

The Legend of Kosovo

Jelka Ređep

The two greatest legends of the Serbs are those about Kosovo and Marko Kraljević. Many different views have been advanced about the creation of the legend of Prince Lazar and Kosovo (Ređep 1976:161). The most noteworthy, however, are those of Dragutin Kostić (1936) and Nikola Banašević (1935). According to Banašević, the legends of Marko Kraljević and Kosovo sprang up under the influence of French *chansons de geste*. Kostić, however, takes a different stance. Rejecting Banašević's interpretation along with the opinion that the legend of Kosovo arose and took poetic form in the western regions of Yugoslavia, which in the second half of the fifteenth century had strong ties with western Europe and in which the struggle against the Turks was most intense, Kostić points out that Banašević does not distinguish between the legend and its poetic expression in the Kosovo poems. He states that "French chivalric epics did not affect the formation and even less the creation of the first poem about Kosovo, not to mention the legend of Kosovo, but only *modified* the already created and formed legend and its first poetic manifestations" (1936:200; emphasis in original). It seems reasonable to accept Kostić's opinion that the legend originated in the region in which the battle of Kosovo took place.

The dramatic nature of the event itself, along with those that followed, could certainly have given rise to the beginnings of the legend soon after the Serbian defeat at Kosovo on June 15, 1389 (June 28 of the old calendar), and the canonization of Prince Lazar. The battle between the Serbs and the Turks was waged in the early morning hours, with the Serbian army led by Lazar and the Turkish force by Sultan Murad I. The battle did not last long and was probably over before noon. It was a fierce encounter with many casualties on both sides. There were not a few reasons why the battle should become memorable. Both rulers—a Serbian prince and a Turkish sultan—fell in battle; the best part of the Serbian army was lost; and although there were many casualties in the Turkish ranks, the losses were more ominous for the small Serbian state than for the mighty Turkish Empire. At that time the fortunes of the latter were on the rise and Kosovo was one of its most decisive victories during the course

of its expansion throughout the Balkans. The Serbian defeat did not, however, mark either the downfall of the Serbian Empire or the beginning of the oppression of the Serbs under the Turks. The Serbian state came under Turkish rule only after the fall of Smederevo in 1459. Besides Serbian accounts of the battle of Kosovo, there are also very important Turkish and Byzantine sources, although it is interesting that in Serbian historiography from the beginning of the fifteenth century it is quite difficult to distinguish between legend and historical fact.

The earliest traces of the Kosovo legend can be found in texts dating from the end of the fourteenth century. The legend evolved gradually so that by the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century it had already taken shape, and in texts of the eighteenth century it can be found in its complete form. From the sainthood cult of Prince Lazar, who originally symbolized all the heroes who died in the battle, there arose in the eighteenth century a cult with national features, particularly in the regions north of the Sava and the Danube. With the awakening of national consciousness and enthusiasm in the northern regions of Yugoslavia, especially following the Serbian migration northward, a new thematic corpus of texts about Prince Lazar and Kosovo, with strong roots in the south, found its full justification there.

The first Kosovo texts were written soon after the battle, Lazar's death, and his canonization in the monastery of Ravanica in 1390-91. During a period of some thirty years—from the 1390's to about 1420—ten medieval Kosovo texts known to us were created. They constitute a separate and complete corpus of texts in medieval Serbian literature.

Also worthy of attention are both Serbian and foreign sources dating from the year of the battle itself or shortly thereafter: the record by the scribe Božidar; a letter of the Venetian council dated July 23, 1389; the dispatch by the Russian deacon Ignjatije; the firman of Sultan Bayazid of July of the same year; the letter of King Tvrtko to the Trogir municipality of August 1; a reply from the Florentine municipality to King Tvrtko dated October 20, 1389; verses of the Turkish poet Ahmedi; a note in Philippe de Mézières's *Songe du vieil pèlerin*, from the end of the fourteenth century; and a reference in the Catalan tale *Història de Jacob Xalabín*, most likely from the beginning of the fifteenth century. From a study of the earliest sources, the historian Mihailo Dinić concludes that "all the sources known to us dating from the year of the battle of Kosovo inspired by the event itself either quite openly celebrate the Christian triumph or are quite indefinite and not even one of them speaks explicitly about the Turkish victory" (1940:138). Since these sources do not contain elements of the Kosovo legend, they will not be considered further in the present discussion.

