

ARCHAIC ELEMENTS IN MIRCEA ELIADE'S "LEGIONARY" WRITINGS

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ABSTRACT. *Archaic Elements in Mircea Eliade's "Legionary" Writings.* Mircea Handoca collected Mircea Eliade's articles accused of legionarism in the volume *"Legionary" texts and on "Romanianism"*. The present paper adopts a neutral attitude towards the Romanian scholar's political orientation so the question "Was Eliade a legionary?" will not be asked. Our approach is an attempt to detect in these articles the early presence of some ideas that would later emerge in Eliade's study of the history of religions.

Keywords: *Mircea Eliade, the archaic man, homo religiosus, the legionary movement, sacred, profane, sacrifice*

The title of the present paper may seem somewhat rhetorical due to the term "legionary" being written in quotes. Therefore, an explanation is needed at the beginning. Mircea Handoca, considered to be Mircea Eliade's best editor, collected in the volume *"Legionary" texts and on "Romanianism"* the articles incriminated for their legionary, anti-Semitic, fascist, and nationalist position, published by Eliade in periodicals such as *Vremea, Buna Vestire, Iconar, Cuvântul, Sânziana, Credința, Revista Fundațiilor Regale*. The present paper does not aim to discuss Mircea Eliade's political attitude, defend his image against accusations or create an aura around political affiliations specific to Romanian interwar period but, as the title suggests, it attempts to reveal aspects of the archaic in the texts described as extreme right.

The year 1927 sees the emergence of a "movement" of Romanian intellectuals with "headquarters" at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest. "Nae's children" (as Dan C. Mihăilescu nicknamed them) initiated what was later to become an extreme right political movement; thus, in 1927 Mircea Eliade published a series of articles entitled "Spiritual itinerary" in the paper *Cuvântul* while

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at Iași, on June 24, The Legion of the Archangel Michael was founded by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ion Moța, Ilie Gârneală, Corneliu Georgescu and Radu Mironovici.¹ Eliade calls it “the ‘class’ of 1927”, who declare themselves as being “in their intentions apolitical, autochthonous, anti-French, orthodox, anti-1848 ideology, anti-Junimea and at the same time in open battle with all preceding generations”.²

“The Spiritual Itinerary” includes 12 articles written while Mircea Eliade was on a student scholarship in Geneva (summer and autumn of 1927) and published in *Cuvântul* between September 6 and November 16, 1927.³ After a few years, Eliade offered an “explanation” of the manifesto: “We were the first Romanian generation who did not have to carry out prerequisite historical objectives. In order not to sink into cultural provincialism or spiritual sterility, we had to know what was going on in the world, in our days”.⁴

Briefly, the generation of 1927 aimed to valorize the national cultural patrimony, to resurrect Romanian spirituality, and create the famous *New Man*, educated in religious and creative spirit:

I felt the culture had to be integrated with the nation. We were all convinced that speaking at the university was not enough. We had to get down into the arena. As in Spain, we thought that, following Unamuno and Ortega, the diary would become the intellectual’s tool. We did not have the inferiority complex of our teachers’ generation, by publishing only in academic journals and refusing to publish in a daily newspaper. We wanted to address the widest audience possible, to give impetus to Romanian culture which, without this participation, risked sinking into provincialism.⁵

The interwar political situation affected the academic and intellectual elites, who “had to” make choices between sides and join either the proponents of the extreme left or those of the extreme right. Mircea Eliade was associated with the latter, together with Emil Cioran, Mihail Polihroniade, Constantin Noica, Haig Acterian, Petre Țuțea, Alexandru Christian Tell and others. Even before the onset of the communist regime, Mircea Eliade was attacked and expatriated from the Romanian culture, a situation that would last for many years. While the scholar’s studies were recognized in

¹ Dan C. Mihăilescu, „Generația ’27, atunci și acum” [“Generation ’27, Then and Now”] in *Cuvântul*, year XI, March 2005, no. 3, p. 12.

