



Looking North Of The Greek World: The Slavic Folk Poetry of The Balkans

Curriculum Unit 84.02.01

by Henry J. Brajkovic

A student might say, referring to the Iliad and the Odyssey; "That kind of stuff they did then, nobody does it anymore!" This paper is written to refute such a thought. Another student might wonder: "Where could we find plain folks making up poems?" Another might quip: "As to reciting them, forget it!" Yet, are there today any tribes or nations that have such a tradition? Where could we find an uninterrupted living tradition of uneducated people or persons with only an elementary education creating their own folk poetry? The answer is: in divided Macedonia. Most of Macedonia is located in the southernmost part of Yugoslavia. The remaining parts of Macedonia are in northern Greece, Bulgaria and Albania.

The material in this paper could be used for the study of geography, ancient or medieval history, folk poetry, story-telling, or for a study about heroes. Therefore, it is usable in all grades and on all levels.

Objectives

Can one say that the spirit of creativity lives within each nation? Can one say that "ordinary" folks (distinguished from literary, educated writers and poets) make poetry that many accept? What is one to say about the lyrics of popular songs, for example, in the "standard" pop tunes, early rock, bluegrass and "urban" folk tunes, protest songs, etc. There seems to be a spirit at work among the people seeking an outlet through song. What about poetry readings? Isn't it true that people want to hear jokes, anecdotes or that children recite rhymes and riddles, passed on from generation to generation of children? Children teaching children: no adults involved!

The same was true in the past. It seems that people or a tribe or a nation gradually acquired a set of stories, poems, proverbs, etc. that they enjoyed hearing to keep the memory of past events alive for the future generations. Possibly recollections of great men doing great deeds were stored in the tribes' or nations' psyche through poetic renditions. Victory or even defeat at the hands of the enemy could spur individuals to tell of heroic acts so that the national character would be protected from obliteration by the victorious enemy. My objective is to show how a subjugated nation preserved its national heritage through folk poetry.

By keeping alive their national language through memorized oral recitations, a tribe's language and their national identity survived. Even the copying of the written poetic heritage of the ancient Greek masterpieces (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*), though those poems were no longer recited, helped maintain Greek nationality intact, though the language changed before and after centuries of Ottoman (Turkish) domination. The natural

further development of the living language of Serbia and Macedonia was constantly responding to the changing circumstances, new pressures, and crises caused by the Turks. Words of Turkish and Persian origin entered the Serbian language. Example: *buzdovan* (Turkish—*buzdahan*) = mace. Among the many Turkish word-borrowings, there appeared in a poem the word “*hartija*”, a word of Greek origin meaning a sheet of paper. ¹ It has been said that wars bring people together, as do crisis situations, such as the Serbs and Greeks being conquered by the Turks.

The Northerners Arrive

Most students are familiar, to some degree, with the accomplishments of the ancient Greeks. Many have heard of the *Iliad* or of Troy, of the *Odyssey*, even if they have never read them. Some might have seen a rerun on television of the film “*Odyssey*” with Kirk Douglas. But most students have the impression that after the classical times of the Greek civilization there was no tradition of oral recitations of poetry in Greece;— everything, supposedly, stopped with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and these survived only through the persistent copying efforts of some monks and scholars through the centuries.

Students with a rudimentary knowledge of European history have the idea that the Dark Ages, with its many tribes and people roaming and pillaging, brought about the end of “civilization”. The Asiatic Huns, Avars, Bulgars, and others had either destroyed, enslaved or pushed the people in Eastern Europe, westward and/or southward thereby dislocating them or forcing them to find safer localities to live in. Life was not safe anywhere, yet they had to keep on the move to avoid contact with the Huns.

First Contact with the Greeks

Of the many people seeking safety, the Serbs, Croats, and a people later renamed Bulgars, drifted towards the northern borders of the Byzantine Empire. The Slavs arrived in the fifth century A.D. in present-day Romania. The Byzantine Greeks captured two “spies” who had no weapons but only a wooden musical instrument called at first cither, but later *gusle*. They sang many songs accompanying themselves with the wooden string instrument. This was recorded by the Greeks in the first half of the seventh century. ² According to Svetozar Koljevic, the Slavic people arrived in the Balkans in an area north of Greece with a tradition of folk singing. ³ Yet in 1938, Dr. Branko Vodnik claimed in an anthology of folk poetry for school children that the Slavs had no poetic traditions before coming to the Balkans. ⁴ We will leave this bone of contention to be fought over by the experts.

As the Slavs moved into the Byzantine Empire they came in contact with Greek culture. How far south have the Slavs penetrated? In the seventh century they reached as far as the outskirts of the town of Thessaloniki and into the mountains north of Athens, parts of Epirus in northern Greece, Macedonia and present-day Albania. Westward they settled on the coast of the Adriatic Sea in present-day Yugoslavia.

