

Epic Songs and Socio-Historical Changes

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Attention is centred upon the historicism of the epic songs belonging to the cycle "Krali Marko liberates slaves, captured by the Turks". An analysis has been made of the connection between these songs and the preceding archaic strata of the epos. Another object of examination is the influence of the social and historical circumstances, created during the years of the Turkish oppression on the Balkan peninsula, over the demythologization of the epos, and the changes which followed as its result.

The view that the heroic epos had emerged mostly in the Middle Ages, after the South Slavs fell under the Ottoman domination in the 14th-15th century¹ has become established in Bulgarian folkloric studies. There is no doubt, whatsoever, that the historical and heroic or the novelistic are those characteristics which have surfaced, impelling folklorists to discuss the epos in the light of the developments in the period of the Ottoman domination. In fact it would be hard to find a cycle of songs, or even a single song, which does not contain in one or another form various stages of the development of epic songs. In this sense, the most suitable premise for the revealing of the socio-historical changes are these works, which by their ideological and artistic content are durably associated with the events and happenings taking place during the years of bondage and form the topmost historical and heroic stratum of epic songs.

The formation of the historical and heroic stratum of the epos which reflects the socio-historical changes that had set in during the period of the Ottoman bondage is a problem of primary importance for folkloric studies. Its importance derives among other things from the fact that it contains in itself the question of the character of historicism in the epos so widely discussed of late.²

In this paper the question will be dealt with on the basis of limited material: heroic songs in the cycle 'Krali Marko liberates three chains of slaves'. The striking content and high artistic form of these songs rank them among the most representative Bulgarian epic songs reflecting historical and heroic subjects. And assuming

¹P. Dinekov. *Bulgarski folklor*. S., 1980, c. 432.

²Evidence of the topicality of the problem is also the new discussion that went on for two years on the pages of *Ruskaya literatura* journal (1983-1985) on the historicism of the epos. Cf. also the exhaustive analysis of the discussion by P. Bochkov and T. Dimitrova. *Diskusia po problemite na folklor i istoriyata*, v sp. 'Ruskaya literatura'. - In: *Bulgarski folklor*, god. XI, 1985, kn. 1, c. 103-107 and *Krayat na diskusiyata po problemite na folklor i istoriyata*. - In: *Bulgarski folklor*, god. XII, 1986, kn. 1, c. 112-116. An expression of the attitude towards the problem of folklore and history is also the newly published book by K. *Penushliski* 'Marko Krале - legenda i stovarnost', Skopje, 1982.

that the epic 'is the most powerful expression of the ethnic self-awareness of a national type'³, then the songs about Krali Marko and the three chains of slaves are the climax of that expression; they reveal to the highest extent the feeling of the people themselves about their historical immortality.⁴ Therefore it can be safely claimed that they are indicative of the historicism of Bulgarian epic songs in general.

And there is something else: the cycle 'Krali Marko liberates three chains of slaves' presents one with the opportunity of once more becoming aware of the Bulgarian epos as a cultural fact which 'both unites us and differentiates us from several ethnically detectable traditions - the South Slavic, the Balkan and the Slavic.'⁵ The songs of this cycle flow into the mainstream of the cultural and historical process, outlining the struggles of all these communities against the foreign enslaver, against the aggressor and the enemy as a generalized concept.

Wherein is the historicism of this cycle?

The answer to this question can be found in the works of a number of authors. The latest studies uphold the stand, very precisely formulated by B.N. Putilov, and related to the 'understanding of the epos as a specific popular and artistic model of history, in which a given set of historical ideas and ideals of the people is built up by poetic means within the frameworks of the traditional epic aesthetics.'⁶

Noteworthy is the exhaustive analysis of the historicism in the song 'Marko liberates three chains of slaves' made by P.Dinekov. He dwells on the most brutal Turkish atrocities recorded in some historical documents, which could find place in folk songs, 'naturally, not as concrete events, but as artistic generalizations'.⁷ 'The entire song', the writer further goes on, 'is ideatively interpreted as an expression of the feelings and aspirations of the people, becoming a poem of the people's sufferings and of the people's struggle. It is hard to determine when the song came into being, but no doubt, impressions, experiences and thoughts accumulated over a long period of time have been reflected in it.'⁸

Fully sharing these views, I shall here try to reveal these mechanisms, by way of which the new historical events and phenomena become refracted through the traditional poetic way of thinking and turn into artistic reality. This artistic reality has the birth stains of what is the latest in history, while at the same time it subordinates to and pushes into the mainstream of tradition even historical facts which are the most alien and most incompatible with it.

The cycle 'Marko liberates three chains of slaves' has been developed in several versions in Bulgarian folklore and its unity is in its common semantic nucleus. Its content in most general terms boils down to the following: Krali Marko meets (overtakes) on his way three chains of slaves driven by Turks (Blackmoors, Anatolians, Janissaries). He orders the Turks to set the slaves free, but they refuse. Marko is enraged and destroys the Turks.⁹ There are very few songs made up by the above-mentioned elements alone. More often they include as a prologue Marko's conversation with the forest, too. His question, what has withered it, the forest answers that three chains of slaves have passed through it; then he overtakes them

³T. I. Zhivkov. *Etnokulturno edinstvo i folklor*. S., 1987, c. 208.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid, c. 29.