² Marta Petreu, *De la Junimea la Noica. Studii de cultură românească [From Junimea to Noica. Studies in Romanian Culture Studies]*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2011, p. 254.

³ Mircea Handoca, *Viața lui Mircea Eliade [The Life of Mircea Eliade]*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, pp. 29–30.

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Memorii [Memoirs]*, op. cit., p. 137, apud Mircea Handoca, *Viața lui Mircea Eliade [The Life of Mircea Eliade]*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, p. 30.

⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Încercarea labirintului [Ordeal by Labyrinth]*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1990, p. 70.

the Western world, in Romania the most grotesque accusations and insults were brought against him. Among his most virulent detractors, we mention: Belu Silber, Oscar Lemnaru, Victor Iliu, D. Murărașu, Anton Dumitriu, Nichifor Crainic, Mihail Sebastian – “They set on him like a pack determined to tear him, dozens of anonymous illiterates, along with valuable envious cultural personalities, some of their own initiative, but most executing orders from the ‘center’.”⁶

I will not dwell on the intellectual massacre of the two sides nor will I accuse or exonerate Mircea Eliade's political attitudes because they have already been analyzed by many commentators.⁷ I will refer to the concept of the archaic discussed in his writings, and then continue by identifying specific elements of traditional society in the articles in question.

Aspects of the archaic

The concept underlying Mircea Eliade's entire hermeneutics (as hermeneutics is the foundation of his studies) is the sacred, which is present in all his writings in a concrete way (predominantly) or is just mentioned, ambiguously, as assumption (in the writings of his youth). The issue of the sacred is encountered both in his scientific writings and in his literary works, in his novels and the fantastic prose. To clarify the concept, Mircea Eliade deals with the manifestations of the sacred in relation to the profane. At the heart of this relationship is the man: firstly, the man of the traditional society, the “instrument” meant for the revealing of the sacred; then, the profane modern man, “suffering” from reminiscences of the “primitive” man. We shall use the term “primitive” in quotation marks, as it is used by Eliade in all his works, precisely to avoid its pejorative meaning. Thus, the “primitive” means the archaic man, who will later be theorized by Eliade as *homo religiosus*.

Returning to the issue of the sacred, it should be noted that in his writings Eliade uses his particular specific terms to describe its dimensions. Thus, we find the concept of *hierophany* which involves the manifestation of the sacred:

Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the act of manifestation of the sacred, we have proposed the term *hierophany*. It is a fitting term, because it does not imply anything further; it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, i.e., that something sacred shows itself to us.⁸

⁶ Mircea Handoca, *Eliade și Noica [Eliade and Noica]*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 44.

⁷ See, for example, Marta Petreu, *De la Junimea la Noica. Studii de cultură românească [From Junimea to Noica. Studies in Romanian Culture]*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2011.

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Sacrul și profanul [The Sacred and the Profane]*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2007, p. 13. Translation of the excerpt from Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated from French: W. R. Trask, Harvest/HBJ Publishers, 1957, p. 11

The concept of sacred is antinomic and can only be relevant in relation to the profane – with the sacred being expressed by *homo religiosus* and the profane being expressed by *homo profanus*, with the respective opposition of the *real* and *unreal*:

The man of the archaic societies tends to live as much as possible in the sacred or in close proximity to consecrated objects. The tendency is perfectly understandable, because, for “primitives” as for the man of all pre-modern societies, the sacred is equivalent to a *power* and, in the last analysis, to *reality*.⁹

Presented as “two modes of being in the world”, the sacred and the profane embody different human experiences that are essentially the same in their substance but are perceived and manifest themselves in opposite modes. Adrian Marino synthesizes the explanation of the sacred in the following way:

The simplest definition of the sacred is “religious sentiment” whose existence nobody contests, even if its justification is disputed with rational, valid arguments. This feeling is (we quote from Mircea Eliade’s sphere of references) “an inner and personal conviction, an a priori category of reason”, it is the “in depth insight of the human spirit in its entirety”, of that which is “ultimate, infinite, unconditional in human spiritual life”.¹⁰

