

Epos of Frontier Warriors : A Monument of Albanian Cultural Heritage : An Effort for Preparation of the File for UNESCO

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Epos of Frontier Warriors: A Monument of Albanian Cultural Heritage

An Effort for Preparation of the File for UNESCO

辺境戦士叙事詩：アルバニア文化遺産の記念碑

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概要

アルバニアの辺境戦士叙事詩はアルバニア精神史を表す芸術の最も重要な柱であり、新しい千年期がはじまった今日でも生きた形で詠われるヨーロッパ最後の叙事詩である。数世紀にわたる戦争やローマに対する反抗の過程で、イリュリア人の生活から叙事詩が生まれ、のちにそれが辺境戦士叙事詩へと結晶化した。辺境戦士叙事詩はアルバニアのラフータ演奏者、すなわち吟遊詩人によって詠われてきた。この伝説的叙事詩は、生ける口承詩として絶滅の危機に瀕しており、したがって AV 機器を用いて組織的に採集する必要があるが生じている。国民的文化遺産を研究し出版することを通じて、芸術文化遺産が次世代の研究者の学際的研究に資するようにすることがその目的である。アルバニアの辺境戦士叙事詩は偉大な民族遺産であると同時に世界の文化遺産であり、したがってユネスコの世界文化遺産に登録されることが期待される。

Abstract

Albanian songs of the Epos of Frontier Warriors are among the most important artistic pillars of the Albanian spiritual culture. These songs are among the last epic poetries in Europe which have been actively sung through the beginning of this millennium. Illyrian epic life during the centuries-long periods of war and rebellion against the Romans produced epic songs which were later crystallized into the Epos of Frontier Warriors. The Epos of Frontier Warriors were sung by the Albanian lahuta players, namely rhapsodists. As the legendary epic is at the stage of ultimate disappearance as a living oral creation, it is necessary to organize a scientific research expedition along with systematic audiovisual collection and analysis, in order to study and publish this national wealth so that this cultural and artistic treasure remains a source of inter-disciplinary study for future generations of scholars. Having high regards for it as a great national treasure, we anticipate that we will achieve in proving that the legendary Epics of Albanian Warriors are a world treasure of art and culture, and as such, should be registered with UNESCO as a world cultural heritage (Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2006).

Introduction

Albanian songs of the Epos of Frontier Warriors are a cycle of epic, heroic legendary songs. They are among the most important artistic pillars of the Albanian spiritual culture. The Epos of Frontier Warriors is a multifaceted poetic echo of the common lifeⁱ (sh.VI-VIII), and represents centuries-long interethnic conflicts,ⁱⁱ and the bloody fights of Illyri-

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ans-Albanians with the south Slavic settlers in Illyria (Balkans), from the beginning of their arrival until the XIV Century, particularly during the Centuries XIII-XIV, when the conflict was aggravated and expanded, as stated by the historian A. Buda (1986), in times of the strengthening of the Serbian central feudal rule of the Nemanjić dynasty.ⁱⁱⁱ The German epicologist, M. Lambertz (1958) agrees that these songs «derive from times of the exodus of Slavs through the Lower Danube in the Balkans, and they preserve the memory of old Illyrians or Albanians against Slavs, which were invaded around the years 700-800».^{iv} These songs are among the last epic poetries in Europe which have been actively sung through the beginning of this millennium, and it is rightly said that they belong in the realm of the world epic.^v