Similarities with Greek Pagan Gods

The Slavs were pagan and some of their gods corresponded to deities in Greek mythology. The Slavic god of thunder, *Perun*, was like the Greek god *Zeus*, their chief and most powerful god. They also had other gods that represented other natural forces and phenomena. A “*Vila*” was a female spirit of the forest endowed with magical powers.

Early Sources of Contacts with Greeks

About 1264 A.D. Domentijan, a Serbian monk, wrote how the people “thought up poems and sang sadly” when they heard how Prince Rastko (in 1192 A.D.) had given up his court life to become a monk at the Chilendarion Monastery on Mount Athos, a peninsula on the Aegean Sea, part of the Byzantine Empire. ⁵ Later, the Serbian monks looked down on folk poetry as lascivious and condemned the recitations of it as sinful.

According to Svetozar Koljevic, a biographer named Teodosiye had a “taste for the classical epic heritage” of Greece. Teodosiye was “instructing . . . [the] court audience . . . [about] the story of Troy”. ⁶ This proves that some of the Serbian Macedonians were acquainted with the stories found in the Greek epic cycle and perhaps the *Iliad* itself.

During the late Middle Ages a collection of stories called *Petrisov Zbornik* (1468) contained the *Novel about Troy*, translated into Croatian from an Italian source. According to Thomas Butler, this collection was found on the Croatian Littoral which is located on the northern shore of the Adriatic Sea, north of Dalmatia in Yugoslavia. It was a primer on chivalry. The translated story was not the Homeric *Iliad* but “accounts of two supposed eyewitnesses of the Trojan War”, Dictus of Crete and Dares the Phrygian. ⁷ Butler translated an excerpt of the *Novel About Troy* from a Serbian-Slavonic text. Therefore, even if some Slavs knew about the Trojan war we cannot say that this knowledge influenced the composition of Serbian folk ballads. All we can say is that some persons knew about the Trojan war.

In Search of Homeric Parallels

The interest in folk poetry of the Slavs in the Balkans were aroused early in the last century by the publications of a compilation of Serbian heroic folk poems by Vuk Karadjich in Vienna. The composition and preservation of these poems was quite different from contemporary European literature that was simply written and published. Some of the poems were translated into German, later into French, then into English, so that the western European readers became acquainted with a totally new literature. Karadjich also collected fairy tales, proverbs and anecdotes. One of the Brothers Grimm gave him encouragement and advice on how to go about it. He continued this work until he died in 1864. ⁸

Some scholars realized that the study of the South Slavic folk poetry could be used as a laboratory case for delving into the question of how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed. Among the questions the scholars have been considering are the following:

- Were the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* the work of one man, Homer, or were they the creation of countless generations of Greek folk poets?
- Were there variants to certain sections of the *Iliad*? (Karadjich found different variations of the same Serbian poem)
- How long a poem could an oral poet compose in one sitting?
- Can a singer accustomed to composing songs on traditional themes using traditional language use that language to compose a song on a contemporary theme?
- How much of it is memorized material?

Karadjich recorded this instance: one poem remained unchanged centuries later for its first written attestation when it was recited by an old illiterate woman in Serbia who had memorized it in its entirety, even using some archaic words she did not understand.

According to Lord, the Slavic epic poetry was a mixture of at least two traditions, Slavic and Greek.⁹ If it is true that the Serbs borrowed from the Greeks, there should be some Greek influence on the structure, composition or topics of the Slavic epic poems. There was an important tradition of reciting ballads and short narrative poems on the Balkan peninsula in which superhuman heroes appear, while other poems mention heroes we know nothing about today.¹⁰ After the arrival of the Turks, according to Lord, those Serbs who became Moslems simply continued reciting or singing poems substituting Turkish heroes for the old Slavic ones.¹¹

Lord found that the Serbian Moslem poem “The Marriage of Smailagich Mehe” has in it the motif of a young hero growing into manhood and obtaining the power to rule.¹² (One version of this poem has 2,160 lines while another version has over 12,000 lines.)¹³ This idea is also found in Homer’s *Odyssey* in the story of Telemachus.¹⁴ On the mythological level, another example is found in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, where Zeus takes over the rule of the gods from his father.¹⁵

The theme of a hero returning home, which is the central theme of Homer’s *Odyssey*, was a staple theme in many Balkan folk epics, especially “. . . among the Moslemized Serbs.”¹⁶ Lord analyzed twelve epic poems dealing with this theme in his book *The Singer of Tales*, Appendix III. He found these ballads in Milman Parry’s collection of Yugoslav folk poetry.¹⁷

In 1890 Vatroslav Jagich expressed his strong belief that the Serbs developed a type of folk epic of such refinement that “in many ways it was much closer [in quality] to the Homeric epic works than to the Russian folk epics”.¹⁸ These epic poems described the major protagonists, real historical personages, involved in the battle on the Kossovo Plain in 1389 A.D. when the Turks defeated the Serbs.

