

**„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
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DOCTORAL THESIS

**READING ABOUT SUMMER SOLSTICE SYMBOLS
IN VARIOUS CONTENT AREAS**

Abstract

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction

II. Myth. Theoretical Frameworks

II.1. Selective Readings of the Myth

II.1.1. Sociological and Ethnological Approach

Emil Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, Laura Levi Makarius, Rene Girard, Roger Caillois

II.1.2. Phenomenological Approach

II.1.2.1. *Cultural anthropology*: James Frazer, Lucien Levi-Bruhl, Rudolf Otto

II.1.2.2. *Structural anthropology*: Claude Levi-Strauss

II.1.2.3. *Myth as a linguistic sign*: Julien Greimas, Roland Barthes

II.1.2.4. *Myth as a symbol – myth-analysis*: Gilbert Durand, Northrop Frye

II.1.3. Hermeneutical approach

II.1.3.1. *Myth and history of religions*: Mircea Eliade

II.1.3.2. *Myth and philosophy*: Lucian Blaga, Ernst Cassirer, George Gusdorf

II.1.3.3. *Myth and history of culture*: Jean-Pierre Vernant, Leo Frobenius, Oswald Spengler, Victor Kernbach

II.1.3.4. *Myth and literary theories*: V.I. Propp, Mihai Coman, Dim. Păcurariu, Silviu Angelescu

II.1.4. Psycho-analytical approach

Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung

II.2. Legends - Structure and Pattern

Arnold van Gennep, Mihai Coman, Victor Kernbach

II.3. Conclusions

III. Summer Solstice

III.1. General Magic Aspects

III.1.1. Sânzienă and the wreath custom

III.1.2. Rituals of gathering medicinal plants

III.1.3. Legends about cuckoos and eagles

III.1.4. The Peregrination of Spirits

III.2. The Image of Woman in Magical Practices

III.3. Legends and Myths

III.3.1. Need fire

III.3.2. *Cynanchum vincetoxicum*

III.3.3. Fern

IV. Myth and Folk Comparative Readings

IV.1. Romanian Christianity – a Religious Syncretism

IV.1.1. Thracian mythology (Bendis, Cotys, Cybele)

IV.1.2. Greek and Roman mythology (Ceres-Demeter, Proserpina-Persephone, Hecate, Luna-Selene, Diana-Artemis)

IV.1.3. Diana a mixed deity

IV.1.4. Sânziana and Sf. John's Eve

IV.1.5. Sânzienne celebration nowadays in Maramureș region

IV.2. Folk-tales

Ileana Simziana, The Hunter's son (Fiul vânătorului)

V. Literature – a Way to (Re)Create the Meaning of Summer Solstice

M. Eliade: Isabel and the Devil's Waters (Isabel și apele diavolului), The Forbidden Forest (Noaptea de Sânzienne), *Les trois grâces...*, Fragments d'un journal (Jurnal, vol. I), Mémoire (Memorii, vol. II)

Mihail Sadoveanu: Midsummer's Nights (Noaptea de Sânzienne), June, 24th (24 iunie)

VI. Conclusions

Selective Bibliography

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The goal of my thesis is to investigate the phenomenon of the summer solstice as a dynamic process within communities. The approach imagines a life cycle. Thus, the first sets of significances have a starting point in mythology. Next, the collectivity metamorphoses mark the foundation of the Sânzienne ritual within folk practices. As a result of changing individual expectation, the symbol of summer solstice gains aesthetic values through literature, added to the common collective ones. The aesthetic perspective illustrates the process of conversion of models through individual effort.

By choosing this title, ***Reading about Summer Solstice Symbols in Various Areas***, the dissertation tries to establish the area of investigation as a symbolic one. The present analytical experience sees the phenomenon neither as a Midsummer-Day Holiday monograph, nor as a critical review of literary texts approaching this theme. The summer solstice variety of meanings is expressed in frameworks such as mythology, folklore, ethnography and literature. Thus, the phenomenon is recovered in different hypostatization and various understanding contexts.

The premise of interpretation relies on a first reading experience about the summer solstice. The questions that arose then made me try to identify the elements that created the variety in revealing the meaning of the ritual. Therefore, I chose the comparative approach (folkloric and ethnographical works, field research in Viseu, critical analysis of several Mircea Eliade's and Mihail Sadoveanu's texts) in order to depict the phenomenon of syncretism amidst the ceremony and to express its implications within the collective mentality.

