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## **Albanian songs of frontier warriors and their antiquity**

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**Abstract.** Albanian heroic songs with a range of values and peculiarities, with the thematic and poetic world, as rich as independent and ancient, and with different layers, could not be created immediately and only in one period. It took time and skill for singers and oral conductors to create, spread and carry from one individual to another, from one generation to the next. Albanian heroic songs are not only important for the many linguistic expressive values that the rich thematic and motivational world has, but they also enable the best knowledge of the oral epic of the peoples of Southeast Europe and especially of the epic of the peoples of the Balkans. What justifies the antiquity, but at the same time the great importance of our heroic songs, is the fact that they express the world of the singers who sing them, their worldview and the world they belong to. They express the honor, manliness, faith, virtues, customs and habits that our man has used over the centuries. Dealing with the comparison of Albanian songs of frontier warriors with ancient epics, I have noticed a series of similarities with some ancient epics, especially with the "Iliad" and "Odyssey", which directly testify to their antiquity.

**Keywords.** heroic songs, oral epic, antiquity, mythology, tradition, story

Albanian oral epic makes one of the most important parts of Albanian oral poetry in general. It is as ancient as it is rich. Various events over the centuries found their echo in a series of creations of various kinds, which were created and transmitted from one singer to another, from one generation to another.

Within the Albanian oral epic, the heroic songs undoubtedly make the most important and qualitative part of it. With the way of the narrative construction, of the poetic means, of the system of expression, of the unusual dimensions of the characters, of the mythical beings: fairies, clocks, etc., then of the theme, which coincides with the theme of the most famous epics of the ancient literary traditions of other peoples, among them with the epics of Homer, "Iliad" and "Odyssey", especially with some of their layers, belong to a period ancient.

Albanian heroic songs with a range of values and peculiarities, with the thematic and poetic world, as rich as independent and ancient, and with different layers, could not be created immediately and only in one period. It took time and skill for singers and oral conductors to create, spread and carry from one individual to another, from one generation to the next.

They are distinguished for the two worlds, which complement and are fused into each other:

A) The real, everyday world, which is concretized with various attempts to protect pastures and lands from various invaders, to protect personal, family or tribal honor,

respectively of ethnicity; then through marriages, murders, deaths, mourning; wounds received by the brave during the skirmishes; women spin wool with a shaft and fork, weave fabric, work the soil with a turmeric harvester; the visits they make and the help they give to each other in the difficult and difficult moments of life; fear; honoring the elder, honoring the friend, the spiritual strength to forgive the other, even the greatest opponents, dressing with sheep (sheep leather) (Lotman, 1970).

B) The imaginative world, which, in these songs is vast and defining. It is intertwined with the real and both create an inseparable whole and together leave the impression of the real world.

This dimension of the Albanian heroic songs is conditioned by the fact that they deal with life in the past, that is, they deal with phenomena from history, from tradition. Even when for a moment the listeners or readers of the time find them impossible, unusual, taken for granted. They know that, by the way, the ordinary man in everyday life can not have snakes in his belly, can not assemble and cooperate with watches and crafts, talk to birds and horses and leave messages to them. To accomplish the goal he sets for himself, to cut off an opponent, or to rob a beautiful girl, the brave man seeks the sun of the moon. Gjergj Elez Alija has been suffering for nine years with nine graves in his body, but he manages to uproot the turnip in the backyard to test his strength - proof that he can fight the sea urchin. The adversary has extraordinary body size, but also unusual strength: his mace is inserted twelve saws into the ground and just as much dust rises in the sky. Muji and Halili are described as beings of extraordinary size: *"big men, like oaks with gems, / have mustaches as big as two brown rams"*. Halil's horse footprint is six feet wide, while Arnaut Osmani endures the fire in his chest only to save his comrades from the king's prison, or Muji himself claims that death does not come to him from man (Haxhihasani, 1983). Even mythical beings, who have a multiple function (fairies give strength to Muji and make him brave, which belongs to both real and unreal life; the power of fairies is hidden in the horned goats; give advice on how they should act). So, despite all that is happening in these songs, such messages the listener or reader receives as possible, as real. This is also the case in the ancient epics of other traditions, where various mythical deities and beings have a great and decisive function.