The main elements of Eliade’s hermeneutics that lead to the revelation of the sacred are the archetype, the myth and the symbol, elements which correspond to space, time and nature. Thus, the archaic man lives in a sacred space (considers it sacred and resacralizes it), in a sacred time (which tends to become history, but this is refuted as the man resacralizes it by imitating myths), and in the sacred nature (cosmological space built on religious symbols and meanings). The archaic man lives by the process of *imitatio dei*, finding divine creation, the only real creation, reaching its meaning by deciphering the significances present around (in space, in nature):

For Mircea Eliade, “the sacred man” is, above all a *homo semnificans*. The openness to the sacred is inherent in human condition, in the structure of human consciousness and not a stage in the history of this consciousness: “It is impossible to imagine how consciousness could have occurred without it having assigned significance to human impulses and experiences. The consciousness of the real and

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 14. Translation excerpt from Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated from French: W.R. Trask, Harvest/HBJ Publishers, 1957, pp. 12–13

¹⁰ Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade [The Hermeneutics of Mircea Eliade]*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1980, pp. 151–152.

significant world is intimately related to the discovery of the sacred". This idea is repeated in dozens of texts and contexts and is undoubtedly the foundation of Mircea Eliade's hermeneutics.¹¹

Coming back to the sacred elements, the so-called bridges between man and the cosmos, Mircea Eliade questions the archetypes, assigning the archaic man the capacity to decipher them, an action that leads to existential exercises:

If one goes to the trouble of penetrating the authentic meaning of an archaic myth or symbol, one cannot but observe that this meaning shows a recognition of a certain situation in the cosmos and that, consequently, it implies a metaphysical position.¹²

As mentioned earlier, the archaic man is in a continuous process of imitation, of *imitatio dei*, from the places he chooses for dwelling (always in the center of the world – a center that actually is everywhere, but by certain typologies it is revealed to all) to the regeneration of time (e.g., the transition into the New Year – "The Creation of the World, which took place in *illo tempore*, in the beginning of the year, is thus reactualized each year"¹³) and to imitation rituals ("We must do what the Gods did in the beginning").¹⁴

Another notable aspect is the fact that the modern man, in spite of his profane nature, has not suffered a complete desacralization, meaning that reminiscences of the archaic man can be still found in him because in the modern profane man dwells *homo religiosus*: "We assume that our human condition is based on this fundamental condition. And this 'fundamental human' can be said to be 'religious' no matter the appearances because it is all about the meaning of life."¹⁵

Hence the connection between the man of the traditional society and the *New Man* described in the articles accused of legionarism. Adrian Marino discusses this issue by calling the new humanism promoted by Eliade, militant hermeneutics. It is called militant because of its structure meant to influence, to transform, to penetrate the human spirit and guide it towards an opening of consciousness – in

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 155.

¹² Mircea Eliade, *Mitul eternei reîntoarceri [The Myth of Eternal Return]*, Univers Enciclopedic Gold Publishing House, București, 2011, p. 13. Translation excerpt from Eliade, Mircea, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, translated: W. R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954, p. 3.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 63. Translation excerpt from Eliade, Mircea, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, translated: W. R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954, p. 58.

¹⁴ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, VII, 2, 1, 1, *apud* Mircea Eliade, *Mitul eternei reîntoarceri*, p. 28.

¹⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Încercarea labirintului [Ordeal by Labyrinth]*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1990, p. 103.

more colloquial words, to open man's eyes to his human nature and to direct and educate him in a creative spirit. And this initiative of Eliade and of his colleagues in the "class of 1930" subsequently brought upon him denigration, accusations, expatriation, and non-recognition:

The ideas remain inert unless they are accompanied by a certain "agitation and propaganda", of direct social action. Militant hermeneutics is just the crystallization and maturation of this conviction: "A creative historical-religious hermeneutics might stimulate, nourish and renew philosophical thought."¹⁶

