

Representations of the Tree of Life in Ancestors' Symbolics

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Abstract: *From time immemorial, our predecessors have projected an entire series of symbols on trees, so that through them, man can become part of what is sacred, thus being able to absorb a speck of the sacred. Therefore, elements of the sacred are identified in a series of established trees. The tree's roots travel in the hypogeal world, the trunk takes part at the terrestrial life, while the branches raise towards the sky, thus forming a ladder which can be climbed by the man who escapes the mundane present and enters the other world. The three fundamental phases from human existence: birth, marriage and funeral are similar to the three component parts of the tree, but in the same time, they are also marked by the presence of the Tree during the three ceremonies: at birth, wedding and funeral.*

The cosmic tree is always situated in a sacred space, we may either refer to the sky tree or the life tree with its substitutes – the tree of birth, of wedding, fertility, of judgement, funeral, or we may have in view the place where the column of the sky is erected with its substitutes – the buttresses of life, the columns of judgement, preventive pales, but also the simulacra of the sky column – the countryside troiță¹, road columns, grave columns.

Even nowadays, there are various sacred connections established by human beings for different trees: the apple tree is of life and wisdom, dominating the landscape from Paradise, the sycamore maple is the one used for making the semantron and the maple is the tree with a divine valence, the fir is the double of human life, the grapevine is a symbol of immortality, the May Tree or the maypole watches over and protects the household from evil forces, the pine cone is an expression of the world renewal.

Our ancestors connected their faith to trees that were their church and body and they also hoped that, when they would die, the tree would be the bridge that would make the transition towards the Other World.

There are many and varied ways of expression of this symbol and there are numberless its codes. The artist from ancient times and even the nowadays

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¹ *Troiță* = the Romanian term for the Orthodox cross made of wood or stone, usually placed at crossroads, in the neighborhood of weels and in special placed, where events took place (sometimes, the cross is embellished with paintings, sculptures, engravings and it is accompanied by a small construction).

peasant differently represent the Tree of Life, depending on the context, but there are also multiple ways of exhibiting; still, its essence has remained sacred and not altered.

Keywords: *the cosmic tree, the heavenly tree, the tree of life, the column of the sky, the grapevine, the fir tree, the apple, the sycamore tree.*

The Tree of Life

Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov makes a very clear distinction between two types of trees that existed before man's fall from Paradise, they do not represent two vegetal types, but two conscience states. **The Tree of Life** is the central unit where there is no good and evil, while **The Tree of Knowledge of the Good and the Evil** represents the polarity where the good and the bad are alternative, the days and the nights, happiness and sorrow. The forbiddenness to eat from The Tree of Knowledge was, in fact, a protection that assured the transition of the human being from one's fluid matter to an opaque matter. Once the apple eaten, Adam and Eve felt they were no longer wrapped in light clothes and they flushed. They continued to live, but they were dead regarding a superior state of conscience. Kabbalah presents us the seven forms of the Earth – from a dense matter to a subtle form, the last one also being the area where Adam and Eve were expelled from. In this ethereal plan is the Tree of Life and now, it represents an energy coming from the Sun and feeding people.

The Tree of Knowledge of the Good and the Evil is the symbol for an astringent current which passes through Paradise, but which is connected to the root of things, the plan of material creation and even of the underground world of metals, crystals and fire. By eating the fruit of this Tree, human beings have changed their consistency and they started to become opaque, dense, thick and dark.

The snake which interceded this transfer is a dual element which is positive in its superior part, if it is impregnated with light and is negative in its inferior part if it is impregnated with negative thoughts. It impregnates the entire universe and transmits good and bad exhalations. Being seduced by Lilith and Samael, two of the entities that lived inside the snake, Adam and Eve chose to explore matter, leaving behind light, beauty, warmth, liberty. This is the source of the endless desire of the soul to return to the lost Paradise and the permanent quest to recompose even a fragment of it, in a dense matter. When the human being raises towards a high goal, one connects with The Tree of Life which is a centre of energy situated above the notion of good and evil.

The roots of the tree go deep into the underground world, the trunk is part of the terrestrial life, while the branches go up towards the sky, thus forming a ladder which can be climbed by the human being which leaves the terrestrial present and enters the other world.

The cosmic tree becomes the axis around which the entire universe is built. Its protrusion from the Primordial Waters and its appearance from chaos

also brings to light the elements which will be used for the entire construction of the Cosmos. This essential role will offer to the Tree a polyvalency of functions and attributes that will be transferred to the *pir* and to all its substitutes

The cross does not annihilate this symbolics, the tree on the grave is also connected with the sacred tree associated to the passions and the Christian Resurrection. The cross replaces the Cosmic Tree that grows from the centre of the Earth towards the sky, being part of the Universe, having a strong bond with everything that exists in this world. The Redemption of Christ on the cross was made from the Tree of Good and Evil and it does not annihilate the pre-Christian value of the Tree of the World, but it reinterprets it and expands it.

The Cosmic Tree includes the entire cosmos with the principles of life, existence, immortality. It is a representation of life and of the cosmos in a vegetal form. The Cosmic Tree was the basis of ancient universal mythologies symbolizing the creation in movement, meaning the condition of continuous transformation. It is visually represented having the roots in the ground and the tree crown surrounded by stars and celestial bodies. As we have already mentioned, the Cross superposed on this mythical concept as a symbol of the centre of the world. Christianity considers that the entire universe was redeemed through the cross – regenerated, renewed.

„Sus în vârful muntelui/ crește bradul brazilor,/ de mare și înfoiat/ tot ceru l-a îmbrădat,/ soarele în cetini,/ luna între ramuri,/ mii și mii de stele/ între rămurele” [“Up there, on top of the mountain/ the fir of all firs grows./ It’s so big and puffed/ that the entire sky is covered by it,/ the sky in its branches,/ the moon between the savins,/ thousands and thousands of stars/ between its twigs”].²

The Celestial Tree is the element of connection between the Cosmic Tree and the Tree of Life and it represents the terrestrial power, a simulacrum of the column which supports the celestial arch. It can be considered a reduced form of the Cosmic Tree. One of its functions is to hold the celestial arch. It acts ascendently and descendently on three plans: the celestial plan in the world of divinity, the earthly plan in the world of humans and the subterranean plan in the world of demons.

„Sus la munte ce-mi vedere?/ Leru-i Doamne,/ îmi vedere-ncetinat/ brad cu stele încărcat,/ brad cu neguri îmbrăcat;/ și în vârful-i ce-mi vedere?/ Cerul leagăn de mătase,/ dar în leagăn cine-mi șade?/ Șade Luna sfântă/ și cu bradul precuvântă” [“Up, in the mountains, what do I see?/ God, oh, God/ I can see a fir/ a fir filled with stars/ a fir all dressed in fog;/ and what do I see on top of it?/ The sky is a silk cradle,/ but who is sitting in the cradle?/ It is the holy Moon/ and it talks to the fir”]³

² Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologie română [Romanian Mythology]*, The Publishing House of the Academy of RSR, Bucharest, 1987, p. 485.

³ *Ibidem.*

The Tree of Life closes this circle and it represents the connection between divinity and the terrestrial plan of the human being as a bridge. It embodies continuity, immortality, the idea of youth without old age and life without death, the symbol of terrestrial fertility. Since Neolithic times, it has been represented through an undefined plant, ageless and genderless or by a miraculous plant which cures all illnesses. The fruits of this plant are made of gold, silver, they make people look younger, they illuminate, they make people return from the dead (the golden apples, the garden of the Hesperides, the garden of the Biblical Paradise).