Dynamic cultural elements regarding the summer solstice are seen therefore as a process, with elements of continuity and discontinuity. Methodologically, the diachronic perspective, used in this exegesis to illustrate comparatively the collective and individual transfigurations, is complemented by the synchronous one, through observation and description of cultural events in a well defined spatial and temporal context.

Myth. Theoretical Frameworks, the first chapter, designs the theoretical framework of the thesis by recourse to various theories in order to describe the comprehension of the phenomenon. The use of comparative perspective that takes into account domains such as mythology, ethnography, folklore and literature needs to establish the starting point of interpretations. Therefore, a complex construct as myth is described through interrelational patterns as sacred, profane, ritual, legend and symbol. The intention is to outline the different meanings of the word myth and to name the

relationship between the terms that interfere: the human being and the elements used to define the concept of myth (sacred, profane, the socio-cultural context).

The concept of myth can be interpreted in two ways: as a sacred history that, concerning a religious identity, may found a society and it becomes the fundamental characteristic of the social reality; or, it may be considered an illusion, a fiction, a story without a real substance. The two explanations of the concept should be related to the social evolution of the individual. Thus, the religious identity changes into a social one beginning with the 18th century. It is the context in which the sacred history loses its power over individuals or it gains new meanings in order to develop the fictional features of the myth. Due to the changes, the concept overtakes the functions of literature, and the reality depicted by it becomes a meta-reality with fictional characters and events. The situation changes again when literature becomes the way to re-gain the religious identity in the modern society. It is indicated a new revival of its primordial function, and the story carries out the meaning of the sacred history.

The need to find the proper definition of the concept of myth as a *modus operandi* within a literary text in order to discover the deepest meaning leads towards a selective list of various approaches and implies the finding of the proper way to use it as an interpretative method.

The sociological and ethnological approaches, through Emil Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, Laura Levi Makarius, Rene Girard and Roger Caillois, imply a close relationship between the religious phenomenon and the socio-cultural level of society integrated within a historical context. These theories demarcate the historical background of each religious creation and explain it using sociological and ethnological facts. This kind of research states the necessity of a well-determined distinction between the sacred and the profane world, the sacredness being interpreted as a manifestation of a force (*mana*).

As regards the phenomenological approach (Julien Ries, 2000:30), the theoreticians intend to clear out the internal structures of the religious phenomena, to understand them through their specific features. Thus, the religious phenomenon is identified and classified using a typology and the result of such an approach reveals a comportment that overpasses the historic event. The common facts are explained and the relationship between them is established due to the religious individual and his reactions. Domains as cultural anthropology (James Frazer, Lucien Levi-Bruhl, Rudolf Otto), structural anthropology (Claude Levi-Strauss), linguistics (Julien Greimas, Roland

Barthes) and myth-analysis (Gilbert Durand, Northrop Frye) use the phenomenological approach to outline different characteristics of myth and to build up specific typologies.

Using the hermeneutical approach (Mircea Eliade, 1990:111) the theorists identify, describe and interpret a phenomenon through out a comparative method. History of religion (Mircea Eliade), philosophy (Lucian Blaga, Erns Cassirer, George Gusdorf), history of culture (Jean-PierreVernant, Leo Frobenius, Oswald Spengler, Victor Kernbach) and literary theories (V.I. Propp, Mihai Coman, Dim. Păcurariu, Silviu Angelescu) are those domains that offer a complex perspective over the myth.

Another approach is the psycho-analytical one. Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung insisted on the role of the human unconsciousness in creation spreading ancient believes. Freud's opinion about myth as the expression of unrevealed wishes projected in the past (Sigmund Freud, vol. I, 1992:123) differs from the Jung's who sees myth as an emanation of the collective unconsciousness (Carl Gustav Jung, 1994:23)

Therefore, I think that the difference in myth perception is to be distinguished regarding the *human reality*. In my opinion, human reality is the sum up of the exterior and interior aspects that shape one's personality. Thus, two perspectives are to be delimited. Within the sociological, ethnographical and ethnological approaches myth is used as an instrument for revealing unknown realities, apart from the human being. Other theories consider myth a constitutive part of the human reality.

