

**The Collection and Analysis of
Oral Epic Tradition in South Slavic:
An Instance**

David E. Bynum

The earliest certain textual evidence relating to the South Slavic oral epic tradition that has been discovered up to the present is a little less than five hundred years old. That earliest scrap of evidence has come down to us in literary learning as the result of a conscious act of *collection* by an Italian to whom not only the poetry itself but also the dialects of the South Slavs were entirely foreign. What was true of him in his time has remained true in principle of all the collecting activity by all the collectors who have recorded oral traditional epic poetry in the South Slavic world ever since: collecting has, by its very nature, been the act of outsiders to whom the tradition was essentially strange, who nevertheless were interested in it as though it were literature, and who did not understand it. Thus the whole history of knowledge about the South Slavic oral traditional epos has been shaped by three constant factors: 1. The tradition has been substantially alien to all its cognoscenti, regardless of their nationalities. 2. It has been valued and acquisitively pursued by them for its perceived literary features. 3. But the possession of texts from the tradition, no matter how the collecting has been done, has continued always to pose some of the most difficult historical and analytical problems known to literary science; namely the questions of how, why, and when narrative poetry arose in human culture to begin with, which of its original characteristics have remained constant in the life of such traditions, and what they disclose about the nature and history of the human mind. Those questions are all as unanswered today as they were five hundred years ago, and are indeed all now far more problematical than ever before. For

while other kinds of natural science have made sure progress in explaining physical phenomena, the phenomena of oral poetic traditions have only very recently come to be appreciated as being truly natural phenomena, and not merely artifacts of culture manipulable at will by the persons whose culture it was. The literary author and the influential critic do, by what they think and what they surmise, actually change literature in the process of its making, and so its constant features as it evolves are only the constant features of their own minds. This reality about written literature necessarily also shapes the historical study of it. But that is not the reality at all about the oral epic tradition, where there have clearly always been objectively verifiable mechanisms sustaining the tradition independently of what anyone has merely conjectured about them; and this difference is at once both the central problem and the central attraction of the tradition for those literary minds that have most successfully understood what it was exactly that they have not understood about it.

But whereas the earliest known textual relics of the South Slavic oral epic tradition (its poetic fossil-finds and paleontology, as it were) presently date from no more than five centuries ago at most, nothing has ever during that five hundred years been found in the tradition itself that would be a sufficient reason not to suppose—and there are many strong reasons why one might suppose—that the tradition has obtained among the South Slavs and their progenitors for a very much longer span of time, as long a length of time indeed as it is possible to imagine. In this way too the radical difference between the collectors' knowledge and the traditional oral epic singers' knowledge is apparent. For a few centuries only, a few people of literary bent have now and again wanted to own texts of the tradition for one purpose or another, but the tradition itself never consisted of texts. It consisted only of a way of making texts; it was a process, not a product. Thus, in the Slavic Balkans, the idea of keeping texts is a cultural novelty of startling recency, while knowledge of the way to make such texts is probably prodigiously older. This is paradoxical not only for literary history, but also for education; not only with regard to the past, but also for the future. For if one believes that the preservation of texts and the knowledge of them in coming generations are important for the continuity of civilization (as all the collectors of the South Slavic oral epic tradition have uniformly believed), and if one values continuity of civilization,

then one must believe and hope that the texts collected from the South Slavic tradition will somehow be preserved indefinitely into the future, even though the collection of such texts was a recent cultural innovation.

Meanwhile the fate of the tradition itself that gave rise to the texts and that was the object of the collecting—the native South Slavic traditional bard's way of making epics—that fate is sealed. Prodigiously old it may have been, but we in the final quarter of the twentieth century have finally witnessed its irrevocable extinction as the very last of the Balkan bards have departed through death or emigration. All the texts there ever were to be collected have now been collected, and what we cannot learn about the tradition from them we shall never know. It remains for our descendants no less than for the descendants of the former bards and of their people to realize sometime far in the future what we cannot yet clearly discern: whether continuity of civilization is in fact better served by practicing a certain way of making things, or rather by attempting to preserve for all of future time the collections of products already made. All that can presently be said with certainty about this question is that the South Slavic experience to date markedly favors the former over the latter probability.

