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THE FEMALE FIDELITY AND INFIDELITY IN THE SHAH ABBAS PLOTS OF THE ARMENIAN FOLKLORE

Key words: plot, motive, fidelity, moral and instructive formula, custom, belief, blood revenge.

Introduction

A number of unique motifs about women make up a significant number of Shah Abbas plots of Armenian epic folklore. In those motifs, the woman is represented by positive and negative manifestations of her character. It is noteworthy that motifs, representing the female theme in the Shah Abbas plots are closely interwoven with the disguised tour of Shah Abbas. The transformed Shah Abbas appears in the center of events, takes a direct part in them, intervenes and directs the actions of the characters. In this article, the plots formed around the contrast of female fidelity and infidelity are examined. The first part of the plot of the tale series under consideration is an episode, representing the domestic life, which is formed around the woman's immoral behavior and the decisive order of Shah Abbas, who witnesses it in disguise. The second part of the plot is also an episode related to the behavior of a woman, which is diametrically

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opposed to the first one and serves as an example to appreciate the positive characteristics of the female sex. One end of the conflict is betrayal and crime, the other one is fidelity, devotion and honor. The contrast between the two parts of the plot leads to an important moral conclusion: the good and the bad, the moral and the immoral cannot be put on the same level, their evaluation standards and approaches should be different.

A Historical Overview of the Folkloric Image of a Woman

In the Armenian folklore tale plots, the woman, as a character of the epic folklore, appears with all the good and bad aspects of her character, virtues and shortcomings, positive and negative deeds. The palette of female characters in folklore plots is very diverse. Conceptions about the diversity of women's nature found their expression in folklore plots. It can be said that it is precisely this piece of knowledge that determines the variety of character manifestations of a female creature or a woman member of society in folklore sources. Therefore, feminine motifs reveal a woman's character as a whole. The development of female characters is also conditioned by the role of women as a member of society and as a member of the family. In this sense, female characters have come a long way in development. The examination of folklore plots shows that in early myths and beliefs, the woman, as the mother-goddess, the pioneer of sedentary life, agriculture, and the formation of the family hearth, occupied a high position in society and was deified. In the course of historical development, as a result of the increase of the role of men and the decrease of the role of women, the rights and role of women have been limited and she has been assigned a secondary role. Due to the historical era, social formation, religious affiliation, women in society did not have equal rights with men. She was assigned a secondary role, that is, her duties were confined to the definition of the mother of the family and household functions.

The everyday life of a woman has been reflected in all genres of fictional folklore. Folkloric manifestations of the female theme, while having a uniform development in different nations, were formed on the basis of national customs, rituals, and household. Stray and transferred plots brought with them the cultural characteristics of other nations, which, being localized, gave a new tone to the folklore tradition of the given nation. In the initial stage of plot formation, the image of a woman met the social requirements of the given period. Along the way

of transmission of the plots, some female characteristics gradually faded and were forgotten. In contrast to that, new features have appeared in accordance with the requirements of the current period of living of the plots. Therefore, the mythological and heroic features of the woman's image have been replaced by the features of a woman in a daily, lowly and servile state. As a result of the reduction of the role of women and the subordinate status as an incomplete member of the society, negative manifestations of the female character have been advanced, that is, cunning, fraud, infidelity, murder, immorality, impudence, etc. With her negative behavior, the woman tried to counteract the factors of social inequality and injustice. Interesting samples of the historical development of the female character are the Shah Abbas plots with the contrast of fidelity and infidelity, in which a woman with heroic qualities is opposed to the image of a negative one.

