

## **LJUDSKO PRIPOVEDNIŠTVO IN VEROVANJA**

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## **RACCONTI E CREDENZE POPOLARI**

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## **FOLK NARRATIVE AND BELIEFS**

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# Folk Storytelling between Fiction and Tradition: The “Walled-Up Wife” and Other Construction Legends

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*Discussed are folktales and songs about the building of important constructions, which include the motifs of human or animal sacrifice or the immuration of other objects, as well as the narratives in which the master mason is a supernatural being. The origins of these stories were interwoven into the myths and different beliefs and cosmogonic presumptions and were at the time of their formation considered to be credible, but in the process of spreading them around they lost their plausibility.*

People have always been caught between different layers of the imaginary and fictional world. Their cultural, social, and natural environment offered them a certain traditional basis, but they continuously added to this the new inspirations that they received. This can also be observed in folk storytelling, where one easily discovers various deposits and substrates of different origins from the very earliest imaginations to the recent beliefs. This article presents the fusion of various beliefs and worldviews based on examples of motifs about building and construction from ancient sources to the modern media and internet tales.

Literary folklore has preserved traces of ancient beliefs that were practised during the building of important structures such as churches, castles, bridges, residences and wells. The constructors used to avert the wrath of chthonic forces or gods and gain their benevolence by offering them a human or an animal sacrifice. This has been confirmed by numerous findings excavated from walls and thresholds, both in Europe and in other parts of the world (Grafenauer 1957a, 41; Kropelj 1995, 73–77; Simpson, Roud 2003, 189). In Ljubljana a skeleton of a cat, which was immured to protect the building and the people living in it from supernatural forces, was discovered in a wall of a house from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Grafenauer 1957a, 41).

Human - or later animal - building sacrifice was gradually replaced by an object of special sacral or apotropaic value; occasionally people tried to redeem themselves also with money. Money and a small cross with apotropaic significance were found immured in the walls of a chapel on Velika Planina. In this case, the sacred object whose purpose was protection from the forces of evil, and gaining the benevolence of gods and house spirits in the form of money, have been combined.

The sacrifice was often built into the foundations or under the doorstep, at the main entrance of the building. Since the main entrance to a building was of special significance people often buried sacral and apotropaic objects, occasionally animals or money, also under its doorstep. This does not merely have as apotropaic character but also signifies that the doorstep was a sacred spot. It leads from one world to another, enabling the tran-

sition from the outer world into the interior.<sup>1</sup> The entrance or the door also closed and blocked it.<sup>2</sup> People also believed that house protecting dwarfs (*gospodarčki* or *dedki*) had their places under the threshold, or else in the saltcellar, by the hearth or in the house altar like the antique Lars.

These beliefs are very deeply rooted in peoples' minds and are depicted also in narrative and song tradition. In this article will be discussed folktales, epic poems and ballads about the building of significant structures which – drawing on Alan Dundes's concept of allomotifs – contain the following episodes:

1. Determination of the place where the construction should be built. 2. Destruction of everything that was built over the day, during the night (Mot. D2192). 3. Supernatural power demands a sacrifice for helping people to build the construction. 4a. The sacrifice is walled-in; 4b. The supernatural power is deceived. 5. The sacrifice of the mason(s). 6a. Ethiological motif explaining the origin of a healing spring. 6b. Ethiological motif explaining the origin of a missing part of the building (construction).

### I. Immuration of Building Sacrifice Victims (The “Walled-up Wife”)

Folk tales and songs depicting the extraordinary tragic fate of sacrificed humans – frequently the wife of the master mason – who had been immured in the foundations of newly-erected structures, occupy a special place among the stories focusing on construction. Such tales and songs were known throughout the Balkan Peninsula in Eastern Europe, Turkey and in Asia. This tradition has been discussed for more than 150 years, starting with Jacob Grimm, who – after reading Vuk Karadžić's epic song *The Building of Skadar* – pronounced this ballad one of the most outstanding songs of all peoples and times (J. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* 1835: 3, 1143).

At first these ballads were researched mostly from the diachronic perspective. Researchers tried to find its origin and expansion, and while explaining its meaning they established a myth-ritual theory. Later synchronic perspectives were introduced, and the researchers analysed the ballad from the point of view of its structure, function and meaning.

The epic poem *Zidanje Skadra / The Building of Skadra* is a deeply moving ballad about the building of the town of Skadar which is today in Albania. Skadar was in Serbian tradition perceived as the residence of King Vukašin Mrnjavčević – Serbian king in central and north-western Macedonia from 1366 to 1371 (Pešić & Milošević-Đorđević 1984, 230). A folk song entitled *Zidanje Skadra* (The Building of Skadar) was first collected by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić in 1804 and published in 1814.

<sup>1</sup> The entrance door, which opens and closes access to the house, is often marked with symbolic images or protective (apotropaic) signs. A proverb stating “The doorstep is like the peak of a mountain” (Kocbek, Šašel 1943, p. 32) further confirms the sacred character of the doorstep. The custom of a bridegroom carrying his bride over the threshold, which has been preserved to the present day, is yet another proof of its significance.

<sup>2</sup> Archaeological findings confirm the related lore. Chicken bones, for example, were found under the doorstep of a house in Studor; bird bones in the hallway of a house in Bohinj; and a receptacle in Dolga Njiva below Kravac.

The song describes the building of Skadar on the Bojana river by the three Mrljavčević brothers: King Vukašin, Duke Uglješa, and Gojko Mrljavčević. Three hundred masons had been building the town for three years but could not progress beyond its foundations. Anything that had been erected during the day was demolished during the night. At the onset of the fourth year, the masons hear a fairy's voice from the mountain telling them to build in the town's foundations Stoja and Stojan, a brother and a sister. King Vukašin sends forth his servant who spends three years looking for the siblings in vain. Upon the servant's return, the king resumes the building – but again unsuccessfully. The fairy communicates with them again. She tells them to immure in the foundations the wife of one of the three Mrljavčević brothers who will be the first to come the following morning to the Bojana, scoop water into a vessel, and bring breakfast to the masons. The brothers swear not to tell this to their wives, preferring to leave the choice of the victim to destiny. But the youngest brother is the only one who has not broken the promise. In the morning, the wife of Vukašin pleads headache while the wife of Uglješa excuses herself by saying that she has a sore arm. So Gojković's wife, who has a month-old baby, has to fetch the water. After she has brought breakfast to the masons she is taken away. The masons start to erect a wall around her. When the wall is knee-high the young mother still believes this is but a game, and only later realizes the truth. She asks her brother Rade to leave openings in the wall: two for her breasts so that she can still nurse her baby, and one for her eyes so that she can see when her baby son Jovan is brought to her. Her wish is granted, and for a year she nurses her child. A source of water with healing powers still runs from these openings. (Karadžić 1953: 114–123).

In this Serbian song, the first episode on determination of the place for the construction has been omitted; while the etiological motif of the source of healing water is explained by the immuration of a nursing mother. As we can see, this motif stresses the importance and sacrosanctity of the waters and is present also in the poem about the bridge in Mostar in Herzegovina and many other songs of this type.