To feel the full force of this uncertainty, one must comprehend more than is usually understood even by experts about the actual precision and scope of the collections as a whole: how fully and how well they document the tradition even within the few centuries when any collecting at all was done. The South Slavic tradition has without a doubt been the most massively collected of all such traditions that have ever been documented anywhere in the world. Yet fewer than three hundred individuals formed all the collections that have survived to be of use in our time. Until the second half of the present century, the Balkans south of the Danube have not experienced a single generation without warfare since the end of the *pax romana*. Much that was once collected has perished or disappeared through pillage. What does survive is nevertheless wonderfully copious and for the most part thus far unused for any purpose whatever. No one has previously attempted even to set down in one place a comprehensive list of who the collectors were whose collections are now, taken as a group, all that still exists of the South Slavic tradition. The following are, with certain omissions (in those

instances particularly where there is much uncertainty as to the continued existence of the collection), those collectors whose names are known and whose accumulations are either certainly or probably still accessible to the modern researcher in some form or part:

Serbo-Croatian

Ante and Miroslav Alačević	Miloš Ivković
Miho Andjelinović	Ernest Jelušić-Štrkov
Vjekoslav Babukić	Ivan Franjo Jukić
Ante Balović	Ivan Justić
Filip Banić	Vladimir Kačanovsky
Juraj Baraković	Ivan Kačić-Miošić
S. R. Bašagić	Vuk Stefanović Karadžić
Nikola Begović	Milan Karanović
Luka Bernaldi-Lucić	Nikola Kašiković
Petar N. Besarović	Gojko M. Kilivarda
Julije Bišćan	Lazar Kirjak
Andrija Blagović	Josip Klarić
Jakov Bobinac	Jovan Koprivica
Krsta Božović	Simo Kosnić
Miladin Božović	Franjo Kovačević
Marko Bruerović	Ivan Kraljević
Manojlo Bubalo-Kordunaš	Friedrich Krauss
Bade Budisavljević	Nikola Stanov Kukić
Ivan Bulić	Ivan Kukuljević
Todor Bušetić	Muharem Kurtagić
David E. Bynum	Sime Ljubić
Ilija Ćulum	Niko Ljubidrag
A. Debeljaković	Albert B. Lord
Pero Delić	Andrija Luburić
Djuro Deželić	Melko Lucijanović
Todor Dimitrijević	Luka Marjanović
Djordjije Dragović-Ćuričković	Krsto Marković
Stevan Dučić	Marko Marković
Ivo and Mato Duić	Pero Marković
Lazar Dunda	Grga Martić
Mustafa Džinić	Djuro Matijašević
Djuro Ferić	Stjepan Mažuranić
Alberto Fortis	Fran Mikuličić
Dominik Franković	Mihailo Dj. Miladinović
Baldo Melkov Glavić	Mato Milas
Aleksandar Godler	Sima R. Mileusnić
Bartuo Grgić	Milan Miličević
Stjepan Grgić	Fran Milošević
Esad Hadžiomerspahić	Sima Milutinović
Petar Hektorović	Petar Mirković
Kosta Hörmann	Ana Mladineo-Dobrila
Dragoljub Ilić	Antun Mostahinić
Luka Ilić	Andro Murat
Nikola Ivanaj-Arbanas	Jovan Mutić
Anibal Ivančić	Rinald Nališ
Ivan Ivanišević	Alija Nametak
Petar Ivanković	Dobroslov Nedić
Stjepan Ivičević	Lazar Nikolić

Petar II Petrović Njegoš	Blagoje Stojadinović
Ivan Krst. Novak	Sreten Stojković
Milan Obradović	Rudolf Strohal
Mato Ostojić	Omerbeg Sulejmanpašić-Despotović
Vidak Otović	Andrija Svilokos
Rogeri de Pacienza di Nardo	Dobroclav Sarić
Vice Palunko	Novica Saulić
Milman Parry	Mirko Šestić
Mićun Pavićević	Miloš B. Skarić
Mijovio Pavlinović	Niko Štuk
Božo Peričić	Marijan Šunjić
Djoka Perin	Djuro Šurmin
Jovan L. Perović	Nikola Tommaseo
Bogoljub Petranović	Fran Tonković
Marko Petričević	Mat. Topalović
Atanasije Petrović	Nikola Tordinac
Martin Pletikosić	Ivan Trnski
Aleksa Popović	Jevrem Veličković
Dušan S. Popović-Momir	Mijailo Viljić
Stefan Popović	Stefan Verković
Mihailo S. Profirović	Milojko Veselinović
Mato Projić	Djuro Vijolić
Filip Radičević	Jovan Vorkapić
Ivo Rajić	Vice Vodopić
Dragutin Rakovac	Fran Vrbanić
Mihailo St. Riznić	Martin Vučković
Branislav Rusić	Tatomir Vukanović
Mijat Saridža	Joso Vukelić
Alois Schmaus	J. M. Weiss
Čamil Sijarić	Dušan Zorić-Dragoš
Tadija Smičiklas	Jovan Dj. Zorić
Jovan L. Srečković	Vid Žunjić
Ivan Stipac	Ivan Žuvela

