

DIE BALLADE VON DER ARTA-BRÜCKE: EINE VERGLEICHENDE UNTERSUCHUNG. By *Georgios A. Megas*. Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1976. 204 pp. Paper.

The ballad about immuring a woman in the foundations of a bridge or some other structure is popular all over the Balkans. Numerous studies have been devoted to this ballad, but they all suffer one drawback: since their authors knew the material of their own countries best, they tended to consider their national oikotype as the original and the others as being derived from it. Consequently, the ballad was proven to have originated in Hungary, Rumania, Albania, and so forth, or to have resulted from polygenesis. There are some exceptions, however, such as the Bulgarian folklorist, Arnaudov, and the Italian, Cocchiara, who supported the theory of the Greek origin of the ballad.

Georgios Megas, the late great master of Greek folklore, undertook a meticulous study of this ballad. He collected 333 variants from the entire Greek area and scrutinized them with great detail. He analyzed all of the episodes, motifs, and individual elements, and examined their distribution and significance for the Greek song and for the songs of other nations. It is of no wonder that he concluded that the ballad was of Greek origin.

The ballad is based on the belief that a human being has to be sacrificed for the security and longevity of a structure. In central and western Europe, usually a child is stolen or bought from its parents; and in southeast Europe and Hungary, it is the wife of the master builder who is sacrificed. Megas's study is concerned only with the tragic ballad of the immuring of the master's wife. He demonstrates that the simplest version of the ballad was created in Epirus, where the Arta Bridge is located. According to Megas, Epirus is also the place of origin of a more complicated version expanded with motifs from other songs, which spread throughout Greece and its neighboring lands. The fact that the song is known in remote Greek islands, and even in Pontus, causes Megas to conclude that it must have been created before the eleventh century, when all of Asia Minor and Pontus were a part of Byzantium. The transmitters of the ballad were the Greek builders and masons who practiced their skill all over the Balkans, as far as the Carpathian Mountains.

The second part of Megas's study is devoted to a discussion and criticism of other studies on this topic, which he characterizes as being based on deficient comparison, false interpretation, and misunderstanding of motifs. Some of the studies suffer from insufficient material—for example, Lajos Vargyas knew only 15 Greek variants (that is, 4.5 percent of the variants used by Megas), when he wrote the first version of his extensive study. Megas has overlooked a few studies, however. Some of them (such as Ninon Leader's) are insignificant, but the omission of Mircea Eliade's article, "Master Manole and the Monastery of Argeş" (in his *Zalmoxis: The Vanishing God*, Chicago, 1970), is conspicuous. Eliade probes into the religious function of the *Baupfer* and shows that every construction, by repetition of the cosmogonic myth about a primordial sacrifice, demands the immolation of a victim. Blood sacrifice was destined to assure the solidity and long life of a structure since, by the immolation, the new body (the structure) was animated.

In this reviewer's opinion, the elaboration of the religious and mythological background of the building sacrifice would have given more depth to Megas's somewhat mechanical, though excellent, study.

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