Very famous is the Romanian folk ballad *Mojster Manola / Master Manola* which sings about the building of the Monastery of Arges. Although its content is similar to the ballad *The Building of Skadar*, there are several differences between the two songs. In this case, masons were building a monastery on the order of Negru Vodă, the duke of Muntenia. After Nicolae Constantinescu, this name relates to the prince Neagoe Basarab the founder of the Monastery of Arges in 1517. There are many variants of this ballad, but it usually opens with the search for an adequate location for the monastery, while in the Serbian variant this motif is missing.

Duke Negru Vodă and ten master masons, of whom Manola is the best, ride through Argeștal, looking for the remains of an unfinished structure. A shepherd shows them the ruin. They set to work on that spot but everything they have built collapses overnight. One night, Manola has a dream. He dreams that the building can progress after the wife of one of the masons, the one who will be the first to bring breakfast to them in the morning, has been walled into the foundations. The masons promise not to tell this to anybody, preferring destiny to decide on the victim. In some variants of this ballad, all have kept their promise; in others, every mason except Manola has broken it. The following morning, Manola pleads in vain for his wife to come across a wolf or a dragon, or to be stopped by a thunderstorm; she is the one who fetches breakfast first. Manola tearfully embraces her. She is placed on the monastery's foundations, and the masons start building a wall around her. When she realizes that this is not a game she starts to beg and weep for her baby whom she will no longer

nurse. In certain variants, the wife is still pregnant, and laments that the wall is crushing her baby and her breasts so tightly that milk starts flowing from them. When the wife has been sacrificed the building of the monastery progresses swiftly. Negru Vodă arrives to admire the beautiful monastery just as the masons have completed the roof. He wants to know if they can build an even more beautiful building. They boast to be the best masons in the world, capable of building even something more beautiful than the monastery. Negru Vodă ponders over their reply, and then orders them to remove all ladders and scaffolding. The masons are left trapped on the top of the monastery. They fasten boards upon their arms in order to fly down, but fall on the ground, petrified. From the spot where Manola has fallen grows a beautiful well, and healing waters arise from its tears of blood.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1: Monastery of Arges in Romania.

As we can see, the etiological motif of the source of healing water is somewhat different from the one in the afore-mentioned Serbian ballad. There is also an additional motif of the murder of the master masons. Even though the motif might be explained merely by the exceptional cruelty of Negru Vodă who had requested the building, and his wish that his monastery would be the greatest, it seems much more likely that this motif has deeper roots. It may be possible that their death could be attributed to ancient beliefs and rituals that necessitated a building sacrifice also of the master mason. It is interesting that

<sup>3</sup> The Slovene translation of the Romanian ballad about Master Manola was translated by Katja Špurova and published in *Naši razgledi po svetu* (February 24, 1984, p. 121.)

folk tales from the Karst region in the maritime province of Slovenia which narrate about the building of the churches, often include the motif about the young mason apprentice or the son of the master mason, who – after the church has been built – falls from the top of the church tower and dies (Premrl 2011, 46). Since this motif is connected with so many construction legends it seems that it is a reminiscence of the building sacrifice – in this case the victim is also the mason.

The European folklore about a walled-up human sacrifice has been very accurately presented and analysed by Hungarian folklorist Lajos Vargyas, who had elaborated also the map showing their wide circulation. He defines their diversity and characteristics, and ascertains that Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian variants are very heterogeneous. These ballads, epic poems or narratives about the human sacrifice in the foundations were very popular in Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Hungary, Mordvinia, the Caucasus, Georgia, as well as in Turkey (Vargyas 1960, 1967), India and Japan<sup>4</sup> in Asia. The ballad was also known among the Gypsies, who might have been the transmitters between India and Europe (Dundes 1996, 190–192). In Croatian variants the wife is sometimes released from being walled-in (Vargyas 1960, 18, 27). Vargyas also concludes that the Caucasian and Mordvinian variants are related to Hungarian versions. In contrast to Arnaudov (1913), who tried to prove that this ballad derives from Greece, where it appeared under the influence of old Greek and Byzantine culture and was from there spread into Albania, Bulgaria and across Romania into Hungary; Vargyas states its origin in the Caucasus (Vargyas 1960, 45–58). In spite of the great erudition of Vargyas' research, we have to disagree with him on the point where he defines the origin of the ballad in the Caucasus, and also on issuing all Macedonian variants being Bulgarian. As we know, many research studies have been done on this ballad in Macedonia, especially lately; in Kumanovo people still narrate about Rada's bridge and some even believe in the story (Stojanović Lafazanovska 2000).

Hungarian ballads often sing about Clement Mason building the town of Deva. Among the Greek variants, the best known is the ballad about Arta's bridge, in the foundations of which is sacrificed the wife of the main constructor. While she was built into the foundations she put a spell on the bridge, which she finally recalled. Georgios Megas has collected more than 333 variants of this ballad (Megas 1971).

Albanian variants of the ballad about immuration of the building sacrifice – like the Serbian – sing about building of the fortification Skutari (Skadar) on the hill of Rozafa (Rozafati). According to some variants the hill got its name after the name of the brother and sister who were walled-into the foundations of the fort – Roza and Fa. Brother and sister – often the twins as the building sacrifice, appear also in Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian variants (Vargyas 1960, 30).

Indic variants from Kangra in Northwest India and from South India most often sing about the building of the well. In these songs, is built-in the waterway one of the daughters-in-law of the master, usually the wife of the youngest son. Her husband sometimes jumps into the well, when he learns about her sacrifice; or else she is avenged by her brothers, who kill her father-in-law and members of his family (Naraya 1996; Srikantaiah 1996).

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<sup>4</sup> The bridge over the river at Matsue (Davis, Myths and Legends of Japan, 342-344; Brewster 1996, 55).



Figure 2: Fortification of Skutari/Skadar in Albania with the reminiscence of Roza and Fa (sister and brother who were walled-in).

Human sacrifice on laying the foundation of a building was intended originally as propitiation of the spirits of the earth, who were thought of as being disturbed; later on it sometimes passed into another conception that the spirit of the victim would be a ghostly guardian of the building being erected. The ritual of foundation sacrifice has been practised almost all over the world. American folklorist Paul Brewster had presented its widespread dissemination and discussed its traces also in children’s games and dances (Brewster 1996, 36-39). Also the Slovenian children’s game “Is the Bridge Strong Enough?” is a part of this wide-spread tradition.<sup>5</sup>

The Romanian ethnologist Ion Taloş presented Romanian variants of the ballad, which he classified as belonging to the segment of European building and construction legends. Analysing various motifs, he stresses beliefs and magical practices connected with building sacrifice victims; the choice of building location; the laying of the foundation stone; and the significance of foundations and the entrance of a newly-built structure, all of which can be perceived in the ballad about Master Manola and in its Balkan variants (Taloş 1969).

The Bulgarian folklorist Lyubomira Parpulova-Gribble, who had collected and examined 180 versions of this ballad, turned to structuralistic and »deep-semantic« analyses and suggested that the ballad may derive from a *rite de passage* involving ritual separation (Parpulova-Gribble 1996). Krstivoj Kotur proposes a Christian interpretation (Kotur 1996); Mircea Eliade presented a myth-ritual reading of blood sacrifices with cosmogonic origins preserved in Romanian mythology. He suggested that the plot of the ballad might be based on cosmogonic legends about the creation of the world from a primordial female body. The construction (city or church) is considered as *imago mundi* or center of the world (Eliade 1996). The Russian folklorist Albert Baiburin has contended that construction sacrifice evokes the whole complex of beliefs about the sacrosanctity of the house, the possibility of ‚deriving‘ it from the body of the victim, and stresses the structural equivalence between the house and the order of the world (Parpulova-Gribble 1996, 174-175). Other readings explored female victimization and heroism by seeing the ballad’s theme as a metaphor for marriage, a male-constructed trap seriously restricting women’s freedom and mobility. Alan Dundes developed his own feminist and psychoanalytic interpretations of the ballad, but at the same time supported the theory of multiple interpretations of this ballad.