⁶B. N. Putilov. *Epos o Marke Kraveviche i problema epicheskogo geroya i istoricheskoi lichnosti*. - In: *Makedonski folklor*. Skopje 1973, god. VI, broi 11, c. 5.

⁷P. Dinekov, *Op. cit.*, c. 473.

⁸Ibid, c. 474.

⁹Cf. L. Bogdanova. *Pregled na motivite na Bulgarskite yunashki pesni i na proizvedeniyata v proza za geroye na yunashkiya epos*. - In: *Sb. NY*, 53, c. 850, t. 4.

and sets them free.¹⁰ There are substantial variations in the songs introduced by the complicated beginning, determining why Marko met the slaves: first, he sets out to go to church (or a monastery) to become purified, not carrying arms. Further on the intrigue develops in the same way, but Marko finds in the horse's mane the weapons his wife had hidden and destroys the Blackmoors (or Janissaries).¹¹

It is noteworthy that the most elaborate version of the cycle is the most widespread. Its elaboration derives from the additional complications of the introductory part. According to it, after Lent, before Easter, Marko set out to church to become purified and following his mother's advice takes no weapons along. His wife, however, secretly hides his sword in the horse's mane. This fairly elaborate introduction entails pertinent details in the main part of the song: the withered forest informs him that Turks (Blackmoors, Janissaries, etc.) are driving three chains of slaves. Marko overtakes them and passes on, for he has no arms to fight against the enslavers. But his close friend Katelena (Kantelena, Yana, Katerina, etc.) is among the slaves, too, and she begs him to set her free. Marko offers the Turks to release the slaves for ransom, but they refuse. Then his horse tells him of the weapon, concealed by his provident wife, and Marko destroys the Turks and liberates the slaves. Then he continues on his way to the monastery, where he receives absolution from the abbot, despite the blood he had shed, because he had shed it to set the slaves free.¹²

What is interesting is that the great variety of versions and variants of this cycle is in no way an obstacle, and the hero remains one and the same. He is well-known Marko who had in other songs met the dragon in an encounter and had let flow the water stopped by that dragon. Or he is the uncle of the little boy Grouyo, teaching his nephew the secrets of how to succeed in winning the girl he loves... He is the same, because the Ottoman domination set in when a well-formed character of the hero already existed in the Bulgarian epic songs: the defender and fighter against external enemies and abductors. He is the same yet different, because that archaic predecessor developed into a hero fighting for social emancipation, political freedom and independence, a hero standing in opposition to a real enemy and aggressor.

The epic model built beforehand exerted a decisive influence on the choice of the historical personality to be the hero in the newly emerging epic songs of the South Slavs from among the ruling feudal topcrust, while the name - Marko - brings to the surface a chance feudal ruler of the same name, who in his capacity of a king is by no way superior to the other representatives of his class. On the contrary, the fact that by the end of his life he became a vassal of the Turks places him in an inferior position compared with them.¹³ The causes of this should be sought in the specificity of the epic as a genre rather than in the personal qualities and superiorities of the prototype. Each genre, as V.N.Toporov puts it, has its own strong

¹⁰Ibid, t. 3.

¹¹Ibid, t. 2.

¹²Ibid, t. 1.

¹³The question about the relation between the epic hero and the historical personality in view of the character of Krali Marko in the epos has been discussed in *B. N. Putilov's* paper *Epos o Marke Kralevice...* In his view Krali Marko is one of those epic heroes who indeed have their prototypes in historical personalities. Putilov considers that this kind of coincidence results from the intersection of epic tradition and the popular ideas of the historical personality. Referring to intersection, the author writes, I have in mind the fact that the epic character existed up to the appearance of the historical personality as an artistic generalization of a definite type. The historical personality lends that character a name and, as a rule, a minimum of actual information from his curriculum vitae. In this way, the most outstanding hero of the Balkan epos had been given the name Marko Kraleovich, and alongside the name some actual elements of his life'. Cf. c. 177-178.

points,¹⁴ and the strong points of the epic is in the generalization of the newly emerging situation - the Ottoman bondage, whereby the pattern of the main action in the epic - the struggle, remains unchanged. The name of the hero does not change either, because the personal names of the heroes are of no smaller importance for the perpetuation of the tradition, established by the actions of their bearers. But at that comparatively late stage of the evolution of the epic, the epic hero, in B.N.Putilov's words gets in contact with the actual historical personality, but not to repeat its curriculum vitae and character.¹⁵ Preserving the 'strong points' of the genre - the struggle of the hero against foreign aggressors, the folk singer simply updated the tradition introducing into it a number of new characters and details of the lifestyle. In the inverse order, the features of the historical personality are interpreted in a new light whereby they are idealized and hyperbolized turning it into a summarized image of the defender of the people. In this way the character of the new epic hero is built - the fighter against the new enemy of the South Slavs called Krali Marko or Marko Kraleovich. There is no doubt that the prototype exerted definite influence on the character, but that influence was not so much personal as the influence of the category of 'a leader' or in this case 'king' (*kral* is the Bulgarian for king). That is why the differences in the variants and versions of the Slavic peoples boil down to their specific idea and memories of the royal personages, of their personal lives and relationships, of their strifes and intrigues.

