

COLLECTIVE MENTALITY AND LITERARY IMAGE

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Rezumat

Generație după generație, "Epopoea Kreshnicilor" rămâne unul dintre monumentele culturii tradiționale albaneze. Imaginile artistice din această operă reprezintă imaginea tipică a zonelor noastre muntoase, figurile noastre legendare, redată prin intermediul unei specifice viziuni a fabulosului. Din aceasta reiese că miturile au modelat creațiile preliterate ale societății, mituri care au ajuns până în zilele noastre prin intermediul acestor creații și care conțin esența gândirii acestei societăți. Mentalitatea acestei faze a gândirii mitice a dominat antichitatea până la sfârșitul paleocreștinătății. Cântecul eposului legendar atrag atenția nu numai prin marea lor valoare artistică, dar și ca monumente socio-culturale cu valoare istorică, filozofică, politică și juridică.

Figurile mitologice au un caracter htonic, terestru. «Epopoea Kreshnicilor» are, în centrul său, figurile unor oameni simpli, văzuți în relație cu tovarășii lor, față de care sunt primi inter pares. Toate aspectele vieții lor – apărarea pământului, a turnului castelului, în chip de metaforă, precum și identitatea lor, rezistența, viața, libertatea, onoarea etc., sunt legate de condiția lor spirituală. Mentalitatea rezistenței, cu rădăcini adânci în psihicul lor, se dezvoltă intuitiv de-a lungul granițelor lingvistice comune. Operând cu criterii artistice, se face diferența dintre imaginația mitic-păgână și imaginația de mai târziu, deoarece, prin antinomie, este trasată granița dintre conștient și subconștient, dintre politeismul totemic și monoteism. Lumea acelor vremuri este diferită de cea care a urmat, pentru că înaintașii aveau un mod diferit de a înțelege viața și moartea, timpul și spațiul, omul și divinitatea, familia și lumea. Generația aparținând vremurilor dominate de mentalitatea mitică și legendară, refuză să recunoască prezentul sau viitorul, deoarece reprezentanții ei aparțin unei lumi care recunoaște doar trecutul.

Procesul convertirii mentalităților colective în adevăruri artistice, mentalități care, emanând dintr-o anumită epocă, se apropie de adevărurile istorice, precum și procesul decodării imaginilor arhetipale în subiecte epice au atras atenția oamenilor de știință, dar și a istoricilor, lingviștilor, etnologilor, precum și a specialiștilor în mitologie.

Abstract

The Cycle of Kreshniks is one of monuments of the national traditional Albanian culture. The traditional images of this literary work reveal the typical view of our mountainous areas, our mighty legendary figures rendered by means of the fabulous.

As a result, the myths shaped and influenced the preliterate creations of the society, the myths which have survived via these creations up to these days and which contain the essence of that society's thinking. The mentality of this phrase of the mythical thinking dominated the antiquity until the end of paleochristianity. Songs of the legendary epos attract the reader's attention not only because of their great artistic value, but they are also regarded as important sociocultural monuments having historical, philosophical, political and legal value.

The mythological figures have a chthonic, terrestrial character. The Cycle of Kreshniks focuses on common people viewed in their relationship with their friends, the girl for whom they are primi inter pares. All the aspects of their lives, and namely, the defence of their land, of the castle tower in the form of a metaphor, as well as their identity, resistance, life, freedom, honour etc. are related to their spiritual condition. The mentality of the resistance which is deeply embedded in their psyche has intuitively developed across common linguistic borders. Operating with artistic between the mythic-pagan imagination and the later imagination as the borderline between the conscious and subconscious mind, between totemic polytheism and monotheistic faith is traced through antinomy. Ancient people differed from their followers who had a different vision of the life and death, time and space, the man and the divinity, family and the world. The generation of the ancient times dominated by the mythic and legendary mentality refuses to recognize the present and the future because their representatives belong only to the past.

The process of converting collective mentalities into artistic truths, mentalities which have emanated from a different epoch, approach the historical truths, as well as the process of decoding the archetypal images into epic subjects have drawn the attention of various sciences such as: history, linguistics, ethnology and mythology.

According to the ways of transmission and the functioning of folklore, with the aim to determine some of the features of oral literature in relation to the written one, in the article "Folklore as a special form of creativity", R. Jakobson and P. Bogatyryov¹ stress that the existence of a folklore creation is based on the belief and the acceptance it should have in a certain social environment. Only after it is accepted, this creation with its real life starts to function, while it is quite different from the written literature. Therefore mythical legendary creativity is not only accepted, but it is also supplemented, protected and transmitted from such environment by

¹Jakobson et alii, 1929.

means of language which has evolved as the society progressed. Regarding this phenomenon, the researcher A. N. Berisha believes that the nature of any creation is determined by linguistic matter, the main component of its birth and function, “while its main value is determined by the poetic language”². So, the songs of kreshniks should be read semantically (in terms of meaning) without forgetting at any moment that the reality of this creativity is richer than the reality of life, being so its cultural experience. There is a strong organic symbiosis in the relationship existing between the way the ancient community thought and understood the world and its reflection in poetry creation or in artistic images embodied in the figures of kreshniks, in the viewpoints of mythical figures, in customs or habits that have created them and accepted to apply them, the sources of which are to be found in the ancient mentality. But, as we may not know the mentality of the pre-literary societies, by means of the images transmitted generation after generation to the present days, we intend to open up their artistic collective code, to analyze the conceptual basis on which they were formalized, according to the sensitivity which was collective just like the spirit of that society where the group and the individual were all one.

