

The beautiful woman as the ideal of the knight in Albanian heroic songs

 Labinot Berisha¹,  Saranda Buzhala^{2*}

¹Dean at the Faculty of Philology, University "Fehmi Agani", Gjakovë; labinot.berisha@uni-gjk.org (L.B.)

²Faculty of Philology, University "Fehmi Agani", Gjakovë; saranda.buzhala@uni-gjk.org (S.B.)

Abstract: The cult of chivalry in the Albanian Heroic songs, which represent the most artistically elevated part of the Albanian oral epic characterized by numerous linguistic and poetic values, is quite present and testifies to the rich and ancient world of songs. The knightly cult in these songs is expressed in different forms and implies, first of all, the strength of the knight, his bravery, his ability, and his willingness to face others and engage in duels with mighty braves. Furthermore, this cult is closely linked to the efforts and adventures to gain fame, to kidnap and attract beautiful girls, to protect the pastures, or to preserve the honor of the family and the tribe from various attackers. A knight can think twice about any undertaking or action, but he would never think twice when it comes to fulfilling a task set by a beautiful girl, even if he has to pay for it with his life. After all, death by fulfilling this purpose is part of the chivalrous ideal, an act that implies pride, honor, and cavalry fame. The cult of the beautiful woman is essentially rooted in the character of the chivalric world and chivalric action. A real knight is not just a knight: he has a horse, weapons for the fighting arena, for feats and battles, and he fights for beautiful women.

Keywords: *Beautiful woman, Chivalric cult, Chivalry, Fame, Ideal, Pride, Sacrifice, Song.*

1. Introduction

Part of the ideal of the knight is to marry or rob the beautiful woman. This ideal is mostly related to the deeds and actions in the Albanian heroic songs. The cult of the horse and the cult of weapons are best evidenced in the initiatives to meet, court, or rob beautiful women or girls. A knight can think twice about any undertaking or action, but he would never think twice when it comes to fulfilling a task set by a beautiful girl, even if he has to pay for it with his life. After all, death by fulfilling this purpose is part of the chivalrous ideal, an act that implies pride, honor, and cavalry fame. Such actions require that songs are dedicated to the knight and the glory of his name is passed on to future generations. So, for the beautiful woman, the knight tries harder, risks more, and also accepts defeat more easily. The knightly cult in the Albanian heroic songs is deeply interwoven with other components, such as with other brave men, mythical beings, then with the world view of the social environment that lacks state organization, honor, faith, hospitality and others.

2. Theoretical Background

In order for the goal and result to be more achievable for the issues we have raised in this paper, we have used the main literature for this field; the main summaries with materials of songs dedicated to knights, the studies that have been done on these songs, but also special works in this field, which we have mentioned in the bibliography.

3. Methods

During the drafting of this paper, we used modern methods, which help and facilitate the work on research-scientific issues. Through the research method, I collected the necessary basic literature; the main compilations with the material of songs for knights, studies, and special works devoted to these

songs. In this paper, we have used the concretization - factographic method, which has enabled us to present more artistically elevated examples-verses, to prove the high artistic level of these songs, but also to concretize the issues that have been presented in this paper because concretization with examples, with the lyrics of the songs best testifies to the size and importance of these songs. We have used the analytical and descriptive methods to look at and analyze the chivalric songs in general and specifically the songs that we have considered in this paper.

3.1. Knight's Ideal – The Beautiful Woman

The main issue for a true knight is that the woman, whom he tries to attract, is beautiful. Only if she is “*kah bjen dielli shogën nuk e ka*”, “*Gjâ mâ t'mirë s'shef njeri nën ket diell*”, “*s'shef njeri nën ket diell*”, “*flyrën diellit krejt-o po ja merr*”, “*rrezen hanës Dylberja ja muer*”, “*t'pamt e diellit n'dynja po ja merr*” (where sun lights with its light, there is no one like her, / under this sun one cannot see anything better than her, / she shines more than the sun itself, / she shines more than the moon), she is worth any sacrifice. It is such a girl that prompts the knights to act and prove their bravery, strength, and fighting skills (Çetta, 1974; Çetta, Sylva, Mustafa & Berisha, 1993; Haxhihasani, 1966; Palaj & Kurti, 1937).

