

Legends about Women in Kosovo's Monuments and their Media Presentation

Artan Krasniqi, PhD Student, Teaching Assistant
University of Prishtina, Kosovo
artan.krasniqi@uni-pr.edu

Albert Mecini, PhD Student, Teaching Assistant
University of Prishtina, Kosovo
albert.mecini1@gmail.com

Dren Gërguri, PhD Student, Teaching Assistant (Correspondent Author)
University of Prishtina, Kosovo
dren.gerguri@uni-pr.edu

Abstract. Sacrifice, as a social phenomenon, is as old as mankind and is found in almost all cultures. Related to this, the main goal of this paper is to explore the social and historical relation of women's sacrifice in the honour of morale code, then analyzing mediatisation of this phenomenon in the present days. Cultural heritage monuments are such not just because they preserve the object, but also because they are covered with legends and stories. This paper will present three cases of Kosovo's cultural heritage monuments, which are related only to women. The first one is about the Girls' Fortress in Prizren. The fortress took this name because of two legends which were related to women. The second monument filled up in legend is the tomb and mosque of Xhylyfatyn in Peja. It is a rare example of a woman's sacrifice for her husband who was an army officer, and whose metamorphosis is on the bridge. The third monument is also related to the act of sacrifice, it represents the sacrifice of a woman who made possible constructing the Holy Bridge which links Gjakova to Rahovec; it is similar to the legend of sacrifice for objects construction which may be encountered in many cultures. All these stories about these legends are also published in the Kosovo's media and the paper analyses the ways they are presented in media. The qualitative research based on case studies, interviews and observation constitutes researching methods for this paper.

Keywords: cultural heritage, legends, media, monuments, sacrifice, women

1. Introduction

Women's sacrifice is part of almost every culture in the world. In Kosovo, there are some cultural heritage monuments that are related to this phenomenon. This paper discusses three different cases. The first one is about the Girls' Fortress in Prizren. The fortress took this name because of two legends, which were related to women. The second monument filled up in legend is the tomb and mosque of Xhylyfatyn in Peja. It is a rare example of a woman's sacrifice for her husband who was an army officer, and whose metamorphosis is on the bridge. Related to the act of sacrifice there is also the legend

within the third monument, the sacrifice of a woman who made possible constructing the Holy Bridge which links Gjakova to Rahovec and it is similar to the legend of sacrifice for objects construction which may be encountered in many cultures. The theoretical framework in this paper is based on the work of Albanian scholars, such as Isamil Kadare and Rexhep Qosja, and on the work of Mircea Eliade. Other theoretical contributions in this paper are the ideas of numerous authors who conceptualized theories of sacrifice by analysing this phenomenon spread in various cultures. All these stories about these legends are also published in the Kosovo's media and the paper analyses the ways they are presented in media (newspaper and online media).

People create relations with objects they use, and carry them as memory forms to future generations. However the stories about these objects inherited from the past are legends that hardly reveal the truth, but in a sense of emotional experience, they are very valuable pieces of cultural narrations of the past.

The qualitative research based on case studies, interviews and observation constitutes the researching methods for this paper. The content analysis method is also used to analyze media reports in different newspapers and online media, desk research and comparative method.

The paper is structured as follows: first, the analogies and variants of myths of sacrifice were briefly presented followed by three cases of Kosovo's cultural heritage monuments, which are related only to women's sacrifice. Finally, the paper discusses the media representation of these three cases.

2. Analogies and Variants of Myths of Sacrifice

Regarding to the definition of term "myth", Mircea Eliade had emphasized the fact that, unlike to the past, in recent times this word is used both "in the sense of" fiction "or" illusion" therefore ethnologists, sociologists and historians use it in the sense of "sacred tradition, primordial revelation, exemplary model (Eliade, 1998, p.1).

Related to the myths of sacrifice in the context of this paper, researcher Naser Ferri (2012) mentioned that the myth about the mure of people during the construction of buildings, in order to maintain the construction, is widespread in both Albanian and other Balkan countries literature. In his book "Mythologia viva", Ferri mentions the case of the construction of Adana Bridge in Turkey, built in 527-565, then the construction of the Arta Bridge in Northern Greece (1602-1606), for which it is said: forty-five construction masters and sixty workers build a bridge. Another example is the construction of the Agriadha Bridge, which is said to have been built by Marollis and Dhimitro in 1659, then the bridge in Gjirokastra on Drino, the Argesh Monastery in Romania, the Strumica Bridge in Bulgaria and many other occasions (Ferri, 2012, p.234).