Feminine Motifs in Shah Abbas Plots

A number of unique motifs representing women in Armenian epic folklore are associated with the name of Shah Abbas. Just as the motif of predestined fate converged on Shah Abbas plots¹ and became a character trait of Shah Abbas himself, that is, an attempt to intervene and oppose a predetermined fate from above, so a number of female motifs also appear directly in the focus of Shah Abbas' actions and are directed by him. The motifs representing the theme of women are the direct consequences and developments of Shah Abbas' disguised tour². The king, becoming superior to the positive or negative actions of women, intervenes and directs them with the authority reserved to him. The most common female motifs in Shah Abbas plots are:

- a) The motif of an unfaithful and criminal woman and the motif of the faithful and devoted woman;
- b) Shah Abbas' motif for re-education of women and girls;
- c) Shah Abbas' motif for eavesdropping on the wishes of the three sisters;
- d) Shah Abbas marries the smart daughter of the peasant;
- e) The motif of a man working with the power and enthusiasm of a woman, whom Shah Abbas puts to the test;
- f) Shah Abbas helps a poor woman. The latter is accused of theft and has her hand cut off, followed by Shah's justice;

¹ Խեմչյան 2017, 160:

² Խեմչյան 2017, 157:

g) Shah Abbas' struggle against female gossip.

Treacherous and Faithful Women in Shah Abbas Plots

Shah Abbas' behavior of putting women to the test, seducing them, pushing them to commit crimes and sins is characteristic of the Shah Abbas plots on women. The plots with a motif of a woman's infidelity and fidelity are the most popular (13 versions from the regions of Artsakh, Syunik, Gandzak, Tavush, Kotayk were used for the study³). The plot scheme with minor differences is as follows. Traveling in disguise with the vizier, Shah Abbas (or the son of Shah Abbas, also called Shah Abbas) is hosted by a young loving couple and at night witnesses the woman receiving a lover (or lovers), who kills the husband or, at his request, the wife kills her husband (in one of the versions, Shah Abbas sees the wife's crime from the window). In another version, Shah Abbas wants to test his wife's love and loyalty and offers her a letter to get rid of her husband and become one of his harem wives - the fortieth. The wife accepts the Shah's offer and kills her husband. Shocked by the woman's inhuman act, Shah Abbas orders to kill all women over the age of five. After this part of the story, a new character appears (the vizier's father, the Shah Abbas' father, the vizier Allahverdi Khan, the king's uncle, the vizier himself, the grand vizier) who tells the king about an incident that happened many years ago, in the days of his youth. At night, an armed rider appears and orders to follow him. He goes to a secluded place (forest, cave, house, walled castle), fights his enemies (demon, dragon (3), bandits (40) and kills them. It turns out that the armed rider is a woman and has avenged for her husband (in variants: fiancé, brother, or brothers (7)). He asks the kidnapped person to bury her and commits suicide. The stories usually end with a moral formula: "Now, long live the Shah, both of them are women, why do you

³ ՀԱԻՐԱ 1945, FFIII: 1535,01-1540,00 («Ամեն կնիկ մին չինիլ»); ՀԱԻՐԱ 1940-1950, FFIIX: 2415,01-2420,00 («Շահ Աբասը»); ՀԱԻՐԱ 1961, FFIIV: 8335,01-8346,00 («Շահ-օղլի Շահաբասը»); ՀԱԻՐԱ 1973-1974, 1975, 9-14 («Շահաբասը հրամայում ա ուրան երկրին օղլուշաղը կուտորին»); ՀԱԻՐԱ 1961, FFIIV: 0463,01-0465,00 («Ալահվերդի խանը»); ՀԱԻՐԱ 1961, FFIIV: 0405,01-0408,00 («Շահ Աբասը»); ՀԱԻՐԱ 1961, FFIIV: 0241,01-0246,00 («Շահ Աբասն ու անառակ կնիկը»); ՀԱԻՐԱ 1983, 91-97 («Շահ Աբասի տղա Շահաբասը»); ՀԱԻՐԱ 1967, FFIIV: 4705,02-4792,00 («Շահաբաս թագավորը»); ՀԱԻՐԱ 1967, FFIIV: 6489,01-6496,00 («Հավատարիմ կնիկը»); ՀԱԻ 1983, 15, 86 («Շահ Աբասեն հրամանը»); Հովսեփյան 2009, 2, 255 («Շահը հոքմը ետ ա եր կալալ»); ՀԱԻ 2000, 21, 138-140 («Կնիկ էլ կա՝ կնիկ էլ», № 42(42)):

want to kill the good woman because of the bad one?"⁴, and the Shah's thoughtless order is suspended.

