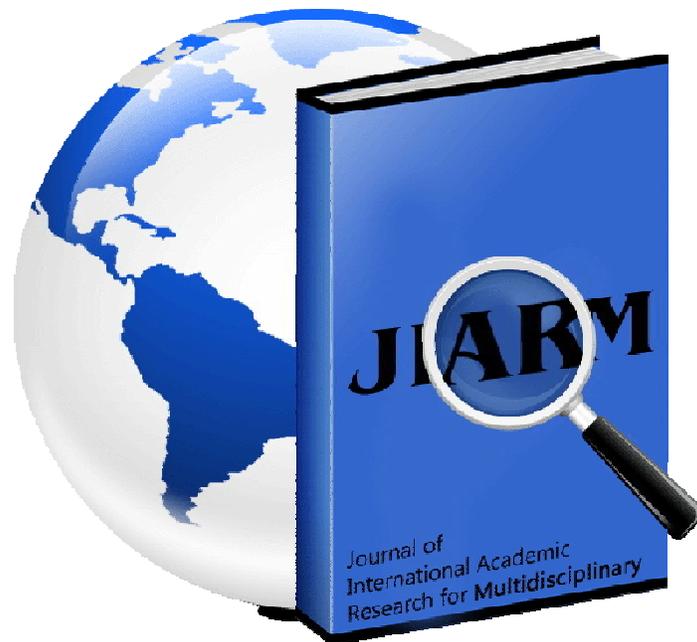


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**THE ALBANIAN BALLADS OF RE-ACQUAINTANCE OF SISTER TO BROTHER
AND ITS RELATION WITH OTHER BALLADS OF BALKANS PEOPLE**

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ABSTRACT

Ballads are known and found in the folklore of many nations. In the Balkans, because of historical dramas and tragedies, as well as other social and natural phenomena that have occurred there, the ballads are well enriched. One of the most known ballads in Albania is the one about re- acquaintance, one the most debatable versions about re-acquaintance of brother and sister, which can then be divided in several sub-versions. There are some of the most ancient ballads of the Balkans in which the element of fantasy is significant and all have in them a strong moral layer that aims to forbid incest. The ballads of brother and sister re-familiarizing, are very well spread and this paper is going to highlight some of the similarities and differences between Albanian ballads and those of other nations of the Balkan. The article aims to draw the conclusion that all these ballads are part of a common and ancient fund of Balkan's folklore in which the subjects have migrated in the neighboring countries taking local and national nuances as well as other artistic and stylistic differences.

KEYWORDS: Ballads, Re-Acquaintance, Incest, Psychology, Customs, Elements of Fantasy

INTRODUCTION

The ballad, being a special kind of poetry, has continuously attracted the attention of folk-researchers, writers and literary critics.

The Albanian folk ballads, their antiquity and evolution, their motifs with a deep emotional content and great ideas, the many characters and their richness, the wide dimensions of fantasy and artistic conception, reflect the history and spiritual life full of drama and tragedy, full of endurance and heroism of the Albanian people, they are evidence of a great creative talent that lived in centuries wanting to transmit aesthetic value and strong emotions.

Ballads, from all our verbal poetic creativity, preserve their narrative character and distinguish themselves from the rest of epic and folkloric stories because of their clear, univocal content.

They are woven around various topics from family life, enjoyment of love to some event either historical or legendary one now and then. They are rich in strong dramatic episodes and

deep emotional tones that in reality constitute the lyrical tone much emphasized among them. Hence, we can say that the folkloric ballad is an epical-lyrical genre that starts out from a tragic or dramatic event with an evident moral layer, a genre in which besides the touching and the nostalgic event, attention is shown to the individual's destiny.

The moral virtues are often placed at the center of the subject but they are not taken apart from human sentiments seen through a mystical veil full of fatality or through clarity in the later ballads.

The mythic and legendary character, the description of ancient rituals and customs also show their antiquity. For instance the immurement motif, the re-acquaintance and other motifs, are ancient and have travelled from one nation to another. The abstract character of the ballads manifests the antiquity of their source from the depth of centuries. This has to do with the symbolic-romantic nature of the earliest ballads which as a genre would not accept the detailed concretization as in historical songs.