The Epos of Frontier Warriors

The Epos of Frontier Warriors is a continuity of a cycle of Illyrian epic songs, as today's Albanians are descendants of Illyrians. Hence Illyrian epic songs precede the Epos of Frontier Warriors. Epicologist D. Shala (1985) says that they reflect heroic deeds dating back from ancient times, which is also seen in the mythic-fairytale element.^{vi} Illyrian epic life during the centuries-long periods of war and rebellion against the Romans produced epic songs which were later crystallized into the Epos of Frontier Warriors. Though there is no evidence of the ancient Illyrian epic songs, there is supplementary historic, archeological and linguistic evidence. The Croatian linguist R. Katičić (1988) found evidence of Illyrian epic songs, speaking about the ancient formulas of epic songs in Illyria, based on Illyrian anthroponomical and homonymic evidence.^{vii} The Epos of Frontier Warriors is a predecessor of the cycles of historic epic songs among Albanians, which date as far back as the Battle of Kosovo (XIV C.), the cycle of Skanderbeg songs (XV C.) and other subsequent cycles (XVI and XVII C.), particularly those of the period of Ali pashë Tepelena and Mahmut pashë Bushati (XVIII and XIX C.), of the Albanian League of Prizren (XIX C.), of the last phase in the anti-Ottoman rebellion (beginning of XX C.), Kaçake Movement of the two World Wars, until the Liberation War of 1997-2001.

The Epos of Frontier Warriors were sung by Lahuta players, namely rhapsodists, who were distinguished for their attrac-

tive voices, their skills of playing the lahuta, and their technique of remembering lines. Such was A. Llordin, from the province of Plavë and Guci, Adem Brahimi.^{viii} They are also known for their skills of recreating list verses. In addition to these features, distinguished Lahuta players also are known for their skill of creating a comparably hyperbolic presentation of warriors, and their ability to build fantastic features of characters. Lahuta players are mainly cattlemen, the majority of whom are born in mountainous or hilly-mountainous areas. Renowned lahuta players can remember over ten thousand verses by heart.^{ix} Lahuta players are mainly men, however, there are cases of women lahuta players in the Northern Albanian.^x Lahuta players sing these songs accompanied by a single-stringed musical instrument called a lahuta. The lahuta is the main instrument used to accompany songs of the Epos of Frontier Warriors. These songs are also sung accompanied by the two-stringed mandolin called 'çifteli', which is also a widely used instrument among Albanians. They are also sung accompanied by a sharkia, a musical instrument comprised of three sets of strings. The lahuta represents the most ancient archetype of chordophone tools in the European continent arch.^{xi} The lahuta has also been raised to a cult level. The cult of the lahuta in the Albanian family is widespread, just as there is a sacred respect for the songs of warriors.^{xii} Its embellishment with totem figures^{xiii} is also widespread, with wild goats and snake totems holding a central place.^{xiv} The regions of the lahuta and the geography of the distribution of the songs of the Epos of Frontier Warriors are also an interesting issue. The main regions of the lahuta in Northern Albania are: Malësia e Madhe, Shala e Shoshit, Nikajt e Mërturi, Malësia e Vogël, Plava and Gucia, Rugova, Peshteri. These areas are almost all represented in the Albert Lord Collection at Harvard University. Other lahuta regions in Albania and Kosova include: the Dukagjini Plain, Drenica, Shala e Bajgorës, Llapi, Gallapi, Karadaku, and some auxiliary lahuta regions are: Kurbini, Puka, Mirdita, Hasi etc. The reach of the Epos of Frontier Warriors in non-lahuta areas is also interesting: from the Kosova Plain to the Vardar Valley in Macedonia.^{xv}

Lahuta players sing such songs in weddings, in parties and in other joyful celebrations, and in evenings, mainly during winter time. Listeners have a special respect for the lahuta

player, particularly when he sings. They are very mindful during the interpretation of the song. There is great silence throughout, and when the lahuta player finishes the song, he is congratulated and praised with words such as: *God bless your mouth! May your son inherit it!* This is the only and the greatest reward for them.^{xvi} The mythical poem is personified and transcends the earth and cosmic beings such as grooves, springs, rills, hills, mountains, horses, birds, moons, stars, suns and skies. The legendary poem focuses on topics such as when Halil sleeps for 100 years and wakes up saying, *'I seem to have slept a bit!'*,^{xvii} or when Muji is sentenced to two thousand years of incarceration and servitude. This is finished with only one verse.^{xviii} The legendary poem in the epos also attracts the interest of scholars in one verse such as the frontier hero emerging from Jutbina and arriving in Miskov (Moscow).^{xix} These are two poems of overthrowing the traditional rules of literary creation, and they are essential to the legendary poetry. The opinion of the scholar Sinani on the time and temporality in epos is also interesting.^{xx}

