

Importance of Oral Ritual Calendric Poetry

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Abstract. Calendric lyric poetry as a folk tradition plays an important role in ethnic cultures. It is an area where cultural researchers, anthropologist and sociologists find answers to a lot of questions. Oral folk tradition in general and calendric lyric poetry therein is rich in their content, history and variety. This paper will present the importance of oral calendric lyric poetry and its relevance regarding the acquaintance and comprehension of ethnic culture. The paper will reveal the connection of old tradition to later religious festivities as well as their connection with ethnic history and culture. Ritual songs are the most common songs of the oral poetry. We find them in different cultures and are considered the oldest type of oral literature. Ritual songs accompanied seasonal changes and can be classified as winter, spring, and summer songs. As an example, winter songs (calendric songs New Year's songs) were sung toward the end of December and beginning of January in celebration of the sun's return from its southern solstitial point. Charming style and content of these archaic songs lie in the reflection of an ancient culture in the form of primordial concepts, beliefs, and feelings. This paper will equally present the importance of oral calendric lyric poetry in Albanian culture as well as its relevance, meaning and preservation up to modern times.

Keywords: Calendric poetry, oral poetry, folklore, tradition, ethnic culture.

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1. INTRODUCTION

If we want to get to know a nation and understand how its spiritual, artistic and general development emerged, we must 'trace' into its antiquity. This will provide enough data to know the origin of the people we want to know more about. Additionally, the songs of our interest hereby are an example of the authenticity of the antiquity of the people. They tell plenty about the construction, the phases over the centuries and the existence of that nation.

Although there are many researchers who have dealt with this issue, there are still many deficiencies. Such as, not studying the calendar songs more deeply, the differences and similarities between the Albanian territories in these songs, why people created these songs, why the deities were originally described as animals or trees, why it happened that unexplained events and phenomena create such songs, and so forth.

On the possible contribution of our work in the field we can say that the fieldwork always enables the expansion and enrichment of answers to the topic we are researching. This would inevitably enable the enrichment of our knowledge about our ancestors, and the life they have lived, according to certain social conditions and practices.

Fieldwork may also reveal new elements, which we may have basic knowledge for, or no knowledge at all. Likewise, although the songs in question are almost all-encompassing for the Albanian people, while working in the field we may encounter elements that may be small, which may seem insignificant, but that vary from country to country. This type of field research can also be surprising, because we can learn about a ritual song that we have never heard of before, or that has never been written about.

Ethnic traditional cultures of different nations in the Balkans are rich in its history, content and different genres as songs, fairy tales, myths, and other traditions, which have been preserved through centuries among our people during different traditional rituals and festivals.

The systematic recording of oral lyric and, certainly, of epic songs began in the nineteenth century and is closely linked with the writers of the romantic era. During this period there was an increase of interest in oral history, literature and culture. This was part of nationhood movements across the region and the desire to find ethnic roots from the past. Initially the main research about Albanian oral traditions was the collection of a German researcher of Indo-European languages, Gustav Meyer (Meyer, 2011). More in-depth researches were conducted later in the twentieth century with the establishment of professional research departments and institutes. In regard to Albanian oral tradition, the most serious effort started with the collection called "National treasure" (Thesaret e kombit) first published in 1938.

Our oral creativity in calendric lyrical poetry preserves the great variety of ancient rites, docks, and cults associated with various songs, dances and games, the tracing of which is very important (Shala, 1974). Scholars, who study ethnology and anthropology, consider this part of oral poetry, which can be compared to a rich mine, with various layers of

paganism, animism, magic, totemic, fetishism, etc. Their examinations and systematizations are among the important problems that arise during the study. In this part of the oral creativity are heard even in the present day, in different celebrations songs, played in different games, in which layers of the former pagan rituals are preserved. The presence of such elements in today's life, of high technology and of the amazing daily inventions in modern human life, proves once more the thought that the source of all human knowledge, the lifestyle confronting the phenomena of nature is first manifested, expressed and shaped in such creations of the oral creativity of the people. It is not an easy job to get all these sources and documents to be collected, sorted and examined, along with the variety and variety of versions. It is a challenging job that requires professionalism, commitments and persistence.

