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Ancient Greek Mythology in the Modern Albanian Epic, "Songs of the Frontier Warriors"

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Ancient Greek Mythology in the Modern Albanian Epic, *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*

An Honors Thesis submitted in

partial fulfillment of the requirements of Honors Studies in Classical Studies

By

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INTRODUCTION

Albanian history is rich and long, but difficult to find. This is due in part to a combination of the lack of time, effort, and resources needed to study the area extensively. But it is also due in part to the fact that finding evidence of ancient history has remained rather difficult. Only until this last half century have scholars and researchers even focused on the area, previously only paying attention to any Graeco-Roman influence found within the area. This new focus offers promise in better understanding Albania and its cultural predecessors, but there is still much work to be done.

In my research I plan to better define cultural history of the people groups located within what is now Albania with the focus being mainly in the Archaic Period through the first several centuries CE in the Illyrian people groups that inhabited the area. I will also briefly outline the limitations to this research while assessing sources. From there, I plan to outline the modern Albanian epic, *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*, and offer a brief history of the text. Following the work of researchers like Albert Bates Lord, I will then look at motifs central to both this epic and Greek and Roman mythology, assessing sources along the way. I will also briefly outline limitations to these connections while discussing other possible influences. I realize for several reasons there is now no way to explicitly define connections to this text, but my goal is to look at correlations and explore ideas that could possibly influence the fluctuating style of the epic.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING ANCIENT ALBANIA¹

Because previous western scholars know so little of Albania's past, instead of distinguishing it as its own culture, they connect it to other cultures with similar backgrounds in an all-encompassing "Balkan" style. Those who did study remains in the area well past World War II cared not for "the autochthonous prehistoric cultures but of Graeco-Roman civilization" (Prendi, 189). This lack of interest in studying indigenous Albanian people groups for centuries has created a void in understanding their identity to which scholars now are slowly but surely trying to fill. For centuries research conducted in this area focused more as a means to justify other cultural groups rather than establish an indigenous identity, and as Albert Bates Lord suggests, the Balkans "have not been studied and analyzed as they should be" (Lord 1980, 1). But even Lord neglects Albania to an extent, focusing more on Balkan epic as a whole, rather than distinguishing different areas in the Balkans, particularly Albania. In this section I will try to focus more on accounts that help to establish a historical basis for the Albanian territory. In later sections that focus on epic poetry analysis I will rely more heavily on mythological accounts.

Located north of Greece and just across the Adriatic Sea from Italy, for thousands of years the fertile yet forested land, good climate, rich mineral deposits, and close proximity to sea access made the area that is now considered Albania "conducive to intensive economic development" (Prendi, 187). People can be detected in the area as early as 200,000-100,000

¹ The first part of this section is drawn mainly from work done by J.J. Wilkes in his book, *The Illyrians*. I would like to have had more sources, but due to lack of scholarly work on this topic, it remains at this time highly unlikely.

BCE from hand axes and other tools left behind, and well into the Neolithic period, dated 7000-3000 BCE. During the Early Neolithic period Albania's location also made it possible for different cultural groups to converge in the Aegean, Adriatic and Balkan regions, evidenced by location sites like Vashtëmi. The pottery found there that is dated during the Early Neolithic period shares similarities in design and shape to pottery found in several different settlements in Macedonia and in Thessaly (Prendi, 203). There is also evidence of anthropomorphic and four-legged clay figurines and rhyton cults in the Middle to Late Neolithic period at such sites as Cakran, and are similar to artifacts found in Dalmatia and Greece. The area seems to be greatly enriched and changed during their Bronze Age, 2100-1100 BCE, as evidenced by the growing variety of pottery at the site of Maliq, while still maintaining contact with other cultures (Prendi, 211). Weaponry found during this age is similar to weaponry Middle Minoan III period in Crete and the in the period of Mycenaen Shaft Graves on mainland Greece, in 1500 BCE, but with regional differences between those types and the ones found in both northern and southern Albania, suggesting local influence on style.

This spread of metal, some archaeologists would argue, "was marked by a large-scale migration of new people into the area from...western Asia and the Black Sea region," namely the Indo-European peoples, and that later migrations in the Late Bronze Age were only these peoples moving southward from the Balkan area into the Aegean (Wilkes, 33). These peoples living in the Balkans, archaeologists have argued, are hypothesized to have "an unbroken continuity in population from the Early Bronze Age down to the first historical records of Balkan peoples" (Wilkes, 33-34). In the western Balkans the group that emerges because of this development and migration is the 'proto-Illyrians', the historical ancestor to

the Illyrians, who settled in Albania. It is difficult to define who these Illyrians are, and there are several theories that aim to extend this group's influence on other cultures in an effort to theorize a homogeneous group that extends across Europe. Other theories suggest that Illyrians are directly involved in the migration of peoples to Greece, which increasingly proves untrue. Others simply try to suggest that there is an 'Illyrianization' of people during the Bronze Age and that from them emerge the Illyrian people groups, during the Iron Age, ca. 1000 BCE. This remains the central theory, but even it ignores the interaction these groups would have had with others, and the clear differences between the subsets of groups that are defined as 'Illyrian'. Above ground Illyrian burial mound sites called "tumuli" have been found in northern and southern Albania, dated between the Late Bronze Age to the fourth century BCE, and have been connected by some archaeologists to Glasinac settlements scattered throughout the Western Balkans during the same period (Wilkes, 192).

There is in fact little documented evidence of a written Illyrian language. The acquired data are "very limited in scope, consisting exclusively of glosses, onomastic material and lexical items" that have survived through documentation in other works or inscriptions, though it is considered to be in the Indo-European language family (Polomé, 866). In particular, Illyrian language is difficult to reconstruct and is often "genetically defined on the basis of personal names from the Balkan peninsula," (Hornblower and Spawforth, 747). Aside from archaeological evidence in the form of inscriptions, the only written evidence of an Illyrian language is names documented in Greek, Roman and later sources, and references to an ancient language spoken in western Balkans different from other ancient Balkan languages like Thracian or Dacian. A major problem with these sources is their ethnocentric quality. These sources tend to weave mythological backgrounds into

historical accounts. While this may cause one to question the validity of these sources, the importance is placed on the fact that Greeks and Romans try repeatedly to establish a historical identity for the Illyrians, even if it is skewed. The most important aspects to mythological stories are the legends “created from unclear memories of real people in the past and of events which most probably occurred in actual locations” (Šašel Kos, 116). So although these stories are mythic they should in no way be discarded in an effort to find the truth.

The parallels between ancient Greeks and ancient Illyrians are difficult to make since the record of the Illyrian language consists mainly of proper names (Wilkes, 66). Scholars have tried to make connections between Illyrian and other Indo-European languages in an effort to possibly better understand the migratory patterns of early peoples in what is now considered Europe. These people are mentioned throughout antiquity by ancient Greek and Roman authors, but it is a struggle to find written artifacts that are distinctly Illyrian. Due to lack of historical records of an Illyrian language, it is hard to connect Ancient Greece to the region. “While the Illyrians are a well-documented people of antiquity, not a single verifiable inscription has survived written in the Illyrian language” (Woodard, 6). Theorists still consider Illyrian to be an Indo-European language and search for sources, but without any written evidence, it remains its own branch.

Even modern scholars use Albania as a tool to connect other areas, as a support for other people groups rather than trying to understand solely the Albanian culture. Lord maintains that ancient Greek influences can be “found in the cultures of the other Balkan peoples,” particularly focusing on the Slavs or the Balkans as a whole (Lord, 1). While Lord

does acknowledge this, his focus is not Albania, but more towards Bulgaria and other Balkan regions, and he does not try to distinguish Albania from other cultures in the area.

Greeks seemed to not only consider the Illyrians one nation, but also recognized their individual city-states. There is some account of the Illyrians by Pseudo-Skylax, a fourth century BCE Greek author, who considers the Illyrians as a community, using the word ἔθνος, “nation,” to describe them (Pseudo-Scylax, 22.1). In this pseudo-geographical account of his circumnavigation in the area, he also mentions different Illyrian tribes, and smaller people groups that are connected to Illyrian history. By the time of his writing, Pseudo-Skylax considers the Illyrians what the Greeks consider themselves: a group of different city-states with a collective identity. He mentions several groups with the Illyrians, including Boiotians, Manioi, Autariatai, and Encheleans, using again ἔθνος to describe them (Pseudo-Scylax, 22.3-25).

Apollonius mentions different Illyrian tribes in *The Argonautica* and claims that the Colchians built a city near the Illyrian river and live with the Encheleans (Apollonius, 4.511-513). This passage suggests that there is a strong historically mythological background to this area, at least for the Greeks. The connection Apollonius makes with the Colchians and Encheleans in mythology is very important. His mentioning of Zeus, Cronus, and Rhea gives strong ties to Greek mythology. Discerning whether or not these tales were originally Illyrian or adapted from Colchian migration, though, is rather difficult. We will look more closely into mythological connections in chapters three and four.

Pseudo-Skylax also mentions that there are Hellenic towns throughout this area. One city mentioned is Buthoë, founded by Cadmus and Harmonia according to Greek mythology whose stones are there (Pseudo-Scylax, 24.2). The connection between Cadmus and Illyria is

mentioned several times throughout antiquity, and differs among authors, which will be discussed further in this chapter. What is a constant factor, however, is the Greek opinion of their northern neighbor.

In fact, Greek and Roman sources consider the Illyrians to be a warlike people, both on land and at sea. They constantly pushed their borders with Macedonia and Epirus and were considered pirates. They “pressed southwards by land and by sea, and in particular the Ardiaean kingdom, based on the southern Dalmatian coast” (Hornblower and Spawforth, 748). But this hostile expansive attitude is only displayed after interaction with other cultures, particularly that of their southern neighbors. They were “enlived by Greek trade and ideas,” which encouraged this kind of hostile behavior and constant expansion (Hornblower and Spawforth, 748).

Herodotus mentions Illyrians in his fifth century BCE *Histories*. He mentions several tributaries, particularly the Angrus River that inhabits Illyrian lands and run into the Ister River, whose source is the Haemus Mountains in Thrace (Herodotus 4.49). Herodotus also tells of how the Babylonians treat their women, and says that it is the same as the custom of the Illyrian tribe, the Eneti. Instead of arranged marriages, all women take part in an auction. These women are “sold to be wives, not slaves” (Herodotus 1.196). It is interesting that he notes the distinction in the women, though all take part. This provides insights into the social distinction within Illyrian society- perhaps women, regardless of their station, are all considered of the same rank. It is also interesting that he notes that a man cannot claim his wife until he pledges “that he would indeed live with her, and then he could take her home” (Herodotus 1.196). He also mentions that men from all over, even “all the well-off Babylonian men who wanted wives” would come and outbid each other for the best-looking

woman (Herodotus 1.196). However, there are no Babylonian documents mentioning this custom, which leads to the question of whether or not it even existed (Asheri, 210).

Herodotus does mention an important oracle possibly concerning the Illyrians. Mardonius, a Persian, claims that “there is an oracle to the effect that the Persians are fated to come to Greece, sack the sanctuary at Delphi, and afterwards perish” (Herodotus 9.42). However, Herodotus does not agree with the Persians on this matter. While Mardonius claims this particular oracle is for the Persians, Herodotus claims that it “was not designed for them, but for the Illyrians and the army of the Encheleis” (Herodotus 9.43). This would agree with the late belief that Illyrians are a fierce nation. However there seems to be no documentation backing Herodotus and their invasion. But it is important that he mentions connections between the Illyrians and Encheleians, as he is another ancient source that documents their existence.

