstice, etc., running, floating over waters or dancing the *hora* (in circle) (cf. Rom. *hora zânelor*, Rom. *hora ielelor*; Fr. *ronde de fée*, Fr. *ronde de sorcières*). They are benevolent and malevolent, but all become vindictive when ordinary mortals try to get to know them more closely or break certain taboos. Morphologically, they are delicate beings, full of femininity, scantily clad in transparent veils (or naked – when they dance), forever young; sometimes, they turn into plants or animals or become hybrid creatures – woman-fish, etc. As we have mentioned, they protect the harvests, the herds, the forests, the mountains and the lakes, but mainly foresee and often change mortals' destinies, which makes them principles of human fate.

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In all cases, their generic name is of Latin origin, both in the Neo-Latin peoples and those from other genealogical families.

In Western Romance languages, their name is the modern form of the word *fatum* 'fate' and, indeed, in those particular mythologies, the oracular role prevails over the concrete one, of protector of nature. In the Latin of all ages, *fatum*,*-i* meant, first and foremost, 'prediction', 'oracle', in both the elevated and the folk register of the language. From here, the meanings have evolved to 'destiny, fatality', then 'command, gods' will' or 'evil, hostile fate' cf. DELL, s.v. and Gaffiot, s.v., with reference to the Greek word εἰμαρμένη. Naturally, such an important concept of human thinking has been personified and deified in the form of *Fatum* or pl. *Fata,-orum*, which can mean either 'Destiny' per se or the *Parcae*, cf. Propertius 4, 7, 51.

Like many other common words, the term has undergone morphological changes as well, being used in everyday speech in the masculine *Fatus* (as *caelus* instead of *caelum* cf. Petronius, 42, 71, 77), but mainly in the feminine *Fata*, translated in Romanian as *Soartă* 'fate' to preserve the grammatical gender, although the word *soartă* comes from another phonetically and semantically equivalent Latin term, *sors,-tis*. [45]

The generic name of the western fairies from the Romanic world comes from this particular feminine form *fata*, cf. Fr. *fée*, *Fayette*; It. *fata/Fata* or the pl. *Fate*; Sp., Pt. *Fadette, Fadha*, etc.

In Eastern Latin, represented today only by the Romanian language, these deities embody rather the principles of natural kingdoms – vegetal, animal, mineral – and only secondarily the principle of the given fate, in which case their cult blends with the magical rituals of predictions, etc. Therefore, their name comes, in all probability, from the Latin *Diana*, the goddess of forests and animals, corresponding to the goddess *Artemis* in Greek mythology. In Latin mythology, she was the daughter of Jupiter and Latona (one of the few native Roman goddesses) and Apollo's twin sister. The problem is that this etymology was not unanimously accepted by researchers. Dimitrie Cantemir has no doubt regarding the phonetic and semantic evolution of the Lat. *Diana* > Rom. *zână*[46]. Vasile Pârvan, who resumes the topic three hundred years later, does not doubt the solidity of the etymological

[45] The Latin term is an example of the semantic evolution of words from concrete to abstract: *sors*,*-tis* initially designated a pebble, a small stick or any object placed in an urn used for drawing lots. Then it designated the action of drawing lots and finally came to mean "luck", "lots", "destiny", "result of chance" etc.

[46] Cf. D. Cantemir, *Descriptio Moldoviae*, ed. 1965, p. 240.

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restoration either.[47] Of the modern linguists, Sextil Pușcariu claims the etymology is too weak and proposes another solution, but this does not directly regards the generic name *zână*:

Lat. *Sanctus Ioannis* > Rom. *Sânziana*[48]

The historian, archaeologist-epigraphist and classical philologist V. Pârvan believes that such an evolution is not possible because the masculine name of a saint could not have become a female name.[49] Two clarifications need to be made regarding this discussion.

a) In the folk speech, the transitions from one gender to another are possible in the onomastic and functional-symbolical evolution of characters. We have already seen that in the case of the neuter noun *fatum*, which became the masculine *fatus* and then the feminine *fata* as early as the Vulgar and Late Latin, inherited as such by Romance languages. On the other hand, in Romanian mythology, the name of a male pagan god, *Mercur* 'Mercury' becomes the name of a Christian female saint, *Sfânta Miercuri*, following a more complicated process, which has to do with the names of the days of the week, of the months of the year, etc.[50] cf. *infra*.

b) The etymology is not very convincing in S. Pușcariu's claim either. A more complicated phrase for the basic term was suggested, which would thus explain the target term supporting the former:

Lat. *Sancta dies Joannis* > Rom. *Sânziana*

Lat. *Sanctus Ioannis* > Rom. *Zâna*

In the first structure, the Romanian element *sân*, derived from the Latin *sanctus*, appears everywhere in old Romanian saint names: *Sângiorgiu* and *Sângiorz*, *Sântoader*, *Sânpetru*, *Sumedru* (from *Sanctus Demetrius*), *Sântilie*, *Sântana*, etc.

