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THE WARRIOR-HERO OUT OF CONTROL: BATRADZ AND HIS COMPEERS

Any research path pointed into the inner nature or essence of the Hero-type will very quickly detect the considerable variability in the available refractions of warrior-herohood – this despite the popular view or the received wisdom which pronounces that there must be such a thing as "a" Hero. Putting aside the mythic hero, with his divine associations and his cosmic tasks, and evading such puzzles as are set by the career of a hero such as Herakles, who dies as a mortal (however superhuman his powers) but ascends to the gods, the mortal or epic hero at first displays a sort of marmoreal image or reminiscence, sculptural, isolate – we might think of the Achillean model, which would in fact be an error, because Achilles is not, as it happens, a 'normal' hero (he talks too much, for one thing). Then we may begin to discern some of the possible variations in the type. We see the 'perfect' warrior, the non-pareil combatant who seems to be unable to stand alone, and so is necessarily teamed with a Tricksterish partner who deals with planning and 'intelligence' (as Diomedes is paired with Odysseus or, in the Old Welsh tales, the half-wizard Cei is paired with Bedwyr the Strong-Arm); we locate the 'slow' hero who comes quite late to his vocation (rather common in the Norse north, but not just there); we find 'blackened' exemplars who are strangely perverse or reversed in their characters and actions; we encounter the occasional 'old' hero (not a very common discovery, in truth, since the hero as survivor contradicts the normative heroic scenario, but some do come to our attention). We even come across 'comic' heroes who appear to rejoice in their resolute and risible opposition to anything resembling a true-heroic ethic. We will, perhaps, begin to expect some surprises. And at some point in our labor of research, if we are persistent and lucky, we will stumble onto that marvel-filled invention of the Caucasian mountain peoples, the collection of Ossetian "Nart" heroes, with all of their Qabard and Abkhaz and Cherkess and other Caucasian epic kinfolk [see Bailey 1980: 236].

In a volume dedicated to that extraordinary investigator of the Ossetian epos and its cognates, Professor V. I. Abaev (that is, Abajty Vaso), a most remarkable man who has spent much of his very long life immersed in the various goings and comings, the feats and disasters and other doings of the "Nart" heroes, it is only right that one of this strange family be examined, dissected, and perhaps set into a comparative frame, or more than one. I have picked the most contradictory and cranky figure of the lot, Batradz, whose name seems to mean "the one showing feats of strength", or the "strong-arm" (Bailey 1980: 240), but whom I have first, and deliberately, put into another, slightly different category, that of the perverse, 'out-of-control' hero – a subtype that itself divides into several distinct and occasionally puzzling images and refractions.

A heroic 'Nart' biography. There are variant versions of the engendering and the birth of the Nart Batradz, but the best known (and most dramatic) has him produced from the mating of an older Nart hero, Xæmyc (or Hæmyts), with an exotic female, either a dwarf or a mer-woman of some sort [in one variant she has the skin of a frog: see Dumézil 1965: 177-178]. Because of the future father's violation of a familiar 'Melusinian' restriction laid on him (no one was ever supposed to refer to his mate's rather odd appearance) the strange woman leaves the marriage, but before she does she places the heroic embryo in an 'absess' on the man's back, and it is from this anomalous and artificial womb that the hero eventually and dramatically emerges. Thus Batradz takes his place in a good old Nart – and, in fact, Indo-European and even wider – tradition in which peculiar heroic engenderings and parturitions are quite normal [see Miller 1990: 38-39 et seq.] – as his brother Nart, the chivalric Soslan, is said to have had a rock for the womb from which *he* is born. From the beginning Batradz is, shall we say, a little different; born from a male 'womb', he is also burning hot, fiery, and encased in steel; so he is the "homme d'acier" as Dumézil calls him, or in Ossete, ændon[1]. When he is 'tempered' by the Ossete smith-god, and his fosterer, Kurdalægon, he is also proofed against ordinary weapons, and so joins that category of 'invulnerable' heroes (like Achilles and Siegfried), heroes who, we know, may be superhuman but still are not ever nor can they ever be rendered totally invulnerable, because true invulnerability would fracture the epic-heroic drama. His young career is