Ancient heroes like Antenor are connected to Illyria and the Adriatic coast, as mentioned in Virgil. After the fall of Troy, Antenor flees and eventually reaches the Adriatic. In his route, Virgil mentions that he could “thread safely the Illyrian gulfs and inmost realms of the Liburnians, and pass the springs of Timavus” (Aeneid 1.242-249).² Sophocles connects Antenor with the Eneti, which are mentioned by Herodotus as being an Illyrian tribe.

Stories circulate about how Illyria comes to be known by that name. Particularly the stories that circulate involve the Greeks and how they begin to reference the area as Illyria, and not how Illyria considers itself Illyrian. Apollodorus’ second century CE *Bibliotheca*

² Translation Fairclough 1916

describes the mythological tale of Cadmus and Harmonia, their journey to the Encheleans, and their ultimate formation of the Illyrians. He claims that it is through their son, Illyrius, that the Illyrians acquire their name (Apollodorus 3.5.4).

The second century CE Greek historian, Appian of Alexandria, gives a different account of how they obtained their name. He also describes the interactions between Illyrians and Romans in the Roman Wars. By this time, southern Illyria has been absorbed into the Roman Empire and is considered Illyricum, while northern Illyrian tribes continue to attack it and the Romans. He writes (Appian, 9.1.2):³

They say that the country received its name from Illyrius, the son of Polyphemus; for the cyclops Polyphemus and his wife, Galatea, had three sons, Celtus, Illyrius, and Galas, all of whom migrated from Sicily; and the nations called Celts, Illyrians, and Galatians took their origin from them. Among the many myths prevailing among many peoples this seems to me the most plausible.

Appian then states that from Illyrius' sons descend all the tribes, including the Encheleans and Dardanians. Even though his much later account is different, there could still be plausible sections in it, that through time are rationalized, "in which attempts are made to explain even the unclear elements in a story in a reasonable manner" (Šašel Kos, 117). It is the fact that there are stories circulating about Illyria that is important.

Appian presents the Illyrians as warlike people, not unlike other ancient accounts. The Triballi and Scordisci tribes in particular he mentions as almost destroying one another. The Triballi seem to have sought refuge near the Danube river until becoming extinct in the

³ Translation White 1899

Hellenistic Age, while the Scordisci survive, ultimately facing battle against the Romans, only to take refuge on the Danube as well (Appian 9.1.3). In accounts of different tribes he finally mentions the Liburni, who “commit piracy in the Adriatic Sea and islands with their light, fast-sailing pinnaces,” which explains why Romans call swift biremes *liburnicas* (Appian 9.1.3). While there are discrepancies in Appian’s history, it is important because he mentions the brutality of Illyrian city-states as they fight each other and others on land and sea. This depiction aligns with others that the Illyrians are a warlike people. Though it possibly ethnocentric in character, it does affirm the fact that Greeks and Romans characterize the Illyrians in this way.

Aristophanes also makes mention of the Triballi in the Triballian god in his play, *The Birds*. Poseidon makes the Triballian god look foolish for incorrectly wearing his cloak (Aristophanes *The Birds* 1567-1571)⁴. Some scholars think that the name Triballian is actually a sexual term, from *tri*, meaning three, and *ballo*, to throw. Other translations say “Three-rubber” instead of Triballian, a term for masturbating (Henderson, F 121). To this reply, the Triballian god cannot even speak properly, answering in grammatically incorrect Greek as “Hands off there, will yer?” (Aristophanes *The Birds*, 1572)⁵. This could be a connection to the Illyrian Triballi tribe, but later scholars place the Triballian god farther east, in what is now Bulgaria, and most likely it was a Thracian tribe.

Appian then describes interactions between Illyria and the Roman Empire, mainly the first and second Illyrian wars. Appian mentions that even the Romans consider Illyria to be a collective identity:

⁴ Translation Henderson 1999

⁵ Translation Henderson 1999

These peoples...the Romans distinguished from one another just as the various Greek peoples are distinguished from each other, and they call each by its own name, but they consider the whole of Illyria as embraced under a common designation (Appian 9.2.6)

This gives evidence to at least southern Illyricum forming a collective identity, not identities separated by different tribes.

Appian does mention Pyrrhus of Epirus in connection with Illyria, but does not give much account of him. However Plutarch does mention Pyrrhus' time in Illyria in *Life of Pyrrhus*. Son of Aeacides, ruler of Molossians, Pyrrhus and his family seek refuge after his father is dethroned with Glaukias, king of the Illyrians (Plutarch 3.2).

For now, these are the accounts that I will mention in an effort to understand and define Illyrian identity up to the Roman Empire. These sources not only give insight into the location and different tribes of the Illyrians, but also the Greeks and Romans viewed them. Though their accounts may be biased, it does show that Greeks and Romans remain in conflict with the Illyrians, which further shapes this Illyrian warlike identity. It is difficult, however, to fully understand who the Illyrians are due to lack of Illyrian sources. In the following sections, I will further explore sources that are more myth based and compare specific motifs to the Albanian epic, *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*.

CHAPTER TWO: *SONGS OF FRONTIER WARRIORS* BACKGROUND AND EXPLANATION

Albania remains a hotbed of cultural influence, due in part to its location and absorption into several empires, and during the constant empire change, its borders are just as fluid. After the split between the Eastern and the Western Roman Empires, Albanian territory falls under the Eastern Empire, which eventually developed into the Byzantine Empire. Albania remains under Byzantine rule until Slav invasions in the sixth century CE, then the Bulgarian Empire in the thirteenth century, and finally the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century until the early twentieth century, when this work is actually transcribed.

Following the work of *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, author John Cuthbert Lawson seeks to find greater understanding in Modern Greek superstitions and folklore by attempting to make connections to the ancient Greek mythology and religious beliefs, an anthropological analysis of early twentieth century Greece in his travels. I will try to apply this same idea to the modern Albanian epic, *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*. Though there are no identified Illyrian texts, based on writings from other ancient sources one can try to reconstruct an idea of Illyrian religion and culture to an extent.

The earliest written account of *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* is by Franciscan priests in the Northern Albanian mountains in the early twentieth century. The most noted of these is Shtjefën Gjeçovi, now considered the “father of Albanian folklore studies” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, xi). Elsie and Mathie date the epic as early as the seventeenth century. They rely on Albanian scholars who stress that this epic “evolved only among the Slavic tribes that lived in close geographical proximity to the indigenous, pre-Slavic population of the Balkans” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, xvii). Though this work may be Slavic in origin, it not

only has greatly evolved but draws on influence of the indigenous people. Because it remained an oral song for so long it is difficult to trace the origins of the work. With a great number of influencers, it is also difficult to “trace in detail the process of tradition through that period,” mainly the periods of transition between the Byzantine Empire, Slavic invasion, and the Ottoman Empire (Lord, 337). There are centuries of influence that could have affected the telling of its warriors. If the Slavs did bring the verse, their earliest existence in Albanian territory is the sixth century CE. This early existence offers great opportunity for influence.

Elsie and Mathie-Heck make note that there are multiple versions of this epic published even today. The work itself is a decasyllabic form in trochaic meter in rhymed and unrhymed versions of this epic, which is still sung today (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, xviii). It is a compilation of smaller songs rather than a chronological story.

Songs of the Frontier Warrior is the tale of the Muslim warrior Gjeto Basho Mujo, his brother, Sokol Halili and their adventures in what is now Albania. The text mainly focuses on these brothers and provides insight into mountainous warrior life as they raise families, fight neighboring Christian kingdom *shkja* warriors with their fellow *agas*, steal brides, and defend their own honor. There is a strong mythological component to the text, as the brothers interact with divine creatures that help them along the way. There are also several songs in the works that tell unrelated stories of other characters, but for the sake of this research, I will not mention them.

The songs begin by first telling how Mujo obtained his divine strength. With the help of *zanas*, mythical creatures who live in the mountains, Mujo is put under a series of tests that help him to “acquire the strength of a *dragua*” (Kresnikesh 1.77). He becomes so strong,

the *zanas* eventually stop his training for fear that “he’d likely take hold of the planet and squash it” (Kreshnikesh 1.84). After completing the tasks, the *zanas* wish for Mujo to be their “blood brother,” a male kind of kinship that seems to take great weight in these tales.

It then describes his marriage to a bride from the Realm of the Christians. He only chooses the best for himself, picking the king’s daughter as his bride. Three hundred faithful Agas, or perhaps warriors, are sent to retrieve the new bride. Mujo sends them with explicit instructions to not dwell in a certain meadow in the mountains, for “this is the home of the fearsome *zanas*...well and alive they will let no one pass them!” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck 2.23-26). This is interesting, because this scene gives insight into how devilish these *zanas* can be. Perhaps these are not the same *zanas* that propose blood brotherhood to Mujo, or perhaps Mujo recognizes their mischievous nature, instructing travelers to stay far away, but they do not and steal his bride. Mujo then must go and retrieve her, and eventually tricks the *zanas* and learns the source of their power, which resides in three he-goats and he captures them. The *zanas* promise to unfreeze the Agas and give back his bride, but the Mujo still refuses to give the goats back. Only at the pleading of a young female *zana* does he finally give in.

Mujo then must battle the Slavic warrior Paji Harambashi with the help of three white *oras*, creatures in the mountains who revel and frolic. They are made victims by Paji, and then seek the help of Mujo. Mujo takes thirty Agas with him, but does not allow his brother Sokol Halili to come, afraid he would endanger the mission. Upset, Halili turns to his mother, who gives him his father’s horse, tells him to set towards the Realm of the Christians and find his blood brother, Begu Ymer Beg, who can help him slay Paji. The two meet an *ora* who gives them special herbs to sneak into the house where Paji’s nine hundred year old

father lives. By doing so, Halili rescues the maiden Januka, kills Paji, and sets free Mujo and the Agas who have been made prisoners. To this the *oras* reply, “may God never leave you bereft of your brother” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck 3.309).

The glory of Mujo and Halili is made known throughout the Ottoman Empire, and they are asked to visit the Sultan at the court in Istanbul. Afraid for their lives, their mother urges them to go. The palace steps cannot support Mujo’s strength nor are the doors big enough for him to easily pass through. The sultan is amazed by them but when Mujo gets up to leave, his trousers snag on the throne, and “he drags to the doorway the Sultan himself” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck 4.89).

Halili then vows he will marry no one but Tanusha, daughter of the king in the Realm of the Christians, for “no man has ever beheld such a vision” and sets out to find her (Elsie and Mathie-Heck 5.85). With the help of an *ora* he comes upon their camp and accidentally awakens Tanusha, who recognizes him from a dream. To save themselves from her father and three hundred maidens, she dresses him as a maiden. Most do not notice, but her untrusting mother realizes what is happening, and though they try to escape, Halili is eventually taken prisoner, and Tanusha shamed. The moment before Halili’s death he calls upon Mujo with the help of birds, and Mujo comes with his Agas, slays the camp, and frees his brother. Halili returns to Jutbina with Tanusha and three hundred maidens.