In addition to the collections formed by the foregoing persons, there are also a few valuable elder manuscript collections whose makers are uncertain or unknown. Among these are the Balović, Mazarović, and so-called Zmajević mss. of Perast, the famous “Popijevke slovinske” (signature R. 4091 in the University Library, Zagreb), and the two “Zagreb” mss. (signatures 638// IV.a. 30 and 641// I.b. 80 in the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts), as well as the Erlangen Manuscript and the Ohmućević ms. (Dubrovnik).

The collection of oral traditional epics in the Slavic-speaking Balkans began in and about the then highly Italianate Adriatic littoral and did not penetrate into the inner fastnesses of Slavic Macedonia and Bulgaria until the nineteenth century. A number of the latter-day collectors of Serbo-Croatian texts also collected in Slavic Macedonia or Bulgaria, or both. The following list indicates most of the collectors in Slavic Macedonia and Bulgaria whose

collections remain important resources for the modern student of this poetry, without repeating names already included in the foregoing list of the collectors of Serbo-Croatian texts:

Bulgarian and Macedonian

Božan Angelov	Petūr Sveštenik Ljubenov
Mixail Arnaudov	Mara Mixajlova
Ivan A. Bogoev (Bogorov)	D. Mitrev
G. P. Bojadžiev	Pančo Mixajlov
S. Iv. Bojanov	Ivan Murinkov
Nikolaj Bončev	Simeon L. Podbalkanski
Zlata Cicekova-Božkova	Elenka N. Popova
D. Čitakov	Rajno Popovič
Auguste Dozan	Krste Popovo
Marija Enjuva	Georgi S. Rakovski
Kozma Galičničeski	Petūr Račov Slavejkov
Najden Gerov	A. P. Stoilov
N. Xadži Gerovič	Vasil Stoin
Ivan Gintolov	K. A. Šapkarev
Vasil Ikonov	Georgi Teoxarov
Mixail Ilčinkov	X. Vakarelski
I. Ivanov	St. Vatev
Rajna Kacarova	Jurij Iv. Venelin
Nikola St. Kara-Nikolov	Stojan Vezenkov
L. Karavelov	At. V. Vürbanski
P. Karavelov	Panajot Xitov
N. D. Katranov	Dobri Xristov
Genčo Keremidziev	P. E. Zdravevski
Evgenija Xadži Gergeva Kisimova	K. P. Žinzifov
Zaxari Knjažeski	

The historical accident of the Slovenes' geographic contiguity, and subsequent political community, with other Slavic-speaking peoples of the Balkans whose dialects have been host to the oral epic tradition has sometimes encouraged them, as a matter of ethnic pride, also to claim possession of an oral epos in some sense. Such a claim however deforms the definition of epos beyond much practical utility, and learned Slovenes themselves do not conventionally use the word to describe what they properly prefer to call simply "narrative songs" (*pripovedne pesmi*), occasionally with the additional epithet "heroic" (*junaške*). Since the collected relics of such poetry from Slovenian tradition are both very short (never exceeding two hundred verses in any text) and notably exiguous in number, publishing them has been easier and has reached a much more comprehensive stage than for any other region of the Slavic Balkans. Consequently a reader can conveniently consult virtually all that there is to consult of this sort from Slovenia in two very serviceable publications (Štrekelj 1895 and Kumer et al. 1970).

Finite though the number of surviving collections is, on average they are big, making the sum of the collected textual evidence from the South Slavic oral epic tradition truly enormous. In all of its variety, the corpus as a whole is indeed quite beyond the possible scope of any one person's knowledge, and it is so dispersed as to be, practically speaking, inaccessible *in toto* to anyone.

Historically, a common way of setting bearable limits upon what one has considered it necessary to know in order to function as an analyst of the tradition has been to restrict one's purview to texts of a particular ethnic or regional provenance: texts from Orthodox Serbs, or from Moslems in Bosnia and Hercegovina, from Dalmatian Catholics, or Muslim Bulgars, and so forth. There have of course often been other motives as well for this balkanizing tendency in the treatment of the epos, but regardless of its several causes and their relative weights, no other single factor has by itself been so obstructive to the advancement of understanding about the South Slavic tradition as this one has.