3. The Girls' Fortress in Prizren

The upper Fortress, as it is known, is located on the top of a conical hillside, above the Archangel Monastery, just three kilometres from today's city of Prizren, to the East, towards the Sharr Mountains, at the "Gryka e Lumbardhit". The archaeologists do not have accurate data for the construction of this castle, but the castle dates back to Roman times. Historian Jahja Drançolli says that the girls' Fortress as well as the compound of the monastery of the Saints Mihal and Gabriel, are known at least from the 4th to 6th centuries A.D.

The legend says there was a girl who was unhappy with her engagement. So she decided to leave home and family. Helped by her friends who understood her suffering, they build a fortress, therefore this fortress took the name the girls' fortress. Another legend says this fortress is called the Girls' Fortress because there it is found a girl's statue filled with gold coins. Up to this day, an object now belonging to the cultural heritage of Kosovo, is known with the same name.

Like the majority of legends, even for the girls' Fortress, it is hard to achieve a final conclusion about the time when it started to spread around, or knowing its exact history of construction. During the research, we have seen there is nothing written about this legend, so it is difficult to know its primary goal of construction or which time it belongs, in the antiquity, in the early Middle Ages, in the late Middle Ages, or in a later age.

However the perspective in which this legend can be analyzed does not exclude the tradition of engagement or marriage, - choosing the destiny of life - of Albanian girls without their will and sometimes without their knowledge. In the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, which was gathered by Shtjefan Gjeçovi, Marriage is regulated in book 3. Article 31 speaks of "the rights of the girl". "Even if the girl does not have her parents, she has no right about her marriage, the right to decide for her, belongs to her brothers or cousins. She has no rights: a) To choose her own fate - she will go with whom she was engaged; b) having her own opinions over engagement; c) Having no rights in shoes nor on clothes." (Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit).

Was this legend a contradiction or a protest against this traditional action against the fundamental rights of women? The logic says yes, but it is difficult to prove. The legend does not give any other explanation on the fate of the girl afterwards. If it was a tragic one, this could have served as a method of discipline to other girls, in the sense of what could have happened if they would dare opposing the established social order.

It is worthy mentioning that in Kosovo the phenomenon of choosing the destiny of life – in every case in which the girl was in question but also even for boys in some cases – from the family and not from their own will, has been massively expressed until the second part of the twentieth century. In the second part of the twentieth century, this mentality began to change dramatically, and nowadays one could hardly find cases in which the girl has no right on marriage or expressing her thoughts and her will and feelings.

Regarding the second legend – namely that a girls' statue filled with gold coins was found – it is related to the legend known as “gold fever” expressed in the vast majority of old castles and fortress.

4. The Tomb and Mosque of Xhyfatyn in Peja

The sacral object, believed to be built in 1697, is located in Karagaçi neighborhood in Peja, near the beautiful park with the same name. In the history which is held by the Regional Center for Cultural Heritage in Peja, it is said that “the facility is somehow characterized by the architecture of local mosques built by locals”. “With a quadrilateral base, the mosque consists of a prayer room and a minaret erected with engraved and plastered stones on the right side, that is in the middle of the mosque” (MKRS).

Related to the legend it says that there was a local woman who was married to an officer of the Ottoman Empire. His name is not known, but it is said that she had told the officer that whenever he was in battle, he would call on her name and God will help them. She was known as a devoted woman with uncompromised levels of humanity. She would show up her humanity till the end. She would die for Ottoman soldiers in order to save them from a battle somewhere in Montenegro. The war would take place alongside the river Lim. Ottomans were embarrassed there, and the officer called and prayed in the name of the woman. Her soul would become a bridge over which would pass the army. When he returned home, “the saint-lady” would ask the man how they had gone. He would tell her everything. Then the woman tells him “the truth” that she made her body a bridge. The officer would be convinced just after he would have seen all those injuries on the back of her woman caused by horseshoes. That moment she would take the last breath. The officer would order the construction of a mosque that would take her name, while her body would be buried nearby. The human sacrifice is historically expressed throughout the history of mankind, and is widespread in many cultures. What is important to mention is the fact that in different cases from different cultures and periods of history is the individuals, such as women or people with special needs, who are vulnerable to social exploitation. In this case, the sacrificed person is the woman. Furthermore Susan Sered says that “sacrifice tends to be highly gendered is, perhaps, not entirely surprising. Both gender and sacrifice are embodied cultural processes” (Sered, 2002, p.14)

It is worth mentioning that during the research on this subject, no similar case has been found, when a woman sacrifices herself for her husband.