The Singers of the Epics

A student may ask: “Who recited these poems?” Men and women recited. The poetry was divided into men’s heroic songs and women’s songs. The singers of heroic poems were men reciting to an audience of men. Women were excluded at these gatherings. Women’s songs were recited at weddings to a mixed audience. Just like Homer, some Serbian blind men recited the heroic poems. However, some blind women also recited men’s heroic poems.

The songs and ballads were recited with the accompaniment of the one-string instrument “gusla” (goose-lah). A bow was drawn across the string and the tones changed with the fingering of the other hand. The singer sat and held the gusla in his lap. Some ballads were recited without the accompaniment of any instrument.

These poems are not pure ballads as one finds among recognized poets. Radosav Mederica calls them epic poems of a ballad style; however, neither with their actions nor by a characteristic formal style of artistic poetry do they fit such an appellation. Therefore, some researchers call them lyric-epic poems.¹⁹

In addition, besides ballads about heroic deeds, there were poems for many occasions: the birth of a child, marriage proposals, weddings, etc. These types of songs can be heard on LP records.

Due to the migrations of the Serbian people, caused by the oppressive rule of the Ottoman Turks, many of the poems were spread among the Croats and Dalmatians who recited them in their own dialects. The Dalmatians recited some Serbian epic poems and kept some Serbian words intact within the poems, even though they could have used words from their own dialect.

The Cycle of Poems on Prince Marko

Prince Marko was the son of King Vukashin and Queen Helen (called Yevrosima in the poems). The kingdom lay in the western part of Macedonia. Upon the death of king Vukashin, the kingdom was divided among his three sons: Marko, Andreyash and Dmitar. The town of Prilep became Prince Marko's capital. ²⁰ They could not overcome the powerful Turks who were advancing into the Balkans. They became vassals of the Turks, and, as vassals, they were obligated to fight for the Turks and against the ancestors of present-day Rumanians, at that time called Vlahs. In 1394 A.D. the Turkish sultan Bayazed attacked the Vlahs. A medieval biographer attributed the following prayer to Prince Marko as he was going into battle: "I pray that God may help the Christians and that in this battle I be the first among those that die." ²¹

How different is Marko from Achilles? While Achilles was angry over the mistreatment he received from Agamemnon and refused to fight, the legendary Marko became a fighter defending the oppressed. Yet, one has to realize, the real historical Marko collaborated with the enemy by becoming the Turks' vassal. ²² The future generations of oppressed Macedonians and Serbs needed a hero to rally around even though they knew they could not rebel against the Ottoman Turks.

The ballad "Prince Marko and Andreyash" was recorded word for word within a longer poem entitled "Fishing and Fishermen's Conversation" by Peter Hektorovic (born 1487 on Hvar Island, Dalmatia) and published in Venice in 1558. In the original it has 15 or 16-syllable or 8-syllable lines. It is the oldest folk ballad recorded. This genre is called "bugarstica" (boo-gahr-shtitsah). The verb "bugariti" means to sing with sadness and with grief. ²³ Such songs were composed for expressing sadness or grief for the beloved departed. ²⁴ This poem starts with the formula of antithesis: "The two paupers were buddies . . . Those were not . . . two paupers, one was a knight . . . and his brother Andreyash". ²⁵ The presence of this formula indicates the authentic oral character of this ballad since such formulae are found in later examples of this genre. ²⁶

This poem is different from other epic ballads in that it has a monologue by the victim, Andreyash, who cares about his brother, Prince Marko, the murderer, and has empathy for him. Before dying, he takes on the role of his brother-murderer, imagining the murderer's painful feelings and sorrow at the moment when he looks upon him, the "calm deer" giving up his soul. ²⁷

The victim, Andreyash, even worried about the future need his brother-murderer might have of him if Marko were attacked by pirates. Andreyash tells Marko to call out his name (Andreyash's) to scare the attackers away.

Note : I have changed the spellings of some names from the original in order to help English-speaking persons read them more easily. My translations of the following three folk ballads are based on Dr. Branko Vodnik's collection, *The Serbocroatian National Poems* .

Prince Marko and Andreyash (Andrew)

Two paupers were buddies a long time,
Good was their friendship and they liked each other,
The booty fairly divided, each went his way,
And having departed again called each other.
But once they captured three very good horses,
the two paupers,
Then were the two horses most fairly divided.
Over the third the heroes could not agree,
But got angry and cursed each other.
Those were not, my friends, two paupers,
One was the knight Marko Kralyevich,
The knight Marko Kralyevich and his brother Andreyash,
the young knights.
Then Marko pulled his bright sword emblazoned with gold
And stabbed brother Andreyash in the heart.
He, wounded, held on to his right hand
Then softly spoke to Prince Marko:
“If only I could, dear brother, beg you,
Don’t take the sword out of my heart,
dear brother,
Until I say two or three words to you:
When you come, Prince Marko, to our brave mother,
Don’t, I beg you, do her wrong by an unfair share:
Give my share, Prince Marko, to our mother,
For no more will she ever expect to get it from me.
If ever our sweet mother asks you,
knight Marko:
Son, why is it that your sword is so bloody?
Don’t tell her, dear brother, the whole truth,
In no way should you get her upset.
But tell our brave mother in this manner:
I came upon, dear mother, a calm deer
Who did not want to get off the road and out of my way,
brave mother,
Neither he for me, dear mother, nor I for him.
And then standing steadfast I pulled my good sword
And stabbed the good calm deer in the heart.
And when I looked upon the calm deer
Where it wanted to part with its soul, upon the road,
Seeing him, I was sad, as if he were my brother,
the calm deer,
And if I could only go back, I would not have done him in.
And when our mother will still ask you:
Where is, Prince Marko, your brother Andreyash?
In no way tell our mother the truth:
Say, he wanted to stay, dear mother, a hero in a foreign country,