These creations (a total number of 700 preserved in the archival fund of the Institute of Popular Culture of the Republic of Albania, Academy of Science) distinguished for their epic width under the terms as; “bravery songs”, “ancient songs for heroes”, “kreshniks songs”, “songs of Muji & Halil”, “lute songs”, “songs of legendary epic” all bear a widespread scientific label named “epos”, although in scientific articles they are recognized with their early term “rhapsody” or in the 1970s known as “ep” or “epopee”. The best term attached to them may be “kreshniks cycle” in parallel with the “legendary epos”, because the term “legendary epic” includes ballads, while tales as a genre are included in popular prose. Artistic images brought in them as typical views (scenes) of mountainous environment, as figures of legendary heroes, of mythical means with which they are surrounded, of the phenomena they unveiled, are all mental images and faithful reproductions. According to the definition taken from “the American Heritage Dictionary”², myth is “a traditional story originating in preliterate society, dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors, or heroes that serve as primordial types in a primitive view of the world”. From this definition, it results that myths formed in pre-literary societies bring to our times, among these creations, hidden, real, encoded commentary but whose essence is encrypted. It is the mentality of this period that means the time of mythical thought, which ruled throughout the ancient time, surviving in such a way up to the end of paleochristianity. Songs of legendary epos draw attention not only to the great artistic values, but also to being socio-cultural monuments possessing numerous historic, philosophical, political, and judicial values. Having a particular affection for the great human epos – of Gilgamesh summer, the Homeric epos, the Ramajana and Mahatbara and those of great medieval epos such as Nibelungs, Songs of Roland, Digenis Akritas, being accompanied by the harmony and rhythm of the solemn verse, then the lute, from the antiquity to the early twentieth century, documented in written form, they continuously inserted in the ancient bed the current situation but distinguished as a foreign contamination.

The universal mentality of the epos heroes is original and has direct connection neither with the ancient confrontation of the three symbolic worlds of Gilgamesh epos (divine, human, savage) or the cosmogony of Mahatbara nor with that of the Homeric poems of Olimp or the cosmogony of the Jewish legends of Talmudit, created between the III and the IV centuries after Christ. This period is characterized by great events, not just ordinary moments. Songs of the kreshniks cycle documented nowadays, after the meeting which begins in the first decade of the twentieth century with the linguist Gasper Jakova-Merturi, is followed by the expeditions of some foreigners, mentioning here the study of two Americans M. Parry and Albert Lord in 1930,³ who clearly bring the echo of events of a period that extends from the early Middle Ages up to the eve of the first battles of our people against the Ottoman Empire, the work of the Priests of Franciscan order with their journal “The Depository of the Nation” and the continua-

²second edition, Boston, 1982, p. 827.

tion of this work in Albania and Kosova, after World War II, studies which have been subject to institutional and individual and monographic studies.

However, a traditional ideo-artistic experience which is very ancient and which starts with our Illyrian past, maybe even before, when the family of the Indo-European peoples was not spread in the South or East of the country, lives in its content. So briefly and simply said, in these contents which were orally transmitted and later changed into legends by the collective memory, are found some complicated, mixed up knots about our prehistoric past. The classic thought that - according to Goethe's and Sheller's preferred terminology, - the object of epos is the ethnic past, the "absolute past", while the source of these songs is the memory of the community, the "national legends" and also Epos is the cult of our ancestors, leads to the idea that in them is hardened not the usual but its antimony. The time that our great grandparents, who survived by creating habits, customs, codes, is reflected in the settings where our legendary heroes and mythical beings lived, who later, because of the desire, became models. There is told about the time when from different directions, north, south or the sea, came the "others", the strangest, who wanted to conquer the Albanian land, its cradle and its grave, the highland, its lifestyle, feeling and mentality possessed by it. These plots depict stories or describe situations in which a "real" reference is needed and which were orally transmitted generations after generation. The notion 'mythological space' has made the scholars search the prehistoric setting, habitat of Epos case's world which are composed and seen in the importance that is given to the birthplace of the myth in magnification of the mountains and the land. These features are seen in the concept of the word 'land' in the German language.

There exists only artistic time in epos where the mythological figures rest for more that a century and then wake up as if they were just taking a nap. An argument for their antiquity is "their matriarchal and chthonic character. Comparing Epos with legendary Ballads where an old and wise man appears remembering thus the patriarch, this element is not seen in Epos. For the first time father appears with the figure of Muji in relationship with his son, Omer. The matriarchal feature of legendary and mythological figures shown in the Gjergj Elez Alia's song with which ends the humans (females) sacrifice for something, for a campaign according to the principle *I give you, you give me*, we find the source of the image. Up to that moment, he had given his wife and his sister (the wall - in ballad of Rozafa castle) but this could no longer last. This figure, according to Sh. Sinani, "grants amnesty from sacrifice for woman", while with chthonic character of Epos'figures is depicted; the autochthonic character of the Albanian people is built. Extra-temporality in these creations is related to mythological mentality where time and space is melt into one. Yet, in some cases these concepts substitute each other. So they say "a nine year journey, nine villages away".

These creations interpreted by our rhapsodists reveal the elements of the happenings, places, phenomena, norms of social organization, geographical and historical names which are not only meaningful, but also serve as important reference points. The kreshinics do have the concept of their ethno-cultural relation, the mentality of being part of a community with a certain mental collective thinking expressed by a set of special virtues towards other ethnic communities surrounding it. The heroes of our Kreshniks' songs are distinguished for their ethno-cultural context based on a traditional legislation, on a social organization led by its own laws with its own habits, customs and lifestyle. Furthermore, they are characterized by a vision and typical concept of thinking and living, by a series of mental and moral norms which make them differ from their neighbors, from their dominant mentality in their common legendary, mythical life. This is seen in a one of the songs where a Kreshnic sings in his ancestors' language, but he is not understood by the foreigners. In an assembly of lords where they are "dressed" in gold: As they wear their hoods/white as snow the field appears (tan kapucat ata si i kane/bytym bardh fusha po duket). This is because of their special way of dressing.

