

THE CLASSIFICATION OF SERBOCROATIAN EPIC ORAL SONGS INTO CYCLES - REASONS AND CONSEQUENCES

SUMMARY

In Yugoslav scholarship classification into cycles is very widespread. There are differences in classification, in definition and in the naming of the cycles. These differences stem, in part, from differences in the distinguishing of material and also, in part, from differences in conceiving the criteria applied. In all cases considered it is a matter of the same classification. The main criterion of classification is an actual historical event defined in different ways, or, to be more precise, there are different limits to the segments of time which the poems, it is supposed, treat.

A more consistent application of the cited criterion would lead to a different classification scheme.

The classification of songs into cycles is based on the conviction that such a classification is possible and to the purpose to establish a chronological order of the songs which corresponds to the historical course of time. This classification is founded on the conviction that epic oral songs represent a kind of history in verse. This conception is older than the classification of Serbocroatian oral songs into cycles, it precedes the use of the term *cycle*, and is noticeable even in those authors who do not use this term (Andrija Kačić-Miošić, Vuk karadžić, Petar II Petrović Njegoš).

The chronological principle in ordering the songs and, derived from this, the division of the songs into cycles are an expression of a romantic concept of folk literature or are at least rooted in such a concept.

A whole branch of studies of oral epics, with the predominant effort toward establishing the historical foundations of the songs and determining the relations between poetic fiction and life reality, is based on such a classification. Its applicability to studies of a different nature is, however, a disputable one. Arguments for challenging such a classification can be derived, primarily, from its immanent shortcomings, and then by a challenging of the criterion as relevant to the study of the phenomenon of oral epics.

If one were to suppose that the mentioned shortcomings in the division of songs into cycles could be alleviated, the challenge of its adequacy, in fact, derives from one fundamental question: whether the choice of criteria is adequate to the phenomenon of Serbocroatian oral epic poetry, that is to say, whether historiographic criteria can be applied at all to the classification of oral epic poetry?

(Translated by V. Felbabov)