Medieval Serbian writings that constitute the first thematic corpus of

texts are the following: *Prološko žitije kneza Lazara* [*Prologue Life of Prince Lazar*] (1390-93) of Ravaničanin II [a monk of the monastery of Ravanica]; “*Slovo o knezu Lazaru*” [“Discourse on Prince Lazar”] (end of 1392 or beginning of 1393) of Danilo the Younger (Patriarch Danilo III); *Žitije kneza Lazara* [*Life of Prince Lazar*] (after 1392 and before 1398) and “*Služba knezu Lazaru*” [“Office for Prince Lazar”] (in the fall of 1390 or 1402) of Ravaničanin I; “*Slovo o knezu Lazaru*” (1392-98) of Ravaničanin III; “*Pohvala knezu Lazaru*” [“In Praise of Prince Lazar”] (1402) of the nun Jefimija; David’s *Žitije i načelstvo kneza Lazara* [*Life and Reign of Prince Lazar*], the so-called older Serbian chronicle, from Peć (second half of 1402); “*Pohvala knezu Lazaru*” (1403) of Princess Milica; “*Natpis na mramornom stubu na Kosovu*” [“Kosovo Marble Inscription”] (1404) of Despot Stefan Lazarević; and “*Pohvala knezu Lazaru*” (1419-20) of Andonije Rafail Epaktit [of Lepanto]. Because the specific purpose of these texts is to celebrate and glorify Lazar, they do not deal sufficiently with the Kosovo event itself, and they are considered inadequate and incomplete as historical sources. Some of them, however, are important for a fuller understanding of the development of the legend.

The most important is the “*Slovo o knezu Lazaru*” of Danilo the Younger. This text provides many facts, such as the name of Lazar’s father (Pribac); it refers to Lazar as a “young man” close to Dušan; it speaks of the family ties of Emperor Dušan and Princess Milica, and says that she was the daughter of the great Prince Vratko; it tells of mountain hermitages and gives a description of Ravanica. Like its predecessors, this text does not exaggerate the size of the Turkish or the Serbian army. There is no specific mention of either victory or defeat, and in only one place is it said that “pobedu postaviše” [“victory was achieved”]. Lazar’s speech to his soldiers and their reply on the eve of the battle and his conversation with Milica are important elements for the origin of the legend. Calling the Kosovo heroes to battle, Lazar says to them:

“Bolje je nama u podvigu smrt, nego li sa stidom život. Bolje je nama u boju smrt od mača primiti, nego li pleća neprijateljima našim dati. Mnogo poživismo za svet, najzad postarajmo se za malo podvig stradalački primiti, da poživimo večno na nebesima, dajmo sebi imenovanje vojnika Hristovih, stradalaca blagočastija, da se upišemo u knjige životne. Ne poštedimo tela naša u borenju, da od onog koji prosuđuje podvige svetle vence primimo. Bolovi rađaju slavu i trudovi dovode do počinka.” (Radojičić 1960:110)

[“Better is death in heroic effort than life in shame. Better to meet with death by the sword than to turn our backs on our enemies. We have lived long in this world, now let us undertake feats and endure suffering so that we may live eternally in the heavens, let us call ourselves Christ’s soldiers, martyrs for the holy cause, to go down in books that long endure. Let us not spare our bodies in the struggle in order to gain bright laurels from the judge of feats. Pain gives birth to glory and toil leads to rest.”]

The soldiers are ready to heed Lazar's call and to show their loyalty:

“Mi, gospodine naš, otkako po opštoj prirodi od oca i matere rođeni bismo, boga i tebe poznadosmo. Bog nas podiže, a ti vaspita. Kao čeda ishrani, i kao sinove obdari, i kao braću izljubi, i kao drugove poštova. Slavu i bogatstvo i sve što je krasno na svetu i sreću ima, u svemu zajedničari i prijemnici bismo. Veselja i radosti, a ujedno i vojinstva, jela i naslađenja bogatih trpeza, ljubav i čast, sve obilno od tebe primismo. Što je mnogo za te i za blagočastije, i za otačastvo nam umreti? Ne pošteditimo sebe, znajući da imamo i posle ovoga otići i s prahom pomešati se. Umririmo da svagda živi budemo. Prinesimo sebe bogu kao živu žrtvu, ne kao pre malovremenim i obmamljivim gošćenjem naslađenju našem, no u podvigu krvlju svojom. Ne pošteditimo život naš, da živopisan primer posle ovoga drugima budemo. . . .” (Radojičić 1960:111)