The topics of the Epos of Frontier Warriors are many: protection of territory (pastures, forests, fields, etc.), protection of livestock (sheep, goats, horses, etc.), protection of *kullas* (courtyard, goods, building) and family issues (mother, bride, sister). Furthermore, the topic of wars against taxes is also present. The topic of the origin of frontier warriors – farmers or orphans getting their power from fairies and maintaining a friendship with them – is also widespread. Another frequent topic is that of the marriage of frontier warriors: marriage arranged in terms of friendship, marriage arranged on predetermined conditions, marriage in a race, marriage arranged for purposes of obstacle, marriage by abduction, and marriage by force. The topic of slavery, imprisonment, and escape from prison is also present in the repertoire of the majority of lahuta players. The topic of rivalry among warriors because of jealousy, malevolence and anger is also frequent. Revenge is also present. Another widespread topic is adulterous women, and topics about brides, sisters, mothers, and topics of grave desecration are also present.

Çeto Basho Muji is the leading hero of the Albanian epos; leader of a band of thirty warriors; the older brother of another leading hero Sokol Halil Aga. Muji has the household: mother, brother, daughter and son. He takes care of Halil's

wedding, welcomes guests and friends according to the Albanian rules of hospitality. When men gather for discussion, he doesn't rush to speak, weighs his words, respects people in conversation and knows how to correct the other if necessary. He steps in for his friends and the district he lives in and highly praises a given word, *besa* (word of honor). He is as wise with foes as he is strict, and doesn't evade a duel with an opponent, becoming triumphant. He is the symbol of bravery, courage and hard resistance, and has mythological powers derived from a fairy's milk. He is a friend of nymphs and fairies. The size of his body is hyperbolic. He fights kings, captains, wrongdoers and others, protecting the free people of his community from submission. He belongs to the pre-Ottoman medieval times, leading a band of thirty young and brave men, who are chosen by the people of the free villages. His band protects people from the *shkjas* (south Slavs), who enter without permission onto their properties. He and his band members consider death in battle as the most honorable death. The fighting and bloodshed are lengthy, because the south Slavs' raids are big and lengthy, borders are moved and territory shrinks. The fame of this band of warriors is saved in the epos of the Albanians echoing resistance from submission.

Sokol Halil Aga presents another leading hero in the Albanian Epos of Frontier Warriors. He is the younger brother of Çeto Basho Muji and takes part in leading the band by Muji. He is one of the seven Halil's; he is the seventh Halil (the rest are killed by adversaries). He is braver than the others and strong, respects and obeys his older brother. He respects his mother and submits to her commands, loves his sister dearly and praises the family of Muji. He is very handsome and is adored by the daughters of kings; he is a model of grace and bravery. He respects all girls in the community like sisters, sometimes going into adventure with beautiful girls in the kingdom. He is a friend of mythological creatures: fairies and nymphs which help the warriors in cases of danger. When necessary, the moon and the sun keep them safe. He has great physical skill and agility, and is smart. He is as wise with foes as he is strict, like Muji. He often goes into battle with opponents, becoming victorious. The honor of his own family and community is of the highest value. He is trustworthy, and abides by certain ethics and morals which distinguish him

from his opponents. He has the ethno-psychological features of Albanians as an ethnicity, as well as of Muji and his band. They arise in the songs as brave and mighty with mythological powers. They are friends of nymphs and fairies, brave and skilled, but also untrustworthy as they attack flocks of sheep in fields and steal them. They send their sheep to graze in the lands of the warriors without paying anything and attack the towers of the warriors, setting them on fire. They damage their family honor by kidnapping their sisters or wives. They go in front of wedding crowds and take the bride, stopping the engagements and weddings of pretty girls. They challenge people to battle in order to show off in front of their wives, kindly asking for the daughters of the warriors. They give their word, but don't keep their word. They accept challenges to battle according to the rules of the time and use the same weapons as Albanian warriors, such as a mace, sword and knife. They also go into very close combat and go into battle on horses.