According to scholar Anton Çeta, the Albanian ballads in mid middle Ages, precisely in the 15th century, had developed and expanded greatly. The Homeric motifs of re-acquaintance, the belief of the spirit passing from man to another being, the rejuvenation of the spirit and the unfulfilled love while alive, the growth and blossoming of the apple and pear trees above the tombs of lovers, the vine convoluted around the cypress after death in order to give the immortality of love through metamorphosis and the symbol of eternity and continuity of the sentiments. Some of these motifs remind us the Greek myth, Dionysus, whose spirit rejuvenates every spring with the rejuvenation of the vine and harvesting of grapes.

It is understandable that parts of the ballads are related to familial and then to feudal relationships, with the strengthening of family, with the infinite love of a sister for her brother. The use of artistic tools is related to the outlook of the time, with beliefs that they did not have any intentions within themselves but that served a progressive idea. Our scholars have observed that these elements of fantasy later have been turned into stylistic tools, for instance the sister who wants to become a cuckoo and cry for her dead brother, etc.

In ballads the individual takes a noticeable place in society and his/her inner feelings are related to the development of his personality, hence we often encounter a greater attention towards the individual, life, death, a woman's fate, love, etc. Therefore this is related with the deeper feelings and contradictions that arise now and again between moral norms, rituals, customs and the desire of people to become emancipated. This desire is often expressed in

certain situations with the symbolic of living beyond death, the antique conception of tragedy, people's imagination that is shown in the trinomial: life-death-immortality.

The through centuries journey in the verbal way has brought important changes in the artistic composition of ballads. During this journey they have blended with new elements that relate with specific historical moments and have gained new layers of social and cultural elements.

The common opinion of scholars is that ballads as a genre appear in a very ancient era from which the verbal tradition has been transmitted undergone a slight process of transformations that is reflected in the variability that actually exists through and within national repertoire.

The ballads motives, such as: faithfulness (of a given word), shutting oneself up or re-acquaintance with someone from your own family, are some of the earliest ballads and have passed from one generation to the other, from one nation to another in the course of time. The folk creative works of the Balkans are very different and they are distinguished for their extraordinary richness, if compared with other European countries. The folk works of the Balkans have played an important role in their spiritual life, especially ballads, which occupy a special place. This kind of genre has had a visible development in some certain historical periods. The ballad, having a sublime content and human-like essence, started from the moral and loyal virtues of the given word, of the love stories to the punishment of the evildoers.

We can say that the re-acquaintance ballad that is an ancient element of the Albanian folk literary works and of the Balkans as well has some particular features that may lighten the path of the moral and spiritual life of the people in the region.

The re-acquaintance ballad is found to exist in three main variants: The ballad of re-acquaintance of husband to his spouse, the ballad of re-acquaintance of brother to brother and the ballad of re-acquaintance of brother to sister.

Paying special emphasis to the latter ballad, I would like to point out some of the peculiarities of its subtypes and some similarities that are to be found in the ballads of this kind among the Balkans.

The Albanian ballads of re-acquaintance of sister to brother

The ballad of re-acquaintances is connected with the tribes and relatives and later with the feudal kinship and family strengthening and the love of the brother for his brother and sisters. In this ballad, the reason for not knowing the missing brother is the long time separation; he might have been recruited by the ottoman invaders and become a janissary, a thief roaming in the mountains or a mercenary fighting away from his country who was brought back home by chance because of the flow of war. (Zheji,Gj. Folklor shqiptar, 2004, p. 140). But at that

moment a white pigeon there came in between them, the candles went out and all the people in the monastery were petrified. A bloody shower was raining outside in order to stop the incest. From people's psychology it is supposed that the incest was considered as something inhuman, that's why we find magical elements, supernatural forces that have to stop the marriage. We also have to consider the tragic events that were caused by the long separation of the people and the morality of their relatives. All these are turned into human virtue. The idea that the ballad legend which contains ancient sub layers reminds us the marriages being forbidden within the family and as such deserves special attention (Sako, Z, Folklor shqiptar, 1959, p.70). According to the localization of the events and the structure of the ballads we can find three different subtypes.