Understood as an exterior human reality the myth and its characteristics are described from a phenomenological (descriptive) point of view and a hermeneutical one. The first type of analyses demarcates the meanings of the concept within various contexts: the cultural and structural anthropology sees myth as an expression of religious feeling; from a linguistic and a semiotic point of view myth is a sign, a meta-language that expresses an exterior reality; the myth-analysis associates myth to the symbol. The hermeneutic analysis is the method that interprets the religious symbols and myths trying to identity a morphology and a typology of the religious phenomenon helping to understand the *homo religiosus's* behavior. It is also used in other domains: from a philosophical point of view the myth is the basis for the philosophic discourse, the meaning revealing the argument, a first step to knowledge; as regards the history of culture, the researchers imagined an evolutionary scale of humanity and myth represents the first step, being associated with childhood; the literary critics explain the narrative structures of the myth through analogies with other literary species, focusing on the discourse.

The perspective is changed when it comes to analytical psychology and psychoanalysis. The concept of myth designates the inner human reality. It represents a category of consciousness and it has the power to create, to justify and to symbolize the human demeanor.

Concluding the chapter, I consider myth a constant element of humanity. Its presence, camouflage or change of meaning may be determined by the influence of external elements. Thus, the individual - myth relation is conditioned by the two parts of individual's reality: the exterior reality and the inner one. Therefore, myth can be a category of reality or one of consciousness; it can lose the direct connection with the individuals and turn into a literary concept or it can define the human being from an ontological point of view.

The next chapter, *Summer Solstice*, is intended to outline the temporal aspects highlighting the role of women in religious practices and harvesting ceremonies. The beginning of the twentieth century marks the decline of the ritual and its functions. Gradually the original functions are invested with new attributes and the manifestation becomes a youth party in general when women gather Sânziene flowers to make wreaths that adorn houses and gates. Celebrated on June 24th, the solstice ritual value the unrevealed and invites to seek for particular myths and legends about the need fire, the *Cynanchum vincetoxicum* plant, and the fern.

Myth and Folk Comparative Readings is the chapter that stresses upon the issue of religious syncretism mechanism within the territories between Danube and Carpathians. Different layers are put out. Thracian and Greek-Roman summer solstice rituals are added and integrated by Christian ones, and altogether become the surface for folk creations (Ileana Simziana and Hunter's Son). Thus, on this territory, the Roman deity, Diana, interjects another form of divinity shaped by the attributes of Artemis, Selene and Persephone assimilated to a pre-Indo-European goddess, Hecate, a htonian force (Braga, 1999: 53-79). The two immixed goddesses are assimilated to the Thracian goddess, Bendis. The new syncretical divinity is the image of the fertile and nourishing mother-earth and features attributes of Nemesis, Iuno, Bendis, Diana-Selene-Hecate, Hestia Demeter, and Persephone. The mechanism of overlapping layers of meanings marks the rural component of society that made possible such a transformation. I therefore consider that the collective imaginary keeps these pre-

Christian significances, referring to the Moon and the Sun, creates a rural deity, Sânziana, and performs the Christian ritual of Saint John of Summer.

Sânziana in Romanian means a plant that blossoms during the summer solstice and also a nocturnal deity celebrated during the holiday that bears its name. Associated with the customs performed on the occasion of the renewal of the season, the name of Sânziana covers a multitude of meanings and aspects within the Romanian folklore: the peasants carry out magic rituals regarding the astronomical and weather observations; they harvest plants for the quack medicine and gather drops of dew used within the popular cosmetics; the aches brought about by the reaping are thought to be prevented by enfolding the waist with stems of chicory; there are performed oratories about the fertility of the land and the cattle; the virgins and the young wives bathe ritually at night in the running waters in order to be beautiful and wanted by men the coming year; young women try to find their fate by throwing wreaths of sanziene on the top of the houses and the barns; it is used to sunbathe the clothes in order not to be bitten by moths; the peasants burn strong smelling substances to drive away the bad spirits; there are also rituals to celebrate the dead people; the dumbness of the cuckoo represents in these men's view a sign for starting the haymaking; it is said that the fern blossoms on the solstice night and the man who can see its flower gathers supernatural powers.

Religiously, during the summer solstice is celebrated St. John, one of few saints in the orthodox calendar carrying more than one ceremonial day. The breaking off moment, noticing discontinuity between the two worlds, is a specific attribute of Saint John of Summer Holiday and colligates by ritual the separation between the profane time and the religious/ magic one. The vespers service consists in space alternation. Women gather together and walk away of the sacred space of the church and surround the holy building hand-in-hand as an attempt to transfer the sacred.

