

Reprint

The European Medieval Ballad

A Symposium

The European Medieval Ballad

Proceedings of the Second International Symposium
organized by the
Centre for the Study of Vernacular Literature
in the Middle Ages.
Held at Odense University
on 21–23 November, 1977.

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in collaboration
with
Julia McGrew
and Iørn Piø

Odense University Press · 1978

Trends of Dissemination of the Ballad Genre

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In a comparative study of Hungarian ballads thirty-two types proved to have French antecedents. Sixteen of these have exact counterparts; in six cases the French counterparts are only fragments or later transformed versions of supposed medieval originals; in ten cases the French antecedents can be inferred only by a thorough examination of the existing national versions. In these comparisons the French-Hungarian parallels have further variants either in German, English, Iberian, or Danish, English, Italian, or German, English, Italian, Iberian and Greek ballads. This distribution of coherent variants around France points to a French-Walloon centre of ballad-dissemination. Another proof of this centre is the fact that the Hungarians have no other medieval borrowings in this genre. It is understandable only if the French had the ballad first and if the Hungarians acquired it from their French-Walloon settlers at almost the same time as it began to spread from the West into German territory, as I pointed out in my studies.¹

But the same picture is seen by a review of interconnections among different European peoples even without taking into account the French-Hungarian relations. The largest number of direct borrowings can be established in the French-Italian relation, in which always the former proved to be the donor. The Piedmont collection of Nigra includes some 127 ballads of which fifty-eight have been considered of French origin, as Nigra already stated for most of the examples. In addition, there are ballads that can be traced back to some lost but inferable French types. Connections with the French antecedents are so conspicuous in certain instances that even toponyms or names of characters have preserved their original French forms. "Les anneaux de Marianson" for example retained the French form of *Marianson* or *Mariansun*; "The Beguiled Husband" has the name and words: "Morlieu, Marion" or "Morblö Mariun"; the

¹ Vargyas 1967 and 1976. See list of references.

Italian wording of the type "Le mariage anglais" makes the wife, forced to marry an Englishman, speak like this: "Come faro a parlare Inglese, io che sono nata Francese?" The texts seem really variants of the French, although some omissions or erosions betray their secondary nature. In many instances they bear a relationship to more or less distorted, similarly secondary Southern French texts, while in other cases they are so closely connected to the best French versions that one may readily suppose a diffusion from the northern point of French-Italian contact, that is, Switzerland.²

One has to bear in mind, that these pieces and the ballad genre in general are to be found mostly in the Piedmontan, narrow area along the French border. In fewer instances, ballads are spread in the entire Northern Italian region, from the French frontier to Venice; but the great bulk of ballads and especially those with French parallels were detected in the neighbourhood of the French language area. There is but one exception: the Hungarian version of "Willie's Like-Wake", with its threefold gradation in the artifices of enticement, reached Italy from Hungary through the mediation of Slovenes. In this instance the ballad shows an even distribution not in Piedmont, bordering on France, but in Lombardy, from where some rare variants penetrated the Lombardian-Piedmontan fringe region. At the same time, more recent versions of the French theme – the story of elopement from the nunnery, without the motif of feigned death – spread again from the French border region. That is, the French ballad migrated to Italy in two ways, in two different forms.

The number of borrowings in the Iberian peninsula is lower than in Italy, although still considerable, and fairly evenly distributed among the Portuguese, Spaniards and Catalans.³ Perhaps the lower number is because, for this material, no summary collection like that of Nigra is available. Therefore I did not treat the three national stocks separately, but as belonging to the common Iberian material. The types evidently of French origin number seventeen in which, however, the ratio of lost and inferred French ones is comparatively high: eight types. An earlier French connection seems to appear here than in the Italian relationship: early and lost

² Italian ballads of French origin are: Nigra 1–6, 10–14, 16–17, 19–21, 24–28/c, 29, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39–40, 43–50, 52–57, 59, 61, 71–74, 78, 80, 84–85, 102, 107, 127 (and 41 by the mediation of Hungarians and Slovenes).

³ I am acquainted with Iberian ballads from the following publications: Amades, Armistead-Silverman, Braga, Cossio-Solano, Geibel-Schack, Hardung, Menéndez-Pidal, Romero, Wolf, Wolf-Hoffman; further some texts of Milá y Fontanals from quotations.