The cult of the beautiful woman is rooted in the character of the chivalric world and chivalric action. A real knight is not just a knight: he has a horse, weapons for the fighting arena, for feats and battles, and he fights for beautiful women. This is evidenced in a special way in the song “Siran Aga”, where the brave man tells Muji the essence of the purpose of his life and his ideal when the condition of taking Kurt Aga's beautiful daughter as his wife is laid:

*“Nuk po kam çikën ku me e çue,
Pse nuk kam as kullë as shpí,
As s'kam arë, as s'kam livadë;
Veç se kam ket kál me shalë,
E takam e armë për mejdan,
Ç'se jam bâ i zoti i vedit,
Zanát tjetër kurr s'kam bâ,
Por për ditë me shkjë tuj luftue,
E ka 'i herë në javë tu' u varruë”
Se me kë në puna për mejdan,
Nuk e lâ çikën pá e xânë.”* (Palaj & Kurti, 1937; 1990)

In the Albanian heroic songs, mutual relations of the two genres co-exist, which are united in the action of the brave and in the fightings for women: the firsts to have beautiful girls as lovers or marry them; the latter to marry the brave and handsome men, such as Sokole Halili, Ali Bajraktari and others.

The importance that a beautiful woman has to the knight and his world, and the pleasures that she causes him are described in the two verses taken from the song “Martesa e Ali Bajraktarit”, (The Wedding of Ali Bajraktari) among the longest songs of the Albanian cycle, where the brave man remembers seven nights with Ruzhë, and how death in front of them has no value:

*“po m'kujtohen, Ruzhicë, ato shtatë net
e s'po m'dhimet jeta hiç me dekë.”* (Çetta et al., 1993)

Precisely because the chivalrous ideal is associated with beautiful girls, they win them mainly by “fighting”, that is, girls who are taken by sacrifices, duels, and fierce battles. In this way, the knights prove their bravery, skill, and desire for fame. Ali Bajraktari cuts the king and takes his wife captive. Meanwhile, the king's wife tells Ali that it is easy to cut a single king, but if he is brave, he must prove this with “*treqind shkjë (i huaj) me vedi qi m'i ka*”, which guard the king's Rusa:

*“por, ne kjo sh i mirë e trim,
del nji herë n'at maje të bjeshkës,*

*ku kadit bjeshkon Rushja e krajlit;
treqind shkje me vedi qi m'i ka,
qi kerdi bajnë kudo me ra
e trimnija edhe ty aty të shifet,
zemer burrit në paç aty ty të shifet.” (Haxhihasani, 1966)*

The real knight cannot ignore this condition, so he immediately acts.

To concretize the phenomenon of searching for a bride "by fighting", we are mentioning the brave Ali Bajraktar, who says to the land owners: *“Be në zotin une kam ba, / nose e marr nusen me bela, Nose rri gjithmon’ pa u martua.”*

A similar oath is made by Ali Aga the Younger, who tells his mother openly that he will take the bride with a fight so he will have a reason to face the brave, in order to become as famous as even the king, in Istanbul would hear of him: *mos e marr’, nan’, nuse me hajr, / por me marr’ nuse me sherr, / le t’më shkoje nami der’ Krajli”* (not to take the bride with blessings, mother, but instead by fighting, / even the King should hear of me), (Haxhihasani, 1983). The letters also testify to the knightly ideal of the hero and to their many relationships with beautiful girls, which cause and encourage numerous actions and make some of the main objects of the Albanian heroic songs. Such letters are mostly written by girls.

One of the most beautiful and artistically elevated Albanian heroic songs is the letter of Krajli's daughter, Dylbera e Bardhë. She writes to Halil, who, as she tells her friends, *“n’shtatë krajli ai shoqin nuk e ka, / as tu mreti n’Stamboll s’un e gjani”*. (Even in seven kingdoms no one is like him / not even at the king in Istanbul you cannot find one like him) The request of Dylbera e Bardhë, that Halil must chase her, is clear: it leaves no room for doubt.

*“O Halil, Dylberja i ka thanë,
qe tri vjet njet për ty unë jam ba,
qe tri vjet n’andërr qi m’diftohesh,
qe tri vjet-o veç me ty po flas,
flas me lulet, flas me ujt e kronit,
me bylbylat qi knojnë n’degë të mollës,
flas me diellin, natën flas me hanën,
flas me yjzë kur dalin me yjzue.
Sa herë zojt, qi fluturojnë n’hava,
unë e mjera porositë i kam,
drejt te ti-o ata për me ardhë,
me t’kallxue, medet, hallin tem!
Mue baba, Halil, m’ka fëjue,
n’Maxharije sod ni muej me m’çue,
sod ni muej-o vaden e kanë lanë,
sod ni muej ata vinë me m’marrë.”*

Further, the letter takes the form of an oath; the girl pleads to Halil the most important things: the sun and the earth, his mother's bosom and in his brother, in Klladusha and in everything that is his, so that he chases her and does not let her marry in Hungary (Magyarország).

