

THE BATTLE OF  
KOSOVO 1389

# THE BATTLE OF KOSOVO 1389

AN ALBANIAN EPIC

Anna Di Lello

Translations by Robert Elsie

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Although the Albanian epic refers to the Battle of Kosova, we use throughout this book the name Kosovo, being the standard English designation for the area which currently calls itself Republic of Kosovo.

## Part One

### *Once There Was a Sultan Murat...*

Solibo Magnificent used to tell me: "Oiseau de Cham, you write. Very nice. I, Solibo, I speak. You see the distance? In your book on the watermama, you want to capture the word in your writing, I see the rhythm you try to put into it, how you want to grab words so they ring in the mouth. You say to me: Am I doing the right thing, Papa? Me, I say: One writes but words, not the word, you should have spoken. To write is to take the conch out of the sea to shout: here's the conch! The word replies: where's the sea? But that's not the most important thing. I am going and you're staying. I spoke but you, you're writing, announcing that you come from the word. You give me your hand over the distance. It's all very nice, but you just touch the distance..."

Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnificent*.

## *Introduction*

"Once there was a Sultan Murat..." Thus begins the Albanian epic on the Battle of Kosovo.<sup>1</sup> This is the story of Murat, a Moses-like leader who performs miracles for his people and is destined to die as a martyr, and Kopilig, the daring warrior with magic powers who kills Murat. The historical event that provides the background to this epic is Sultan Murat I's Kosovo campaign in the spring of 1389, culminating in a confrontation with the coalition of Balkan forces led by the Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović.<sup>2</sup> Both the Sultan and the Prince were killed in a battle that apparently ended with no decisive victory in the field, or no immediate outcome, but signaled the weariness of local forces against the Ottomans. Seventy years later the last resistance was finally overcome; Kosovo feudal lords lost their independence to the Ottomans, who established their rule over the entire region.

Compared with the fame of the Serbian epic songs on the same battle – centered on the characters of Prince Lazar the pious, Vuk Branković the traitor, and Miloš Obilić the loyal general and assassin of the Sultan – knowledge of the Albanian epic is scarce. This is no surprise. The Albanian oral tradition has had a profound influence on national history and self-identification, but has not had the same worldwide recognition as the Serbian tradition, for the language itself is not widely known.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the Albanian epic of the Battle of Kosovo has never played the central role that the Serbian myth of Kosovo played since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in building a national and regional identity.<sup>4</sup> Yet, while the Serbian oral tradition seems to have died out in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Albanian oral tradition is still very much alive in Kosovo.<sup>5</sup> Its continuity demonstrates remarkable resilience against modernization, emigration, and even more direct threats: during the Milošević years and in the run up to the war, the Serbian police and army targeted singers and destroyed scholarly institutions where folk culture had been recorded and archived.<sup>6</sup> The oral tradition survived despite of, or

maybe because of, the violent attempt to suppress it. It still adds new productions to a rich body of songs that are legendary tales of individual resistance played against an historical background.

I stumbled upon an Albanian song about the Battle of Kosovo while I was researching the culture of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), the guerrilla group formed in the 1990s to fight for independence from Serbia.<sup>7</sup> In books by local historians I read that Miloš Obilić, the Serbian hero reputed to be the assassin of the Sultan, was instead the Albanian hero Millosh Kopiliq. Evidence of his Albanian origin was to be found in the epic song on the Battle and in folk wisdom, which locates Millosh's birth in Kopiliq, a hamlet in the rural area of Drenica. In Kosovo, current popular history texts, but also school textbooks, have absorbed the oral tradition.

The possibility of an Albanian Kopiliq will come as a complete shock to a wider audience that admires Serbian epic poetry and knows the Serbian hero Obilić. In truth, no historical evidence confirms Kopiliq's Albanian origin, but no evidence confirms Obilić's Serbian origin either. The name Obilić for example, is an 18<sup>th</sup> century invention that two Serbian amateur but influential nationalist historians, Vasilije Petrović and Pavle Julinac, introduced.<sup>8</sup> Obilić reflects the Serbian word *obilje*, which means "abundance." Before then, the assassin of the Sultan had always been known as Kobila, Kopiliq, Kobilić or other versions of that name by the same stem.<sup>9</sup> The root here might be in an old Balkan substrat word, in Albanian *kopil* (child or bastard child), in Romanian *copil* (child) and in Serbian *kopile* (bastard child) or *kobila* (mare, from which *kobilić*, son of the mare).<sup>10</sup> Since then, the medieval character named Kopiliq has only lived in the memory of the Battle of Kosovo among the Albanians.

This book is dedicated to bringing to light the little known Albanian epic poetry on the Battle of Kosovo as one of the neglected voices on that event, but not as an undiscovered "true" story. It is concerned with historiography only insofar as historiography is related to epic. There is certainly no "true" history of the Battle of Kosovo outside the very simple facts that both armies suffered great losses and the two leaders died.<sup>11</sup> On all other aspects of the Battle, including the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Murat and Lazar, the accuracy of historical texts is elusive. Scholars who have studied early Ottoman, Byzantine and Italian sources agree on this. Those

early histories, as written texts, constitute a body of literature with the potential of establishing a hegemonic narrative, but they do not. They contain too many inconsistencies.

One reason for the variety of narratives that early historical sources on the Battle have provided is that the oral tradition, which tells more about the meanings of an event than the actual facts, has been incorporated in these texts, emerged from the texts, or developed alongside them. If it is true that "a good deal of medieval literature drew on popular oral tradition, rather than vice versa,"<sup>12</sup> something similar is also true of medieval history. By nature, oral tradition is made of a plurality of voices that do not crystallize events into a single storyline. Instead, they build memories and provide material for different narrative plots.<sup>13</sup> As historical texts, through memories, fashion events into stories of a certain kind, they have shaped "romantic" national subplots of the Battle of Kosovo.<sup>14</sup> This multiplicity of stories matters, though is not to be equated to the confusing relativism proposed by the unifying and ideological notion that the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević espoused, when he argued: "Today, it is impossible to say what is historical truth and what is legend with the Battle of Kosovo. This is no longer even important."<sup>15</sup>

The purpose of this book is not simply to introduce a wider audience to an official Albanian discourse on the Battle of Kosovo. It is to broaden the focus that has inevitably narrowed the otherwise excellent literature on this subject to two main concerns: debating the hold that the myth of the Battle of Kosovo maintains on the political discourse of the Serbian nationalist elites, and critically distilling historical facts from that myth. Here, the idea is to enrich the understanding of what the Battle of Kosovo meant, or means, to all participants and their progenies. In other words, by truly accepting the fluidity of oral and written sources, this research is a democratic project.

As I tried to collect the many Albanian variants sung of the epic of the Battle of Kosovo – all recorded and transcribed by scholars throughout this past century – I realized that I was doing much more than documenting a largely forgotten folk poetry. This task implied inevitably interfering with the research subject. By searching libraries and conducting interviews with academics, political activists and ordinary citizens, I awakened an interest in the topic where it had been dormant.<sup>16</sup> I placed the different songs alongside other texts on the history and culture

of the Albanian nation and they became a collection, providing a distinct plot. If this reinforces the idea of an uninterrupted and coherent tradition, it is an unavoidable risk. I do not make a fetish out of the scholar's absolute detachment from the subject of research, although I do not practice or defend practicing a partisan loyalty to a particular political ideology.<sup>17</sup> I simply argue that it would be naïve and fruitless to assume the total passivity of the authors and the subjects of research.

What is more important, I hope to enlarge the conversation on two "mnemonic practices" that are attempting to shape a national creed in post-war Kosovo.<sup>18</sup> One is the strengthening of an epic pan-Albanian national story line, punctuated by heroic characters or actions. The claim that the hero who murdered the Sultan in defense of liberty was Albanian establishes historical continuity with a distant past; it is further evidence of the autochthonous presence in Kosovo of an eternal Albanian nation and its dogged resistance against foreign oppressors. The other mnemonic practice is the formulation of a collective religious identity that downplays the Albanians' overwhelming conversion to Islam vis-à-vis their pre-Ottoman culture. Establishing the participation of the Albanians in the 1389 Balkan coalition, both as foot soldiers and commanders, confirms their historical roots in a land that is both Christian and European.

While the themes of resistance and European belonging are not new in the Albanian national discourse, current circumstances in Kosovo have provided a new context for their revival. On February 17, 2008, Kosovo declared its independence.<sup>19</sup> When Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi, the former KLA leader, delivered his speech on that same day in the Parliament, he stood as the symbol of a victorious liberation war. He mentioned the dead, "those who have honored us with their sacrifice," and asked the living to "retell for generations of the joy and pride we now feel, and never forget to teach them to remember the great sacrifices of those who have come before us." Thaçi spoke the lines of a national master narrative focused on the notion of resistance unto death against foreign domination. Thanks to "memory entrepreneurs" like Thaçi<sup>20</sup> – veterans, but also journalists, teachers, politicians, and historians – the fallen KLA insurgents have become the physical embodiment of a continuous heroic history. Through the new institutions of self-government that emerged from the war, memory entrepreneurs turned the private

mourning of families into public, ritual commemoration of the resistance. They borrowed from cultural scripts of the local patriarchal tradition to elevate the dead insurgents to the very core of the nation's life. They demanded that the new generations remember the blood of those martyrs and honor their *amanet* (the ancestors' sworn pledge) to fight for the nation.