[1] In Abaev's rhymed Russian version: "I mal'chika, roždennogo toboi/My zakalim, kak stal', v vode morskoi" – "And the little fellow born to thee/We dunk him, like steel, right in the sea" (ABAEV 1957: 149). "Aunt" Satana (sometimes called the Mother of the Narts) is speaking, and for *her* bizarre engendering, see Abaev 1957: 87-90.

almost predictable; he beats all the other little Narts at various children's games, he grows very quickly, and his heroic temper is already revealed to be ungovernable.

When he matures and takes up his heroic tasks, he takes up residence in a place that is, mostly, not locatable in any civilized or even human setting: he either rests from his adventures "in the Heavens" or, sometimes, in the high mountains, and he has to be called down from his remote eyrie; one legend has him sitting and cooling his still-hot steel carapace on the ice of a mountain glacier [Dumézil 1978: 24]. His heat almost never is sexual; very few of the Nart "légendes" (in Ossete: *kadängä* or *kadäg)* say that he has a wife, and he has no gallant adventures at all – and he certainly has no son or any other child[2]. He is a great enemy of the Giants and the other supernatural enemies of his people – as a mere youth he had already slain and taken the head of the Giant with the Multicolored Beard [Dumézil 1965: 187] – and against these and their fortresses he sometimes hurls himself, all encased in steel as he is, with the velocity of a sort of superhuman missile – a wall-breaking bullet or arrow. His final and his greatest, if most questionable and, eventually, fatal set of feats have to do with the revenge he takes for the murder of Xæmyc, his father; but in this revenge he shows himself as committing the "Three Sins of the Warrior" identified by Dumézil [see Dumézil 1956, 1969/1970, 1971/1983]. As a "sinner" within this type he shows no particular weakness, incapacity or fault, as is the usual case, in respect to any of the three Indo-European fonctions: his sin each time is in his gross hypertrophy of heroic energy, as he mercilessly and without discrimination pursues his furious revenge (see below). Eventually this campaign leads to his death; the Powers of the Air (called Angels, Genii, or Spirits) appeal to God (a Sun-God?) for aid against the pitiless hero; so the heat of a year is concentrated into one day, and a small fault – that typical small fault or gap – in Batradz's steel proofing ("ordinary steel above, Damascus steel below") lets in the terrible calor which is finally able to kill him. A variant but important, and quite different version says that the Narts manage to haul his great sword to the sea-side and throw it in; the sword is Batradz's "twin" [Dumézil calls it his "âme extérieur": 1978: 30] and when it sinks so does the hero. Or in another, rather less dramatic,

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[2] In the tale called "The Dance of the Narts" Batradz, after assigning wives to his father and to his brother Uon, is said to wed "the fair Akula", who has been described as "the beauty of the land"; in a shorter tale, "How Batradz beat up the Protective Spirit of the village of the Narts" this Spirit insults "la femme de Batradz" whom Batradz then avenges: Dumézil 1965: 209-216, 217-218.

terminus, he kills himself with his own wonder-sword, the Giant-killing weapon he had won in single combat from his own mother (ibid., 45).