2. METHOD

Upon defining our research matter we looked at the studies which conducted the similar research. Our analytic research focused on the analysis of the existing studies, respectfully books and articles which fundamentally created basics of our study. The information gathered guided us to the disparities in these studies, thus, created an idea of how to proceed in order to question some of the existing gaps.

3. FINDINGS

Ritual Calendric Poetry

Ritual songs are the most common songs of the oral poetry. We find them in different cultures and are considered the oldest type of oral literature. Ritual songs accompanied seasonal changes and can be classified as winter, spring, and summer songs. Winter songs (calendric songs New Year's songs) were sung toward the end of December and beginning of January in celebration of the sun's return from its southern solstitial point. Charming style and content of these archaic songs lies in the reflection of an ancient culture in the form of primordial concepts, beliefs, and feelings. The folk singer singing these songs believed that nature was governed by good and evil spirits that could be appeased by sacrifice, ritual, and song. That is since deities whom they believed were anthropomorphic, picturesque, and alive. The sun was extolled as a human with a mother who was concerned about his long journeys through the heavens. The new moon, for instance, complained that witches were eating him. In ancient times, the year was following the lunar calendar and therefore the new year songs were related to the moon. The ancient New Year rite with its songs was preserved in many Balkan regions in the nineteenth century (Zojzi, 1949). From the ancient times of human life, the embryo of human culture begins. Such a definition leaves room for thinking about a certain level of awareness of those creators, individual subjects and collective carriers, which enables today's knowledge to create links to understand the strata of a people's culture across

time periods, thus rounding up, not only the path of the creation of these creations, but also the path of the historical walk of the bearers of these creations, that is, of the people who created them (Fetiu, 2009). This system, largely related to livestock and agricultural life, was, in fact, human life itself, which was always compelled to seek the freedom of the unknown powers of nature, followed by ritual ceremonies, only to entice them, those natural powers and take advantage of them for the purposes of his interests (Tirta, 2004).

Classification of the Oral Lyric Poetry

“It is found all over the world, past and present, from the meditative personal poetry of recent Eskimo or Maori poets, to mediaeval European and Chinese ballads, or the orally composed epics of pre-classical Greek in the first millennium B.C.” (Finnegan, 1977, p. 93). This statement from Ruth Finnegan, explains the best way the importance of oral poetry and its value to understanding cultures and traditions. Nevertheless, since oral poetry is old in the creation and wide in its content, there is a challenge and struggle in its classification (Polonijo, 1995). Easiest way of oral lyric poetry classification is looking its relation to specific feast or celebration period of the year. Thus, we are presenting below the oral poetry of the different periods of the year.

On the 20th of September (the night) and 21st of September (the day), the fall holiday falls on the ancient calendar. This comes out of the account we make when we measure 45 days from August 6th. It is Christianized as St. Mary's Day, celebrated on the 21st of September, although it is also known as Bee's Day, as bees were traded on this day (Elsie, 2012). It is likewise known as "vintage", as Rrok Zojzi mentions (Zojzi, 1949, p. 45). In this way, for centuries, the moment of renewal of the power of the Sun, according to the calendar, takes place on the 25th of December. Then it was important that the rebirth of nature occurs in spring, the coming of summer, autumn and winter. With these seasons and with these annual and seasonal celebrations was the fate of the livestock, the crops, and the crops that were the sources of his daily life. Closely related and dependent on these circumstances, the primitive man tied many ceremonies to specific dates that marked different periods of the year. These ceremonies, in which the economic and religious character was not concealed, where material goods appeared through signs of magic and animation, over time, following the rise of the development of social relations, lose their first meaning, and end in habits that have been preserved for centuries. Annual (Motmot) songs are of interest to Albanian folk creativity, primarily for the reason that they provide insights into the efforts and goals of the Albanian farmer and farming through various periods of social development (Pllana, 1965). The farmer and the livestock of these creations first comes as evidence of a certain time, then comes as evidence of a state of development of relations not only between people but also with the district where he lived. There is no more accurate data on the evolution of Albanian livestock and farmer life than those that have preserved these creations. Herein lies their importance, even when transformed into different songs or games, for they have always preserved their pagan or mythical stratification. These efforts and intentions, this part of the calendar lyric has preserved from the earliest times and has been followed to this day.