Epos of Frontier Warriors and its Collection

Gustav Mayer was the first to publish the fragments of the song, *Said, shone light but sun hasn't set* in 1897.^{xxi} Whereas, the first collectors and publishers of the Epos of Frontier Warriors were Gasper Jakova-Mërturi, who published the song *Blessed are we for the beloved Lord* in 1904,^{xxii} and Nikollë Ivanaj who published the song *Vuko Harambashi and Hajkuna of Dezdar Osman Aga* in 1905.^{xxiii} Despite the distress of the Albanian intellectuals of the time, it was carried out on the behalf of several generations by the priest Shtjefen Gjeçovi who published the fragments of the song in 1905.^{xxiv} Mayer who collected *Gjergj Elez Alia* in 1901 translated it into Serbian.^{xxv} Additionally, others who collected songs of the Epos of Frontier Warriors between the two world wars were: Bernardin Palaj, Donat Kurti, Karl Gurakuqi, Filip Fishta, Hasan Reçi etc. The collection of songs of warriors by A. Lord in the 30's is noteworthy, as it is considered to be as important as the *Visaret e Kombit (Treasures of the Nation)*, Blenjtë I and II (1937) and IV (1939), *Zana populllore*, the Folk Fairy (Kasem Taipi), as well as the publications of magazines such as *Hylli i Dritës (Star of Light)* (Gjergj Fishta), *Leka* (agency of the *Leka* society), *Edukata e Re* (S. Pejani). The generation of the 20-30's led the way for collectors and publishers of the Epos

of Frontier Warriors in the second half of the 20th century, such as Zihni Sako (author of partisan and socialist theater), Qemal Haxhihasani, Gjergj Komnino (persecuted poet), Anton Çetta, Demush Shala.

The Epos of Frontier Warriors is a type of Albanian legendary epic poetry, and is among the oldest units of the spiritual creations of the endangered Albanian people, who were unfortunately on the brink of extinction. Its collection in five countries of the Balkans is an essential need for Albanian people in this new millennia. Many articles have been written regarding the artistic value of this legendary epic poetry, and studies were conducted by Albanian and foreign scholars in the last two centuries. It has been concluded that the artistic value is very high. The Epos of Frontier Warriors may be deemed one of the most enlightened epics among European and world original folklores today. It can be said that the Epos of Frontier Warriors is one of the main pillars of the centuries-old heritage of the Albanians. The Epos, along with the polyphony, the mourning, and the Kanun Code, is the oldest ethno-cultural monument which Albanians can be proud of in the world. Although there have been around half a million verses of songs and variants collected up until today, the work is not over for collectors of the Epos of Frontier Warriors, especially for those in the larger study centers in Tirana and Prishtina.

The Albanian epos in ethno-geographical regions of Kosovo such as Rugova, Dukagjin region, Llapushë, Drenicë, Shalë Bajgorë, Rrafsh i Kosovës, Llap, Gallap, and Karadak, is deemed one of the last epics in Europe which is still alive. It is also active in many ethno-geographical regions of Albania such as Malësi e Madhe, Shala, Shosh, Nikaj, Mërtur, Gjakova highlands, Lumë, Pukë, Mirditë, Kurbin. It is active in ethno-geographical regions of the Albanian people in Macedonia: Kumanova, Skopje, Tetova, Gostivar, Kërçova. Furthermore, it is active in some ethno-geographical regions of Albanian areas in Serbia: Presheva, Bujanovac, Medvegja and part of Sandzak of Pazar in Serbia. It is also active in more ethno-geographical regions of Albanians in Montenegro: Kojë, Triesh, Grudë, Hot, Krajë, Shestan, Anë e Malit, Plava and Gucia, region of Rozhaja and the part of Sandzak of Pazar in Montenegro. As the legendary epic is at the stage of ultimate disappearance as a living oral creation, and consider-

ing that the Albanian people live in its northern areas, mainly in mountainous areas where poetic creation is still kept alive, it is necessary, at these moments in which this kind of historical culture exists, to organize a scientific research expedition along with systematic audiovisual collection and analysis, in order to study and publish this national wealth so that this cultural and artistic treasure remains a source of inter-disciplinary study for future generations of scholars. By collecting and studying the Epic of the Warriors we hope that, on the one hand, this cultural treasure be forever kept from extinction and, on the other hand, it will enable scholars of other linguistic, socio-cultural and ethno-psychological disciplines to have a better study on its basis in the future.