His strong feelings would not let him depart,
Andreyash;
There he kissed a finely dressed girl.
And since he, the hero, kissed that girl,
No more will he go with me to wars,
No more would he divide the booty.
She gave him many strange herbs
And the kind of wine for forgetting,
the finely dressed girl,
But you can hope to see him soon, dear mother.
And when the pirates attack you in the black woods,
Don't get scared of them, dear brother,
To cry out for brother Andreyash;
Though your call for me will be of no use.
When they hear you call my name,
the accursed pirates,
At that moment the pirates will run away,
As they, each time, brother, ran away
When they heard you cry out my name;
And let your beloved band know.

That you murdered your guiltless brother!” Hesiod’s *Theogony* tells of: “. . . graceful haunts of the goddess-Nymphs who dwell amongst the glens of the hills.”²⁸ A goddess-nymph is called a “vila” in Serbian folk poetry. The nymphs “. . . are well disposed toward mortals and ready to help them: they even wed with them . . . nymphs of the forest and trees.”²⁹ Nymphs appear in many Serbian epic ballads. They are the favorite pagan goddesses that survived into the Christian era. Some of them are even given individual names. The “vila”, besides being able to help people, can also hurt a person. A “vila” can also speak to people as in the following poem:

Prince Marko and the Vila (Nymph)

Two blood brothers were riding
Over the beautiful Miroch Mountain;
One was Kralyevich Marko,
The other duke Milosh;
They rode, alongside each other, on good horses
Each carried a battle lance,
Each kissed the other’s white face
With affection, the two blood brothers;
Then Marko dozed off on his dappled horse
Then spoke to his blood brother:
“Ah my brother duke Milosh!
Heavily did the dream fall upon me,
Sing, brother, then talk to me.”
Then spoke duke Milosh:
“Ah my brother, Kralyevich Marko:
I would sing to you, brother,
But last night I drank too much wine
On the mountain with the vila Raviolya,
And the nymph threatened me:
If she hears me sing
She will send arrows
Into the throat and the live heart.
But spoke Kralyevich Marko:
“Sing, brother, don’t be afraid of the nymph
As long as I’m Kralyevich Marko,
And have my golden six-spiked mace.”
Then Milosh began to sing.
A beautiful song he began,
Of all our best and olden ones,
Of how and who had kingdoms
Throughout Macedonia proper,
Of how each had a monastery;
And Marko liked the song,
He leaned on his saddle pommel,
Marko sleeps and Milosh sings;

The vila Raviolya heard him,
Then she began to answer Milosh with a song.
Milosh sang and the nymph sang.
Finer the imperial voice of Milosh,
It was more beautiful than the nymph's.
The vila Raviolya got angry,
And jumped to the Miroch Mountain,
She pulled her bow and two white arrows,
One hit the throat of Milosh,
The other hit the hero's heart.
Said Milosh: "Oh my mother!
Oh Marko, blood brother by God,
Oh brother, the nymph struck me!
Haven't I told you
That I should not sing on the Miroch Mountain?"
And Marko snapped out of his dream
And jumped off his dappled horse,
He tightened Dappler's girth firmly,
He hugged and kissed his horse Dappler:
"Oh Dappler, my right hand:
Catch up with the nymph Raviolya,
I will shoe your hoofs with pure silver,
With pure silver and pure gold;
I'll cover you with silk to your knees,
And with tassels from your knees to your hoofs;
And put gold in your mane,
And decorate it with tiny pearls;
If you don't catch up with the nymph,
I'll take out both your eyes,
All four legs will I break,
And that's how I'll leave you here,
To crawl from fir tree to fir tree
As I, Marko, am without my blood brother."
Marko threw himself upon Dappler
Then rode through the Miroch Mountain.
The nymph flew atop the mountain,
Dappler rode through the middle of the mountain—
Unable to see or hear the nymph.
When Dappler saw the nymph,
He jumped the height of three lances,
And the length of four lances forward,
Quickly did Dappler reach the nymph.
When the nymph saw herself in trouble,
She flew, the poor one, skyward up to the clouds;
Marko threw his mace
Swirling, with full power,