Many researchers have examined gender and power issues in the ballad, following male and female interpretations. But such theories seem to be questionable, since the victim can be also a child, twins or a brother and a sister. Already Vargyas had seen in the motif of twins or brother and sister as the building sacrifice an extremely old religious

<sup>5</sup> Mirko Ramovš, *Otroške igre z odvzemanjem in privzemanjem na Slovenskem*. *Traditiones* 20/ 1991, 127–142.

element practised in ancient cultures. He also cites Georgian, Mordvinian as well as central and east European songs and legends where a child is walled up (Vargyas 1960, 49 f.f.). In Bosnian variants *Zidanje Derviš-pašine munare* (The building of Derviš-pasha's minaret) the building sacrifice is a son of the pasha who is building a mosque, but beside him, under the minaret, is buried the pasha's wife who had died because her heart was broken, hearing that her youngest son will be sacrificed (Hrvatske narodne pjesme V/1, 1909, 141–145). Also in the folk song *Čuprija na Drini* (The bridge on river Drina) from Herzegovina (Hrvatske narodne pjesme I/1, 1896, 105–107) the sacrificed victim is not a wife but a sister and a brother or the twins – Stoja and Stojan. These names mean 'standing', which has an additional symbolical message. As already mentioned, Stoja and Stojan were supposed to be the victims also in the Serbian song *Zidanje Skadra*, but they were not found. But the most popular legend about the bridge on the river Drina is the one that was presented by the famous Serbian writer Ivo Andrić from Bosnia, who in 1945 wrote the novel *Na Drini Čuprija* (The Bridge on the Drina) and received in 1961 the Nobel award for his work. The novel is the chronicle of the bridge in Višegrad and depicts the life in this small town through the centuries. The old bridge of Višegrad on the Drina was built by the Grand Vezir Mehmed Pasha (1505–1579), who had been born in the nearby village of Sokolovići (1505–1579) and was named after him "the bridge of Mehmed Pasha Sokolović". This bridge is a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina and has been glorified also in folk narrative and song tradition. Ivo Andrić begins his novel with this folk legend, which includes the motif of a supernatural being – *vila brodница* (the fairy of the boatmen), who destroyed everything that was built over the day. Finally master mason Rade Neimar (Rade the Mason) heard the voice from the water, and the voice said that infant twins – a brother and a sister, Stoja and Ostoja – should be immured into the two supporting pillars of the bridge. The viziers searched the whole land, and finally they found them in a remote village. Their mother followed the viziers and managed to persuade the master mason Rade Neimar to leave at least two openings through which she could breast-feed her babies. Still today one can see the two small blind windows through which Stoja and Ostoja were breast-fed, and at special times of the year two white streams run out of them. Ivo Andrić wrote this legend:

*...They knew that the vila of the boatmen had hindered its building, as always and everywhere there is someone to hinder building, destroying by night what had been built by day, until 'something' had whispered from the waters and counselled Rade the Mason to find two infant children, twins, brother and sister, named Stoja and Ostoja, and wall them into the central pier of the bridge. A reward was promised to whoever found them and brought them hither.*

*At last the guards found such twins, still at the breast, in a distant village and the Vezir's men took them away by force; but when they were taking them away, their mother would not be parted from them and, weeping and wailing, insensible to blows and to curses, stumbled after them as far as Višegrad itself, where she succeeded in forcing her way to Rade the Mason.*

*The children were walled into the pier, for it could not be otherwise, but Rade, they say, had pity on them and left openings in the pier through which the unhappy mother could feed her sacrificed children. Those are the finely carved blind windows, narrow as loopholes, in which the wild doves now nest. In memory of that, the mother's milk has flowed from those*

walls for hundreds of years. That is the thin white stream which, at certain times of year, flows from that faultless masonry and leaves an indelible mark on the stone....<sup>6</sup>



Figure 3: The Bridge on the River Drina in Višegrad.

An important fact, which has not been considered enough, is also the context of the song or the rituals connected with the singing of this song. This ballad was connected to certain rituals and was sung as a carol-song during certain periods of the year. This has been preserved in Bulgaria, where it used to be sung at Christmas time and at the wedding rituals (Anastasova 1993). These traditions were also remembered in Kangra in Northwest India, where these ballads were traditionally performed during the lunar month of Chaitra (March-April) by the carol-singers. Each ballad ends with an allusion to the month of Chaitra, and it is considered inauspicious to use the name of the month of Chaitra before one has heard a basketmaker sing these ballads. Also a ritual gathering associated with the beginning of the planting of rice in the town of Charhi near Dharamsala is held at the temple that was supposedly built by the brother of the sacrificed woman (Narayan 1996, 109–10). **These facts contribute to understanding human building sacrifice as an important ritual tradition which was necessary to connect death with life, this world with the world beyond, and in this way to enable the living and make possible the purpose and functioning of the construction. With such customs people tried to establish world order and fertility.**

<sup>6</sup> Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*. Translated by Lovett F. Edwards. Beograd: Dereta 2007, 25–26.

How important the human sacrifice was for establishing the world order can be seen also in folk tales which narrate about the sacrifice of the child who was embedded into the banks of the river to stop the flood. These narratives *Mälinčki mantrnik/The martyr from Melinci by the river Mura* were recorded in the Prekmurje region in Eastern Slovenia. The legend narrates that a seven-year-old boy Džurov Števek was put between two planks and buried alive by the river to stop the overflowing. After many years they tried to dig him out, but they stopped because of the bad odour.<sup>7</sup>

Katja Hrobat connected the tradition of the walled-up woman or a child with the folk belief that by doing so the strength of the world beyond would be acquired. The connection with the world beyond enables the fertility and at the same time functioning of the sojourn object (Hrobat 2010, 103–104). This custom is based upon the folk belief that it is through the woman and her sexuality that the connection between this and the other world can be established (Dragan 1999, 25–26, 42–49). The capability of bearing the child and of breast-feeding is fundamental for establishing this contact. Also small children or the snake, which symbolizes woman's sexuality, could have the same effect. If we take into account the customs which are connected with this kind of narrative or song tradition, which includes these ballads into carol singing, it becomes possible that this tradition derives from such a world view. **The sacrifice of a woman or a child is therefore necessary to establish the connection with the world beyond and to gain the benevolence of the supernatural forces.**

The Slovenian folklorist Ivan Grafenauer established already in the 1960s the wide distribution of beliefs connected with the building of houses into the foundations of which were immured human victims, frequently children. He cites Herodotus who mentions in his report that when the Persian army of Xerxes crossed the river Strimon its soldiers buried nine local boys and nine local girls under the river's bridge, when they were building it.<sup>8</sup> Known throughout the world, such sacrifices later entailed the shadows of humans who were believed to die shortly afterwards (Grafenauer 1957a, 41–42). Ivan Grafenauer also pointed out that even the boundary stones that marked the border between two clans or two countries sometimes necessitated a human sacrifice (Grafenauer 1957a, b).