„Junelui bun,/ cică-n dalb de răsărit/ răsare un soare strălucit./ Da nu-i soare strălucit,/ Ci-i un pom mândru-nflorit”. [“To the young good man,/ at the beginning of sunrise/ appears a shiny sun./ But it is not a shiny sun,/ But a beautiful blossomed tree.”]⁴

„Mircea Eliade, în Tratatul de istorie a religiilor, arată că simbolul arborelui sacru este polimorf: arbore-imagie a cosmosului, arbore-teofanie cosmică, arbore-simbol al vieții, arbore-centru al lumii și susținător al Universului”. [“Mircea Eliade, in his Patterns of Comparative Religions, shows that the symbol of the sacred tree is polymorphic: the tree-image of the cosmos, the tree-cosmic theophany, the tree-symbol of life, the tree -centre of the world and the one which supports the Universe.”]⁵

There is an association between the Tree of Life and the Mother-Goddess (woman-soil-plant) on some fibulae found in Romania and in its proximity. Regarding Altaic people, there is the belief that the Mother-Goddess is at the basis of the Tree of Life which has seven branches, interpreted as a metaphor of the seven known skies from Romanian mythology, skies that need to be pervaded by the dead, an allusion to the seven planets known in that period and to the seven temples from Sarmisegetuza and to the seven bodies of the Earth that are mentioned by Kabbalah.

Our ancestors believed in fairies, young girls that did not know old age, maidens born from flowers, deities of fertility and fecundity that were represented in their art as half woman, half plant, a migration of the Great Goddess from the Neolithic to the plant-woman of the Thracian world.

⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵ Adrian Petringenaru, *Imagine și simbol la Brâncuși [Image and Symbol regarding Brâncuși]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, p. 102.



Fig. 1 The Tree of Life and the Mother Goddess on a bronze fibula, Middle of the 6th century- middle of the 7th century A.C., Ungheni, Argeş, The Museum of Argeş County, Piteşti

Mircea Eliade in *Patterns of Comparative Religions* tells us that the universe with its entire creation has vegetal roots, thus: the cosmos is symbolized through a tree; the divinity manifests His presence dendromorphously. The divinity reveals Himself in the cosmos under the shape of a tree, being in the same time the spring of regeneration and of «life without death», a spring towards which the human being goes and puts one trust concerning one's immortality; fecundity, abundance, luck, health – or, at a higher level, immortality or eternal youth – they are concentrated in herbage or trees; humanity or race derive from a vegetal species; human life seeks refuge in vegetal forms when it is interrupted, by wickedness, before the proper time; in a word, everything that is, everything that is alive and creator, continuously regenerating oneself, is expressed through vegetal symbols.

Restarting the processes that made possible the appearance of the first signs of life (reawakening, revival, rebirth) is possible by *the hero's receding into the tree* (as a principle of light, reason, vital energies), according to C. Prut in *Calea rătăcită [The Lost Path]*. The hero's regression into a tree is kept up to the end of the medieval period. We find practices in the area of Moldavia where, if a young man dies and his body is not found, in his place a tree is buried, dressed in that young man's clothes. In other areas, a tree is planted on the grave or, at the burial process, it is brought a tree that is the substance of life and it makes possible the transfer between worlds.

The way towards redemption is difficult towards the Tree of Life which is in an inaccessible place and it is guarded by two monsters – *griffins*. Immortality is very hard to obtain, after an entire series of hardships and after the man confronts and kills the two monsters which are a quintessence of the three elements: air, fire and earth. The gold of Apollo from Scythia and the crater of Dionysos were guarded by snakes, they are present in all cultures when it is about a "centre" only to be accessed by the initiated. All trees represent the universe in its perpetual regeneration, but in its centre, the centre of the World, it is situated the Tree of Eternal Life or of Knowledge. The Great Goddess is the personification of the spring of creation which is always full of water, it is the "centre of the world" where the spring of Life is, of youth and immortality.

The griffins are symbolic representations frequent during ancient times. The fight between the griffins and the herbivore is a very much used theme, the griffins are the terrifying guardians of the treasures that are guarded with great ferocity. On the bronze matrix found in Sarmisegetuza, there are griffins with heads of lion, wolf and vulture, on the golden coin from Băiceni-Iași there are two griffins having wings and horse bodies, guarding the Tree of Life or griffins which appear on burial stones. Near the Tree of Life which also has solar elements, the griffins suggest the hope of renaissance in a better world, governed by solar forces. When the king wore the helmet with the Tree of Life guarded by griffins, he became a correspondent of universal order here, on earth, having the tree included, it could bring the divine order into the perfect man. He could become a messenger between the terrestrial and the divine plan for his followers, thus offering them access to the soul's immortality when they died.

In old legends, griffins had their homeland in the country of the hyperboreans, they guarded the gold of the Arimaspi. According to N. Densușianu, from Hyperborea, gifts of gold were sent to the sanctuaries from Greece where celebration were held, honouring Apollo the Hyperborean. He travels to sanctuaries dedicated to him being on the back of a griffin.

Griffins are also present in the Christian church, in many representations inside the church and, what is more, they have become the symbol of Jesus, having a double human and divine genesis.

Griffins become symbols also present on the heraldry of many noble families.



Fig. 2 Griffins on the blazon of Moldavia (detail), the tower of the bell tower, The Church Three Hierarchs, Iași

The representation of the Great Goddess as half goddess half the Tree of Life having a palmette shape had a large spreading in the Danube area for more than 1000 years. Other representations of the pair the Great Goddess - The Tree of Life are cosmological symbols and heraldic animals: the bucranium-uterus, swastica, fir, palmette, birds' heads, vultures, the petal rosetta.

Another representation of the *Tree of Life* can be seen in the pair of the **V of the Great Goddess** centrally placed and the **bucranium-uterus** present in pair on each side, symbols that can also be found on a series of Neolithic statues, votive sanctuaries and Geto-Dacian objects. Since Neolithic times, a very suggestive representation of the Tree of Life has reached our times, it has suffered very few changes in time, being alto taken over by the Geto-Dacian and later on, by the Romanian traditional repertoire.

Cristian Pintilie makes a demonstration of the evolution of the Tree of Life from Neolithic up to nowadays, he remarked the presence of some elements that have been perpetuated, their essence was not changed and their form was slightly modified. The association between the symbols of regeneration, the **V** of the Bird Goddess and the **bucranium-uterus** already formed the Tree of Life in the Neolithic period. In parallel, it was used the group formed out of the three symbols – the **V** of the Great Goddess, the **comb** -a running water and the **Column** – the connection of the Sky with the Earth.

The **V** of the *Great Goddess* is a sign derived from the pubian triangle, an initiation symbol, a symbol of Divinity; the **axis**-the mast of the world is Axis Mundi, the centre that unites the sky with the earth and makes a connection with Divinity; the **bucranium-uterus**, represented as two opposing banderoles, refers to the uterus, the branched curled yarns represent the vegetal expression of immortality; the **comb**-brush is a symbol of vulva, of running

water, being a symbol of abundance; water is non-manifestation, sprouts, latency, the elixir of deathlessness, the creative force.

At the beginning of the Bronze Age, they were superposed, thus obtaining a Tree of Life specific to the Danube area. The Tree of Life evolved in the bronze Age up to the form of a palmette – a palm leaf. Serpent-like spirals receive the form of some S-shaped volutes which sometimes multiply, and the comb becomes a triangle or a realistic representation of the root or even a plant, a rhizome.

The Palmette is the Dacian, Getic and Thracian Tree of Life which appears on very many weapons, helmets, spiral-shaped bracelets made of gold and silver, fibulae, phalerae, fittings, pots, spikes.

The palmette from the Carpathian space is frequently met placed between two rolls. Sometimes, the palmettes are represented as being the extension of a ribbon which goes up and down, forming double S-es which cross each other. This type of representation is the symbol of the passing of time, the process of regeneration and obtaining immortality or of continuing one's existence from beyond death. The body sinuously travels on the ribbon of life, among the regenerating-palmette centres which permanently give their fertilizing energy.

Being taken over by the Greeks from the Thracians, Dionysos had ivy and grapevine as his sacred plants, two symbols which were also present on his thyrs -the mace of the god, but also on the maces of the followers who took part in celebrations dedicated to him. The etymology of the name "agatârși" could be suggested by V. Flaccus as *thyrsgetae* – the Gets with thyrs. The bishop crook is a long rod which is part of the hood and the clothes of the Christian high-ranked hierarchs, being a symbol (depending on the ornamental elements, the vegetal motifs and/or snakes) of the authority and wisdom of these people who can shepherd the people.