Through ritual and magical signs and actions, most of the time accompanied by poetry, attempts are made to tame the supernatural and natural powers in order to improve the basic conditions of life. The main holiday in the ancient calendar was the Annual year, "Motmot" or Head of Year "Kryeviti", which in Christianity was named St. George (Siceca, 1990). "Motmot" songs, as can be examined from the subject matter under review, as well as the variations of their motifs, have been the subject of early analysis in Albanian folklore studies, beginning with Thimi Mitko (1878), Spiro Dine (1908), Vincenc Prenushi(1911), (Hykolli, 2016, p. 66). This continued with other researchers and collectors of oral folk creativity. The findings of these collections and documents that were collected on the ground, hold their relevance as they reveal moments and conditions of later social periods. This is the Illyrian-Epirus version of the Greek lunisolar calendar. This calendar was used in southern Illyria, Epirus and the island of Corfu. For much of the age of these songs, in the lives of our ancestors, nature occupied an important place, creating a series of cults that had become part of their lives. They worshiped the Sun, Earth, Fire, Water, Stone, and Wood. In the celebrations for these cults, besides the feast, they offered sacrifices to gain their deities' support. These ceremonies were mostly accompanied by special dances, some of which have been preserved to this day preserving their syncretistic character. Therefore, it is not by accident that Christmas is celebrated on the same day as the pagan Holidays on the 25th of December when the energy of the Sun begins to renew. Likewise, the Christian feasts of St. Lazarus and Christ in the weeks when they are celebrated repeat the pagan feasts of the renewal of nature in the spring and take their place. The pagan carnival ceremony, which originated in the Dionysian feasts of antiquity, and today preserved with many signs of this antiquity, was a spring holiday, but as it fell in the midst of Lent, Christianity made it a winter holiday. However, generally the Christian calendar was set up to fit the signs of the pagan calendar. January, New Year's Eve, became St. Basil's and pagan customs were similarly maintained in the context of the Christian holiday. Hence, the 25th of March, which is the beginning of spring, became Vangelism (related to Evangelism) and later, according to other religious beliefs, became Novruz or Sultan Novruz feast. St. John's is celebrated on the 24th of June, the first day of summer. The 6th of August the Feast of the Mountains or Midnight, as it is the mod summer day. This is known by different names according to the provinces, such as, feast of Gjalica, feast of Runa, and feast of Tomor. It is Christianized as the Feast of Saint Mary and is Islamized as Aligyn (St. Elijah's day), while in Kruja as the Feast of Sari Saltuk. This is celebrated on various dates, such as the 15th of August due to the Roman influence according to Mark Tirta (Tirta, 2004). Sari Saltuk on the 22nd of August, while Alygyn is celebrated on the 2nd of August. The exact date for this holiday as it was originally, is the evening of the 6th of August, while the 7th of August is the day. Six days before this holiday and six-day after it is the 12 hottest days of the year. Due to this reason people feared that these were days when ghosts arise the most, or it was believed that it is the weather of these days which would follow the next 12 months in its heat. With today's calendar these days correspond to the first 12 days of August. This holiday was celebrated at night in mountain peaks, with fires small enough to roast the meat, take shelter at the springs,