Albanian heroic songs according to Mark Milani are not only important for the many linguistic expressive values that the rich thematic and motivational world has, but they also enable the best knowledge of the oral epic of the peoples of Southeast Europe and especially of the epic of the peoples of the Balkans (Jakova, 1904): "In our opinion, the study of the oral epic of the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula and the fulfillment of some important tasks for the enrichment of this study and for the achievement of the most stable scientific results should be focused, expanded and deepened, seeing and concretizing time and time again with the study and problems of the Albanian oral epic - as one of the ancient epics, qualitative and voluminous of the Balkan Peninsula - without the knowledge of which there can be no genuine scientific results of the study of the epic phenomenon in this part of Europe and of the special and common elements of the oral epics of the peoples living here"(Nike Berisha, 2017).

The multiple value of these songs has been emphasized by all those researches who have taken them seriously and with their main features. Thus, Qemal Haxhihasani (1983), one of their best connoisseurs, emphasizes that Albanian heroic songs "[...] have the appearance of a great artistic monument that speaks of the history of our people - psychology, ethics, life as sober, as fast as as calm and noble, as well as combative and irresistible of our highlander" and "[...] these songs remained as a great monument, which with its art stood for centuries [...] bring

us old motives, habits and rites, elements of a psychological worldview and various manifestations of relationships of an early social order (Sako & Haxhihasani, 1966).

In these songs, as has rightly been pointed out, “[...] there is no evidence to lead, even indirectly, to some form of centralized state power. In these songs there is no allusion to the extension of political boundaries, to wars to subdue the opponent, or to impose on him a certain religious ideology” (Haxhihasani, 1967).

Although some thematic elements of the Albanian heroic songs are of recent times, they have not touched and have not changed the essence of their world, which was once more independent and unique. Hence, “It is not only about those ancient elements with mythological bases (such as: metamorphoses, mythological beings, clocks, crafts, close cooperation of people with those mythological creatures, horses and birds, animals that communicate with heroes, desires to have bodily power and not power and wealth, etc.), but also for those early traces in the development of the family which testify to the remnants of ties in the native line, the presence of which is certainly of great importance. They undoubtedly make up the earliest echelons encountered in our epic...” (Gjergji, 1986).

What justifies the antiquity, but at the same time the great importance of our heroic songs, is the fact that they express the world of the singers who sing them, their worldview and the world they belong to. They express the honor, manliness, faith, virtues, customs and habits that our man has used over the centuries. This has been confirmed by comparative studies of our culture with ancient cultures, such as Japanese and Hellenic. Thus, Japanese researcher, Kazuhiko Yamamoto says: “[...] *we are of the opinion that societies without state authority have had their typical code or rules, of an ethical and social nature. Our comparative study between the Albanian tribal customary code, the Kanun and the ancient Japanese culture, where we explain the ethical structure of a society without state authority, leads us to the above conclusion. In this study we note that the ethical structure of a society without state authority, such as that of the Gege tribes of northern Albania, consisted of faith, honor, acquaintance, blood, bread and revenge*” (Yamamoto, 2004).

These important components of the life of the Albanians, as well as the brotherhood and similar phenomena, codified in the *Kanun of the mountains*, which we find in different ways in the Albanian heroic songs, not as decoration, but as a matter of first hand, testify to their molding from the concrete life of their creators - their singers over the centuries. Outstanding researcher, M. Lambertz does state “The songs of Halil and Muji belong to the most ancient background of Albanian folk poetry. They therefore contain many ancient fairy-tale elements...” (Lambertz, 1917). This researcher brings down their subject matter at the time of the Slavic penetration into the Balkan Peninsula: “[...] numerous traces in short epics prove that the songs were born early, they go down to the time of the penetration of the Slavs under the Danube and the Balkans and preserve the memory of the early wars of the Illyrians or Albanians against the Slavs, who penetrated around years 700 and 800. The ancient fairy-tale elements of Albanian-Illyrian origin, which vividly shape the Albanian popular thought, the ancient weapons are part of the memory from the earliest times” (Lambertz, 1958).