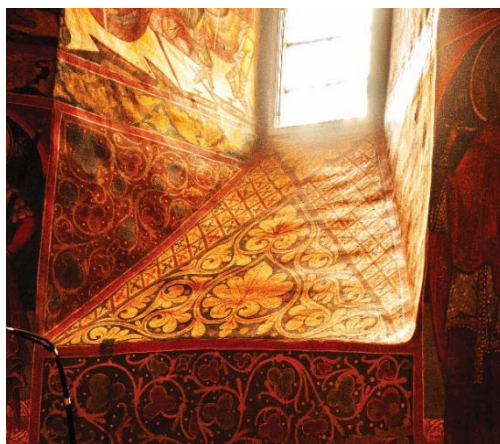


Fig. 3 Palmette on the inner window of Humor Monastery built in 1530

The grapevine is a symbol of immortality, to the same extent that it is the symbol of youth and eternal life, and the Mother Goddess is called at the beginning *Grapevine-Mother* or *Grapevine-Goddess*. Under this representation, we always find, in fact, the prototype of the Tree of Life, situated in the centre or in an out-of-reach world where only the initiated have access.

The Tree-Goddess, the Grapevine-Goddess, surrounded by heraldic animals or cosmological insignias, reveals us the existence of "*the centre of the world*" where the Spring of Life is, of immortality. In the centre of the universe, there is a tree of Eternal Life or of knowledge. The presence of the Goddess is an expression of the existence of life, immortality and sacredness in that "centre".

Ancient and medieval weapons have hefty representations of the Three of Life, because this assures the revivification of the warrior in another body, preserving a permanent connection between the fighter and the Sky and the Earth and the supreme deity Zalmoxis during the battle. According to the Dacians, the more violent one's death during the battle, the more assured one's resurrection was in the Afterlife, also as a warrior. By destroying weapons – the benting ritual – it was envisaged the death of the weapon's spirit, together with his fighter, so that weapons could more easily follow him in the Afterlife.

On the golden helmets from Băiceni and Coțofenești, worn during magical-religious ceremonies, there are representations of ritualic scenes of immortality – the scene of sacrificing a ram, the scene of offering sacrifices and their receiving by winged griffons which guard the Tree of Life, these practices are regarded as sygnifying immortality. The confrontation of the two griffons does not have a physical dimension and it should be regarded as an initiation act. Receiving immortality is represented on the helmet from Băiceni, by representing the two winged griffons which guard the Tree of Life, suggesting the opening of the ways toward immortality and the free access to the spring of youth without old age and life without death. This image reminds us of the fairytale of Harap-Alb who was in search of immortality and he was helped by his winged horse which ate embers. The two helmets which imitate the lambskin transmitted to their subordinates that the people who wore them were initiated king-priests that had the ability to perform the magical-religious rituals for obtaining soul's immortality. The fur of the animal sacrificed for this purpose offers the king-priest an overflow of energetic flux which are necessary for performing this ritual. The cap with golden fur facilitated the dialogue with divinity and offered immortality to royal subordinates even from beyond death. This image of the golden cap infkames our imagination and makes us think about the Argonauts and the golden fleece, but also about the way the Dacians extracted gold from river, by using lambskins that were put perpendicular to the waterflow and gold filaments were kept in the twirls.

Ever since Neolithic times, the Tree of Life is represented having the shape of **columns**, as it is the case of the sanctuary from Căscioarele made of two clay columns that were empty inside and they were over two metres height. The higher column is decorated with the motif of the continuous fugitive spiral. According to archeologists, they were built around a tree trunk that was later removed. Around them, there were more columns that formed something similar to a canopy, which proves that it was a sanctuary destined to the cult of columns. The two painted columns represented the Sun and the Moon, and the seven columns that framed them represented the seven stars that were known at that time.

The Column of the Sky is a more evolved form of the columns, they have been shrines or sanctuaries for a long time and they have reached our present times, but having a lost meaning, a complocation of architecture and a decoration which gives up on magical symbolism and takes over traditional symbolism.

The column which is Y-shaped is the oldest type of Tree of Life. At the beginning, it was a living tree, having its roots deeply fast in the ground, having its crown cut, only two branches that were Y-shaped were left uncut, it is possible that they were the support of a solar symbol. Having the shape of tree columns, we see them at Naviodunum or as Dacian columns on Trajan's Column. The Sky Column has had several shapes in time: *the Y-shaped columns*, discreetly decorated with points, circles, spirals; *the T-shaped columns* (commissural shape) marked by the sun, the moon, the stars; *hominoid columns*, the predecessors of Atlas that was holding up the Earth in his back, decorated with the sun, the moon and the stars; more recently, under the form of *troițe* and of the *disk-shaped columns* having the symbolism of the sun and the moon, later on it was the Christian symbolism. Other mythical symbols scrawled on the columns of the sky, coming from the the Uranian period were *the pole axe and hatchet* symbolizing light, thunder and lightening, these were mythical signs of solar deities. These elements were in most cases associated to consecration horns – representing the bull – a divine animal having a solar order. All these symbols that decorated the column of the sky had the mission to make the place sacred.

„Stâlpurile pe cărare/ Stau cu fața către soare...” [“The columns on the path/ Are facing the sun...”]⁶

„După troița-n picioare/ Cunoști luna când răsare/ Și noaptea cât e de mare” [According to the standing cross/ You know when the moon rises/ And how big the night is”]⁷

⁶ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1972, p. 186, inf. teren, Mureș, 1936.

⁷ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1972, p. 186, inf. teren, Muntenia, Vlașca, 1934.

While the column was replaced by the *troița* which is a religious element, the columns were the astronomical primitive stakes older than the raising of stone calendars from Sarmisegetuza, which involves that their origin is from an archaic population that lived on this territory long before the Indo-European migration.

The megalithic columns of the sky are also those monuments that are in the mountains and are called *Babele*⁸. They are columns of the sky and earth and they sky leans against them.

While the sky column was erected, there was an entire ritual that took place, and we mention here only the fact that the masterpiece was brought to its place being carried by two pairs of oxen and placed in a carriage, a white cock was sacrificed, the work was placed towards the east, its founders gave away white clothes and towels, there was a feast on the occasion of placing the masterpiece at its place, followed by *hore*⁹ around the column of the sky, and during the evening, these dances ended with *hore of light*. The sky column usually placed at a crossroads paralyzed the power and the effervescence of bad spirits and it became a sacred place which was once called *the lighted column* or *the sky column*. They were placed depending on the cardinal points and the zodiac's trajectory on the sky and, depending on the shadow, they became solar sundials. The columns which were Y-shaped were similar to some antennae that guided celestial forces towards the earth, cures for hard to cure diseases were prepared near these columns.

*"The theme of the myth of the sky column seems to refer to a monument of light: scattered in its cosmic dimension (the sacred light of the sun) or focused on the three terrestrial hypostases (the solar ray, the lightning and the fire) considered specific to a deux tonans: Saint Elijah in the Christian belief, Gebeleizis in the Geto-Dacian mythology. Therefore, we can say that the theme which is basis of the myth of the sky column was first of all the representation of the totem of light and second of all, of the trinity hypostasis of this deified totem".*¹⁰

⁸ *Babele* is the name given to the rocks from Bucegi Mountains, the translation would be "The Old Ladies" and they can be seen here: https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babele,_Mun%C8%9Bii_Bucegi

⁹ *Hora* (pl.*hore*) is a traditional Romanian dance which supposes that people hold their hands and form a circle, symbolizing their union and understanding.

¹⁰ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1972, p. 190.



Fig. 4 Troiță, Costești, Hunedoara



Fig. 5 Cross that was usually placed at a crossroads, The Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, Cluj

Sometimes, the *Sky Column* was made by cutting down a fir that was left with only three leafed branches, graphically forming the image of three arrows or spears. This image was interpreted as being the spears that the Dacians used to throw towards the clouds representing the god of weather and death. Among the twelve categories of columns which formed the succedaneums and the simulacra of the sky columns, the funerary ones are used more frequently, they describe sex, age, marital status, family, profession.