Not so blatantly obvious, but a close second to ethnic bias as a prevailing cause of confusion has been the problem of accuracy in the recording and even more in the publishing of texts. No technique was ever devised by anyone in the entire five-hundred-year history of the collecting that would assure consistent perfection in the translation of this poetry from sound-waves to alphabetical characters on paper. With no exceptions whatever, *some* element of prejudice on the part of collectors and their helpers as to what the poetry *should* be has crept into the actual fixing of it in its finally fossilized textual form. In consequence, the very first requirement for every analyst of the South Slavic oral epos is to determine what parts of the recorded corpus are reliable, or to what extent they may be unreliable, for every *other* analytical purpose. In actual practice therefore, due care with regard to the qualities of texts—in what ways they do or do not mirror the actual tradition—sets much more rigorous and realistic limits upon what part of the extant corpus may properly be used for any particular analytical task than mere ethnic preferences ever did. The only known method for judging what texts are good reflections of tradition, and which are not, derives in the universal experience of all the cognoscenti from knowing the tradition directly, not merely in its texts, and how this indispensable source of practical wisdom can possibly be

replaced now that the tradition has finally died is a new problem of great magnitude for this field of learning.

Collectors' biases have distorted their collections, but editors' interventions have often falsified published texts outright. Thus, the mere fact that an editor of whatever excellence has previously worked to establish authoritative texts upon a given collection has rarely meant that published texts were even as reliable as the originals were before editing took place. No fault *per se* of editors in the Slavic Balkans was to blame, for they were many of them quite as good as their best western European counterparts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The fault has been in the very idea—the western European idea, indeed—of *Textkritik* and editing in accord with it: to establish from flawed epigonic copies and conflation a perfect original text in all its self-explanatory pristine clarity as it must have been before later folly and error obscured it. The very idea and motivation of such editing ran foul of the fundamental difference between literature and the tradition, which, utterly unlike literature, had no original at all, perfect or otherwise, and derived its authority from another kind of source, the nature of which was not even suspected by anyone until a mere fifty years before the final extinction of the South Slavic tradition.

So throughout the entire half-millennium of the collecting activity, editors have with only rare exceptions assumed not only the license but indeed have felt the positive responsibility to “correct” texts so as to render them better literature than they appeared to be in their original, true oral traditional form. The usual result of such tampering has been neither durable literature nor a good representation of the tradition. The many ways in which deliberate meddling with texts has distorted the record of the tradition are almost too many to name, and they infest every moment of the record from its very beginning. Indeed, the very first text in the entire record is a revealing case in point, inasmuch as it vividly displays the most irresistible of all motives for editorial tampering: the editor's inability in some respect to understand his text *unless* he alters it. In this aspect more than any other the texts of an oral epic tradition do not tolerate treatment as though they were literature. For entirely unlike literary texts, epics in an oral tradition are never, nor do they ever need to be, either self-explanatory or wholly intelligible in and of themselves. In the tradition that made them, they were never more than the flitting shadows of the thought which they

transiently expressed, and which none of them ever could or would attempt to replicate completely. Every line of such poetry means what it meant in a hundred other places at other times in other men's tellings; but shear it away from that potent system of resonance with its own past—a past as old as time itself—and while it will still mean *something*, its power to convey meaning is inevitably crippled. Every editor recognizes the worst instances of such crippling and sees how they blemish the poem under his editorial treatment, but too often the editorial prostheses are a cure worse than the ailment, because, while they are only meant to correct the “awkward,” literarily unacceptable features of a text, in doing that they also commonly obliterate all trace of the corrected text's vital connections with the other elements elsewhere in the tradition that originally give it a great part of its meaning.

The central principle involved here, namely that *no text from the oral tradition is an entity in its own right nor intelligible apart from the rest of the tradition*, is well illustrated by the case of what is supposedly the very first text in the collected record of the South Slavic oral epos. The text in question is very short, but the circumstances of its collection are extraordinarily well documented. Those circumstances are indeed much more fully recorded in this instance than for any text of comparable length in any manuscript collection from any other time during the past half-millennium.