In the next episode Mujo tells Halili to summon the thirty *Agas* in order to continue the raid with the *çeta*. On the road they meet Dizdar Osman Aga and his thirty *Agas* and decide to join forces. Mujo finds his horse weeping, giving Mujo a sign that “we will not reach our house alive if divided, ” and tells Dizdar, who does not listen and departs (Elsie

and Mathie-Heck 7.144). While Mujo is deciding what to do he encounters an *ora* who tells him “do not, for God’s sake, partake of the water, till you fell the head of Behuri the captain” (7.265-266). The *ora* gives him two steel keys and he sets off to Behuri’s house. There he finds the dead bodies of Dizdar and his thirty *agas*. Deeply moved, he finds gun powder and a wick, prepared to blow up the house. Behuri then emerges, calling for his daughters, but sees Halili with them and hurls the severed heads of Dizdar and Zuk, ready to slaughter Mujo’s men. Mujo chases after him and engages in a duel on the battleground. A long fight ensues, and Mujo calls to the *oras* for help, but they are reluctant to come to his aid. The *ora*’s first response is, “Have you forgotten what I told you, not to start a duel on Sunday?” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 7.434-435). He explains the situation more fully. The *ora* then tells him to distract Behuri and take the poisonous dagger he has hidden on his person and kill him. They then take the bereaved maidens and hold a wedding feast in Jutbina.

Mujo wakes from a dream in which his mare was foaling, and awakes to find a foal with a white star on its forehead, just as in his dream. He orders his wife to care for the majestic horse diligently, and soon the King Captain hears of the horse and offers a reward for its capture. Arnaut Osmani betrays Mujo and takes the horse to the land of the Christians. In search for the horse Mujo comes upon the shepherd Raspodini and kills him, takes his garments, and disguises himself as the shepherd to get close to the king, who reveals to Mujo that the horse is in a constant rage. Mujo offers to help, and arriving in the stables takes the horse and leaps over the courtyard, escaping the king. But Mujo realizes the error in his ways, and ashamed of dishonesty he returns his horse to the king. The king intends to use the disguised Mujo as an escort for his daughter at her wedding, but his wife reveals on that day that it is Mujo, and not Raspodini, who has been here the entire time. He then takes three

hundred *shkjas* prisoner and steals away the king's daughter. After a letter from Mujo the king realizes "I'll never have... a son-in-law more sly than this one" (8.411-412).

The story continues with the widow's son named Ali Bajraktari who refuses to leave his house for three years afraid that if he does the *shkjas* would come and destroy it and steal his new bride. His mother finally convinces him to go and visit his friends but on the way there he is captured by the king's Hungarian guards. They then send a disguised *shkja* back as Ali to his house to take his wife for the king, but she is not convinced. The king then sends a note to her that says she must choose another husband for Ali is in jail. She promises to his mother "for three full years will I await him, for three full years I will write him letters," but if he is not freed by then she will choose another (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 12.149-150). After three years she promises to marry Sokol Halili, and sends one last letter to let Ali know. His anger is so wild that as he lets out a cry it shakes the palace walls, which alerts the king. Ali lies and tells the king that his mother has perished and asks him to let him leave for six days to bury her. The king does not trust him, but his own daughter promises to stand as bail and take his sentence if Ali does not return. Once at the palace Ali encounters Mujo, Halili, and his mother, who do not recognize him because of his disguise, and offer him tribute for his assumed death. As he tells her the story, he reveals a mark on his forehead previously covered by his long hair, and she immediately recognizes him and they flee together. Mujo rides after them to hold a celebration for Ali's return. But after six days Ali turns to him and says, "I must go back to the kingdom, I gave the king my word of honor" (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 12.311-312). He returns to the king, and pleased that Ali kept his promise, the king lets him go home to mother, friends, and bride.

Halili and Arnaut Osmani along with several *agas* are imprisoned by the king for nine years. After a while, Osmani devises a plan that he will fake his death in order to escape. The king does not believe them, however, and sends his daughter to investigate. She and Osmani are lovers, and she tells her father that he is dead. The king then submits Osmani to all kinds of torture, including serpent bites, heat exposure, and sharp nails, but he passes each test. The king insists on one final test, he instructs his daughter and thirty maidens to dance around him. The maidens notice that Osmani smiles at her and tell the king. The king then sends for a *baloz* to kill him, but just before the deed is done Osmani “to his feet he sprang and, jumping through the air, he seized the sabre, [and] slew the *baloz* like a madman” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 13.170-172). He then kills all the guards, injures the king, and frees the other *agas*. They return to Jutbina with the maidens and the king’s daughter in celebration.

Mujo and Zuku Bajraktari get in a heated argument over the king’s daughter, Rusha, Zuku’s lover. He tells Mujo, “by the Lord who made me, Mujo, were you not the greatest of us, I’d not tolerate your talking, either I will have my Rusha or leave my head back in Jutbina,” and he sets off to seek his mother’s counsel (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 14.35-38). She tries to convince to marry another, but he will not listen, and insists she go and get him his horse for travel. They set off to the kingdom of the Christians, but Rusha will not let Zuku enter until she sees his recognition token, the ring that she gave him. When Mujo arrives, he is furious to find the two alone together, and they meet with the council and both threaten to kill if they do not get Rusha. The council decides that they must head to the battle grounds and engage in a contest for her. The race begins and Mujo is in the lead, but by divine intervention his horse shies away and turns around, and Zuku wins his bride.

The king of the Christians is insulted by his wife, who claims that despite his wealth and property he cannot compare to the warrior Mujo. Wounded, the king assembles three hundred rough men without family or possessions in order to train them and send them to burn down Mujo's *kulla* and steal his wife, Mehreme, his sister, and his daughter. They succeed and upon return the king marries Mehreme and turns his other wife into a servant. Mujo, who happens to be away when this happens, summons Halili and tells him of his dream. Thirty *agas* arrive and offer to rebuild his *kulla* and to find him a better wife, but for Mujo this is a subject of honor, and sets off to the kingdom of the Christians. But his wife betrays him by getting him drunk, tying him up, and handing him over to the king. Before his execution the king grants him one request, and Mujo asks if he can play his *lahuta*. The song warns Halili who immediately sets out to the kingdom of the Christians and arrives to slay the king and his entire army. Mujo's horse hears his master's cry and kicks open the doorway to rescue him. Mujo kills his wife, sister and daughter, takes the king's old wife, steals his money, and burns his *kulla* to the ground.

Halili is again caught in a love affair with a daughter of the king of the Christians, but this time it is Jevrenija. When her mother learns of her daughter's feelings, she insists that her husband kill her. Instead he decides to give her to the black *gumans* and sends a letter to them telling of his plan. With the help of a bird, Jevrenija dispatches a letter to Mujo asking for his help. They meet the thirty *gumans* on the road and attack them and then dress themselves up as the *gumans*. When they arrive, the king subjects them to a series of tests to prove they are *gumans*. They pass the test and take the daughter, but the king follows them on the road and realizes that they are actually Mujo, Halili, Zuku and the *agas*.

Mujo is gravely wounded and Halili sets out to avenge his brother. While Halili is away, Mujo stays under the protection of a wolf, a serpent, and an *ora*. Soon Halili encounters grave danger and the *zanas* send word to Mujo, healing him so that he can save his brother. Mujo's very presence causes the *shkjas* to flee, and in their absence Mujo realizes that Halili has slain Llabatani and avenged his brother.

Mujo's wife convinces his son Omer that he and Halili are dead. The *agas* reveal to Omer that they have actually been held prisoner for years by the king of the Christians, but refuse to help. Omer goes alone and soon encounters Rusha, the daughter of the king. She is in love with him and devises a plan to help Mujo and Halili escape. Omer steals the king's twin sons and uses them as bribing tool. Once Mujo is free he tests Omer and tricks him into thinking that he will slay the twins. Omer refuses to let him, and at this Mujo realizes that "I now see you, and you really are my son" (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 18.267-268).

Ajkuna, Mujo's wife, begs him not to train Omer for battle, for she is certain she will lose her son as she has lost all the others before. Mujo does not listen and tests his son's strength by ordering Omer to attack a Christian church. He manages the deed for a while, but the *shkjas* and an old woman trick Omer by telling him that "today we have slaughtered Mujo" (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 19.84). Omer is gravely wounded and his groans alert Mujo that he is in danger. Mujo arrives just in time for Omer to request that he not tell his mother of his death, and he and Halili bury Omer in the mountains.

Ajkuna eventually does hear of Omer's death, however. In her grief she flees to the mountains to see her son's grave and cries out in anger to the Moon, wishing she could be buried with Omer. The *oras* cannot bear to hear her hurt anymore, and "calmed her heart

down, slowed the beating, dried the teardrops” and send her home (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 20.87-88).

Arnaut Osmani, jealous of Halili and Mujo, again deceives the brothers. He tells Halili the *shkjas* have murdered Mujo, and Halili sets out to take revenge on Zadrani of Tetova. Zadrani realizes that Mujo will come after him. When Mujo returns, Arnaut Osmani tells him that Halili has gone off fighting and soon finds his corpse and Zadrani. They fight for three days and nights, and in his frustration Mujo calls out to the *zanas* for help, who reveal to Mujo that he has a poisoned dagger in his pocket. He Zadrani, who falls on him and nearly crushes him. The *zanas* help roll Zadrani’s body off Mujo and upon further examination they find “three serpents in his stomach, two were sleeping, one awake” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 21.110-111).

Arnaut Osmani insults Mujo, who feels the need to seek trouble. Mujo is shot nine times and calls to Arnaut Osmani for help, to which Osmani refuses and instead insults him, and Mujo falls lifeless. Mujo’s horse is crazed with grief and “no one could calm down the courser, for it kept neighing loudly” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 22.39-40). The *zanas* revive Mujo, just to stop the horse’s wailing, and Mujo kills Arnaut Osmani.

The final section again deals with Mujo’s death. When Halili is still alive, Mujo falls ill, and Halili buries his brother, promising not to tell anyone that he is dead. After seven years a sea *baloz* believes that Mujo is dead and heads to the mountains in search of his grave. The *baloz* finds the grave and taunts Mujo to awaken. Mujo, cannot however, because of his coffin, emerge from his grave. A bird sends word to Halili that his brother is in fact alive, and Halili sets out to find Mujo. Halili kills the *baloz* and opens the coffin to

find Mujo, who has been revived by the *zanas*. Together the two brothers leave the mountains to Jutbina, “full many a deed did they accomplish” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 23.80).

This concludes the summarization of *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*. What is important to remember for this research is the strength of brotherhood displayed between Mujo, Halili, and their *aga* warriors, animal imagery, and divine aid. In the next two sections I will discuss further certain motifs found within this text, and compare them to similar motifs found in Greek, Roman, and Byzantine works, in an effort to understand better the possible influences on this work. Though it is difficult to trace these influences, similarities can still be found in the works.

**CHAPTER THREE: DRAGON IMAGERY FOUND IN *SONGS OF THE FRONTIER*
WARRIORS AND ITS COMPARISON TO GREEK MYTH**

In this next section I will attempt to point out parallels between imagery found in the stories of *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* and Greek mythology, paying attention to the relationship and description of Mujo and Halili. I will try to establish that the motifs in consideration are significant to Illyrian culture, as seen by their possible passage through different social time periods. It is important to note that though these two subjects may exhibit similarities, due to lack of sources and time it is difficult to make concrete claims about continuity and influence. That being said, in *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* there can be found two motifs which I will further outline: (1) dragon imagery and (2) the theme of strong brotherhood similar to the stories of the Greek mythological brothers, the Dioscuri. The second motif I will discuss in the next chapter. In discussing Greek, Roman, and Byzantine sources, I hope to provide insight into possible influence of dragon ideas common to this region.