The Cycle of Kreshniks differs from the idea of the hero created as an artistic figure in the Greek epos. They preserve human features and qualities, not only in their origin, but also in the relation with their co-fighters with those were "premus iter pases". Halil invites his brother in the battle because he considers himself 'the first above the seconds', but blood calling dictates

him to call him the great brother. The image created by this invitation to the battle reminds us the pagan tradition without a king. These fighters who at the same time are figures and characters of their personal life, create an alliance with the mythological beings which insure their protection, testifying so an inherited quality from antiquity. When Halil passess through dangerous paths of the Kingdom, the sun has said "A ndorja eme, the moon has said; A ndorja eme, and the fairies have said: A ndarja jone".

There are a lof of similarities between Muji, the protagonist of these songs compared with his homolog's poems of south Slaves, Kraveviq Mark. But there are also many original features. In his poem, Mark uses slyness, a feature that according to some scholars "is a feature which supplements physical force". While their heroes are loyal, insuppressible warriors who keep their promise and achieve their victories with heroism, fortitude, honesty, moral and physical advantage against their enemies in direct confrontation with them in the battlefield of honor. Being loyal in not the same as being confident. Loyalty, as a moral, primitive relationship of the ancient inhabitant with the others, which later was improved and reached up to the level of the institution, became the basis of his resistance throughout the land of the ancestors. The protagonist of the Albanian Epos are highlanders, even the décor of their artistic action is pastoral, therefore their mentality is pastoral too, further ahead in time than the mentality of the agricultural society.

In the Albanian Epos there are some legendary mythical autochthonous elements. This is understood from the essence of the typological features of their structure. Its heroes do not have four heads and four arms like Brahma, they do not have the attributes of Buda and they do not have the same origin as other mythological Greek heroes that in fact are born form the relationship between the divine and the earthly beings. Furthermore, they are not identical even in the historical figures concerning time and space, as in Kraveviq Mark's songs of Christian slaves or in Bosnia Muslims epos. The essence of their origin derives from a native and complex mythology. Throughout the development of the human society the man always needed to show and tell stories that other people were interested to hear. Intuitively confession created myths and cults which were well known and respected according to the code of justice. In his relation and confrontation with the nature and world, the man always needed to dominate them and exactly this kind of sensitivity and the necessity of time led to the creation of the super powerful fantastic reality of "his own superiority". According to J. Christie, "this is not an isolated object but the compilcation of cultural textuality". Our Kreshniks are also the heroes of our rhapsodists and auditors that have created and preserved them through out the centuries. It is because of the tasks undertaken and solved by them - the defence of their ancestors' land, highlands, farms, valleys, of their life full of dignity, of their ethnic customs and traditions which were suffered from continuous attacks approaching from the sea and land, from kings, black giants, captains, etc. Today, maybe, we are not able to find the name of their mother land, of their starting point, as well as the orally transmitted names such as Illyria, Illyrian, Dardania, Dardan. It happens because of the cultural trauma, continuous pressure from the Roman legions, the Byzantine administration of the state which was against virtue, Slavic attacks, Ottoman military campaigns which promised freedom, just as in the times of Alexander the Great in the East. Though they tried to vanish their traces, the essence of their existence and their figure is untouched. It is here where the element of isolation sprouts, in the tower where the human being feels dignified "washed by the Sun and wore by the Moon" in order to implement the blood feud code. During the period of Ottoman occupation, there was an attempt to draw a parallel line between their ethnic and religious affiliation, as sometimes happened in other Epos like that of Roland. Nevertheless, the Albanian ethno-cultural base and their way of thinking, their codes, virtues, morals and customs, goals and decisions of wars could not be changed. The heroes of our songs, brought from far-off centuries, even if their names and appearance had been changed, time and again called Muslims who fought against Christians, preserve and maintain their traditional experience of war in order to protect their ethnic identity. Muji, Halil, Omer, Gjergj Elez Alia and all the kreshniks in general, hold and follow their ethnic norms. It seems that everything in their figure is traditional even in ideas, life, and poetics. In this case the Epic creativ-

ity is related to the attacks from the invasion of the different peoples - Normans, Katalane, Goths, Ostrogoths, and Slavs.