### ***Human Sacrifice on the Borders***

Although Slovenian narrative tradition does not include the legends or ballads about immured human sacrifices into the walls of important buildings, it preserves the memory of human sacrifices buried under the border stones. The legends about *Krvavi kamen / Bloody stone*<sup>9</sup> narrate how a border stone which stands on the planes of Gorjanci between the churches of St. Miklavž and St. Jera, was rolled onto the pit where the young runners for determining the border were buried. This stone supposedly marked the border between *Kranjci*/Carniolians in Slovenia and *Uskoks* from *Vojna krajina* in Croatia (Grafenauer 1957a, 44–49). The motifs of one of the variants of this tale are the following:

<sup>7</sup> Števan Kūhar, Narodno blago vogrskij Slovancof. Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje 14/1914, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Herodotus VII, p. 114; translation by Savo Sovre II, p. 159.

<sup>9</sup> Jožef Babnik (pseudonym: Joseph Buchenhain), Der Blutstein. Eine vaterländische Volkssage aus dem Jahre 1650, Carniola I/16-18 (22., 25., 29. Juni 1838); Krvavi kamen (Narodna pripoved od godine 165). Danica Ilirska 25, 26 (1838); varianta iz Žumberaka: N. R, Crtica iz okolice žumberačke (B. Krvavi kamen), Arkiv za povjestnicu jugoslavensku VII, Zagreb 1863, 180–184.

1. Two communities quarrel because of the pastureland. 2. People decide to determine the border by sending runners from each side; on the spot where they meet, the border will be set. 3. The runners from one side start earlier and gain more land. 4. The commissioners from the other side see this first, and decide to bury the runners alive and roll a stone on top of them. 4. In the grave is buried also the fiancée of one of the runners, who was from the other side. Before she dies, she puts them under oath that this border should be respected.

There are also other ethyological legends about this *Bloody stone*. The Slovenian writer Janez Trdina wrote that Carniolians and *Žumberčani* (people from Žumberak), while determining the border, because they could not decide where the border should be, started to fight. Human blood covered the stone, which from that time on got its name – the *Bloody stone*.

Another variant from Cerov Log explains that, at the time when both sides were determining the border between Slovenians and Croats, there was also a girl among the negotiators. On the spot of the border they cut off her fingers, so that it would not be forgotten. Her blood coloured the *Border stone*. The girl was a fairy and that is why the stone remained red for centuries.<sup>10</sup>

These legends contain similar episodes as narratives and songs about immuring of the human sacrifice in the foundations of significant constructions, yet they are different in their structure and contents. The historical background is anticipated as realistic and is set in the year 1650, but the central motif of the human sacrifice is older, and derives from the same belief traditions as the motif of sacrifice in the ballads about the walled-up wife or other human sacrifices.

## II. Supernatural Masons

Supernatural or mythological masons, generally giants, dwarfs, fairies or the devil, feature as masons in a number of European legends about the building of prominent structures. In these myths, legends and belief tales the supernatural mason has preserved the mythological image, but is always outwitted by men or the gods.

### a.) Mythological masons

The tales about a mythological being building an important edifice are wide spread, not only in northern Europe but all over Europe and on other continents as well.

Inger Boberg (1955) wrote extensively on legends about supernatural masons, particularly in North and West Europe. In these stories, demands for payment range from sacrifice of one of the goddesses from the pantheon of gods, to revealing the name of the chief architect by the contract giver. Very well known is the episode in Norse Edda in which a giant was building the wall of Midgard:

A giant is building the wall of Midgard (Asgard) with the help of his horse Svadilfari. For payment he requires the Sun, the Moon, and the goddess Freya. Since his horse possesses supernatural pow-

<sup>10</sup> Vir: Marinka Dražumerič, Zavod za spomeniško varstvo v Novem Mestu.

ers, it seems that the castle will be finished even before the fixed time. Appalled, the gods appeal to Loki to avert the catastrophe. Turning into a mare, Loki appears at night and diverts Svadilfari from work. Thus deceived, the giant starts to leave but is crushed with a hammer wielded by Thor.

Although widespread, especially in Swedish, Norwegian, and German lores, such stories were widely known among the Slavs as well. (Taloš, 1974-77, 1394).

An example of this kind of belief is also presented by the Istrian folk tale from Croatia, depicting the building of the amphitheatre in Pula by fairies.

*Divić (arena in Pula)*

*Fairies have built the arena in Pula. On their heads, they had been carrying funnels (grote) and spindles (prele). When a rooster crowed they could no longer continue, which is why the arena has no roof. Old people used to call it Divić. (Bošković-Stulli 1959, No. 71, p. 120).*



Figure 4: The arena in Pula.

The motif of the mason who loses his power, and with it the bet he had made, because of the premature morning song of a rooster, is known also in Slovene folklore.

People often attributed the building of larger structures to the work of supernatural beings, who under Christian influence were replaced by the devil. The latter was believed to have been responsible for *Hudičev Most* (Devil's Bridge) on the path leading to Dante's Cave in Tolmin, and also for the *Vražja peč* (Devil's Cliff) by the Drava river in Carinthia.

The cliff *Vražja peč* got its name because the devil could not build the bridge over the Drava river in time.

The God promised to him the soul which did not have enough good deeds to prevail on St. Michael's scale, to be able to go to heaven. But this soul would be the devil's only if he would build the bridge in three days. The soul was shaking and praying on the other side of the river. The devil had to bring stones for the bridge from the Peca mountain, and on the way he dropped many rocks so that the Devil's Cliff arose. The Devil was building very fast, but the bad storm and the darkness prevented him from building it in time. The bells in the church rang on the morning of the last day three times the Angelus Bell before he was finished, and the soul was saved.<sup>11</sup>

Another legend *Zlodjev most* (Devil's Bridge) from Velikovec in Carinthia tells a different story. The main character is a miller who had his mill on the right side of the river Drava and wanted the people from the other side to bring the grain to him too. So he wished there was a bridge on the river Drava. One night the devil appeared before him and offered to build it before the bells rang in the morning. In the end, the miller asked the sexton to ring the bell a little earlier, to prevent the devil from getting his soul.<sup>12</sup>

Also the dike on the river Vipava by Branik/Rifemberk near Nova Gorica was built by the devil. In 1941, Jože Seražin published a story about this dike that had been recounted to him by his grandfather in Kazlje by Sežana; the story is titled *Zlodjev Zid* (Devil's Wall). In the story, the devil is defeated by the tolling of church bells that prematurely announce the arrival of the morning.