1-The first subtype is focused on the kidnapping of a maiden by an unknown soldier. It can be found in the ballads of Albanians of Southern Italy and in the North-western part of the country.

2-The second subtype has to do with the kidnapping of the maiden by a thief and is to be found in the South-eastern part of the country.

3-The third subtype is focused on the sale of the wife (spouse) because of debts motives and the unknown brother who buys her.

The first type

The first subtype is well-known within the Albanians from Italy and the names are Olimbi and Vllastari. The scene is located in different parts. In a variant, the kidnapper takes the maiden to her master and later it turns out that he is his brother. We find this motif in Kiutit's manuscript, in which a brother who is a janissary meets his sister while she is singing and picking flowers and learns from their conversation that they are brother and sister. The sister's name is Shege and the story takes place in Naples of More (Zheji, Gj., Folklor shqiptar, 2004 p.141). In De Rada's version, prohibition of incest takes its starting point from a black bird that flies around the monument of Army Commander : "Pastaj mbrëmavet me hënë, / ja u duk një zog i zi, / gjithnjë sillej andej rrotull, / shtatores së atij trimi. / Kshtu rënkonte edhe qante: / Mjeri unë i mjera zogë, / puthën vëllai të motrën. (Balada popullore shqiptare, 1982, p.43) These symbols help them recognize each other and learn that they are brother and sister. The Arbëresh variant is much more compact in its plot, in the acquainting conversation and in the identification of the characters.

This subtype is focused on the kidnapping of the maiden by an unknown soldier. This is known at the North-western part of the country and bears the name of Gjon Pretika. The

researchers think that in this variant the rhapsodist condemns the long time military service that separated the sons from their families for years. In most cases they even didn't come back home, being killed for the interests of the others. In this subtype the name of the brother is a Christen one while that of the sister is the Muslim. The plaiting of the two different religious names is of great significance. This witnesses that the ballad has existed with two christen names and only later they have been changed in Muslims. The willingness to narrow the gap between sister and brother is one of the reasons that the rhapsodist takes the characters from different religious beliefs. One of the main goals of the ballad is to better incarnate the hostility between Gjon and Fasile. This hostile feeling is obvious when the man seizes the hair of the maiden, and is seen in the cursed language of the two characters. It is noticed that the portraying of the maiden is warmly realized. Her voice is fascinating among an army of conquerors. The identification of the heroes is done not only by the actions of super-natural elements but also by special remarks that are six fingers instead of five in one hand and six fingers at one foot. The moment of their re-acquaintance is given shortly and briefly only in two lines. The heroes die putting their hands round the neck of each other. This sort of elements is found in some other ballads to. Upon their single grave there grew two beautiful plants. This scenery originates from the old faith that shows the unity between the humans and the nature: " Edhe u kapën qafë më qafë, / porsi motra me vëlla, / të dy plasën tue kja, / Ku ra Gjoni, mbiu ftoi, / aty çeli lule ftoi, / ku ra blega mbini shega, / aty mbini lule shega", Balada popullore shqiptare, 1982, p.48) Upon the grave of Gjon there grew a quince tree which blossoms pomegranate with red flowers. The combination of the two colors represents the existence of life; something that shows the main idea of the ballad and the continuation of life.

A well-known folk researcher named Qemal Haxhihasani, has noticed a parallelism of this ballad with that of Slavic which stands on the name of the hero Perika (in one of the variants from Herzegovina); but judging from the point of their artistic structure they are quite different. The scholar is of the idea that there is a genetic link between the version that Gjon Pretika gives and the Arberesh version. The link between these versions lies in the reflection of a particular stage of history in the ballad (Qemal Haxhihasani, Issues on Albanian Folklore, 1982, p. 152- 153)

.The second type

The second type that is widely spread on the northern part of the country is characterized by an original artistic structure. This subtype bears the name Gjino Vaku and sometimes the

name of Janko Pasha as the main hero of the story. The ballad starts with a rhetoric question that prepares us for the calamity that is to take place to the hero. The beginning of the ballad is rather original and the subject of the story is well understood in the first three lines. The hero is a thief (and his activity is defined clearly, he has an experience of 20 years) and after such long time he could come back home.