Hitting the white nymph between her shoulder blades,
Throwing her down upon the black earth
Then he started hitting her with his mace:
Turning her, right and left
He beat her with his golden six-spiked mace:
“Why, nymph? May the Lord kill you!
Why did you shoot at my blood brother with arrows?
Give to that hero the healing herbs,
Because you won’t have your head anymore.”
The nymph called Marko her blood brother:
“By God, brother, Kralyevich Marko!
With the Lord on High and Saint John!
Let me go, alive, into the mountain
To gather the herbs upon the Miroch Mountain,
To heal the hero’s wounds.”
But Marko is merciful on hearing the Lord’s name,
And feeling sorrow in his heroic heart,
He let the nymph go, alive, into the mountain;
The nymph gathered herbs on the Niroch Mountain,
Picking the herbs, she often called out:
“I’ll be there, thanks to the Lord, my blood brother!”
Upon the Miroch the nymph gathered the herbs
And healed the wounds upon the hero:
Finer was the imperial voice of Milosh, T’was better than ever,
And a healthier heart in the hero,
Really sturdier than ever.
Into the Miroch Mountain went the nymph;
Away went Marko with his blood brother,
Away they went to the region of Porech,
And crossed over the River Timok, by boat,
At Sregovo, the big village,
Then they went to the region of Vidin;
But the nymph amidst other nymphs said:
“Oh hear me, my companion nymphs:
Don’t shoot arrows at heroes on the mountain
While there is word about Kralyevich Marko
And his clairvoyant Dappler,
And his golden six-spiked mace;
What I, the poor one, suffered because of him!

And barely have I stayed alive.” The Yugoslavs consider “The Death of Mother Yugovich” as one of the two finest ballads about the battle on the Kossovo Plain in Serbia. The other is “The Kossovo Young Maiden”. The Yugovich family was an old and powerful feudal family. The family patriarch was the father Yug-Bogdan (Yug-Godgiven). His daughter Militsa was married to Tsar Lazar of Serbia. In another ballad “Tsar Lazar and Tsaritsa Militsa”, she asks her brothers to stay with her. All her brothers went to battle on the Kossovo Plain, refusing to stay.

It appears that in “The Death of Mother Yugovich” all nine sons are married and their wives are staying with their mother-in-law. There is no news about the battle on the Kossovo Plain, and being naturally worried, she would like to be able to see what’s happening. Therefore, the desire to be a falcon and fly over the battlefield comes over her.

It is the story of a remarkable woman, brave in adversity and family tragedy. To lose not just one son, but all nine, including her husband, Yug-Bogdan, is hard to take, but she holds up with dignity. As the poem unfolds the pressures of grief build up gradually to a crescendo and a finale. Even her youngest son’s horse is expecting his master to take care of him. Animals play their part, showing emotions for their master, same as in the *Iliad*. Her final surrender to her emotions of grief comes about when Damian’s own wife recognizes the wedding ring she wore on the day of her marriage. Mother Yugovich finally gives in to her grief and dies.

The following ballad is part of a cycle of poems about the battle on the Kossovo Plain in Serbia, between the Serbs and the Turks.

The Death of Mother Yugovich

Oh dear God, what great wonder!
When the army came to Kossovo Plain,
With the army the nine Yugovich brothers
And the tenth, old man Yug Bogdan:
The Yugovich mother prays to God
That God give her the eyes of a falcon
And the white wings of a swan,
To fly high above the Kossovc Plain
To see the nine Yugoviches
And the tenth, old man Yug Bogdan.
What she sought from the Lord, was granted:
Lord gave her the eyes of a falcon
And the white wings of a swan.
She flew high above the Kossovo Plain
And found the nine Yugoviches dead
And the tenth, old man Yug Bogdan,
And above them nine battle lances,
Upon the lances nine falcons,
Around the lances nine good horses,
And alongside nine angry lions.
Then did the nine good horses neigh loudly
And the nine angry lions roar out,

And the nine falcons cry out.
And at this the mother's heart held fast,
That from her heart would fall no tears,
But takes the nine good horses
And takes the nine angry lions,
And takes the nine falcons,
And then to her white castle she returned.
From afar her daughters-in-law saw her,
A little closer walked up to her;
The nine widows wailed,
And the nine orphans cried.
The nine good horses neighed,
The nine angry lions roared,
The nine falcons screeched.
And here the mother's heart held fast,
That from her heart would fall no tears.
When it was right, at midnight,
Damian's dapple grey horse neighed loudly;
Mother asked Damian's dear wife:
"Daughter-in-law of mine, Damian's darling:
Why does Damian's dapple grey horse neigh loudly?
Is he but hungry for the white wheat,
Or thirsty for the water of Zvechan?"
So spake Damian's dear wife:
"Mother-in-law, Damian's mother:
Neither is his hunger for the white wheat
Nor is he thirsty for the water of Zvechan,
But Damian got him used to eating
Grounded oats until midnight,
From midnight on to roam upon the road,
So he mourns for his master,
That he did not carry him back."
And here the mother's heart held fast,
That from her heart would fall no tears.
When in the morning the day broke cut,
But two black ravens flew by,
Their wings bloodied to their shoulders,
On their beaks the white foam dripped;
They carry the hand of a hero,
And on the hand a golden ring,
They throw it in the lap of the mother;
She took hold of the hand, the Yugovich mother,
Turned it round and round,
Then called the darling of Damian!
"My daughter-in-law, darling of Damian:
Would you recognize whose hand this is?"