#### *Devil's Wall*

*In Dutovlje lived a rich farmer who was also a sexton. He had a farmhand who was not only very strong but also mean. The farmhand played tricks on people whenever he could. One time, he hanged a bull by his tail. Hearing the animal bellowing, people saved the bull just in time.*

*The sexton had a hayfield up by Brdo. The hayfield had almost no walls around it, and cows were always coming to the field to graze. One evening, the sexton returned home very angry. He had gone to take a look at his hayfield but found that all the grass had been eaten.*

*Seeing his anger, the farmhand makes a suggestion:*

*“If you give me your soul in return I shall build by the time the Angelus Bell announces the arrival of morning a wall over which no cow will be able to jump.”*

*The farmhand, you see, was but the devil. In his anger, the sexton promises him his soul. The farmhand vanishes into hell to fetch others who will help him build a wall so high that no cow will be able to go over it.*

*The sexton cannot get any sleep that night. Time after time, he tries to figure out how to save his soul. Finally, he gets an idea. He climbs the belfry to check the hayfield. It is too dark to see anything but he thinks that the devils may be able to finish the wall while it is still dark. He pulls the rope of the Angelus bell and starts to announce the arrival of morning. When the devils hear the bell toll they escape to hell, and the farmhand with them. The sexton has*

<sup>11</sup> Tone Gaspari, *Vražja peč*. *Mlada Jugoslavija* 8, Velikovec (31. 8. 1919), 3–4; reprint: T. Gaspari & P. Košir, *Zbirka koroških pravljic*. Ljubljana 1923, 42–47.

<sup>12</sup> *Zlodjev most*. *Mladi rod* 18/3-4 (November – December 1968), 35–36.

*thus saved his soul but good luck has left him for good. The family died out a long time ago* (Seražin 1940/41, pp. 78-79).

A common element of such stories is that the supernatural being can only work at night but loses power in the morning. The ancient roots of this legend are further confirmed by the fact that the hoax in the story is valued as a virtue. Since in old civilizations, such deceptions reflected common sense and great wisdom.

#### **b.) Sacrifice on the Bridge, AaTh/ATU 1191**

This motif about deceiving the supernatural mason is central also in a very popular folk tale of this kind “The Sacrifice on the Bridge” (AaTh/ATU 1191) which had undergone even more Christian influence.

According to data, the significance of the building of bridges and the veneration of their architects was known already in antiquity. In the early period of the Roman Empire, bridge construction was closely connected with a cult, and the traces of this cult had been preserved for a long time. It is by no means a coincidence that the most distinguished body of Roman priests, the *Collegium pontificum*, consisted of the so-called Pontifices (the builders of bridges), and that the emperor, who was also the chief priest, had the function of Pontifex Maximus (Lexikon der alten Welt 1965: Pontifices). Modified and embedded with Christian elements, a survival of this belief has been preserved in folk tales and legends.

The motif of a soul that had been promised to the devil is very frequent in folk narrative and it often replaces the motif about a hoax in which the bell or the ruster prematurely announce the morning. In this case, the devil is given an animal, which is perceived as having no soul, instead of the promised human soul. The most frequent story with this motif has been classified as the international folk tale type AaTh/ATU 1191 “Sacrifice on the Bridge,” or the motif S241.1 “Unwitting bargain with the devil evaded by driving dog over bridge first”. This motif makes the main difference between the former type of folktales about the “Supernatural masons” and this type about the “Sacrifice on the Bridge”.

Already in 1688 the Slovenian polyhistor Janez Vajkard Valvasor had included in his “Topografia archiducatus Carinthiae antiquae et modernae completa” the renowned tale about the Devil’s Bridge below Ljubelj. Various variants of this legend have been recorded later. One of the variants was written down by Ivan Čavko in 1920 in Brodi in Carinthian Rosental:

Šum is a bridge that was being built over high waterfalls. The masons’ progress was very slow. At night-time three men got hold of a book on black magic and summoned the devil, asking him for his help. In return they promised the soul of the first one who would cross the finished bridge, and signed the contract in blood. However, they tricked the devil by letting a goat cross the bridge first. They saved their souls, and the goat met its tragic end in the pounding waves of the river. (Published in: Kropej 1995, p. 252).

In his book *Narodno blago iz Roža* (Folk Lore from Rož, 1936/37), Josip Šašel wrote this legend in the dialect of the Rož Valley.

### *Devil's Bridge*

*The bridge under the Šum Waterfall by Sopotnice repeatedly collapsed during its construction. The master mason no longer knew what to do, so he summoned the devil to help. He promised the devil a good prize: the first one to cross the finished bridge would be his to take. The devil was satisfied. He diligently helped, handling the stones so that he was all wet. The bridge no longer collapsed. When the devil rolled the last stone into place he hid by the end of the bridge, waiting for his prize. The mason hurled a loaf of bread along the bridge, and a dog ran after it. I don't know whether the devil took the dog rather than the bread. To this day, the name of the bridge remains the Devil's Bridge.*

Šašel published a variant of this tale in *Koroški Slovenec* in 1931. He also added the history and principal geographic features of the area. The story is described in a more realistic manner and in the context of the way of life of three local villages, Brodi, Sele, and Rute (Šašel 1931; Kropelj 2003, 68-70). Placed within a realistic cultural and geographic milieu with which local people could identify, such stories sounded much more plausible than those merely focusing on the central motif, as is the case with the one above.

This legend was widespread also in other parts of Slovenia: in the 1990s, in Upper Carniola in the village of Stara Fužina, Marija Cvetek collected the following variant of the Sacrifice on the Bridge legend:

### *Devil's Bridge*

*People used to tell a story of how the Devil's Bridge was built. They were building it until evening, only to find it torn down in the morning.*

*Then somebody said: "Let the devil build this bridge for I shall not!"*

*So the devil started to build the bridge. People asked him what he wanted in return.*

*The devil said: "The first soul that crosses the bridge, I will have that."*

*In the evening, people were pondering over who would be so unfortunate. Then a farmer, who had a dog, got an idea.*

*He said: "I shall take the dog and a juicy calf's bone with me."*

*He flung the bone across the bridge, and the dog followed it. So the devil got the dog's soul. Outraged, the devil wagged his tail so hard that he demolished the entire railing. [Cvetek 1993: p. 178, no. 127; Cvetek 1999: 35].*

Larger and more demanding architectural feats were often explained as the work of supernatural beings or the devil. Thus it was believed that the devil built the Ponte del Diavolo (Devil's Bridge) in Čedad/Cividale and the Devil's Bridge on the path leading to Dante's Cave in Tolmin. One variant of such tales about the bridge in Čedad is a Friulian tale *Al puint di Cividat*:

### *The Bridge in Cividale*

*The inhabitants of Cividale (Čedad in Slovene) decided that their town was too cut off from the rest of the world, and that they needed a bridge. However, they did not know how to build one. The devil suddenly appeared, making a suggestion: "I will build your bridge in return for the first soul who crosses it!" "All right!" they replied without giving it a second thought. The devil, however, could not fulfill the promise by himself so he summoned his*

mother. Being huge, his mother kept throwing stone upon stone so that the bridge was finished in one night.

The people of Čedad started to think: “We will have to give him the soul now. How do we do this? Who has enough courage for such a sacrifice?”

So they got the idea of sending a dog over the bridge. The dog walked across the bridge, but this dog was not the promised soul, because dogs have no soul that can be taken to hell. When the devil beheld the dog he was so indignant that he disappeared, never to return. (Sandrin 2010, 80; another variant was published in: Wagner 1931, 89–94).



Figure 5: The devil's mother helping to build the bridge in Cividale/Čedad in Italy (Illustration from the book Sandrin 2010, 81).

Such legends focusing not only on bridges but also on churches and cathedrals are known throughout Europe. The best known are the German legends about the “Sachenhäuser Brücke” in Frankfurt-am-Main, as well as about the bridges in Regensburg and in Bamberg; and also the legend about the cathedral in German Aachen. Very popular is also the French legend about the bridge on Pont d’Yeu (Moser-Rath 1978, p. 839).

