ARCHETYPAL STRUCTURES IN THE EUROPEAN IMAGINARY: RITUAL FIRES

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1. Premises

Cultural diversity naturally provokes the need for belonging and, at the same time, the investigation of one's own identity. The phenomenon is in close correlation with the forms of representation of reality reflected in the traditions and customs performed since ancient times and whose recurrence demonstrates the preservation, even if often partial and sometimes functionally distorted, of the rituals as landmarks of existence. This landmark status in a world of plurality brings to the forefront the need to reinvest rituals with original, archetypal significance, both as an approach to individual and community-based identity recovery, and as a form of eco-awareness of the nature-culture relationship.

Specializing in cultural history, Anne-Marie Thiesse has observed since 1999 that "the supranational entity of the European Union becomes a legal, economic, financial, police and monetary space: it can not be an area of identity. It lacks the very symbolic heritage through which the nations have been able to propose to individuals a collective interest, a fraternity, a protection. After all, refuge in national identities is understandable. Coin 'euro' is not an ideal" (Thiesse 2000: 12); this is the premise of the present approach: prolegomena for the work of establishing a symbolic heritage.

A common cultural space implies a similarly structured collective imaginary but with particularities that assure the ethnic specificity of performances, as can be seen, for example, at the level of passage and calendric rites. These rituals activate the archetypal structures circumscribed to old European traditions whose continuity, although situated on another level of reception and reporting, remain anthropologically relevant.

The need for ordering the world ontologically speaking is one of the fundamental needs of man of all time, and can only be achieved by the call to ritual that

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integrates celebrations, ceremonies, carnivals and festivals as forms of reactivating mythical-magical archaic practices. The basis of all rituals is a "divine model", an archetype that reiterates the primordial godly gesture of consecration, or the ancestor, the hero, of "that time", *ab origine*.

Observing the renewal of archetypal structures at the imaginary level could reveal that red thread of a symbolic heritage that Anne-Marie Thiesse was talking about. In this sense, a pertinent example is fire – that archetype of cyclicality, which showcases the desire to escape from "the terror of history", as Eliade states.

Fire festivals in Europe circumscribe pre-Christian practices and rituals that, over time, overlap with those introduced by Christianity and continue to be performed throughout the continent; many of them, as noted by Petru Caraman, Ion Ghinoiu, Mihai Pop, etc., give information about the reminiscences of the solar cult on this territory. Fire production involves the gesture-object (tool) relationship and can be achieved by two antithetic methods: by percussion and by friction. The first method will give rise to *Purifying Fire*, given the fact the *pure* root is the word in Sanskrit that means "fire", as Gilbert Durand says. The *Purifying Fire* was used by Indo-Europeans at incineration, practice related to beliefs in the immortality of the soul. A second method will give birth to the *Living Fire*, about which Gaston Bachelard says: "A holiday sign is correlated forever with the production of fire by friction" (Bachelard 1989: 58), method considered natural. The latter, the *Forced Fire* or the *Necessary Fire*, as Frazer calls it, is the one that perpetuates the myth of rebirth by activating an archetypal scheme of rhythmicity in the direction of fire–water–green branch in rites around the Spring Equinox. We will follow a comparative study of the *Living Fire* according to Romanian customs and practices in the Scottish Beltane.

Similarities of scenarios, time and place of performance, of actors, give information about the presence of a cohesion element, so the present study aims to investigate these ritual forms in order to highlight the meanings of human becoming. This analysis could help to explain European symbolic heritage making and the cultural connections between the member nations.

2. Theoretical landmarks

The comparative study of these ancient rituals proves unity in diversity and preserves the experiences of those communities that can be useful "lessons" to others, circumscribed to a transnational context. Rituals and customs are different forms of social connections, but the contemporary world has a totally different specificity coming from previous epochs, i.e. that of a cultural diversity and interconnection that pose a serious problem to the relation between identity and otherness.

