

REVIEWS

SANJA BOŠKOVIĆ, *KOSOVSKI KULTUROLOŠKI MIT* [KOSOVO CULTURAL MYTH].

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*Reviewed by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović**

The monograph *Kosovo Cultural Myth* by Sanja Bošković, Professor of Slavic Studies and Chairman of the Department for Slavic and Oriental Languages at the University of Poitiers in France, treats a very actual topic both in scholar and public discourse. Intent on approaching this subject from the cultural angle, the author points out that her book “is an attempt at different reading of a cultural legacy and within it the unique fact such as the Kosovo myth”. Bošković’s study is divided into eight chapters.

The first introductory chapter discusses the motive of betrayal as one of the key elements of the oral epic tradition concerning the Battle of Kosovo which has also become the fundamental bearer of the collective interpretation of a historical event. The author poses a number of questions which put the false historical fact about the betrayal of Vuk Branković in opposition to the oral popular tradition and the collective remembrance of the Battle of Kosovo as a place of meeting between history and poetry. Here is a poetisation of history in which historical

fact departs from its initial shape and conforms to epic voice (p. 11). Therefore, the Kosovo cultural myth is comprehended in this book as remembrance of and singing about the Battle of Kosovo embodied in the epic oral voice which has developed in something of a spiritual creation in the fullness of time.

The second chapter deals with the notions of legend, myth and mythicisation within the Kosovo saga and demonstrates the crucial role of an oral tradition in the emergence and formation of the Kosovo myth. Bošković explains the notion of myth relying on interpretations of the classic authors of the anthropological theory of myth: Frazer, Malinowski, Jung, Lévi-Strauss, Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, Eliade. The author quotes Eliade who has claimed that myth is a true story, i.e. a story which speaks the truth about the position of a human in the universe notwithstanding all its imaginativeness, a story of creation and coming into being.

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Mythicisation of epic content — the Kosovo myth in this case — is a constructive process which has become the main cultural myth amongst Serbs. Considered a cultural myth it develops from cultural perceptions to unique collective experience of historical and cultural reality (p. 17). Besides primary, ethnological myths which are contained in archaic cultures, cultural myths are derived from the culture of a particular community. Such myths reflect collective experience and memory, and they are built and modified in the course of time. In an attempt to present the complexity of the Kosovo myth through her different reading of it, the author distinguishes between the following segments of its structure: historical segment, the core around which mythical structure is formed; contemplative segment which offers the explanation of a historical fact; metaphysical-Christian segment provides an explanation for the defeat in the battle and puts historical event into a wider metaphysical context; archetype segment is visible in oral tradition; and finally, the segment of collective cultural perceptions which reflect the collective consciousness of the people and their reception of historical event (p. 30).

The third chapter points out the difference between ethnological and cultural myths, and argues that the Kosovo myth cannot be categorised in the former group. It provides a review of different mythological theories formulated by Taylor, Spenser, Frazer, Malinowski, Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, Freud, Jung, Cassirer, Eliade. Based on Cassirer's division into natural/cosmogonical and cultural myths, the author considers the latter as myths of ancestors-heroes, the mythical forms of a profane content which rest on the collective perceptions of a society. Cultural myths are of pragmatically ethical nature, they develop in the course of time and pass on from one generation to another.

The fourth chapter analyses the origins of the Kosovo myth which has grown from a concrete historical event. Bošković wonders when and how the Kosovo myth came into being, and she points out the complex origins of it the discussion of which requires an analysis of different facets of collective memory. The key notion in the analysis is that of time — “the Kosovo myth has been formed and is still being formed in the course of time” (p. 89). Within the Kosovo myth there is a number of layers of different memory types: mythical-ethnological memory, ritual-syncretic memory, the elements of epic memory, historical memory, “flash” memory as well as repetitive and semantic memory. The said types present different forms of collective memory and attest to the complex nature of the Kosovo cultural myth. The aspects of perception of the Kosovo event are presented in tables for the purpose of emphasising the semantic structures which contribute to passing on the Kosovo cultural heritage.

The fifth chapter discusses the multi-layer nature of the Kosovo myth, including the epic cycle dedicated to the Battle of Kosovo. The author analyses the key figures of the myth (Emperor Lazar, Jug Bogdan and his nine sons, the Jugovići, Miloš Obilić, Vuk Branković, Milan Toplica, Kosačić Ivan) and points out that “the cultural myth of Kosovo has formed around concrete historical event, the battle that took place on 15/28 [according to Julian/Gregorian calendar] June 1389, and as such it constitutes the back-bone of the Serbian people's historical memory” (p. 218). Bošković finds out that the epic cycle of Kosovo reflects a collective memory which, on one side, bears witness to historical facts and, on the other, relays symbolical value. Although this cultural myth has been formed around concrete historical event, it was epic verse and oral tradition that had the essential role in its passing on from one genera-

tion to another. In order to explain the complex spiritual structure of the Kosovo myth, the author points out several layers: archetype, contemplative, metaphysical-Christian, historical layer and that of collective cultural perceptions, and she thoroughly analyses each segment on the basis of the extant sources (rare records of the medieval and Ottoman chroniclers pertaining to the Battle of Kosovo and oral tradition).

The sixth chapter lays out something of a topography of the Serbian people's cultural identity which allows for the materialisation of all that is invisible and all that has been transferred within collective memory for ages (p. 401). The map of the Kosovo cultural myth has been drawn under influence of different sorts of memory, i.e. through their intertwining.

The seventh chapter presents the results of a minor opinion poll carried out amongst the younger generation of Serbs abroad. The questions concern their view of the Kosovo legacy taking into account that they reside outside their native cultural environment.

The last eighth chapter broaches the question of preservation of cultural identity in the era of globalisation in the 21st century. New appreciations of the notions of space and time lead to new appreciation of the Kosovo cultural myth. The author concludes that "apprehended as a virtual and real ground of Serbian spirituality and collective cultural identity [it] is being moved from a location into the space of modern historical moment" (p. 464).

In this book, the Kosovo myth as a cultural phenomenon recorded in the Serbian language and oral tradition is a case study of cultural identity, both individual and collective. This study particularly benefits from its interdisciplinary approach (literary, anthropological and cultural). Due to its exposition of numerous theories regarding the research of a complex phenomenon such as myth this book is a valuable point of departure for humanities students and scholars as well as those interested in the issues stemming from myths and their interpretations in different cultures.