Archaic elements in the "legionary" writings

A particularly significant article for our topic is "Ion Moța and Vasile Marin", published in *Vremea*, nr. 9, January 24, 1937. Seven legionary volunteers enlisted with the anticommunist camp in the Spanish Civil War, including Ion Moța (founder of the Legion of the Archangel Michael) and Vasile Marin, an action which Eliade considered symbolic: "But the departure of the seven Romanian legionary commanders in Spain – where they fought as mere volunteers in shock troops – was symbolic."¹⁷

The article is a tribute in memory of the two leaders who lost their lives on the Spanish front – the symbolic death of the two is "above divine values and heroism."¹⁸ Their action, which is perfect and at the same time striving for self-perfection, is in itself a sacrifice founded on a spiritual pillar:

The voluntary death of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin has a mystical meaning: the sacrifice for Christianity. It is a sacrifice to substantiate the heroism and faith of an entire generation. It is a sacrifice meant to exploit, strengthen Christianity, to dynamize the youth.¹⁹

Ion Moța's portrait can be summarized in one word: "martyr", namely he who sacrifices himself in the name of faith and "proves to the others that such a faith saves one from the fear of death, and in it one may find support after one

¹⁶ Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade [The Hermeneutics of Mircea Eliade]*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1980, p. 294.

¹⁷ *Ion Moța și Vasile Marin [Ion Moța and Vasile Marin]*, published in *Vremea*, year X (1937), January 24, no. 472, p. 3, *apud* Mircea Handoca, *Mircea Eliade. Textele „legionare” și despre românism [Mircea Eliade. "Legionary" Texts and on "Romanianism"]*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 36.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

¹⁹ *Idem*.

found a sense of existence".²⁰ Or, in this case, the meaning of existence is revealed in the action of the warrior, in its purpose. Ion Moța dies for faith, for spirit, for values that were meant to revive Romania, to create a Christian country:

Ion Moța believed that the younger generation's mission is to reconcile Romania with God. To transform the dead letter in Christian life. To fight with every means against the powers of darkness. In the hour when he felt Lucifer clashed again in the fight with Christ – Ion Moța, orthodox crusader, left adamant, with heart at peace, to sacrifice himself for the Savior's triumph.²¹

The same description can be found in the case of comrade Vasile Marin, a more than heroic figure who, in his turn, showed that he was not afraid of death: "Destiny chose them to testify; to show the others the serenity faith gives you, the Christian and heroic sense life gets when you are ready at any moment to renounce it."²²

The motif of sacrifice is complex and dates back to prehistoric times, whether it refers to the sacrifice of others or to self-sacrifice. An example from traditional societies would be the creation of a sanctuary, of a space that requires human sacrifice – this is present within the oldest indigenous tribes down to the local regions, in the ballad of Master Manole where the raising of the church demands human sacrifice. Self-sacrifice, in this case, occurs with a meaning, a purpose. It is a consequence of the discovery of the meaning of existence. Or, modern man is confused and lost in history, in the moment and in the social turmoil, alien to the purpose of his existence on earth – in contrast, the sense of existence is revealed to the archaic man, or even more, he "fights" to discover it and his existence is meaningless without a purpose. Ion Moța discovers this meaning – he is doomed to die for an ideal, hence his voluntarism in combat which would not be called mere "courage". Reconciliation in the face of death and acceptance of the destiny make him a prototype of traditional man. Death seen as a "passage from one mode of existence to another"²³ assumes complexity, first of all because it is not planned or deliberate but because it must happen:

It can be said, in a brief formula, that the "primitive" world does not conceive Death as a natural and necessary phenomenon, it is only the consequence of an accident which took place in *illo tempore*, in the mythical time of the beginnings, and to this

²⁰ *Idem.*

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

²² *Idem.*

²³ Mircea Eliade, *Arta de a muri [The Art of Dying]*, Editura Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 102

accident followed by a downfall is attributed the foundation of the current human condition, substantially depleted in comparison to the previous state.²⁴

