



The Cult Towards Courage In Oral Epic And Chivalric Literature

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Abstract: The cult of bravery and deeds, of the horse, of weapons, and of the beautiful woman is old. It can be said with certainty that it has been present in epic oral poetry since the beginning of its existence. Ancient epics such as “Iliad” and “Odyssey” etc. convince us of this. In literary works, which dealt with such aspects of human action, the cult of bravery and deeds took on a marked dimension. These works had a great influence not only on the development of epic genres, but also on other literary genres of different periods. Works of this character were called chivalric literature and had a wide spread. This literature was characterized by the symbiosis of the creator, poet or singer, with the public; in it the miracles of the actions of the knights, the various descriptions of heroic acts, of the actions to kidnap (rob) beautiful girls, to gain fame, and to preserve personal and family honor are expressed. Literature with such features developed especially in France and is associated with gesture songs, which made an impact on other European literatures, as the initiator is the writer, Chrétien, who began to write in the second half of the XII century. Works of this quality were spread by the so-called jugglers, who were wandering poets. Through them was revived the “old fame” of the brave actions (res gestae) of the brave and the former leaders. Even our knightly songs are deeply permeated by a spirit of chivalrous cult, namely the testimony of bravery and chivalric deeds.

Keywords: chivalric cult; chivalric literature; epic; gesture songs; singers

1. Introduction

The cult of bravery and deeds, of the horse, of weapons, and of the beautiful woman is old. It can be said with certainty that in oral epic poetry it has been present since the beginning of the existence of this kind of poetry. The ancient epics convince us

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of this. Thus, in the Homeric epics “Iliad” and “Odyssey”, this cult is quite present and of particular importance, and as such it made a great impact on Roman literature, as well as on other kinds of literature that developed later. This is justified by the opinion of T. S. Eliot, who in his well-known essay “What is a classic?” among other things says: “The blood-stream of European literature is Latin and Greek – not as two systems of circulation, but one, for it is through Rome that our parentage in Greece must be traced. (Eliot, 1944)” This influence is also mentioned by the well-known Croatian Latinist, Vladimir Vratović (1977), who asserts: “The influence of the Greeks on the Romans was the deepest and most intense in the continuous course of several centuries, while that of the Etruscans was less direct and was more detour “.

Although the meaning of the word knight is broad, from the beginning it has denoted a warrior, a knight. It got a more defined meaning, especially during the time of the Roman Empire, which “[...] constitutes the cultural substrate and provides the demographic basis of Europe”. The literal meaning of knight and chivalry must first be sought among the barbarian peoples, especially among the Germans. Later, an important role in the phenomenon of chivalry and the knight was played by the church, which was carried over to different periods of social development (Flori, 1999).

The researcher of medieval chivalry, Franco Cardini, emphasizes that with the strengthening of the Roman-Germanic Empire, throughout the Christian West, a warrior culture was born, a civilization in which the warrior has a say in everything, in government, in the judiciary, in treasures. At the time of the decline of this Empire the exercise of arms was a dull necessity, while, on the contrary, for the Germans the bearing of arms was a title of honor and dignity and a source of original (authentic) joy. Carrying weapons for them was valued as evidence of personal freedom and fulfillment of civil rights. So, carrying and using weapons for the Germans in reality was rather a right and a pleasure.

Even in the time of the Byzantine Empire, this use of weapons lasted until the 6th century, to continue in different forms, even in the following periods (Flori, 1999). Such a culture of chivalry and the knight was naturally expressed in art in general and also in literature. In the literary works that dealt with such aspects of human action, the cult of bravery and exploits took on a prominent dimension. Thus, a number of important epic works were created, which had a great impact not only on the development of epic types, but also on other literary types of different periods.

Works of such a character were called chivalric literature and had a relatively wide spread (Škreb, 1974).

Chivalric literature was characterized by the symbiosis of the creator, poet or singer, with the audience, or recipient. They expressed the wonders of the actions of the knights and their feats, which aroused the curiosity of the listeners or (later) of the readers. Various descriptions of heroic acts, of actions to abduct (rob) beautiful girls, to gain fame and to preserve personal and family honor, were one of the features of works with this spirit. In a word, chivalric literature extolled the martial virtues of knights; she added and magnified the deeds of bravery and the exploits of the brave, their weapons and the battles they waged. Expressing this world, literature also served as a source to know the rules and the moral and ethical code on which it was based.

Such kind of literature became popular and spread in oral and written form. Thus some works like, for example, the novel “Lancelot”, consisting of 2500 pages, was spread into over a hundred manuscripts, despite the difficulties of copying. Such spreading of works with a simple knightly theme testifies to the same taste of their creators as the listener or the reader. In this context, long poems with this theme were born in some countries, which had a noticeable spread: “At the threshold of literature, in France, as well as elsewhere, the epic is created. Elaborated at first in assonant lase, then in rhymed ten-syllables, the long poems, destined to be recited by wandering poets (jullars) sang the glorious facts [...] (Flori, 1999).