Intuitively the Kreshniks do not only feel the divine character of the traditional laws, but also the secret of continuity and protection of their life. It is known that one of the main features of our nation is the conservation and protection of the customs of our ancestors. Albanian epos hero has regularly actualized this traditional experience and has made it a norm, a deep autochthon image of these people that should be followed. This is the way Muji, when he was imprisoned by Krali (the king) acts when he wants to prove that Omer, not yet being born, was his own blood. He sends his brother to sin, being afraid that Halil has violated the Albanian norms. "Qi per n'dashte m'pru marren te shpija,/He, kti zoti i shkimet hisen e diellit!/E n'paste menden me na korrite fisin,/Gjujma re, qetash me koke rfeje,/Zirma, toke, perjashta n'nate te vorrit." (So that if Evil befalls on our health/and thinks to Sway our tribe/vast a cloud your thunderbolts on him/throw him out of earth into the Gloomy night). That is the way, Halil answers the noblemen in the assembly when he is proposed to marry the most beautiful girl in Yutbina: "Deksha pra, m'u martofsha,/Se gjithe grate e Jutbines ku jane,/Se gjithe vajzat e Jutbines ku jane,/Bash si motra qi po m'duken." (May death strike me if I marry./for all women of Youtbina wherever they are,/for all the young Ladies of Youtbina wherever they are,/to me seem like my very sisters,/". The force of the Albanian canon is expressed even in Gjergj Elez Alia's answer given to the black giant: "M'ke lype motren para se mejdanin;/M'ke lype berret para se cobanin,/E jam dredhe n'ket log me t'kallxue/se ne t'paret nji kanu na kane lane:/Armet me dhane perpara e mandej gjane,/Kurre balozit motren mos me ja dhane,/Per pa u pre n'ate fushen e mejdanit!" (You've asked for my sister before challenging me on the battlefield,/you want my flocks before settling accounts with their shepherd,/thus I've come to this place to let you know/of the canon which our forefathers have left us,/not to give away our chattels before our weapons,/neither to wed our sisters to our foes,/before trying it all out on the battlefield!).

The customary right intuitively derives from the personal contemplation expressed in the guest room and then in the assembly. So it should be taken as an inside expression of the popular way of thinking. The Albanian canon, just like the Jewish Talmud, is the only strong organizing basis which the life of our nation was based on. The head of the families were the interpreters of this code. It is important to underline the fact that this inheritance created during a thousand-year process pulsates throughout the entire judicial life of the Albanian nation. It was also materialized in various forms of rituals and customs of the daily life, in their different actions, in their attitudes and daily relations with the others. Some layers were added to this code as the time passed, but in its entirety, it is an Albanian legislative and original monument such as "the old customary German code", "jus romana", "Customary Greek code" etc. used to be. "Ky kod, pjelle e rendit gjinor te popullit tone ushqejej nga nje substance e pasur konteksti mendor kolektive dhe zbulonte ne te njejten kohe jeten ekonomike, politike, ushtarake te botes etnike te kreshnikeve, aq sa edhe ngjarjet e jetes se tyre te perditshme." "This code, the product of our people, nourished by a rich substance and collective mental context, at the same time it revealed the economic, political, military life of the kreshnik ethnic world, as well as the events of their daily life."

As there were no specific obligatory means to follow them, the elements of the code were verified and controlled by the community opinion that would not accept any violation or perversion of it. The Kreshniks' description in the relation with customary code helps to understand the conditions of their life, expressing the attitude and existential interest of the inhabitants.

The Kreshniks are characterized by a realistic spirit which captures their mental structure and their main feature, by the determination to assess everything, in order to achieve concretely and immediately the military aims set to themselves. This is a feature erected in the depth of the Kreshniks'soul equipped with the weapon of courage and heroisms. Everything in their life, the defense of the mountains, land, tower, castle as metaphors and myths of their identity and resistance, life, freedom, honesty etc., is related to their spiritual feeling. They never invade for-

eign lands and they never leave the battlefield, even when tricks and tactics are necessary. The mentality of over resistance, deeply rooted in their psyche, is intuitively developed throughout the territory of the common linguistic borders. Their resistance to survive, to protect their family, clan, country and ethnicity is a feature that distinguishes them from the warriors of other ethnicities – the Romans, Greeks, Slavs, Spanish who are described as invaders trying to fulfill their professional intentions to invade for themselves and for the others. It was a norm and an obligation for the worriers to take decisions in different assemblies concerning the most important matters dealing with political, social and also private life. The assemblies were a kind of self-governing organs based on democracy. Representatives of all ages and genders were invited there. It is here where Muji reports about the “occupation” of Yutbina’s mountains by Galiqe Galani, Paun Harambashi etc. who came with lots of shepherds, body guards following them. Here Ali Bajraktari tells the lords that Kotorri’s King (kral) has imprisoned 30 young men of Yutbina, he tells about Kuna, the Kreshniks’sister, kidnapped by Gjure Harambashi. In the assembly, Muji is criticized by his friends that he should have married his brother. In these assemblies, decisions about different warriors were also taken. Even fairies joined the assemblies and decided about the extraordinary physic force offered to Kreshniks or lords, they also decided on their cure or revival, when they were wounded or killed by the enemies. Also, the ladies and women of Yutbina or the kingdom met to talk about intimate issues of their life. According to this administrative-judicial model, the “Guest Rooms” had worked until the present days. They talked about everything calmly and wisely, where the words were heard and understood clearly. Every issue discussed in these rooms was characterized by order and etiquette. It was an obligation for every member of the community to obey and carry out the tasks correctly, otherwise they could be punished.

It is of great interest to see the mental ritual of their own creation with the full authority in their political and social life. Through the times that flow peacefully, some new rituals have appeared, adding to the first ones. They were honored by the heroes of the Epos and known by them as the cult of the sun, the moon, the human sacrifice, the calendar of yearly fests, St. George’s day, the ritual of climbing in the mountains etc. Some elements of the funeral rituals demonstrate that they were practically similar with those of the Illyrian people. Halil finds his brother Muji, in a tomb in a position which reminds us the hunch-backed position of the skeleton of Pazhok in the burial mound; “Edhe Mujës vorrin ja ka zbulue/kambe kryq Mujin ma ka gjete” (Muji’s tomb he has cast open /And found Muji on crossed legs). Muji buries his son Omer in the land around his house; Gjergj Elez Alia’s tomb is surrounded “with a beautiful cairn”; Arnaut Osmani’s friends mourn his dead body with traditional calamity of the highlands, etc.