The poem was recorded, very badly, by an Italian poetaster, Rogeri de Pacienza di Nardo, on the afternoon of Thursday, June 1, 1497, in the small southern Italian town of Gioia del Colle in what is now known as the province of Puglia. The occasion was a royal procession by the newly crowned Queen Consort of Naples, Isabella del Balzo, from her estate in the district of Lecce to the east toward Naples in the west by way of Taranto. As part of the festivities marking her pause at Gioia del Colle, the local nobility arranged for Isabella and her numerous retinue (among whom Rogeri de Pacienza was one) to be entertained with song and dance performed, as it happened, by a company of thirty or more “Slav” colonists of that vicinity. Besides a fragment of their oral poetry, Rogeri de Pacienza also noted the names of twenty-eight of the performers, a number of which are unmistakably Serbian (Vukašin, Raško, Vukosava, etc.). De Pacienza's function in the Queen Consort's company was to record in poetry all the personages and events connected with her royal progress to Naples, which occupied nearly five months' time, from mid-May to 15

October, 1497. This he did in the form of an epic of nearly eight thousand Italian verses dedicated to Isabella under the title “The Balziad” (*Lo Balzino*), into which he inserted many snatches and tags and oratorical effusions that occurred during the royal progress, of which the “Slavic” poem heard in Gioia del Colle was only one. Miroslav Pantić, a Serbian scholar particularly of the literature of the Dalmatian Renaissance and Baroque, has admirably gathered and reported the historical facts surrounding this poetic incident, and has attempted his own reconstruction of the Serbian text from Rogeri de Pacienza’s bad writing (Pantić 1977).

Following the *editio princeps* of “Lo Balzino” (Marti 1977), Pantić worked from the following lines in fifteenth-century Italian orthography, which cannot be taken as an intact text in any known or positable Slavic dialect:

Orauias natgradum smereuo nit core
 nichiasce snime gouorithi nego Jamco
 goiuoda gouorasce istmize molimtise
 orle sidi maolonisce dastobogme
 progouoru bigomte bratta zimaiu
 pogi dosmederesche dasmole slauono
 mo despostu damosposti istamice
 smederesche Jacomi bopomoste
 Jslaii dispot pusti Jsmederesche
 tamice Jatechul napitati seruene
 creucze turesche bellocatela vitesco
 cha

Adding something to this text in seventeen places (I show his additions below by underscoring), subtracting something in seven places (I show his omissions in brackets), and interpreting the orthography differently from place to place twenty times so as to standardize the text phonetically (I show such interpretations in italics), Professor Pantić reconstructed the text as follows, with ten lines instead of Rogeri’s twelve:

Orao se vijaše *nad* gradom Smederovom.
 Nitkore *ne* čaše s njime govorit[h]i,
 nego Janko vojvoda govoraše iz tamnice:
 “Molim ti se, orle, sidi ma[o]lo niže
 da s tobome progovoru: *Bogom* te brat[t]a jimaju
 podji do smedereyske gospode da s’ mole

slav[o]nomu despo[s]tu da m' ot[s]pusti iz tamnice
 smedereyske;
 i ako mi Bog pomože i slavni despot pusti
 iz smedereyske tamnice, ja to ću[i] napitati
 ćrvene krvce turečke, bel[i]oga tela viteškoga.”

I translate:

An eagle circled over Smederevo city.
 No one desired to speak to it
 Save only Yanko, leader of troops, who spoke to it
 from (where he lay in) prison:
 “I pray thee, eagle, descend a little lower,
 So that I may talk to thee: I have thee (as my) brother;
 Get thee to the noble folk of Smederevo, let them beseech
 The famous despot to set me free from Smederevo prison;
 And if God aids me and the famous despot sets (me) free
 From Smederevo prison, I shall feed thee
 Crimson Turkish blood, white flesh of mounted warriors.”

Now this is unquestionably a great improvement upon the error-ridden original notation by Rogeri de Pacienza, who by his own admission knew no Slavic and understood not a word of what he had recorded. How he recorded the poem is unknown; whether by his own hand as it was sung, or from a dictation repeated after the actual singing, or with the help of some other literate person who perhaps understood more of this foreign language than did Rogeri. What is clearer is who sang the poem; de Pacienza uses the third person plural in his Italian description of the scene, and says moreover that the whole company of men and women, children and adults alike, sang the song together at the top of their voices *as they danced* (“saltando como caprii girava et insiem tal parol cantava”). Professor Pantić has helped to clarify at least the sense of what they were singing, which Rogeri de Pacienza did not know at all.