*Pashë atë diell, Halil, qi na rrezon,
pashë kit tokë, Halil, ne qi na man,
pashë atë nanë gjinin qi ta ka dhanë,
pashë atë vlla qi s’e jep për kurrkan,
pashë sytë, Halil, qi t’bajnë dritë në ballë,
hajde merrum, sa jam hale gjallë!”*

The spiritual state of Dylbera e Bardhë is exceptional. On the one hand, not being sure how Halil feels about her and knowing the difficult circumstances, she was aware that he might very easily fall into the hands of the kingdom, the end of her letter takes a different direction:

The girls words should touch Halil on his pride and knightly honor. If he will not chase her and prove his bravery and sacrifice for her, then let him send her his horse and a sword so that she can fight with the Hungarians who will come to take her, while she will send him "the loom and the needle" to deal with women's work! This change of the letter is not accidental: if the first part of it will not touch the hero, then the second part will convince him; Halil could not deny the chivalric ideal and code; if he didn't stick to it then he would have no choice but to do needlework, as the girls of Kladusha do: *Unë t'i çoj ty gjergjef e gjylpana / e qinis ti me çika t'Klladushës*" (I will send you the loom and needles / and you can do the needlework together with the girls in Kladusha), (Çetta et al., 1993).

In the song "Halili rrëmben Tanushe Devojkën" (Halil kidnaps Tanushe Devojka), the king's daughter writes a letter to Halil. She writes it "*letrën me gjak të faqevet / ma ka shkrue me lotë të syvet / ja ka çue Sokol Halilit.*" (She wrote the letter that was sent to Sokol Halili with the tears of her eyes and the blood of her cheeks). The girls ask him to come and chase her because her father was about to marry her with the King of Kotorr. The way the letter and her request are written, "*e, qofsh kurr me kanë për mue*" is a clear message to Halil. The Knight has no other way despite going there and freeing her, without taking into account the danger and consequences (Haxhihasani, 1966).

Likewise, Kurt Aga's daughter's request about what kind of husband she will get deeply justifies the spirit of chivalry in the female world as well. The letter and its realization prompt and condition all the action in the song. So, the girl's request is related to the ideal of Kreshnik: with the bravery, with the strength and with the sacrifice that he must prove to her in every case.

*"Por një burrë fort trim e due,
Që për ditë me shkjé t'jët tue luftue,
E ká 'i herë n'javë me u varrue,
E plot gjak petkat i bâhen.
E për ditë petkat me i a lá,
Për sahat varrët me i a ndrrue,
Tjetër burrë s'mundet me m'marrë mue."* (Palaj & Kurti, 1937)

Sir Osman Dylbera's request is also similar: she will marry the brave man who will bring Vide Harambash to the tower alive, so that "*me dorë tëme unë me e shkurtue*". So, who will fulfill this condition in front of a great brave will be her husband, regardless of his physical appearance.

*"Si maxhup-o, more, i zi n'kofhtë,
deri n'sy, more, qelat ne i pastë,
deri n'shokë, more, gushán në kofhtë –
qato burrë unë për pa e marrë s'e lâ."* (Çetta, 1974; Çetta et al., 1993)

The extraordinary cult towards the beautiful woman is evidenced especially by the severe tests that the King does to the imprisoned Kreshniks, such as Arnaut Osmani and Sokole Halili (Palaj & Kurti, 1937). The brave endure trivial physical hardships; they don't make any sound and don't make any movement to convince the King that they are "dead" (Haxhihasani, 1966). However, the he also puts them to the test with beautiful girls, which is the hardest test. Only this finally convinces the king about the "death" of the brave. The king tests Arnaut Osmani, releasing snakes on his chest, inserting the tips of the nails "*për nën thoj fell ia ka shti*", put him between two enormous flames, *por gjallë ish kanë, për t'gjallë s'â ndie*. Of course, the most difficult test is when 30 beautiful girls are brought to dance and sing in front of him:

*M'i ká zgjedhë tridhetë çika t'mira (...)
për rreth t'deknit bashkë po kcejnë,
për rreth t'deknit po lodrojnë,
për rreth t'deknit mirë po kndojnë.
Çika e krajlit tu kryet i ká qillue,
mirë Osmani e ka hetue,
me njen' sy ma ká shikjue,
buzën n'gaz m'iu ká bâ,
mirë po i qeshë njana anë mustakut.* (Palaj & Kurti, 1937)

In the song “Halili i wet bejled Mujit” the King tests Halil by putting him in between two flames, where “*Para e mbrapa lkura m'i pelset*”, but he doesn't give any sign that he is alive. But then the girl brings to him the girls, because “*se ne e pastë shpirtin në shtat, / çarje s'ka për pa qeshë ka pak*”(If he is still alive, it is impossible for him not to smile a little), (Haxhihasani, 1966).