Studies on the imaginary of the Other circumscribe the discourse on cultural facts through the traditions and cultural institutions as forms of human action involved

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in the process of social reproduction of life. Cultural exchanges, mediated by rites and rituals, give the dimension of otherness. The context raises the need for ritual in an increasingly secularized world. The term for "ritual" derives from the Indo-European word *rta*, which means "order of the universe" or the balance between divine and human. In traditional societies, the ritual was the premise of physical survival, but the contemporary man, in order to ensure his mental, emotional and spiritual welfare, needs rituals to mark the important moments of his life. Dally Messenger III, founder of the Program of Civil Ceremonies, says: "Ceremonies are an expression of culture, mechanisms which express and generate love, forge and declare the bond between individuals, and establish and identify community" (Messenger III 2016).

The psychoanalytic interpretation of the phenomenology of rituals changes the framework of interpretations in favor of the ability of the contemporary man to become aware of the rupture which he has imposed on the nature-culture relationship. Following the circumscription of the theoretical concepts with which the investigation operates, one can observe that the universe of archetypes and symbols that have grounded the existence of the archaic man has preserved its function of transcending the immediate into a possible world.

The symbol – "total sign, autonomous way of knowing", as Eliade says, makes it possible to rediscover the reality of the World and the Cosmos. Instrument of the imaginary, the symbol articulates the components of the myth, which Gilbert Durand defines: "Nous entendons par mythe un système dynamique de symboles, d'archétypes et de schèmes, système dynamique qui, sous l'impulsion d'un schème, tend à se composer en récit"[1] (Brunel 1988: 8). The symbolism of the four elements of the material world: water, air, fire, earth, considered "imagination hormones" by Bachelard, adds new meanings that are organized on the level of personal unconsciousness in a corpus of laws similar to those of the material world that ensure harmonious connection with the cosmos.

3. The symbolism of fire

As a symbol of life, of civilization, a fundamental element in all cosmogonic systems, present in purifying, apotropaic or fertility rites, the fire or the "quasisemiological archetype of unity of opposites" (Durand 1998: 323) is the sign of total regeneration of time (Eliade 2013: 412). The ritual extinction of fire is equivalent to the suppression of "old" profane time, and its ignition to the repetition

[1] This definition of *myth* given by Gilbert Durand is the one that includes all the elements that contributes to the configuration of it in the imaginary, being taken over by Pierre Brunel in his *DICTIONNAIRE DES MYTHES LITTÉRAIRES*; [t.n. – *we mean the myth as a dynamic system of symbols, archetypes and schemes, a dynamic system which, under the impulse of a scheme, tends to build a story*].

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of cosmogony and the establishment of a "new" time. Schematically, the ritual scenarios marking the end of the year and the beginning of the new year determine a complex of rites that can be grouped as follows: purification (confession of sins, eviction of evil, devils, witches and demons), fire extinguishing and re-ignition, masked processions (mask representing the soul of the dead led up to the edge of the town or on the shore of a water), fighting between two groups of ritual agents and carnival orgy.

The ambivalence of fire puts its creative power in its antonyms as a symbol of life, love, purification, and its destructive power. The embodiment of the male principle, yang, is symbolized by the bird, as can be seen in the mythology of the Slavic peoples, where there is a picture of the *Bird of Fire*. In the Australian ritual images, the fire appears as a picture of the ignifer *Raven*, in the Romanian folklore as the *Zburător*, and in the Mediterranean peoples as *Phoenix Bird.*

The hypostases of fire in Romanian mythology as cosmic symbol, sacred power and mythical creature are highlighted in beliefs, customs, rituals, some of which are even relics of solar cult. Generator of life and cleansing symbol, the fire appears mythologized in the image of the *Living Fire*, lit ritually at religious ceremonies, calendar holidays, or in moments of liminality: misfortunes, calamities, epidemics that affect animals.

In Chinese mythology, obtaining instrumental fire is attributed to a wise man whose method is identical to the method used by the Slavic and Teutonic peoples for firing the *Living Fire*.