After the death of Milman Parry in 1937, Albert Bates Lord learned Albanian and returned to Albanian lands to continue collecting more epic song data, particularly Albanian epic which is still sung by bards there (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, xii). He then tried to trace the tradition of the Balkan epic to Greek origin and influence. He recognized that “the straight line of tradition from ancient Greece to the modern Balkans...is much more complex than that,” affected by such changes as “language, social institutions, religions and people” (Lord 1980, 1). He somewhat generalizes the songs he collects under the term ‘Balkan epic’ and tries to realize the connection to Greece mainly through heroic myths like Heracles and Theseus. He does, however, make note of the common dragon imagery, particularly dragon-

slaying, as seen in Hesiod's eighth century BCE poem "Theogony" (Lord 1978, 339). In it, Zeus defeats Typhoeus, a hundred-headed "snake, a fearful dragon with dark, flickering tongues" (Theogony .826).⁶ Here the words describing Typhoeus are ὄφις and δράκων, both meaning 'dragon' or 'serpent'.

The strong ties of a religious-myth based society could possibly connect Illyrian culture to *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* in some ancient sources' accounts of Illyrian lineage. This can be seen in the tale of Cadmus and Harmonia, who flee to Illyria where eventually Ares turns them into serpents, fulfilling an earlier prophecy. This tale is important not only in its similarities to *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*, but also because the myth physically places these two Greek characters in Illyrian territory, where they not only defeat the peoples there, but eventually rule them as well. The emphasis placed on serpent-dragons and their strength also makes a connection between the two stories. But due to lack of Illyrian sources, it is difficult to know whether Illyrian sources spoke of Cadmus and Harmonia in this region, whether or not there are connections in religion, or if this is merely a Greek tale. Later Greek and Roman sources do claim that Illyrian tribes, particularly the Encheleans (Enchelei) trace their royal lineage to Illyrius, the supposed son of Cadmus and Harmonia, who is mentioned by Apollonius Rhodius, Ovid, Apollodorus, and later Ptolemy Hephaestion as ruler of Illyria after Cadmus' departure (Wilkes, 98). I shall discuss below these ancient sources.

We will present some myth examples that not only show serpent imagery, but also reveal themes of strife, power, and longevity, similar in form to the serpent accounts of *Songs*

⁶ Translation Evelyn-White 1914

of the Frontier Warriors. Serpent myths in Greek tradition are plentiful, especially in explaining origins and progress. The Greek god Apollo must defeat the Python in order to found the Delphic temple and gain knowledge and power from the temple which he establishes at Delphi, arguably one of the most important holy sites in Ancient Greece. Cadmus defeats a serpent as he founds Thebes. From its teeth springs a new race, and for Cadmus its defeat affords him a place to rule in not only Greece but also later in Illyria, and eternal life in the Land of the Blessed. Cecrops, part man and part serpent, rules as the king of Athens as does Erichthonius, ruler and son of the gods. Erichthonius' rule establishes the festival Panathenaia, a staple of Athenian culture. Asclepius the god of medicine is connected to the serpent, and their presence is seen as a sign of healing. These examples will be discussed more fully in this section and provide a background for comparison to events in *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*.

Cadmus in Greek myth is one of three sons of Phoenician Agenor, son of Poseidon, and Telephassa. In search for his lost sister, Europa, he eventually founds and rules Thebes. While hoping to sacrifice a cow to Athena for the new city, he sends companions to take water from the fountain of Ares (Apollodorus, 3.4.1).⁷

φρουρῶν δὲ τὴν κρήνην δράκων, ὃν ἐξ Ἄρεος εἶπόν τινες γεγονέναι, τοὺς πλείονας τῶν πεμφθέντων διέφθειρεν. ἀγανακτήσας δὲ Κάδμος κτείνει τὸν δράκοντα, καὶ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ὑποθεμένης τοὺς ὀδόντας αὐτοῦ σπείρει.

⁷ Translation Frazer 1921

But a dragon, which some said was the offspring of Ares, guarded the spring and destroyed most of those that were sent. In his indignation Cadmus killed the dragon, and by the advice of Athena sowed its teeth.

This theme of dragons, dragon-strength, and serpent-related beings is a parallel between Cadmus and the hero Mujo in *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*, and is connected to both. Here Apollodorus uses *δράκων* to describe a dragon. In fact, the modern English word “dragon” directly comes from this. The constellation Draco directly derives from this word as well. But there are problems with this particular word because while some scholars translate it as dragon, its original meaning seems to be a very large serpent (there seems to be no difference between dragon and serpent, however, as several ancient texts use both to describe the same being in question). In fact, Draco refers to the snake/dragon constellation in a mythical catasterism (Aratus, 45-46).

This is not the only word for dragon used in connection with Cadmus and Harmonia. The fifth century BCE tragedian Euripides mentions the tale of Cadmus and Harmonia in *Bacchae* (Euripides, 1330-1333).⁸

δράκων γενήση μεταβαλὼν, δάμαρ τε σὴ

ἐκθηριωθεῖς ὄφεος ἀλλάξει τύπον,

ἦν Ἄρεος ἔσχες Ἀρμονίαν θνητὸς γεγώς.

You will change your form and become a snake, and your wife,

Ares’ daughter Harmonia, whom you married though a mere mortal,

⁸ Translation Murray 1913

Will also take on the form of a serpent.

Here, Euripides makes a distinction between Cadmus and Harmonia. Cadmus is described as being a δράκων, dragon or large serpent, while his wife Harmonia is distinctly described as being a ὄφις different words are used to describe Cadmus and Harmonia. We might ask why sometimes two words are used to describe what seems to be the same creature. It does not seem to be an issue of gender, as seen in Hesiod when the male Typhoeus is described as both. They seem to be synonyms and rather the author's choice to use both.

Not only does this passage mention a dragon, but also, as in Apollodorus, it refers to the Illyrian tribe of the Enchelei as having a physical presence in Greece at Apollo's holy oracle at Delphi. Herodotus reports that an army of Encheleans did sack the site and mentions an oracle predicting a Persian sack of Delphi and their deaths there. Herodotus claims this is a false interpretation: "I happen to know that the oracle...was not designed for them but for the Illyrians and the army of the Encheleis" (Herodotus 9.43).⁹

Herodotus also mentions Cadmus in connection to linguistics. In fact he claims it is Cadmus who is believed to have brought the Phoenician alphabet to Greece. It is ironic that he then rules Illyria, where there is now no evidence of a written language save other sources. "The Phoenicians who came with Cadmus . . . introduced into Greece...writing, an art till then, I think, unknown to the Greeks" (Herodotus, 5.58).¹⁰

The connection between Illyrians and Pythian Apollo has some interest here, as both have ties to dragons and serpents in mythology. The 7th century B.C.E. hymn to Apollo

⁹ Translation Waterfield 1998

¹⁰ Translation Waterfield 1998

describes this god's battle with the Python, and how the epithet Pythian is born (HH Delian Apollo, 300-303).¹¹

ἀγχοῦ δὲ κρήνη καλλίρροος, ἔνθα δράκαιναν
 κτεῖνεν ἄναξ, Διὸς υἱός, ἀπὸ κρατεροῖο βιοῖο,
 ζατρεφέα, μεγάλην, τέρας ἄγριον...

But nearby was a sweet flowing spring, and there with his strong bow

The lord, the son of Zeus, killed the bloated, great she-dragon,
 a fierce monster wont to do great mischief...

Here, the word used to describe the she-dragon is δράκαιναν, which means she-dragon. This setting is similar to Cadmus slaying Ares' serpent. Both dragons are located near a spring and terrorize the men there.

Furthermore, Apollodorus mentions this oracle in reference to the Enchelei, who will have victory over the Illyrians if they make Cadmus their leader. He also mentions Cadmus and Harmonia (Apollodorus 3.5.4).¹²

αὐθις δὲ μετὰ Ἄρμονίας εἰς δράκοντα μεταβαλὼν εἰς Ἠλύσιον πεδῖον ὑπὸ Διὸς
 ἐξεπέμφθη.

But afterwards he [Cadmus] was, along with Harmonia, turned into a serpent and sent away by Zeus to the Elysian Fields.

¹¹ Translation Evelyn-White 1914

¹² Translation Frazer 1921

In this later passage, Apollodorus refers to Cadmus as a δράκοντα, (the singular accusative form of δράκων), and does not distinguish the man and wife with separate words, as seen in Euripides.

The first century BCE Greek author Strabo mentions this oracle in reference to the tribe Enchelei, which means “eel men”. As do other ancient writers, he places the Enchelei in southern Illyria, near a mountainous region with silver mines (Strabo, 7.7.8). He does mention that in earlier times each of the tribes -like the Tauntalii and the Enchelei- ruled as separate entities, suggesting that by his time they were a more collective group in nature, under an encompassing Illyrian identity. In earlier times he claims the Illyrians rule separately: “For instance, it was the descendants of Cadmus and Harmonia who ruled over the Enchelii; and the scenes of the stories told about them are still pointed out there” (Strabo 7.7.8).¹³

The first century CE Roman author Hyginus recounts that Cadmus kills Ares’ sacred dragon guarding the spring at Thebes (Hyginus 178).¹⁴

Et aquam quaereret, ad fontem Castalium uenit, quem draco Martis filius custodiebat.
Qui cum socios Cadmi interfecisset a Cadmo lapide est interfectus, entesque eius
Minerua monstrante sparsit et arauit, unde Spart<o>e sunt enati.

While seeking water he came to the fountain of Castalia, which a dragon, the offspring of Mars, was guarding. It killed the comrades of Cadmus, but was killed by

¹³ Translation Jones 1924

¹⁴ Translation Grant 1960

Cadmus with a stone. Under Minerva's instructions he sowed the teeth and ploughed them under. From them sprang the Sparti.

Hyginus' version of the story does not, however mention that Cadmus and Harmonia flee to Illyria, turn into serpents, and settle in the Land of the Blessed. He does mention, however that Agave, one of Cadmus' daughters, having killed her own son Pentheus eventually wanders to the doorstep of the Illyrian king Lycothereses, who takes her in (Hyginus, 184). Her story does not end there. Several sections later under a section appropriately titled "Women who kill their husbands," Agave "killed Lycothereses in Illyria, in order to give the rule to Cadmus her father" (Hyginus 240).¹⁵

Unlike earlier sources, Apollodorus also includes the detail that Cadmus and Harmonia had a son Illyrius who rules after Cadmus' departure (Apollodorus 3.5.4)¹⁶

ὁ δὲ Κάδμος μετὰ Ἀρμονίας Θήβας ἐκλιπὼν πρὸς Ἐγγελέας παραγίνεται. τούτοις δὲ ὑπὸ Ἰλλυριῶν πολεμουμένοις ὁ θεὸς ἔχρησεν Ἰλλυριῶν κρατήσῃν, ἔὰν ἡγεμόνας Κάδμον καὶ Ἀρμονίαν ἔχωσιν. οἱ δὲ πεισθέντες ποιοῦνται κατὰ Ἰλλυριῶν ἡγεμόνας τούτους καὶ κρατοῦσι. καὶ βασιλεύει Κάδμος Ἰλλυριῶν, καὶ παῖς Ἰλλυριῶς αὐτῷ γίνεται.