The tree was charged with divine forces because of its vertical position, it renews its canopy year after year, thus being revived, because it dies and it is reborn for countless times. Man has found a brother in the tree, for both of them are born from the ground, they take their sap from the fertile land, they have a connection with the sky, that offers them food having the form of rain and high energies, both of them left their seeds for perpetuation and they ended up rotting in the ground. This union has led to the creation of the archetype the *Tree of Life*.

The tree appears in many situations in a symbolic landscape: guarding fruits is often done by birds like the dove, the peacock, at its shadow, there are terrestrial animals – like the lion, or fantastic ones – like the griffin, and sometimes people – the Tracian chevaliers appear near the trees around whose trunks there are serpents coming from the underground, following the way of the roots, an eruption of the chthonic during daylight. This image is to be met

when a man dies and a serpent-like wax candle is placed on a wooden rod, having the length of a human being, the rod is a funerary column having the motif of the snake and of the spindle. The psychopompe character is also met regarding its role as bridge between the worlds when the tree bends in order to make the man cross the sea towards *The Afterlife*, on condition that the man knows some magical words. At the bottom of the tree's trunk, lives a serpent, and on its treetop – a cuckoo.

The Tree of Life is an archetype, a spiritual entity that hides itself under the form of a tree that is distinct depending on its geographical area (fir, oak, persimmon). It is sacred because of its divine essence, it has power due to its presence and it revives because of its own evolution law. If man can detach himself from his visible form and if he can overcome specific mental barriers, the symbol becomes detached from its concrete form and it is abstract.

It is possible that the sky column is a concrete image of a metaphysical state in which man transcends towards the sky, he releases a ray of light in the heaven, representing the column (the obelisk), he has a beatitude experience (the disk-shaped columns), he brings information into the terrestrial world (the lightning, the thunder – symbolizing the pole axe) and matter is recast (by the usage of fire). The sky column is possibly a physical representation of a prayer addressed to divinity, a spiritual travel that invites man to make steps in the chosen direction. Another interpretation could be the representation of the road that man has to go on, after death, without deviating from his route, straight to the source, to God. „*Junelui bun/ Cică-n d-alb de răsărit/ Răsare un soare strălucit / Da nu-i soare strălucit/Ci-i un pom mândru-n florit*”. [“*To the good young man/ It is said that in the east/ A golden sun rises/ But it is not a shiny sun/ But a beautiful blossoming tree*”].¹¹

¹¹ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1972, pag. 48, apud S. Drăgoi, 1939, p.163.



Fig. 6 Fire columns, wall painting, Voroneț monastery

The fir

The Romanian people have always considered that the connection between man and plants is a mythical hetairism present in all the important phases of one's life: birth, wedding, death and also after death. Thus, we see how the man who died hard was put on the ground or on straws, in order to diminish his suffering, the child was offered to a fir when he was born and the child had to take care of that fir all his life, and if the child got sick, the parents went to the fir to ask for its help; when the child was a grown up and he/she was supposed to get married, he/she went to the fir to announce the news, the fir took part in the wedding, it was carried at the wedding by a fir-taker, it was put on the house, in order to protect the couple's home, and at the wedding, the funerary fir was used.

The fir is used in the Carpathian space as the double of man's life. It replaces in the tomb the young man whose body was not found, being dressed in good clothes and having an Orthodox icon on his chest. The destiny of the child is written on the top of the fir, and the life of the tree and of the human being are closely connected. When the young man asked a young lady to be his wife, he took a fir as his witness and, up to the wedding, it was decorated with tinsel, it hold the place of the groom for the girl. At death, it was carried to the house of the deceased, then it was included in the funerary convoy and "planted" on the tomb. When it was cut from the forest, people asked the fir for forgiveness and they told the tree the reason why they cut it. The simulacrum of the fir was the wedding column which had the elements of the

wedding on top of it, they had to be taken down during a ritual of climbing on the column: the scarf, the bota bag with wine and the basil, in order to be offered to the bride.

The fir is the cosmic tree that always appears in rituals connected to periodic agriculture activities, fixed and mobile celebrations and the cycle of life, in general. If his branches are oriented towards the ground, it is a sign of terrestrial life, a *life ax* that is also rendered through an ascending powerful column. When the tree has a horizontal column accompanied by birds and flowers and leaves, then it is a *perpetuation ax*. If the branches are oriented towards the sky on a falling column, then it is a *thanatic ax*. When it appears represented in the same register, both ascending and descending, it keeps the space between the sky and the earth not altered, thus maintaining *cosmic order*.

We have already seen that, once the cosmos appeared after striking Sky Waters with a rod, a tree full of light appears (the fir), having its roots deeply placed in the ground and its branches in the cosmos. Regarding the Romanian universe, the myth of forests and secular saint trees that dominate them is very much present, there are also cult relics with spiritual reminiscence. A special place is held by the fir, which is the tree model that concentrates inside it most of the spiritual activities that are connected to Romanian mythology, it is a cosmic tree *per se* and also a divine tree, a tree of life.

According to Romanian beliefs and customs, the *Cosmic Tree* is multiplied in its derived elements and substitutes, depending on the cycle of calendaristic activities and fixed and mobile religious celebrations over the year. As we have already mentioned, the fir is present at all major events in human life, like birth, as *the birth tree* (by connecting the baby with the fir that will be his/her brother for a lifetime), at wedding, as a *wedding tree* (it replaces the groom up to the moment when they get married), or at the death of a virgin or a young man (it replaces the bride or the groom and that is the moment when it becomes the simulacrum of the fir), *the wedding column* that is decorated on top of it with the signs of the wedding, like the scarf, the basil and the bota bag with wine. As a *funerary tree* placed near the head of the deceased, it had the role of helping the deceased person's soul to cross the Water of Saturday, as a *give-away tree* substituted by a fruit tree, as a *fertilizing tree* placed among fruit trees, as *armindeni*¹² *columns* decorated with icons and they had a protective role, also being *columns of the sky*.

¹² *Armindeni* = a celebration that is held every year on May 1st, it dates back to the Dacians and it is also known by people as "The Tree of May" or "The Day of Absynth", it is considered a celebration dedicated to the fertility of the soil.



Fig. 7 Wooden keeves that have the scrawled symbol of the fir, Museum of Folk Customs, Humor

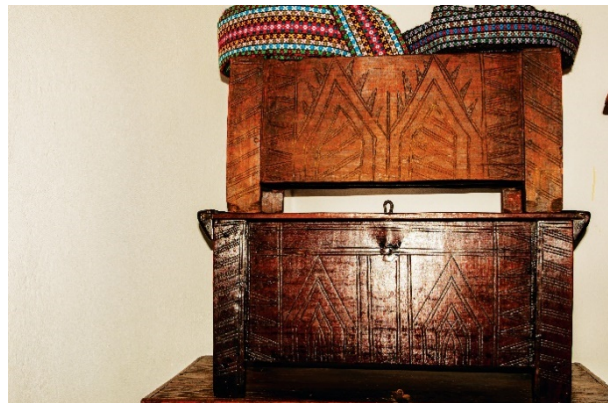


Fig. 8 The tree of life on hope chests, Museum of Folk Customs, Humor

On top of the tree, it was written the destiny of the child or of the marriage. If the top of the tree grew beautifully and straight, so was the development of the child or marriage. Rendering the child to a sacred tree in order to protect him/her is a belief which comes from time immemorial when people believed that trees are beings with superior powers which can defeat demons.

„După mersul pomului
Va fi mersul fătului;
Dacă pomu mere bine
Fătu crește și se ține,
Dacă pomu nu mere,
Fătu scade tăt și piere... ”¹³
dies...”]

[”According to the life of the tree
So the child will live;
If the tree is good
Then the child is good as well;
If the tree is small
Then the child becomes smaller and

Through its grandeur, the fir imposed respect and this is the reason why we see it as a tree of divine judgement:

„Brad în munte
Brad în vânt
Lângă bradu mare sfânt,
Șade Petrea la pământ
În funii de trei legat
Gătat pentru giudecat.
Și-n giuru-I șade gloată
crowd
Păcurari de giudecată... ”¹⁴

[”A fir in the mountains
A fir in the wind
Near the big saint tree
Sits Petrea on the ground
Being all tied up with ropes
Ready to be taken to be judged.
And around him, there is the
Ready for the judgement...”]

