

Folk Story of a Person, Walled-in as a Sacrifice

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Abstract

Human sacrifice was an accepted practice for everyone in the world. And as the history progressed, this religious belief gradually became a legend connected to various architectural monuments. Therefore, one can say with certainty that similar conditions have created similar stories.

The Georgian Legend is different and distinctive. This legend originates from Georgian soil, in local conditions, but these conditions were similar to the conditions in other countries, which arises visual similarities between the story in the Georgian legends and other nations.

Keywords: Ballad, folk, sacrifice

Introduction

The story of a sacrifice walled-in in a fortress (church, bridge or city) is widely known in the folklores of many people in the world. It belongs to the “wandering” stories and is spread worldwide.

Several folklorists in Georgia as well as abroad were attracted to the story of construction sacrifice. Different peoples’ creations, whether its poetry, music or other, have become very much alike. Partly, it is because the nations coexisted close to one other since ancient times.

In Georgia, the most ancient are those versions of the legend about Surami Fortress, which remain as the fragments of a ballad. In the first fragment, there is a dialogue of a mother with a child, while the latter is in the process of being walled-in:

“Surami Fortress, I saw you with desire,
My Zurab is there, please, keep him well”

In the second version, mother asks the fortress:
“What have you done to my child Zurab? Keep him well!”

I will bring water in a vessel, please, let him wash his face,
Do not give him the barley bread, keep him on pure bread.”

I. The Search for Objectivity

Surami Fortress Legend

There is a prose version of Surami Fortress Legend. Its short version is as follows: David the Builder (sometimes Vakhtang Gorgasali) was trying to build the Surami Fortress but the walls were falling down every time they were built. The Seer told the builders: If you want to build the Fortress, the only child of a mother should be wall-in. Zurab, the only son of his mother had volunteered to sacrifice himself and asked to be walled-in. They started to build and when Zurab was almost covered with the mortar, the Seer ordered to release him. “The homeland of such sons does not need the fortresses” - he said (Chonkadze, 1932, p. 98). This version must be from the time, when patriotic spirit prevailed, despite the pressure from the multiple conquerors.

The tails from different parts of Georgia similar to Surami Fortress Legend are quite interesting.

In Racha, Minda Fortress dominates the small rocky mountain. According to the legend about this fortress, the builders kept trying to construct the walls, but unsuccessfully, until they have walled-in a little boy. The boy’s surname was Mindeli, from which derives the name of the fortress.

According to the Imeretian Tale, construction of Khoni Church had ended with similar tragic result. The same tales exist in Kakheti, Samegrelo and Abkhazia. The Legend of construction sacrifice has not become subject to the discussion of Georgian researchers and writers yet.

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In 1887, the Letter "Science News" was published under the Pseudonym Don Iago in the Newspaper "Iveria". The author believes that Surami Fortress tragedy had really happened and that Zurab is the real hero (Newspaper Iveria, 1887). Don Iago not only mentions the legend, he tells us in details about the analogical tales spread among the world's different people and tries to perform the scientific research about them but he is not interested at all in the originality of the story about the sacrifice of construction.

The Hungarian Researcher, Laiosh Vardash has published in Budapest an extensive work in German Language: "The Origin of Hungarian Ballad about the Walled-in Woman" (Laios Varguas, S.1). The author had diligently studied the legends spread around the world on this issue. He believes that the legend was spread from the West to the East.

According to L. Vardash's opinion, the story of construction sacrifice had emerged in Hungary first and Georgians have borrowed it earlier than others.

The Researcher Vakhtang Kotetishvili (Soviet Art, 1936) has dedicated a special letter to the story of walled-in sacrifice. He has included more parallels to the legend and has written about the ancient customs of the people. Similar, to the above-mentioned Don Iago, he has searched for the origin of the legend in objective reality. Kotetishvili has raised the issue about the relation between the stories according to their origin and tried to find the place of Surami Fortress Legend among them. In this regard, the Prof. M. Chikovani's Letter "When Georgian, Serbian and Hungarian Epics Come Across" (Bulletin of Georgian SSR Academy of Sciences, 1955) was a new step forward.