But Cadmus and Harmonia quitted Thebes and went to the Encheleans. As the Encheleans were being attacked by the Illyrians, the god declared by an oracle that they would get the better of the Illyrians if they had Cadmus and Harmonia as their leaders. They believed him, and made them their leaders against the Illyrians, and got

¹⁵ Translation Grant 1960

¹⁶ Translation Frazer 1921

the better of them. And Cadmus reigned over the Illyrians, and a son Illyrius was born to him.

Some Roman accounts claim that Illyrians trace their ancestral history to Illyrius and Cadmus, a sign of the not only close physical proximity of the Greeks and Illyrians, but perhaps an overlapping of culture and ideas. But this reference to ancestral past could be an influence of Roman culture, and not Greek at all. Lack of Illyrian texts makes it difficult to construct any kind of timeline.

The fourth-century BCE Pseudo-Scylax mentions the city Buthoë in connection to the Enchelei. These are the same Enchelei that sack Apollo's oracle at Delphi, further making a connection between Illyria and Delphi. Pseudo-Scylax says that the Enchelei are actually "an Illyrian people, who inhabit the land after Rhizon" (Pseudo-Scylax, 24.2).¹⁷ He also mentions that the rocks of Cadmus and Harmonia are near the Rhizon River but does give any further explanation about these rocks. Though his text contains errors, it is the first authentic account of the Adriatic that mentions several Illyrian peoples inhabiting the region as far east as the river Aous (Wilkes 96). The region of Illyria changes and eventually means regions only south of the Adriatic by 200 B.C.E., and *Illyricum* in the Roman era means lands between the Adriatic and the Danube (Wilkes 97). The Enchelei, "eel-men", then are an Illyrian tribe, located near what is now Lake Lychnitits, now called Lake Ohrid, which straddles the border between modern Albania and Macedonia. Inhabiting a land rich with fish, it makes no wonder that these Enchelei are so appropriately named. Their rulers claim descent from Cadmus (Wilkes, 98). Like the Illyrian king Lycothereses, there is a connection

¹⁷ Translation Shipley 2011

between Illyrian nomenclature and wild creatures. Boeotia, a Greek city-state near Athens, is also known for their eels, and is even mentioned in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. In basic form, perhaps snakes can be connected to eels, which live in water and have a serpentine form. Serpents, as seen in the myths mentioned in Delphi and Boetia, are connected to springs and water. This could help reinforce the connection between Illyrian and Greeks with serpent-like imagery.

The third century bce poet Apollonius Rhodius mentions Cadmus and his tales in *Argonautica*. The ruler Aeetes gives Jason and the Argonauts “for the contest the fell teeth of the Aonian dragon which Cadmus found in Ogygian Thebes when he came seeking for Europa and there slew the -- warder of the spring of Ares” (Apollonius 3.176-1180).¹⁸ Specifically Apollonius uses ὀδόντας Ἀονίοιο δράκοντος to describe the “teeth of the Aonian dragon” (Apollonius 3.1177-1178).¹⁹ These teeth, which Cadmus sows in the earth to produce new men, Aeetes gives to Jason to sow in the field along with other tasks in exchange for the Golden Fleece. Apollonius mentions Apollo in reference to his oracle for Cadmus. Mentioning this reinforces the strength of this dragon tale in Greek myth.

The first century BCE Roman poet Ovid tells Cadmus' story, along with any tangent that includes one of Cadmus' family members. Ovid describes the snake in great detail (Ovid, 3.31-34).²⁰

ubi conditus antro Martius anguis erat, cristis praesignis et auro; igne micant oculi,
corpus tumet omne venenis, tres vibrant linguae, triplici stant ordine dentes.

¹⁸ Translation Seaton 1912

¹⁹ Translation Seaton 1912

²⁰ Translation Melville 1986

Hidden in a cave there dwelt a snake, a snake of Mars. Its crest shown gleaming gold; its eyes flashed fire; its whole body was big with venom, and between its triple rows of teeth its three-forked tongue flickered.

The word Ovid uses to describe the creature is *anguis*, meaning “snake, serpent”. But later in the text he also uses *serpens* (Ovid, 3.38), meaning “a creeping thing, snake, or serpent” and *vipereus* (Ovid, 3.103) “of a viper, serpent”. His choice to use multiple words to describe the same being implies that there is no distinction between these words which appear to be merely synonyms and in this context there is no specific use for each word, reflecting Euripides’ use of δράκων and ὄφις to seemingly mean the same thing. Perhaps this is a poetic usage by the authors, who do not want to sound repetitive.

The second century CE Roman traveler Pausanias mentions Cadmus in his journey through Boeotia that “Cadmus (he may believe the story who likes) sowed the teeth of the dragon, which he slew at the fountain, from which teeth men came up out of the earth” (Pausanias 9.10.1).²¹ He also describes the place where some believe Ares’ fountain stands in Boeotia: “Higher up than the Ismenian sanctuary you may see the fountain which they say is sacred to Ares, and they add that a dragon was posted by Ares as a sentry over the spring” (Pausanias 9.10.5).²² Pausanias uses δράκων to describe the serpent in both passages.

Through Cadmus we note a mythological connection between Thebes, Illyria, and Boeotia. Like the Boeotians, the Athenians had a foundational myth related to serpent creatures. Apollodorus mentions Cecrops, half man half serpent, as being the first king of Athens using δράκων to signify his body as part dragon (Apollodorus 3.14.11). Cranaus

²¹ Translation Jones 1918

²² Translation Jones 1918

succeeds Cecrops, also a son of the soil, who then is expelled by Amphictyon, either a son of Deucalion or the soil; and then Erichthonius expels him and takes his place as king (Apollodorus 3.14.6). Some believe Erichthonius is the son of Athena, who wipes Hephaestus' seed on the ground, an act which sprouts the future ruler. She places him in a box, in which he appears to be a serpent coiled about a child, which could mean the child is part serpent, using δράκων to describe the creature.

The serpent image is prevalent in Illyrian society and ritual, particularly in southern Illyria, and seen as a symbol of fertility and potency, even in Roman periods (Wilkes, 245). Later accounts attribute the continued presence of serpent imagery in the area to represent a struggle of power in Christianity, obtained from the account of the Illyrian St. Jerome about the life of the ninth century monk St. Hilarion in Dalmatia (St. Jerome 39).

An enormous serpent, of the sort which the people of those parts call boas because they are so large that they often swallow oxen, was ravaging the whole province...He ordered a pyre to be prepared for it, then sent up a prayer to Christ, called forth the reptile...And so before all the people he burnt the savage beast to ashes.

This word *boas*, cognate with Latin *bos* and Greek βούς "ox", is interesting that it is used to describe the serpent that terrorizes Christian villages. Its connection to cows is interesting, in particular for Cadmus as he searches for his sister Europa and intends to sacrifice a cow to Athena on the altar in the newly founded Thebes. Cadmus, as previously mentioned, destroys Ares' serpent guard who terrorizes and kills his men. The result of his action is that Boeotia gets its name from the ox which he sacrifices.

These same themes can be seen in use of dragon/serpent imagery in *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*. In these following paragraphs I will discuss in detail these instances of dragon imagery and compare them to the Greek myths that I have mentioned, along with other myths that are appropriate for the particular scene. *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* mentions not only dragons but often compares Mujo and Halili's strength to that of a dragon. The dragon is seen as a source of power to them but it also something they must defeat, as seen when Halili slays the shape-shifting Christian queen. Its prevalent use of dragon imagery suggests there is an Albanian cultural connection with serpent creatures, paralleling the similar motif in Greek stories, which we have seen above. I will refer to this text as Elsie and Mathie-Heck 2004, as it is their translation of the text.

The first section of the *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* describes young Mujo and how he obtains his strength as a warrior. Trying to find work, he encounters in the mountain three *zanas*, who give him strength as he completes a series of tasks. He “seemed to acquire the strength of a *dragua*” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 1.77). The Albanian word used here is *drangue*, which in Albanian mythology is a winged warrior that is part human with extraordinary strength (Lowie, 523). This can be compared to Apollo, after he defeats the Pythia. On the spot where he slays the Pythia, near a spring, sits his Pythian oracle, a revered oracle sought by many in the ancient world that offers insight and guidance (*Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo*, 370-374). In a way, both Apollo and Mujo absorb this serpent “strength” and use to overpower their enemies and help their loved ones.

When Halili and his future bride Tanusha escape from a Christian encampment, her mother, the queen, pursues them. They take refuge in a lighthouse, but the queen soon finds them. She beguiles Tanusha into opening the door, but “the mother was no mother, she was

a *dragua* slaying monster. The Slavic queen espied Halili, and hissed, recoiling like a serpent” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 5.470-474). The word used here is *drangujt*, another declension form of *drangue*. She is not directly a dragon herself, but it is important that she be described as such.

Albert Bates Lord also mentions in his findings in *Digenis Akritas*, a tenth century Byzantine epic about the warrior named Basileos (Lord 1980, 2). His epithet Digenis Akritas means “Twyborn Borderer” so named because of his Christian and Muslim heritage. Lord compares the Byzantine myth to Heracles and Theseus episodes and Balkan epics. Basileos “grew, the Twyborn Borderer, having from God strange favor of manliness” (Mavrogordato, 976-980). In it, he is a famed warrior, associated greatly with horses, who also must defeat serpents. Basileos’ connection to great strength and dragon-slaying could be similar to Halili’s. Due to Slavic invasion of Albanian territory in the sixth century CE, it may be unlikely that this Byzantine epic found its way there, but it is still worth mentioning for the importance of dragon imagery still prevalent by the tenth century and later twelfth, when the text is first documented.

When Mujo lies gravely wounded, a serpent, an *ora*, and a wolf stay at his side to attend him. Dizdar Osman Aga, who is visiting Mujo attempts to kill slay the serpent and wolf in his confusion, but Mujo explains the serpent’s purpose (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 17.183-188).

And the serpent now slithering over my lesions was given by God as great help and assistance. Three times a day does it cleanse my wounds with them, and whenever the aching is too great to suffer, the serpent begins then to sing me a carol.

The word here used to describe serpent is *gjarpæn*, meaning “serpent”. Because Dizdar Osman Aga, a warrior older than Mujo, is surprised at the sight of a healing serpent, this would suggest that perhaps this is an unusual method. Perhaps due to Mujo’s bond to the *zanas* and the *oras*, he is allowed greater magical care than most. It might also suggest that due to Mujo’s profound strength it takes greater care to heal his wounds.

This connection can be seen through Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine and healing. He is depicted with serpent imagery, and his temples, like the one at Epidaurus, use serpents as a form of healing. Asclepius’ association is such that the serpent enlightens him in the power of healing and eventually entwines itself in his staff, a popular depicted image in Greek art. Hyginus summarizes the connection (Hyginus, 2.14).²³

While meditating what he should do, staff in hand, a snake is said to have crept on to his staff...Where upon Aesculapius, using the same herb, brought Glaucus, too, back to life. And so the snake is put in the guardianship of Aesculapius and among the stars as well. Following his example, his descendants passed the knowledge on to others, so that doctors make use of snakes.