According to the internal logic of these stories, the main role of a woman is to be a loving, faithful and devoted wife to her husband. Deviation from this unwritten law is reprehensible and punishable. The monarch, witnessing the fact of the woman's treason and crime, spreads the private case to the entire female sex and orders everyone to be punished indiscriminately. This motif development has its precedent in the folkloric tradition, and it is possible that the story used various episodes that are also known in other folkloric plots. In that sense, the motif of unfaithful and loyal women in Shah Abbas plots in its beginning reminds to some extent of the beginning of the Arabic tale collection "One Thousand and One Nights"⁵. Faced with his wife's infidelity, King Shahryar claimed an innocent girl every day and killed her in the morning after spending a night of love with her. The massacre of the girls is stopped by the vizier's daughter, Scheherazade, who tells Shahryar a tale every night and interrupts it at an interesting point, on the condition that it would be continued the night to come. In Arabic tales, the motif of unfaithful women serves as a frame for the rest of the stories⁶.

Both in the Shah Abbas plots and in the Arabic tales, the actions are carried out by the oriental monarchs, who, according to folklore sources, are cruel and their justice goes beyond the limits and is not subject to any legality. The second part of the fairy tale, which is opposed to the first part and aims to deny the erroneousness and inappropriateness of the absurd decision to mass exterminate women, simultaneously presents an original plot, which is genealogically characteristic of the early layer of folklore plots. Ancient customs, beliefs and rituals served as the basis for the image development of a woman in a man's clothes. Traces of the dedication ritual are preserved in the behavior of the disguised woman. In order to move to a new stage of life and find a husband, a woman had to pass a certain test and perform ritual actions. In a number of folklore plots, the phase of a woman's achievement of a new status was accompanied by a fight between a man and a transformed woman, which ends with the woman's defeat and marks the beginning of her new status. In one of the

⁴ ՀԱԻԲԱ 1973–1974, 1975, 9–14 («Շահաբասը հրամայում ա ուրան երկրին օղուշաղը կուտորին»):

⁵ Հազար ու մեկ գիշեր 1959, 11–19:

⁶ Фильштинский 1986, 7.

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Shah Abbas plots, the conflict between the disguised woman and the young man who accompanies her, turns into a fight. "I had decided that my secret should not be taken away from here, so now we should fight for it, whoever wins should kill the other with a dagger. I was in form, I caught him, but struggled with him for a while. In the end I grounded him, I liked his clothes, uncovered his chest to stab him and I noticed that it was a woman's chest. At the end I told her that I was hers and she was mine and I married her"⁷. In this version, the ritual of dedication was added to the motif of revenge, which once again emphasized the main role of women in the society.

The plot we are considering corresponds to the mythological scheme aimed at correcting the chaotic state and restoring the natural order, that is, the disguised female character fights with the demon to avenge the man she loves, and at the same time regulates the chaotic state and restores the natural order. After going through the dedication ceremony, she is ready for marriage.

There is also another ancient custom in this series of faithful wife plots, it is the habit of blood revenge. To avenge the murdered husband, beloved man, brother, a faithful wife pursues and kills the murderers of her beloved, thereby protecting her and her husband's or brother's rights. According to ancient beliefs, the power and strength of the murdered person passes to the killer, especially the magical significance of blood, which if drunk, the killer not only takes revenge, but also receives the power and force of the person killed⁸: "...there was a demon killed and grounded, she filled a bowl with his blood and drank it, and said: "Now my heart cools down"⁹. In parallel to this, there is also a belief related to the cult of the dead, according to which the murdered person will not find rest in the underworld until the one who caused his death cleanses the sin of the murder with his own blood¹⁰. Revenge is usually carried out through a blood relative of the deceased. In the case of our story, there is a duality: if the deceased is the brother of the disguised rider (who is actually a woman), then the function of the traditional custom of blood revenge corresponding to the behavior of a blood