So spake the darling of Damian:
"Mother-in-law, mother of Damian,
This is the hand of our Damian
Because I recognize the ring, mother,
The ring was with me at the wedding."
The mother took the hand of Damian,
Turned it round and round,
Then softly spake to the hand:
"Oh my hand, my green apple, apple of my eye,
Where did you grow, where were you torn off?
You grew upon my own lap,
Tom off on the Kossovo Plain!"
So great was the mother's sorrow,
From grief her live heart broke,
For her nine Yugovich sons
And for the tenth, her old man Yug Bogdan.

Notes

1. Lord, Albert B. "Uticaj turskog osvojenja na balkansku epsku tradiciju" (The Effect of the Turkish Conquest on the Balkan Epic Tradition), printed in "Aspects of the Balkans, Continuity and Change. Contributions to the International Balkan Conference held at UCLA, October 23-28, 1969. Edited by Henrik Birnbaum and Speros Vryonis, Jr. The Hague-Paris, 1972 (Mouton). Translated from English by Salih H. Alic in *Narodna Knjizevnost Srba, Hrvata, Muslimana i Crnogoraca* —A Selection of Critiques. Buturovic, Dr. Benana and Palavestra, Dr. Vljako (compilers). Published by IP "Svijetlost" OOUR Zavod za udzbenike. Sarajevo 1974. pp. 73-74. Note: I translated these quotes from Serbian. Future footnotes will list this book as: Buturovic: *National Literature* .
2. Koljevic, Svetczar. *The Epic in Making* . Oxford, 1980. p. 11
3. Koljevic, S. *ibid* p. 11
4. Vodnik, Dr. Branko (ed.) *Narodne Pjesme Srpskohrvatske* (The Serbocroatian National Poems) Dio (Part I) Junacke Pjesme (Heroic Songs) Zagreb, (Yugoslavia) 1938. p. 3
5. Koljevic, S. *op. cit.* pp 11-12
6. Koljevic, S. *op. cit.* pp 12-13
7. Butler, Thomas. *Monumenta Serbocroatica* —A Bilingual Anthology of Serbian and Croatian Texts from the 12th to the 19th Century. University of Michigan. 1980. pp 162-170.
8. Stefanovic, Dragutin A. and Stanisavljevic, Vukasin: *Pregled Juoslovenske Knjizevnosti* Knjiga II (Zavod za Izdavanje Udzbenika. A survey of Yugoslav Literature) Book II, Agency for the Publishing of Textbooks, Belgrade, Socialist Republic of Serbia. 1958. pp 30-32
9. Lord, A. B. in Buturovic: *National Literature* . p 65
10. Lord, A. B. *ibid* p 65
11. Lord, A. B. *ibid* p 65
12. Lord, A. B. *op. cit.* p 76
13. Lord, A. B. *ibid* p 76
14. Lord, A. B. *ibid* p 76
15. Lord, A. B. *ibid* p 76
16. Lord, A. B. *op. cit.* p 77
17. Lord, A. B. *ibid* p 77
18. Jagic, Vatroslav reviewing "The Kossovo Heroes and Events in the Folk Epic." Written by Dr. T. Maretic. Zagreb, Yugoslavia. 1889 (Archiv XII, 1890) in Buturovic: *National Literature* . p 38
19. Mederica, Radosav: Prilog Pitanju Klasifikacije I Terminologije Narodnih Pesama (A Contribution Toward the Question of Classification and Technology of Folk Poems) in Buturovic: *National Literature* . p 216
20. Vodnik, Dr. Branko. *op. cit.* p 81
21. Vodnik, Dr. Branko. *ibid* p 81
22. Vodnik, Dr. Branko. *ibid* p 81
23. Krnjevic, Hatidza. *Antologija Narodnih Balada* (Anthology of Polk Ballads) Srpska Knjizevna Zadruga (The Serbian Literary Guild) Belgrade, Yugoslavia 1978. p 241
24. Krnjevic, H. *op. cit.* p 241
25. Boskovic-Stulli, Maja: "Balada o Marko Kraljevicu i Brata Mu Andrijasa" ("The Ballad About Prince Marko and His Brother Andrijas") in Buturovic: *National Literature* . p 19
26. Boskovic-Stulli, M. *op. cit.* p 19

27. Boskovic-Stulli, M. op. cit. p 20

28. Auden, W. H. (ed.) *The Portable Greek Reader* , The Viking Press, New York. 1948. (1955).

Hesiod: *Theogony*, translated by H. G. Evelyn-White. p 52

29. Seyffert, Oskar: *A Dictionary of Classical Antiquities* , revised and edited by Henry Nettleship and J. E. Sandys. The Meridian Books, New York. 1957. p 420

SAMPLE LESSONS

Lesson One : Phonetics

Before teaching about the poems, a good idea would be to learn how to read phonetically the Serbian names that appear in the poems. The writing of the Serbo-Croatian language is based on a simple idea: "write as you speak." Basically, each letter of the alphabet has one sound. For example:

a is always = ah as in far

e " " = eh " " let
i " " = ee" " meek
u " " = oo " " push
o " " = o " " for

There is *no* combining of the sound "oo" with the "o" as in English: "Oh" or "owe".