[“We have, lord and master, known God and you ever since, by the general order of things, we were born of father and mother. God gave us sustenance and you raised us. Like your own children you brought us up, and like your own sons you gave us gifts, and like your own brothers you held us dear, and like your companions you honored us. Fame and fortune and everything wonderful in the world that brings happiness we have shared and received. Joy and mirth, and also the warrior's life, food and the enjoyment of a rich table, love and honor, all in abundance did we receive from you. Why should it be too great a task to die for you and for the holy cause, and the homeland? Let us not spare ourselves, knowing that we have to take our leave at some time and mingle with the dust. Let us die in order to live eternally. Let us sacrifice ourselves to God not as formerly by catering to our pleasure by feasting, but by blood in heroic deeds. Let us not spare our lives in being living examples to others henceforth. . . .”]

Leaving for the battlefield, Lazar is in a dilemma about whether to choose the kingdom of earth or that of heaven, and in selecting the latter he calls his soldiers to join him in battle, that is, in certain death. He chooses honorable death over dishonorable life, eternity over transience. Setting off for battle with their prince, the soldiers voice their loyalty and their awareness that struggle and death signify immortality. According to the legend of Kosovo, besides Vuk Branković's treason, one of the main reasons why the Serbs lost the battle and their empire was Lazar's deliberate choice of the kingdom of heaven over that of earth. This notion is first encountered in the “*Slovo*” of Danilo the Younger and only subsequently in oral legend and in the folk epic poem *Propast carstva srpskoga* [*Downfall of the Serbian Empire*]. It can, therefore, be said that the legend of Kosovo is rooted in the early written literature and not in folk literature, and that it is connected with the creation of a cult to the fallen Prince Lazar.

In Danilo's “*Slovo*,” specifically in the dialogue between Lazar and Milica, there is another instance of Lazar's conscious choice of the life hereafter. In a description of the transferral of Lazar's remains from the

Church of the Ascension in Priština to Ravanica, at which Milica is present with her two sons and during which she grieves for Lazar, he replies to her thus (although he is dead), consoling her:

“Bolja mi bi pohvalna smrt, nego li s porugom život. Ako i na obrazu ranu i po glavi mač, zbog blagočaćća mučih se, no mužastven pokazah se i s mučenicima ubrojah se. Videh donje bojeve i izbrojah gornje počsti. Videh mačeve, i pomišljah na gornje vence. Očekivah smrt, i na besmrtnost pomišljah. Promena podviga dovoljno mi bi za utehu. . . .” (Radojičić 1960:112)

[“Better to me was praiseful death than shameful life. Though with a wound across my face and a sword upon my head, I suffered for a holy cause, manfully I proved myself and numbered myself among the martyrs. I have seen battles down below and counted honors on high. I saw swords and thought of laurels on high. I awaited death, and thought of immortality. A change in feats was sufficient consolation. . . .”]

Lines from the *Propast carstva srpskoga* (Karadžić 1953:288) contain the same idea: “zomaljsko je zamaleno carstvo, / a nebesko uvek i doveka” [“earth’s empire is short-lived, / Heaven’s is lasting and forever”].

Treason is one of the main themes of the legend of Kosovo. According to oral legend, Vuk Branković, a high-ranking Serbian noble and Lazar’s son-in-law, betrayed him to Murad at Kosovo, which was the reason why the Serbs lost both battle and empire. There is no mention of treason in these terms in the Serbian ranks in any of the historical sources from the time of the battle, not in fact until about two centuries later. The theme of betrayal at Kosovo as we know it was created gradually in an effort to find justification for the defeat and subsequent downfall of the Serbian Empire and its coming into Turkish hands. A study of medieval Serbian literary texts and other sources reveals that at first there is vague reference to treason, that it is then linked to a group of people, and that only later, at the end of the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth century, is there specific mention of Vuk Branković.