On carpets, the tree of the deceased is carried in front of the funerary cortege, it is represented as a tree whose canopy is formed of *ginger bread* having in its vicinity *clouds* and *chairs* – solar thrones, as a symbol of fertility and *birds* – as a messenger of one’s soul in the cosmic zone.

Ginger bread actually represents the offerings – *prescuri*¹⁵ or patties – offered in order to worship the memory of the deceased or ritually given under the first furrow from the beginning of the agricultural year. These patties had different forms on carpets: they looked like crenelles, restangles that were gathered on head and they sometimes had crosses, which show people’s belief in their existence as the centre of the Universe or having the shape of *prescură* which looks like a eight-petal flower.

¹³ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Coloana cerului [The Sky Column]*, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest , 1972, p. 56.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Prescură* (pl.*prescuri*) = a rounded small piece of bread used by the Christian Orthodox church for the Holy Eucharist. It is usually prepared by a woman having a clean life, with good deeds and praying.



Fig. 9 The tree with ginger bread, carpet, Mimi Castle, The Republic of Moldavia

The wheel of fire are often accompanied by ginger bread, they can also be found together with hooked rhombuses, the tree with sweet patties is actually a symbol of fertility.

The column of the sky offers support to the celestial vault, it is an *axis mundi* which appears in all ancient cultures and it has complex symbolism: the spindle supports the sky and also assures communication between sky and earth. *Axis mundi* is situated in the centre of the World, around it, man can talk to divine powers. Megalithic cultures have given birth to some megalithic columns which, in our country, can be seen in more Carpathian areas.

The image of the Tree of the World is presented during winter holidays, when Santa Claus comes and offers gifts near the beautifully decorated fir. According to N. Densușianu, Santa Claus is Old Saturn, regent of the Golden Age when the Tree of Life gave miraculous fruit to people. The image of Santa Claus coming in a sleigh pulled by reindeers, filled with gifts that he puts near the fir full of light and tinsel has its origin in the long-forgotten Golden Age when people were bright, they lived very many years and they did not have to work in order to obtain their food.

According to Densușianu, we find Saturn (the most important deity of Pelasgi) in Bucegi under the form of an old man with tresses and a bushy beard, carved in stone on the road which leads to Omu Peak. From the right temple, a woman springs and she reminds us of the myth of Athena's birth (also known as Minerva) from the head of Zeus. She is the goddess of wisdom and war.

After Uranus set the basis of the great Pelasgi Empire, he was followed in reign by his son Saturn, he was the one to instaurate the *Golden Age* on Earth.

According to some ancient sources, the Gets called Saturn "Zalmoxis", but the Greeks and the Romans called him Homo (The Man). In Romania, it is known even today as *Old Man*, *The Big Man*, *Santa Claus*.

The fir also has magical-religious valencies, just like there is the *church of firs* in the mountains, whose purpose is the marriage between a shepherd and a girl who marry against their parents' will. The church is in fact a small forest of firs planted in circle. Dan Oltean in *Religia dacilor [The Religion of the Dacians]* states that fir churches were formed of three concentric circles that were identical with the shape of the great rounded sanctuary (S7) from Sarmisegetuza Regia. „...căsătoria tinerilor daci avea loc tot la munte, în interiorul sanctuarului, căci numai așa se explica de ce majoritatea nedeilor din secolul trecut includeau momentul logodnei fără preot a tinerilor”. [“...The marriage between young Dacians also took place in the mountains, inside the sanctuary, this is how it can be explained that most nedei from the past century included the moment of the engagement between the young man and woman without the presence of the priest.”] ¹⁶

Shepherds confessed to the fir and they used savin buds as their eucharist. "A long time ago, shepherds confessed their sins to trees (especially firs). They made a cross on the tree's crust (with an axe or a knife) and they confessed their sins in front of the cross, as if they had a priest in front of them, while they were making genuflections. Afterwards, they cut some slivers from the tree with an axe, and then they threw them away. According to the vow they made, if after a year, the tree would still be green or not, they considered that they had been forgiven or not for their sins. Shepherds claimed that this confession was even better than the one in front of a priest. Better, because they believed, probably, that they confessed directly to God, in the His representation on the fir". ¹⁷

Iconography presents the fir under three aspects: as a *metaphor* of the youth of the mountains covered in their green ornaments, as a *sacred symbol* of the Carpathian ecosystem and as an *allegory* of the force of the Romanian territory in one's ascension towards the sky, of the immanent that goes up. He is also represented partially, as a fir small *twig* and the fir cone.

There are very many places and objects that the Romanian man marks with these symbols: he engraves the beams, the walls, he carves flutes, rods, tools, hope chests, he paints clay pots, their shape can be found on ring-shaped bread that is given as alms, known as *colaci*.

The Apple

A substitute of the fir is *the Apple*, *the tree of life and of wisdom*, which dominates the heavenly landscape. It is the tree from which, according to the

¹⁶ Dan Oltean, *Religia dacilor [The Religion of the Dacians]*, Saeculum Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, p. 424.

¹⁷ Traian Herseni, *Forme stravechi de cultura poporană românească [Ancient Forms of Romanian Folk Culture]*, Dacia Publishing House, 1977, p. 184.

Christian belief, Adam ate, this is the reason why the entire humanity is punished, but it is also the fruit tree that promises the divine reward of Heaven. Under it, there is a table with good food and God sits with the saints at the table, according to the righteous people that claim to have seen God during the nights when the sky opens.

The human body has two areas placed at its extremities that pulse in order to make energy enter these areas both ways (from top to bottom and the other way round). The first centre is placed on top of the head, while the second is in the area of perineum, where there is a set of eight cells which stay unchanged from birth until death. They are the only cells of this type, because the rest of the cells change at intervals between 5 and 7 years. Between these two poles, an energetic tube is created and it supplies the human being during every moment of life. From these eight cells, bodies develop themselves, no matter the evolution phase (plant, animal, human being), in a radial way, in all directions, starting from this cellular bow, this model being kept up to 32 cells. Starting from here, cells become asymmetrical and a sphere is formed up to the moment when it becomes a tor (a shape that gathers in itself towards the centre and it opens up towards the exterior and also towards the interior).

This tor looks very much like an apple which is hollowed in the middle and it has the name of morula. From this phase, through which all living creatures pass, the members of different species start to differentiate themselves. Maybe this is the reason why iconography remarks the fact that the tree of knowledge of good and bad was an apple tree, because in a specific moment of our lives, we all are similar to an apple. It is the shape that appears in the model of the Genesis, a unique shape that was called by Arthur Young *the chart of the seven colours from mathematics* (there are seven regions that have all the same size and that perfectly cover the surface of the tor). The tor shape can be found in various life aspects – man's heart has 7 muscles that compose a tor and that pumps up in 7 directions. This structure is at the basis of all forms of life, of celestial bodies – planets, stars, galaxies.

The apple has, it seems, an extraordinary importance in the architecture of the living and it has created an archetype that only science can now demystify. In our fairy tales, the apple appears as a primordial centre out of which everything was born, having the Sun as the father and the Earth as the Saint Mother, the Polar Star is our Emperor, the Earth is a silver island with a gold axle, Fire is the emperor and Water is the empress, in the middle there is a mountain on which God sits, in the centre there is a fountain, the sky is supported by 7 pylons, guarded by 7 angels. The Earth is surrounded by the Water of Saturday, which is the river bed of all waters, there where it is the Fortress of God and the Red Apple. All the waters of the world get out of the Red Apple, they spread in the world and they return to it. The sea in which the Red Apple can be found is the Black Sea.