Many elements of the world of heroic songs, action, which is their main feature, the robbery of beautiful girls, fights with old tools (mace, hammer and hammered knives), mythical beings: crafts, clocks, goats that hold the power of the brave, the search for separation from the moon and the sun, the various fairy-tale elements, prove that some of their layers belong to very early periods: “Lambertz had reasons when he concluded that the Albanian heroic songs belong to the most ancient background of the oral epic of this people. Such a world that approaches and resembles in many ways the world of fairy tales and that is far from any possible reality of

a late period of development of the Albanian people, could not be related to historical facts, nor to those of the XV century, which first of all had a strong historical basis. Body size, the extraordinary power of Muji and Khalil as well as their companions (Arnaut Osmani and other agas), or their opponents (a brave opponent when they wait for him finds three hearts in the body), a common and permanent communication of the human and animal world (friendship and brotherhood with crafts and watches; the goats hold Muji's power in their horns, the horse talks to the lord, follows everything that happens in the battle log, etc.), the existence of various beings, snakes or doves in the body of heroes, the use of ancient weapons, which man used in very ancient times and of a series of phenomena that are unique to a world outside the everyday reality of man, did not provide elements to conclude that they were echoes of a certain historical period of at least of the 15th century and later (Haxhihasani, 1983). Lamberts descended to the seventh and eighth centuries based on the historical fact that in this period the Slavs invaded the Balkans and that undoubtedly these clashes will have found their echo in various songs among Albanians, but also among the peoples of others living in the Balkan Peninsula, resisting Slavic attack and assimilation. However, it is difficult to accept the opinion that the heroic songs were born at that time" (Nike Berisha, 2017).

Researcher Kole Luka approximates the ballad of "Lule Frangut" with the songs of "Cycle of conditions" (*Cycle de la gageure*), of the flair/gabe of the cavalry epic, where as the main one he mentions the "Pilgrimage of Charlemagne", which makes two imaginary trips to Jerusalem. "The first scene takes place at the beginning with the same episode as in the other Albanian song: 'The kidnapping of Muji's wife (Palaj & Kurti, 1937). Both Charlemagne and the King of Serbs in our song sell praise to their wives [...] But both the bride of Charlemagne and the king of Serbs oppose them and say that their rivals are the best and the best".

In some Albanian heroic songs, the cause of the action and the clashes of the brave is caused by this praise and opposition from the woman (Luka, 1982).

The mythological world of heroic songs coincides with the bodily dimensions of the heroes, who not only receive strength from such beings (fairy), as happens with Muji and Halil, but also help each other and are in constant friendship with them. The characters of these songs, as Lambert points out "[...] live in the minds of the people as the representative giants of an extinct and wonderful time, when there were still no weapons, while the people were extremely tall and stout" (Lambertz, 1922).

Seen from a broader and deeper perspective it can be said: "[...] Although the indirect data are missing, it can be said that the Albanian oral literature, within it and the oral epics and the heroic songs, in the period for about ten centuries after Jesus was characterized by a double development:

a) From the continuity of the previous oral literary tradition, from the mother oral literature, from the roots. I say so because of the need for creation to be accepted as easily as possible, to be improvised and transmitted through speech - orality, reliance on tradition was necessary [...] Therefore, it can be said that the existing tradition has always clearly expressed the creativity that was born, as if the innate tradition expressed the previous one [...] (Berisha, 1997).

b) From the very flow of new life conditions and circumstances. Namely, the changes that took place in other areas of the spiritual and material life of Albanians, of course, were also expressed in the creativity, whether of what was inherited from the native oral literature, or of what was created and the influences of literary creations. Oral traditions of neighboring peoples, first of all of the ancient Greek literature (in the beginning) and the literature created in the Latin language (later) [...] (Nike Berisha, 2019). Perhaps the heroic songs were born at the time when

Albanian itself was formed as a language and the oral creators through the songs pronounced the confrontations of the Albanians with their neighboring opponents, among them also with the Slavs who were occupying the Albanian lands, respectively of the former Illyrians? Perhaps the new events, the confrontation and the wars of the Albanians with the Slavic peoples, gave a greater impetus, I say, "enlivened" the epic songs dedicated to the prominent heroes they had inherited from the past? Did only the names of the characters and the second-hand component change?



Dealing with the comparison of Albanian songs of frontier warriors with ancient epics, I have noticed a series of similarities with some ancient epics, especially with the "Iliad" and "Odyssey", which directly testify to their antiquity. Further comparative studies, from different planes and aspects, will prove even more their richness and antiquity.

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