The particularity of the summer solstice ritual is given by the presence of both names, Christian and Pagan, *Saint John of Summer* and *Sânziene*, in the ceremonial calendar. This fact indicates a constant feature along the social and cultural dynamic process. A natural phenomenon concerning numerous holidays (ex. Christmas Holiday), assimilation is not to be noticed in the case of the summer solstice ritual. The religious syncretism is revealed by celebrating the moment through a joined ceremonial

gathering old pre-Christian culture together with the Christian-Orthodox one. To the vespers celebration, when women surround the church singing, it associates the need fire wheels rolled by young men over the hills and along the riversides. I identified these aspects in a field research in Maramureș (2003, 2006, 2008), one of the Romanian counties where people still double celebrate the ritual in a Christian and also a pagan way, without altering the elements of the ritual in a post-December 1989 manner. The report of the field study, that supposes a direct auctorial implication, implied a different narrative discourse. Therefore, in this part of my dissertation, I preferred to replace the auctorial third person, neutral, with the first one. Through participative observation, the ethnographical reality is a subjective act of perception and, in the field, I was a witness of traditions and I looked into the people's life while they took part in the summer solstice ritual. The chapter *Sânziene celebration nowadays in Maramureș region* analyses the way in which local identity is stated by creating a ceremonial space (wooden churches), by presenting prominent characters of the village, and by featuring trades (clothes, sculptures). An important part to be seen is the dynamics of the ritual. It is important to be noted the way in which new values are adopted, and how they are added so that the ceremony keeps its significance in contemporary period. During the field research, I was particularly interested in the actual aspect of the ritual celebration and its constitutive factors. The synchronic dimension of the culture was rendered by the interest manifested to the practices. Methodologically, to illustrate the ethnographical facts I used *interpretative methods* to stress upon the way in which the community members see the tradition; *qualitative methods*, such as half-structured interview concerning Midsummer Day ritual; *ethnographical observation* to record the ritual; *ethnographical description*, to register morphologically the constitutive elements of the ritual.

Concerning the aesthetic element, I also notice that the folk literature registers two kinds of stories about the Midsummer Day. Some of the legends refer in a comparative way to the Moon, while in folk-tales, the main feminine character, Ileana Cosânzeana, represents an archetype. Both ways of folk fictional creations cumulate specific attributes as sum of collective syncretism. To illustrate the second category of mythological reality I articulated short analyses of the fairy-tales *Ileana Simziana* and *The Hunter's Son*.

The moment of celebrating this maternal and agrarian deity still keeps the memory of the merged divinities, but it changes in time. The degradation of the ritual's celebration could be interpreted as a consequence of meaning decline of Sanziene holiday in people's conscience. The great variety of symbols as a result of the syncretism mechanism could be the cause of keeping and perpetuating the significances of the holiday in a passive way. To the active stage of the ritual follows at the beginning of the 20th century a fragmental receptivity. The components of the ritual are not perceived as a whole, but interpreted due to the immediate needs of the participant. Therefore, the myth of Sanziana loses its functions within communities and turns into a literary motif.

The chapter *Literature – a way to (re)create the meaning of summer solstice* reveals Sanziana as a pattern, a symbol of regeneration, that keeps its archetypal valences while changing into a literary motif and becomes the proper field for implementing new or borrowed significances. The night and the day of the summer solstice carry the charm and the mystery of ancient rituals mixed with erudite significations. The literary works dealing with the motif of Sanziana stress upon this indetermination. "*There is something going on*" could be the leitmotif of the variety of connotations for this temporal segment

The principle of renewal is still an important element of the ritual, but the terms of equation are rather changed. Midsummer Day enlarges its meanings in some authors' texts such as Mihail Sadoveanu and Mircea Eliade. The aim of this paper is not to present an exhaustive illustration of literary works, but to analyze a specific set of creations that reveal the mechanism of reinterpreting the mythical attributes according to the author's aesthetic needs. The symbol of Midsummer Day allows and inspires the authors' semantics. An aesthetic value is added to the fictional writing. In this context, animals are allowed to speak as humans do; a simple man is permitted to be present to a vegetation ceremony where heavens open to allow the initiated ones the access into a spaceless and timeless world. Fascination and fear are both dominating and define the sentiments concerning this day. Miraculous becomes a component part of the daily life and it is recognized as it is. Fiction speculates the feeling of uncertainty, dividing the characters in two categories: those who believe in the power of miracle and those who try rationally to explain the other reality.