There is nothing particularly new in commemorating self-sacrificing heroic figures, which is common to the process of state formation in many other instances and, in the words of Anthony Smith, is the "final sacred foundation of national identity, at once seen and unseen, actively cultivated, and a silent presence."<sup>21</sup> It is also a powerful antidote against the pressure to embrace an amnesic present for the sake of a purported democratic modernity. A case in point is post-war Kosovo, and the demand to forget the dead by its international wardens, in the name of a quick and unreflective reconciliation.<sup>22</sup> To paraphrase Italian historian Leonardo Paggi, the dead count for how a national collectivity perceives itself and goes on living, but there is no better way to defend their memory than to understand, both critically and empirically, the modes in which they are recomposed in the collective imagination.<sup>23</sup> Reconstructing how the heroic dead came to become the foundation of the new state of Kosovo does not intend to deny their actions. On the contrary, it secures their memory, by enlarging it.

Among all the heroes of the Albanian national resistance, Drenica's martyr Adem Jashari is the most prominent. On Independence Day, Thaçi made a special mention of Jashari's role in the liberation of Kosovo and angered those, in Parliament or outside, who revere instead the pacifist leader and late President Ibrahim Rugova.<sup>24</sup> Known as the *komandant legendar* (legendary commander), Adem Jashari was killed along with most members of his family during a three-day siege of his house in 1998. In the immediate aftermath of this massacre he acquired iconic stature as a symbol of the heroic resistance that liberated Kosovo from Serbian oppression, suddenly minimizing the dominant discourse and practice of a Gandhian opposition to Belgrade. A native of Drenica, an isolated and rural area traditionally antagonistic to the central state, Jashari is the latest in a long roster of local resistance figures, starting with Kopilq.<sup>25</sup> This lineage is not coincidental. Because of the overlapping of territorial and kinship principles that characterizes the customary patriarchal



culture of Kosovo, Jashari is to be understood as the contemporary heir to Drenica's rebellious people. It is in this context that the discourse on the Albanian origin of the medieval hero named Kopilijq needs to be first located.

The Albanian assassin of the Sultan plays a double role in post-war Kosovo: he is not only the protagonist of a heroic past, he is the marker of a Christian and European identity. Since the issue of political status became the object of negotiation, after the end of the 1999 NATO war against the now defunct Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY),<sup>26</sup> Kosovo's viability as a state has been put to multiple tests. Even after declaring independence, full statehood will impinge on the ability to demonstrate that the country does not need international wardens anymore. Kosovo must prove not only its economic and institutional functionality, but also its "Europeanness," or adherence to the cosmopolitan values that define liberal democracies.<sup>27</sup> As a reaction to these challenges, the dominant Albanian intellectual and political discourse has argued that the Albanian nation already belongs to Europe, despite centuries of Ottoman occupation and a purported "tardiness" in catching up with western modernity: Albanians are one of the oldest European Christian nations and they can bracket 500 years of their Ottoman past as a temporary interlude. This argument rests on the classic notion of Europe as a tradition of deep cultural difference vis-à-vis the oriental Muslim "other." Not surprisingly, it is also polemically used in the dispute over who can legitimately claim Kosovo's historical ownership. In fact, the political mythology of *antemurale christianitatis* (outer battlement of Christianity) is the symbolic field on which Kosovo sovereignty has been debated and continues to be debated more forcefully.<sup>28</sup>

Milošević's war frenzy fed on the promise to retake Kosovo from its Muslim occupiers and the same promise has been the underpinning of the post-Milošević leadership's rhetoric. This persistent depiction of Albanian and Serbian competing interests over Kosovo in religious overtones has found allies within the broader scheme of a "clash of civilization" between Christianity and Islam.<sup>29</sup> It acquired even more credibility after 9/11 and the 2005 bombings in Madrid and London, when a mode of Europe's self-representation that stresses communal identity has successfully competed with the notion of a cosmopolitan Europe.<sup>30</sup> This might explain why Serbia's extraordinary claim

of historical rights on Kosovo as a Christian, ancestral land, goes almost always undisputed in western diplomatic and intellectual circles.<sup>31</sup> It also explains why, struggling to counteract that claim, Albanians have felt compelled to state the authenticity of their European belonging through identification with Christianity. Participation in the Battle of Kosovo under the banners of the Christian lords is one important piece of evidence of the Albanians siding with the "right camp;" it identifies Albanians as well as the "guardians at the gate." It follows that the subjection to Ottoman rule after the Kosovo defeat takes the form of something Albanians were forced to experience, but never really embraced.

This book focuses on how mnemonic practices converge in the epic of the Kosovo Battle, at this particular moment in history, to reveal the dynamics of an Albanian collective memory construction and of the struggle to impose continuity and homogeneity on the past. The silence of most Albanian commentaries on the figure of the Sultan in the epic of Kosovo,<sup>32</sup> for example, can be explained by an overwhelming concern with defining the Albanian nation as Western and Christian. In the songs, and presumably in the popular understanding of Ottoman Kosovo, Murat cuts a saintly and sympathetic figure as a benign and pious Muslim Sultan: he is referred to as *baba* (father sultan).<sup>33</sup> Today, the official Albanian national discourse harbors ambivalent feelings toward Islam and neglects the memory of the Sultan or Islamic cultural themes. Revamping the story of an Albanian murderer of the Sultan is more consistent with the task of building the identity of the new European state of Kosovo on a pre-Islamic Christian past.

Yet, the story that one listens to (reads in our case) in the Albanian songs of the Battle of Kosovo contains more than a linear tale of Christian and Albanian heroism. This body of folk artistic creation describes and celebrates open rebellion, but also displays an internal contestation of this choice from those who prefer a different path. In it, we find different forms of resistance: adaptation through negotiation with an overwhelmingly more powerful ruler is one. Islam appears as brought in from afar, but is defined as a benign force that makes the imperial occupation of Kosovo bearable, and integration possible. Certainly, a mutual course of accommodation and negotiation between the local communities and the central authorities was part of the

Ottoman experience among Albanians.<sup>34</sup> It allowed the creation of autonomous spaces and the maintenance of traditional structures of power, without hindering the assimilation and cooperation of local elites.<sup>35</sup> The memory of these alternative experiences – whether under Ottoman or, later, Yugoslav rule – is exactly what the post-war master narrative, focused on heroic resistance, is trying to suppress.

I hope to provide a critical understanding of this process of memory construction and propose to enlarge the memory of the past. As Albanian analyst Fatos Lubonja has always eloquently argued, deconstructing a national creed is a democratic project<sup>36</sup> and is badly needed in the new state of Kosovo. But not at the cost of forgetting the “fundamental orality” of Albanian societies in order to pursue some abstract and empty ideal of democracy as modernity. In his reflection on the modern art of the novel, Milan Kundera points to the French-Caribbean writers of the Martinique as successful interpreters of local oral heritage and creators of world literature; they brilliantly managed the gap between their oral tradition and the “written expression pretending to be universal-modern (sic),”<sup>37</sup> without trying to combine them or prefer one to the other. They just “touched the distance” between orality and writing (to paraphrase the words of the story-teller Solibo Magnificent to the ethnographer-writer<sup>38</sup>), remaining aware of the particularities and biases of each form, and turned this awareness into vigilance against both forgetfulness and the straightjacket of existential memory. I take this model as an inspiration and a guide to discuss the Albanian oral tradition on the epic of the Battle of Kosovo.

### *The Historian's Record:*

#### *Albanian Protagonism in the Christian Camp*

Because Albanians sing the hero's geste and because he comes from the Albanian village of Kopilq, Albanian historians have no doubt that Millosh Kopilq was Albanian. They find broad corroboration of this theory in early Ottoman chronicles of the Battle of Kosovo that place Albanians in the Christian camp. In fact, Albanian scholars' traditional concern has been to establish the historical record of this participation, against those who

either overlooked it or denied it altogether. They have invented an original narrative, by adding oral sources to written chronicles about a poorly documented past. This does not mean that there is a Macpherson among Albanian professional historians; although Albania is as “invented” as Scotland, there is no act of forgery to support a particular story line for national history.<sup>39</sup> If Albanian historians have a fault, it is their failure to maintain a critical approach to their sources.