The Romanian mythology talks about the creation of the fire by the *Nefârtate* (Romanian archaism for a protagonist in cosmogonic legends that could be translated as "anti-brother" or "evil borther") to dominate the world, but *Fârtate*'s (Romanian archaism for "brother") intervention that stole his fire by hiding it in a stone gives it sacredness and at the same time reveals the method of obtaining the fire by percussion. The habit of preserving the sacred fire all the time throughout the year by covering the ambers with ash, is still practiced today in isolated households, as well as in some sheepfolds.

The popular calendar records a series of celebrations on the eve of which the fires were extinguished and reestablished as a sign of renewal either of the agrarian or pastoral year that coincided with the plant revival or the beginning of the calendric year. An old habit is the burning of firewood in the courtyards as part of ceremonial sequences of rites of family life: birth, marriage, death, which includes *hora* dancing (Romanian round traditional dance), which along with the fire-wheel rolling on the slopes of the hills, the figure of the Sun, during the holiday celebrates attests to the reminiscences of the solar cult. The cult of fire integrates customary performances at fixed calendar dates: St. Basil (January 1), Epiphany (January 6), The Martyrs (March 9), St. Alexie (March 17), the Annunciation (March 25), St. George (April 23), St. Demetrios (October 26), or movable: Easter, starting of the Lent, St. Theodore, Palm Sunday, the Holy Wednesday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Saturday.

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4. Living Fire

In the volumes four and five of his *Golden Bough*, James George Frazer makes an inventory of traditions, habits, beliefs and feasts related to fire. *The living fire*, says Frazer, obtained in a very archaic way by rubbing two pieces of wood of different essence by the Teutonic peoples was called a *fire of need*, and was known by Slavic peoples as the *living fire*, and sometimes it was called "wild fire" to distinguish it from the "domestic" one used within domestic needs. The importance of this ritual derives from the fact that it is considered the origin of all other rituals dedicated to fire. Its practice is attested in Germany, England, Scotland, Ireland, as well as among the Slavic peoples. In Scotland, this ritual was updated in a contemporary reinterpretation and is held annually on April 30 in Edinburgh and became eventually the renowned *Beltane Fire Festival*. It is noteworthy the observation of researchers who conducted a study based on 11 interviews taken in 2010: „This is not a festival developed in response to economic and tourism agendas. Rather, it has evolved on an organic basis to celebrate the passage of the seasons and affirm community identity"[2] (Tinsley, Matheson 2014: 144).

The sequences of the ritual observed by Frazer are the same that we encounter in the Romanian area; the difference is that of the data it holds and, unlike the burning of the Beltans, the Romanians celebrated a feast of fire usually on May 1st or 2nd that integrates all the specific sequences of rituals connected to the spring equinox. The firing of the *Living Fire* by Romanians usually takes place at the beginning of the pastoral year, marked by *Sângeorz* (Romanian regionalism for the feast of Saint George), considered the divine agent that drives the winter away and changes the nature, celebrated on April 23. It is the time when the sheep are set on the mountain or of difficult moments for their well-being: plagues, diseases or when animals no longer give milk. The ritual sequences follow a repetitive structure: the gathering of vegetal remnants for the fire on the eve of the feast, the extinction and re-fire, the choice of actors who must usually be young men, unmarried, blood relatives or at least carriers of the same baptismal name, the apothropaic smoking of both animals and humans, jumping over fires with fertilizing and purifying function, the passing of the animals through fire. This day is also considered the appropriate time of performing magical practices such as chasing the witches who can take away the milk. With the occasion of Romanian *Sângeorzul*, green branches were hanged over the gates of the stables, such as scotch and honeysuckle were used by the Scots. Fire-heated water has healing

[2] The study conducted by Ross Tinsley and Catherine Matheson is part of a complex work that brings together cases of vibrant events such as festivals which has continued to exist since ancient time and provides information upon the role of tradition and ritual in the modern world as a reaction against the trend of homogeneity in this increased process of globalization, demonstrating that the communities strive to preserve their traditional events and even reinvent new ones in accordance with the needs of the contemporary man.