In an effort to find the reason for the defeat at Kosovo, David voices his opinion and that of his contemporaries in his *Žitije i načelstvo*:

I boj među obojima bi, i u boju tom nečastivi nasilnik pada od mača posred razboja, i telom i dušom, s množinom svojih boguprotivnih vojnika. A ostaje toga sin jedan. I na kraju boja toga—ne znam šta istinito reći o ovom, da li je izdan kim od svojih hranjenika, ili je naprotiv ovo sud božji koji se zbi nad ovim—u ruke toga uzima i posle mnogih muka sam časnu i pobožnu glavu njegovu otseče. I potom kao podružnike (potčinjene) uzima sve. . . . (Radojičić 1960:142)

[And there was battle between the two of them, and in that battle the fiendish villain fell by the sword in the midst of the strife, both in body and

soul, along with a multitude of his God-opposing warriors. But of the others there remained a son, and at the end of that battle—I know not what to say of him in truth, whether he was betrayed by one of his dependents or whether it was God’s judgment rendered against him—he took him in his hands and after much suffering he cut off his honorable and pious head. And then he took all the others as his subjects. . . .]

David clearly is unsure as to whether Lazar was betrayed or his death was due to fate. However, there is a change in the corresponding section of David’s chronicle in later versions of it: the *Studenički letopis* [*Studenica Chronicle*] (second quarter of the fifteenth century) and the *Cetinjski letopis* [*Cetinje Chronicle*] (a longer, supplemented version of the *Studenički letopis* up to 1572). Not only is uncertainty now absent, but there is a decisive statement about the betrayal and flight of Serbian soldiers at Kosovo. There can be no doubt that oral legend has exerted its influence. In the *Cetinjski letopis* the account is longer than in the *Studenički letopis*, and there is mention of flight out of fear or breach of faith, and also of calumny and envy.¹

Calumny and envy are also spoken of in the *Žitije despota Stefana Lazarevića* [*Life of Despot Stefan Lazarević*] (1431 or 1433-39) of Constantine the Philosopher. For the first time in Serbian texts mention is made of Miloš’s deed (though there is no mention of his name) and it is said that “neko veoma blagorodan” [“someone of very noble birth”], someone who had been maligned by those who envied him, in his desire to show his faith and courage, killed Murad. The tale of the maligning of the hero who killed the Turkish sultan and his penetration of the Turkish camp indicated how the story of the battle was told when Constantine lived. It is, at the same time, evidence of the evolution of the legend.

From the mid-fifteenth century it is also possible to follow the gradual development of yet another theme, the quarrel between Lazar’s sons-in-law. A Nuremburg gunsmith in the service of Duke Stjepan took down the story of the quarrel between Lazar’s sons-in-law. In later sources this story evolved into a tale about the quarrel between Vuk Branković and Miloš Obilić/Kobilić and between their wives, Lazar’s daughters.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the betrayal account included a group of people. In the *Turska hronika* [*Turkish Chronicle*] of Konstantin Mihailović of Ostrvica (1496-1501), it is said that some were friends of Lazar and that others were not, “a kudgod jedinstva nema, nikakvim načinom dobro ne može biti” [“and that where there is no unity, in no way can there be any good”]. This text talks about disloyalty and discord:

¹ The story of the Serbian flight is also recorded on a parchment from the first half of the fifteenth century.

Gospoda koji su bili prijatelji knezu Lazaru, ovi su se junački i istrajno pored njega borili, a drugi, kroz prste gledajući, bitci su se divili. I zbog te nevere i nesloge zlih ljudi bitka je izgubljena u petak u podne. (Radojičić 1960:222-23)

[The lords who were friends of Prince Lazar fought bravely and steadfastly at his side, while others, peering through their hands, marveled at the struggle. And because of the disloyalty and discord of these wicked men the battle was lost on Friday at noon.]

Mihailović sees the reason for the defeat in unequal and improper participation in the struggle. This is, in his opinion, a breach of faith, and treason. In the *Turska hronika* we also find other elements of the legend. It is said that the battle lasted for three days, from Wednesday to Friday. This confuses the actual events of the first and third battles of Kosovo (the three battles occurred in 1389, 1402, and 1448). In Mihailović's account there are details that indicate the infiltration of oral legend into written texts (Ređep 1976:183-85). Among other things, it is said that the Serbs lost the battle of Kosovo since "sam Bog je tako hteo zbog grehova naših" ["God himself wanted it so because of our sins"] (184). In Serbian oral legend it is believed that the Serbian Empire fell because of the sins of the nobles and their misdeeds against their rulers. This influence on the battle of Kosovo can be perceived even in the texts of some Turkish chroniclers (Ređep 1976:185-93), especially Mehemmed Neshri (sixteenth century) and Mehmed Solakzade (seventeenth century).