Probably, these features could be characteristics of a universal system for all the people throughout the world, but the experience of our people up to the latest time, shows that they have been components of its ethno psychology from the beginning and in continuity. The well known men in Dukagjin have never been mourned in a lying position but sitting on a chair, dressed in their best clothes, with a pipe in their hand. Staying in a frozen position, they covered the dead body even in the tomb. On the other hand, the lute was beautified by the highlanders with totemic Illyrian motives, with snakes symbolizing the fairies, with the goat’s, horse’s and deer’s head up to the middle of the XX-the century. Patriarchal relationships dominated in kreshniks’ families. There is sometimes an element of the female authority which is taken as the relic of the matriarchy, related to the authority that a woman enjoyed in the Illyrian tribes. This is personified by Teuta’s figure, reaching up to a queen’s position. But when Omar’s mother tries to stop her seven-year old son to go and release his father and uncle from prison, his answer was: “Me m’kallxu bab’ e axh’ ku I kam,/no cop’- cop’ me shpat’ un pot e baj!” (Tell me where my father and uncle are,/or my sword will cut you into pieces).

They believe very much in themselves and, in the relationships with the others, they are led by the realistic principle “I give you and you will give me, too”, as the Romans used to say “Do ut des”. This principle is in the essence of sacrifice in the building foundations of common interests. Every human act for them is a divine component that is why they believe in miracles

and divine powers. However, in their contract with the divine forces, the mystic haze is not felt, a mysterious surge that unifies these two ethnicities. A contract of their independent existence is settled between man and divinities. In a part of the songs (cycle) when fairies kidnap Muji's wife and turn the bride's parents into stone, their horses into logs, he follows the three wild goats: "ato i kan brinat prej dukati* edhe i kan' kambt prej florinit!", he follows them in the highest mountains ready to kill them, but in the end he hesitates because there is a connection set with them. In another subject, Muji and Halil reach the top of Kruja Mountain in Kurbin to offer a sacrifice to "the beauty of the sky" on the 15 August fest. But when he sees that the sky is dark and the sun is covered with the clouds, he tells to his brother: "Hajde, lum baca, t'i bajme keto kurbane ne shtepi se dielli s'po i don" (Come, my brother, let's go and become them the sky's sacrifices at home because the Sun doesn't want them). The hero of this epos acts fully independently, putting himself in the center of the universe. According to kreshniks' mentality, man is capable to mold everything, even his own history. These legendary figures have realized the anthropocentrism as a very important element of their poetic universe. This element does not appear accidentally in this cycle, it is proved and it exists in all subjects of the songs; "Muji and the fairies", "Muji and Halili in the King" etc. Kreshniks are well molded with the ethno-psychological Albanian characteristics: calmness, wisdom, generosity. A special feature of theirs is the feeling of duty and honor. The protagonists of these songs, deep inside, are greatly concerned about the defense of their country, historical facts of ethnicity, customs and traditions of their ancestors, which were born from the unit of their history. The triple formula of Sidi "el rey, la tierra, la christandial" – "the king, the earth, the Christianity" is not reflected in the Albanian epos. In these cases when any element of Christianity is spotted in the songs of the cycle, it stresses the antiquity of epos. There is no state for the Kreshnik, so he can not have any leader. Isolated in his castle, he managed to join Christianity late in time as a monotheist religion of the invader. Muji, Halili and their fellow warriors, landlords of Jutbina, defend their highland with such determination that "nuk lene te kaloje as korb e as sorre ne qiell", (neither raven no crow can fly on their sky). The highland is their cradle and grave, their final shelter that is why it is considered to be a holy place for them and the fairies too. It is exactly in this environment where the crucial motives of their subjects have their starting point, where the highland is considered to be a common property and could not be inherited as a private property.

Deeply rooted in kreshniks' moral physiognomy is the feeling of honor, like a key to decode their mentality and simultaneously the divine image of the word. In the code of the canon the loss of honor, the assumption of the clan happen in some typical cases clearly authorized when: the promise was broken, even the supreme will after the physical death; the guest was not honored; the member was not one of the first participants at the war; its members did not pay attention to the war cry to take care of the environment and its inhabitants; they did not help their captivated friends who were held in king's prisons; they did not render a helpless man who was unable to help himself; they did not inoculate with the mountain brigand who fought against the invader; they did not join their friends who were fighting against the kraal, the prince and the feudal³.

Another dominant mentality is that of keeping the given word and faith, and especially the protection of a fellow, a friend, the traditions and customs of the ethnos which were threatened by the foreigners. In kreshniks' songs, faith, as a term of the socio-judicial sphere, appears to be a very important mentality, as a holy law penetrating all their family and social relations, even their relationship with the mythological and antagonistic figures. It unites the kreshniks, it gives them strength and an original seal which distinguishes them from the opponents. This motive is interrelated in almost all the main Albanian ballades-songs of faith, immurement, reunion between man and woman-in most of these songs. In these creations, faith gives grandiosity and special originality to the heroes. In one of them, Muji and "the fairy" give the faith to each other for reciprocal help. Halil promises Muji "that he will act according to his advice and

³Haxhihasani, 1991, p. 20.

instruction”, he also promises his sister “that he will not allow her to marry the old man”. Muji helps his opponent to escape from prison due to the promise given, because “the braves entrust each other”. The girls from Krajlja are sure that they will marry the boys from Yutbina, as the boys have given their word to go and take the girls regardless of the difficult situation they might be. Krajljas, frightened by the black giants who threaten their lives, entrust their girls and their fortune to Halil, Muj, and Zuk etc., and depart for unknown places. They confront and defeat the black giants, thus saving the honor, wealth and lives of their opponents. In the song “Vuke Harambashi and kreshniks become friends”, Muji gives his word to the opponent who has killed three boys, so he does not only save his life, but he invites also him in his castle, where the mother of the three dead sons serves the murderer, as Vuke himself accepts: “Thus Vuke has spoken - Great is the world of honor of Yutbina,/his three sons I have slain,/today I have pledged myself in their hands,/and they treat me as their guest.”