Resonating strongly in oral tradition, the process of construction – be it of bridges, churches, castles, cities, houses, and even walls – was once connected with numerous beliefs and rituals. At the time of their origin, among some people construction legends were believed to be true. Although their credibility gradually diminished over the years, some of them have still, in some way or another, survived in a modernized form.

An example of such a legend is an aetiological tale about *Zidani Most*. The story blends an ancient motif with Christian elements, and even with fairly recent events such as the cholera ravaging among construction workers.

The legend recounts how engineers tried in vain to build a railway bridge at the confluence of the rivers Sava and Savinja. Late at night, a young man came to a local pub that was owned by Tone, offering to take over the building and solve the problem. Tone signed a contract for his own soul, and the young man brought in his own workers. These workers were somewhat unusual and were feared by the local population. In order to save his soul, Tone had a statue built of St. John the Steadfast on one river bank and a chapel consecrated to St. Catherine on the other. Then he tied bells to the paws of a cat, urging it across the bridge. Afraid of the noise, the cat plunged across the bridge. The young man, who was really the devil, was furious. He hastened after Tone, but Tone had already hid inside the chapel. When the devil realized that he would be unable take revenge he took off toward Hrastnik. During his progress, he strangled every Croatian worker who was still working on the

railway bridge. People could see the workers fall on the ground and immediately turn black. At the end of the story, the person who published it in *Domači prijatelj* in 1913 under the pen name Radečan, concluded: “This legend is still recounted by people living in the vicinity of Zidani Most. The bridge had been built 75 years ago by Croatian construction workers, who were succumbing to an outbreak of cholera.”<sup>13</sup>

While St. Catherine (November 25) is venerated as helper in necessity, St. John the Steadfast (sv. Janez Nepomuk) is the guardian of the bridges and has his name day on 20 May. His statue stood on many bridges in Central and Western Europe, and on his name day people – especially in Prague – floated lights on the river Vltava. In Slovenia, in the small town of Kropa in Upper Carniola, a special children’s battle game was performed on his name day. The children hid, each at their end of the bridge, and when a friend from the other end of the bridge came along, they attacked him (Kuret I/ 1965, 321). This children’s game might have previously been an old custom connected with the importance the bridges had for society.

Due to its explanatory character and the fact that it has been linked to an actual location, in this case a bridge, the legend has been preserved to the present. The person who had recorded it on paper added that it was perceived as a myth – and therefore fictitious. However, his remark that during the bridge’s construction the Croatian workers were succumbing to cholera indicates that he believed that there was some truth in the story. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people clearly no longer believed that the devil could build a bridge; in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, they might have still believed that there was a diabolic element to its construction. The story has been placed within the context and circumstances around 1838 when the bridge was presumably built. This was the period in which even a train and its engine were perceived as extraordinary, let alone the demanding construction of a railway bridge. Combining reality with fiction, the story has a similar character and could have been a contemporary story from the period prior to the First World War.

One of the characteristic features of contemporary stories may be the perpetuation of old patterns. In the case of the railway bridge, the pattern has been preserved.

### c.) **The Legend of St. Wolfgang** (Wolfram, Volbenk, Bolfenk)

Legends about St. Wolfgang (Wolfram, Volbenk, Bolfenk) building a church that is torn down by the devil each night are widespread in Slovenia, particularly in Central Europe. At last the saint and the devil make a contract and the devil is promised the soul of the first pilgrim who enters the newly-built church. St. Wolfgang, was born approximately in 934 in Germany; his name day is on 31 October. The apocryphal legends and old stories describe him as a saint who is building a church. He makes a contract with the devil but tricks him by foisting upon the deuce an animal, thus saving an innocent soul from his talons. The animal, which has no soul, is usually a wolf or a dog, sometimes also a cat, a rooster, a pig, or a billy goat. In such legends the protagonist is usually St. Wolfgang, but may be replaced either by St. Cado (Moser-Rath 1978, 839), or in Scandinavia by St. Olof (Boberg 1955, 11–14).

<sup>13</sup> *Domači prijatelj* 10/9, September 1, 1913, pp. 275–277.

The legend about St. Wolfgang was first mentioned in the Early Middle Ages. According to the legend, the devil, posing as the master mason, offered to assist the saint in the building of a castle for Frisian King Radbod (Boberg 1955, 4). Spreading throughout Europe, this variant also reached Slovenia where he was also known as St. Bolfenk or St. Volbenk

In Slovenia the legend of St. Wolfgang was first published by a Capuchin monk Oče Rogerij/Pater Rogerij (born in 1667 in Ljubljana as Mihael Krammer) in his *Palmarium* (II/1743, p. 414). Already in his presentation of this legend all the main motifs were included. Even the motif about determination of the location of the church, which was determined by St. Wolfgang throwing a small axe or a hatchet, and on the spot where it fell – in the valley by the lake 'Abersee' –, he started to construct a church for Mother Mary and St. John the Baptist. He situated the foundations on the rock, and the devil offered to help him build the church for the first pilgrim, who was – with God's help – the wolf. Pater Rogerij was in this sermon influenced especially by German written sources, from the Austrian borders.

One of the Slovenian variants of this tale, published by Anton Kosi in 1891, *Cerkev sv. Bolfenka na Pohorju* (The Church of St. Bolfenk in Pohorje) narrates about St. Bolfenk who, holding a stick in one hand and an axe in the other, was looking for a suitable spot in Pohorje on which he could build a church. After he had found the location he thrust his axe into a nearby birch tree. The devil comes by, offering to build the church in return for the first pilgrim who comes to the church. St. Bolfenk suddenly hears a voice from heavens telling him to accept the devil's offer, for the first pilgrim to come to the church will have no soul. After a multitude of devils had finished building the church, a wolf, carrying a lamb in his mouth, enters it. St. Bolfenk takes away the lamb and leaves the wolf for the devil. The enraged devil demolishes a part of the church wall, which can still be seen today (Kosi 1891, 20–21).

The folk song about St. Volbenk who tricked the devil was written down by A. Jeglič in the vicinity of Begunje in Gorenjska and later published by Karel Štrekelj. It contains all of the essential motifs about St. Wolfgang that were already included in pater Rogerij's *Palmarium*.

*St. Volbenk Tricks the Deuce*

*"Volbenk, fling your axe!  
This is where we shall build the church".*

*Volbenk threw the axe,  
And on that spot they began to build the church.  
But what they had built during the day  
Was demolished at night  
By the defiant Deuce.  
One day, the deuce passes by,  
Terribly mocking the masons.  
"Help us build this church  
And you shall get the first pilgrim!"  
Once the church is finished  
Volbenk kneels on the floor,*

*Asking the good Lord  
To present him with a pilgrim  
Without a soul.  
As soon as he utters this  
A wolf strolls down the road,  
Holding a stick in his mouth  
And with a haversack around his neck.  
The wolf enters the church  
Where the Deuce lurks behind the altar.  
“I do not want a pilgrim  
Without a soul!”  
“We haggled not over a soul,  
But agreed on the first pilgrim!”*

*The Deuce seizes the wolf  
And behind the altar flies out of the church.  
There still remains a hole.  
Those who believe not  
Should see for themselves. (Štrekelj 1895–1898, no. 630)*

Niko Kuret presumes that the song refers to the church of St. Volbenk in Log in Poljanska Dolina. The song makes a reference to an ancient legal custom, and the reminiscence of it is the motif in which St. Volbenk determines the place in which to build the church by flinging his axe in the desired direction, which signifies that he has claimed that parcel of land. The same motif can be found in the legend about the church situated in the village of Abersee by Lake Wolfgangsee in Upper Austria; the church is believed to have been built by St. Wolfgang during his missionary years in that region (Kuret 1970, 109–111). The determination of the location of the significant building was considered as sacred, just as the determination of a border (Grafenauer 1957b).