By the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century, the betrayal theme was linked to a single person. An anonymous resident of Dubrovnik or at least of Dalmatia translated an account of the battle of Kosovo written by the Byzantine historian Ducas. His story about this event, however, is a longer one, since he supplements it with details taken from oral legend. The traitor is Dragoslav Pribišić (Probištitović), who is said to have committed treason and turned his arms against the Christians; as soon as Duke Vlatko learned of this action, he quickly fled to Bosnia: "Ovaj glas pustili [su] Turci, najprepredeniji ljudi, da bi uplašili našu vojsku, ili je tako htela nesreća jadnih hrišćana zbog grehova njihovih" ["This rumor was started by the Turks, the most devious of men, in order to consternate our army, or such was the ill fortune of these poor Christians because of their sins"] (Ređep 1976:194-95).

In the *Komentari [Commentaries]* of Ludovik Tuberon Crijević, dating from the sixteenth century, there is no mention of treason but there are many other elements of the legend: Lazar's supper on the eve of the battle, the maligning of Miloš, and Lazar's reproach of him for his disloyalty. In the genealogy of the Albanian emigrant Jovan Musać, dating from 1510, "punom raznih izmišljotina" ["full of various inventions"], it is stated that Lazar, Marko Kraljević, and Todor Musać and other Albanian

nobles fought together against Murad, that the Christians were defeated, and that Lazar was captured and executed (Kovačević 1888: 266).

In his *Putopis kroz Bosnu, Srbiju, Bugarsku i Rumeliju* [*Travels through Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Rumelia*, 1530], the Slovenian Benedikt Kuripešić (Kuripečić) shows how the legend of Kosovo changed and took on various aspects during its evolution. He claims also that “na celom hrvatskom i srpskom terenu pevaju junačke epske pesme” [“heroic songs are sung throughout Croatian and Serbian territories”] (Latković 1954:333). Kuripešić was a Latin interpreter in the diplomatic mission King Ferdinand sent to Suleiman II in Constantinople in 1530. The *Putopis* gives a detailed account of Lazar’s supper on the eve of the battle, although Miloš Obilić is depicted here as an old hero. He is a deserving nobleman but has fallen into Lazar’s disfavor because of calumny. The prince humiliates him to such an extent that he is not allowed to sit at table. In the tale recorded by Kuripešić, in order to prove his loyalty Miloš murders the sultan, but there is no mention of defeat. It is only stated that on this occasion the Serbs took leave of the Turks.

The battle of Kosovo and Lazar’s death are also recorded in later Serbian chronicles dating from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century and later. They give only the basic facts about the battle: Lazar’s and Murad’s deaths and when the battle took place. In some of these chronicles it is said that Murad was killed by Miloš Obilić, but only in the *Podgorički letopis* [*Podgorica Chronicle*], written in 1738, is there also mention of Vuk Branković, where it is said that he fled the field with his seven thousand men and thus had broken faith. This source also refers to other heroes—Jug Bogdanović, Musić Sćepan, and Milan Kosančić—thus making it evident that oral legend about the battle had become part of the chronicle also.

Mauro Orbini’s *Il regno degli Slavi*, published in Pesaro in 1601, is particularly important for reconstructing the development of the Kosovo legend. Orbini relates the tale of the battle according to L. T. Crijević and the Byzantine historian Laonicus Chalcondyles (Chalcocondylas), but he also incorporates into his narration some themes from oral legend unknown to his predecessors. He is the first to record the story about the quarrel between Lazar’s daughters over the bravery of their husbands, Vuk Branković and Miloš Obilić. Orbini sees the reason for Vuk’s hatred and his calumny of Miloš in this disagreement. In addition to many other details about the battle taken from oral legend, Orbini is also the first to refer to Vuk Branković as a traitor at Kosovo (Orbin 1968:102):

Vuković je s malo svojih ljudi pobegao posle pomenute bitke, koja se zbilja na Kosovu 15. juna 1389. godine. Međutim, zet kneza Lazara Vuk Branković spasao se gotovo sa svim svojim ljudima, pošto je (kako neki kažu) imao tajne pregovore s Muratom da izda (kako je i učinio) svoga tasta

da bi se dokopao njegove države. Tako je posle njegove smrti i ostao gospodarem jednog dela Raške, dok je drugi deo dobila Lazareva žena Milica i Lazareva dva nejaka sina, Stefan i Vuk.