The development of an Albanian scholarly tradition of historians is relatively recent and tightly linked to a project of national legitimization. While a loose international network of Albanian-speaking intellectuals began to develop a national narrative in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, professional historians were absent. Only after WWII did the Enver Hoxha regime start to train the scholars who would take up the task of writing Albanian history and, from the outset, the profession was strongly influenced by an authoritarian project of state building; political circumstances kept Albanian historians absorbed by issues of national identity. This does not mean that their work does not yield reliable information. The first volume of the history of Albania that first appeared in 1959 concerns the period from antiquity through the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and is a major enterprise based on a serious examination of Greek, Latin, Byzantine and Turkish sources. Its emphasis on the autochthonous character of the Albanians as the sole descendants of the Illyrians and on the existence of an Albanian state in the XII century, and the insistence on the Albanian nation as an autonomous entity during the Ottoman epoch, are all elements of a national construction and in the end inseparable from the process of national identification, but not entirely without foundation.<sup>40</sup>

History textbooks published in Tiranë – old and new – dedicate only half a page to the Battle of Kosovo.<sup>41</sup> It is Gjergj Kastrioti's (Skanderbeg) military resistance against the Ottomans – the 15<sup>th</sup> century leader earned the papal commendation of *Athleta Christianitatis* (Athlete of Christendom) – which plays the greatest role in the Albanian national narrative. The 1389 Battle, where Albanian feudal lords feature on the Christian side, is rather notable as one of the first episodes in a long and valiant fight against the invading Turks. This choice of camp is important for a nation that rose to independence from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire only in 1912, with the establishment

## Notes

- 1 Among all the variants known to the author, only Dauti's song (1954) starts with the theme, "Praise be to the Lord Almighty, once there was a Prince Lazar" (1–2). Dauti is the singer whose performance Çetta recorded and published in 1954. In this book, all the quotations from the songs are attributed to the singers, not to the scholars who recorded them.
- 2 The battle took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June of the Julian calendar, the 28<sup>th</sup> in the modern calendar.
- 3 On the lagging fortunes of the Albanian epic songs see the Introduction to the first English translation of Albanian heroic songs by Elsie and Mathie-Heck (2004). Their recording and collection is relatively recent. Earlier research on traditional epic songs of the Albanian communities in Italy was completed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by mostly *arbëresh* scholars and only in Italian (see bibliography in Koliqi 1937). The epic songs popular in the northern Albanian highlands were recorded much later and published in 1937 in Albanian thanks to the work of the Franciscan monks Bernardin Palaj and Donat Kurti. There are subsequent Kosovar collections published in 1952 (Dančeto*vić*) and 2007 (Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës). Between the two World Wars, German Albanologists published a few songs but a major collection is archived in the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature at Harvard (<http://cgs119.harvard.edu/mpc/index.html>). The Albanian section of the Collection is the work of Albert Lord, who conducted research across northern Albania in 1937. However, it is the selection of songs from Bosnia Herzegovina in the same Collection that has attracted the attention of English-speaking scholars. Before the translations by Robert Elsie there are only a few good English monographs on the Albanian heroic songs (Skendi 1954; Pipa 1978 and Kolši 1990). The spread of South Slavic epic songs, beyond local boundaries has a different history (Koljević 1980, 2–5). Starting from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, learned people mostly hailing from Dalmatia began to write down epic poems. These poems then made their way to history texts in Italian and English and came to the attention of major literary figures of the European Romantic movement, from Goethe to Herder and Madame de Staël, at the

- same time that the Serbian linguist Vuk Karadžić published his first collection (1845).
- See Fommet (1990) and Popović (1974/1998) on the Kosovo myth. See also below, page 18, on the reach of the Kosovo myth beyond Serbian nationalism.
- This is true mostly in the Rugova highlands and the areas of Liplje, Deçena and Shkëlq in Bagjara, but also in northern Albania and among some singers in Montenegro.
- Neziri (2006, 1991; Elsie and Marink Fleck (ibid., XIV) more detailed information was gathered from Albanologist Arbana Bushi in November 2008, during a series of conversations on her research on the difficult development of folklore studies in Kosovo.
- Djellillo and Schwander-Sievers (2006a and 2006b).
- On these two Serbian historians see Petrović (1976, 9–13) Vasilje Petrović, the archbishopric of Cetinje is most notable for his aggressive foreign policy and a slim history exonerating Montenegro's continuity as an independent nation from the Ottomans; it was published in Moscow in 1754 to court favour from Russia. Jularić was an amateur historian who nevertheless exerted a great influence on this contemporaries and beyond for being the first Serb to publish a history of the Serbian people (1765) that broke with the medieval chronicles.
- For a clear and short discussion on the etymology of Serbian and Albanian names of the hero, see Malešević (1998, 73–74).
- Kostić (1934/1935, 252); Subotić (1932, 87–88) and Hladick (1936, 231).
- In one interpretation (Piraku 1990), the whole Battle is an invention, a conspiracy conceived by Aljara's son Barleti and Lazar's son Stefan to accelerate the succession. This thesis is proposed also by Kadare (1994, 22) as one of the most plausible accounts of the killing of Murat, a context in which the Battle of Kosovo remains a symbol of brotherhood for all the Balkans.
- Damron (1984, 17).
- My whole research is heavily indebted to the studies on the oral tradition developed by Alessandro Portelli and succinctly presented in an essay on methodology "A/For Alakes (and History) Inferior" (1991, 45–98).
- In Haidan Vilić's discussion on the different terms that the historical narrative takes, the dominant form is the one founded on epic (1973, 7).
- From the speech delivered at Çazimustan on June 28, 1989, on the occasion of the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo: "As I was doing research for this essay as well as reaching at the Kosovo Institute for Journalism and Communication I discussed Kopllig with my students and that same week an unsigned article on the Albanian origin of Kopllig appeared in the daily newspaper *Ligjori*, [Misteri i Serbo-Sheqerari Mitlosh, May 5, 2007]. Although there was not at the time any novel debate on the issue in the press, I subsequently learned that the article was a reprint from a French publication, *Shqip*, but this discovery would not invalidate my observation, as Albanian-speaking journalists do cross state lines easily. In June of the same year an article on Kopllig appeared in the daily newspaper *Zeri* (Drenovli 2006). Finally, in December 2008, during a visit to Feshitina, I was interviewed on the themes of the Albanian epic and the role of myths in Albanian history and politics by Vjehrima Janna for her show *Një Zëri për TV A Voice for You!*. I directed the producer to two singers, Halim Baskova from Shkëmbi and Azem Jahiri from Çorodane. They also appeared on the same show to perform a fragment of the song on the Battle of Kosovo, learned from Halim's uncle Riza Bliça, a famous rhapsodist. For many in the audience, that was the first time they had heard the song, as I was told after the show was broadcast.
- Portelli (ibid., but also elsewhere in the same volume, 29–44) forcefully and in my opinion successfully, argues in favor of such disclaimers.
- "Mnemonic practices" is a better term for what is more commonly called collective memory (Chick and Robbins 1998). Portelli (1996, 101–102) provides a very straightforward definition of the social and political aspects of memory construction based on myth and folklore (exemplary stories), delegation (one subject telling the story), and institutions (an abstract subject that organizes memory and rituals).
- This decision was quickly recognized by the US and major European countries, but was hotly contested by Serbia and Russia. I borrow, here and elsewhere (Djellillo and Schwander-Sievers 2006a, 514) the notion of "memory entrepreneurs" from Elizabeth Yellin to indicate those actors who struggle over memories and "seek social recognition and political legitimacy of one (their own) interpretation of narrative of the past" (2003, 33–34). The term memory entrepreneurs does not necessarily imply bad faith, just emphasizes the active pursuit of a political goal through memory construction and institutionalization.
- Smith (2003, 218 and ff.).
- On the active role of the international warlords in Kosovo to promote forgetfulness of the past and "reset" the history of Kosovo to the year 0 of NATO intervention, see Djellillo and Schwander-Sievers (2006a).
- Paçali (1999, 13).
- The oldest survivor of the Jashari family, Riza, was seized in Partion and recognized by the Prime Minister as a guest of honor. The Rugova family was not equally acknowledged, although