In another aspect of the poem however, the fifteenth-century Italian poet, who was at least very accustomed to counting syllables, may have understood something about the little Slavic dance-song which Professor Pantić did not observe. Rogeri’s *division* of the lines from one another is impossible as he recorded them; Pantić no doubt correctly divided all of the first four differently. Yet Rogeri heard a syllabic meter in the Slavic poem, and wrote it accordingly even though he had to divide the lines strangely in order to compensate for the absence of words which he

had missed. For bad as they are linguistically, metrically Rogeri de Pacienza's lines are quite regular: no line varies by more than one syllable of length more or less than the length of the line before or after it, thus:

(1)	13
(2)	13
(3)	14
(4)	13
(5)	12
(6)	13
(7)	12
(8)	12
(9)	12
(10)	13
(11)	13

Professor Pantić's reconstruction is radically different in this respect:

(1)	14
(2)	12
(3)	15
(4)	12
(5)	16
(6)	10
(7)	18
(8)	15
(9)	15
(10)	17

For Professor Pantić, the explanation for this great metrical irregularity (and for much else that is peculiar about the poem as well) is to say that it is a *bugarštica*, i.e., a kind of South Slavic oral traditional epic of which several dozen manuscript and printed examples have survived associated with various dates between the mid-sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries. It is, however, a form of epic which no one has reported from any live singer since more than two hundred years ago, by which time it had apparently died out. Until the recent productive attention (entirely within the last decade) to the Slavic debris in Rogeri de Pacienza's unique autograph copy of "Lo Balzino" (which is preserved in the municipal library in Perugia), there was no known association of the *bugarštica*-tradition with any Serbian singer, and the tradition itself was known to have existed only on the eastern littoral of the Adriatic Sea.

But is the little dance-song from 1497 really an epic *bugarštica*? Two aspects of it speak decisively against any such notion: the one is metrical, as already observed (more concerning it hereafter), and the other is the fact that never in five hundred years, with hundreds of collectors collecting millions of lines from the tradition—never has there ever been a single report of oral

epos being sung by a group of men, women, and children whilst leaping about “like goats” (*come caprii*) in a strenuous dance such as that in Gioia del Colle. The very idea is ludicrous on its face, for it supposes what is self-evidently a physical impossibility. Short dance-songs of a few lines’ length have of course been reported in teeming abundance everywhere in the Slavic Balkans, not only where epic has been found but also where it has not, and there is a long-established name for this different *genre*, which, unlike epos, has indeed been universally known and sung by people of both sexes and of every age group that is able to dance. Such a song is called a *poskočica* in Serbian (meaning literally a “jumping” or “leaping” song, from the root *skok-/skak-*) and by other equivalent names in the other Balkan Slavic languages. But nothing in the entire spectrum of human social kinetics is farther removed from the jumping, leaping, and sure breathlessness of the South Slavic ring-dance in all its forms than the long-winded, quietly seated, leisurely singing and listening of the oral epic tradition. On that ground alone, Rogeri de Pacienza’s scrap of Slavic poetry is not, and never could have been, an epic. But even if it were metrically indistinguishable from epic, to call it epic merely for that reason would require us also to call Anacreon an epic poet just as Homer was because both composed in dactylic hexameters. This we clearly cannot do.

Having recognized that much, we are still left however with the *formal* issue that Professor Pantić has usefully posed: for if indeed it is not epic (which it certainly is not), is the little piece from Gioia del Colle nevertheless truly indistinguishable *in its form* from the epic prosody of the long-extinct *bugarštica*-type? This question brings us around once more to the metrical peculiarity already noted in Professor Pantić’s reconstruction, and to certain other equally striking anomalies thereto related.

For the past hundred years, the academic tradition has been to say of the *bugarštica*-meter that it displays certain tendencies toward regularity of syllable-count without, however, being entirely confined to those tendencies. In general, the earlier the date of such texts, the more frequent is the irregularity, and the later the date, the stricter the regularity.

The regularity consists in a hierarchy of features with a descending order of significance. The first and most consistently observed feature is division of the “line” into hemistichs by a word-boundary falling approximately mid-way in the line, a

juncture which may consequently be called a medial caesura, provided it be understood that the term does not necessarily imply any audible pause in delivery of the line as for inhalation, about which nothing is known with certainty. The first hemistich, the one before the medial caesura, when it is regular, is further divisible at a word boundary within it into two syllabically measured cola, either 4 + 3 or 4 + 4.

The second hemistich similarly, when it is regular, consists of either 4 + 4 or 5 + 3 \approx 3 + 5. Thus, *two different placements of word-boundaries were widely practiced in each hemistich*, of which one was dominant and the other a recessive or secondary alternative in each half-line:

Dominant schema: 4 + 3 // 4 + 4

Recessive schema: 4 + 4 // 5 + 3 \approx 3 + 5

So, for example,

(4 + 3) Ma se bješe / žalostan // s grešnom dušom /
razd'jelio (4 + 4)
So the miserable wretch gave up his sinful ghost

shows the dominant schemas in both hemistichs, while

(4 + 3) Bez glave je / ostavi // usred zelene / planine (5 + 3)
And having beheaded her he left her there in that green
mountain wilderness

shows the dominant schema in the first hemistich, and the recessive one in the second hemistich. Essentially the same construction also produced the line