[With a few of his men, Vuković fled after the aforementioned battle, which took place at Kosovo on June 15, 1389. Lazar's son-in-law, Vuk Branković, however, saved himself and almost all of his men, since (as some say) he had had secret talks with Murad to betray his father-in-law (which he did) in order to seize power over his state. In this way, after his death, he became ruler over half of Raška, while the other half was given to Lazar's wife, Milica, and Lazar's two infant sons, Stefan and Vuk.]

As noted above, the betrayal at Kosovo as we now know it is not mentioned in the earliest texts: David (1402) voices uncertainty about whether fate or betrayal led to Lazar's death; in the *Turska hronika* the theme is linked to a group of people; in the anonymous translation of Ducas' text, the traitor is a specific person, Dragoslav Pribišić; and it is only in Orbini's text that Vuk Branković's name comes up for the first time. The theme of betrayal in its final form evolved gradually over a long period of time just as the legend itself, and reasons can be given for the charge leveled at Vuk Branković (Ređep 1976:206; 1969).

In the *Dubrovački letopisi* [*Dubrovnik Chronicles*] (1608) of Jovan Lukarević, the story of Vuk's treason is also found, while Lazar's other son-in-law, Miloš Obilić, "vlastelin iz Tjentišta i Lazarev zet po kćeri Vukosavi" ["a noble from Tjentište and Lazar's son-in-law by his daughter Vukosava"], is said to have killed Murad. In the so-called *Brankovićev letopis* [*Branković Chronicle*] (1600-18), preserved in a Latin translation, it is said that "Vojvodi ergo, knezio infideles facti, fugere, Vuk Brankovich, et alii" ["the dukes, therefore, Vuk Branković and others, having betrayed the prince, fled"] (Kukuljević-Sakcinski 1854:16). This is the earliest Serbian chronicle that accuses Vuk of treason. The genealogies speak of the battle, but not of betrayal and flight from Kosovo.

A translation of Orbini's *Il regno degli Slavi* was published by Sava Vladislavić in St. Petersburg in 1722. Its language is a "mešavina slovenskoga, ruskoga i srpskoga jezika" ["mixture of Slavic, Russian, and Serbian"] (Radojčić 1956:25). Nikola Radojčić claims that this "okretni trgovac i mudri diplomata, rođeni Hercegovac, u ruskoj službi" ["clever businessman and wise diplomat, a Herzegovinian by birth, in the service of Russia"] (p. 24) translated Orbini's work at the request of Tsar Peter the Great, who wanted to learn more about the glorious Serbian past. Vladislavić's *Kniga istoriografija* is not a real translation but rather an adapted and shortened version of the original. This text was widely read in the eighteenth century, particularly in the regions north of the Sava and the Danube, and although Austrian authorities attempted to prevent its distribution among the Serbs in Austria, Radojčić states (26) that "nije bilo

iole veće biblioteke a da se u njoj nije nalazio prevod Orbinija od Save Vladislavića” [“nowhere was there a rather large library that did not have a copy of Sava Vladislavić’s translation of Orbini”].

At the end of the seventeenth century, an anonymous resident of Perast wrote a play in dodecasyllables in the vernacular about the battle of Kosovo. It has been attributed to Andrija Zmajević, archbishop and “Serbian primate.” Instead of a short title, the following inscription heads this work: “Here begins [sic] the battle of Prince Lazar and the evil purpose of Miloš Kobilić and of the traitor Vuk Branković and the nine Jugović brothers at Kosovo field on June 24, 1343.” Oral legend is thus evident here too, as it is elsewhere in the Kosovo legend.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century (perhaps by the end of the seventeenth), the anonymous *Žitije kneza Lazara* [*Life of Prince Lazar*] was composed, some of whose versions bear the longer title: *Žitije kneza Lazara, Miloša Obilića, Vuka Brankovića i ostale gospode koja su bila na polju Kosovu* [*Lives of Prince Lazar, Miloš Obilić, Vuk Branković, and the Other Nobles Who Were at Kosovo Field*]. The author compiled his work on the basis of several written texts as well as oral legend and folk poems in both the *bugarštica* and heroic decasyllabic meters. The manuscript was produced in the south—the Gulf of Kotor and Montenegro—but was gradually disseminated to the regions north of the Sava and the Danube and even further. It represents the second thematically complete corpus of texts about Lazar and the battle of Kosovo, and is therefore also known as the *Priča o boju kosovskom* [*Tale of the Battle of Kosovo*]. The manuscript *Priča* is, no doubt, a well thought-out compilation, composed on the basis of several other works: Orbini’s *Il regno degli Slavi*, the Perast play mentioned above, chronicles, oral legend, and folk poems. Its author interpolated verses from the poems and the Perast play into his prose narrative. No other work viewed as part of the corpus of Serbian medieval literature reflects the influence of folk literature as much as the manuscript *Priča*, whose internal structure situates it closer to a folk tale and really outside of the medieval genre of rulers’ and saints’ lives.