On studying more thoroughly the archaic element, it is apparent that the sacrifice of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, their symbolic death, which Eliade appropriates, is not a tragedy, because existence does not stop here (Christianity, the purpose of the two warrior's battle, supports the existence of the afterlife). Thus, this death (which, once identified as symbolic, becomes initiation) is a retreat from time to *illo tempore*, it is an action that also happened first in *illo tempore*, an act repeated *ab origine*:

Death does not have the meaning we are generally tempted to assign it but means the following: the past is done with, a profane existence is put to an end – in order that another regenerated one begins. Initiating death is thus a start, it is never *an end*. There is no ritual or myth in which initiating death is encountered as the end but as a *sine qua non* condition of passing to another mode of being, indispensable evidence of regeneration, of the beginning of a new life.²⁵

The funerals of the two martyrs (if we are allowed to call them so) are described in the article “Comments on an oath”, published in *Vremea*, on 21 February 1937. The convoy accompanied by tens of thousands of people swear an oath before the coffin: “Moța and Marin, I swear before God, before your holy sacrifice, for Christ and the Legion, to relinquish the earthly joys, to renounce human love and, for the resurrection of my nation, am ready at any moment to face death!”²⁶ The entire article, accused mostly of paying tribute to the Legion, relates to the glorification of the two “heroes” but it is not this aspect that interests us but Eliade’s description of the *New Man*. As mentioned above, the sacrifice of Ion Moța and Vasile Marin occurs voluntarily, naturally, as an inherent, predestined given – the man at peace with death, who discovered the meaning of existence and does not avoid it, does not find the tragic or finality in it. Eliade underlines the importance of this oath enthusiastically believing in it because it is meant to revive spiritual Romania, the religiosity of man who could rebuild a society founded on the spirit that knows no political and economical greed. He finds the tragic element in this event due the solemnity and solidarity of those assembled who, having the two volunteers as example, are bound to pass with them:

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

²⁶ “Comentariu la un jurământ” [“Comment on an Oath”], published in *Vremea*, 21 February 1937, no. 476, p. 2, *apud* Mircea Handoca, *Mircea Eliade. Textele „legionare” și despre românism* [Mircea Eliade. “Legionary” Texts and on “Romanianism”], p. 44.

The ascetic vision contained by this oath is tragic – as it means fighting with oneself, renunciation, restraint – but not pessimistic. On the contrary, the solemnity and seriousness of the decision to give up the human love fail to hide the joy of the other love, the Christian heavenly one. Renunciation of earthly pleasures is not a diminution of being, a sterilizing of its substance – but on the contrary, a frantic increase of the spiritual being, a true victory of the real against transient, illusory, desperate human joys.²⁷

The issue of death and self-sacrifice appears again because the “salvation of the Nation is not possible without sacrifice; no resurrection, in no order of existence is possible without death”.²⁸ The *New Man* mentioned here is actually the “old”, or the return of the “primitive”, the man of the traditional society who lived in the sacred and for whom there was no possible existence beyond this dimension – “*a new man, a man for whom spiritual life exists.*”

Therefore, in his article *Meditation on Burning of the Cathedrals*, Mircea Eliade insists on blaming the action of church-burning. His references are Christian but could have been to any other denomination because the universality of Eliade’s meditation on religiosity is not diminished by his support for Christianity; thus, the extreme left is condemned for massacres of clergy and for burning churches. Hitler, in his atheism, maintained a synagogue in central Berlin, whereas communists first and foremost acted by destroying cults and dispelling all spiritual values. Hence the denial of the religious and the attempted creation of man spiritually sterile, on the one hand, and the respect for the sacred, on the other. To destroy a place of worship is the equivalent of a spiritual massacre of the individual, it is denying the origins and moving towards chaos, but not to the primordial one that led to the creation of the world, but the Luciferian, meant to destroy religious man:

Take a little time to consider those details that explain one another: bloodlust, unnecessary savagery; the lust to burn churches; the refusal of spiritual primacy (of any spiritual primacy, be it secular or Buddhist); the humiliation of European values (monogamy, family, charity, Mediterranean beauty, the personality).²⁹