Between his birth and his death he is given, or earns, a particular character among the Nart family of warrior-heroes. Often he is specifically contrasted to his "brother" Soslan, a warrior who is also a great gallant – "Soslan of the sparkling eyes" – and a bit of a careless adventurer. In fact, Soslan is described as a *human* hero, and being so he has to call on Batradz for aid and counsel (though in another heroic avatar Batradz is described by Soslan as "our hoodlum, our crazy one" – [Dumézil 1978: 33]. A consistent characteristic (seen in the Abkhaz version of his legend as well as the Ossetian) makes him "wrathful" – in fact in one Abkhaz tale he, as an infant, is said to be nourished by the Narts not with milk "but with molten iron" [Dumézil 1978: 42] and the legend goes on to claim that the hero only had to speak of his "glory" and he could make water boil. Such a fiery nature even has a related, if rather more undignified morphism; here Batradz shows a grubby (ash-covered, or cindery – a Male-Cinderella, un cendrillott aspect, and in this dishevelled guise he rather resembles the type I have called the 'Blackened Hero' [see Miller 1983, 1985, and also Miller 2000: 272-74, 364-66]. In this last role he might be associated with a Tricksterish persona, though in the end he has nothing I am able to find of this essentially dubious (but mentally alert and manipulative, sly and intellectually capable) character about him, nor has he any comic attributes. His 'blackened' persona is sometimes set forth as part of a duality, as he is reported to show a "common" appearance by day along with a grander, true-heroic persona at night [Dumézil 1978: 43-44].

Batradz is a character who certainly invites some attempt at the comparative insight or effort; I note that Christian Vielle has attached the Ossete hero to the "type" of Achilles of the *Iliad* and Arjuna of the *Mahâbhârata* [Vielle 1996: 183], a position which had already been lined out by Abaev himself some years earlier [see Abaev 1963: 1063]. Vielle sees the Achillean resemblence or parallel revealed in such details as Batradz's "maritime" maternal associations and the fact that he was identified as "the best of the Narts", as the masterful (and wrathful) Achilles was named aristos Akhaiôn, but he also sees a typic equivalence displayed in a described matter or motif such as the "powerful voice" of both heroes, the Greek and the Ossete [Vielle 1996: 184, 188, 192][3]. The "wrathful" nature of both also invites scrutiny; clearly we have here, in both cases, a kind of mortal (if divinely descended) hero who resists any constraint, who easily gives way to the most

[3] For variations on this theme of the "best of the Achaeans" see Nagy 1979.

powerfully destructive instincts – instincts which, as we shall see, often at last eventuate in his own destruction[4].

Georges Dumézil, as I have already observed, sees in the Nart Batradz that sort of warrior-hero who is easy to fit into his theoretical scheme describing the "sinning warrior", that is, a Second Function (in the Dumézilian reading) warrior who is fated to commit a fault, or "sin", located in each of the three canonical Indo-European Functions [Dumézil 1978: 50ff]. Dumézil examined this "sinning warrior" type in two separate treatments [Dumézil 1969/1970 and 1971/1983], using as his exemplars Indra, Starcatherus and Herakles in the first published work, and expanding on the cases of Starcatherus/Starkaðr, Sisupala (a mortal hero substituted for the god Indra), and Herakles in the second. Usually the "fault" (and the sin) springs from that hyper-aggressive warrior-heroic stance that perpetually marks and distinguishes him in his essence: heroes always kill, but *he* kills the wrong person, or kills someone in the wrong – the inacceptable – way. The emblematic Norse hero Starkaðr, for example, is fated or predicted to commit three níðingsverkar or "wrong, forbidden, unfitting deeds" – so, he kills a king (regicide, an offense against the First Function), he shows cowardice (obviously the primary sin or fault in the Second, Warrior Function) and he kills someone for pay or gain (and so he perverts the Third Function's particularity, of wealth and "goods"). The "sins of the warrior" make up a fascinating area of research, and they may even be converted into a formula fitted to three homicidal enormities that may be – and often are – committed by this or that hero: *parricide* (slaying the father, taken as a First Function figure), *fratricide* (killing one's brother, a "forbidden" image of, in fact, oneself as a Second Function warrior) and *filicide* (killing one's children, the "next generation", the future warriors or breeders of warriors; generation and the Third Function is aborted). Filicide is, however, as I have tried to show elsewhere, a very special mark of the Indo-European warrior-hero; in this scenario the emblematic hero kills his own son, a theme seen in a number of pretty well-known cases from the Persian, Irish and Germanic epical contexts, and found in the Russian heroic byliny as well [see Miller 1994/1996][5].