A study of the manuscript versions of the *Priča* has revealed a very large number of variants (some 36) and the possibility of grouping them into two streams according to their similarities and differences (Redep 1976:157). These two can be shown to have branched out from the mainstream, although the differences between the manuscripts are neither very extensive nor essential. Copies of this very popular text were made for some 150 years, and the manuscript variants are found over a broad area, ranging from southern Yugoslav regions to those in the north, and even as far as Budapest and Sofia. Originating in the south, where the Kosovo tradition was very vigorous in the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, the *Priča* was disseminated to northern regions, particularly after the migration of Serbs to those areas. There it underwent a rebirth, especially after Lazar's remains were transferred to the Srem monastery of Ravanica near Vrdnik at the time when the cult of Saint Lazar was revived. This cult, which was created toward the end of the fourteenth century, took on national significance with the awakening of Serbian national consciousness in the northern regions.

The *Priča* contains all the elements of the fully developed Kosovo legend: attaching itself to the legend of Vukašin's murder of Emperor Uroš, it deals with Lazar's coming to the throne, the battle of Kosovo of 1389, the quarrel between Lazar's daughters and sons-in-law (as the cause of Vuk's hatred and his calumny of Miloš Obilić to the effect that Miloš would betray him to the Turkish sultan), Lazar's supper on the eve of the battle and his rebuke of Miloš, spying on the Turkish army, the details of Miloš Obilić's arrival in the Turkish camp and his meeting with the sultan's attendants and Murad, the death of Miloš, Ivan Kosačić, and Milan Topličanin, the dialogue between Murad and the captured Lazar and Miloš, and their deaths, along with a number of details absent from the entire folk epic tradition. Since the *Priča* has preserved interpolated verses from unrecorded folk poems dating from the end of the seventeenth or beginning of the eighteenth century, it is important for solving the problem of when the Kosovo poems in Vuk's collection originated (Ređep 1976:239-69). The *Priča* contains lines identical to those recorded by Vuk a hundred years later.

Around the middle of the eighteenth century, and under the influence of the manuscript *Priča* and Sava Vladislavić's Slavic translation, the *Tronoški rodoslov* [*Tronoša Genealogy*] was composed. Like its sources, it too preserves the legend of Kosovo. A comparative study of the *Hronike* [*Chronicles*] of Count Đorđe Branković (a historical text from the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century), of the *Tronoški rodoslov*, and of Orbini's original and Vladislavić's translation reveals great similarities in accounts of the battle of Kosovo. Both the *Hronike* and the *Tronoški rodoslov*, just like Orbini's and Vladislavić's, tell of the duel between Miloš and Vuk and of many other details that show a greater similarity between the *Tronoški rodoslov* and Vladislavić's translation than between the former and Orbini's original text. It is possible to cite other eighteenth-century texts that share features with the manuscript *Priča*: Pavle Julinac's *Kratkoe vvedenie v istoriju proishoždenija slaveno-serbskago naroda* [*A Short Introduction to the History of the Origin of the "Slavenosrpski" Nation*] (1765) and Vasilije Petrović's *Istorija o Černoj Gory* [*The History of Montenegro*] (1754).