Another feature of the archaic found in the texts that we are discussing is that of freedom, or rather (in this context) the lack of freedom of modern man, which is a consequence of his captivity in history – in other words, the issue of the “terror of history”, often mentioned by Eliade. Hence the frenzy of the scholar in

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 46

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

portraying General Cantacuzino, against the description of Romanian people as a nation of slaves, but not of their own fault, but because of external forces which have been permitted to invade the local culture (an aspect debated in the article “Blind Pilots”³⁰):

In the midst of such a society – Balkan trash, the emancipated gypsies,³¹ “serfs ignorant of freedom, servants, hired servants and mercenaries – General Cantacuzino would come down as if from legend.”³² The lack of human freedom described by Mircea Eliade is caused primarily by lack of spirituality, by religious sterility as a really free man is one who is aware of divinity, freedom being basically a consequence of faith:

It is to say the least strange to hear a man who does not believe in God, does not believe in the primacy of the spirit, does not believe in life after death, clamor in the name of “freedom”. Such a man, when he is in good faith, confuses freedom with libertinism and anarchy. There can be no freedom but in spiritual life. Those who refuse the primacy of spirit, automatically fall into mechanistic determinism (Marxism) or irresponsibility.³³

However, over time, struggle happens strictly historically – the archaic man killed and sacrificed within a religious perimeter, his action having a religious meaning. One could interpret similarly the action of contemporary warriors but that is not so because they are ignorant of the divine, their warfare is intrinsic – they are not aware of the fight of Good against Evil and the actions become merely bestial, without sense or purpose, accomplished outside the spirit. This is illustrated in Eliade’s statement on the Gulag and the Holocaust: “All this can be compared with the Aztecs: They all thought they had a justification. The Aztecs believed they helped the Sun God, the Nazis and the Russians believed that they made history.”³⁴ That is, for the Aztecs the sacrifice was transcendent and transhistorical while, at the opposite pole, the Communists and Nazis engaged in a historical fight stripped of any religious significance.

³⁰ *Piloții orbi [Blind Pilots]*, published in *Vremea*, no. 505, 19 September 1937, p. 3 *apud* Mircea Handoca, *Mircea Eliade. Textele „legionare” și despre „românism” [Mircea Eliade. “Legionary” Texts and on “Romanianism”]*.

³¹ Cf. “Sloboziile” = emancipated gypsies (cf. Mircea Eliade).

³² *Mitul generalului [The Myth of the General]*, published in *Buna Vestire*, year I (1937), October 14, no. 189, p. 2, *apud* Mircea Handoca, *Mircea Eliade. Textele „legionare” și despre românism Mircea Eliade. [“Legionary” Texts and on “Romanianism”]*, p. 61.

³³ *Libertate [Freedom]*, published in *Iconar*, (Cernăuți), year III, 1937, no. 5, p. 2, *apud* Mircea Handoca, *Mircea Eliade. Textele „legionare” și despre „românism” Mircea Eliade. [“Legionary” Texts and on “Romanianism”]*, p. 68.

³⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Încercarea labirintului [Ordeal by Labyrinth]*, p. 111.

Beyond religion the man is trapped, a prisoner of the time in which he lives, a prisoner of the past, a prisoner of history. Eliade's hermeneutics proposes the understanding of the past through the present and the understanding of the present through the past. These constraints generate the concept of "terror of history". By being away from God and his own spiritual side, modern man gets trapped and the course of his life contributes to history while he, in his turn, draws on the history of his predecessors:

The "Terror of history" is for me the experience of a man who is no longer religious, who has therefore no hope to find an ultimate meaning in the drama of history, but who is forced to endure the crimes of history without understanding their purpose. A Jew trapped in the city of Babylon suffered enormously, but his suffering made sense: Yahweh wanted to punish His people. And he knew that by the end victory will be Yahweh's, so the Good will prevail... Even for Hegel, any event, any endeavor was a manifestation of the universal spirit and therefore had significance. Therefore, the Evil in history could be if not justified, at least explained rationally... But when historical events are devoid of any transhistorical significance and if they are no longer what they used to be in the traditional world – ordeals for a people or an individual – then we are dealing with what I called the "terror of history".³⁵

The archaic man is deemed to be a creation of the divine, a creation that occurred in *illo tempore*, in a mythical time, while the modern man considers himself as the result of linear historical events, thus taking a first step towards his and the world's desacralization. Yet, the desacralization or the demystification of life, living outside the spiritual, proclaims man's lack of freedom.

