UM MARUP — A FOLK POEM ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF CHAM ISLAMISATION

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The present article deals with the Cham poem about the islamisation of Champa which is little known even to specialists.

The Chams are one of the Austronesian peoples living mostly in Vietnam (100 thousand people in 1996) and Cambodia. In the 12th/19th centuries on the territory of modern Central and Southern Vietnam a state called Champa existed whose history is connected with the history of Cambodia, Laos, China and Nusantara (Malaysia and Indonesia) [1].

The Cham culture contains elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and at the same it is an original culture which deserves big attention. We must note that in Asia (Vietnam, Japan, Malaysia) as well as in Europe the interest of researchers in the Cham history, literature and language has grown in the last two decades. However, there are very few specialists, even in Vietnam, able to read Cham manuscripts. There are not many research works on the history and literature of Champa, and few of them are dedicated to Islam.

There is not a single work dedicated specially to the theme of Muslim motives in Cham literature. The lack of structured materials or a developed approach has complicated the work on the present article.

In connection with this we have attempted to show the influence of Islam on literature after this world religion has spread more or less widely in the Cham society on the example of one of the most characteristic works.

The main problem is distinguishing Muslim features from the syncretic mixture of three religions (Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam) and the local cults which are still spread among the Chams of South Vietnam [2] and which could not but be reflected in their literature.

Akayat Um Marup is one of the five classical poems, and it is one of the most significant works of Cham literature [3].

Um Marup was written in the beginning of the 17th century, approximately at the same time with the other two famous akayats Deva Mano and Inra Patra. Because of the fact that Um Marup borrowed a lot from Deva Mano created in the end of the 16th century, a number of researchers (for example, Inrasara) conclude that it was written later.

By the end of the 16th century Islam was already widely spread in Cham society. Thus, the king Po Rome went to Kelantan to study “Kabar rup” (most probably the martial art which in the Malay tradition was part of the Islamic pedagogical complex) and to deeply comprehend Islamic dogmata.

According to the tradition, another Cham king Po Bin Thuor who ruled as early as in the second half of the 14th century, although he was a follower of Hinduism, refrained from eating pork to smooth antagonism between his citizens part of who practiced Islam. Probably the fact that the population of one of Cham villages (Binh Nghia, Ninh Thuyn province, Central Vietnam) does not farm pigs and does not eat pork (as well as beef) as a sign of respect of Po Thuors tradition resulted from this.

In connection with the conflict described in akayat, Um Marup was not much popular among the Chams who practiced Hinduism and its reading or keeping was even banned by their priests. At present, however, this work is still preserved in Hindu manuscripts and is seen as part of the common spiritual heritage of the Chams.

One of the pecularities of Um Marup is the fact that its plot was not adopted from Malay literature (at least there is no evidence of this) unlike “Inra Patra” or “Deva Mano”.

Although, according to Chambert-Loir, there is no evidence that this is a legend about the conversion of Chams into Islam, he does not reject this taking into account the popularity of Um Marup among the Chams of Central Vietnam [4].

Um Marup is written in classical lu ebat, i.e. it consists of strophes each of which contains two lines. Each strophe consists of 14 feet written in the form of three verses: in the first one there are six feet (the first line), in the second and the third — four feet in each.

Each foot is monosyllabic or disyllabic and can never exceed two syllables. If a word contains three or four syllables, it is divided into two parts. If it is necessary for the harmony of a phrase, a syllable that belongs to a word is attached to the previous or the following foot (in another word).

Thus, in one strophe there can not be less than 14 feet and 28 syllables. Each verse in a strophe contains a rhyme in the last syllable: the first verse rhymes with the second

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