French ballads almost equal in number those still surviving. In contrast, ⁱⁿ the Italian, a later French influence continued unbroken up to the recent times. There is a greater number of French adoptions in Portugal than in Spain; also the total absence of the former epic genre in the Portuguese tradition is in sharp contrast to Spain. I tried to explain this by the French domination in Portugal in medieval times.

Farthest in the Mediterranean Sea, French folksongs proceeded to the Greek islands, where, however, French antecedents can be demonstrated in a considerably lower number. Their ration would surely be higher, if I were able to rely on a direct knowledge of this material. I can refer to seven French parallels here, and to a further six with inferable French antecedents. Here, again, the number of old, already lost French types as parallels is almost equal to the numbers of those still existing, and this again reveals an old, subsequently interrupted contact.⁴ The Greeks had an opportunity to be acquainted with French ballads in the days of French dominion of Cyprus, in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. The situation must have been the same as in Portugal. And here, again, we encounter such versions of a French ballad type, in which the hero is named "The son of the French (*Frank*) man".

The English have long experienced the presence of French ballads in their folklore. By the evidence of Hungarian ballads even more English-French connections can be clarified. With some further, so far unidentified correlations added, twenty-two ballads may be reckoned with.⁵

A fairly identical view can be seen in the German relationship; earlier research, however, recognized for fewer French borrowings in German balladry, and in many instances suggested a trend in the reverse, or simply ignored the existence of French parallels. The total of these obvious borrowings is sixteen, to which borrowings from lost French ballads should be added: seven types. That is, twenty-three French parallelisms in all, as many, by and large, as in the English stock.⁶ Scholarly opinions often differ from my opinion in regard to common French-Germanic themes. Experts are prone to suppose a German priority when the theme of a

⁴ The Greek ballads are known to me from the following publications: Baud-Bovy, Firmenich, Iatrides, Kind, Lüdeke-Megas, Passow, Politis; further single texts from Jeannarakis, Lagarde, Rouse, Sakellarios and Zampelios from quotations.

⁵ Child 4–5, 9, 11–13, 15, 17, 20, 25, 44, 54, 65, 72–73, 75–76, 96, 100–101, 112, 156, 193.

⁶ D.Vlr. 7–8, 11, 23–24, 34–35, 41, 49–50, 55–56, 59, 67, 79, 102, 116; Erk-Böhme 460+668, 852, 910, 67, 202.

ballad bears affinity to some Old Germanic epic motif. However, we must consider that the French ethnic group, too, incorporated several Germanic tribes: Franks, Burgundians, Normans and even Goths. They may have contributed their earlier tradition of epic themes to the French folklore. It follows therefore that the priority of ballad formulation should in every case be assessed by confronting the folk variants. For instance, in the case of D.Vlr.6 = DgF 20, "Enticement in Woman's Disguise", is present in the French tradition too (Tiersot 179 and the fragmentary Simon 158), as well as "Elopement and Birth in the Forest", D.Vlr. 7 = Child 15 Leesome Brand = DgF 271 = Millien 153, Decombe 106, Bujeaud II, 198, Cahminade-Casse 12. At the same time, the scene of poisoning mentioned in the eighth-century Longobard chronicle – which has Central-Asiatic parallels – had turned into a ballad theme certainly in France: "Dame Lombarde",⁷ – according to the common opinion of scholars.

The number of French borrowings is by and large the same with the Danes (Scandinavians), and the French traits in their ballads are even more conspicuous than in the German material. Twenty types come into consideration, to which can be added four derived from inferred French ones.⁸ In addition to the themes there are several motifs and formulas in sundry Danish ballad types and variants, the English, Spanish-Portuguese and Hungarian (East European) analogues of which also suggest French antecedents, which are mostly absent in the German ballads: such as the opening scene of the girl embroidering with gold thread either in the window or in the bower or on the balcony; the motif of chapel flowers embracing each other – the "true lovers' knot" –; enticement with the promise of a wonderful country; finally the circumscription of the "nevermore" concerning the return, that it will happen "when the sun and the moon leap on yon hill, and that never be," and the like.