To exemplify the above, namely the issue of freedom that leads to the perfection of self, we return to Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, embodiments of the free man who lived "the primacy of the spiritual, against the primacy of the temporal in which the previous generations believed."³⁶ The two martyrs who broke the chains of the mundane and of the profane and for whom death was an initiation, are similar to the archaic man who, "To become a man in the proper sense he must die to this first (natural) life and be reborn to a higher life, which is at once religious and cultural."³⁷

³⁵ *Idem.*

³⁶ *Fără titlu [No Title]*, published in *Buna Vestire*, year II, no. 262, 14 January 1938, p. 4, *apud* Mircea Handoca, *Mircea Eliade. Textele „legionare” și despre „românism”*. [*Mircea Eliade. "Legionary" Texts and on "Romanianism"*], p. 70.

³⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Sacrul și profanul [The Sacred and the Profane]*, p. 141. Translation excerpt from Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated from French: W.R. Trask, Harvest/HBJ Publishers, 1957, p. 187.

The man in bondage, chained, trapped in the social and the profane will not find the meaning of existence, will not create, nor will he know the others but his existence will be limited to a simple mechanistic and degrading spiritual sterility which will impact on his whole being, because, as Eliade says: "The purpose of existence and the duty of every man is the creation."³⁸

The article "The Province and the Guard" approaches the concept of reality, of presence and faith in reality, a characteristic element of the archaic man. For the archaic man, the only reality is the sacred: "Objects or acts acquire a value, and in so doing become real, because they participate, after one fashion or another, in a reality that transcends them."³⁹ Hence we find the opposition sacred-profane compared with the real-unreal or pseudoreal⁴⁰: *homo religiosus* cannot be conceived outside reality: "Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires to be, to participate in reality, to be saturated with power."⁴¹

In this article, Eliade describes his travel experience by train to Călărași where he notes the provincial desert, the isolation from the high congestion of the capital, and states that it is the optimal environment for creation. He wonders why man does not use this environment to create: "How is it that nobody understands this lesson of realism that the province offers us? Where can you look reality more clearly face to face – but this avenue in Călărași on a foggy wet February night?"⁴²

The poverty stricken provincial environment, the hard living conditions of the Romanians are still an endless source of inspiration – this is the reality people flee and evade for the crowded cities – "to understand that this rough life and these poor people can be the substance of divine things."⁴³ This has been a contemporary issue at all times, that modern man seeks salvation in the social and everything emanating from it: career, rank, a so-called clean environment in

³⁸ "România în eternitate" ["Romania in Eternity"], published in *Vremea*, year VIII, no. 409, 13 October 1935, p. 3 *apud* Mircea Handoca, *Mircea Eliade. Textele „legionare” și despre „românism”* [Mircea Eliade. "Legionary" Texts and on "Romanianism"], p. 140.

³⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Mitul eternei reînnoierii* [The Myth of the Eternal Return], p. 14. Translation excerpt from *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, translated: W.R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954, p. 4

⁴⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Sacru și profanul* [The Sacred and the Profane], p. 14. Translation excerpt from Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated from French: W. R. Trask, Harvest/HBJ Publishers, 1957, p. 13

⁴¹ *Idem*.