*“Under the earth, there is an apple, the red apple. Under it, there is the fish which holds the Earth. If the fish moved a little bit and the apple fell down in the water, peace, there would be no earth! That apple tree says that it has apples, but who can reach them! Nobody on earth can travel up to that point! It says that all the waters that are on this planet and they run, they all move from sunset to sunrise, all of them have their origin under that apple tree, they spread all over the world and they also return there. That sea where the apple tree is found is actually called the Black Sea“.*¹⁸

The apple tree is the axle of the Earth, it is there where the Navel of the World is. The tree is Axis Mundi. It goes along the pole on the vertical until it meets the horizontal line determined by waters; it is known that in Heaven, from the Tree of the World, the four rivers that fertilize the entire world spring: The Tigris, the Euphrates, Gihon and Fison. On the right and on the left of the Tree of Life, there are Adam and Eve. In many cases, in carols, the Sun is considered the fruit of the Tree of the World.

In fairy tales, Făt-Frumos set free Ileana Sânziana from the **Other Realm** after he killed the 7-head dragon and, in wonder regarding what he had seen, wished to bring back something from the novelties of that world. After smiting thrice with his whip, palaces were transformed in a golden apple, brought by him into our human world. It is made of gold because it becomes materialized in all its beauty during the Golden Age, positioned in the northern, polar area, that the Romanian pre-Christian belief considers to be Primordial. Planting a tree when a child is born or when the bride is brought home makes a temple out of the man's house, a temple subordinate to the tree (there are no better deeds than sowing and growing a tree).

By using his whip, Făt-Frumos transforms the palaces of dragons into apples; once he reached home again by using the whip again, he brought them back to their initial form and he set free his sisters that lived in those palaces.

In another story, because he wanted to get married, Făt-Frumos disguised himself as a gardener, but, despite all these, the Emperor's daughter chose him among all the suitors of high rank, throwing an apple in his head. After he saw his daughter's choice, the Emperor chased him away from the palace and they went to live in a hut that was dirty outside, but it was full of gold inside, that was the place that made the connection with a subteranian palace. The kingdom was attacked by a neighbour thrice, Făt-Frumos set it free each time, and the emperor discovered its true identity and gave him the throne.

The choice that the Emperor's daughter made by throwing the apple represents the recognition of its essence, the awakening of the hero and the setting of all future events, her gesture started a spiritual endeavour. The

¹⁸ El. Niculiță-Voronca, *Datinile și credințele poporului român adunate și așezate în ordine mitologică [The Customs and beliefs of the Romanian People Gathered and Ordered Mythologically]*, Saeculum Publishing House I.O., Bucharest, 2008, vol. II, p. 306.

Emperor contributed to Făt-Frumos's initiation by trotting away from paternal care. Neither the gesture of the Emperor, nor the hut are what they might seem at first sight.

Spân represents an identification of Harap-Alb with *The Apple of the World*, what represents its recognition as a *Pole*. The daughter of The Red Emperor put three twigs of apple in her hair and Alive Water and Dead Water and she managed to remake his sanguineous flux by vegetal flux, thus reviving him. This fact would be translated by creating an allegiance of a secondary tradition (the daughter of the Red Emperor represents the Atlantis tradition) to a *Primordial* tradition represented by Harap-Alb (the Hyperborean tradition).

In the fairy tale Harap-Alb, the hero must bring twigs of apple and Alive Water and Dead water from the world beyond this human existence, meaning the place where mountains smash their peaks.

These twigs of apple have magical powers and, as we know, the daughter of the Red Emperor will revive Făt-Frumos by using them. They hold the secret of knowledge, of health and of life. In the rituals of dendrological magic all over the world, there is the custom of hitting people, animals, land, trees with a branch, stick in order to transfer them health, fertility, life from the plant towards the hit one. In the games of winter celebrations, "the old men" and "the ugly ones", they struck things by using their twisted rods, the purpose being the transfer of magic power, life and fertility from the vegetal world.

The apple tree has a major importance regarding the Romanians, because it is the tree of life from the real of paradise (the cosmic mountain) situated in the vicinity of the river with the eater of life, this is why the apple twigs brought by Harap-Alb have magical powers.

"Then, he showed me the river and the Water of Life, clear as crystal is (...) And on the two shores of the river, the tree of life grows..." (Apocalypse of John, according to the vision of the prophet Ezechiel).

"The frequent meeting of the water of life, the tree of life and the cosmic mountain is normal, because they are elements having a similar mythical-symbolic essence, they are part of the same sacred, surreal area, which can be the Afterlife, the Kingdom of Death, Paradise or the Centre of the World".¹⁹

The Golden Apple is destined to be contemplated, self-sufficient through its beauty, just like the fir, the oak. When its destiny in the Golden Age was fulfilled, the apple was substituted with a fruit that was good to be eaten, it is obvious its residual character towards the golden apple, which also has it as an archetype. The spreading of the seeds from the tree is a propagation of the seeds of knowledge from the Biblical Tree.

¹⁹ A. Oişteanu, *Grădina de dincolo. Zoosophia. Comentarii mitologice [The Garden from Beyond. Zoosophia. Mythological Commentaries]*, Polirom Publishing House, Iaşi, 2012, p.141.

In the fairy tale "The Golden Hen", God transformed the Golden Tree which invites to deep meditation only through observation and contemplation, into a fruit apple tree whose seed should be spread in the entire world by both good and bad people, because all, through their own effort, should reach higher phases of consciousness. The Golden Bird with golden chicken, on the top of this Tree, was transformed by God in the constellation the Hen (Pleiades), in order to be eternally contemplated by people. This fact show us once again that the autochthonous pre-Christian context was Primordial.

The *moji*²⁰ from the Apuseni Mountains also have a legend that connects the Mountain Găina with the golden hen that had its nest with golden eggs on its top. It was, in fact, *Vălva băilor*²¹ which, being hunted by the locals, left the area of Roşia Montana, taking all the gold from the area.



Fig. 10 The Tree of Life represented on the houses from Bukovina Under the form of grape vine, the eye of God, vesica piscis

²⁰ Moţ (pl.moţi) = autochthonous inhabitant of the central part of the Apuseni Mountains in Romania.

²¹ Vălva bailor = according to folk beliefs, it was a spirit that guided people towards finding gold, it showed them the place where they could find it and it also warned them regarding a future event.



Fig. 11 The Tree of Life represented on the houses from Bukovina

According to Traian Herseni, the Romanians have always had a cult of the apple established on other principles than the ones of the fir and the oak. The people that were poor and shepherds frequently ate wild apples, and their tameability has led to the formation of the tree-totem that was later transformed into a sacred tree. The apple often appears in Romanian *colinde* where there is also the central idea of the ceremonial fable creation, but also as choruses which are nothing else than ritualic formulae of incantation:

*Sub cel roșu răsărit,/ Mândri-s pomii de-nfloriți,/ Mărule cu flori dalbe.
Under that red sunrise,/ The blossomed trees stand in beauty/ Apple tree with white flowers.*

Sorcova, a Romanian folk custom from the 1st of January, whose object of mythical-magical translation is a branch that is in bud or a *sorcovă* made of a branch decorated with paper flowers, an allusion to the green of the tree in bud. Inclined towards the person who is *sorcovită*, it plays the role of a magical branch that translates good wishes of youth and health, just like a spell.

The pine cone is an expression of the renewal of the world, representing the main symbolism of the tree of life. Furthermore, we also find the **grapevine branch** which, together with the snake, is one of the most frequently met representations on the rod of shepherds, on funerary stones and on crosses. Another presence is the **flower** which keeps the promise of endless life, permanent youth, saving wisdom, miraculous healing, of saving physical power, it sends our thoughts towards the initial paradise. Together with the fir, the grapevine and the flower, we also find *the apple*, as an expression of the nostalgia of paradise-like spring.

The root of life appears in a variety of stylistic forms on a large scale on the carpets from Moldavia. Simple or associated with the motif of the fir,

of the spike, of the birds – the *beet* or the *root of life* is a hymn to the vitality of nature and of creative forces.

The full pot is always connected to the plant of Life or with fertility, the Tree of Life being sometimes replaced with the grapevine which gets out of the pot.