Due to celebration both of the Moon and the Sun, the semantics of the summer solstice myth is larger and permits the (re)creation of the cosmic androgyny previous to

the moment of being. Therefore, it represents a fertile theme for fiction. The panel of symbols reveals an endless way of interpreting the meaning and allows new significances to increase. Fiction through story recovers the meaning of the existence and represents an act of world creation.

The present dissertation has also an independent part formed by a selection of various texts concerning the summer solstice theme. The anthology of selected works illustrates the Romanian ethnographers' and folklorists' perspective upon midsummer's day ceremony, the way in which the oral tradition kept the image of the ritual in legends and folk-tales, and how the Romanian writers (re)create the world of magic through literature. The way the anthology is organized respects the present theoretical approach, showing out diachronically a dynamic perspective of the summer solstice custom with continuous and discontinuous forms. The selective ethnographic texts respect the chronological order of their appearance. They are followed by a number of legends, ballads and fairy-tales that depict a fictional folklore reality. Due to the space reason, the works tracing the summer solstice theme are illustrated within only three Romanian authors, Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sadoveanu and Fanus Neagu.

The purpose of creating such an anthology has a didactic aim. The selected texts, accompanied by authors' short biographic note, are to be adapted to a curricular auxiliary for the XIth and XIIth forms. Completed with exercises, they will develop reading skills in different content areas.

In conclusion, the present approach illustrates the complex phenomenon of summer solstice symbolism, with its implications in important social-ritual moments in individual's life. It spotlights the way the people revive themselves within cultural dynamics and the analysis reveals the specific contexts generated by groups or individuals.

APENDIX

Sânzienele. Anthology

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

I. ETNOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

Dimitrie Cantemir

Despre religia moldovenilor

Tudor Pamfile

Sânzienile

I.A. Candrea

Ferega

D. A. Vasiliu

[Focul viu]

Ion Mușlea

Sânziene (24 iunie)

Drăgaica (abrev. *d.*), (nr. 148)

Ileana Cosânzeana (nr. 145)

Mircea Eliade

De la Zalmoxis la Genghis-Han. Studii comparative despre religiile și folclorul
Daciei și Europei Orientale

Adrian Fochi

Drăgaica (II, 108)

Sânziene (II, 106):

Mihai Pop

[Sânziana sau Drăgaica]

Valer Butură

Sânziene, Drăgaică (*Galium verum L.*)

Sânziene albe (*Galium mollugo L.*)

Sânziană de pădure, Vinariță (*Asperula odorata L.*)

Take Papahagi

Sânzienele

Ovidiu Bârlea

Drăgaica

Dumitru Pop

Drăgaica

Victor Kernbach

Drăgaică

Iana Sânziana

Ileana Cosânzeana

Sânziene

[Drăgaica]

[Sânzienele]

[Iarba fiarelor]

Sinteza optimă a zânei în Iana Sânziana sau divinitatea convertită

Ion Ghinoiu

Drăgaica

Dansul Drăgaicei

Steagul Drăgaicei

Târgurile Drăgaicei

Sânziana

Sânziene

Cununa de Sânziene

Moșii de Sânziene

Târgul de fete

Înfloritul ferigii

Sânzienele

Maturizarea timpului calendaristic la solstițiul de vară

Ivan Evseev

Drăgaica

Iana Sânziana

Inia Dinia

Sânzienele

Antoaneta Olteanu

Plante magice; plante de leac

Ferigă

Practici magice

Condiționarea temporală

Text și metatext. Structura descântecului

Ion Taloș

Drăgaica/Sânzienele

Feriga

Ileana Cosânzeana

II. FOLKLORE

Balade și cântece bătrânești închipuind Luna

Soarele și Luna

Sora Soarelui

Luna cere fratelui ei, Soarele, să-i facă pod peste mare, scară până la cer și biserică de ceară așezată pe mare

[Povestea Soarelui și a Lunei]

Soarele și Luna

Gemenii

[Soția necredincioasă]

Cucul și Sava

De ce cântă cucul numai până la Sânziene

Macul

Zânele bune

Ileana Simziana

Fiul vânătorului

III. ROMANIAN LITERATURE

Mircea Eliade

Noaptea de Sânziene

Jurnal

Memorii

Isabel și apele diavolului

Les trois grâces

Fănuș Neagu

Noaptea de Sânziene

Mihail Sadoveanu

Noapțile de Sânziene

24 iunie

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