Thus focusing his attention on Marko, the folk singer, at the same time introduces a new hero. Within the context of the situation thus outlined, his character 'accrues' new features which lend him additional weight and dignity. The result is that great variety and multiple stages in the character which can be detected in almost each song of the epic, in each variant.

The changes in the qualities and composition of his assistants also play quite an important role in the newly formed character of the hero. Besides his old mother, who never ceases to be his best and wisest adviser and friend, his wife also plays a fateful role in his life, as well. She is provident, because contrary to the advice of his mother not to carry arms when going to be absolved, she hides his sword in the horse's mane and instructs the horse, Marko's loyal friend, to keep guard of him on the way.

With the introduction of his wife, the song gives up the magic helper of Marko, as his close friend Vida is, for instance, in other more archaic song variants, but does not give up the fairy-tale approach to the helpers in general. In this case, that approach is exemplified by the alliance between Marko's wife and his horse Sharko (Sharkolia). In fact the role played by Marko's wife is a *sui generis* continuation of the role that Marko's horse has to play as the magic assistant of the hero at the climax of the struggle against the enemy. In the emerging situation whereby Marko engages in an encounter with the enslavers, he turns out to be without any weapon. This, however, does not mean that he gives up his desire to help his compatriots that had met ill fate. His attempt to set the slaves free by paying ransom for them is met with mockery. At the instant, when greatly enraged he begins to gather poles and stones to fight against the enslavers, the magic helper comes to the fore. What is more, in order that the pattern of the fight be preserved where the essential share goes to the magic helper, the authority of his mother's advice is ignored. The additional elements listed: the proposal to pay ransom, the engagement in fighting using what comes handy from the place around, etc. are but attempts 'to bring down to earth' the epic narration. These attempts, however, do not seem to satisfy the epic

¹⁴V. N. Toporov. Ob odnom sposobe sohraneniya traditsii vo vremeni: imya sobstvennoe v mofopeoticheskom aspekte. - In: Problemy slavyanskoi etnografii. L. 1979, c. 142.

¹⁵B. N. Putilov. Epos o Marke Kralevice..., c. 6.

singer and he reverts the narration to the chosen classical pattern of story-telling, which preserves the fantastic and heroic elan of the struggle and the greatness of the hero.

In his desire to lend trustworthiness to the narration, the epic singer places the actions of the hero within space frameworks well known to him. They are on his way to plain Sofia where the Church of Holy Mary rises; or the way across the forest leads the hero to Mount Athos, to the Rila Monastery, or to the Ilinden (St Eliah's Day) Monastery. Although most often the lay venue of the people (Sofia) coincides with a holy hermitage (churches, white masonry monasteries, etc.), the ultimate objective of the hero is precisely the church as an ethnic spiritual centre. The mention in the songs made of the biggest geographical, lay and religious centres of the Bulgarian people like Sofia, the Danube, Mount Athos, the Rila Monastery, etc. in fact delineates those boundaries within which is, what Lihachov calls, a Bulgarian 'state of the spirit'. The churches and monasteries in Bulgaria under the Ottoman bondage are those places to which the enslavers of a different faith have no access. The identification of the Christian faith with the Bulgarian nationality and the Bulgarian cultural centres is counter opposed to the road, the forest, the dark or narrow gorges. But this is not an undefined mythical forest separating the human from the supernatural. This is a forest well known to the singer, through which is running the Sitnitsa River, where the Drenitsa drinking fountain can be found. It is on the way between the hero's home and the Christian temple. The forest which is part of the least tenable space in ethnic terms, is the most vulnerable place for the hero and for his compatriots during the period of bondage - a place where the enemy commits his atrocities. And although the hero's meeting with the enslavers by the river and the fountain leads to associations with the songs about Marko who released the water stopped by the wood nymph, the new toponymy updates the epic piece, raising it to an ethnic level and lending it new socio-historical meaning.

The temporal dimensions of the songs of the cycle 'Krali Marko liberates three chains of slaves' back up the spatial characteristic, too. The measuring of time in Christian religious terms also matches the Christianization of space. What is more, it has been taken to its peak moments like, for instance, Easter. It is on that particular day after Lent that the hero sets out to church to receive absolution. It is on that particular day that before reaching the church he has to fight and conquer the enslavers of three chains of slaves. The victory over the enemy of another ethnic community fuses with the resurrection of Christ after the long days of the Crucifixion and death.

