

ZALMOXIS, THE VANISHING GOD. By *Mircea Eliade*. Translated by *Willard R. Trask*. *Comparative Studies in the Religions and Folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972. x, 260 pp. \$9.50.

Chapters 1 and 3–7 of this book's eight chapters, written at different times, have already appeared earlier in the journals *Numen*, *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, *Revue des études roumaines*, *Acta Historica*, and *Zalmoxis: Revue des études religieuses*. But in view of the significance of Eliade's contributions to the comparative history of religion and culture, it is useful and convenient to have this selection which centers on the Balkans—Rumania in particular—gathered together in one book.

In chapter 1, "The Dacians and Wolves," the author adduces substantial evidence from history, ethnology, and linguistics, of the original meaning "wolf" for the tribe name "Daci," which places this group in the line of peoples who considered a blue or gray (she-)wolf their mythical ancestor—Indo-Europeans and Altaians as well. This is substantiated by a number of valuable observations on the role of the wolf, and werewolves, in both ancient religion and modern folklore.

In "Zalmoxis" (chap. 2) the traditions concerning this mythical figure are traced from Herodotus on through the entire classical literature as far as they can be pursued down into Christian times and to the revival of the tradition in the early 1920s in Rumania, where some nationalist groups promoted the idea of the Daco-Getic pre-Roman heritage of the Rumanian people. Zalmoxis's role in Greek religious traditions—always in connection with the supernatural, the irrational, and the occult—is not that of a shaman, as has been proposed by some scholars. Even based on shamanist traces in Greek religion and belief (found also in the characteristics of personages such as Orpheus, Abaris, Pythagoras, and Parmenides), Zalmoxis as described by Herodotus cannot be considered as belonging to this school of thought. Eliade supports his view by pointing to the most characteristic features of Zalmoxis's eschatological cult, which reflect a cultural and religious milieu that was quite typical of the Thracians and related peoples of the Carpatho-Danubian area of the Balkan Peninsula.

The views on the Devil and God, and their relationship, as they survive in Rumanian folklore are illustrated by the author through a comparative historical analysis of the Rumanian folk cosmogony (chap. 3). Typical is the myth of the "cosmogonic dive." The creation myth which deals with Satan's cosmogonic dive into the sea for the seed of Earth is basically the same not only all over Southeastern Europe but also, as Eliade shows in his elaborate comparative research, among the Poles, Baltic Sea Finns, Volga Finns, Ugrians, and in Northern and Central Asia. But a specific feature of the Rumanian and Southeast European cosmogonies in general is God's weariness after the creation, his passivity—an attitude not found in Central and Northern Asia and absolutely contrary to the idea of the Creator and Kosmokrator in Judaism and Christianity. On the origin of the myth, Eliade refers to Wilhelm Schmidt's view that it belonged to the "patrimony common to the Paleolithic peoples of northern Asia" (p. 123) and from there it spread across Asia and into America. In its "predualistic" form, the myth of creation must have been a part of the religious heritage of Southeastern Europe. The "dualistic" features, dealing with Satan's role in the act of creation, reflect the relatively late influences of Gnosticism and Manichaeism.

According to the earliest chronicle records, the first Rumanian principality came into existence in 1359 when Prince Dragoș, the voivode of Maramureș, came from Hungary to the Moldavia region while hunting an aurochs (chap. 4). With his usual mastery, Eliade explores the native symbolism of this complex and traces its various streams back to their archaic pre-Indo-European, late Paleolithic sources, discussing the many aspects of ritual hunt, animal guides, and so forth. All these elements are reflected in the national and religious traditions of Dacia and later Rumania, and now become understandable against this rich background. Eliade stresses the “paradox of Dacia,” as he calls it—namely that Dacia, along with the entire Balkan Peninsula, is a “crossroads” of many influences as well as a “zone of conservation,” as seen in these archaic folklore and religious traditions surviving there (p. 160).

Discussing one of the two foremost Rumanian folk ballads, “Master Manole and the Monastery of Argeș,” from the standpoint of comparative religious folklore (chap. 5), Eliade investigates its fundamental religious views, such as the serene acceptance of violent death (in this case, a human sacrifice to be brought for the completion of construction work at the Monastery of Argeș), and traces them back to remote pre-Indo-European times. Quite a number of very ancient features, among them religious beliefs and rites, have been preserved remarkably well in the area of the Danubian Balkans, as perhaps nowhere else in Europe except the Pyrenees and Ireland.