The concept of faith is so deeply rooted into the ethnic Albanian consciousness that it has taken the meaning of an oath formula “On the pledge that our forefathers have left us,/on the weapons that have invaded Rod.../There the friends are really dejected.../Even Kune, for faith, it takes...”⁴. Therefore “... it’s very important to know that the worst insult in Albania is to call someone unfaithful, which means not being loyal”⁵. For the Albanians, strong character is more important than cleverness (intelligence). Even the custom, in which the godfather takes some hair from the child, becoming in such a way his second parent, or the other custom in which we are connected with someone by drinking each-other’s blood in order to become best friends, testify the presence of the oath formula. Another detail of the epic width of the epos is that of the necessity to survive when the eager Halil requires: “the steed’s horn I cut open,/the steed’s blood I imbibe,/my blood brother thus he is”. As the time passed, the howl (screch) “who is brave” was heard more often in those ancient environments. Their hospitality is closely connected with heroism, honor and faith, as elements of firmness in the free rural community and the patriarchal order, and with the security of their own lives,. Everyone who lives in this community is obliged to welcome the guest “with bread and salt and heart”. Hospitality is a well-known custom in other countries, too, especially in the Eastern ones, but in Albania, it has a special treatment, sanctioned in some norms and rules predicted even in the canon code: “The house of the Albanian, the God, and the guest”. The same custom was applied even for the messenger sent by the sultan: “Hand Muji the letter in person,/beware not to drink his coffee,/neither his bread should you eat,/I’m summoning the warriors to cut them down!” (“Muji and Halil in Sultan Suleyman”).

Many evidences are found in the kreshniks’ cycle about their dominant mentality in different areas of the economical, political and cultural organization. These features as the highest degree of their mental universe constitute a big moral capital of our epos. They are factors of unity, bearers of a common ethnic life, which precedes the notion of a nation. For this reason, when Albanians talk about themselves, everyone notices an overestimation for themselves; especially when they boast of their virtues and qualities. The source of these popular expressions and sayings is to be found in those times when their mythical legendary mentality was embodied in the legendary figures, and it has been preserved with respect until now. Vital situations, inflexions of the human destiny and mythical beings, create the basis of the collective ancient mentality by reflecting the relief of the Illyrian life. These figures have in their yeast the main characteristic of the Albanians, their individualization. They recognize this feature even in the others that is why they have created the proverb: “The forgiven head is not cut.” They also respect the loser (defeated) without insulting him. The song “Muji invites Halil to the battlefield” illustrates this idea: “My belly Muji has opened it up,/There he has found three white doves,/three snakes he also there found,/Muji starts to weep and cry,/on that God above I swear,/if I knew what you were like,/your blood brother I would have become...”. Every Al-

⁴*idem*, p. 105, p. 413.

⁵Konica, 1997, p. 413.

banian is a man with self-confidence, who lacks totally the idealism and has the spirit of adventure.

Afterwards, from the new elements of the kreshniks' mental mechanism, new appearances began to float. The changes in the socio-politic realities, under the pressure of the cultural traumas, made possible the creation of new concrete figures. The antinomy figure of kreshniks which in its initial times was more general, fumer, more schematic, became more concrete. The unclearness dissipated and was substituted by the appearance of the foreigner around their land-bank, while the heroes would carry different mentalities, customs and aspirations. The flow in the mechanism of mentality brought new reflections in relations, fightings and battles of the warriors with different antagonistic populaces. Some evidences of these are the new spiritual dimensions of the kreshniks, and the new dominant mentalities. Their lives and spiritual features, present them as a settled, consistent, uniformed commune due to an interior, conceptual logic. The pomposity (greatness) of their lives gave kreshniks a privileged position compared to the world around them, gave them the status of a distinguished populace. The denomination that linked the most important qualities, their inherent aspirations, has created the model of the ideal man, of the exemplary hero. In our epos, such models are represented by the figures of Muji, Halili, Ajkuna, Kuna, Gjergj Elez Alia, Ali, the daughter of the old man, Omar etc., whose gestures, immortalized through the lute's ions, have survived in centuries, owing to the popular, permanent efforts to imitate their higher, moral, military virtues. The integrity of these elements offers us the key to the interpretation of a culture which is one of the oldest and most attractive contemporary civilizations, which constitutes evidence that throws light on the complex appearances of the ancient world of our people.

The word *kreshnik*, regardless of its etymologic origin, expresses in the consciousness of the Albanian highlander, a concept that contains in itself two categories of notions; the notion of the figure that nominates the hero, the protagonist, who is distinguished for extraordinary gestures for the good of his people, and secondly, the idea of an *ethnocentrism*, a member of a common homeland with the lute player who sings the song and the ode that follows him. In the kreshnik-song binomial the artistic image comes out that the song is the tomb of the man. As the denomination of their country, kreshniks usually cite Yutbina together with the environments related to it - The valley of Yutbina, small Yutbina, the Region, the Dry (bare) Highlands, the desert Highlands Klladusha etc. One of these toponymies, for example the Region, may be a typologic element that can be encountered even in the eposes of other countries, to show the frontier areas, the interferences of the contrary civilizations, as it happens in other eposes.