*”The beginning and the end of the road are in the tree of life. It is also there, day and night, the deep and the high, the past and the future. The gate of falling into history, just like the one of getting out of history. It is, maybe, more than just an allegory of transcendence: between the zenith and the nadir, one can go both ways, and on this path, the ages of the world are different”.*²²

The Maple Tree

A.Oișteanu has an extended study regarding the maple tree (1989). This tree is also called field maple or simply maple. The author tells us that when a church is built, an arch (Noah), a construction, this is usually done in a place where a man died, as we will see in the legend of the Oak from Borzești according to which Ștefan cel Mare built a church where a friend of his from childhood died in an accident near an oak. According to the Moldavian legend of the flood, God told Noah that, in order to finish the ark which fell down because of the antichrist, Noah must strike the first tree with his axe, make a maple *semantron* and to use it at the root of the maple. Around the maple, the devil has no power, this is the reason why the maple is called *Kill it with the Semantron*.

The great sacred religious constructions are based on legends having the same mythic background: a hermit, a priest, a monk, in order to establish the place of the church to be built by a ruler, uses a bow and an arrow and from the wood of the tree where the arrow gets stuck, usually a maple, the altar is done.

When the ruler or Noah has a cut on his finger when the hermit (the magus) realizes the made mistake – it is either the place which is not proper, or the building is done from the wood of another tree -this is the reason why the hermit puts his ear on the chosen maple and he hears the *semantron* at it root. The ruler destroys the construction and makes a new one on the chosen place and using the wood of the preferred maple.

*”Just like in the Romanian legend of the flood and in the legends involving Ștefan the Great building churches, the role of the maple and the role of the *semantron* is transposed, even if this time, we are talking about its divine prototype: the *semantron* from the sky or the *semantron* of God is similar to the one on earth, just like the one from the church and having the same purpose (everything that is evil disappears and the devil can not show its face anymore). Of course, it is a big *semantron* heard only by the good people that believe in God, without sins or extraordinary people. The magic gesture*

²² C. Prut, *Calea răătăcită [The Lost Path]*, Fundația INTERART Triade, Timișoara, 2012, p. 88.

*of the man and of the god are complementary and they take place in the same time and in the same place. The maple – on its place and from its wood, the church will be built – is a symbol of the cosmic tree that marks the Axis and the Centre of the World. The arrow or the sematron of man, on the one hand, and thunder or the sematron of the deity, on the other hand, meet in the same point, the only place where creation can start, the building of the monastery (imago mundi). Any other place, not established and not chosen in this manner proves to be not suitable, not a single construction can pass the test of time in this way”.*²³

According to Romanian traditions, when a house is built, it is an evil sign for the owners, if the stonemason gets hurt when building the house, the future inhabitants will get sick and die. Noah got hurt before building the ark, it is a warning sign regarding a made mistake having a magical-ritual nature, and the one that commits it is a dendro-daimon or a forest daimon, a Mother of the forest.

A belief from Banat says that: *”...in the forest, there is a supernatural being that supervises the trees, it makes sure they grow, it defends them of the wrongdoers. It is beneficial for the ones who cut down trees that respect the laws of the forest, but the ones that are bad spirits and enter the woods and they try to destroy it, the being attacks them, by throwing branches on them and breaks their hands, it makes them cut their own legs with their axes...”*²⁴

R. Vulcănescu considers that the basis of rising a sacred construction, monastery complexes is represented by paleoChristian confraternities of monks that were masons/stonebreakers that had the labyrinth as a ritual sign or a heraldic symbol.

The Dacian ascetic priests were called *pleistoi* in antiquity, what would be translated as the founders or the ones that founded cities. These priest, in order to create a sacred building, sent arrows to the clouds in order to chase atmospheric demons, but also to the ground to make earthly and subteranian demons disappear. In order to set the basis of a new centre, a ritualic hunt took place and it was done by throwing an arrow, a spear, a rod.

”In some areas (in Bihor County for example), a simulated hunt took place by using a bow and arrows or by throwing a bat or a stick. The place where one of these objects fell was considered the one where the future village

²³ Ion Muşlea, Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Tipologia folclorului. Din răspunsurile la chestionarele lui B. P. Haşdeu [The Typology of Folklore. From the Answers to the Questionnaires of B.P.Haşdeu]*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1970, pp. 138-142.

²⁴ Emilian Novacoviciu, Ecătărina Novacoviciu, *Din comoara Banatului [From Banat's Treasure]*, Ed. Folclor, Oraviţa, 1926, p. 59.

would be founded, thus an oracle animal was symbolically killed in that area”.²⁵

Establishing the centre from where creation spreads was done by digging a gun into the trunk, the root of a tree or in the ground, by listening to the established tree, by hitting the wood of the tree with an axe or a hammer (semantron), by organizing a ritualic hunt, by throwing the hatchet.

The establishment of a village or a house was done by digging the ground and putting a picket there, it became the centre around which the house or the village was built. This gesture immitates the founding of a world by the Bosom Friend, he hit the primordial waters with a rod, thus the earth appeared. Man (Noah, Manole the Master) did not do anything else but to immitate him.

*“He was a great man/ and he took a big axe/ and he went into the big forest/ and he cut down a big tree (or a big maple)/ and he made a large monastery/ [...]with nine doors, with nine are”.*²⁶

Noah made a semantron out of a maple's wood that is also used for building the ark that is periodically destroyed by the antichrist. *“Then Noah (...) made a maple semantron (...) and he started to use it; and the more he used the semantron, the faster the wooden parts put themselves back, they had been spread all around by the devil”.*²⁷

The fact that the semantron is used in churches had its origin in this legend which is documented in a paper from 1647. And the tree which was hit with an arrow by Daniil Sihastru, in order to build Putna Monastery, the tree is also a maple. Putna, according to George Coşbuc, is raised on the place of a former old temple of another saint maple. And Alexandru-Vodă Lăpuşneanu built Slatina Monastery on the place where a maple grew and where the hermit had seen several lights on Sunday and on the occasion of important religious celebrations.

*“On Christmas morning/ A young man was born for me,/ A young man like God,/ Young and pure/ And he has clothes,/ Clothes made of cotton,/ He's dressed in white silk,/ His cradle is made of maple/ The wind bows and swings Him.../ God grew and grew,/ He did a great thing for me:/ He made the sky and the earth/ he made the sky in two days,/ And the earth in nine days”.*²⁸

²⁵ Vladimir Trebnici, Ion Ghinoiu, *Demografie și etnografie [Demography and Ethnography]*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1986, p. 304.

²⁶ Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițional românească [Order and Chaos. Myth and Magic in Romanian Traditional Culture]*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p. 128 apud Cristea Sandu Timoc, *Cântece bătrânești și doine [Old Songs and Doine]*, Ed. pentru Literatură, Bucharest, 1967)

²⁷ Tudor Pamfile, *Cerul și podoabele lui după credințele poporului român [The Sky and Its Ornaments According to the Beliefs of the Romanian People]*, The Romanian Academy, 1915, p.130.

²⁸ Alexiu Viciu, *Colinde din Ardeal. Datini de Crăciun și credințe populare [Carols from Ardeal. Customs for Christmas and Folk Beliefs]*, Bucharest, 1914, pag. 26.

Even if they are Christianized, some carols reflect the cosmogonical features of the maple. The reviving of the used cosmos was done together with the birth of Jesus that recreates the world around an axis which is central, the maple, in which He is swung and, later on, the cradle is made of maple.

“The huge sea is coming,/ but it has no shores,/ what does it bring on its waters?/ It brings pines/ with their trucks;/ Among pines and firs,/ A small cradle/ made of maple.”

*“From the sand of the sea,/ At the border of the country,/ Born, growing,/ Three maple trees are showing/ Tall and yellowish”.*²⁹

The maple seems to be a saint tree under which young men were trained and initiated, leaders received their ointment under these trees, after killing their predecessors, the old men of the village judged people under the maple, brotherhoods were formed under this tree, people confessed under it etc. The maple is the residency of the Demiurge, of Baby Jesus and the Virgin Mary.

In fairy tales and carols, the maple is the residency of the Demiurge, of a God, or of the main Christian characters: Mary and Baby Jesus are sitting near two golden maples, in their shadow. The hawk that steals *“The cloth of the Son,/ the belt of God”* and makes its nest in the maple is cursed or killed, and the nest is destroyed and the maples are cut down.