Apart from the immediate French-Danish connections there are French ballads mediated either by Germans or by English to them. German transmission is likely in four cases,⁹ English in three.¹⁰ But English and Germans transmitted their original types as well. The full amount of borrowings from German, according to me, are eleven,¹¹ from English sev-

⁷ Doncieux 11, Barbeau 1935 56, 1937 97, 1962 125 – the latter a reconstruction –, D'Harcourt 8, Rolland II 179/a, Millien 94–97A–C.

⁸ DgF 47, 58, 89, 126, 247, 250, 252–253, 263, 265, 290+271, 311, 338, 342–343, 345, 357, 408–409, 437+525, 446, 458; further Dal 42.

⁹ DgF 183, 249, 341, 254.

¹⁰ DgF 529, 446 and Dal 42.

enteen;¹² and in both cases, scholars derive one German type in the reverse way, from the Danish, and two English ones, from Norse material.

The amount of borrowings from the French as I have presented it is much greater than scholars used to reckon with. It is because they ignored the fact that the presence of the same ballad in German and Danish, or English and Danish material, is due to independent adoptions from the French among the three linguistically related peoples, not to a special connection among themselves.

In Eastern-Central Europe it was in Hungary that the French ballads first appeared through the mediation of French-Walloon settlers, and soon found their way to the neighbours and even further, together with some original Hungarian ones. The figures for the borrowings, as established by me, are fourteen with the Moravians, fourteen with the Slovaks, twelve (fourteen?) with the Ukrainians, thirteen with the Rumanians, sixteen with the Bulgarians, fourteen with the Serbs, nineteen with the Croats and eleven with the Slovenes. These figures do not mean that almost the same ballad themes diffused in all directions. Some of them – four in number – went only to the North; one, exclusively to the East; again, four exclusively to the South; among them one is to be found only with Slovenes, another one only with the Bulgarians. There are eight ballads which were disseminated round Hungary from Northwestern Moravians to Eastern and to the Southwestern Croats and Slovenes. The same picture is to be seen around France, where the adopted ballads differ as well with the different peoples.

Special attention is to be paid to those types which found their way to the Germans. There is only a motif of a single ballad Germans directly borrowed from Hungary: this is the scene under the tree in the Hungarian and German versions of "Lady Isabel and the Knight" (=Mädchenmörder). Further there are three versions of the forced-marriage theme which were mediated to Germans by Slavs, who borrowed them from the Hungarians. These three types have as topic the fate of a bride before the wedding or during the wedding process. With the Hungarians this is a well-defined circle of themes illustrating the tragic consequences of forced marriage. The girl married by her parents or brother curses herself and in one type she is already dead when the bridegroom arrives, in another she

¹¹ DgF 90, 97, 306, 369, 378, 382, 486 and the forementioned four.

¹² DgF 81–82, 95, 270+271, 274+276, 340, 408+409, 416/2, 438+439, 528 and three already mentioned.

is dying while the procession is approaching the house of the bridegroom. The essence of the conflict is the girl's reluctance to accept the forced marriage, especially to go into a far, foreign land. Many of the Slavic variants have dropped this essential motif or regarded it as unreasonable, and have substituted a chance death: either the bride is wounded by the bridegroom or by some other accident. Germans accepted the theme in this form, and the widespread type of "Graf Friedrich" has come into existence.

Two other German solutions are rare and were found only in restricted, separate areas. One, found along the Czech frontier in seven variants, tells about a bride who steps on a serpent, or on a thorn, and is dead when the procession of the bridegroom's suite arrives. The other, known from three variants from Switzerland, the Rhine province and Württemberg, that is, along the frontiers of France, has the same topic as the Hungarian ballad: the girl does not want to accept the marriage and dies before the bridegroom arrives. Here again we encounter the diffusion of a theme from France and from Hungary in opposite directions, but in this case the themes appear on German soil only in two fringe areas.

This view is well supplemented by the spread of the German ballads in Eastern-Central Europe. Certain types appear sporadically in Czech territory, as established by O. Sirovátka (1968), but in general only in a few adaptations. Two German ballads have a wider diffusion in Slavic areas: the "Mädchenmörder" (Lady Isabel) with a few incomplete Slovene-Croat and numerous Polish variants (the latter strongly contaminated with French elements); and "Die wiedergefundene Schwester" (D.Vlr. 45), widespread among both Southern and Northern Slavs and amalgamated in diverse ways with divers other elements. A more recent, broadside-like version of Child 20 "The Cruel Mother" = "Die Rabenmutter" appears in a few Southern Slav borrowings. Finally, motifs of two German ballads can be recognized in a medley of variants among Southern and Northern Slavs: these are the "Maid Freed from the Gallows" = "Die Losgekaufte" and "Edelmann und Schäfer".