Collection, systematization, analysis and publication will be carried out on the existence of three types of the Albanian legendary epic. The first type is the sung form: the last phase of its existence, included in the western areas of Kosovo, north of Albania. The second type, found in the southwest of Montenegro is the recited form: the initial phase of extinction, stretching across the southern and eastern parts of Kosovo, Presheva Valley. The third type, found in the northern part of central Albania, is the told version: the final phase of extinction, stretching across several parts of Kosovo, northwestern part of Macedonia and central Albania. Out of the materials collected in the field, it is expected that Albanian studies will be enriched with new data for further analysis on the major issues regarding the epic warriors, as projected in the international scientific conference of August 2010, held at the Institute of Albanology of Prishtina. The conference was organized by both the Institute of Albanology of Prishtina and the Center of Albanian Studies in Tirana. The themes of the conference were as follows.

- The genesis of Albanian epic.
- Authenticity in the Albanian epic.
- Ethnic functioning according to mythological-fairytale symbols.
- Topics and motives of the Albanian – Slav conflict.
- Authentic value of the epic: mythology, figuration, concatenation.
- Comparative layering with the European epic: comparisons in the thematic and motivational aspect.

- Old ethno-cultural layering: parallels of life under the Albanian code of Kanun with Homer's period.
- Historical synonymy: Muji and Halil – synonym of border resistance.
- Balkan context: sequences and mutual implications with the oral epic of the Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Greek.
- Bilingual singers (Albanian and Serbo-Croatian).
- Formulaic theory by Parry-Lord, as one of the basis for the study of the epic.
- Interpretation of epic songs: paths of development.
- The lahuta: the accompanying instrument for the interpretation of the epic.
- Situation today in archives and in the field.
- Tasks in the current stage of the scholars and institutions regarding the Epics of Frontier Warriors.

The collection of warriors' epics as a material, will immensely help the Albanian scientific musicology, and since it is there where the oldest forms of music and harmony are, musicologists can bring valuable conclusions regarding the historic age of development of the Albanian music in Kosovo and other countries. Furthermore, comparative studies in this field will enable people worldwide to have a wider access to the studies on music and its age in the Balkans and, especially, in the geographical area of Albanians. Collection of Epics of warriors will help a lot, not only in the historical study of Albanian grammar, especially morphology and syntax, but also in etymological studies and the origin of language. Considering the value of the Epics of Warriors as the biggest monument of Albanian oral poetry, we put forth this scientific project to document it with UNESCO as a sublime value of the spiritual oral heritage of humanity, which will reflect its authentic features. The operation of this project enables this oral epic creativity to be offered to the scientific world and cultural community for admission and recognition as a world cultural treasure. Having high regards for it as a great national treasure, we anticipate that we will achieve in proving that the legendary Epics of Albanian Warriors are a world treasure of art and culture, and as such, should be registered with UNESCO as a world cultural heritage.