Besides these elements - the fighting and the victory crowned by the triple absolution at the end, it is not accidental that the song adds yet another one - the beginning of bondage, of which Marko is reminded by his captured friend 'When Turks fought with Bulgarians'. In this way the time period of the song is confined once within the frameworks of the Christian religion through the beginning of Lent and Easter, and another time within the historical-political frameworks - through the period of bondage starting with the Bulgarian people's fall under foreign domination when Marko got 70 wounds, and up to the liberation of the three chains of slaves and the glorification of the hero. The two aspects of time are parallel and identical, mutually supplementing each other and intertwining. In this way the Christian religious calendar with its holidays gives an expression of that critical period of the 'life cycle' of the Bulgarian ethnos, at the beginning of which they lived through their 'well-neigh death', in order to 'be resurrected' through the victory at the end.

The character of the new enemy of Marko evolves also in line with the tendency of 'getting down to earth'. Instead of the mythical nymph or the dragon, the hero most often encounters the plural enemy in the person of Blackmoors, Turks,

Janissaries, and less frequently - a Blackmoor, Moussa Kessedjiya or Philip Madjarin (Philip the Magyar). In this sense, the assumption that the characters of the enemies engaging in battle with the hero are of an older date is not accidental. The fact that Moussa Kessedjiya, Philip Madjarin and the Blackmoor are encountered as the enemies of the hero in the cycle 'Marko liberates three chains of slaves', too, eloquently speaks of the continuity between these songs and the songs that came before them. The elimination of the supernatural elements of the character is detected in the replacement of these epic characters by named and unnamed representatives of the Ottoman authorities as Emza Beg, the Governor of Belgrade, etc. Most often, however, the relationship between the old and the new characters can be followed in the gradual increase of the number of enemies. This is best manifest in the number of Blackmoors - usually they are 'three Blackmoors'. The increase of their number is the first step towards the relieving of the character from its supernatural traits. Henceforth the road to the historization of the characters is clear and their great strength has to be sought not so much in the supernatural qualities of the enemies as in the number or in the countless Ottoman troops: 300 or 500 Janissaries, Turks or simply Anatolian Turks.

The new numerical strength of the enemy reflects back on the semantic of the epic hero. From a mythological character and cultural hero endowed with supernatural strength within the new context of the songs, Marko evolves as a defender of the people and fighter against the foreign oppressors. 'In his character, people gather as in a focus the traits of their defenders and embody their dreams and aspirations for struggle and liberation'.¹⁶ The supernatural elements of the character develop from the content of that character into a poetic principle - principle of hyperbolization which is one of the main traits of the epic. Or in V.M.Gatsak's words, 'we are faced with a grandiose hyperbole and herein,... is the poetical essence of the heroic and epic genre'.¹⁷ This principle comes to life within the depth of the epic itself; it is a natural consequence of its internal development and contact with the changes taking place in the course of history.

The new perception of the character of Marko, of his enemies and their struggle is highly instrumental in the overall interpretation of the songs as songs about the bondage, as songs of definite historical and heroic elan. No doubt, the cause for the fight - the three chains of slaves - that superb picture of slavery painted in but a few verses has a definite contribution to the new way of their interpretation.

One chain - maidens betrothed,
Another chain - boys, their moustaches just grown,
The third chain - newly wedded brides.¹⁸

Един синџир - под пръстен девојки,
други синџир - под мустак момчета,
трети синџир - под вепок невести.

At first sight, the three chains of slaves seem to have no relationship to the preceding archaic stages of the epic. The question, therefore, arises as to how the historical facts fit in the specific epic poetry. Wherein is the continuity of the epic tradition and where are the new elements to be sought?

As the image of the three chains of slaves is widespread in folklore, I shall try to answer this question through the mediation of other folkloric genres. This image is most often encountered in a version of a Christmas carol about St George. Setting out early on St George's Day, to make a round of the fields, the saint meets three

¹⁶P. Dinckov. Op. cit., c. 469.

¹⁷V. M. Gatsak. Epos i geroicheskie kolyady. - In: Spetsifika fol'klornyh zhanrov. M., 1973, c. 70. The author enlists all sources known to him.

¹⁸СбНУ, 53, c. 186, No. 3.

chains of young slaves who beseech him to set them free from the chains of the wood nymphs. In return, the chain consisting of ploughmen promises to give him as a present 'three hundred kilos of white wheat'; the other chain of diggers promises 'three hundred measures of fine red wine' and the third chain of shepherds promises him 'three hundred rams'. Instead St George only wants 'a ritual loaf of bread', 'a glass of wine' and 'a fine lamb'.¹⁹ The songs usually wind up with the blessings for fertility and a New Year toast typical of Christmas carols:

To your health, St George,
To your health, God bless you!²⁰

Поздраве ти, свети Георги,
От бога ти тва поздрав!

The similarities between the images of the three chains of slaves in the heroic songs and in the cycle of Christmas carols are due to the unified ideological and world outlook source 'feeding' all folkloric genres. Moreover 'St George liberates three chains of slaves taken by wood nymphs' and 'Marko liberates three chains of slaves' are epic in character.²¹ However, there is a substantial difference in the character of the epic, in its specific functional purpose determining also the principles underlying the idealization of reality in the heroic epos or in songs related to some rites and rituals.²² If the differences engendered by the specificity of the genres are taken into consideration there is the opportunity arises of discussing their images as comparable magnitudes.