(4 + 3) Kad je došla / maladjahna // prid starca / despota
Djurdja (3 + 5)
But when, charming young creature that she was, she came
before the old man, Despot George

The recessive schema in the first hemistich and the dominant one in the second hemistich abolish the usual asymmetry of the line, and yield lines in which the first and second hemistichs are completely interchangeable:

(4 + 4) Otidoše / govoriti // vrli Turci / Mostarani (4 + 4)
The fearsome Turks from Mostar then began to speak

Finally, there is the infrequent but still often enough attested construction with the recessive schemas in both hemistichs:

(4 + 4) Jutro rano / podranile // budimske / mlade djevojke (3 + 5)
The young maids of Buda rose early on the morn

Besides the foregoing metrical components of the *bugarštica*-form, there were also cadential refrains which at least

some of the *bugarštica*-singers added to their lines from time to time *ad libidinem*. These refrains did not conform metrically to any of the habitual schemas of either cola or hemistichs, but were *sui generis*. They varied in length from four to six syllables, and tended to occur (when they occurred at all) as a kind of pause after some *even number* of lines: sometimes two, occasionally four, less commonly six or eight, and in a few instances at the end of “runs” as long as twelve lines. Examples are, closing a quatrain:

(4 + 3) A sad mu je / od rana // i bolesti / potamnijelo, (4 + 4)
 A punice moja (6)
 But now it is grown ashen by reason of his sickness and
 his wounds, O mother-in-law of mine

And closing a couplet:

(4 + 3) Vino da mi / popiješ // pehar da ti / na dar bude (4 + 4)
 Moj Šajnoviću (6)
 So the wine and keep the cup as apophoreton,
 My good man Shainovich

And closing a sextain:

(4 + 3) A on mi se / junakom // tihim mukom / ujimaše (4 + 4)
 Radosave ((4)
 Though full of silent sorrow, he betook himself away in
 manly wise, did Radosav

It should be noted too that the number of syllables in the refrain had no dependency on the number of lines in the stanza which it closed. Of the three metrical varieties (four, five, or six syllables), the six-syllable refrain was much the most frequent.

Now in an oral epic tradition it is inevitable—since human beings make it and not automata—that singers sometimes compose “bad” lines. In fact, the more fluently and rapidly a singer composes, the more certain it is that he will eventually produce faulty lines; and the more he sings, the more they accumulate in his texts. The process of dictation, which is slower than singing, reduces the total number of bad lines, but by no means eliminates them. In singing, a bard often simply “aborts” a bad line, leaving it unfinished. If he is aware of having spoken confusedly (for, having his mind concentrated upon what comes next in his story, he perhaps will not even notice), he may elect to make the line over again “correctly” (i.e., in the habitual way), or else—it is truly unpredictable—he may simply leave it in its partly formed and imperfect state and pass on to the next thought. But on the other hand he sometimes also forms unusual lines completely, quite as though there were nothing exceptional about them, and never so

much as notices their unconventional features. Common instances of this kind include both hypometricisms and hypermetricisms, when a singer unwittingly “omits” something (which, if confronted with the fact, he may firmly believe and insist he has actually said) and so produces a “short” line; or else he adds something, often by conflating similar or related formulas into an unconventionally expanded line, which will typically contain all the expected metrical units and some surplus of others in addition. These, when they have been fossilized by writing, become the mysterious “long” lines that may puzzle metricians but never even enter the singer’s consciousness as somehow different from all his other lines. For traditional epic singing is a biological process, not capable of recursive inspection by those whose process it is, and like every other biological process it is not perfectly efficient and never completely conforms to rules. In fact it *has* no rules, but only tendencies, and these mere tendencies are all that we can properly invoke in speaking about the “meter” of an oral epic tradition.

Consequently *there is no more certain indication of intervention in a text by a literary editor, regardless of whether the text was dictated or actually recorded as sung, than the complete absence in it of prosodic “irregularities,”* for there never was an oral traditional text of any length and substance that was not endowed with a certain share of such irregularities at birth. This is no less true of the *bugarštice* than of any other form of oral epos.