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qualities, according to two informants from Belisul Nou, Cluj County, in 1977: their testimony was an integral part of the field research conducted by Lucian Perța. During the same fieldwork, another informant explains the importance of the *Living Fire*: "Sânjorz fire is always alive on April 23, when the sheep climb on the mountain in case of a disease of the cattle but then [...] when you are in danger" (Perța 2002: 199).

Spread in the past in almost the entire Romanian area, in the pastoral environments, the *Living Fire*, is first certified by ethnographers in the northern Carpathians. Elena Niculiță-Voronca mentiones it in her work about customs of the Romanians published in 1903, and later mentioned in the answers of the informers questioned by Sextil Puşcariu in 1932, in the researches of Traian Herseni, Ion Ghinoiu, Tiberiu Morariu, Dimitrie Dan, Ion Muşlea, Vasile Latiş, Lucian Perța, the latter two referring to the Maramureş area. Jean Cuisenier undertook a study of the ritual in three areas of Romania: Gorj, Bucovina and Maramures. In his work *Le feu vivant. La parenté et ses rituels dans les Carpathes*, his conclusion is that it conveys over generations the significance of a gesture of utmost importance referring to the friction technique of obtaining the fire. Cuisenier considers the rite a founding one. The field research carried out by Vasile Latiș provides information on how the method is practiced in Maramureş area.

The fire, as initiator of popular calendric cycles, symbolizing the male principle, is also a symbol of continuity in this pastoral space: it establishes a Center, and in its "living" status it is perceived according to Bachelard's psychoanalytic key, as the most pertinent image of *coincidentia opossitorum.* Within the European space rituals, the ambivalent symbol of fire activates an archetypal scheme of fire-water contradictions, whose relationship, instead of causing a reciprocal cancellation, represents a new beginning in the shape of the green branch. Fire is born by the burning of wood as a sacrifice rite, the total destruction that prefigures the event of universal regeneration.

In various places in Europe there are festivals of fire, but we only mention one which takes place in Spain on the 18th of March, under the patronage of St. Joseph. It is called "Las Fallas – Fire Festival", a celebration of music, arts, folk costumes and traditions, a celebration under the sign of satire. In Maramureş, the Romanian Irishman Peter Hurley initiated the "Maramureş United Villages – Living Fire" Festival, the name of the *living fire* being used as an emblem of the resurgence of the traditions covered by the forgotten ashes.

Our synchronization with global trends requires "integrating our intellectuals into transnational working groups", says Stefan Borbély, who also underlined that "what matters is systemic culture, practiced on broad thematic dimensions, with a proper planetary bibliography" (Borbély 2016). Shaping European identity profile and European spirituality starts from a common cultural heritage that must be perceived as a differentiated patrimony that belong to individual national cultures. The study of cultural models is a cultural anthropology approach whose purpose is to understand the direction that this phenomenon will take further on.

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity naturally provokes the need for belonging and, at the same time, the investigation of one's own identity. The phenomenon is in close correlation with the forms of representation of reality reflected in the traditions and customs performed since ancient times and whose recurrence demonstrates the preservation, even if often partial and sometimes functionally distorted, of rituals as landmarks of existence. This landmark status in a plural world brings to the forefront the need to reinvest rituals with original, archetypal significance, both as an approach to individual and community-based identity recovery and as a form of eco-awareness of the nature-culture relationship.

A common cultural space implies a similarly structured collective imaginary but with particularities that give the ethnic specificity of performances, as can be seen, for example, at the level of passage and calendric rites that activate the archetypal structures circumscribed to old European traditions whose continuity, although situated on another level of reception and reporting, remains anthropologically relevant.

Shaping the European identity profile and spirituality starts from a common cultural heritage that must be perceived as a differentiated patrimony that belong to individual national cultures. The study of cultural models is a cultural anthropology approach whose purpose is to understand the direction that this phenomenon will follow.

Keywords: *archetypal structures*, *European imaginary*, *transnational context*, *Living Fire*, *European symbolic heritage*.

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