Footnotes

- ⁱ Shaban Sinani, *Mythology in the Epos of the Frontier Heroes*, monographic study, second edition, Argeta-LMG, Tirana, 2006, p. 66.
- ⁱⁱ Alfred Uçi, Heroic epic, and its role in the Albanian folklore, in: *Albanian folklore issues*, 2, Academy of Sciences of the R. of Albania, Institute of Popular Culture, Tirana, 1986, p. 28; Andromaqi Gjergji, Our ethnos on the legendary epic», in: *Albanian folklore issues*, 2, IPC, Tirana, 1986, p. 11; Zymer Neziri, Features of songs of heroes, rev. Educologia, University of Prishtina, Faculty of Teaching, Prishtina, 2001, p. 75.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Aleks Buda, Our epos and our history, in: *Albanian folklore issues*, 2, IPC, Tirana, 1986, p. 54.
- ^{iv} Maximilian Lambertz, *Die Volksepik der Albaner*, Leipzig, East Germany, 1958, p. 184.; See the Albanian publication, translation of Eqrem Çabej: Maksimilian Lambertz, *Albanian popular epic*, in: *Albanian folklore issues*, 6, IPC, Tirana, 1998, p. 5.
- ^v Alfred Uçi, Heroic epic, and its role in the Albanian folklore, in: *Albanian folklore issues*, 2, IPC, Tirana, 1986, p. 40.
- ^{vi} Dr. Demush Shala, *About the Albanian heroes' songs*, Rilindja, Prishtina, 1985, p. 5.
- ^{vii} Radosllav Katiq, About the Illyrian language, rev. Fjala, nr. 21-22, Prishtinë, December 1988, p. 1 and 7.
- ^{viii} Adem Brahimi sang for A. Llordin a song of 2163 verses.
- ^{ix} Only in the region of Rugova, by the end of the last Century, there was a repertoire of over 10 thousand verses: Isuf Selmani-Kuklecaj, Haxhi Meta-Nilaj, Shaban Groshi and Isë Elezi-Lekëgjekaj.
- ^x Mustafa Gërcaliu, Type of rhapsody of heroes' songs, in: *Albanian folklore issues*, 2, IPC, Tirana, 1986, p. 302.
- ^{xi} Pirro Miso, Role and ethno-artistic function of the lute, in: *Albanian folklore issues*, 3, IPC, Tirana, 1987, p. 27, 42.
- ^{xii} Shaban Sinani, *Mythology in the Epos of the Frontier Heroes*, quotation, p. 89.
- ^{xiii} Ramadan Sokoli, Pirro Miso, *Albanian popular music instruments*, Academy of Sciences of the R. of Albania, IPC, Tirana, 1991, p.214.
- ^{xiv} Prof. Dr. Mark Tirta, *Mythology among Albanians*, IPC, Tirana, 2004, p. 62, 157, 158.
- ^{xv} Hamit Xhaferi, *Popular epic of the Kërçova region*, Tetovo, 1996. Hafezat Osmani, *Albanian popular epic (collected in Tetovë and Gostivar)*, Skopje, 1999; Qemal Murati, *Old songs of Kërçova*, Tetovë, 2000.
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- ^{xvii} Ismail Kadare, Albanian epos and culture (discussion), in: *Albanian folklore issues*, 3, IPC, Tirana, 1987, p. 328, 329.
- ^{xviii} Zymer Neziri, *Legendary epic of Rugovë*, volume I, manuscript (1986), lutenist Adem Salihi sings Muji is held captive by the king, v. 25.
- ^{xix} Zymer Neziri, *Songs of heroes*, Libri Shkollor, Prishtinë, 2003, song King of Miskov abducts the gjog of Muji, p. 142, v.133.
- ^{xx} Shaban Sinani, *Mythology in the Epos of the Frontier Heroes*, quotation, p. 108.
- ^{xxi} Gustav Meyer, *Albanesische Studien*, VI, Wien, 1897, p. 52.
- ^{xxii} Prof. D. Gaspër Jakova-Mërturi, *Grammatica della lingua Albanese*, Frascati, 1904.
- ^{xxiii} Gaz. *Shpnesa e Shqypëniis (1905-1908)*, Dubrovnik, Croatia.
- ^{xxiv} Shtjefën Gjeçovi (1874-1929), churchman, teacher, folklorist, ethnologist, archeologist, historian etc. Was assassinated by the Serb regime.
- ^{xxv} Song was published in Serbian, in 1932, by professor T.R. Gjorgjeviq, in *Naš narodni život*, VI, Belgrade.