Within the frameworks of the comparison, the ritual version and the version belonging to the heroic epos do not have an identical relationship to historic reality. The songs of the cycle 'Marko liberates three chains of slaves' fit in the socio-political history by their overall ideological and artistic content: because of the hero and ruler, because of the enslaver, as well as because of the struggle between them. Against this background, the three chains of slaves (brides, girls and bachelors) stand out as the most typical age groups representing the entire people smarting under the Ottoman bondage.

The main conflict in the Christmas carol version is based on the hero's struggle against supernatural beings (wood nymphs), which lends St George the tints of a cultural hero. The slaves here again represent the entire people, but they have been classified by their labour activities: ploughmen, diggers, shepherd, viz. the producers of the main farm products. In this sense, their bondage implies a suspension of fertility, a temporary stagnancy in Nature, and their release - the beginning of new fertility, of the new farming year. Therefore the struggle between the hero and the wood nymph acquires the character of struggle for the return of fertility and the victory over the enemy determines the glorification of the hero and farmer. Or, in this case, it is a matter of glory-singing whose dimensions are correlated to the early folkloric and mythological patterns drawn from the sphere of calendar rites and rituals.

¹⁹Bulgarska narodna poeziya i proza. Tom II. Obredni pesni. S., 1982, c. 23-24.

²⁰Ibid, c22

²¹Referring to the similarity in the plots, *B. N. Putilov* discusses the songs of the two cycles as variants with different heroes. - *Russkii i yuzhnoslavyanskii geroicheski epos*. M. 1971, c. 220. *V. M. Gatsak* devotes a paper to the genre correlation between the heroic epos and the Christmas carols dealing with the liberation of three chains of slaves. *Epos i geroicheskie kolyady...*, c. 7-52.

²²The difference in the principles of idealization of reality and the heroes in the epic and ritual songs is very well specified by *V. M. Gatsak*, *Op. cit.*, c. 42 and *F. M. Selivanov*, *Izobrazhenie cheloveka v bylinah*. - In: *Fol'klor poeticheskaya sistema*. M., 1977, c. 202-204.

In other variants of this version, where the supernatural enemy is a dragon instead of a wood nymph, or is not mentioned at all, the relation to fertility is presented in a set of symbols:

Its first river - yellow wheat,
Its second river - red wine,
Its third river - fresh milk...²³

The liberation of the slaves sets off the three rivers of plenty. The conflict is resolved in the spirit of ritual poetry by way of the direct glorification of the victory over the forces of evil arresting fertility. In this case, the depiction of fertility as three rivers is but a ritual variant of the epic songs about Marko, who released the water stopped by the wood nymph. No doubt, the levels of the phenomena compared are different. In the epic variant what is dealt with is water - the endowment of Nature itself, whereas in the ritual variant, the natural wealth is the result of the mediation of people - 'the slaves' of labour. It is this difference in the levels that sets out the trends of development - from the most archaic strata of the epic, form the mythical imagery - to the historical facts.

Therefore, standing out in the calendar ritual epic is the relationship of the enemy and the object of fighting with the respective enemy and the natural wealth - water, for which the epic hero of the heroic songs fights. By virtue of this logic, the place of Marko is taken up by Saint George.

But why is it precisely Saint George? How does Saint George uphold his stand in the calendar ritual epic? What is the way covered from the mythical Marko to St George?

Essentially, the road traversed from the mythical hero Marko to Saint George is the road of development traversed by the fighter evolving from a defender of the water already gained for the benefit of the people to the patron of 'the slaves' - the procreators of fertility. The holy 'title' of George is but a superstructure, which collapses if the semantics of the character is considered within the context of the image in the song, as well as in the light of St George's Day (April 23) construed by the people as the borderline between winter and summer. The saying 'Saint George brings summer and Saint Demetrios - winter' is not accidental.

Indeed as every holiday, St George's Day, too, is a beginning, a repetition of the 'sacramental precedent' and therefore it repeats in its own 'mode' the uniform common meaning of 'the primordial holiday'.²⁴ In the consciousness of the Bulgarian peasant, St George's Day is the beginning of the new year in stock-breeding.²⁵ In this sense the mode of St George's Day is stock-breeding. Yet, though in the background, St George's Day or the days around it are the focus of a great number of rites and rituals directly related to farm work, as well as rites of fertilizing and wedding semantics.²⁶ Therefore, this day becomes characterized as a *sui generis* concentration of the outstanding features of the archaic 'primordial holiday' with its sacramental character spreading all over it, with its comprehensive nature, pragmaticism, effectiveness, inextricability from the ritual, synthesis, comprehensiveness, game-playing character and emotional charge.²⁷

On the other hand, on a broader plane, St George's Day is a sort of a permanent final point within the set of holidays associated with the welcoming of the seasons of spring and summer. Its movable beginning equivalent is Easter, which always precedes St George's Day. March 1 is the beginning of that set of holidays being a

²³Bulgarsko narodno tvorcestvo, t. V, C. 1962, c. 108.

²⁴V. N. Toporov. Prazdnik. - In: Mify narodov mira. T. I. M. 1982, c. 329-331.

²⁵T. Koleva. Gergyovden u yuzhnite slavyani. S., 1981, c. 104.