The consonants also are pronounced only in one way. They do *not* stand for two different sounds. For example:

g is always as in *go*

j " " " y ellow
c " " " the "ts" in ca ts
c " " " ch at
c " " " na tu re
s " " " sh ip
r " " pronounced as the Scots say it.
dz (dj) " " " j ug

To help out the students the teacher could write on the blackboard the following transliterations: (underlined syllable is stressed)

Marko	= <i>Mah-r ko</i>	
Kralyevich	= <i>Krah-l yeh-vich</i>	
Andreyash	= <i>Ah-n -dree- yah-sh</i>	
vila		= <i>ve e-lah</i>
Milosh	= <i>Mee -lo-sh</i>	
Miroch	= <i>Mee -ro-ch</i>	
Ravioyla	= <i>Rah -vee- oy -lah</i>	
Porech	= <i>Po -reh-ch</i>	
Bregovo	= <i>Breh -govo</i>	
Vidin		= <i>Vee -deen</i>
Yug		= <i>Yoog</i>
Yugovich	= <i>Yoo -go-vich</i>	
Bogdan	= <i>Bawg-dah-n</i> (means "Godgiven")	
Kosovo	= <i>Koss -o-vo</i> (as in "caw")	
Damian	= <i>Dam -yahn</i>	
Timok	= <i>Tee -muck</i>	

Note : I have changed some of the spellings of the above names from the original to help English-speaking readers pronounce them as correctly as possible.

Lesson Two : Geography lesson

Map #1 The Balkans –Northern Greece and Yugoslavia

The teacher can use a wall map of Europe and point out the Balkan peninsula. (The word "balkan" is of Turkish origin and means "mountain.") The teacher can hand out copies of the following blank map of The Balkans-Northern Greece and Yugoslavia to the students. The students will fill in the following items in their appropriate locations:

- (1) Northern Greece
- (2) Albania
- (3) Bulgaria
- (4) Yugoslavia, divided into:
 - (a) Macedonia
 - (b) Serbia
 - (c) Montenegro (means "Black Hills")
 - (d) Bosnia
 - (e) Hercegovina (*Hair -tse-go- vee nah*)
 - (f) Croatia
 - (g) Dalmatia
 - (f) Slovenia
- (5) Adriatic Sea
- (6) Italy
- (7) Romania (Rumania)
- (8) Hungary

(9) Austria

The teacher may select, add, or omit items from the above list.

Lesson Three : Geographical Orientation

Map #2—The Arrival of the Ottoman Turks into the Byzantine Empire

Map #3—Northern Serbia and Northern Bulgaria

The teacher could make copies of the following blank maps and hand them out to the students at the beginning of the lesson. The teacher should direct the students to fill in the following items on their maps.

Map #2 —The Arrival of the Ottoman Turks into The Byzantine Empire

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Athens | 12. Adriatic Sea |
| 2. Castoria | 13. Ionian Sea |
| 3. Mt. Athos | 14. Sea of Marmora |
| 4. Vardar River | 15. Dardanelles |
| 5. Marica River | 16. Black Sea |
| 6. Kossovo Plain | 17. Asia Minor |
| 7. Peloponnesus | 18. Bosphorus Strait |
| 8. Northern Greece | 19. Mt. Olympus |
| 9. Macedonia | 20. Thessaloniki |
| 10. Istanbul | 21. Delphi |
| 11. Aegean Sea | 22. Prilep (Prince Marko's capital) |
| | 23. Epirus |

Map #3 —Northern Serbia and Northern Bulgaria

1. Northern Serbia
2. Rumania
3. Bulgaria
4. Danube River
5. Mt. Miroch
6. Timok River
7. Bregovo
8. Vidin

The teacher can select, add, or omit any of the above items.

I have supplied maps that are filled in with the locations and corresponding numbers to facilitate the teaching of these lessons, since some of the items cannot be found in standard atlases.

Map #3 was included to elucidate the action in the ballad “Prince Marko and the Vila”.

I have also added an illustration of the one-string instrument “gusla” (sometimes called “gusle”) to help the teacher explain or show the students what it looks like. This type of instrument was hand-made. Some of them were carved with exquisite decorations.