In Slovenia there are three subsidiary churches consecrated to St. Volbenk in the diocese of Ljubljana; one parish church and two subsidiaries in the diocese of Levant; and only one subsidiary church, consecrated to St. Bolfenk, in the diocese of Gorizia. Legends about St. Volbenk are widespread particularly in Pohorje (Kuret 1970, p. 111).

In 1914, Pavel Flere published in the collection of folk tales and legends *Babica pripoveduje* (Grandma Tells Stories) a legend with the same title and content as the folk song mentioned above. The legend begins with the same motif of choosing the location for a church by flinging an axe. Identical is also the end in which the furious devil leaves the church by rushing through a wall behind the altar, leaving a gaping hole that is still visible today (Flere 1922, 11–13). These similarities suggest that Flere merely translated the song into prose.

The legend of St. Volbenk was widespread particularly in the North-Eastern part of Slovenia in Pohorje where it was heard also by Paul Schlosser. He published two of its variants in his German collection of legends from Pohorje.

The first one tells of St. Wolfgang who, upon his arrival at Spodnja Štajerska, starts looking throughout Pohorje for the prettiest location for a church. While he is gazing around he hears a voice from

the sky: "If you need help from the devil accept it freely for the first pilgrim shall have no soul." At that moment, a company of small devils appears at the saint's feet, offering their services. Their leader Beelzebub assumes command over the building of the church, demanding as payment the first pilgrim who will set foot in the church. When the church is finished a wolf leaps through the door, carrying a lamb in his mouth. St. Wolfgang takes the lamb but leaves the wolf to the devils. They grab him so quickly that each is left only with a single hair of the wolf's fur. Furious, Beelzebub kicks at the church wall to demolish it, but the church remains standing. Only a gaping hole appears in the wall, and the Devil disappears through it. (Schlosser 1956, 52).

The second variant was written by Schlosser in Unter-Kötsch in Austria:

God wished to get the devil to build a church, promising the first pilgrim as payment. God himself wished to retain the first sacrificial offering. After the church has been completed a wolf came rushing in, holding a captured lamb. God took the lamb from him and the devil was left to run after the wolf. But the wolf was faster and escaped into a wood. (Schloser 1956, pp. 52–53).

The folktale *Bolfenška bajka: Zlodej sezida cerkev* (A Belief Legend about Bolfenk: The Devil Builds a Church) published by Jože Tomažič, refers to a small church in Pohorje that is consecrated to St. Bolfenk.

A hermit named Bolfenk starts to build a church but the devil, disguised as the Green Hunter (Wild Hunter), demolishes it every night. This occurs repeatedly until the hermit and the devil make a contract. A multitude of green devils set to work. When the church is completed the devil and Bolfenk the hermit hide behind the altar, waiting for the first pilgrim. They have to wait for a long time. At last, a wolf appears at the threshold. Enraged, the devil rushes through a wall. That hole had remained behind the altar for centuries. (Tomažič 1943, 103–112).



Figure 6: The church of St. Bolfenk in Northern Pohorje (J. Tomažič, *Pohorske bajke* 1943, 103, 111, illustration by Jože Beranek).

In this legend – as we can see – the etiological motif about the hole in the church is included.

Not all legends about St. Wolfgang belong to the type AaTh/ATU 1191. A legend from Pohorje about St. Wolfgang – “St. Bolfenk and Areh” (*Sveti Bolfenk in Areh*), published by Josip Brinar (Brinar 1933, 5-11), does not feature the devil that helped to build a church. Instead, it recounts how St. Bolfenk charmed a spring from a rock for the Bavarian Duke Heinrich (Areh in Slovene). At this spot, Heinrich built a church in which a monument to its founder, St. Areh, was erected years later.

It is interesting that in Slovenian folklore St. Areh (St. Heinrich – the duke whose teacher was St. Wolfgang, the bishop of Bamberg) appears in religious legends as the saint who stopped the dragon – dwelling in the lake – from causing the flood. The dragon finally had to move away from this location (Šmitek 2010, 28, no. 22). The connection of St. Wolfgang and St. Areh in Slovenian folklore seems to have deeper roots at the level of protection of churches, bridges or souls against the evil.

Likewise, the legend about Volbenk’s souls, published by Venceslav Vinkler (Vrtec 1936–37, 38–39), does not depict the building of a church. It tells how St. Volbenk forced the devil to release three souls from hell. The tale takes place in a snowy landscape situated between the churches in Volčje and in Tara. Wading through deep snow in the middle of a severe winter, the devil meets St. Volbenk on skis. Wanting a pair of skis for himself, the devil makes a wish. But he is careless, and a blacksmith fastens the skis onto his feet too tightly. Forced to ask the saint for help, the devil is compelled to relinquish the souls of three sinners from St. Volbenk’s parish.

All subtypes of the legends about a supernatural constructor: Mythological masons (2, 3, 4b), The Sacrifice on the Bridge (2, 3, 4b [6b]) and St. Wolfgang’s legend ([1], 2, 3, 4b, [6b]) contain most of the allomotifs which form the structure also in the folk narrative and song tradition about the human building sacrifice. But they do not contain the motif about immuring of the human sacrifice, they just narrate about the promised soul or other reward. This makes the main difference from the former, and we can hardly believe that they were ever considered to be true, which means that at the time of their formation they were either myths, saint’s and sacral legends or aethiological legends. And yet they could fit into the same pattern **establishing the connection with the world beyond and gaining the benevolence of the supernatural forces by sacrificing an animal or by destroying the supernatural mason.**

### III. “Fixing the Flue” – Contemporary Construction Legends

A similar “building archetype”, namely the motif of immuring an object into a newly-constructed building, can be found in modern urban or contemporary legends as well. A lexicon of urban legends contains a modern story with the same motif, but in a very different context. In his book “House”, Tracy Kidder mentions that the masons, concerned that they might not be paid, mortared a glass pane into a chimney.<sup>14</sup> This was spread around the U.S.A. as a modern story entitled “Fixing the Flue”, and has been transformed into the modern legend.

<sup>14</sup> Tracy Kidder, *House*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1985.

The story mentions how a mason, concerned that he will not receive adequate payment for his work, mortars a glass pane in a chimney of the house under construction. The pane blocks the flue, and when the house owner re-summons the mason, complaining that smoke leaks through the fireplace, the mason promises to “fix” the problem as soon as he has received back payment for the building of the chimney. When the client finally pays him the mason simply releases a brick through the pane, breaking the glass and thus “fixing” the problem. (Brunvand 2002, 152–153).