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[4] I might suggest that in addition there is a parallel between Achilles and Batradz in the particular matter of their horses: Xanthos, one of Achilles' chariot-horses, could speak [*Il.* XIX.405] and Batradz's mount also has human speech, addressing his master in a remarkable fashion (in Dumézil's translation of the *Narty Kajjytæ)* as "thou of that brood that is enemy to God" [Dumézil 1978: 63].

[5] Referring to the "classic" cases of Sohrâb and Rostam, Cú Chulainn and Connia, Hildebrand and Hadubrand, and Ilya of Murom and Sokolnichek (the father listed first, the son

Batradz's "three sins" are marked by his peculiarly ferocious and uncontrolled energy; in short, he "sins" by *excess,* a marking characteristic of one sort of warrior-hero, the *hypermachic,* a heroic type I have identified, in theory, elsewhere[6]. "Il est inflexible, impitoyable et, pour tout dire, cruel" says Dumézil of Batradz [Dumézil 1978: 50]. He attacks and nearly destroys, first, that segment of the Nart community, the Boratæ, who appear to command the F3 area of economic prosperity; then he turns on his own "warrior" or Second Function family of Narts (all of whom he deems to be responsible for the murder of his father), and finally he attacks the Genii and Spirits, a sort of sacrilege that elicits their appeal to a divinity who finally arranges for Batradz to die in his turn, though in fact Batradz boasts early on of how he had attacked and killed various of these divine or quasi-divine Spirits[7].

Now I would like to try to identify Batradz within another category or kind of excess, and that is with those examples of warrior-herohood who show a symbolically "red" persona, that is, they seem to operate within a special, caloric (hot or "red") characteristic variation, one built on C. G. Jung's suggestion of the psychic "shadow", which is that primitive, often perversely destructive – and especially *self*-destructive part of humanity's essentiality or soul [see Miller 2000: 285-288]. Thus I would like to add the Nart Batradz to a list of exemplars that included Hagen of Troeneck (from the German *Nibelungenlied),* Efnisien, who appears in that Branch of the Welsh *Mabinogion* called "Branwen, daughter of Llyr", and Skarp-hedin, one of the sons of Njall and the violent, uncontrollable stirrer-up of those feud-hatreds that ended in the brenna, the Burning after which this great Norse saga was named.

The two dominant characteristics of this heroic sub-type are: 1) the extraordinarily destructive, almost insane and certainly irrational perversity pursued by these "red" characters, leading to 2) a fiery ending of the tale and, not inconsequentially, the death of the perverse one who caused it all. Hagen, whose intelligence and courage is undoubted, still is the true architect of the destruction, in blood and fire, of the Nibelung knights at King Etzel's court, where he also dies [see Mowatt 1965: 221]. The red-headed, importunate

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second); slightly modified versions of the theme are seen very widely, even cropping up in the Ossete "Nart" tales (see, for the latter case of the unfortunate Nameless Son, Miller 1994: 309, and Dumézil 1971: 564-5). Even 'comic' renditions of the motif are possible.

[6] See Miller 1986, with special attention given to Theseus as a hypermachic Greek hero.

[7] DUMÉZIL 1965: 207, for the "Spirits of the Day" and "Spirits of the Morning" whom he slays, as well as "le fils du Seigneur des Céréales" whose name (given in French) is Ali Blé-Jaune.