The importance that the beautiful girls had for the Kreshniks is seen also in the song “Agajt ngujohen në shpellë”. (The nobles are shut into a cave) The shutting into a cave of Muji and Halili together with the nobles of Jutbina meant vast consequences for the king: they did harm and did not pay taxes. The king does the impossible to free the heroes from the cave. He does anything that was in his power but still could not achieve his aim. An old man, being aware of the Knightly ideal, teaches the king what to do in this instance: send beautiful girls near to the cave, this would make the heroes get out of the cave to take the beautiful girls in:

*“Kursesit agajt s'mujm' me i xjerrë,
veç tridhet' çika me i zgjedh n'Krajli,
karshi shpelle agëve ma ia u çue
e forcat' rreth na me ia u vnue,
se ashik' agajt ç'i po janë,
kan' me dal' çikat me i marrë”* (Haxhihasani, 1983)

The chivalric cult towards the girl that Halili wants to rob, Mirusha of Gradina, is typically expressed when the brave man encounters and overcomes many obstacles. Mirusha, to go with Halil, is released from the top floor with a thread of cloth that she pulls out of the box. The cloth does not reach the ground and the girl, at that height, remains suspended and is in danger of being torn to pieces. Even Halil is seized by this fear, therefore, not being able to help her (in that state the brave man could not do anything), he promises Mirusha that, at least, he will bring her pieces home. He had set out to kidnap her, so if he couldn't take her whole, then in Klladushë he will at least bring her parts, proof of the act and knightly honor: : *ta dhash besën copat do t'i marr / e qashtu ty në Klladushë do t'çoj*. (I promised you that I will gather your pieces / and will send you in Klladushë that way). The cult of the beautiful woman in Albanian heroic songs (kenget kreshnike shqiptare) is also expressed in other forms, which can be concretized with many examples (Çetta, 1974).

4. Conclusion

Albanian Heroic songs (kenget kreshnike shqiptare) contain a range of values and peculiarities. With the thematic and poetic world, as rich as it is independent, and with different layers, this great cycle could not be created immediately and only in one period. It took time and skill of singers and oral performers to create and carry from one individual to another, from one generation to another. The knightly cult in these songs is quite present and justifies the rich and ancient world of the songs, where man lives and acts in special conditions and cooperates with various mythical beings. Thus, the knightly cult is an important component of them and brings them closer to the ancient epic traditions of other peoples of Europe and beyond. Every action in the heroic songs is associated with the rider and the horse. There is no action and no communication where they are not together and do not help each other. This is the well-known phenomenon and peculiarity of ancient epic creations, whether in poetry or prose. The brave knight does not do anything by chance. The chivalric code requires the cause, which prompts the promise of the brave, the fulfillment of which is inevitable, even if it costs him imprisonment or life. After the word given to another knight or to anyone, the knight does not fail to fulfill it. Failure to realize it disqualifies him as a knight because the knight cannot talk something and not fulfill it.

The main quality of Albanian Creshnika songs is that they are songs of action, bravery and chivalric feats. The life of the social environment, where feats and fights resemble, is without state organization with sensitive elements of matriarchy: “Nuk është fjala këtu vetëm për ato elemente të lashta me baza mitologjike (si: metamorfozat, qeniet mitologjike, orët, zanat, bashkëpunimi i ngushtë i njerëzve me ato krijesa mitologjike, kuaj e zogj, kafshë që komunikojnë me heronjtë, dëshira për të pasur fuqi trupore e jo pushtet e pasuri etj.), por edhe për ato gjurmë të hershme në zhvillimin e familjes që dëshmojnë për mbeturina të lidhjeve në vijën amtare, prania e të cilave sigurisht ka një rëndësi të madhe. Ato bëjnë pa

dyshim shtresat më të hershme që hasen në epikën tonë...". (It is not only about those ancient elements with mythological basis (such as: metamorphoses, mythological beings, clocks, fairies, the close cooperation of people with those mythological creatures, horses and birds, animals that communicate with heroes, the desire to have power physical and not power and wealth, etc.), but also for those early traces in the development of the family that testify to remnants of connections in the maternal line, the presence of which is of course of great importance (Andromaqi, 1986). They make undoubtedly the earliest strata encountered in our epic.) In other words, our heroic songs express the world and the social, moral and spiritual code of those who create them. Bearing in mind the fact that until now no comprehensive study has been done on the knightly cult, through this paper we intend to shed as much light as possible on its importance and presence in these songs, which at the same time proves their antiquity and value.

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