(figure available in print form)

Bow

(figure available in print form)

Gusla

MAP #1—The Balkans—Northern Greece and Yugoslavia

(figure available in print form)

MAP #1—The Balkans—Northern Greece and Yugoslavia

(figure available in print form)

MAP #2—The Arrival of the Ottoman Turks into the Byzantine Empire

(figure available in print form)

MAP #2—The Arrival of the Ottoman Turks into the Byzantine Empire

(figure available in print form)

MAP #3—Northern Serbia and Northern Bulgaria

(figure available in print form)

(figure available in print form)

BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR TEACHERS

Auden, W. H. (ed.) *The Portable Greek Reader* . New York: The Viking Press. 1948.

An excellent introduction to Greek thought and literature.

Bartók, Béla and Lord, Alpert B. *Serbo - Croatian Folk Songs*. Texts and Transcriptions of Seventy-five Folk Songs from the Milman Parry Collection and a Morphology of Serbo-Croatian Folk Melodies. New York: Columbia University Press. 1951.

A book for those with an interest in folk music. It has the original poems and their translations.

Butler, Thomas. *Monumenta Serbocroatica* . A Bilingual Anthology of Serbian and Croatian Texts From The 12th To The 19th Century. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Michigan Slavic Publications, University of Michigan. 1980.

The best anthology of historical and literary works of the past;, some are excerpts from masterpieces of Yugoslav literature.

Dvornik, Francis. *The Slavs in European History and Civilization*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 1962. An excellent general history of the many Slavic nations and their involvement with the major European and Ottoman-Turkish nations.

Koljevic, Svetozar. *The Epic In The Making* . Oxord: Clarendon Press. 1980.

A major work in English on Yugoslav epic poetry.

Morison, W. A. *The Revolt Of The Serbs Against The Turks (1804-1813)* Translations from the Serbian National Ballads of the Period, with an Introduction. Cambridge: At The University Press. 1942. It describes when the Serbs carried on their rebellions against the Turkish pashas (governors). An interesting collection of folk poems on recent historical events.

Seyffert, Oskar. *A Dictionary of Classical Antiquities* . New York: The Meridian Books. 1957.

An excellent paperback covering the mythology, religion, literature, and art of the Greek classical times.

Stanoyevich, Dr. B. Stevenson. *An Anthology Of Jugoslav Poetry —Serbian Lyrics*. Boston: Richard G. Badger, The Gorham Press. 1920.

Short selections of varied lyric poems.

Tripp Edward. *The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology* . New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library. 1970. Originally published as *Crowell's Handbook of Classical Mythology* . An indispensable guide.

West, Rebecca. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. A Journey Through Yugoslavia. New York: The Viking Press. 1941.

The best book in English on Yugoslavia—its people, history and traditions. It describes the conditions in Yugoslavia before World War II and the intellectual cleavage among the intelligentsia.

Wilson, Duncan. *The Life and Times of Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic , 1787-1864*. Literacy, Literature, and National Independence in Serbia. Oxford: At The Clarendon Press. 1970.

In addition to following the life of Vuk Karadzic the book describes the struggles Vuk had in instituting a new literacy reform, and his efforts in collecting national folk poems. It also describes his relations with various Serbian leaders.

READING LIST FOR STUDENTS

Eliot, Alexander and The Editors of LIFE. *Greece* . New York: Time Incorporated. 1963, 1966. An excellent visual and learning experience for interested students. It covers its history from the ancient times to modern, independent Greece.

Petrovitch, Woislav M. *Hero Tales and Legends of The Serbians* . London: George C. Harrap & Company. 1914.
A beautiful book with fine illustrations of folk themes and heroes. In addition to a historical survey, it has many of the Serbian folk ballads retold in prose.

Rootham, Helen. *Kosovo—Heroic Songs of The Serbs* . Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1920.

Bilingual translations of the original Serbian heroic folk ballads pertaining to the battle of Kosovo.

Stillman, Edmund and the Editors of LIFE. *The Balkans* . New York: Time Incorporated. 1964.

An excellent introduction to the various Balkan countries—their heritage and ways of life.

Wiles, J. W. *Serbian Songs and Poems : Chords of the Yugoslav Harp*. New York: The MacMillan Company. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1917.

Translations of short religious poems, folk songs, lamentations, and miscellaneous poems for special occasions.

MATERIALS FOR CLASSROOM USE

LP Recordings :

Lomax, Alan (compiled and edited). *Yugoslav Folk Music* , Volume XV of The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music, #SL-217. Columbia Records, Inc., New York City.

Notes, texts and translations by Albert Lord.

It covers all the major republics of Yugoslavia by presenting their particular type of folk songs and dances.

Boulton, Laura (recorded). *Folk Music of Yugoslavia* . Ethnic Folkways Library, #FE4434. Folkways Records and Service Corp., New York City. 1952.

This interesting LP record has songs and dances from: Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Hercegovina. It includes an epic song sung or recited by a guslar. (A singer with the gusle) from Montenegro. The renditions are authentic.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>