- President Farmi Sejdiu did mention both Jasenovac and Kosovo in his speech and the Prime Minister followed suit in his second address to the Assembly.
- 131 Lelito and Schwanderer, *Sievers* (2006b), 183.
- 132 In 1999 what had remained of the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia, including the two provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, and Montenegro) changed its name into FRY. In 2003 it became known as Serbia and Montenegro, and since the referendum on independence in Montenegro (2006) it has been renamed Serbia.
- 133 A European Partnership Action Plan is being put in place and implemented under the *aegis* of the office of the Prime Minister and the United Nations Mission to Kosovo (UNMIK). Progress is tracked and monitored on democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities as well as economic regulation and European standards on internal market, sectoral policies, and justice (<http://www.eunis.com.org/npb/04/PMA%202007eng.pdf>). Kosovo must fulfil standards that converge with the membership criteria laid down at the June 1999 European Council in Copenhagen.
- 134 Membership requires that candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union" (Excerpt from the Copenhagen Presidency Conclusions, 1993).
- 135 The use of this political mythology is not unique to Kosovo but has played a distinct role in other national discourses within former Yugoslavia & points to the one has also partaken in a self-understanding as a champion of Europe and Christianity, an image which has frequently appeared in the Croatian media during the Yugoslav war, when the country felt abandoned and betrayed by Europe. See Jaksic (2003), 501.
- 136 Under the tenure of Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, a reference campaign conducted by the Serbian government, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and a number of aggressive proxies has tried hard to spread an image of Albanians as the next recruits by the global *Uffat*. This intense anti-Albanian lobbying has been waged particularly on the Internet. See among many <http://www.srbijainform.com>, <http://www.srbijainform.net>, [www.kosovawar.net](http://www.kosovawar.net). In 2007, the Serbian Orthodox Church has sought and gained allies in Washington DC among the religious right of Pat Robertson and the late Jerry Falwell. See also Djansez, "US Evangelists join the late Jerry Falwell: See this Diocese," *The Financial Times*, 6 November 2006.
- 137 On the role of the battle of Kosovo in founding competing national narratives that present themselves as "European" and "Western" as opposed to "Eastern," see Djalilovic (2007).
- 138 See "Introduction," Djalilovic ed., (2006).
- 139 Notable exceptions are Skeriat (ibid.), Phoca (2004), and Shala (1982).
- 140 Ibid., 39; Bogdan, 33; Kabashi, 11; (Jakovic, 2; and Metia, 21. Else notes that the Albanian word *Albani* - (Latin: *Imperialis*), to designate the Sultan and to be contrasted with *King*, which instead means "Christian King" (Jakovic, ibid., 228) - is almost never used to refer to the Sultan, who is usually *koba* (father). Always in Jasenovac we read that "Abdurehman Albanians feel very strongly that the sovereign is the father of his people. They frequently assert that 'Turkish sultans married European wives, and it told that they married their own subjects, they are revolted, thinking such marriages incestuous.' Significantly at the height of the local rebellion against Istanbul after the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the Sultan was still referred to as a sympathetic figure. As the Albanians sang that they had been betrayed by the Ottoman Empire (see Çetina, 1981), they expressed anger at the Sultan who had treated them as pawns to keep his power in the Balkans, but felt betrayed only by his emissary Mehmet Ali Pasha, who is called Abagjan, German or Christian.
- 141 In his research on the Ottoman frontier, historian İsa Hani (2003) convincingly focuses on this dynamics of power.
- 142 See Çetina (2007) for her rich discussion of both regional and historical articulations of social and political relations in the Albanian-speaking world under the Ottomans.
- 143 See Labadie on his project of reconstruction of national communism and national myths (2004, 109). This is also not a particularly Albanian issue. It will suffice here a reference to newly published Pagaritsh, among others, clearly formulates the relationship between democracy and democratic memory in the context of the lively debate among historians and politicians of the construction of the Italian post-WWII national narrative based on the anti-fascist resistance.
- 144 Berozovic, Çetina, and Çetina (1990, 96).
- 145 Çetina, *idem* (1996, 27, 28).
- 146 In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Janina Maqbeson used Catholic ballads in Serbian to write an "epic" which he presented as original to the Serbian Highlands. He claimed that the Catholic inhabitants of Scutari did not come from Ireland, but were autochthonous Albanians from the Roman times. Reverend John Maqbeson, minister of Skut, confirmed the existence of this Celtic Homer. It took a century to unmask the fake epic and history of the Maqbesons (Clever Paper 2008, 75-188).
- 147 Pajtim Budaç, Jasenovac Island (1979). On Albanian historiography, see Pajtim (1987, 142-43). Pajtim Budaç

What many other Albanians know and think that needs to be known is just Kopitig's Christian identity, discarding altogether the saga of the local hero and even more the story of the Ottoman Sultan. What they remember from the songs and the folk tales is a distilled "historical" knowledge confirming what they want to know about their past, or their autochthonous and Western origins. The rest is ironically received as primitive and irrational. They do not acknowledge that the alternative history in which they recognize themselves is founded exactly on what they perceived as being primitive; that is, the folktales of the oral tradition.

I dealt above with the reasons for a political use of the Albanian oral tradition on the Battle of Kosovo. In Kosovo, the task of state formation within a European framework that a priori defines the Ottoman Albanian past as alien to its tradition has acquired paramount urgency. There has been a genuine attempt by Albanian historians to establish some historical truth to the 1389 events that have negatively and violently marked their modern relationship with the Serbian state in Kosovo and have come to signify the end of the Christian era among Albanians. The oral tradition has provided support to this endeavor with its connection to the memory of past generations. But the result has been mixed, with the production of a narrative that reduces, rather than expands, the rich popular tales on the Ottoman experience. What is necessary, to paraphrase Labonja, is to use more critical introspection in order to avoid both models imported from the outside, and the heroic models of national mythology.<sup>22</sup> Recovering the oral tradition in all its richness could be a first step in the right direction.

## Part Two

### *The Albanian Variants of the Song of the Battle of Kosovo*

A selection of Albanian-language Songs of the Battle of Kosovo as sung or recorded between 1923 and 1998. The Albanian texts are given here in the original orthography of the period, and are accompanied by an interlinear English translation.

## Variante 1: Ćiša Elvezović 1923

- 05 Af'ish kon sultan Murat.  
 Afir ovdes kish pas nar  
 E' jashn ekish haf,  
 E' m'ish ra pr me jet.  
 Ni ondra ekish shue,  
 Ondra gjuoin ja ka ndzin.  
 Ky soltani m'ish kon tshue,  
 Yet me veti tv okufue.  
 Opet ovdes ekish nar.  
 E' m'ish ra pr me jet.  
 Opet ondra i ka shue,  
 E'dhe ondra gjuoin ja ka ndzin.  
 Ky soltani m'ish kon tshue,  
 Nomon e vet ekish thir.  
 15 "Ti, be nar, tshka met kalldzue,  
 Qe di ondra q' pa m'even mne."  
 "Kallizo onah, be elaf," i ka thom.  
 "Dy orla nu mi ka andh,  
 N ka djahtu oi ka ra.  
 20 "Je ton udizat prej qeli n nok jon ra:  
 "Jon ode tok jon bashue."  
 Homa dielli n det ishin ra.  
 "Merli kofe, be elaf," i ka thom.  
 Kue ma fifti Zoti sabahin.  
 25 Qyr tsu boui sultan Murat:  
 "Tshoj e thirke dme rakhrudzhin.  
 Tshoj e thirke ket sheslanin.  
 Tshoj e thirke sadrazemin.  
 Tshoj e thirke dzhahon serasgerin."  
 30 Se te kate kshan tshue,  
 Se tu morei bokan shue:  
 "Tshka don, bab, q' na kis thir?"  
 "I ni ondr ekon pa."  
 35 Jo rakhr me ma bou.  
 "Kallizo ondrin, sultan! Kon thom.  
 Nis sultan! Ondrin me kalldzue!"

## Variante 1: Ćiša Elvezović 1923

- 05 Once there was a Sultan Murat.  
 When he finished his ablutions  
 And he said his evening prayers,  
 He then went to bed for sleeping.  
 He fell asleep and started dreaming,  
 From his sleep a dream awoke him,  
 So the sultan stirred and got up  
 From his bed, and started thinking.  
 10 Once again he did ablutions,  
 Then returned to bed for sleeping.  
 And again he started dreaming,  
 From his sleep a dream awoke him,  
 So the sultan stirred and got up.  
 To his mother did he call out:  
 15 "Mother dear, what can you explain  
 To me two dreams I've been dreaming?"  
 "Tell the dreams, boy," said the mother.  
 "In them did arrive two eagles,  
 And they perched on my right shoulder.  
 20 All the stars fell from the heavens,  
 Fell to earth and there did gather."  
 Sun and moon plunged in the ocean.  
 "Good news, son," replied the mother,  
 When the Lord brought back the morning.  
 25 Look how Sultan Murat acted:  
 "Go and call the dream exegete,  
 (Go and call the Sheh-Iskani,  
 Go and call the Ćirand Vezir,  
 Go and call the army general."  
 30 All four of them were awakened,  
 And they hastened to the sultan.  
 "What is it you want, oh father?"  
 "I have had a dream while sleeping.  
 You must now explain it to me."  
 35 "Tell your dream," they urged the sultan.  
 And the sultan started telling:

35 "Dy orja bledhën në këmbë,  
 Në këmbë e më në këmbë,  
 Të rin udhëzoi prej qeli në tok jon ra,  
 40 Tive në tok jon bashkue,  
 Dua, delli në det o ra."  
 Durrësba i thombe dime rakibdzhiu:  
 "Dua orja që t'kan adli,  
 45 Se në këmbë që t'kan ra,  
 Don me mar sandzakun e sherit,  
 Jon asqerin don me i bashkue,  
 Se në Kosovë don me daf,  
 50 Her Kosovën don me bo,  
 Vet shërb don me mbet.  
 Tona, delli në det që o ra,  
 Vet shërb don me mbet,  
 55 Pa shërb tona as delli nuk mbet."  
 Durrësba bëri sultani Murat:  
 "Në tona shërb të ligërta ka tshue:  
 60 "Jon asqerin këmbë dhe,"  
 "Jon pashallari këmbë dhe,"  
 "Jon asqerin i kan bashkue,  
 Se në mbetë jon këmbë dhe,  
 65 Durrësba bëri sultani Murat:  
 "Pa këmbë mar sandzakun e sherit,  
 Jon asqer ish këmbë dhe,  
 70 "Ndëron e vëll, tshka në këmbë dhe kallëzue,  
 U në gati jon bo,  
 Se në Kosovë don me daf."  
 75 Asqerin i ka ligër:  
 "Shërbet mi asqer ju këmbë dhe,  
 Durrëska të bë sultani Murat:  
 "A po mbetë, her e vëll,  
 80 Ju pishmon me ju këmbë dhe mi,  
 Mëna, babu i dhimshin jon,  
 Të dhe ropi i dhimshin jon,  
 85 Her e këmbë prej shpije me shkue,  
 Më arshi të më të shpija me ju tëshoj,"  
 Shumë asqer mbetë në këmbë dhe,  
 Këmbë dhe mi ju këmbë dhe,  
 90 Tëshet mi i këmbë dhe,  
 Mëke ulën sultani ka tshue,  
 95