The question whether there ever was a Rumanian shamanism (chap. 6) is answered “improbable.” Eliade discusses the famous passage, “De incantationibus” (ca. 1650), in Marcus Bandinus’s records, in which Bandinus describes essentially shamanist features such as the trance that befalls the *incantatores*. But, like Vilmos Diószegi, Eliade comes to the conclusion that these Moldavian *incantatores* whom Bandinus witnessed were not Rumanians but Csángó (Hungarians of the Moldavian Carpathians). There are essential differences between the Hungarian *táltos*, the shaman, and the sorcerers of neighboring peoples, such as the Rumanian *solomonar* or the Serbo-Croatian *grabancijaš*. Although incantations belong to shamanist practices, not all incantations are to be considered shamanist, even though they may contain shamanist elements, as Eliade correctly maintains in the discussion of an article by Gábor Lükő (pp. 202–3).

After describing the cult of the mandragora in Rumania and many varieties of the rituals performed when gathering this “herb of life and death” (chap. 7), Eliade analyzes in the last chapter (chap. 8), “The Clairvoyant Lamb,” the religious and folkloristic basis of this folk ballad, so well known and beloved by all Rumanians. It came to the West rather late, after Jules Michelet’s French translation (1854) of the literary Rumanian version by the poet Vasile Alecsandri (1850), and was received enthusiastically. The most striking feature of the ballad is the young shepherd’s unreserved acceptance of a violent death, in more than a Tolstoyan vein of *nesoprotivlenie zlu* (this is not meant as an interpretation). Thus the “Miorița,” as equally esteemed and loved by the folk as by the intellectuals, was considered to contain the most eloquent expression of the Rumanian national character and psychology. During the last twenty years, propaganda has been put forth in Rumania against this pessimistic, even “obscurantist” interpretation, which has always been the prevalent one. In the context of the uneven struggle of opinions between traditionalists and modernists (including Marxists), Eliade analyzes the themes of the ballad, discusses folk views on postexistence, posthumous

betrotals, and the prehistory of the ballad, and comes to the conclusion that what he aptly calls the “terror of history”—the awakening of the consciousness of Rumanians (and other East European peoples alike) to the many invasions and ensuing phases of oppression and to other historical catastrophes they had to undergo, “because of the crushing inequality between the invaders and the invaded peoples” (p. 254)—explains the attitude as found in the “Miorița.” The peasant populations of Eastern Europe “succeeded in bearing disasters and persecution principally by virtue of cosmic Christianity” (p. 255), as Eliade calls the particular East European projection of the “Christological mystery upon the whole of Nature” (p. 251).

I have nothing to add to these convincing deductions of the eminent scholar of comparative religion and religious folklore, and this goes also for the other chapters of this valuable book, some of which pose problems less intricate than the “Miorița.” Beyond the many topics dealt with, Eliade’s book is of great importance not only with regard to Rumania but also concerning her Slavic neighbors and the entire Southeast of Europe.

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DRACULA: A BIOGRAPHY OF VLAD THE IMPALER, 1431–1476. By Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973. xiii, 239 pp. \$7.95.

In the history of Wallachia, Vlad Țepeș—the Impaler—is recorded as a triple-crown loser. His elevation from relative historic obscurity to fame and fortune for his rediscoverers, primarily through identification of the late Wallachian ruler with Dracula of contemporary popularity, is important to the historical profession. Vlad Țepeș, as Florescu and McNally rightly point out, was a significant ruler both as the champion of law and order at home and as Wallachia’s defender against Turkish encroachment. Such recognition had in fact been accorded to him by Rumanian historians of the twentieth century long before the appearance of the present volume.

The essential merit of this book lies in the professional manner in which the authors have reviewed and analyzed the historic events of the period of Vlad Țepeș’s tumultuous life. Less persuasive and appropriate for an objective historical study are the chapters devoted to identification of Vlad Țepeș with Dracula, particularly those connected with vampirism, demonology, sexual aberrations, and such assorted condiments of contemporary exorcism.

In the last analysis the book was written to provide sound professional treatment of a simple historical problem blown out of proportion to its actual significance by the authors’ previous and less rigorous studies on Dracula. The legitimizing process is successfully achieved, albeit with the risks involved in making historical scholarship and writing relevant to a non- and perhaps even anti-historical reading public. The style is slightly P.R.-ish, the photographs are cast in the same vein, and the pictures of the authors on the dust jacket bear an uncanny resemblance to actors of grade-B horror movies.

It is regrettable, if quite understandable, that the publisher has found it necessary to resort to gimmicks to promote a significant historical study. To paraphrase the profound statement of one of America’s leading figures: “If Vlad