On his way home he meets a caravan of in-laws, and being stimulated by his beastly tendency he killed them and kidnapped the bride. Unlike the other ballads, the events here take place in a monastery. The mystical veil that is attached to this ballad is more emphasized than in the other re-acquaintance ballads. A monastery often serves as the theatre where the story is elaborated but there are cases when it is located in the Holy Mountain.

The crowning wedding moment is considered the climax of the ballad and is thought to be the realization of the physical marriage of the characters. The acquaintance is enabled by a strong blowing wind, which put out the candles, breaking the doors open and hardens the monks: "Në manastir në Janorë, / vanë të vinin kurorë; / atje kandilet u ftonë, / Fryn një erë e një furtunë, / gjithë kandilet i shoi, / kallogretë i vovosi, / priftërinjtë i marmarosi". The hero understands the sin he has done and quickly runs away with the girl towards an uncertain place whose name is a toponym. The answer is very simple and clear, the conclusion of the ballad is left in the mouth of the hero who understands the reason of the calamity: "E kuja je ti moj vajzë?, / jam e bij' e Spiro Vakut, / Jam e motr'e Gjino Vakut, / jam e mbesë e qir Dhespotit, / Qënkemi motër e vëlla, / ndaj u bë kjo hata" (Balada popullore shqiptare, 1982, p. 45)

This sort of ballad is original not only for its structure but also for its characters; it is not touched by the spread of Islam. This aspect and names of certain places that are found in the ballad or even names of certain characters, brings this ballad close to the Greek variant, for instance: emir Janko pasha as greek emir Janaq: We notice similarities with the Slavic version in names such Vaka, for Gjino Vaku in the Albania version. The geographic proximity of our nations has favored the influence in each other's ballads with some partial elements.

In the Greek version the characters are recognized by an element of fantasy or by identifying similar physical marks. However, the starting point of the subject such as the bride being kidnapped, the atmosphere of the plot as well as other consolidated artistic elements distinguish this ballad from the Greek version or other versions.

We can also notice some similarities with the Romanian version which is clearly seen in the introduction of the character.

The third type

The third subtype of the ballad is well found in the entire area of the northern country. The process of Islamism has widely influenced this ballad, as the names of the characters in all variants of these subtypes are Muslim. The subject of the ballad shows its origin, comparing it with the previous epochs. The characters names were Luta, Ali Borxhalia, Rroki or in some rare cases the Turkish name. In the majority of the variants it is pointed out that the husband sells his wife for debts motive only for 300-600 ducats.

The subject of the ballad is simple, the man, i.e., husband under the name Luto Fukaraja is in debt. In this ballad the debt is inherited by his father, while in the other variants the reason of the debt is not known. The hero has sold all his own property but the money is not sufficient to pay such a huge debt, so he is obliged to sell his wife. The idea of selling the family members comes to the hero's mind through his dream. "Rash me fjet, pava një ëndërr, / për me i shitë babën e nënën." Then it is the wife who asked her husband to sell her and not his father or mother as it is considered to be something he would be ashamed of. There are also cases when the hero tries to sell his parents, but failing to do so, he decides to sell his wife. Some elements from the ancient habits and customs are encountered in this ballad such as the bride's clothes. Another interesting element of the ballad is that of the bride being sold in her wedding dress and the way she was sold. Generally speaking, the bride doesn't resist or oppose the selling. The description of the bride's beauty is not a special characteristic of this sort of ballad; but in a few variants the epithet is given: "wears in white" with which the seller describes.