A reverse trend can be discerned in sporadic instances of the penetration of some motifs or formulas into the German language area from the Poles and Czechs: a single notation of the French "Les métamorphoses" and some opening formulas in the East German version of "Mädchenmörder" (both from the Poles), a ballad about the Orphans from the Czech along the Czech-German border, and three recorded texts of the "Schwester Giftmischerin", adaptations from the Polish version of a

French ballad, "La dame Lombarde". An explanation of these French elements can be found in the one-time existence of Walloon settlements on the Hungarian-Polish border area and in the wine trade between the Walloons and Hungarians of the Tokaj region on one side and the Poles of Cracow on the other.

The few and scattered transmissions from Germans to Slavs and in reverse support the early diffusion of ballads in Hungary and from Hungary. After Hungarian ballads had spread in all directions, German ones which arrived later could not have a similar spread – the area would have been, so to speak, "filled up", at least, it was acquainted with the new genre. And the rare cases of filtering back show that a diffusion in the direction East-West had already begun.

Exceedingly instructive from this point of view is the Czech-Moravian territory, where a kind of duality has been pointed out by Sirovátka (1966/67). The Turkish motifs (Turkish character, Turkish imprisonment, etc.) come up fairly frequently in South-Eastern Moravia and less frequently among the Czech towards West or the Poles in the North, where they gradually disappear and lose their dramatic intensity. This line of demarcation and duality of the dissemination holds in relation to the German influence as well, which is detectable to a remarkable extent only in the Czech provinces, in much lesser degree also among the Moravians, but is mostly absent among the Slovaks. Perhaps it is superfluous to remark, that ballads with Turkish motifs are of Hungarian origin, so the demarcation between Czech and Moravian ballad areas represents that of ballads coming from Hungary and Germany.

Special attention must also be paid to the Balkan area. While some eighteen Hungarian ballads penetrated to Southern Slavs and Bulgarians, of the Italian balladry, on the contrary, only certain traits of a single ballad, "The Soldier Girl", are present in the Croat and Serbian material; but the formulation follows, on the whole, the Hungarian version even in this case. And no other Italian traits occur at all in the Balkan area. This shows that the Balkan peoples had been sooner acquainted with the ballad from the Hungarian than from the Italian side.

Also Greeks had passed a few elements to the other Balkan peoples' folklore tradition, mainly in the vicinity of the Greek borders: the "Bad Wife" (who does not want to return from the dance to her dying husband) recorded from Southern Bulgarians and Aromuns in one variant each (to my knowledge). Exceptionally, Greek solutions occur in the Albanian formulation of the "Cruel Mother-in-Law" (=La porcheronne), and in

two or three Serbo-Croat variants of the same ballad, one of them being a literary transplantation; but also in this case there are numerous other variants which follow the Hungarian version; finally, the Albanian version of the "The Soldier Girl" includes, besides the Greek name of the heroine, certain Greek tale elements. That is, French ballads which reached the Greek soil began, in Greek transformation, to filter through the language borders towards the North, but only in sporadic instances.

The picture I have outlined points to a French centre and a geographical order in the sequence of dissemination as it followed from late medieval circumstances of neighbourhood, domination and contact. This sequence, however, is disturbed in the fringe areas – in Scandinavia, in the German-Slav, Italian-Slav, Greek-Slav relationships, even in the Central German territory, as seen from overlapping French-Hungarian diffusion. As if two brooks flow into a pond – a stronger and a weaker – and on the edge they flow back, cross, and overlap each other.

I am aware that my results concerning the interrelationships of single ballads are open to revision, perhaps to correction, and the whole picture is surely to be supplemented. But the law of great numbers, I think, prevails here too, and the great outlines are right. Thus I am convinced that future comparative research on the ballad cannot arrive at definitive conclusions without taking into consideration these trends of dissemination in medieval Europe.

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