Here the Latin word *Anguitenens* means “serpent-holder”. Like Mujo’s instance, Ovid mentions that Asclepius uses the serpent’s herbs to heal Glaucus (Ovid 6.735). There are several instances of snakes healing people and then being dedicated in cities, not just in Epidaurus, which suggests that there is a common knowledge of snake-healing in ancient Greece (LiDonnici, 111).

²³ Translation Grant 1960

As Mujo, the great warrior with dragon strength, lies gravely wounded, his younger brother Halili sets out to avenge him from *shkjas* warriors in the Christian Kingdom. Halili's strength is indeed great, and he "holds fast in the cave like a dragon" (Elsie and Mathie-Heck 17.326). Here the word used to describe his patience is *drang*. This then implies a greater connection between the two brothers, that both are associated with serpents. Other *aga* warriors are not connected to serpents like Mujo and Halili, perhaps due in part to their great strength. This could reinforce the divine strength seen clearly in Mujo, due to the help of the *zanas*, and his brother Halili, who together are greatly feared.

The use of dragon imagery in *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* helps to establish a kind of connection between it and earlier works by Greek, Roman, and Byzantine authors. Dragon cults and worship in Illyria further solidify the tie to a longstanding serpent focus in the area. However, because it is difficult to trace the exact origins of the work and because the temporal gap is so vast, the connections made here are not concrete. In the next section I will follow the same style of analysis as I focus on the connections between brotherhood and the mythical twins, the Dioscuri.

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE BROTHERLY BOND IN *SONGS OF THE FRONTIER*
WARRIORS AND ITS COMPARISON TO THE DIOSCURI**

Strong bonds between brothers are very important in both Greek myth and *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*. This extends but is not exclusive to brotherly bonds and actual familial connections. These bonds are strong in war, and often one brother is called to save another. There are differences in the extent of the relationship for some, and other brother pairs seem to work better together. *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* makes a distinction between actual brother and “blood brother,” a bond chosen at birth that ties two unrelated males together, but both bonds are very strong. Halili and Mujo are actual brothers and throughout the epic each one faces terror and must be saved by his brother. There are several examples of this in Greek mythology. Though not all stories of brothers have strong notes of compassion and reverence, there are a few examples in Greek and later Roman mythology of brothers actually caring for one another and working towards a common goal. In this section I will discuss the bonds between the brothers Mujo and Halili as well as blood-brother bonds compared to the Greek Dioscuri brothers.

In Greek mythology, there are several sets of brothers that work together. The Dioscuri are a set of twins, Castor and Polydeuces (in Latin, Pollux), sons of Leda, and though born at the same time Castor is the mortal offspring of Leda’s husband Tyndareus and Pollux is the divine son of Zeus, who tricked Leda by turning into a swan. There are several variants of the story, but if one brother is considered immortal it is always Polydeuces. One seventh century BCE Homeric Hymn addresses the Dioscuri as “the Tyndaridae, who sprang

from Olympian Zeus” (*HH* 17.2).²⁴ Hymn 33 elaborates more on their characters, describing Castor as “tamer of horses” and Polydeuces as “blameless” (*HH* 33.3-4).²⁵ Often Castor is associated with horses, and Pollux is known for immortality and athleticism. Together they are known for protecting sailors on the open sea and for providing fair weather. Some ancient sources say that when Idas slays the mortal Castor, Pollux asks his father Zeus for death as well, because he cannot live with his brother. Instead, Zeus has them share their immortality, alternating between Hades and Olympus.

Mentions of the Dioscuri occur as early as the eighth century BCE, as in the Homeric Hymns. The seventh century bce writer Stasinus of Cyprus also makes mention of the Dioscuri in his work (Stasinus fr. 1).²⁶

In the meantime Castor and Polydeuces, while stealing the cattle of Idas and Lynceus, were caught in the act, and Castor was killed by Idas, and Lynceus and Idas by Polydeuces. Zeus gave them immortality every other day.

They have two sisters, Helen and Clytemnestra, wives of the brothers Menelaus and Agamemnon. But before Helen marries Menelaus, Theseus of Athens abducts her and the Dioscuri come to her aid. Stasinus’ Cyprian fragments explain that “Helen had been previously carried off by Theseus”, and in their attempt to save her the captor Aphidnus wounds Castor (Stasinus, fr. 1).²⁷ This episode shows the great lengths that the Dioscuri go to save their loved ones, reaffirmed by Castor’s injury.

²⁴ Translation Evelyn-White 1914

²⁵ Translation Evelyn-White 1914

²⁶ Translation Evelyn-White 1914

²⁷ Translation Evelyn-White 1914

The eighth century BCE Homeric *Iliad* also mentions the Dioscuri. Helen, their sister, looks from the Trojan wall to the battlefield as she tries to find her brothers (Homer, 3.236-244)²⁸:

δοιῶ δ' οὐ δύναμαι ἰδέειν κοσμήτορε λαῶν

Κάστορα θ' ἰππόδαμον καὶ πύξ ἀγαθὸν Πολυδεύκεα

αὐτοκασιγνήτω, τῷ μοι μία γείνατο μήτηρ.

ἢ οὐχ ἐσπέσθην Λακεδαίμονος ἐξ ἔρατεινῆς...

τοὺς δ' ἤδη κάτεχεν φυσίζοος αἶα

ἐν Λακεδαίμονι αὖθι φίλη ἐν πατρίδι γαίῃ.

But two marshallers of the host can I not see, Castor, tamer of horses, and the goodly boxer, Polydeuces, even mine own brethren, whom the same mother bare. Either they followed not with the host from lovely Lacedaemon ...but they ere now were fast holden of the life-giving earth there in Lacedaemon, in their dear native land.

The brothers in fact never make it to Troy. This passage again reaffirms Castor's connection to horses and Polydeuces' connection to boxing.

Apollonius Rhodius in the *Argonautica* tells of how the brothers join Jason in his quest for the Golden Fleece. When Amycus, king of the Berbrycians, challenges the bravest man of the Argonauts to a boxing match, it is Polydeuces who engages him. Amycus is described as the “most arrogant of men,” forcing travelers to engage in duels (Apollonius,

²⁸ Translation Murray 1924

2.4).²⁹ Meeting on the sand, Polydeuces engages Amycus in the fight and ultimately kills him, protecting his comrades from further taunt and harm by the malicious king. He is described “like the star of heaven...but his might and fury waxed like a wild beast’s” (Apollonius, 2.40-45).³⁰ Castor helps ready him for dueling, and Polydeuces faces Amycus (Apollonius, 2.94-97).³¹

ὁ δ' ἄγχ' αὐτοῖο παρὲκ γόνυ γουνὸς ἀμισίβων

κόψε μεταίγδην ὑπὲρ οὐατος, ὅστ' εἶσω

ῥῆξεν: ὁ δ' ἀμφ' ὀδύνη γνῦξ ἤριπεν: οἱ δ' ἰάχησαν

ἥρωες Μινύαι: τοῦ δ' ἀθρόος ἔκχυτο θυμός.

And coming near and slipping his knee past the king's, with a rush he struck him above the ear, and broke the bones inside, and the king in agony fell upon his knees; and the Minyan heroes shouted for joy; and his life was poured forth all at once.

This displays the Dioscuri’s courage and willingness to battle against fiercely famed enemies. It also displays the divine strength of Polydeuces who can defeat the worst of men. After Amycus’ death the Berbrycians charge on Polydeuces, but Castor and the Argonauts rush to his aid and kill the great warriors. They then pass through the land of the Mariandyni, and when the lord Lycus hears that they slew Amycus and his warriors, Lycus holds a feast

²⁹ Translation Seaton 1912

³⁰ Translation Seaton 1912

³¹ Translation Seaton 1912

in their honor. Polydeuces is described as being “welcomed as a god” (Apollonius 2.755).³² Lycus also promises a temple to the Dioscuri twins (Apollonius 2.807-810).³³

τὸ μὲν μάλα τηλόθι πάντες ναυτίλοι ἄμ πέλαγος θεεύμενοι ἰλάζονται· καὶ κέ σφιν
μετέπειτα πρὸ ἄστεος, οἷα θεοῖσιν, πίονας εὖα· ρότοιο γύας πεδίοιο ταμοίμην.

Which all sailors shall mark far across the sea and shall reverence; and hereafter for them will I set apart outside the city, as for gods, some fertile fields of the well-tilled plain.

Hesiod mentions the brothers and their familial connections in his work *Catalogues of Women*. Of their character he says “but there was no deceitful dealing in the sons of Tyndareus” (Hesiod, *Fragment 68* 1.20). These fragment further shapes the Dioscuri’s character as one that is respected.

Euripides mentions the Dioscuri in his play *Electra*. The two appear after Orestes and his sister Electra wrongfully kill their mother, Clytemnestra, at the urging of Apollo. As Clytemnestra is the sister of the Dioscuri, they tell Orestes and Electra that though their actions are justified it is wrong to kill their mother. They instruct Orestes to flee to Athens to the effigy of Pallas and later to the Areopagus for a just trial. At this effigy, Athena is said to shield Orestes from the Fates’ “snakelike rage,” here used as “δεινοῖς δράκουσιν ὥστε” literally “as terrible dragons” (Euripides, 1256). Here, the Dioscuri are described as helping only those “who live lives that show themselves devout and just” (Euripides 1352-1353). They display characteristics of respected authority that people look up to and trust. If their

³² Translation Seaton 1912

³³ Translation Seaton 1912

guidance towards Orestes trumps Apollo's this suggests that they are very wise in seeking the right answer.

The fifth century Greek writer Pindar praises the brothers in several Olympian Odes, in which he describes their association with horse racing and boxing, and mentions their patronage in the Olympian Games. One ode in particular is for Theron's 476 BCE victory in the chariot race. In thanking the gods for the victory, Pindar gives special attention to the Dioscuri: "I pray that I may be pleasing to the hospitable sons of Tyndareus" (Pindar, 3.1-5).³⁴ This depicts the reverence with which Pindar and Greek athletes pay tribute to the Dioscuri, whose *xenia* Pindar stresses, perhaps to thank Theron for his hospitality. Pindar also mentions Castor and Polydeuces in his Pythian and Nemean odes. Pindar credits Arcesilas' victory in the chariot race of 462 BCE in part to Castor "favored by the gods, from the first steps of your famous life you seek for it with glory, by the grace of Castor with his golden chariot" (Pindar, 5.5-9).³⁵ The Nemean Ode for Theaus of Athos describes his wrestling victory, and Pindar rightly acknowledges Polydeuces and Castor. This poem also mentions how the games honor the brothers "since the Dioscuri, guardians of spacious Sparta... administer the flourishing institution of the games, and they care very much for just men. Indeed, the race of the gods is trustworthy" (Pindar, 10.49-54).³⁶

These examples help to explain Pindar's repetitious yet gracious reverence to the Dioscuri in his odes. For most of the victories that Pindar writes about, Castor is thanked for his horse skills, Polydeuces for his boxing, or the brothers are acknowledged together. Often these brothers are associated with sport and the Olympic Games, and honoring them seems

³⁴ Translation Svarlien 1990

³⁵ Translation Svarlien 1990

³⁶ Translation Svarlien 1990

customary, if not just to Pindar. But this particular Nemean ode for Thaeus of Argos for wrestling also mentions the Dioscuri's beginnings and their mythological tale. In it, Pindar shares a passage where Polydeuces cries to Zeus that he may end his life because Castor, his brother, has died. Polydeuces cries "a man's honor is gone when he is deprived of friends; but few mortals are trustworthy in times of toil to share the hardship" (Nemean 10.78-79).³⁷ This passage defines the importance of brotherhood and friendship to the Dioscuri. By including this passage in the ode, Pindar seems to praise Polydeuces for his choice to willingly give up his immortality for the sake of his own brother. And here it seems the strength and bond between brothers does not go unnoticed, and is very revered, and mentioned in this athletic environment. Perhaps there is a strong connection between competition and brotherhood.