The name of the buyer is given in some different variants such as: Islam, Ymer, Ramë Demiri, Rexh Demiri, Hasan Hisa, Deli Hasani etc. generally, at the moment of the incest there used to be a supernatural element such as: "bloody shower", a thunder-bolt, an earthquake, etc. but in some variants, a white pigeon appears sitting between the brother and sister at the moment of the incest not letting it being fulfilled. The identification is done by a special mark. A distinctive mark is seen on the left or on the right arm, or in some cases it has the sign of a horse-bite. The ballad has a happy ending. The brother takes his sister to her real husband. We have to take into consideration the fact that her feelings for her husband haven't changed, even after he has sold her; and her brother donates the debt to his brother-in-law.

The purchaser at the Albanian variant is a single man, while in the Bulgarian, Macedonian and Rumanian ones is married. The attitude of the brother towards his sister very often is similar to the other ballads in Balkans. In the Albanian ballads of this subtype there is

no information where the debts come from, but in some Balkan versions the source of many is given: it is the taxes that the Ottoman administration imposes.

With regard to the Albanian version, at the moment the couples get re-familiarized, a white dove flies around, whereas in the Macedonian, Bulgarian and Greek version the bird could be a swallow, cuckoo or a falcon: “çka mor pllumb, gjithë ky kjamet, / shi me erë rfeja qet, / S’ka faj zoti që s’iu vret, / si me fjet vëllai me motër të vet”(Balada popullore shqiptare, 1982, p.50)

As far as the supernatural phenomena are concerned, the Albanian version is nearer to Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbian.

Conclusions

Judging from the point of view of its artistic structure we may state that these ballads are distinctive because they are short with a heavy style and brief narration, in most cases they are written in eight syllable styles and are very rich in figurative meanings, among which the lyrics of the poetry are always evident. A dramatic situation predominates in all these ballads during the tragic execution of the event a dramatic situation holds the reader in a continuous anxiety. Judging from the viewpoint of their structure these ballads have a mono-column rhyming form. Their popular character is noticed in their contents. The mythological character, description of rituals and ancient habits witness their antiquity. It is also noticed their abstract character. It has to do with the symbolic nature of ballads, which considered as literary genre, will never accept detailed demonstration. It can be found in the historical songs, although in some of them we have to look for special countries.

As we mentioned above, the originality of the ballads lies on their simple fable. Usually, there is not any introduction or any direction of the supernatural forces, but the event starts directly. The style of the story in a ballad is realized through communication and direct dialogue that occupy an important place in it.

This dialogue originates in the relationships of the humans and resembles to a tragic story and we do not find long descriptions and surmounting in time in order to reach the essence of the contents. Each ballad brings certain environments. The first two subtypes have limited range of action. The third subtype of the re-acquaintance between the brother and his sister is characterized by a stronger dynamic action. The re-acquaintance ballad as all the other Albanian ballads show us the evolution of the figurative speech and the broad fantasy are real

reflection of the spiritual life of the Albanian people, full of drama and tragedy; witnesses of resistance and a great creative talent of the folk genius.

We may conclude that the ballad of re-familiarization with all their complexity in constructing and elaborating an idea, represent one of the most antique genres of the Albanian folklore which has prohibition of incest in its core.

The Albanian version compared to those of other nations of the Balkans, is found in several geographical areas and is divided in three sub types that differ from each other in some aspects. The mingling of social and cultural elements from different eras has brought innovation to these ballads. In terms of interactions with other nations of the Balkans the ballads have borrowed elements from each other. From this viewpoint, the first and second sub type of Albanian ballads look more like their Greek sister ballads, while the third sub type looks more like the Slavic ballad. Some particular elements link our ballads with the Romanian ones. This tells us that these ballads with similar subjects, characters, ideas and motifs have been part of the ancient repertoire of the Balkan folklore.

The fact that these ballads have their counterparts with the other Balkan people, witnesses the aspect of giving and taking cultures, relation and strong cooperation and a common and broad creative spirit of theirs.

We hope to go further in the study of the Balkans cultures and see the similarity among them, highlighting that such studies bring the people closer and in harmony and peace.

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