5. The Bridge of Legends

This bridge holds the name the *Holy Bridge*, because of its legend related to this construction. The sacrifice of a woman by one of the three brothers, who built the bridge, is part of the history. Everyone knows it, there is even a song about it. Below the bridge the White Drin River crosses and it flows into the Radavcac mountains. The River Stream divides Gjakova from Rahovec. It is believed that the bridge was built in the 17th century.

The legend says that the construction of the bridge was started by three brothers who were construction masters in the area, not far from the construction, and close to the attractive Canyon Drini i Bardhë, where this building was built.

The folk songs describe the event in a way in which the brothers decided to build the bridge. After three years of work, they could not finish it. The wall which was built during the day was falling apart during the night. One night they decided to guard the bridge. "They didn't see anyone to crash the wall – They saw the stones flying away – and they were scared", as a part of folk song says. In the morning they will meet around an old Derivish man, who wishes them a good day in construction. The three brothers told him that the work was not going well, they explained him the problem they had. The old Man gave them a piece of advice: You have to put an oath between each other – You should not tell your wives at home – The woman who brings the dinner – Must be sacrificed in the bridge. The old man disappeared and nobody saw him again. That is what the three brothers did. They put an oath, and went back home. But according to the legend, the two elder brothers broke the promise. "The older brother got ashamed – he told his wife – do not bring dinner to the bridge – because we will put you in the wall of bridge". The same did the second brother. In the morning, the three brothers went to the bridge and saw that its walls had collapsed once again. It was the time for dinner and there came the wife of the third son. She left her little son to her mother-in-law by saying her about a very strange dream she had about not coming back to her garden. And she went to the bridge. "Good work brothers-in-law – it would not be good for you – we are building your grave – since the three years we have been working on the bridge – we cannot build it – this bridge needs a woman's sacrifice – well done my brothers-in-law – I do not regret for being sacrificed", this is the moment when the wife of the third son hears the sad news. "I have a last wish, my brothers-in-law- I have left a little boy at home - Someone must get there to take him – I want to breast feed him – they went and took the child - they put him on her lap – and she did breastfeeding and fondle him". The woman was saying prayers for the child for a good luck in the future. She asked her brothers-in-law to send regards to her father and her mother, and to her sister, saying she must get married to her husband because he was a trustworthy person. Also in the last moments she requires them: "One last wish, brothers-in-law - she told them - Leave one of my breasts outside - When this baby child cries – It would console him."

The sacrifice of women like in the version of holy Bridge is also expressed in the Castle of Rozafa. An analysis from a historical point of view of different cultures shows us that usually the orders or advice for sacrificing a human being for a building were taken by

wise men who were considered sacred, prophets or oracles. In this case, a wise old man, but unknown to brothers is presented to us. He gives advice on what should be done for the bridge in order to be built. Another element of the Albanian tradition encountered in this legend is that of the marriage of the sister of the sacrificed woman to her husband. This was done on behalf of the child in order not to be left an orphan after his mother's death, and for the purpose of family relations.

A very emotional moment and expressing the mother's connection to the child is that of bringing the boy to breastfeed him for the last time, and the demand to let one breast out in remembrance for the son of his mother. Based on this legend, it is believed the river - Drini i Bardhë was named. The legend says breast drains milk till to that day. The legend of Rozafa, like this one of a woman's sacrifice for a bridge construction was also treated in Albanian literature.

This legend was treated in books of Ismail Kadare (at the Three Arches Bridge, 1980) and Rexhep Qosja, in "Beselam Why Sacrifice Me". There Qosja aims to demythologisation of this legend. "Mark Tirta had noted that around 1878-1879 was the last known case of such sacrifices in Albania, in the case of the construction of the Old Bridge of Dashovica near Vlora, when it was buried a man with psychological and physical problems" (Ferri, 2012, p. 236).

However, the tradition of animal sacrifice, regardless of its gender, remains alive among Albanians. When the foundations of a house are put on place, an animal must be sacrificed. (ram, sheep, rooster, chicken, etc.)