⁷ ՀԱԻՐԱ 1961, FFVII: 8335,01-8346,00 («Շահ-օղլի Շահաբասը»)

⁸ Ֆրեդեր 1989, 584:

⁹ See ՀԱԻՐԱ 1961, FFVII: 8335,01-8346,00 («Շահ-օղլի Շահաբասը»):

¹⁰ Սամուէլեան 1903, 270:

relative is assumed by the sister, especially if there is no male in the lineage¹¹. In two of the 13 analyzed plots, the sister takes revenge for the murdered brother (7 brothers), in 11 stories the wife takes revenge for the death of the murdered husband (beloved man). The image of the vengeful woman at the base of the stories was formed on two original manifestations of custom and belief, the first of which, the ritual of dedication, historically interprets the important role of women in public life, the second, the theme of blood revenge, emphasizes the growth of the role of women in family and social life. As well as the sanctification of the unwritten laws adopted by society of marital fidelity. As can be seen, this type of Shah Abbas plots has preserved elements of the folk thinking, customs and beliefs, which over time went out of everyday life and were forgotten.

The story of the faithful wife has a somewhat moral purpose. The story contrasts the actions of a woman endowed with heroic traits with the behavior and treacherous actions of a calculating and treacherous woman. The link connecting the two parts of the plot is the eyewitness, who performs two tasks: first accompanies the disguised avenger, then buries the suicidal faithful wife near her husband (6 stories), or at the request of the wife kills her and buries her, or fights with the disguised wife, defeats her and marries her. The direct witness and participant of the second part of the story makes Shah Abbas understand with his story that he is wrong in his decision because it is based on the behavior of one person. "Now, long live the Shah, a sly calf is playing with the herd's name. In this city, there is one bad woman and a thousand of good ones. Mixing the good and the bad together, you gave an order to kill them all"¹². The persuasive story re-introduces the woman to Shah Abbas, and he suspends his order because: "... there is a woman who is a hero, and there is one who is a scumbag"¹³.

Conclusion

In these plots, Shah Abbas acts as a regulator of public life and overseer of injustices, whose actions are not always fair, there is an obvious abuse of power, which can lead to the disruption of the natural order and be disastrous for humanity with its negative consequences. The story reveals Shah Abbas'

¹¹ ՀԱԻՔԱ 1961, FFV: 0463,01-0465,00 («Ալահվերդի խանը»); ՀԱԻՔԱ 1973-1974, 1975, 9-14 («Շահաբասը հրամայում ա ուրան երկրին օղուշաղը կուտորին»)

¹² See ՀԱԻՔԱ 1961, FFVII: 8335,01-8346,00 («Շահ-օղլի Շահաբասը»):

¹³ Հովսեփյան 2009, 2, 255 («Շահը հոքմը ետ ա եր կալալ»):

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intolerance of female infidelity. Notably, he ignores the partners of the unfaithful wife and focuses his anger on the wife, in some versions he also tests the seemingly loving and faithful wife. Accepting Shah's seductive offer, the woman pushes him to the extreme step of ordering the extermination of the female sex. The behavior of Shah Abbas suggests that he places all the responsibility of love and loyalty on the wife, because the wife has been considered the patron and the guardian of the family hearth since ancient times, therefore she is also responsible for the maintenance of marital relations.

An examination of Shah Abbas plots shows that a number of popular tale motifs were invoked in Shah Abbas themes, which are conditioned by the peculiarities of Shah Abbas' novelization. Especially in the case of female-themed motifs, Shah Abbas acts as an executor of the function of destroying, reforming, and setting women who deviate from accepted standards on the right path. Shah Abbas learns about the problems of women's closed society with a disguised tour. Having personally faced women's problems, he tries to solve them in his own way and in some cases makes wrong decisions due to anger, without considering their disastrous consequences. In contrast to treacherous and faithful women, popular experience and wisdom come to the aid of Shah Abbas to reconsider the wrong decision taken.