The kreshnik's life with all its economical, political, military aspects treated today in the epos, usually takes place in the mountainous heights, in highlands, grooves, woods, rills etc. Since the year 1930, Nika-Merturi has been specified by E. Cabej as its main area together with its surroundings as the Northern Alpine Region, without forgetting two other important centers for its survival, one in the Southern part of the River Drin and the other in Kosovo⁶. This territory, that may be called a Wilderness or a real Albanian Ithaca, where neither the Roman legions and Byzantine army nor the Slavic or the Ottoman recruits could infiltrate, for many centuries remained a region of existential sacrifice, where the Albanian ancient ethno-cultural traditions were preserved and transmitted from generation to generation. Christianity, which was the religion of the Roman conquerors, later came into this region. The highland's inhabitants honored and deified, without being ascetic like believers. Under the pressure of this monotheistic religion the sacral mentality (which derives from the Latin word "sacrum" with the meaning of immolation, the root of the word sacrifice) became a holly mentality (which derives from the Latin word "sanctus" - holly) which is noted as a later layer in these songs. In this land of ethnic yeast for our people, one could not find the public streets, the urban constructions, the bridges and the markets of the economic exchanges, but there continued to remain the stately castles, the highlands, the mountains, the real castles of the infinite freedom, that would be the embryos of the ethnic mentality, of his identity, of the nationality and then of the Albanian nation. Based

⁶Ccabej, 1994, p. 39.

on a diachronic, attentive, spatial investigation of the rhapsodic land, we would discover a wider range of territories and events, which stretch out from the Southern region of Albania up to the shores of the Danube in the North. Besides the mountainous regions in our kreshniks' cycle, wide, open, clear areas are mentioned too, such as: the big, wide Fields of Vlona, Yutbina, Kladusha, Talir, Kotorr etc., zones where public roads of the seven kraals and the European drums flow. In some cases even some geographic distances of the opponent pairs are cited. So, for example, the Krajl of Herdel had to travel on his wingy horse for eight nights and days to arrive in Muji's castle in Kaldush⁷.

We have to emphasize a very important geographic component of the kreshniks' songs, the sea and the coastal regions. It is from and on the sea, where glorious fights and battles took place. Muji prepares a boat for his brother to give him the heart of the sea. In the main layers of these songs, "a black giant has come out", or "rascal black men", and besides the conquerors, kings and powerful kraals like the Urosh of the Sea, the Kraal of Taliri etc. attack them. Remembering the informative function of art, it comes out that the sea is an environment where the following of the epic songs develop, testifying so to the genetic continuation of the Illyrian people in these lands. In a song of the coastal regions, a gift is mentioned: "we are bestowing a big olive-grove" ("Bani of Zatfor"), while in another of this region too, after the battles, the kreshnik's father is found drown together with his boat in the sea bed. Whereas in the Eastern or Northern side of the Illyrian Wilderness, the subjects reflect military confrontations with a range of Kraals who come from different directions of the Balkan Hinterland—with the Kraal of Senja, Dumlika, Krushev, Herdel, Maxhar, Gumanev etc. Such events belong to the pre-ottoman period, when the attacks put in danger the existence of the Illyrian nation, which escaped annihilation because of the Ottoman conquest.

It is in the mythical beings and figures, in the active, healing and reviving mythical means, which perform the function of mythical tools, in the ritual practices and many socio-historic elements of the songs, and even in our ballades and fairy-tales, where meanings and values of universal importance derive from, because it is in these worlds where the yeast of the structures and the unique artistic models are to be found, it is the yeast of the Illyrian dimension and character. The spiritual features of the Albanian people on the foundations of the artistic, legendary mentalities are nothing but genetic relics of the ancient Illyrian world. The logic, binary rapports of these genres (this world-that world, the tower-the highland, the house-the wood, me-the other, mine-the foreign, near-far, good-bad, the friend-the enemy etc.) testify to the relation between the man, the society and the nature, or micro, mezzo, and macrocosms that attest a certain degree of the qualities of the created values. Meanwhile, among the totally artistic issues, we distinguish the character of versification and poetic code, the prosody type and the distinctive nature of the verse. Our epos was created with un-rhymed and hetero-metric verse, while the prosody was tonic.

After a scientific interpretation of this ancient subsoil, we arrive into its ideological content that leads us to the time mentality when these images were created, which reflects a historic, medieval, ethno-cultural layer. According to the scholars Q. Haxhihasani and M. Mustafa⁸, two sub layers are recognized. In the first, the echo of the national and citizenship process of our people under the influence of the national interior laws and the political outer factors is preserved. The Albanians, as descendents of the Ilirs, were under the domination of the Byzantine Empire since the beginning of the medieval period (330-1435 a.ch.). In the VIIth century, the Slavic people were settled in Danub, after they had moved from the Asiatic steppes between the Caspian and Ural. This populace, owing to the Beograd's strategist, begged Basileus Heracles in Costandinopoli (610-638) "who reigned an unmoral place"⁹, to give them lands in the northern part of the Empire. Heracles frightened by the Moslem military units, and threatened with endless civil wars, signed his collapse by accepting their demand. Disappointed and

⁷Haxhihasani, 1991, p. 33.

⁸Mustafa, 2003, p. 124.