worship the sun, and sacrifice goats. Characteristic of this celebration are the masses of people around the top of the mountain for three hours at midnight, each with a candle in their hand. The candle should be a replacement by the church of the torch used earlier in paganism. This feast in the past was dedicated to fairies and some god of lightning, as it is also known as Fairy Feast and Thunder Holiday. The subject of Motmot songs, in relation to the rites of the respective festivals, for the Albanian population, reflect in addition to the magical faces of the forces of nature, also the social relations, mainly feudal, especially under the influence of religion, which consistently took action manifestations among the population, which did not coincide with the monotheistic preaching (Pllana, 1965). The early creations of these rites, or of these calendar holidays, under the influence of the monotheistic religions, irrespective of their religious designation, after the great resistance they had made in refusing these elements within their structure, with the passage of Over time, they have also accepted such elements, which proves, on another level, the phenomenon of their evolution, but also the power of monotheistic religions (Tirta, 2004). Therefore, the Motmot rites and Albanian songs also changed, linking to Christian holiday dates, and in some cases to Muslim ones. In this way, "Boazmi" and "Kolendrat" were identified with the Christmas trees. The celebrations of spring holidays that the Albanian population traditionally celebrated, according to the pagan calendar, turned into winter celebrations. Despite the changes that took place, songs and rites created that belong to these creeds, essentially remaining of clear religious content, testifies their existence in pre-Christian and pre-Islamic ages.

The character of each holiday, of course, varies by season, but nevertheless, in addition to greetings that are almost the same, there are similar celebration customs and ways. There is no periodic celebration, for instance, where no cakes, candies or sweets are cooked, no fire lit, no singing and dancing, and no greetings to one another. Biscuits, candies, or pies and sweets are also devotionals for the dead but are also for honoring the elders of the tribe who, with great reverence being made, were considered dishonorable. On the other hand, fire, light, and heat symbolize the Sun, the source of all good, removing evil, and songs are expressions of desires and hopes that reveal the mood of their bearers in those moments. In the dances played, nature is imitated, as well as its productive actions and magical character. Mutual wishes only reinforce the power of words and ritual actions.

The phenomenon of turning Motmot songs into children's songs and games is not only characteristic of Albanian folk culture but almost all other peoples with whom our culture had friction and interactions. Another phenomenon of transformation that is investigated in this type of oral creativity is that some Motmot songs, departing from their respective rituals and holidays, lose their first function of utilitarian character, gain motive independence and ritual Motmot lyricism. In spite of the changes in different time periods and the losses that Motmot songs have suffered in the structure of their poetics, which now makes it impossible to recognize their literary qualities compared to their prototypes, which are unfortunately not known but can be assumed that they would have been very beautiful, but despite these changes, these songs deserve a special place in the

oral creativity of our culture. "Motmot" songs are known to be the product of their respective Motmot rites. This fact has led them to be opposed together, so they will be discussed in turn, according to the calendar of the year, from "Buzmi" to Saints, including the celebrations of spring, summer and autumn. This time, in fact, represents a year of agricultural and livestock work, within the reach of the popular economy.

Therefore, Albanian folk oral creativity is a rich source to study and research as it provides rich soil for understanding its culture and its traditions. Through studying these traditions, songs and folk festivals we can discover plenty on our history, our rites and way of living through centuries. Roots of our traditional culture go back deep in antiquity and are spread in different ways even in our everyday life today. The better we know and understand them, the better we will know ourselves.

4. CONCLUSION

Oral literature in general represents the core value of ethnic culture and tradition. It is a crucial asset for anthropology, ethnological and folklore studies. It represents the important spiritual parts that an ethnic group kept and cherished for centuries. In this paper we showed how regardless of historical, political, religious and social changes occurred during the history of a nation or nations, the oral tradition remains almost the same. While over the years they have adjusted to different pressures and foreign influences the core of its content remained intact, valued and worshiped. This underlines the importance of the oral ritual calendric poetry in understanding cultures and traditions or the humankind in general. While ritual songs are the most common songs of the oral poetry. We find them in different cultures and are considered the oldest type of oral literature. There is no more accurate data on the evolution of Albanian livestock and farmer life than those that have preserved these creations.

Among others we hereby answered the questions on the beginning of creation of such songs, the reason of their creation, who are the dedicated to, who created ritual songs, why are they called ritual songs, as well as, their evolution during the year completing the gaps in the studies written thus far.

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