35 "If it there were two white eagles,  
 And they perched on my right shoulder,  
 All the stars fell from the heavens,  
 40 Fell to earth and there did gather,  
 Sun and moon plunged in the ocean.  
 What replied the dream exegete?  
 45 "Those two eagles that arrived and  
 Settled, perched on your right shoulder  
 Came to seize the holy banner,  
 Came to gather up the army,  
 50 Came to set out for Kosovo,  
 Came to occupy Kosovo,  
 Came to give their lives in battle.  
 Sun and moon plunged in the ocean  
 Came to give their lives in battle.  
 55 Sun and moon won't warm without you,  
 Look what Sultan Murat did them!  
 All the towns he telegraphed with:  
 "Bring unto me all the army,  
 60 Bring unto me all the pashas."  
 They assembled all the army,  
 And amassed before the sultan.  
 Look what Sultan Murat did them!  
 65 Lo, he seized the holy banner,  
 And he then approached the army:  
 "Listen, lads, to what I tell you,  
 I've decided I am ready,  
 70 Afoot to march upon Kosovo."  
 Then he counted all his soldiers,  
 Seventy thousand men he numbered,  
 Look what Sultan Murat said them:  
 75 "Listen, lads, to what I'm saying,  
 Should a man here have regrets, or  
 Should your parents be dear to you,  
 Should you children be dear to you,  
 80 Go back home, you have permission,  
 I will pay you to return there."  
 Many soldiers left the sultan,  
 Forty thousand did forsake him,  
 85 Forty thousand did stay with him,  
 On his march the sultan set out,  
 90



- Se tu deti kur o shkue,  
Ngar gjene i ju kan afue.  
Qytetshka boni sultan Murat:  
Me i shtr asqerit n' gjenit  
Foot po i dhuned.  
Duoit n' amin i kish tshue:  
"Kuj, Alla ti qit' bak,  
Ti detyr me t' ma prapish,  
Ilin ti qes asqerit pr' t' thar."  
Edhe Zoti detyr kanullin i kish bon,  
N' te dyon deti ish prapue,  
Me orin n' deti oshit' ij,  
At at on detit koka d'it,  
Kokan unq' me pushue  
(Der tsha foli sultan Murat:  
"A po ndjeu, b'ce cv'lad,  
Ju pishmon n' e ju kush t' ini,  
N'ome, baba dinstan jon,  
Edhe ropi dinstan jon,  
Iz'et ekini p'ej shpije me okrye,  
Me arsy t'et n' shpija n' rshoj,  
Edhe ju am kush k'ini angj,  
Ju lesh vak kush nuk k'ini f'it',  
Ila me veti nuk u d'ue,  
Iz'et ekini p'ej shpije me shkue,  
Se cv'ldhe lufte n'far nuk ka shkue,  
K'heui ju, deti sa so n' sh'et."  
Shtun asqer koka k'rye,  
T'etudhet n' kokan k'rye,  
Veq q' kan mbet n'viti dymdhjet n'it.  
(Der tsha boni sultan Murat:  
Duoit n' amin i ka tshue.  
Qyt' dyan asqerit q' u ka bon  
"Kuj, cv'lad, ju rshka po thom?"  
Qyt' asqerit shka ju ka thom:  
"A po ndjeu, more bab,  
Na pishmon kur n'po nuk jemi,  
Na kur Zoti mos na d'it p'ej teje,  
Na arat kur a kemi ongj,  
Na besh vak' s' kemi jon ju f'it',  
Na me v' d'ue n' cv'ld'ek."

- When he came upon the ocean,  
Ships and vessels drew near to him,  
I took what Sultan Murat did then,  
Putting his men in the vessels,  
Did he feel so sorry for them,  
Raised his hands to the Almighty?  
"Allah, oh thou God of Justice,  
Pull the ocean back and let me  
Over dry land lead forth the army."  
And the Lord did hear his pleadings,  
From both sides pulled back the waters,  
With his troops he crossed the ocean,  
When he reached the other coastline,  
Did he pause to rest his army?  
Look what Sultan Murat said then:  
"Listen, baba, to what I tell you,  
Should a man here have regrets, or  
Should your parents be dear to you,  
Should your children be dear to you,  
Go back home, you have permission,  
I will pay you to return there,  
You who've eaten foods forbidden,  
You who've not prayed for five hours,  
You who've not prayed for five hours,  
I don't want to have you with me,  
Go back home, you have permission,  
For with you will fail the fighting,  
Go back over the waters flood in.  
Many soldiers did return home,  
Eighteen thousand homewards ventured,  
With the sultan stayed twelve thousand,  
Look what Sultan Murat did then,  
Raised his hands to the Almighty,  
Listen to his exhortation:  
"Well, what do you say my fighters?  
I lead the army, what if answered:  
"Listen to us, Father Sultan,  
We have no regrets to be here,  
May the Lord ne'er separate us,  
We've not eaten foods forbidden,  
We've prayed in the last five hours,  
We are ready to die with you."

- Qyt' sultanit' koka ishue,  
 Me asqer ish anahue,  
 120 M'u avdes asqerit' eka mar,  
 M'haden l'utem i kan nis,  
 S' muke me eprit' kurund,  
 Af'ish i m' Selamk,  
 125 Ait' e' yit, tv' ehtue,  
 Se ne Shkup kokan shkue,  
 Ish k'iku s' m'ishin me e prit,  
 Se ne Shkup kur' jon if,  
 Jon ungj me pushue,  
 130 N'i rek ngat' ish kon q'lhue,  
 N'i moli ni asqer eka pa,  
 Se qat' moli asqerit' ekish mar,  
 Vesj' ni ere ekish k'afshue,  
 135 F'ahue me d'zhep e ka s'rit,  
 "Jala" bojsin, kokan ishue,  
 Jon ndr' yet' jon allashtis,  
 Opet' l'utem ja kan nis,  
 L'ut'e m'ahue sham ish bo,  
 140 Tim e m'egull' Zoti ekish bo,  
 Shum asqer sh'cit' i kan mbet,  
 Kur' jon if u gryk' k'atshankut,  
 L'ut'e m'ahue sham ish bo,  
 Ish s' pomudet' sultani kur'go me bo,  
 145 Sham sh'cit' i kan mbet,  
 A'het sh'cit' sh'cit' anit,  
 Sh'cit' anit me g'ijit' n'ijn,  
 A'het sh'cit' sadrazeni,  
 Sadrazeni me g'ijit' birin,  
 150 Por asqerit' jon l'oll,  
 Tim e m'egull' Zoti ekish bo,  
 Ish shoj shojin nuk po i shojin,  
 Qyt' Is'ka hani sultan M'uratit'  
 Duet' u amit' ekish ishue:  
 155 "O, Alla, ti q'je l'ub,  
 T'i ket' m'egull' i ma prap'ish,  
 I ha ti sho asqerit' ku i kom,  
 Zary m'jegulla ish papue,  
 Jon asqerit' n'ere e ka ruhue,  
 "A in l'oll, bre e'v'ad,

- 120 Look at how the sultan rose up,  
 Praising Allah with the army.  
 When they finished their ablutions,  
 They at once set off for battle.  
 Nowhere pausing for refreshment,  
 Till Salonika they entered.  
 125 Forward, toward, into battle,  
 On to Skopje did they travel,  
 Stopping nowhere on their journey.  
 Till they entered into Skopje,  
 There he paused to rest the army:  
 130 Close beside them was a river,  
 There a soldier glimpsed an apple.  
 And the soldier took the apple,  
 Only once he bit into it,  
 Then he stuffed it in his pocket.  
 "Let's get going," so they set off,  
 135 (One another praising Allah,  
 Once again they left for battle,  
 And it was a mighty battle.  
 Dust and smoke arose around them,  
 140 Many soldiers fell in fighting,  
 When Kraganik George they entered,  
 Was the fight there even stronger,  
 And the sultan could not stop it.  
 Many fellows died in battle,  
 145 Shieh-Islami perished fighting,  
 Shieh-Islami and his nephews,  
 Died in fighting the Grand Vizier,  
 The Grand Vizier and his son.  
 Mortal was the army fighting,  
 150 Dust and smoke arose around them,  
 Men could not see one another,  
 Look what Sultan Murat did then,  
 Raised his hands to the Almighty:  
 "Allah, oh thou God of Justice,  
 155 Pull back all the smoke around me,  
 Let me see where stands my army!"  
 All at once the smoke was lifted,  
 Murat gathered up his army,  
 "Are you weary, my brave fighters,