⁹Norwich, 2007, p. 119.

ashamed, sick and despised for being married with his niece, he died on February 11, 641. After the ratification, the Slavs directed their eyes and attention to the Illyric lands, dreaming about a way out to the sea. They invaded the present Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia, not to destroy them as invaders, but to live there. Thus, the Illyrian-Slavic symbiosis began. The Illyrians managed to resist to the powerful Roman pressure throughout the centuries maintaining their identity, but at that time they had to face the Illyrian-Slavic encounter, which brought difficulties because of the numerous forces of the enemy and the frequent attacks. Facing the risk of ethnic annihilation, the remaining Illyrian people had not the opportunity to proceed to the creation of a new independent state. This period helped to consolidate some specific conditions of the Kreshniks' social life, and the mentalities of their ethno cultural universe. This situation brought different rural communities closer to each other, while the feeling of the clan vanished. The continuous attacks forced the social groups, united by their language, to form two dialects, but a common mentality system which would contribute to the creation of a nation with a political, social, cultural, juridical unity, making so the first step towards the creation of a citizenship. The epos of this time, initiated during the Illyrian-Slavic crash, is characterized by a general moldiness developed in an unspecified, historical and geographic "chthonos" of the military combats, while our history of this period is characterized by silence. The exemplary hero of sacrifice, distinguished for his relationships with the community, for his high moral military values, is also characterized by some personal deficiencies which originate from the Albanian ethno-psychic identity. Muji can not tolerate even the mythical beings; Halil often surrenders to adventure. Nevertheless it brought authority to the hero in mythology. His power flew from his consideration and respect for his own people, by giving and taking in the same time. The artistic images reflect the kreshniks' units who acted as protective forces. The brave warriors gathered time and again under the appeal "who is brave?". These gatherings were not organized; they were groups intuitively collected against the foreigner who threatened their existence. A series of songs, in the center of which there was the image of kreshniks' units over the highlands, or in the roads and jaws where they are fighting the enemy belong to this period. The lute player believed in the image of the kreshniks and the surrounding he lived, so everything outside the highland was unknown, was not his, was the exotic, and the mysterious, that dusked him with mysticism and bewitchment.

The other sub layer reflects the outer attacks from the sea and the land approved by the Byzantine who strengthened any time it became weaker. In any of these songs, we feel the opposition toward "Justinianian" legislation against the pagan knowledge, in 529¹⁰. The existential stoicism of the territories where our epos was created, protected their rural communities, while the other part, with the economic and social differentiation during the early medieval centuries (VIII-XI) were involved in large, latifundista and feudal economies. This differentiation deepened more in the period when the feudal relations bloomed and the Albanian political and social stratum existed, in the XII-XV centuries, during the formation of the first Albanian states. The heavy historical silence of this period is accompanied by a lack of artistic images. To fulfill this emptiness there was a series of Bulgarian-Macedonian songs which had as a main object events happening between Slavic rulers and Albanian feudalists in different zones as: Prizren, Shkodra, Ohrid, Kaccanik etc. Some of them are the songs about the fight between Kraveliq Marku and Musa Arbanas, Mark and the young boy from Dukagjin, Mitro Stefani and Gjergj Arnaut, the song about Lek Kapetan's the sister etc. Let us remember, the cycle of the border guard songs that has lived until recently in the south-eastern part of Dibra and in the north-eastern part of Librazhd. This cycle conducts the image of the permanent alarms in their ethnic borders. It is this zone which marks the eastern borders of the first Albanian state. "Martalloze" or the border military guards, according to the cycle, defended the borders of a state. Even Muji, Halil, Omer etc. do not fight anymore against unknown heroes, but against Kraals, Captains, Vojvods, Harambashes, Bans etc, who come from certain Slavic, Maxhar territories. Some

¹⁰Camerun, 2008, p. 216.

songs, where the kreshniks decide to sell the arena's horses, to convert the swords in ploughs etc., belong to this period, too.

The pre-tribe mentality, being totally a collective mentality where the individual is not separated from the others, has a universal character as an ethno-cultural layer of this legendary, mythical mentality. Creativity, as an artistic image, is the echo realized in songs, where the shortest songs have less than 100 verse lines, which together with some other elements resemble to ballads, while the longest songs have nearly 600 verse lines and present the mythical subjects more dramatically. Operating with artistic criteria, we distinguish the mythical, pagan imagination from that which comes after words, because the antonym builds the border between the consciousness and unconsciousness, between the totemic polytheism and the monotheistic belief. The way the world of that time was imagined differs a lot from the later one, because there was a different understanding about life and death, the man and the divinity, the individual and the world, the time and the space, the household and the world. "The mentality of this period implicates the time of the mythical thought, which dominated all antic times and survived as a form of a past imposition through compromises up to the end of the paleochristianity"¹¹. The times of the legendary mythical mentality accept neither the present nor the future, because they belong to a world where only the past exists.

The relation where the collective mentalities are converted into artistic truths as the spirit of an epoch comes closer to the historic truths. Also, the decoding of the ingrained images in epic subjects, have attracted the attention of such sciences as history, mythology, ethnology etc.

The Albanian, mythic-legendary, oral literature created in prehistory as "terminus ad quem" in the XV century, the time when fire arms were invented, was "an opus non finita", which would give more space to the layers of the other systems of knowledge, art, faith and mentality, a feature that has been understood and argued correctly by the researcher M. Parry and A. Lord. They tracked the mechanism of (self) preservation of the epos while passing in the north of Albania. The epos with its mysticism fed the ancient inhabitants of these lands with generosity, who survived in spite of many privations. Together with them, for their life, this kind of art: "...never surrendered but fought and still fights to make it more beautiful and more vital (felt)"¹².

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¹¹Sinani, 2006, p. 124.

¹²Kadare, 2009.