The motif about immuring of an object into a newly constructed building element is much more prosaic than in the lore of the past. Yet in spite of its credibility it may not have been true. Whether we believe it or not depends on the way the story has been conveyed to the listener or the reader. Similar stories have been also recounted in Bela Krajina in Slovenia, and the masons themselves tell them, which means that these legends were probably true. As we can see, this contemporary legend was originally true, just as many other contemporary rumors which circulate today in Slovenia, due to the crisis of some Slovenian construction companies.

The origin of these stories is realistic, but in the process of spreading them around they may lose their plausibility. Yet if we compare these legends with the former types, it is clear that contemporary legends do not even have the same structure, nor meaning, and that they are based on entirely economic motivations.

### **Fiction and Tradition in Construction Legends**

If we define myths as prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past (Bascom 1965, 4), this means that ancient civilizations and peoples living prior to the Late Middle Ages believed in myths, belief tales, legends and epic songs recounted in their milieu. They generally perceived them as an integral part of their history, shrouded in the mist of the supernatural.

In the Renaissance, the focus of interest shifted from the transcendental and the supernatural to the human. Instead of ancient beliefs, human beings became the primary criterion in the world that became oriented toward knowledge and the secular. This in turn resulted in a very different perception of tales and legends, which gradually became designated as fabricated and fictitious. Folk tales in particular were eventually perceived as literature for children or amusing stories for adults. In spite of this general tendency, people still believed in certain myths, belief tales, and legends about supernatural apparitions and mythical beings. This is indicated in the sermons, chronicles, historical books, and in other literature from the Renaissance and the age of Enlightenment. According to Jack Zipes, it is no longer possible to distinguish between folk tales and literary fairy tales, nor is it possible to discern whether they have roots in an imaginary world or are symbolic representations of actual past events and circumstances. They are simply perceived as fabricated stories with no relation to a society or historical tradition (Zipes 1992, 4).

The process of gradual disbelief in the lore intensified during these periods, and continued to the present. However, in the present time of cybernetics and advanced technology we bear witness to the birth of new stories and tales. They are inspired by modern literature, circumstances, unusual events and phenomena that have aroused people's curiosity and fantasy. The plausibility of a tale clearly depends more on its content than its gen-

re. Certain themes seem more believable than others, which is why they have preserved their “authenticity” to the present. On the other hand, credibility depends more upon the narrator and the narrative practice (Fine 1995, 2005; Schneider, p. 143). Among the motifs that are deeply rooted in the past, but have nevertheless managed to preserve their plausibility and credibility, are certainly stories about ghosts and witches (Röhrich 1987, 1281). It is also true that in order to be perceived as authentic, the motifs of such stories have to adapt to the times and change correspondingly. Certain supernatural concepts are more acceptable for certain groups of people and correspond more to their belief concepts. As a result of these differences, people constantly create variants of such tales (Boyer 2000).

Old customs and beliefs related to construction and the building process have thus found their place in folk tales – not only in belief tales but also in fairy tales and songs. Modern issues connected with construction are reflected in urban legends and contemporary stories, even though it seems that these stories started to disappear simultaneously with the decrease of their plausibility and the credibility that may have been preserved because of their connection with a certain social praxis or location (this is true primarily of etiological tales), or because of their educational or humorous elements. People have added to the content new inspirations and elements that they received over time. With the gradual disappearance of old motifs, with their adaptation to new circumstances, and with their subsequent transformation, new genres and contents appeared. Refreshed and transformed, they seemed to be more plausible and were further recounted and distributed in belief tales or contemporary legends.

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## Ljudsko pripovedništvo med fikcijo in tradicijo: "Zazidana žena" in druge zgodbe o gradnji

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Človek je bil od nekdaj razpet med različne naplavine imaginarnega in fiktivnega sveta. Njegovo kulturno, družbeno in naravno okolje mu je sicer nudilo določeno tradicionalno osnovo, ki pa jo je nenehno nadgrajeval z novimi vplivi. Dovolj nazorno se to odraža v ljudskih pripovedih in pesmih o gradnji pomembnih objektov, kjer lahko zasledimo najrazličnejše usedline in sestavine različnega izvora.

Gradnja pomembnih objektov je bila včasih povezana s človeško stavbno daritvijo, podobno kakor tudi mejniki ali bregovi rek. Posebno mesto v okviru tovrstnih pripovedi zasedajo pripovedi in pesmi, ki opevajo izjemno tragiko človeške žrtve – pogosto žene, otroka, dvojčkov – ki je bila vzdana v temelje novogradnje. Sloveča je epska pesnitev o zidanju mesta Skadar, prav tako romunska ljudska balada „Mojster Manola“, ki opeva gradnjo samostana v Argesu, enako tudi grški opevani most na Arti. Tovrstna epika je bila zelo razširjena v prvi vrsti na Balkanskem polotoku: v Grčiji, Albaniji, Bolgariji, Romuniji (kjer so tudi aromunske in ciganske variante), Makedoniji, Srbiji, Črni gori, Bosni in Hercegovini ter na Hrvaškem. Poznana pa je tudi na Madžarskem, v Mordviniji, na Kavkazu in v Gruziji ter v Turčiji in Aziji – predvsem v Indiji. Natančno je do tedaj znano izročilo predstavil madžarski folklorist Lajos Vargyas (1960), pozneje tudi romunski raziskovalec Ion Taloş. Mircea Eliade je v tej baladi videl povezavo z romunskim kozmogonskim mitom, ki predpostavlja, da je svet nastal iz ženskega telesa. Med številnimi razlagami je Alan Dundes podal feministično in psihoanalistično interpretacijo te balade. Vendar pa je bila doslej premalo poudarjena povezava med ritualnimi praksami, ob katerih je bila ta pesem peta. Premalo upoštevana so bila tudi verovanja, povezana z žrtvovanjem htonskim in vodnim boštvom in obredne dejavnosti, s katerimi so ljudje na mikronivoju svoje skupnosti skušali poustvariti kozmično strukturo sveta in vzpostaviti red. Prav to nam danes narekuje drugačno razlago, ki temelji na povezavi tega motiva z obredji, povezanimi z rodovitnostjo in vzpostavljanjem povezave med tem svetom in svetom onkraj našega zemeljskega bivanja.

V članku so predstavljene in analizirane tudi druge ljudske pripovedi in pesmi o gradnji pomembnih objektov, ki pripovedujejo o določanju meja in postavljanju mejnega kamna; prav tako tudi izročila, kjer nastopajo nadnaravni graditelji, kot so velikani, vile, palčki in druga bajeslovna bitja, ki jih je s krščanstvom nadomestil vrag, zlasti v pripovednem tipu »Žrtev na mostu« AaTh/ATU 1191. Prav tako so analizirane tudi apokrifne legende in legendne pesmi o sv. Volfganku (sv. Cado oz. sv. Olof), ki ukane vruga, potem ko mu sezida cerkev.

Kljub veliki razliki med izročilom o zazidani ženi, otrocih ali žrtvi graditelja in med izročilom o nadnaravnih graditljih, obstaja med njimi vendarle skupna ideja o žrtvi, ki vzpostavi vez med tem in onim svetom in s tem vzpostavi naklonjenost onstranstva ter naravni red.

Predstavljene so tudi sodobne zgodbe in urbane legende o zazidavi predmetov v novogradnjo, ki pa nimajo več simbolične sporočilnosti, pač pa so trdno zasidrane v sodobnem svetu.