²⁶Ibid, c. 110-184.

²⁷V. N. Toporov. Prazdnik, c. 330.

fixed date in the yearly calendar, or the first week of Lent as the movable beginning of the 40-day long Easter Lent. And if Easter and St George's Day are essentially holidays marking the ultimate victory of summer over winter and the beginning of strenuous farm work, the first week of Lent and March 1 are exclusively associated with the changes taking place in Nature due to the changing seasons. It is no accident that the period between March 1 and the first week of Lent, on the one hand, and Easter and St George's Day, on the other, is a period of games of commemorative character and sorrowful emotions. These as well as some other traits outline the crisis of nature of the period; chaos seems to have the upper hand over the organization of the cosmos, over the deity or the cultural hero, who well-nigh dies exhausted by the struggle against the supernatural beings...²⁸ In fact, March 1 and St George's Day are the beginning and the end of that period of crisis. Taken as a whole, they focus in themselves all the traits and attributes of the main holiday. In the process of historical development, however, the peak moments of that holiday also move depending on the main livelihood of the population. Under feudalism, when farming and stock-breeding were of leading importance for the survival of the population, St George's Day gained the upper hand over the other holidays. The rites on that day abundantly present aim at securing success to agriculture and stock-breeding. Therefore the beginning set off on St George's Day does not run counter to my claim, expressed in another publication, about the beginning marked by March 1, construed not only as the beginning of summer, but also celebrated until the adoption of the Julian calendar (i.e. in a comparatively more ancient period, the first century B.C.) as the New Year Day by the peoples of the mediterranean and the Balkan Peninsula.²⁹ Against this background, March 1 stands out as the holiday of the annual renewal bearing more archaic pre-agrarian features, as the holiday of society whose livelihood was ensured by hunting and wild fruit gathering, and which is testified to by the specificity of the rites and rituals performed. That is why March 1 is a relic phenomenon in the folklore of the Balkan peoples and mostly of the Bulgarians.

It is not an accidental fact either that the two holidays - March 1 and St George's Day have different relationships to Christianity as a religion which was comparatively late in becoming superimposed on the already established sets of holidays. The first one remained unaffected or almost unaffected by the influence of the Christian Church, because of its lowered significance, whereas the second one was almost completely overpowered by the new religion. It is another matter that the Christian religion could not penetrate deep into the matters, actually forming but a thin layer around. In fact Easter, which is close to St George's Day, is the day focusing the ambitions of Christianity. Therefore the people observe Easter, but the holiday reaches its culmination on St George's Day. Or as the folk song has it 'Easter is a good day, but St George's Day is still better'.

The drawing of the watershed along the lines of the Christian religion can be discerned in the reflection of the holiday in the heroic epos. Let me remind you that in the cycle of songs 'Marko liberates three chains of slaves' that is being discussed, the collision develops on Easter. And this is, of course, associated with the concept of Krali Marko as King Marko, i.e. a representative of the official power - an ideologist and supporter of Christianity.

The attempt made at elevating Marko to a cult figure and his fusion with the Christian cult of St George is also indicative, as described in the legend from the village of Samouilovo, Petrich region, according to which '... on the second day of

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹I. N. Grozdova, S. A. Tokarev. *Zaklyuchenie*. - In: *Kalendarnye obichai i obryady v stranah zarubezhnoi Evropy. Vesennie prazdniki*. M., 1977, c. 343; cf. also R. Ivanova. *Vuzvurnatata voda* (at the printers').

St George's festivities, called Marko's Day in Dolyanc, a sacrificial animal is slaughtered in the village and given out and people go to Marko's water fountain'.³⁰ No doubt the fusion of the two cults ensues from the idea of Marko and of St George as donors: the first - of water, the other - of fertility, the indispensable components of man's way of life.³¹

Within the context of the above, the holy title of George is that Christian religious halo which conceals the real nature of the epic hero and his name. His encounter with the dragon as well as with the wood nymph is in complete harmony with the folkloric heritage. However, the encounter of the hero and the wood nymph also undergoes changes resulting from the continuous updating of folklore. The name is updated as well as the overall content of the folk songs. Therefore, if in the songs of the mythical stratum of the cycle of epic songs about Krali Marko, the valiant young man releases the stopped water, St George sets free the slaves captured by a dragon or a wood nymph who happen to be the producers of fertility and plenty: of wheat, wine and livestock.

The last (but not least in importance) argument in favour of the relationship between Marko and St George is also the functional belonging of the songs to the calendar ritual cycle, containing the motif 'St George liberates three chains of slaves of the wood nymph'. They are chiefly carols performed by the carol signers on the way to or in front of the house they visit. Their appearance in the winter ritual cycle, notwithstanding their spring semantics, is not a folkloric anachronism but a natural phenomenon determined by several reasons.

The functions of March 1, as the archaic New Year holiday associated with the welcoming of spring are taken over by St George's Day due to the socio-economic changes prompted by the replacement of the pre-agrarian hunting and gathering type of economy by the patriarchal agrarian and stock-breeding way of life. It is in the specificity of labour that the semantics of the name of the hero George should be sought, as that hero came before the saint and meant 'farmer'. That is why, to a large extent, he ousts Marko in the calendar-ritual epic songs.