- 160 "Aini mizat, a ini mbet e hum shoit?"  
 "S kemi fol, bab s jemi mizat,  
 Shum shoit neve na kan mbet,  
 Mbret shoit shetfajni,  
 Shetfajni me gjith njiin,  
 Mbret shoit sadrazemi,  
 Sadrazemi me gjith birin,  
 Fort sultanit ja u kishin dhimit,  
 fese n Zori kish bo:  
 "Une luftem s kom me ndal,"  
 Ter boet gjaka deri gu." 170
- Qytetsha thanke sultan Murat:  
 "A po ndgoni, bre ev'ad," u kish thon,  
 "Ju hak t ni kush kini grom,  
 Damm m one ju kish thon,  
 Se neve lufta mbar nuk na shkon,  
 Ju besh vak' kush nuk kini fol,"  
 Damm m one se edhe nbar  
 I lufta nuk na shkon:  
 Qytet asqer i kan fol:  
 "Na hak t u nuk e kemi ngrom,  
 Besh vak' s kemi fol pa fal,"  
 N' asqer qytetish kan dar:  
 "I ni moll, bab, ekom gjert,  
 N' rek isikon ty eshkuo,  
 I qat moll ekom mar,  
 Veq mjer ekom kashue,  
 Se n dzhep tok ekom." 185
- Qytetsha thanke sultan Murat:  
 "Mjeri rekën, bre ev'ad," u kish thon,  
 "Pjeret rekës me shkue,  
 E qat moll ju me gjert,  
 T' zotit molës me i kalldzues,  
 Ju allahin me ju lyp,  
 Ju allah mos ju bofi,  
 Ju epni gromi aj sa t lyp." 195
- Papier rekën ekan mar,  
 E dhe molën e kan gjert,  
 N' stom t rekës molja ish kom,  
 Zoti ju e molës ekan gjert,  
 Qytet qytetsha ikan thon: 200
- 160 "I had pressed, have we many losses?"  
 "We're not weary, father Sultan,  
 Of our men have many fallen,  
 Shoh-Islami is among them,  
 Shoh-Islami and his nephews,  
 Died in fighting the Grand Vizier,  
 The Grand Vizier and his son."  
 Sorry felt the sultan for them,  
 Swore an oath to the Almighty:  
 "I will not get through this war till  
 Blood is flowing round our kneecaps."  
 Look what Sultan Murat said then:  
 "Listen, lads, to what I'm saying,  
 If some of you fruit have eaten  
 of your comrades' toll, then stay here,  
 For the war's not going well now.  
 Those who've not prayed for five hours,  
 Step aside because the fighting  
 Is not going well among us."  
 To him did the army answer:  
 "No forbidden fruits we've eaten,  
 We've prayed in the last five hours."  
 Then one soldier did step forward:  
 "I, oh sultan, saw an apple,  
 As we rested at the river,  
 And I plucked and took the apple,  
 Only once I bit into it,  
 Here it is, it's in my pocket."  
 Look what Sultan Murat said then:  
 "To the river, lads," he cried out,  
 "Go back down beside the river,  
 Find for me that apple tree and  
 Tell what happened to its owner.  
 Beg forgiveness of the owner  
 If the man will not forgive you,  
 Give him money as he wishes."  
 Down the hillside to the river  
 They returned and saw the apple  
 Tree upon the riverbank and  
 Found the owner of the orchard.  
 Look at what they told the owner: 200

- 204 "Šta ni mošta keni mar,  
"Ti alho! a po ni ebon?"  
"Teh," the "mošta alho!" ja u kish bor,  
205 "Ja sa dnošt grosh," i kan rbon,  
"Ti me pure me na shir,"  
"Ish me pure nuk ja u shes,  
Veq u ni bofi meri sadrazen,"  
210 Qyr rha, meri i kan kallazue:  
"Še alho! molen nuk na eboni,  
As me grosh nuk na eshti,  
Veq, parha, u mbofi meri sadrazen,"  
215 "Škoni," meri u ka rbon,  
"Aro kta me na pure,"  
koken shue, e kan mas,  
E ni meri ekan tshue,  
Sadrazen meri eka bo,  
220 Mishonai ja ka ngfi.  
Qyr tshka meri u ka rbon:  
"Shengoni, bre e'jad," ja u ka rbon:  
Qyr asqeri koka shtrigore,  
225 Ton avdes paska nar,  
Ton ndr veri jon alhoie,  
Mo njer lufren ekan nis,  
Ish bekand Shkai's munder me qrit,  
230 Še o Çolosh kor koken ra,  
Ish bekand uq nuk pagjojin,  
Kort asqeri eci jon loli,  
Qyr meri i kan kallazue:  
235 "Jon na eci jeni loli,  
Bekand uq nuk pagjojin,"  
Qyr meri tshka kish boi:  
"Dort n amu ekish tshue:  
240 "Ja, Alla, ti q'i je haki!  
"Ti ni uq me na fa!",  
Se me dori ni gunt kish ra,  
Me jesi Zoni uq ja kish fa!  
245 Jon asqeri uq ekan pi,  
E adant uq ekan pi,  
Kdhe rhar uq pa pi,  
Ahr avdes aky ekan mar,  
250 E mmarzin ekan fa!"
- "From this tree we stole an apple,  
And we now beg your forgiveness."  
"I will not forgive the apple."  
"Ask your price in compensation,  
205 We will pay for it in money."  
"I will sell you nothing, but I  
Want to be proclaimed Vizier."  
I ask at what they told the sultan:  
"He will not forgive the apple,  
210 Nor will he accept your money;  
He asks to be Grand Vizier."  
"Go," the sultan ordered, "and bring  
Back that fellow here to see me."  
215 Off they went and found the owner,  
To the sultan did they bring him,  
And the sultan made him Vizier,  
On his chest he put some medals,  
220 I look at what Almur said to them:  
"Tind your weapons, lads," he told them,  
And the troops did gird their weapons,  
Then they finished their ablutions,  
225 Asked of one another pardon,  
So again they rose to battle,  
Nowhere did they Shave encounter:  
When they finally got to Çolosh,  
230 Nowhere was there drinking water,  
And of thirst the troops were dying,  
So they murmured to the sultan:  
"We are all so very thirsty;  
235 Nowhere is there drinking water."  
I ask what Sultan Almur did them:  
Roused his hands to the Almighty:  
"Allah, oh thou God of Justice,  
240 Give us but a drop of water!"  
With his fist he bent a boulder,  
God at once did give them water,  
All the army drank their fill and  
245 All the horses gulped the water,  
Water flowed and was left over,  
Then they finished their ablutions,  
And completed all their prayers,

245 Aiv' qay kan pushue,  
 Opet asqer bekau tshue,  
 Me jet lufien ekan nis,  
 Irah bekau! Shkau s'omij me prin,  
 Kan jon ra ne Ferizovic,  
 I Jofit mahe shum ish bo,  
 Kuka shk' g'aku uderi gu,  
 Ika rdzue magari me du.  
 250 Ebe Zari dovai(n) k'apull' i kish bo,  
 Bejan vend sultan' i ka shkue,  
 Atli Prishtin kur koka shkue,  
 Aiv' sultan' ish kon dal',  
 255 Qay' ishader i ka ngre,  
 Ikan mar durbi e po kqyr,  
 Tshshavren av po ekqyr,  
 Shat kulla av eksh pa,  
 Shat baliza av' ishin kon.  
 260 Qao kullat meti po i kqyr,  
 Ton frengit k'obat ekshin pas,  
 Pei shogu shqes ekshin pas,  
 Qay' meti sadazemin e ka thir,  
 "Ishka jon kro kulla me ni kallizue,  
 Frengit pei shoj shqes q'i kan?"  
 265 Aiv' meti i kan kallizue,  
 "Shat balize av' jon,  
 D'it pr di metveti llojin,  
 I'it qara frengit ma ekan Pan."  
 270 Qay' meti eksh pas tshue,  
 Mllosh k'opiliq' i ka tshue,  
 "D'x'uat e nomd k'afajere me ni tshue,  
 E reshin me m'abo,  
 275 Ja luf' me me t' kon."  
 Qay' kera Mllosh' i ka shkue,  
 I'ksh mar heret' p'e kon.  
 280 Qay' g'ruoja q'a i kish thot:  
 "Ka-o, Mllosh, heratshka po i kallizot?"  
 Qay' Mllosh' herat i ka kallizue,  
 Se othe meti n' Kosov koka ardh,  
 "Aiv' luf'et' po eip me neve,  
 Ebe alim' ishka e' bej zaf."  
 Qay' g'ruoja Mllosh' i ka thot:

245 When the soldiers were well rested,  
 Did they rise again and muster,  
 Setting off at once for battle,  
 Nowhere did they Slavs encounter.  
 When they got to Ferizaj, did  
 There occur a mighty battle,  
 To their knees in blood they wended,  
 Laden mules and donkeys stumbled,  
 250 Then the Lord their prayers did answer,  
 And the sultan won the battle.  
 When the army reached Prishtina,  
 There the sultan deigned to come forth,  
 While the tents were being raised, and  
 255 Took his field glass out to have a  
 Look at yonder V'igavica.  
 There he noticed seven towers,  
 Seven *balizas* were in them.  
 At the towers gazed the sultan,  
 260 All the towers had their loopholes,  
 In a line were all the loopholes.  
 Then the sultan called his Vizier:  
 "Tell me, what are yonder towers  
 265 With the row of loopholes in them?"  
 To the sultan he did answer:  
 "Seven *balizas* are in them,  
 Fighting one another daily  
 From the loopholes built into them."  
 270 To his feet arose the sultan,  
 Mllosh k'opiliq' informing:  
 "Send the keys of your nine castles,  
 All the keys surrender to me,  
 275 O! I will with you do battle."  
 To Mllosh he sent the message:  
 He received it and did read it.  
 Then his wife, inquiring, uttered:  
 "What's that letter you are reading?"  
 280 Mllosh told her of the letter:  
 "To Kosovo's come the sultan  
 Yearning with us to do battle,  
 I don't know what I should do now."  
 To Mllosh the wife responded:

- 285 "Aia, Afilosh, marak me u bë,  
Se edhe mreti kurgu sun m'beon."  
Ky Afiloshi koka i lufte,  
Çmos vet grushtin ka mshue,  
Tet dhon n'rok i ka qit.  
290 Qary Afiloshi koka tshue,  
Mir atkisë n'shpind ja ka gñe,  
Se në Paj koka shkue,  
Qary krali i ka kallzue:  
"Sutani, n'fishin osh' anlu,  
295 Ap, rha, l'ifti po lyp,  
Qysh po thue?" krali i ka dhon.  
Qary krali kish pas thot:  
"M'a mir resim na me n'be,  
Ise edhe na nuk do me mui me lufte?"  
300 Qare Afiloshi kish pas thot:  
"Kur resim nuk i bonu,  
Pr pa erher, t'be, në Paj!"  
Qary krali tshka kish pas thot:  
"Tidhet tshka me shingue,  
305 I me i vesh, e mir me i mbath,  
Shum duket me ja dhon,  
N'odi t'kut pr me i tshue,  
N'ashta asqerit meja mashue,  
Idhe me i kqyr asqerit qysh i ka."  
310 Aty tshkat i ka shingue,  
Tidhet tshka i minu,  
Shum duket me veti ja ka dhon:  
"Shkoni ju n'odi i mreti," ja ka thon.  
315 "Mëshon asqerit në i mashue,  
Idhe paret asqerit a po ja u marrin,  
Idhe qysh i ka asqerit mreti me na kallzue."  
Qary tshkat koka tshue,  
Ka ji rrypi duket me veti tshu mar,  
320 N'odi i mreti koka shkue,  
Se tri ditë koka s'el,  
Kush me sy tresh nuk po i kqyr,  
Kush me dor tresh nuk i ka grrk,  
As paret nuk ja n'kan mar,  
As me paret nuk s'u kan dhon,  
325 Af'as tri ditë mreti i kan kallzue.

- 285 "Come on, Afilosh, do not worry,  
For the sultan cannot harm us."  
Afilosh was infuriated.  
In the jaw he punched his wife and  
390 fought teeth to the floor did tumble.  
To his feet arose then Afilosh,  
Well his saddle mare he mounted,  
Off to let them did he gallop,  
There he told the king, proclaiming:  
295 "To Pishimas come the sultan,  
Saying he'll with us do battle,  
What to do now?" he inquired.  
To him did the king then answer:  
"If we can't defeat him would it  
300 Not be better to surrender?"  
To him did Afilosh then answer:  
"To him will not surrender.  
Till I run him through, won't give in."  
305 Thus the king did give his answer.  
"Make you ready thirty maidens,  
In fine garments and fine footwear,  
Give them many golden diars,  
To impress the Turkish army,  
310 To deceive the horde of soldiers.  
And to spy upon his forces."  
Thus the maidens were made ready  
Thirty of the finest maidens,  
315 Taking many diars with them:  
"Journey to the sultan's army,  
Try to trick the hordes of soldiers.  
While the soldiers take your money,  
Find out what their army's good for."  
320 To their feet did rise the maidens,  
Taking pains of diars with them,  
Leaving for the sultan's army:  
Taking three full days for travel.  
No one cast his eyes upon them,  
325 No one with his hands did touch them,  
No one stole the money from them,  
No one sold them food for money,  
In three days they told the sultan:

- 325 "Qeshu tshikar krali naka tshue,  
 jui l'ol'uni pr me dek.  
 Na buk's u kemi dhor,  
 As parat s'ja u kemi nar."  
 Qary mreti ja ka thon:  
 "Ejmi buk bre c'jad," u ka thon,  
 "Ara parat kur qjo mos ja u mreti."  
 Qary buk u kan dhor,  
 Kur ni parat nuk ja u kan nar.  
 Qary tshikar kokan khye,  
 Tu Afloshi kokan shue.  
 335 Qary Afloshi po i vet:  
 "Qesh oshu Turku bre?" u ka thon.  
 Qary tshika i kan thon:  
 "Nani dir kemi ndet,  
 Kush me dor nuk na ka prek,  
 Kush parat nar nuk na i ka,  
 Kush me sy kyq nuk na ka  
 Shum asqer mreti kish,  
 Iresh kurgu ju's mundeni me bo."  
 Qary Afloshi tsha u kish thon:  
 345 "Na ni krali kur i shkeqin,  
 Kshu ju krali'r me kallzue,  
 Toxve kryet ume ja u pres,  
 Veq ja krali'r pr me thom:  
 Dergje maqhe asqer u kish na,  
 Isha l'ol' pr me dek.  
 350 Ne asqer na kan kap,  
 E'dhe parat na kan nar."  
 Ale tshika Afloshi koka shue,  
 E' na krali' kok'an dal'  
 355 Qary krali' tshikar po i vet:  
 "Qesh ish 'Turku bre tshika?' u ka thon  
 Qary tshikar ja kan thon:  
 "Dergja maqhe u kish na,  
 Isha l'ol' asqer me dek,  
 E'dhe neve na kan kap,  
 E'dhe parat na kan nar?  
 E'dhe asqer skishu shum bashkue."  
 Qary krali' tsha kish manë?  
 Shum asqerin okesh bashkue,

- 325 "We have come the king has sent us,  
 We are weary of our journey;  
 No one gave us food for eating,  
 No one took our money from us."  
 Then the sultan bade his soldier:  
 "Give them food, lads, be commanded,  
 330 "No one rob them of their money."  
 Thus they gave food to the maidens.  
 No one stole their money from them,  
 So the maidens journeyed homeward,  
 Went back to report to Aflosh.  
 335 Aflosh turned to them and spoke out:  
 "How's the Turk, maid?" he inquired.  
 To him did the maidens answer:  
 "Three days did we spend there with them,  
 No one had a finger on us,  
 340 No one stole our money from us,  
 No one cast his eyes upon us,  
 Hoards of soldiers has the sultan,  
 You're unequal to oppose him."  
 Look how Aflosh then responded:  
 345 "When we to the king do venture,  
 You must talk to him and tell him  
 I will lay all of their heads off.  
 You just tell the king about a  
 A big big plague that struck the army,  
 Say they're weary almost perished,  
 350 We were captured by the soldiers,  
 And the fellows took our money.  
 Aflosh set off with the maidens  
 To the king did they all venture,  
 There the king spoke to the maidens:  
 "How's the Turk, maid?" he inquired.  
 355 "A mighty plague befell the army,  
 They are weary almost perished,  
 We were captured by the soldiers,  
 And the fellows took our money."  
 Then did he have many soldiers,  
 "What was it the king then ordered?"  
 Many soldiers did he gather.

- 365 Ish bo gati me lline,  
 Qazv' Allahi tsha kish thon?  
 "Nal, kahlë, krah," at ekish thon  
 "Se e dhe une duo me shtrigues,  
 I lu tu meri duo me shkue,  
 370 Ma dhasht doren meri,  
 Testim do me ja n bë,  
 Ma dhasht korrën meri,  
 Imdzhar due me i ra,  
 Ky Allahi tsh'kon shtrigues,  
 375 Popartin e kish pas  
 "Popartin bre," i ka thon,  
 "I me une a don me ardh!"  
 Mleqaty kahan shtrigues,  
 N' s'pand arkites ju ka gje  
 380 Se tu meri kur jon shkue,  
 Nibetir Allahshin ekan daf:  
 "Ku po don?" i kan thon,  
 "A tu meri duo me shkue,  
 Nal se meri duo m' i kallzue!"  
 385 Qazv' meri i kan kallzue,  
 Qazv' shu meri kish kallzue,  
 Sheshm' i kan rhou:  
 "Qysh po rhou me ja bon,  
 390 Se Allahi jo na ç'u,  
 Kur i ma hy dëgj me dhou,"  
 A me dhou a mos me ja dhou?"  
 Qazv' Almeri i kan thon:  
 "A Allahi ku kur i na vën,  
 395 Mos jep dëgj veç d' epia korrën,  
 Nal kom tani aly pr me onet!"  
 Aq meri i kan thon:  
 "Ishom Allahshin a llet vën,"  
 E Allahshin tu meri o shkue,  
 400 I shujke korrën meri me i dhou,  
 Ky Allahshin der amzharin ekish pas,  
 Se amzhar meri ikish pa  
 Ipek m'perru kish luvë,  
 Qazv' Allahshin kan vaf:  
 405 A lu arkites o s'pand i ka ar,  
 A luke m'perru pr me shkue

- 365 Made them ready for the battle.  
 "What was it that Allahsh uttered,  
 "Hold your horses, kings," he ordered,  
 "For I too am getting ready,  
 370 I am off to see the sultan.  
 If the sultan gives his hand, then  
 I will gladly pay allegiance.  
 If the sultan give his leg, then  
 I will slay him with my dagger."  
 Allahsh girded on his armour,  
 375 Had a *palatim* go with him,  
 "Oh *palatim*," he requested,  
 "Will you deign to set out with me?"  
 Thus the two men did make ready,  
 380 And their saddle mares they mounted.  
 Soon the sentries captured Allahsh,  
 "Where're you going?" did they ask him,  
 "I am off to see the sultan,  
 385 For I have something to tell him."  
 So they took him to the sultan,  
 I ask in what the sultan did them  
 First he summoned Sheh-I-lanvi,  
 "How should I react," he asked him,  
 390 "For Allahsh has come to see me?  
 Should I shake his hand in greeting?  
 Should I do so or withhold it?"  
 They did counsel Sultan Almeri:  
 "When Allahsh arrives, don't give your  
 395 Hand, but rather kick the fellow.  
 Place him at your feet to grovel."  
 To them did the sultan answer:  
 "Bring in Allahsh, let him enter."  
 Allahsh then approached the sultan,  
 400 While the sultan tried to kick him.  
 Allahsh had in hand his dagger,  
 With the dagger did he stab him,  
 Thus the sultan fell and perished.  
 Allahsh on the spot departed,  
 405 With his saddle mare he mounted,  
 See off swiftly on his journey.



