

The Ritual of "Arminden" in Maramures Area, Romania



Education

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ABSTRACT

The Arminden tree is considered a sacred tree in Maramures area. The Arminden trees are not very strictly individualized as species. It can be most a birch tree, a beech tree or a hornbeam tree. The birch tree is a symbol for life and the revival of the entire universe. It shows the coming of spring (Chevalier and Gherbrant, 1995). The research regarding the sacred tree in general special the ritual of the Arminden tree in particular took place during the period 2011-2013. The tradition in the Maramures area is that in the evening before May 1 a man for every family goes to the woods and cuts down a birch tree, which he then hangs at the gate pole. This ritual is still practiced in this area, despite the communist pressures and the Christian constraints.

INTRODUCTION

The ritual of the Arminden tree is a family ritual but through the faith that is prevalent at the level of the entire community, it becomes a ritual of the community. In other words, the ritual of the Arminden tree is a social ritual.

Below are some of the opinions of people from Maramures area who were interviewed (in sentence is written the name and age). For example:

The Arminden tree is a birch - a birch tree is put at the gate on May 1st. It is cut and brought home by a man, a young man or somebody from the family (Dragos Maria, 47).

The Arminden birch tree is put at the gate, as tall as possible, as a sign of pride; the strongest man of the house cuts it (Bogdan Gheorghe, 74).

The men of the house or the young man go and bring it home (Bogdan Mihali, 85).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methods that were used are the participative observation and the "well informed informants", taking part in semi-structured interviews. The interpretation of the information obtained within the studied community was done through social hermeneutics.

In this area, the man is considered the positive pole of the family, associated with purity and sacred and for this reason; he has to perform the ritual. The man holds important roles in the community (study of community) are assigned according to sex and age, taking into consideration the degree of difficulty they imply. Cutting down and bringing home a tree implies a difficult work and is one of man duties, because they represent the physical and moral force of the family. This is why in family with man, young and strong man, they are in charge with this mission. It is also a sign of submission in front of divinity. Men are in charge with the difficult activities, especial since in small communities the social control is very important. Social group seriously frowns upon the deviation from certain social rules.

In fact, the religion (orthodox) is the basis of relations hierarchy in the universe differentiated according to sex. The men are those who receive the word of God before women.

The general welfare of the community within the spring agrarian rituals, men represent the mediator and the social protector of the community.

In comparison with the man, women are considered weak "foul", impure because long time ago the women has succumbed to the devils temptation. In addition, women's impurity is due to having a period and her natural ability to perpetuate the species (Evseev, 1987).

The man is also the symbol of power and virility. That is why it is said that it is "a pride" that the Arminden tree be "as tall as possible". Unfortunately, from some village the population is migrated from Romania in: Italy, Austria, Spain, etc., or for studies. Some young people come back only for visit, or to spend their holidays in "fresh air".

Many families of this area has gown old. However, some rich people come and buy houses in this beautiful mountain area, or renovate and set up with all the utilities and transform them into "holiday houses" for tourism.

A very important aspect is the mutual assistance work. Because in some family of old age, are not able to honors this ritual.

Somebody from house or the neighbors goes and gets the tree (Ilies Grigore, 62).

In the beliefs of the traditional are from Maramures the Arminden tree stands for one of these supplementary reinforcements during the period of maximum concentration of evil spirits.

The Arminden tree has apotropaic values-it protects the family, as well as all the animals and the household against bad things and troubles.

The Arminden tree is used so that nothing spoils the cattle. The men bring it in one day before May 1 and is put at the gate pole (Crisan Silvia, 59).

Incense has an apotropaic role; it is meant to keep evil spirits away. It is used in rituals for bringing rain. Rain and cloud are influenced by imitative magic.

The tree from which incense is made represents symbols from Christ. The unlit charcoal represents the symbol of vitality. It symbolizes life that can be rekindled any time. Garlic also has an apotropaic function by keeping away bad spirits and it is used in a ritual on entire vegetation cycle.

The little branches on top of the Arminden tree are tied in the form of a cross. The cross represents the defense against evil. It is a fundamental symbol of the Christianity, but its magical symbolism is pre-Christian. It represents the center and all the energy flows from this center. The cross has an apotropaic role. It represents a model for the totality of the universe but also of the man with the hands open towards the sky. On the other hand, it stands for a version of the Cosmic Tree, a symbol of life and death, of their unity and their alternation.

The most important role in this ritual is the imitative gesture, because there is the belief that through this sympathetic magic the man can influence according to his interest the quantity of precipitation and their form (Klingman, 1998).

In the mountain village, the Arminden tree is keep for lighting

the fire for baking the first bread made of the new corn flour. In this case, it has a fertilizing function. For this people corn is one of the most important ingredients, just like for the whole country and most of the nation. Corn is a symbol of food that ensures immortality. In most agrarian rituals, the corn seed stand for the fundamental symbol of death and revival. Bread is the result of an industrious activity, and thus it is seen as a heavenly gift and spiritual nourishment.

Bread is obtained after a lot of effort and the man from traditional communities has a respectful attitude towards it, because bread represents faith, luck and power. Bread is present at all ritualistic meals and in all mysteries of the gods of vegetation, such as: Dionysos, Attis, Demetra, etc.

Fire has a purifying and regenerating function; it stimulates the fertility of soil and makes the household prosperous. By burning the Arminden tree for baking the first bread made from the corn collected that year people aspire to the regeneration of the vegetation and look forward to a new year. The ashes that result from the burning of the sacred tree have magical properties. In the past scattering, these ashes over the fields had a fertilizing function. The sacred tree always stands for "never-ending life", richness and prosperity of the household. According to old beliefs, the principle of life and fire is certain sacred trees and can only be extracted through friction.

The Arminden tree represents a pre-Christian ritual of St. Jeremiah. The people's calendar is connected to the religious one, and the days are dedicated to patronizing saints. Certain of their virtues that are highly valued by the human aspiration are resumed and used in ritual practices (Ghinoiu, 2007).

In the community studies, the Arminden tree has protective vir-

tues, and this ritual reminds of the episode in which Jesus was saved from the pagans by the realm of vegetation.

Herod and his man have killed children all day and then they put an Arminden tree as a sign by the gate where they finished. The next day they came back to continue killing the children and they found by each gate an Arminden Tree and thus they were confused (Almas Maria, 57).

The Arminden tree is put up on May 1st for the belief in Jeremiah the Prophet, who protected Jesus from the Jews (Petrovici Ileana, 49).

CONCLUSIONS

The Arminden trees are not very strictly individualized as species.

In Romania, it is used in magical rituals, which seek to influence weather and vegetation growth. It also protects the home and the household, in order to shelter it from malefic forces, which generate meteorological phenomena. By this ritual, the people in this area used scrutiny believe they can influence certain regularity of rainfall during summertime and snowfall during wintertime; thus the top branches of the tree are bound together in order to calm down their violence. Besides this function of influencing meteorological phenomena and its apotropaic role of protecting the family, the animals, and the entire household from "evil". The "Arminden" tree also has a symbolical function of fertilization, of promoting domestic wellbeing and prosperity, as well as a protective role, alluding to the episode when Jesus who, while being sought by the pagans, was saved under the sway of the vegetal world.

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