Backing up these thoughts are also the materials of the Romanian epic songs. The songs of the hero liberating three chains of slaves feature also George the hero or simply George, alongside the nameless young valiant man on horseback and Moldovan Dobroudjan.³² The colourful description presents the hero as a mountain shepherd.³³ From that hero to St George the road is much shorter and the distance easily covered.

Another cause of the changes in the official calendar system is the replacement of the Gregorian calendar by the Julian calendar as early as the 1st century B.C. As a result, the celebration of March 1 as the New Year Day was ousted by January First New Year's Day. The consequence was the split in the spring rites and folklore due to which some folkloric pieces dealing with springtime subjects became part of the make-up of the newly-shaped January 1 calendar rites. Such precisely is the case of the songs about St George liberating three chains of slaves. By their militant content, these songs fully match the character of the New Year holiday construed as a time of struggle between the forces of chaos and of the cosmos, of the old and the new, of the evil and the good... On the other hand, the theme of the

³⁰Cb.NU 53, No. 804.

³¹The fusion of the two cults has also been noted by *E. Teodorov*, who discusses St George and Marko as the donors both of water and of fertility, whereby no difference has been made between the donations of the two heroes. - *Bulgarski naroden geroichen epos. S.*, 1981, c. 33-34, 48.

³²*V. M. Gatsak. Epos i geroicheskie kolyady...*, c. 10.

³³*Ibid.*, c. 15.

struggle bringing to the fore the militating hero, though not ceding completely its place in the spring cycle is further elaborated in the winter cycle, too, where the warrior's features of the hero are enhanced and his bravery glorified.³⁴

The classification of the calendar rite cycles into winter and spring by virtue of the feature 'New Year' and 'not New Year' entails also their greater specification respectively into 'chief', 'leading', 'male', 'epic', 'militant', etc. referred to the winter and 'secondary', 'matching', 'female', 'lyrical', 'love', etc. referred to the spring cycle. The exceptions to this rule, viz. the existence of epic works in the spring cycle testify to relic traits of the ancient New Year set of rites in it, while the relic presence of lyrical works in the winter cycle is an indication of the search for a meaningful balance with the spring cycle.

In this way the spring cycle remains to play a secondary role within the system of calendar holiday rites. It further develops and updates the semantics of its pieces along the lines of fertility in a close relationship with the glorification of the labour of the land tiller and stock-breeder. This is the only manner in which the songs about Saint George can be explained, St George making a round of the fields mounted on his horse. As a careful husband he grieves when he sees that they have not sprouted and he is glad to see 'the autumn crops starting to ripen, and the spring fields growing ears'.

The spring set of rites is that context within which the traits of the hero husbandman gain the upper hand over his warrior and heroic characteristics. That is why predominating in the spring cycle among the inherited and the newly created songs are the lyrical-epic or lyrical love songs. This is the case, for instance, with the song 'Marko loves three girls': from Sheep Field, from Wheat Field and from Wine Field.³⁵ Here the name of the epic hero is directly associated with the subject of plentiful harvest and farm stock fertility.

Even the image of the three chains of slaves, which suggests the epic struggle as the culmination in the song, loses its epic character in the field of spring rites, develops into a lyrical-epic or into a lyrical piece about the slaves' weeping, and becomes a generalized picture of slavery.

One of the lyrico-epic versions of the song begins with a lyrical introduction: 'A young girl was braiding her fair hair, braiding her hair and calling down curses on black eyes...' ³⁶ That introduction prepares the listener for an emotional attitude towards the events narrated. The pieces of this kind focus the attention mainly on the picture of slavery, presenting in detail the sighs and sobs and wailing of the enslaved maidens, brides and bachelors from the three chains of slaves. The action seems to recede to the background although it is a requisite component of the piece. It usually proceeds dynamically and winds up with the longed-for victory over the enslavers.

The emotional and meaningful centre in the lyrical pieces is the slaves' weeping. There it is developed to the full, turning these songs into song-laments: the brides fastened to the one chain bewail their unbathed babies; the maiden girls of the other

³⁴According to *M. Benovska* the plot of dragon-fighting received a fresh powerful impetus thanks to the writing of lives: 'Infiltrating the "high" literature via folklore, the universal mythological model of fighting against the dragon has been assimilated and transformed by it according to its own laws of development, after which it is given back in a transformed shape to the folklore. As an agiographic motive it acquires new existence in the folklore, which gives birth to a multitude of new forms... wherein the relationship may be followed with the "George's legend" as well as more far-fetched transformations of the motive...' - *Obrazut na zmeya v bulgarskiya folklor* (at the printers).

³⁵Bulgarska narodna poeziya i proza. Tom II, c. 193.