Shum asqeri pe e dikun,  
 Po munden pr me pre,  
 Ishi nuk mishiin ato me pre,  
 Kur jam shkuar Babinova,  
 Si Shkin pake ikishin gjer,  
 Qay Shkines i kan kallzue:  
 "Ishka o, more 'furg' u ka thom,  
 Qay Shkines i kan kallzue:  
 "Ne Mlloshi inveri naka thar,  
 Nuk po mundem na Mlloshin me pre,"  
 Qay Shkin u ka thom:  
 "Kur Mlloshi ju s mundeni me pre,  
 Se iveshin eku osht,  
 Falhe atknjen eka veshuan ekan,  
 Ju" tha "shpuar pr me shru,  
 F'arkines u b'hyzëk me i ra,  
 Se edhe kont me ja pre,  
 Qar ere Mlloshin ju eubzeni,  
 Ju si u d'ushin Mlloshin me endzon,  
 Qyoni tshel'isan aly u mureqan i ka,"  
 Qay asqeri tsho kan ba,  
 Falhe shpuar pe rok ekan slarë,  
 Ka po ikë Mlloshi,  
 Atknjës në b'hyzëk i kan ra,  
 Falhe atknja'sh kan r'lyue,  
 Gj'at Mlloshin ekan d'zon,  
 Podojin kryet me ja pre,  
 Qay Mlloshi tsha kish thom:  
 "Anmer ju po ja u f'a,  
 Qay Shkin pake me ma r'hir,  
 Por shum mall une q' ekom,  
 Anmer u me ja f'om,  
 Falhe kont do f'at me ja thom,"  
 Qay Shkinjen jekun pun,  
 Qay Mlloshi tshka i kish r'hom:  
 "Afom ma ngat, b'ce afi,  
 Se ty tshirak ju me t'ba,  
 Por shum mall sho me i ekom,"  
 Qay Shkin i sh'afine,  
 "Afom ma ngat, se m'vesh  
 D'om oer kallzue."

Many soldiers did pursue him,  
 Many soldiers tried to slay him,  
 But they could not catch and kill him,  
 When they got to Babinova,  
 There they met an old Slav woman,  
 And they spoke to that old woman,  
 "What is wrong, Turks?" she inquired.  
 They responded, saying to her  
 That Mllosh had slain the sultan,  
 "We can't catch and kill the fellow,"  
 To them spoke the Slav woman:  
 "Never will you catch that Mllosh  
 For he's wearing metal armour,  
 And his mare is decked in armour,  
 Lay your sabres on the ground to  
 Slash the mare above the ankles,  
 Slash the mare and cut her legs off,  
 That way you will capture Mllosh,  
 When you've got Mllosh surrounded,  
 The armour key is to his whiskers,"  
 "What is it the soldiers did then?  
 On the ground they laid their sabres  
 Over the route Mllosh was taking,  
 And they slashed the horse's ankles,  
 Thus the mare did topple over,  
 And alive they captured Mllosh,  
 First they sought to chop his head off,  
 What did Mllosh utter to them?  
 "I have one request to make you,  
 Summon forth that old Slav woman,  
 For I'm longing to behold her,  
 I've a final wish to give her,  
 And I have to converse with her,"  
 Thus they brought the Slav woman,  
 Look what Mllosh uttered to her:  
 "Come up closer to me, grandma,  
 For I've got a job to give you,  
 I've got lots of wealth to give you,"  
 Thus the woman did approach him  
 "Come yet closer to me for I've  
 Something in your ear to whisper."

- Kjo Sakuja kur ja ka afrue,  
 Qyr me dhun Ajlosh ja ka ngit,  
 Në Babinover ekish qit.  
 450 Me tej kryet Ajloshit ja kam pre,  
 Qyr tsha boni Ajlosh Koplliqi,  
 Kryet ndër sietulla ekish pas mës,  
 Aje aft, ty eskhuc,  
 Në Sahbanj kur o shkuc,  
 455 Në grom em tshis ishin krom,  
 Ty ofa tsha ishin krom,  
 Qatë Ajloshin ekan pa,  
 Qatë tshika tsha kish thom:  
 "Ej, mori mor, qyre ti qjeri  
 460 Pa krye qysh po ers!"  
 Qatë Ajloshin kish pas foli:  
 "Ej pa krye, edhe ju re dy mbereshi pa sy!"  
 Se ja vend Ajlosh ishen mbet.

\* \* \*

- Se rom popull qi jon bashkuc,  
 465 Se o qitapa ekan qjeri:  
 Me mugi si kish ary me mame,  
 Pa pa krye kudojshi e sabit,  
 Edhe Ajlosh ka pr me urshuc,  
 Neshin kishen me cunave,  
 470 Gati krye kishen ekan mame,  
 Mi qeremide ka ja qitshin,  
 Kudojshi e sabiti paskan kenduc,  
 Edhe Ajloshin ary ishen mbet,  
 Në vend tok o mber Ajloshi,  
 475 Atyqi Zoti ekish foli:  
 Ajiu shum ilash qi ishti.

\* \* \*

- Qyr tsha boni noma sulhan Aturan,  
 Pe sulhan kur kish pas ndije,  
 480 Qe Ajloshi ja ka pre,  
 For sa osh ja kish pas dhime,  
 "Ej, Koser, kish pas rom,"

- When the Slavic woman neared him,  
 With his teeth did Ajlosh grab her,  
 Flung her off to Babinover.  
 450 Swiftly they beheaded Ajlosh,  
 What then did Ajlosh Koplliq?  
 Tucked his head under his armpit,  
 Off he went and fleeing vanished.  
 On to Sahbanj he travelled.  
 455 There a woman and a maiden  
 Who were busy washing garments  
 Caught a glimpse of headless Ajlosh.  
 What is it the maiden uttered?  
 "Mother, mother, look and see that  
 460 Man whos passing us is headless!"  
 Man whos passing us give answer:  
 "To her did Ajlosh give answer!"  
 "Headless I, may you be eyeless!"  
 Thereupon did Ajlosh perish.

\* \* \*

- All the priests for him did gather,  
 465 In their scriptures was it written:  
 If a church you can construct there  
 By the morning, 'er the cocks crow,  
 Ajlosh will be resurrected.  
 470 Thus they started with the building,  
 Had the whole thing almost finished,  
 On the walls one tile was missing.  
 When the cocks crowed in the morning,  
 At that place Ajlosh was buried.  
 475 There into a grave they put him.  
 The Almighty gave them water,  
 Water which had healing powers.

\* \* \*

- What did Sultan Aturan's mother  
 When she heard about the sultan  
 480 Who by Ajlosh had been slaughtered?  
 Greatly did the mother mourn him:  
 "Oh Koser, did she cry out,"

- 484 "Ej, Kosova e shkert," kish pas thom,  
 "Pa çfal qm' paske tim,  
 Berqeti ty bot' uhoft,  
 485 Kush razbet o te mos boft,  
 Edhe kur pa gjak at' mos umart!"  
*Zajv testim, ishkon bo.*

\* \* \*

- 490 Ni ishak om's tshu kish pas thom:  
 "Ku po shkojm, mori mor?"  
 "Ne po dikim prej Torku," i ka thom,  
 "E kur vin ko, mori mor?"  
 "Kur rshatqet Torku si kur ma,  
 Edhe kur boet Tshishavitsa q' i p'ere  
 Sikur na q' po etom.  
 495 Q'at' o' Kosovën opet dom' me mar."

- 485 "Jaoni Kosova," did she cry out,  
 "That has left me without children,  
 Even though you harvest plenty,  
 485 Now none there be blessed with fortune,  
 May none here be too bloodless marriage!"  
 Having said this, did she perish.

\* \* \*

- 490 "What did say the mother's daughter?"  
 "Mother, where can we now go to?"  
 "We must flee the Turks," she answered,  
 "When will we be back here, mother?"  
 "When the Turks, like us, are beaten,  
 490 As it is for us departing,  
 Then we'll take back our Kosova."

(Revised by Janzë Nheue Boikoviq, also known as  
 Ujë Boiku, a rebel from Përvara near Vushtrria and first  
 published by Ujshë Përzovic as "Jedna armatska varnata  
 o Boju na Kosovu," in *Arhiv za narodnu umirnu, jezik i  
 knjevostin*, Belgrade 1 (1923), p. 54-6. Translated from the  
 Albanian by Robert Elsie.)