The fourth century BCE philosopher Plato mentions the Dioscuri and athleticism in his work *Laws*. He discusses how certain dances and types of wrestling should be kept and continued to be taught to pupils used for different purposes. In particular he mentions warrior dances used for war and festivals by the cult at Lacedaemon, to which they are particularly attributed since they are in myth from Sparta (Plato, 796a-796c).³⁸

οὐδ' ὅσα ἐν τοῖς χοροῖς ἐστὶν αὖ μιμήματα προσήκοντα μιμεῖσθαι παρετέον, κατὰ μὲν τὸν τόπον τόνδε Κουρήτων ἐνόπλια παίγνια, κατὰ δὲ Λακεδαίμονα Διοσκόρων... ἃ δὴ πάντως μιμεῖσθαι πρέπον ἂν εἴη κόρους τε ἅμα καὶ κόρας, τὴν τῆς θεοῦ χάριν τιμῶντας, πολέμου τ' ἐν χρειᾷ καὶ ἐορτῶν ἕνεκα

Nor should we omit such mimic dances as are fitting for use by our choirs,—for instance, the sword-dance of the Curetes here in Crete, and that of the Dioscuri in

³⁷ Translation Svarlien 1990

³⁸ Translation Bury 1967

Lacedaemon... These examples it would well become the boys and girls to copy, and so cultivate the favor of the goddess, alike for service in war and for use at festivals.

This is interesting the connection between wrestling and ritual practice. Not only is it seen as a use of physical athleticism, but also as a kind of spiritual athleticism, somehow focusing the immaterial being to use one's own material nature in an effort to bring praise to the divine. In practice it seems that physical success is closely tied to worship and spirituality. In fact, the Dioscuri, with their connection to wrestling and worship, are often seen on the battlefield. The Dioscuri's association with war in cult practice is very important. Indeed these brothers are strongly connected due to their strength and athletic skill and are often seen in battle in both myth and practice. This close connection with Sparta, which is known for its fame on the battlefield, further strengthens a connection between worship and war.

Pausanias mentions the Dioscuri's hatred the Messians, and the bad blood between the Messians and the Lacedaemonians, in his second century CE *Description of Greece*. In it, he gives his reasoning for the tension, attributing it to mistaken identity as the two Messian friends, Panromos and Gonippos, ride in a Lacedaemonian encampment pretending to be the Dioscuri (Pausanias 4.27.2-3).³⁹

οἱ νεανίσκοι δὲ ὡς ἅπαξ ἀνεμίχθησαν, διεξήλαυνον διὰ πάντων παίοντες τοῖς δόρασι, καὶ ἤδη κειμένων πολλῶν ἀποχωροῦσιν ἐς Ἀνδανίαν, καθυβρίσαντες τῶν Διοσκούρων τῇ θυσίᾳ. τοῦτο ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν προήγαγε τοὺς Διοσκούρους ἐς τὸ ἔχθος τὸ Μεσσηνίων.

³⁹ Translation Jones 1918

The youths rode right through them, striking with their spears, and when many had been killed, returned to Andania, having outraged the sacrifice to the Dioskouroi. It was this, in my view, that roused the Dioskouroi to their hatred of the Messenians.

The Dioscuri's rage does not go unnoticed as they are known for seeking revenge against their enemies. The Dioscuri's connection to this warlike spirit continues in later Latin writings. The first century BCE Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero mentions in his work, *De Natura Deorum*, that "in the Latin War... Castor and Pollux were seen fighting on horseback in our ranks" (Cicero, 2.2).⁴⁰ Their presence on the Roman side according to Cicero establishes them as warriors in ranks spanning generations and seems to justify the Roman's actions, as though having these two brothers adds a weight and sense of duty to the particular scene described. Cicero also mentions the Dioscuri ride on *equis albis*, meaning "white horses", a depiction commonly associated with warriors, which signifies that their presence can be bellicose (Cicero 2.2).⁴¹

The Dioscuri are mentioned in connection to the word σύζυγος, meaning "yoked together, paired, or united," in literature. Euripides uses this word in reference to the Dioscuri when Hecuba chastises their sister Helen for her mistakes in *The Trojan Women*: "what cry for help did you ever raise, though Castor was still alive, a vigorous youth, and his brother also, not yet among the stars" (Euripides, 1001).⁴² Here the word is translated as "brother". This gives a much stronger emphasis to the word σύζυγος, as though it can reference not only a close friend but also someone who is bound by blood.

⁴⁰ Translation Rackham 1967

⁴¹ Translation Rackham 1967

⁴² Translation Roche 1998

When describing the Dioscuri in the *Argonautica*, Apollonius Rhodius does not specifically use the word σύζυγος, but invokes a similar idea. Here, the Dioscuri have instructions to yoke the oxen, because “they had been detailed to do so” (Apollonius Rhodius 3.1315). The word use here is προφράζω, meaning “to tell or announce beforehand”. Though they are not explicitly being bound like oxen in the *Argonautica*, what is important is the imagery evoked concerning the brothers, with this idea of oxen, being yoked together. It is as though they are bound together on the same course and cannot complete their task without each other.

Their reverence is seen not only in athleticism and war, but also at sea. The first century BCE writer Diodorus Siculus mentions their valor in connection to sailors. Diodorus explains that they “have won them fame among practically all men, since they make their appearance as helpers of those who fall into unexpected perils (that is, they appear to mariners in storms)” (Diodorus Siculus, 6 fragment 6).⁴³ This describes again in detail the reverence that the Dioscuri receive from men.

The Dioscuri are even mentioned in the New Testament in reference to nautical terms, as they are patrons of sea travelers. On the apostle Paul’s arrival to Rome he states that “after three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux” (New International Version, Acts 28:11). Depending on translation, the Dioscuri may also be called the “twin gods” or Castor and Pollux, but here the word used to describe them is Διοσκούροις, which can only mean the Dioscuri.

⁴³ Translation Oldfather 1935

The 16th century Italian priest Antonio Gallonio mentions the twins Florus and Laurus in his writings, *De. SS. Martyrum Cruciatu*, translated *Tortures and Torments of the Christian Martyrs*. It describes the brothers as second century CE stonemasons who learn their trade from Proclus and Maximus, who are later tortured and thrown into a well. After this, Florus and Laurus leave Byzantium to the Roman district of Illyricum, in Ulpiani (Gallonio, 204).⁴⁴

These holy men were twin brothers, and hewers of stone...they left Byzantium (Constantinople) and retired into the district of Illyricum, to the city of Ulpiani, where, working in the quarries under Lido the Governor, they worthily followed their trade. Finally, after enduring many tortures and being cast by Licio into a deep well, they gave up their souls to God.

These twins eventually become saints. Their saint day in the Byzantine calendar of saints is August 18th. They are greatly celebrated in Russian orthodoxy, and Leo Tolstoy mentions them in *War and Peace*. In the novel, two peasants discuss praying to the twin saints and mention that they are the “horses’ saints,” which establishes a strong connection between horses and Florus and Laurus in Russian folklore (Harris, 3). Harris attempts to establish a connection between the Dioscuri and the twin martyrs, suggesting a connection between the festivals celebrated on August 18th. The Roman Catholic Church honors Helena, mother of Constantine on this day, while the Byzantine Church honors the twin martyrs. In the Greek myth, the Dioscuri have a sister named Helen, and are worshipped together, particularly in the cult at Sparta. He also mentions that Pliny the Elder names electric

⁴⁴ Translation Allinson 1903

discharges that produce a bright light on the masts and yards of ships after Helen and the Dioscuri. As the Dioscuri are the patrons of sailors, one discharge is named Helen, while the two discharges are named after the brothers. He claims that this single “Helena-fire” is later in the Middle Ages referred to as St. Elmo’s fire merely due to a corruption in Helen’s name (Harris, 4-5). St. Elmo is also known as St. Erasmus, Bishop of Formium in Italy, who is later martyred in the Roman province of Illyricum in 303 CE.

Other sources, like twentieth century researcher Alexander Kazhdan, claim that Dioscuri images can be found on North African pottery well into the fourth century CE, alongside the 12 apostles and Lazarus, as well as on sarcophagi with St. Peter’s arrest (Kazhdan, 633). Cults dedicated to the Dioscuri still existed within a Christian timeframe, but instead of dismissing the brothers altogether, the church merely rejected the idea of their immortality and replaced them with important Christian figures. Some depictions include Peter and Paul for seafarers and Kosmos and Damianos for healing (Kazhdan, 633). What is interesting is the need to keep this strong bond between mythological brothers alive in both the Byzantine and Roman churches in the early developments of the Christian faith. The fact that the twin saints Florus and Laurus are geographically placed in Illyria (Illyricum) is important, because it suggests strong ties to a twin cult, possibly from earlier religions.

Likewise, as we have seen above, the brothers Mujo and Halili share a bond similar to that of the Dioscuri. Their bond is characterized by sacrifice, and each goes out of his way to ensure that his brother is safe. There is also a strong brotherhood for the *aga* warriors and other mythological characters, called a “blood brother”, someone who is not strictly kindred, but is nevertheless bound to a warrior until death. Usually one’s blood brother is another

aga, but Mujo is unique in that his blood brothers are the three *zanas* who give him great strength and promise to assist him whenever needed (Elsie and Mathie-Heck,, 1.91-93).

Mujo and his brother share similar bonds with Castor and Polydeuces. Mujo and Polydeuces share similar traits in their god-like strength and ability, and look out for their lesser sibling. Mujo receives great strength from a divine source, “that the Lord did give him” through the aid of three mythological creatures, the *zanas*, and he is almost unrivaled in his strength (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 1.76). His strength, then, is almost divine in nature. His younger brother, Halili, longs to join him and the other *agas* in their raids and pursuits, but Mujo refuses to let him, fearing he is too inexperienced (Elsie and Mathie-Heck,, 3.113-121).

I do not want to take you with me on this *çeta*...much gruesome fighting will likely take place there, in pools full of blood will their bodies be floating...a man young as you are is bound to go crazy!

Mujo’s act is not done out of jealousy or strife, but out of love for his own younger brother who does not possess the strength that Mujo does. This act shows the strength shared between two brothers, the bond that they possess, that Mujo cares deeply for his own kin and thinks of Halili’s safety before some kind of comradely sport. Despite any grievances they may have, they still value each other over selfish desires.

Halili is angered by Mujo’s decision and turns for guidance to his mother, who gives Halili his father’s horse and sends him on his way. The horse, familiar with the path, leads him to the Realm of the Christians where “your father selected for you a blood brother...Begu Ymer Beg is the name that they call him, and this man will teach you to deal

with the *shkja* men” Elsie and Mathie-Heck, and with the help of three *oras* they defeat Paji Harambashi, who has taken Mujo’s betrothed, Januka, thirty *agas*, and Mujo himself as prisoner. Halili feigns indifference as he frees his brother, but on their return the *oras* prophesy about the bond that the brothers share: (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 3.315-318).