Skarp-Hedin, by his series of often foul and always outrageous insults, totally cuts his father Njall's family and their few supporters away from any others who might have aided them against their feud-foes; he dies in the Burning. Efnisien shows perhaps the clearest case of all; through his three successive acts he brings about that final, mutually destructive battle between the Irish and the men of the Isle of the Mighty (Britain), a battle in which he himself is immolated[8]. So we may be able to add Batradz, from the mythic-folkloric Legends of the Narts, to a group that includes, as a medieval German example, a knight taken from one of the greatest German epics, along with a figure from a famous "historical" Norse saga, and a character from Welsh myth. The resemblence may be supported in one other way: Dumézil has parsed the last acts of Batradz in terms of the "Three Sins of the Warrior", and I believe that the same can be done in the case of at least one, and probably more, of the central figures of baneful perversity named here.

In the case of Efnisien, the terrible confrontation between the Welsh and Irish kingdoms is advanced by three of Efnisien's acts [see Ford 1977: 61, 68-70]: *first,* he mutilates the horses of the Irish king, Matholwch, a "disgrace" both to this monarch and to the Welsh (British) king, Bendigeidfran (though there is a sort of rationality to the act, since Efnisien was angered at the fact that he had not been consulted when his half-sister, Branwen, was given to the Irish king – still, the assault on two royal – First Function – players and their kingly honor is clear). *Second,* Efnisien kills the two hundred Irish warriors, poor devils, concealed in leather bags in the Irish king's feasting-hall; he kills them by crushing their heads with his mighty hand's grip – almost certainly these hidden warriors were meant to treacherously attack the Welsh at some point, but confined as they were they had no chance to use their weapons, and so they died a disgraceful death for a Second Function warrior, and Efnisien, again, was the author of this disgrace. *Third* – and as he does the deed he says "doing what I do now will seem a perverse outrage to the family" – he thrusts Branwen's son, his sister's-son, head first into the hall's hearth-fire and so kills him. Efnisien says it himself; the terrible act is set right against the rules of the family, which made sister's-son and mother's-brother closest of kin – and so he has utterly abused and violated one of the most sacred Third Function ties of kinship. The "perverse" Efnisien thus acts sequentially against – or defies – the rules of each of the three Functions, Fl, F2, F3; he is killed, or he kills himself, when in the fatal melée that follows his unconcsionable act the Irish dead are

[8] I have also included Dubtach Chafer-Tongue, from the Old Irish *mythos* and *epos,* in this category; Dubtach is perverse and trouble-making in one of his guises, but his final end is not given: see MILLER 2000: 287.

being thrown into and revived in the magic Cauldron of Life; Efnisien lays himself down among the corpses and is put alive into the Cauldron, which bursts (evidently because of the anomalous deposition of a living being in it) and his contrary heart bursts as well. According to Dumézil the canonical terminus to the "Three Sins of the Warrior" comes when the sinner is "cleansed" of his sins (best seen in the case of Herakles, made immortal, reconciled to and even made a favorite of his old foe, the goddess Hera); there is at least a hint of this commutational ending in Efnisien's case (the "good end" in the case of Batradz is clearer, for the hero was "taken away" to the heavens)[9].

The final ligature binding Batradz to these heroes of the perverse and the destructive appears, of course, in the sign and significance of fire: Efnisien's most terrible act is the burning alive of his nephew (and he dies recumbent in a magical cooking-vessel), Hagen (though his central perversity is, correctly, called "cold") is responsible for the fiery immolation of the Nibelungs, Skarp-Hedin dies in the brenna after which this powerful saga is named. Batradz, the fiery one, fostered by the Smith-God and barely tempered (and continually showing himself as *hot-tempered)* ends his fractious life burnt up by the heat of the Sun as it penetrates his steel sheathing, after the panicked prayer of the Genii and Spirits is answered.

Conclusion. Having placed Batradz in a category of perverse, "out-of-control" and unusually destructive heroes, I now want to shift him over to another dimension and even to introduce him into another category, one in which the emphasis is less on what he *does* than in what he *is*. Dumézil began his last analysis of this particular Nart hero by saying that he closely resembles that Scythian god whom Herodotus, listing the Scythian pantheon, called 'Ares', though of course Batradz was a human hero, not a god (though, as the French scholar, perhaps wistfully, notes, the god Indra would also show a certain parallel to Batradz's career and nature: [Dumezil 1978: 19-21]).