[47] V. Pârvan, 1911, p. 21.

[48] S. Pușcariu, 1959, p. 21

[49] V. Pârvan, *op. cit*., p. 145 (V. Pârvan's response was to an article written by S. Pușcariu in his youth, the content of which was included in *Istoria limbii române* II. *Rostirea*, 1959).

[50] Preserving the grammatical and natural gender, the pagan goddess *Venus* became *Sfânta Vineri* in the Romanians' beliefs. If the morphophonological evolution went smoothly, according to the expected laws (Ac. *venerem* > *vinere*), the only unexpected "detail" is related to the symbolism of the divinity in question: not only did a goddess at the top of the Roman pantheon hierarchy become a secondary deity – we have previously shown the dynamics of role changes when historical ages and religious systems change –, but Christianity also transformed a protector of love and guilty pleasures into a fierce defender of abstinences of all kinds, on the day of the week she patronizes, as the Friday fast comes with heavy canonical marks, some of the harshest divine punishments in the Christian teachings and the ancestral faith perpetuated by word of mouth...

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On the other hand, the *Sânziene* is a celebration that coincides with the summer solstice, i.e. the birth of St. John the Baptist, in the Christian calendar.

However, we believe that the etymology of Lat. *Diana* > Rom. *Zână* is more credible, both linguistically (*d+i* > *dz* > *z*, etc.) and historically: *zâna* is a name in the pagan, pre-Christian mythological corpus and even though Christianity absorbed much of the old beliefs and rituals, within the usual syncretism[51], in this case the overlap of a Christian saint did not occur.

Regardless of the subsequent etymological evolution, Diana was greatly adored by the Roman soldiers, most of whom had become colonists, for she had also acquired the attribute of protector of warriors (probably favoured by the image of the armed woman roaming the forests). The historian and archaeologist Nicolae Gostar brings forward some inscriptions found in the territory of Roman Dacia, showing the soldiers' veneration of Diana and the nymphs accompanying her. Those who consecrated gifts to those particular deities would order texts such as the one below on votive tablets:

Diana, regina et bona
Diana mellifica
Nymphae salutiferae
Nymphae sanctissimae.[52]

It should also be mentioned that, if *Diana/Zâna* is cultivated in the area of Eastern Latinity, whereas *Fata* ("Soarta" 'Fate') emerges in the western area, there are attestations the other way round. Also due to the early Roman military colonists, Neo-Latin peoples west of *Romània* become familiar with a subordinate divinity with attributes similar to fairies-fays: Fr. *Gene, Genes*, It. *Giana*, Sp. *Janere* and so on. All these names continue the ancient name *Diana*.

The Italians use the term *fattura* in folk texts to designate the charms of these *zâne* 'fairies', in their good or evil hypostases (for the latter, cf. Rom. *iele*). People defend themselves against these "deceits" by invoking the female saints in the Christian calendar: *Santa Lucia, Santa Maria, Santa Rosalia*. Since it was considered that magic and witchcraft practised by these minor deities originated

[51] We should say that the Latin *Diana* herself is the result of a syncretism: the Italic archaic divinity acquired some of the features and roles of Artemis from the Greek pantheon, therefore she was worshipped early on (in the temple on the Aventine, for example, attested in the time of Servius Tullius) as a goddess of the Moon, a symbol of night light, protector of the hunt, of women and of the "annual rebirth of vegetation", in general.
[52] N. Gostar, 1965, pp. 237-254.

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from the Orient, the people called them *Pagan* or *Donne di fiori*, in Italy, or *Drăgaice, Vâlve, Iele, Dânse, Fetele Codrului*, *Împărătesele Văzduhului*, in Romania (cf. V. Kernbach, s.v. *iele*).

Individual names are rarer for these deities – usually imagined as a collective entity: *Zâna Sânziana* or *Sânziana*, in Romanian (here it is clearly a pagan-Christian syncretism, in the spirit of that "ancestral law"), *Fata Morgana*, in the case of western Romance peoples, etc.

The northern European counterparts of these fairies could be the old Celtic, Brit. *Fawd*, which corresponds to the Latin *Sors* "Soarta" ('Destiny') and which can be partially encountered in Celtic mythology, in various forms such as *Korigan*, *Koridgwen*, *Korrigez*[53].

In the same category of subordinate, but this time individual and independent deities, there are the ***strigoi***, in Romanian terminology. Haunting the night, these wakeful souls of the dead, particularly of those who have died with unfinished business, without having received the sacraments and are not commemorated following the proper rituals after death, accomplish preferentially the punitive tasks of the entire caste of *zâne/iele*. We are mentioning them here because their origin and name are also Latin:

Lat. *striga* > Rom. *striga*, It. *strega*, Fr. *strige*

In fact, the term *strix,-gis* (cf. Gk. στρίξ) originally designated several species of birds with nocturnal lives: *cucuvea* 'little owl', *bufniță* 'owl' or, generically "night bird". The term itself was preserved as such for one or the other of the various species[54], as it is equated to species such as the Fr. "grand-duc", "sorcière" ("witch", hence a metaphor), *vampire* (a species of bat, whose name has become, in its turn, a metaphor) and so on and so forth.