One of the elements that prove the special world of the brave is ‘besa’, the given word, the respect of which, according to Jean Flori, is undoubtedly one of the foundations of chivalric ethics (Shala, 1985). ‘Besa’ is of a solemn character. It is trustworthy only for the one who gives it and the value of which is known and considered by the relevant social circle, where the knight lives. This phenomenon is associated with knightly honor and the experience of the deeds and their achievements, which becomes the subject of singing (Flori, 1999). So, when the action and victory of the brave are sung in song, then the knight has reached the highest point and has truly realized the chivalric ideal (Milani, 1971; Milanov & Berisha, 1998).

Literature with such features was developed especially in France and is related to the songs of gestures, which made an impact on other European kinds of literature as well. For these songs, the theme was mainly taken from the events of the VIII and IX centuries. However, the very fact that the time distance was great, in the most

frequent cases, they were detached from historical events and expressed the imagination of their creator. Gesture songs were sung or recited on various occasions, either in royal courts or in other public places, where the main determinant was the listener. He had to like and accept the creation, he was the only receiver. So these creations were transmitted orally, as is usually the case with the creations of oral literature.

The researcher, Zdenko Škreb (1974), points out that the founder of medieval chivalric literature was the French writer Chrétien, who began writing in the second half of the XII century. In his works and in the works of other authors of this literature, besides exploits, chivalric enterprises and unusual adventures, various mythical beings, fairies, dangerous divas, magical courtiers, dwarves, strange springs, magical tools and similar things were present, they surrounded the brave and were present in their actions, some of which elements we encounter in our chivalric songs. In German literature, this epic tradition is represented by the "Song of the Nibelungs", written in the stanzas "Song of Kudrun", which has as its main motive the robbery of the girl. The most prominent representative of German chivalric literature was Gottfried from Strasbourg (Škreb, 1974). Works with such epic and chivalric features were spread by so-called jugglers, who were wandering poets. With them, the "old fame" of the brave actions (*res gestae*) of the brave men and leaders of the past was revived (Vinja, 1982). These poets, who became famous especially in the XI and XII centuries, sang their works accompanied by instruments. According to the researcher Helmut Birkhan, the "Song of the Nibelungen" was the most popular poetic creation sung in the German language during the Middle Ages in the Danube area and in Austria: "Unlike the courtly novel of King Arthur and Tristan, it was not from its beginning predestined only for an aristocratic public, but was addressed (as was the legend of Charles of France) to all strata of the population. Itinerant musicians sang it in bazaars, in castles, in town and country pubs, maybe even in monasteries" (Birkhan, 1986).

These reciters and singers mainly sang about the brave and their deeds, about adventures and duels, about fighting and about the robbery of women, about the sacrifices of the brave, just as it happens in the overwhelming part of our Heroic songs, where the chivalric cult has multiple importance and function. In later times, when these creations were read rather than sung, they passed into prose genres, maintaining their popularity, but losing their former beauty and charm (Vinja, 1982).

The possibility of some influence of this literature on our oral tradition cannot be ruled out, since in different periods of time our people had contact with other peoples,

including the Greek and French. Without wanting to dwell on this issue, I am mentioning that in the epic “Song of Roland” there are a number of Albanian toponyms, verified in today's Albania (Luka, 1983). So, without denying the possibility of any such influence, it will be emphasized that the Albanian singers, who were mostly uneducated, could not be influenced by a literature in another language. The similarities of our Heroic songs with gesture songs and other epic works are a result of the nature and peculiarities of epic creations and epic style in general.

Our Heroic songs too are deeply permeated by a spirit of the knightly cult, namely the testimony of bravery and knightly deeds. At their core these are songs of action and confrontation of strength between the brave or opposing sides. So, the knightly cult in our Heroic songs is an essential element, which brings them closer to the traditions of the most ancient epics (Berisha, 2006; Nike Berisha, 2008; 2019).

The knightly cult in the Albanian Heroic songs is deeply intertwined with other components, such as characters, mythical beings, then with the worldview of the social environment without state organization, with honor, with faith, with hospitality and others. In these songs, it is expressed in different forms and means, first of all, the strength of the knight, his bravery, his ability and willingness to face others and engage in duels with powerful braves. Furthermore, it is closely related to efforts and adventures to gain fame, to kidnap beautiful girls, to protect the pastures or to preserve the honor of the family and the tribe from various attackers. So, in many songs, this cult expresses the object that is treated in them, encourages and conditions the elaboration of the song, namely the narration.

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