The Researcher has opposed the Serbian, Hungarian and Albanian folk ballads on construction sacrifice to the respective Georgian traditions and strongly concluded that our legend has outgrown locally.

L. Vardash has compared the Hungarian Ballad with the Georgian Tale and found the following similarities. 1. The wall construction; 2. Built at day time, falls apart at night-time; 3. The sacrifice is gradually walled-in; 4. Dialogue with the victim in the process of building him in; 5. In the place, where victim was built in, the wall becomes wet (water is leaking).

According to the author, the dialogue with the victim while gradually walling him in is the most developed and constantly rotating detail in Georgian legend. In this regard, he names similar German legend, where during the construction of Castle Libernshtain building walls became impossible, finally they were forced to buy a child from a mother and wall him in.

The boy was given sweet biscuits, while being built in. He was eating sweets and calling his parent: "Mother, I still see you ..." later: "Mother, I can hardly see you ..." and when the last stone was laid, he cried out: "Mother, I can see you no more!"

According to L. Vardash's opinion, there is no doubt about the connection between the Georgian and German Legends;

- Zurab, son, till where?

- Oh, Mother, till my leg!

- Zurab, son, till where?

- Oh, Mother, till my knee!

- Zurab, son, till where?

- Oh, Mother, it is the end of me! (Chonkadze, 1932, p. 98).

The Researcher has drawn a parallel between Georgian Legend and German Story, to conclude that: "Common ancient European tradition lives in both stories" (Laios Varguas, p. 25).

The author has confessed that the fragments of Georgian Ballad are far more archaic than the Hungarian Ballad. Indeed, many facts point to this story existing in Georgia's remote past. Firstly, the legend is connected to the names of Vakhtang Gorgasali, D. Aghmashenebeli and G. Amilakhvari. Secondly, the buildings vary in different tales of the legend: some say it is the construction of Surami Fortress, others say it is the Minda Fortress, Signaghi Fortress, Church of Khoni (believed to be built in IV century AD), or the Kelasuri Wall, the construction of which is attributed to Romans.

In olden times, Surami had a big strategic significance because it is situated on the border between Kartli and Imereti. During David Aghmashenebeli's reign, this was the residence of Kartli nobles - Surameli. According to Historian Sh. Meskhi, at that time "it is possible that there used to be a city here, in the later centuries there are many clues pointing to Surami being a small town" (Zakaraia, 1960, p. 20).

The ancient Georgian Tribes used to worship the "Place's Mother" and the "House Angel", and they would offer sacrifices to these deities, the translation of the Antioch Church World Assembly monument writing (Javakhishvili, 1960, p. 65) provides us with interesting statements regarding this.

At a certain stage of humanity's development, the human sacrifice was substituted with animal offerings, and then gradually animals were replaced by the objects. This change is reflected in the Biblical Story of Abraham and Isaac. As Abraham was poised to slay his son, he heard the God's voice, which told him to sacrifice a sheep instead of Isaac. For us, Leonti Mroveli considers the catalyst of this change to be King Revi. He writes: "During his reign as king, in Kartli he no longer forgave those, who would sacrifice a serf as they would before, and he decreed that cows and sheep would be used instead, for this he was named Rev the Just" (Life in Kartli, 1955, p. 58).

II. Conclusion

At one point or the other, the human sacrifice was an accepted practice for everyone in the world. And as the history progressed, this religious belief gradually became a legend connected to various architectural monuments. Therefore, we can say with certainty that such reports were produced under similar conditions. In some cases, we can not exclude mutual influence, when being introduced to the ballads of different nations worldwide. They are quite close and kinship is noticeable. Possibly, they have the same root, but this root is hard to find as it has already gone under the influence of artistically perfect ballads. As for the Georgian Legend, it is a different and distinctive. This legend originates from Georgian soil, in local conditions, but these conditions were similar to the conditions in other countries, which arises visual

similarities between the story in the Georgian legends and other nations.

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