It is recorded in ancient writings (cf. Pl., *Ps*., 220, Ov., *Fasti*, 6,133, Petronius, *Gloss.*, etc.), the Latin name being commented upon by several moderns, cf. Mayer-Lübke, 8319, Al. Graur, *Mel ling.*, 22, etc. From the fem. *striga*, Romanians have created a masculine noun by means of an augmentative and, at the same time, depreciative suffix: *strigoi*.

The ***Ursitoare***, in Romanian mythology, are another kind of benevolent fairies or, at least, the old version of deities predicting the future of the newborn child. They usually appear in groups of three, just like the Fates, and reveal signs

[53] Cf. P.Y. Sebillot, 1968, p. 5.

[54] We have shown elsewhere that in the dynamics of languages, the same term can be used for several species of birds, animals, plants, just as the same species may be designated by several different terms.

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about people's destiny. Their name is of Neo-Greek origin, an agent derived from the verb *a ursi* (cf. Neo-Gk. *oríso* 'I determine, I decide', whence it was taken by Balkan languages with the meaning "to predestine", "to ordain"), but it finally overlaps a Latin noun, *ursus-i*, the bear being associated with beliefs and rituals related to the god Mars and the temporal-agrarian cycles[55]. The banishment of the bear is related to the fall of the gods.

The traditional celebration of the ***Mărțișor*** is also related to the vast and complex mythology of the god Mars. The Latin *Mars,-tis* was the name of the god of war. But, at his Etruscan origins, he was both an agrarian and a warrior god, cf. Etruscan *Mavors*. Later, his role was contaminated by that of the Greek god *Ares*. That is why his name was given to the first month of spring, i.e. to the beginning of a germination cycle, of the new crops, etc. It was also in spring that wars would break out. Until the Julian reform of the calendar, March had been the first month of the year. That is why, in early Roman traditions, the celebrations dedicated to the god Mars took place on the 1st or the 15th of March. Among other rituals, on that occasion, common people would hang a white wool thread, symbolizing the air, and a wool thread dyed red, the symbol of fire, in trees and shrubs, on the first leafed branches. Small objects called *oscilla* clung to these threads. The word was a diminutive from *os, -oris* 'mouth', 'face'. As a diminutive, *oscillum-i*, it designated either the inner part, cavity of a leguminous plant (the bean pod, for example), or a small mask, usually of Bacchus. People would hang such masks or various other small objects in trees, the grape vine, etc. to sway in the wind (*oscillare* 'oscillate, swing', cf. *oscilatio*), invoking the gods' goodwill for the new crop, cf. Virgilius, *Georgica,* 2, 387 sqq.:

> "*oraque corticibus sumunt horrenda cavatis*
> *et te, Bacche, vocant per carmina laeta tibique*
> *oscilla ex alta suspendunt mollia pinu.*"
> "Grim masks of hollowed bark assume, invoke
> Thee with glad hymns, O Bacchus, and to thee
> Hang puppet-faces on tall pines to swing."

It is interesting that this ancient custom has been preserved to this day, and is very much alive, with its normal evolutions in time, mainly by Balkan peoples – especially Romanians, but also Bulgarians, Albanians, etc.

[55] For more about the myth of *ursitoare*, cf. R. Vulcănescu, 1985, p. 164; P. Gh. Bârlea, 2007, pp. 191-193 ("Ursoaica Ancuța") and especially Lucia Berdan, 1999-2001, "*O problemă de etnolingvistică* (*urs, urși, urzi*), in: *Anuarul de Lingvistică și Istorie Literară*, XXXIX-XLI, Iași, pp. 203-208.

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Conclusions

In this study, we have selected those elements in Latin-Roman mythology for which the corresponding terms of Latin origin have been preserved. In fact, referring to *zâne* and *strigoi*, Ioan Petru Culianu shows that these words, as others in this semantic series, have not been replaced, in Romanian, by their Slavic, Turkish, etc. correspondents, which means they had been frequently used by the people in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space ever since the years of Romanization[56].

What all peoples with a rich mythological background have in common is the anthropomorphization of myths. Not only are gods represented in human form, but they also have the same virtues and flaws as humans; hence the confidence in the deeply human nature of myths. Heraclitus of Ephesus (535-475 BC), the pre-Socratic philosopher supporting the theory of permanent change in the Universe and in our life (cf. the statement *Panta rhei* "Everything flows"), pregnantly formulated this relationship:

"*Gods are immortal humans and humans are mortal gods.*"

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[56] I. P. Culianu, 2000, *Eros și magie*, p. 323.

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