From a gendered perspective, Susan Sered (2002, p. 14-15) says that "perhaps the most striking observation that can be made about sacrifice, and especially animal sacrifice, is that it is almost always a male dominated and oriented ritual activity. Furthermore, in a surprisingly wide range of cultural contexts, men's involvement with sacrifice is – implicitly or explicitly – contrasted to women's involvement with childbirth. In other words, in many different cultures men and sacrifice stand in structural tension with, or opposition to, women and childbirth."

6. Media Analysis

There are different legends about the girls' Fortress in the Kosovar media. In an essay Koha Ditore presents a history of this fortress in different historical periods, as well as in various stories which have been kept alive over the centuries. The two main legends prescribed in Koha Ditore are: one mentioning the construction of the fortress by some girls and other emphasizing the fact that a girl's statue filled with gold coins was found (Krasniqi, 2015).

Beside these two legends, another newspaper, Kosova Sot, introduces some other versions about the girls' fortress. In an article, this newspaper presents a legend which talks about the decision of a Dardans' King who built the fortress as a shelter for his girlfriend during the war.

Another legend, presented in Kosova Sot, says the fortress took the name the girls' Fortress, "because there were only girls and no any boy who served there". In another case presented in Kosova Sot, it is said that this Fortress was built by a Pasha for his daughter, who was sacrificed for forbidden love. The other legend presents the Fortress as a shelter for unmarried women.

These articles in the media present two phenomena of the time, the one which is related to women, and the fact that the father, brother or cousin would decide for her marriage, and the other phenomenon speaks of the women's role in the society of that time.

The Fortress's position is thought to have been assigned the function of controlling and preserving the road that sent to the Old Fortress of the city. The legend that mentioned the fact that there lived only girls tells about their role in the security aspect of that area. Contrary to the scriptures of the girls' Fortress, the Myth of Xhylyfatyn and the mosque that holds its name, is presented in the same description in different media. In the case of Xhylyfatyn or otherwise known as "The Tomb of the Princess", the media presents the woman's sacrifice for her husband (Krasniqi, 2015).

The similarities in presenting the same legend in different media exist even in the case of the Holy Bridge legend. Three different articles show the same story about the bridge which was built by three brothers during the day and crashed at night and as well as its completion after the small brother's wife was sacrificed. The legend for this Bridge resembles the legend of Shkodra Castle, but the article in Koha Ditore, shows that there are two differences (Krasniqi, 2013). In an article in Bota Press the legend is interpreted in a way that says "without sacrifice ... nothing can be achieved" (Bunjaku, 2016).

References

- Bunjaku, H. N. (2016). *Elementet përrallore në legjendën „Ura e Shenjtë“*. Prishtinë: Bota Sot. Retrieved from <http://www.botasot.info/kultura/515788/elementet-perrallore-ne-legjenden-ura-e-shejte/>
- Eliade, M. (1998). *Myth and reality*. Long Grove-Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Ferri, N. (2012). *Mytologia viva*. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës.
- Gjeçovi, Sh. (1933). *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit*. Retrieved from: https://gruppostudentescoalbanesemilosao.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/kanuni_i_leke_dukagjinit.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0g_kfID3duI7dH70QAItc_M8SDL2mI51Vm6Z9rR7dQWedvC9gne3Rk15s
- Kosova Sot. (2016). *Prizren: Kalaja që sundohej nga vajzat*. Prishtinë. Retrieved from <http://www.kosova-sot.info/lajme/141551/kalaja-qe-sundohej-nga-vajzat/>
- Krasniqi, A. (2015). *Kalaja e cucave midis legjendave e dëshmive*. Prishtinë: Koha Ditore.
- Krasniqi, A. (2015). *Legjendat e Xhylyfatynit i mbijetojnë kohës*. Prishtinë: Koha Ditore.
- Krasniqi, A. (2013). *Ura e legjendave*. Prishtinë: Koha Ditore.
- Ministria e Kulturës, Rinisë dhe Sportit (MKRS), Databaza Elektronike. Retrieved from: https://dtk.rks-gov.net/tkk_objekti.aspx?id=3787
- Sered, S. (2002). Towards a gendered typology of sacrifice: Women and feasting, men & death in an Okinawan village. In Baumgarten, Albert (ed.), *Sacrifice in religious experience*. Leiden: Brill.