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[9] The case of Skarp-Hedin, and the insults he levies in cap. 119 of the saga, is a perplexing one, but I can suggest the following: 1) he insults Skapti Thoroddsson, accusing him of *cowardice* (the primary F2 fault); 2) he insults Snorri the Goði (a priest-chieftain and F1 figure), accusing him of not avenging his father; 3) he insults Haf the Wealthy of not rescuing (by paying a ransom for?) his kidnapped sister; an implicit F3 delict. The confrontation with Gudmund has no Functional valence, but against Thorkel the Braggart Skarp-Hedin seems to issue a *trifunctional* set of accusations – first, that Thorkel avoided the Ping (and thus the proper sphere of the unwritten Law), second, that he fought with his own father – a prohibited opponent in combat; third, that he committed an obscene act with a mare – forbidden sexual contact: F1, F2, F3 sequentially.

Batradz also demonstrates a divine association in the area of some of the dramatic powers of nature, with the wind, thunder, lightning. What we seem to see in this "uncontrolled" Nart hero is, in fact, a type of warrior who belongs in what is not completely a binary opposition between Mortal and Immortal (though such a contrastive opposition can be stressed, as it is in the ancient Greek context) but who belongs in a *continuum* or spectrum, where aspects of the divine and the human may be commingled or confused, and where, therefore, a given hero-figure may be more or less human, more or less inflected by divinity.

Batradz shows his mixture of divinity – and, more, his siting in a place closer to the gods than to humankind – in such particulars as his usual location 'above' or in 'the Heavens'; also by his divine fostering, by the smith-god Kurdalægon. More, he shows these non- or extra-human characteristics in his violent assault on heavenly or supernatural beings – the Angels, Genii, Spirits. Heroes of course may occasionally confront deities – we have the prime case of the warrior Diomedes spearing and wounding both Aphrodite and Ares, the war-god himself, in the *Iliad's* Book V. But Homer's narrative seems to show the hero confronting the gods by accident; the Immortals are simply in the way of a hero filled to overflowing with his battle-rage. A rather closer bridge of equivalence could be constructed between this violent Nart hero and the ancient Celtic evidence, where as I and any number of others have remarked, the boundary between mortal and immortal, divine and human is permeable, vague, elastic. Such a situation certainly obtains in the strange world of the Welsh *mabinogi,* where we find Batradz's fellow breaker-of-boundaries, the egregious Efnisien; there we see where gods and godlings take up human tasks, or are concealed in out-of-the-way places and strange guises, while humans penetrate in their turn into the dangerous zone of the supernatural and the divine. We may even detect something of this confusion in a great Irish hero-tale like the *Táin Bó Cúalgne,* where we find the hero Cú Chulainn confronting and defeating the war-goddess, the Babh or Morrigan herself- and earning his own fated end thereby, as Batradz did when he attacked, once too often, all those Angels and Spirits.

The similarity between Batradz and Cú, or between the Ossetian and the Celtic mythoi, is evidently more than a casual one – and in fact the relationship had already been described or at least sketched both by Dumézil and by his student Joël Grisward, specifically in regard to two themes, that of the "tempering" of the over-heated hero, and that of "the sword cast into the water" [see Dumézil 1978: 84-90, Grisward 1959]. So we can be sure that the great fund of Ossete and other Caucasian hero-tales provided and exegetically examined by V. I. Abaev still holds a vast number of puzzles and problems, but

perhaps this last one is deepest and most enduring. I repeat, with gratitude, the summary words of Georges Dumézil himself:

"Cette première rencontre des Ossètes et des Celtes, à propos des personnages importantes et sur un groupe de thèmes rares, suffit à poser les grandes questions: héritage commun? emprunt? et, si emprunt il y a, par quels intermédiares, à quelle époque?" [Dumézil 1978: 90].

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