⁴² *Provincia și legionarismul* [The Province and the Legionarism], published in *Vremea*, year XI (1938), February 13, no. 525, p. 8, *apud* Mircea Handoca, *Mircea Eliade. Textele „legionare” și despre „românism”* [Mircea Eliade. "Legionary" Texts and on "Romanianism"], p. 79.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

which luxury and comfort prevail. In this situation, the individual suffers again from spiritual abandonment while his salvation is in fact precisely the environment where he would have to fight and would be subject to perfection, where he would reach self-knowledge and knowledge of his forces which in turn lead to creation; and here the situation refers not only to artistic or literary creation, but to that of the spiritual man, a man above the mundane, who by himself was recovered in communion with the transcendent.

Moreover, in the province "you are *alone*. There's nobody to help you, fool you. No comfort, no reverie. Alone in *reality*. A perfect therapy of the soul." And these observations feature again a portrait of the *New Man*, "precursor" of the archaic man who will be described in his later writings: for the "primitive", as for the man in all pre-modern societies, the sacred is *power* and, finally, *reality*.⁴⁴ Or, the archaic man is possessed by a thirst for the real and this real is happening only by retrieving the sacred; the unreal, on the other hand, is the state that is outside the sacred, devoid of meaning and sense:

The conscience of a real and significant world is intimately linked to the discovery of the sacred. Through the experience of the sacred the spirit perceives the difference between what is revealed as real, strong, rich and meaningful and what is lacking these qualities, I mean the dangerous and chaotic flow of things, their random and meaningless appearance and disappearance...⁴⁵

The same issue of the real is found in the article "A Conversion to Romanianism", where Mircea Eliade explains the foundation on which spiritual man should be built:

To believe in the primacy of spirituality is not to be an abstract man, a dead individual. On the contrary, the only concrete life, flexible, that one can continually overcome – is this spirituality. That does not mean abstraction, dryness, erudition, cowardice, anarchy – but the only way to take over the real, the only way to live in the concrete.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Sacru și profanul [The Sacred and the Profane]*, p. 14. Translation excerpt from Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated from French: W.R. Trask, Harvest/HBJ Publishers, 1957, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Încercarea labirintului [Ordeal by Labyrinth]*, p. 131.

⁴⁶ *O convertire la românism [A Conversion to Romanianism]*, published in *Cuvântul*, year IX, 22 September, 1933, no. 3021, p. 1, *apud* Mircea Handoca, *Mircea Eliade. Textele „legionare” și despre „românism” [Mircea Eliade. "Legionary" Texts and on "Romanianism"]*, p. 95.

Conclusions

Mircea Eliade's militancy was recognized as the new humanism, one that aimed at a spiritual rebirth, a spiritual universalization, the creation of the *New Man* society needs in order to develop culturally and economically. The texts accused of legionarism present concepts that he will discuss later as elements specific to the archaic – they anticipate the man of the traditional society, “the primitive”, the *homo religiosus*.

The basic idea that Eliade goes through is the spiritual as described in the life of the modern man living outside the religious, outside a society that tends to disperse in the profane and history. Death, sacrifice, freedom, reality and creation can not be considered outside the spiritual – they coexist and are consequences, or features of the religious. The purpose of existence can be discovered only by the one who is dedicated to the discovery of the sacred. He who discovers the meaning of the existence is actually a free man, freed from worldly chains, cured of the fear of death and of the biological and mechanical anguish.

Ion Moța is an archaic figure, the synagogue in central Berlin under Nazi expansion is evidence of the conservation of the spiritual; the hypothesis of the *New Man* meant to create a spiritual revolution is the man who will then be called *homo religiosus* – the new humanism supported by Eliade being likened by Adrian Marino with the Enlightenment. Similar to the Platonic theory whereby the soul attains knowledge through the process of recalling, in his theory of *homo religiosus*, Eliade recommends anamnesis. While witnessing a demystification of the world, of life in general, the man still retains peculiarities of the religious man and their continuance (the fact that religiosity is inherent to the being) is a first step towards saving it: “The sacred does not involve belief in God, in gods or in spirits. It is, and I repeat, the experience of reality and the source of the consciousness of being in the world.”⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Încercarea labirintului [Ordeal by Labyrinth]*, p. 132.

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