Listen to me now, Mujo and Halili, brothers are and will be so forever. May neither alone ever set out for battle. Forlorn will the one be, bereft of a brother.

This prophecy conveys the strength of the bond that Mujo and Halili share. Like the Dioscuri, they are bound together in a similar fate. One cannot exist without the other. When Castor dies, Polydeuces offers to relinquish his mortality rather than living without his brother. Mujo seems to have that same kind of protective quality, fearing that Halili is not capable yet to face dangers on the road. But Halili’s single act of disobedience towards his older brother shows he is capable and makes the prophecy possible: had Halili not defied Mujo, the prophecy could not exist, because it relies on the strength and capability that both brothers possess. Like the Dioscuri, one brother cannot exist without the other, one brother cannot be separated from the other.

Mujo and Halili build a reputation for themselves as brothers through duels and other escapades, never withdrawing from a duel or challenge, so much so that even the Sultan, ruler over all the Ottoman Empire, knows of their strength and courage. When the king of the Christians throws Halili into prison for taking his daughter, Tanusha, Mujo must save his brother. Mujo is hesitant to help Halili, “were there not Jutbina’s honor,” but ultimately decides that this is the best option and rallies three hundred *agas* and waits by the river in Kotor to watch Halili’s situation (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 5.559). As his last wish, Halili asks if he can sing and play his *lahuta*, and sings in an ancient language no one knows, and begs

the *zanas* and *oras* to send word to Mujo for help. A bird approaches, to which Halili says, “should he [Mujo] be near, should he hear me, tell him it is my worst dilemma,” and Mujo arrives to save his brother (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 5.630-632). This shows the strength of bond between Mujo and Halili, that Mujo would risk his life to save his brother. Similarly, Polydeuces offers his own immortality to save Castor from death. In times of need, both sets of brothers do what they can to help their kin.

Halili again helps his brother, this time after Mujo’s wife betrays him to the Captain King. Mujo sets out for revenge against the king- without Halili- and is taken prisoner by the Captain King in the land of the Christians. He requests that he might play the *lahuta*, a musical wood instrument, and after three hours he sings out to the *zanas* that “I’ve been captured, sister *zanas*, never in a worse position, my hands and feet are all in shackles, tomorrow I will die on the war grounds... I beg you, take word to Halili” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 15.338-343). The *zanas* alert Halili, and with Mujo’s horse he sets off to battle the Captain King in the mountains, beheads the king and frees Mujo. This again is a time when these brothers help one another out, and call on each other’s aid. It is interesting to note that despite disagreements between the two brothers, their bond remains strong.

While an *ora*, serpent, and wolf nurse Mujo, young Halili makes his way to the kingdom, steals the king’s daughter, and holds fast in a cave. When the *shkja* fighters come for him, Halili replies, “Return to your home and select a new monarch, because I will chop off the head of this last one, and send it to Mujo to lie at his bedside” (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 17.313-315). But soon he is overtaken and the *zanas* send word to Mujo that his brother is in trouble. With their help, Mujo quickly recovers and comes to his brother’s aid. Halili is even there for Mujo when he recognizes his son, Omer, and when Omer dies. This

passage is important because both brothers risk their lives to save the other. Mujo and Halili cannot exist without the other their brother, which echoes the bond between the Dioscuri.

Like the Dioscuri Mujo and Halili do not seek vengeance where it is not needed and instead practice restraint, to an extent. This can be seen when Mujo instructs Halili, after having killed king Llabutani, not to mutilate the king's body but to let the dead lie, to "make war with the living, the dead cannot harm us, for this is the customs of our forefathers left us" (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 17.391-392). This is important to note because Mujo and Halili build a reputation for themselves, leading expeditions, slaying *baloz* and dueling foes. But they practice restraint when it comes to the dead. In Euripides' play *Electra*, the Dioscuri offer similar counsel to Orestes and Electra after they kill their mother, Clytemnestra (Euripides, 1244-1248).⁴⁵

Now she has her just reward, but you have not acted justly, and Phoebus, Phoebus— but I am silent, for he is my lord; although he is wise, he gave you oracles that were not. But it is necessary to accept these things. As to what remains, you must do what Fate and Zeus have accomplished for you.

Instead of suggesting that Orestes run from his choices, they tell him to accept the consequences, regardless of why he carried out the act. This is a similar situation in that neither the Dioscuri nor Mujo and Halili give more than what a person deserves.

Mujo avenges Halili when he is slain by Zadrani of Tetova. Arnaut Osmani tricks Halili into thinking Mujo is in danger, and when Halili arrives he is slain by Zadrani of

⁴⁵ Translation E. P. Coleridge 1938

Tetova. Mujo then goes after his brother's killer: "For three days and nights they struggled, Mujo had almost been defeated...to the cliff-dwelling *zanas* he cried out" (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 21.80-86).

The *zanas* again come to Mujo's aid and place a poisoned dagger in his pocket that he uses to kill Zadrani. And after Mujo himself, dies and is buried, the *zanas* rejuvenate him so that he can continue living. In that instance, Halili as well slays the *baloz* that is after his brother. This instance is so important because it displays the immortal capabilities of the hero. With the help of the *zanas*, after a seven year burial Mujo can live again: "He uncovered the hero's grave and lo! The hero sat cross-legged! The *zanas* had awakened Mujo, they were worried for the hero, for his body had been rotting" (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 23.71-74). This plays with the immortality theme that is so important to the Dioscuri, as Polydeuces is originally immortal and shares his immortality with Castor. Only here, it is Mujo that is revived; when Halili dies, there is no mentioning of him being revived, but Mujo does avenge his brother's death.

The sun and moon also provide protection to Mujo and Halili. When Halili goes to find his bride Tanusha, "The sun now proclaimed: 'he is under my aegis,' the moon now proclaimed, 'he is under my aegis,' the *oras* proclaimed 'he is under our aegis' (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 3.191-193). With the help of the *oras* and *zanas*, this suggests that a divine power protects Mujo and Halili, as the Dioscuri are protected by their divine immortality.

There is a connection between the brothers and their horses, which have the ability to communicate with them. This is important because of the Dioscuri's strong connection with horses, particularly Castor's. Castor as the "tamer of horses" connected to horse in athletic

games, and the brothers are depicted as riding on white horses. The horses often lead Halili and Mujo towards their path. When Halili is trying to prove his worth to Mujo, he borrows his father's horse, which knows the right direction to one of his blood brothers. When Halili avenges Mujo who is a captive of the King Captain, Halili borrows Mujo's horse and tries to fight the *shkjas* in an effort to free Mujo. Even Mujo's horse helps out (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 15.376-381).

Well Halili led the battle, being helped by Mujo's courser. See what Mujo's course did then, with its teeth it ate a soldier, and behind it, kicked out wildly, left the king with many corpses.

The word "courser" here refers to the horse. The horse even breaks down the door to save Mujo. Upon seeing his master in danger, "how loudly did the courser whinny, for its master was it worried" (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 15.415-416). Without the help of the horse, Halili might not have been able to save his brother. The brothers are able to have strong communication with their steeds, who express human emotion. Before Halili slays Llabutani, he is greatly enraged by comments about his youthful age, but horse is more angered than he is: "The courser then neighed and the trees gave a quiver...the flames that the courser emitted were yellow, angry the steed was, more angry than the rider" (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 17.239-242).

In fact, great detail is given to describe the horse that Mujo and Halili use throughout the epic. The foal's birth is revealed to Mujo in a dream just before it happens, describing a white foal with a star on its forehead, given by God (Elsie and Mathie-Heck, 8.11-22). He devises a specific diet for the horse, instructing his wife that the horse must be kept hidden from sunlight for three years. This horse is so revered that the Captain King offers a reward

for anyone who can steal it. These *aga* warriors take great pride in their horses, and they seem to be of great value to them. It seems important to have a “horse for dueling,” that can ride great distances for lengthy amounts of time (Elsie and Mathie-Heck 14.22). They are closely connected to their masters, and to these brothers, who are strong enough to tame and train them.

Another connection pertaining to brotherhood is the concept of a blood brother, which is prevalent in these tales. A blood brother seems to be a powerful bond between two warriors that are not related, but are nonetheless close to one another. They seem to be next person to go to if family is not able. There are several passages that mention blood brother of other characters in the work, mainly not of Mujo and Halili. But Halili has a blood brother as well. He and Zuku Bajraktar are close friends, who share a special bond and are destined to never see one another again after their *aga* raid party is separated. Zuku is eventually killed, and Halili is left angry and heartbroken at the death of his close friend. Mujo shares a kind of blood brother bond with the *zanas* who have vowed to protect him. Though blood brothers may not be connected by blood, their presence reinforces the idea of close kin-like relationships that echo the Dioscuri’s own.

There is a strong sense of kinship and brotherhood in *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*, which relies heavily on familial relations and maintaining strong ties within their community. Those who break those ties, like Mujo’s wife or Osmani, are severely punished, usually to the point of death. This and the need for defined relationship in a blood brother reaffirms how closely knit this community is, and how they value this kind of bond. This bond is echoed in the Dioscuri. As mentioned earlier, Helen in the *Iliad* mentions the strength and bond between the Dioscuri in their brotherhood as she looks for them on the battlefield. The

Dioscuri influence can be seen through Christian legends that culminate in Roman Illyricum and continue east to Russia. It develops a kind of identity that is heavily rooted in a warlike setting, strong ties to community, and a serious understood rule of punishment for any that would try to defy these brothers. Their strength-particularly that of Mujo- that is divinely bestowed and connection to fabled creatures adds a layer of mystique to the story common to myths.

CONCLUSION

By making attempts to define ancient Illyrian identity, I have tried to provide a background for the culture in which *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* could have been received. This is difficult, because of the centuries of separation between the two. But if this epic draws its origin in Slavic work, as Elsie and Mathie-Heck suggest, then there is possibility of influence on the rudimentary songs expressed in this area in occupation of Slavic rulers in the early centuries CE. It is impossible to prove, however if this is so, but one can only attempt to understand how these songs may have been influenced by the indigenous groups in Albania.

In these last two sections I have tried to trace parallels found in *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* ultimately to Greek mythology, while mentioning Roman and Christian parallels as well as Illyrian cult worship to further strengthen the connection. In this research, I have tried to follow work done by scholars such as Lord and Lawson, who look for connections between Greek myth and modern culture, while focusing mainly on Albanian culture and text. Because *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* has such rich imagery to offer for scholastic purposes, I focused only on dragon imagery and Mujo and Halili's brotherhood, in order to devote more time and effort to their analysis. However, because of temporal gaps between Greek mythology and the epic, and due to difficulty in tracing Slavic epic, it is difficult to make claims of origin.

Songs of the Frontier Warriors also gives a glimpse into the rich history that Albania has to offer. Because the history is so rich, there are vast numbers of influence that could affect this text. The temporal difference between ancient Albania and this epic must be noted

as well. Despite efforts to make ancient historical connections to the text, it remains difficult to explicitly define motifs that are connected to ancient Greek myth.

Even defining Illyrian history remains difficult, due to lack of primary sources and evidence of a written language. But this research has been beneficial in understanding the opportunity of influence that a work could have, and the limitations that are present in researching a work as fluid as *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*. As interest begins to grow on the subject of both Illyrian history and modern Albanian history, perhaps the future will provide a greater depth of information and possibility in answering the questions that Albania has to offer scholars.

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