In folk poetry, Kosovo became "tip bojnog polja, razbojišta, pa i saborišta za raspravljanje svih značajnih pitanja narodnoga života našeg" ["a

symbol of the battlefield, the scene of combat, and even of the assembly ground for debating all the important matters of Serbian national life”] (Kostić 1939:1-2). From two different historical events that occurred at different times—the two battles of Kosovo in 1389 and 1448—two different Kosovo cycles arose, as Dragutin Kostić has noted. In collections of folk poetry, one can distinguish between the poems about the battle of 1389 and those about the battle of 1448. In the creation of the legend, confusion arose between the actual historical events of these two battles. The poems about them can be found in the collections of Vuk Karadžić, Valtazar Bogišić, Bogoljub Petranović, Franz Miklosich, Ivan Franjo Jukić and Grga Martić, Grigorije Nikolić, as well as in various periodicals. The largest number of Kosovo poems about the battle of 1389 appear in Vuk’s collection (Karadžić 1953:194-206, 256-310, 315; 1935:66) and in the collection of Bogišić (Nos. 1, 2, 14). The oldest heroic decasyllabic poems about Kosovo are contained in two manuscript collections: Avram Miletić’s “Istorija kneza Lazara ot Kosova i ot cara Murata” [“History of Prince Lazar, Kosovo, and Emperor Murad”] (1780) and Timotije Nedeljkić’s “Pesma od svetago serbskago kneza Lazara” [“Poem of the Holy Serbian Prince Lazar”] (1812). A comparison of these folk poems with the manuscript *Priča* shows that there are similarities between them and indicates that Vuk’s poems represent a phase in the evolution of the Kosovo legend (Redep 1976:239-69).

University of Novi Sad

References

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Banašević 1935 | Nikola Banašević. <i>Ciklus Marka Kraljevića i odjeci francusko-talijanske viteške književnosti</i> . Skopje: Skopsko Naučno Društvo. |
| Bogišić 1878 | Valtazar Bogišić, ed. <i>Narodne pjesme iz starijih, najviše primorskih zapisa</i> . Belgrade. |
| Dinić 1940 | Mihailo Dinić. “Dva savremenika o boju na Kosovu.” <i>Glas Srpske kraljevske akademije</i> , 182:131-48. |
| Karadžić 1935 | Vuk Stef. Karadžić, coll. <i>Srpske narodne pjesme</i> . Vol. 6. 2nd State ed. Belgrade: Državna Štamparija. |
| Karadžić 1953 | _____, coll. and ed. <i>Srpske narodne pjesme</i> . Vol. 2. Belgrade: Prosveta. |

- Kostić 1936 Dragutin Kostić. "Noviji ["Najnoviji" in Pts. 2 and 3] prilozi proučavanju narodne poezije." *Srpski književni glasnik*, n.s. 47:196-209; 264-80 (2); 356-75 (3).
- Kostić 1939 _____. "Dva kosovska cikla." *Prilozi proučavanju narodne poezije*, 6:1-18.
- Kovačević 1888 Ljuba Kovačević. "Vuk Branković." *Godišnjica Nikole Čupića*, 10:215-301.
- Kukuljević-Sakcinski 1854 Ivan Kukuljević-Sakcinski. "Srpski ljetopis despota Đorđa Brankovića, u prevodu latinskom." *Arhiv za povjestnicu jugoslavensku*, 3:1-30.
- Latković 1954 Vido Latković. Review of Benedikt Kuripečić, *Putopis kroz Bosnu, Srbiju, Bugarsku i Rumeliju 1530*. Trans. by Đ. Pejanović. Sarajevo, 1950. *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor*, 20:333-35.
- Orbin 1968 Mavro Orbin. *Kraljevstvo Slovena*. Trans. by Zdravko Šundrica. Belgrade: Srpska Književna Zadruga.
- Radojčić 1956 Nikola Radojčić. "Slovenski prevod Orbinija u Vojvodini." In *Iz prošlosti Vojvodine*. Vol. 1. Novi Sad: Državni Arhiv AP Vojvodine. pp. 21-31.
- Radojčić 1960 Đorđe Sp. Radojčić, ed. *Antologija stare srpske književnosti (XI-XVIII veka)*. Belgrade: Nolit.
- Ređep 1969 Jelka Ređep. "Motiv izdaje na Kosovu u bugaršticama." *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu*, 12:245-61.
- Ređep 1976 _____. *Priča o boju kosovskom*. Zrenjanin: Filozofski Fakultet, Novi Sad, and Centar za Kulturu, Zrenjanin ("Ulaznica").