If a sick person die under a consecrated tree, one easily finds the ladder-tree to limb towards heavens.

In Romanian legends, the maple is blessed by Saint Sisoies to stand in front of the church and, through the sound made by the semanstron made of maple wood, people gather at church. *“Since then -says a legend -the maple is considered a blessed tree, saint and honest, without it, no Liturgy can be held inside the church”.*³⁰

The maple is frequently represented as a funerary tree in mythical Romanian folklore. The maple appears with: *the top towards the sky,/ the feet on the seas,/ its shadow is round,/ its leaves are small*. Here, according to some formalities from the book of the living, the sky on which the traveler goes to the sky is descended.

The maple as a funerary tree has a double hypostasis: the relationship deceased-maple (either a maple tree grows out of the dead person's body, or one is placed in a maple tree or in a cradle made of maple) and the postume resurrection of the deceased.

²⁹ Alexiu Viciu, *La luncile soarelui. Antologie a colindele laice [On the Meadows of the Sun. A Collection of Secular Carols]*, Ed. pentru Literatură, Bucharest, 1964, p. 167, 275

³⁰ Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițional românească [Order and Chaos. Myth and magic in Romanian Traditional Culture]*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p. 140.

Apollonios from Rhodos wrote in the 3rd century B.C. regarding the funerary rituals practiced by the people from Caucasus on the eastern shore of the Black Sea: “[...] *They lived there in strings/ Many trees with graceful branches and also huge willows/ Where all dead people were hung from the top branches/ With ropes. And today in Colchida, there is a huge iniquity/ To burn the deceased on stakes; it is not appropriate to put them in the ground/ To bury men and to put a funerary stone above them./ In exchange, corpses are put in oxen skins that have just been stripped off,/ [...] This is the tradition back there*”.³¹

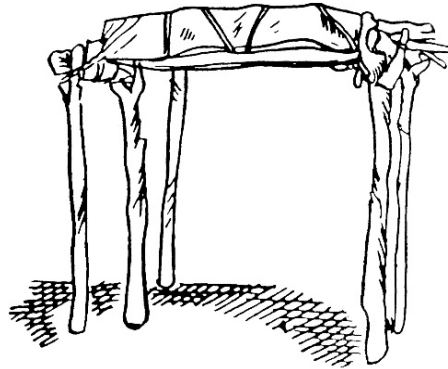


Fig. 12 Corpse exhibited on a platform by the Northern-American Indians, according to A. Oișteanu

This funeral practice of people connected to trees gave people the hope that they would come back to life just like the trees that revive every year.

Mircea Eliade, Petre Culianu remarked the fact that moving in the air “*in flesh and bones*” or only with the spirit and some shaman features of the Greek ecstatics would be due to the contact that the Greeks had with the Thracian and Scythian civilisations, once Greek colonies appeared near the Black Sea. The Greek priests served the northern god Apollo hyperborean, Orpheus is thracian, Abaris comes flying from Hyperboreea, Leonin from Athens was sent in order to cure people in Leuce Island from the Mouthes of Istru, Medeea was a missionary priestess that introduced the cult of the goddess Artemis hyperborean (Bendis) in Greece.

The symbolic features of the maple tree are: it is the place where the god has its residence, Axis Mundi, a well-known tree, considered for judgement, the maple tree makes evil spirits disappear, it gathers people to get

³¹ Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițional românească [Order and Chaos. Myth and magic in Romanian Traditional Culture]*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p.153 apud Argonauticele, III.

o church (the semantron) or when people are in a good mood (the flute), it charms fairies, it gathers the three saint virgins around the maple fire, on Saint George's Day -the branches of field maple protect the household, people and animals of bad spirits, women who disenchant using them as magical wand, they use the maple stick to make spirits of love come or go.

Maple flowers are used for the onest hat suffer from love, in the decoction from field maple shell, children bathe, no matter the illness they suffer from, the maple leaves which decorate houses, churches, tombs are used against thunder, they are picked in the day of Jesus's Rising in order to have a purifying role, when the maple becomes ladder for the souls of the deceased. The celebration of Jesus's Rising takes place 40 days after Easter, it is a dy with a great religious and also funerary significance.

In laments, but also in funerary songs for the deceased, we find the description of the path that the dead person has to go on -one should not got o the left, where there are thieves, but towards the right where, at the fountain under the maple tree, the Virgin Mary crosses out one's name from the notebook of the living and writes one's name down among the deceased. From heaven, two angels descend a maple ladder that is meant for the deceased toc limb towards Christ where one is watered with white wine in order for one to forget about the white world. During this travel, one is neither alive, nor dead, neither in the white world or the black one, wondering around in a labyrinth and one can get out of it only if one deserves it.

What is important is the world created around the maple, it appears: "Having the peaks oriented towards the sky/ The feet on seas/ Having a rounded shadow/ And a small leaf..."³²

And also in some fairy tales, the heroes go up to the heavens on a miraculous tree. In the fairy tale written by Petre Ispirescu, *Piciul, Ciobănașul și pomul cel fără căpătâi* [*The Kid, the Shepherd and the tree without a Purpose*], the hero, in order to reach for the sky, asks to be given nine corners of *prescură*, nine glasses of wine and nine axes, a typical request in order to travel to the World from beyond. The hero places the nine axes on the truck of the tree, as he goes up on it, thus forming a ladder with nine steps (levels).

We can see the motif of the ladder in the burial tree under the form of some cookies made of dough together with other funerary symbols: the cross, the angel, the bird symbolizing the soul, the woman, the man. In other funeral songs or ballads, according to A. Oișteanu, from the corpse of the decesead (young men, children, Ana – the wife of *Meșterul Manole*), two maple trees grow, miraculously rising towards the sky, the child of Ana does not die, but it is perpetually swinging on top of the maple tree. In *Miorița* as well, the

³² Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și magie în cultura tradițional românească* [*Order and Chaos. Myth and Magic in the Romanian Traditional Culture*], Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p. 143.

shepherd does not want to be buried “*Pe mine pământ nu puneți/ numai dalbă (sfântă) gluga mea,/ fluierul după curea*” [“Don’t put soil on top of me/ only my white (saint) hood, / the fistula after the belt].³³

This presentation at the surface, in branches of maple tree or in the cradle made of maple wood, exhibited higher than the ground is an archaic funerary rite which supposes being buried at height, on wooden platforms, in trees of the deceased that were placed in thick wool fabric. The shepherd from *Miorița* also wants his fistula and his hood (*sarica*) to be hung in the maple tree, but “*Brazi și pălinași/ I-am avut nuntași.*” [“Firs and maple trees/ Were my marriage guests”]; in the case of the versions in which the shepherd is not buried, the two trees accompany him, and in another version, if he was buried in the ground, he had a maple cross near his head.

“... in many cases, beliefs and customs which are still alive in specific conservative regions of Europe (among them, we must always mention the Balkans and Romania) reveal layers of culture which are more archaic than the represented ones, to be more specific, by the “classical” Greek and Roman mythology. This fact is particularly obvious for everything that is connected to the magical-religious customs and behaviour of hunters and shepherds. ... Systematic research in the field of Romanian or Balkanic paleoethnology is still to be conducted; it has been proven that a specific number of cultural pre-Indo-European and paleo-Indo-European elements have been preserved better than anywhere else in Europe...”³⁴

Short conclusions!

Man invested the Tree of Life with mythical functions, but especially with divine ones, choosing it as a transfer bridge between the human world and the celestial one. The tree was the element that created balance and gave the hope of regeneration and immortality, it maintained cosmic order or it was the representative of creative forces and an expression of the renewal of the world. The archetype of the Tree of Life is present even today in all the forms of social, cultural and religious manifestation, which gives us a key for decoding its symbolism which seems to deeply live in the human DNA.

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³³ Adrian Fochi, *Miorița. Tipologie, circulație, geneză, texte*, Ed. Acad. R.P.R., București, 1964, p. 565.

³⁴ Mircea Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis la Genghis Han*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1995, p. 141,

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Fig. 12 Corpse exhibited on a platform by the Northern-American Indians, according to A. Oișteanu

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