These plots of female loyalty and infidelity have a strong moral orientation, they cover a wide range of society's life and lifestyle, customs, and beliefs, they bring forward the problems that have been troubling the society for centuries, the answer to which is given by popular wisdom in a concise formulation: "... there is a woman who is a hero, and there is one who is a scumbag".

The examined Shah Abbas plot is a fusion of two motifs built on contrasts, in which the behavior of treacherous and loyal women and its assessment by the king and society is revealed through two female types.

The plot helps to reveal other aspects of Shah Abbas' character and behavior as well. Although the Shah's powers are, one might say, open-ended, and the character development and personal perceptions of the Shah lead to the consequence that is conditioned by his command, there is still a natural order established from above that even the Shah has no right to violate.

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ԽԵՄՉՅԱՆ Է.

Ամփոփում

*Բանալի բառեր*¹ սյուժե, մոտիվ, անհավատարմություն, բարոյախրատական եզրակացություն, սովորույթ, հավատալիք, արյան վրեժ:

Հայ վիպական բանահյուսության հեքիաթային սյուժեներում առանձին խումբ են կազմում կնոջ հավատարմության և անհավատարմության մոտիվներով սյուժեները, որոնք աղերսվում են Շահ Աբասի վիպական կերպարին: Սյուժեն բաղկացած է երկու միմյանցից անկախ պատումներից: Պատումի առաջին մասում ի ցույց է դրվում կնոջ անհավատարմությունը, իսկ երկրորդ պատումն առաջինի հակադրությունն է, որտեղ հանդես է գալիս նվիրված կնոջ կերպարը: Այս ինքնատիպ սյուժեում պահպանված են հնագույն սովորույթներ, հավատալիքներ և ծիսական գործողություններ, ինչպես օրինակ՝ արյան վրեժի սովորությունը, որի իրագործման գործառույթը ստանձնում է կինը:

Պատումները բարոյախրատական որոշակի նպատակ են հետապնդում, դրանց եզրակացությունը պայմանավորված է դեպքերի շղթայում կնոջ վարքագծի ու բնավորության հակադիր դրսևորումներով: Սյուժեն նպաստում է բացահայտելու Շահ Աբասի բնավորության ու վարքագծի այն կողմերը, երբ նա հանդես է գալիս որպես հասարակական կյանքի կարգավորող ու անարդարությունները վերահսկող, որի գործողությունները, սակայն, ոչ միշտ են արդարամիտ և կարող են հանգեցնել բնական կարգի խաթարմանը:

ВЕРНОСТЬ И НЕВЕРНОСТЬ ЖЕНЩИНЫ В ШАХАБАССКИХ СЮЖЕТАХ АРМЯНСКОГО ФОЛЬКЛОРА

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Резюме

Ключевые слова: сюжет, мотив, неверность, морально-дидактическое заключение, обычай, верование, кровная месть.

В сказочных сюжетах армянского эпического фольклора отдельную группу составляют сюжеты, построенные на мотивах женской верности и неверности, соотносящиеся с эпическим образом Шаха Аббаса. Сюжет состоит из двух независимых рассказов. Первая часть посвящена неверности женщины, а вторая часть являет собой противопоставление первой, где повествуется о верности и преданности женщины. В этом своеобразном сюжете нашли отражение древнейшие обычаи, верования и обрядовые действия, к примеру, обычай вендетты, которую осуществляет женщина.

Рассказы однозначно имеют морально-дидактическую направленность. Сюжет способствует выявлению скрытых черт характера и поведения Шаха Аббаса, когда он пытается упорядочить общественную жизнь и пресечь несправедливость, однако его действия не всегда справедливы и могут привести к дисбалансу естественного порядка.