³⁶Cf. for instance the variants of the song published in *SbNY*, 53, No. 13, 14, 15 and 16.

chain cry for their maidenly outfits;; the bachelors of the third chain grieve for the *kaval* wooden pipes they had not played on, and for their unused rifles...³⁷

At other places, the emotional charge of the depiction is shifted within the sphere of innermost emotions. The feeling evolves into the love yearnings, into the girl's desire to see her sweetheart among the bachelors of the three chains of slaves.³⁸

The gloomy overtones of the narration turn out to be a suitable background for the feeling of love, for the maidenly grief for her love. It is not accidental that the episode about Marko liberating the slaves has no place in this song; it has 'naturally' been omitted.

The image of the three chains of slaves has no uniform semantics. Its presence in the heroic epos is lastingly associated with the last stage of its classical evolution - the historical and the heroic. Painting the picture of slavery, this image sums up also all preceding stages of its development. It is one of the keys to the unravelling of the epic throughout its evolution from the archaic strata to the historically truthful reflection of reality.

Of course, it is difficult to find your way in the explanation of the intricate interlacing of traditional epic imagery and historical facts within the context of heroic songs alone. The widespread image of the three chains of slaves in the various folklore genres and cycles lends it even more aspects and multiple meanings. Reviewed and updated through them, it gets back into the heroic epos. At the same time, the interpretation of this image, when compared with a similar image from the epic Christmas carols, as well as from lyrical and lyrical-epic pieces outlines the only way possible of its spiral movement up the epic historical vertical. This is the way of its historization, which is also the way of the historization of the Bulgarian heroic epos in general.

The clash between the heritage from the past, between the epic tradition and the newly emerging socio-historical reality in the Bulgarian lands during the Middle Ages gives rise to those characteristic features which make up the historical and heroic stratum of Bulgarian heroic epos as a qualitatively new stage in its evolution. These characteristic features are in most general terms manifest in the following.

The features of the epic hero develop into a 'grandiose hyperbole' (V.M.Gatsak). It is the result of the attempt to associate the old, mythical-heroic essence of the cultural creator and hero with the earthly, sometimes lowly traits of the prototype by virtue of the chance, but historically mandatory coinciding of the names. In this way the principle of *hyperbolization* becomes established as one of the most characteristic poetical principles of the epic. The dimensions of the hyperbole are directly contingent upon the strength of the enemy, this time expressed on the scale of his manifold numerical superiority.

The image of the epic enemy, by studying whose reincarnations we can best follow the stages in the evolution of the epic, in the heroic and historical stratum here acquires its *ethnic identification* as the Ottoman aggressor and oppressor. This identification is the more clearly presented, the more the epic hero focuses in himself the features of the Bulgarian people having gained self-awareness, and becomes the symbol of Bulgarian greatness and glory.

³⁷Although the songs on this subject are most frequently placed on equal footing with the other variants of the cycle 'Marko liberates three chains of slaves', it is my opinion that we are not in the least justified to consider them epic, because both in terms of lyrics and in melody, they do not correspond to the epic standards. Variants of these songs see in L. Bogdanova. Op. cit., c. 851, No. 15. Outlining the emotional charge and lyrical framework of the songs about the three chains of slaves, B. N. Putilov refers them to the ballads. - Slavnyanskaya istoricheskaya ballada, L., 1965, c. 36-37.

³⁸Cb. NU, 53, c. 206, No. 27.

The counter opposition of the hero and his enemy along the lines of their differing *religions* can be interpreted as an additional element in the ethnic identification of the enemy. This is in fact the supraethnic foundation on which the southern parts of the Balkan Peninsula are united by their Orthodox Christian faith against the united Muslim enemy.

At that new stage of the evolution of the epic, the goal of the struggle - the liberation, acquires *socio-political dimensions*. The renewed goal in turn brings to life a qualitatively new object of struggle between the epic hero and the enemy - 'the three chains of slaves'. In tune with the other characteristics, 'the three of slaves' evolve into a *generalized image of the enslaved Bulgarian people* - a picture which is as much concrete as it is abstract; as much earthly and truthful as it is poetically elevated.

And in the final count, the continuous positive conclusion of the struggle where the epic hero is the victor that persists as a bright trace from the most archaic to the most modern stratum of the epic, bolsters the Bulgarian people's faith in their liberation from bondage and becomes the prerequisite for the emergence of that *optimism*, which Ivan Vazov later most properly described as 'the intoxication of a people' in his novel 'Under the Yoke'.

Epske pjesme i društveno-povijesne promjene

SAŽETAK

U središtu zanimanja su junačke epske pjesme iz ciklusa "Kralj Marko oslobađa robove okovane trima lancima". Te se pjesme ovdje tumače kao vrhunac svijesti naroda o sebi i vrhunac bugarskog epskog izraza. Motivi i slike u tim pjesmama uspoređuju se sa sličnim verzijama u kršćanskim epskim božićnim i đurđevdanskim pjesmama. Potonje, kaže autorica, vraćaju nas junačkom eposu a sve one upućuju na društveno-povijesne činjenice koje vezujemo uz period otomanske vladavine na Balkanu. Tako će se vrijeme turske okupacije Balkana moći promatrati u dvostrukoj funkciji. S jedne strane ono obilježava epske pjesme. S druge, prinosi kasnijim fazama demitologizacije eposa.