

ABSTRACTS

History, Heroes and Anti-Heroes

JOSEPH HODARA

ACCORDING TO R. NISBET'S DEFINITION, ours is an anti or rather a-heroic era. The devaluation of faith and the bureaucratization of the world have done away with heroes. The author of this article does not agree with Nisbet's view. Although it is true that in our times Darwin, Marx, and Freud, each in their own field, have also de-mystified the idea of the hero, they themselves, strangely enough, would fit in the category. Heroism is still very much with us because there is an undeniable need in the human being to seek for exemplary models. Also, our era is not devoid of human beings who believe that their mission is dictated by either the Absolute, Destiny or History.

For Burckhardt, the hero is "what we are" yet magnified and idealized, "the great man is he, without whom, the world seem incomplete". Each epoch cultivates its own heroes according to the needs and culture of a specific historical moment. In a hero "states, religions, cultures and crises are condensed".

Heroes have not disappeared. In the present we can find them in a variety of scenes from power to rock music. Amidst the ever increasing loneliness of modern man the hero becomes a bridge between isolated masses and deserted streets. The hero rekindles our faith in our historicity, in our capacity to make history.

Gilgamesh: The Image of the Hero

JORGE SILVA CASTILLO

THIS ARTICLE CONTAINS AN ACCOUNT of the various Sumerian poems and the Akkadian epic poem which have preserved to our times the legend of Gilgamesh who reigned in the city of Uruk in the second quarter of the third millennium B. C.

Based on the content of these poems, the author studies the various traditions which offer a diversity of views of this legendary hero. The Akkadian epic poem presents an image of the hero which does not seem to tally with our general concept. Nevertheless, taking into account the initial proposition that the hero may represent society and not the idealized individual, the epic Gilgamesh reveals a hero who embodies the Semitic society of Mesopotamia to perfection, a society which developed a profoundly pessimistic social psychology.

Kṛṣṇa and Hercules. Two Heroic Cycles

BENJAMIN PRECIADO SOLIS

THE CLOSENESS BETWEEN THE STORIES of Kṛṣṇa and Hercules was first discovered by the Greeks when they came to India during the late 4th century B. C. Megasthenes, sent by Seleucos Nikator, heir to the Eastern portion of Alexander's empire, as ambassador to the Mauryan court, wrote that Hercules was worshipped in Mathurā, the famous city birthplace of Kṛṣṇa, in this way identifying the two heroes. This identification made by Magasthenes is not strange since the story cycles of Kṛṣṇa and Hercules bear a strong similarity.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, several European scholars devised a model to analyse hero-stories, and found that dozens of heroes in Europe and Asia could be fitted into it. Hercules was included very prominently among those heroes but Kṛṣṇa was mentioned only by one of the scholars proposing the model. By following this model several of the coincidences between the Indian and the Greek heroes can be accounted for, however not all similar episodes in both cycles can be explained in this way. Another comparative model to analyse hero-myths was devised by Prof. Fontenrose. This model considers the myths of the "Slaying of the Dragon", and Hercules is included as one of the foremost examples of dragon killers. Fontenrose did not include Kṛṣṇa among the examples but we can accommodate him very easily within the pattern. However, as in the previous case the inclusion of both heroes within the same scheme does not account for all the similarities.

A detailed list of parallels is presented showing the extent of the coincidence between the two cycles. No other option is left but to postulate that due to long contact between India and the Greco-Roman world there occurred a mutual influence between the stories of Kṛṣṇa and Hercules.

Arab and Bizantine Paladins

CARMEN CHUAQUI

THE ARTICLE TRACES THE PROFILE of the Arab and Bizantine heros who, during the seventh to fourteenth centuries fought along the constantly contested borders of two hostile worlds. Nonetheless their deeds are not selected from the pages of high literature, history or official chronicles, but rather from two narratives by anonymous authors. The first describes the life of Digenís Akritas, defender of Greek Capadocia, while the second —included in the *Thousand and One Nights*— narrates the history of king Umar al-Numán

and his sons, who fight on the opposing side in approximately the same territory.

The Bizantine legend gradually took shape during the Macedonian dynasty, but it was put into writing several centuries later. The Arab narrative, on the other hand, stretches from the Umayyad dynasty until the end of the Crusades. Both reflect the coexistence of two peoples with different religions and customs, that were always ready to win territory by means of arms, but also ready to mix and enrich their respective cultures with elements taken from quite varied sources.

Neither of the two works is an epic in the strict sense of the term, since they embody an amalgam of literary genres, erudite and popular, among which novels of adventure and miracle stories are the most prominent. Their heroes (based on various historical persons) and ladies possess the characteristics that will later appear in the protagonists of novels of chivalry in the West.