Once a singer in the *bugarštica*-tradition was fluent in making first and second hemistichs of both the dominant and recessive kinds, it was effortlessly easy for him by negligible inversions of word-order to anticipate in a first hemistich, for example, some part of what otherwise would be second-hemistichic phrasing, and to substitute in the place of an anticipated phrase that part of the first hemistich which the anticipated words would supplant. Thus, instead of

(4 + 3) *I sa mnome / ni plinca // nije veće / rasdilio¹ (4 + 4)
Nor shared booty with me anymore

which would conform perfectly to the dominant traditional metrical schemes in both half-lines, the line which we *actually* have in the sixteenth-century text is

(4 + 4) I sa mnome / nije veće // ni plinca / rasdilio (3 + 4)
Nor anymore with me shared booty

Such lines show us incidentally that syllable-count stood much higher in the hierarchy of conventional metrical tendencies than did the placement of accents (which was chiefly trochaic in this tradition, just as in the tradition of the shorter, ten-syllable lines).

If, in analyzing such a verse as this, one is guided by literary notions of metrics, it will seem highly irregular, for clearly constructions of 4 + 4 // 3 + 4 are random deviations from the metrical norms of the *bugarštice*; yet at the same time such lines are neither so utterly rare nor so artless as to be attributable either to scribal error or to poetic incompetence in their makers. Many an analyst of the *bugarštice* has been driven by such appearances of metrical and other prosodic lawlessness to invent cabbalistically mysterious (and completely imaginary) invisible supra-segmental accentual forces as explanation for such lines, or else to abandon all faith in any governing prosodic forces whatever and to declare that the *bugarštice* were simply an early kind of free verse. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is indeed extremely difficult—perhaps even impossible—by exercises in isolated cudgeling of one’s own brain to conceive of how such poetic mutations can happen. One must pass many attentive hours listening closely to how the oral epic bard actually makes his lines (before any editor gets at them) in order to recognize, for example, the powerful metrically refractive force of such habits as word-order inversion, which is very common in all forms of the South Slavic oral epos.

Another easy and (from the traditional point of view) perfectly “lawful” process whereby the *bugarštice*-singers made “abnormal” lines was by first composing a first hemistich and a second hemistich of the usual kinds to form a line of a common type, but then, rather than making a new first hemistich at the head of the next whole line, enchaining instead an additional series of two or more further second hemistichs, with the single initial first hemistich of the ordinary kind thus made to stand as a sort of *incipit* to a whole couplet or more of multiple lines, of which all but the first line would appear to be “irregular” in meter. Thus we find in the manuscripts such unusual “first hemistichs” (which would however be, and are in fact, perfectly ordinary *second* hemistichs) as the following:

(5 + 3) više košulje / nosaše // vezenu l'jepu / mahramu (5 + 3)
Over the shirtdress wore a lovely 'broidered shawl

or again

(5 + 3) I još mu ide / djevojka // ove r'ječi / govoriti (4 + 4)
 These were the words the maiden said to him again

It is quite likely moreover that the basic *recessive* type of first hemistich (4 + 4) actually arose in the first place in just this manner; and quite naturally 4 + 4 is much more frequent than 5 + 3 (= 3 + 5) as an alternative to 4 + 3 in first hemistichs for the same reason that 4 + 4 is more frequent than 5 + 3 (= 3 + 5) also in the second hemistich itself.

Consequently, we are surely right to recognize a fundamental functional difference between the dominant schema (4 + 3) and the recessive schema (4 + 4) in first hemistichs: the shorter, seven-syllable schema, with its habitual heroic feminine caesura distinguishing it from *all* other types of hemistich, had the basic character of an *incipit*, while 4 + 4 and 5 + 3 or 3 + 5 were fundamentally mechanisms for the adding of more phrases to a poetic period that was already in progress.

Academic confusion about the meter of the *bugarštice*-tradition has persisted for more than a century because the basic metrical unit of that tradition has heretofore always been supposed to be the entire *bugarštica*-line as written in the manuscripts. But as we have now seen, such confusion dissolves the moment one recognizes the *half*-line, rather than the whole line, as the basic rhythmic determinant in the *bugarštica*, for all half-lines are formed by one permutation or another of only three simple, basic metrical components, two of which were obligatory and one optional. Those three components were, namely: 1) an incipital meter - - - - / - - - //; 2) an octosyllabic continuative meter composed of two either symmetrical or asymmetrical cola; and 3) an optional explicit meter, either a hexasyllable or a pentasyllable, divided into two or three either symmetrical or asymmetrical cola.

It is further understood that all three of these metrical systems were fundamentally syllabic in character, i.e., they were based upon the fundamental vocalism of the language and not upon any system of accentual features at either the segmental or supra-segmental level. That certain accentual regularities also occur in the *bugarštice* is not disputed; it is only that they have no significance for metrical analysis, since they are only the incidental consequences and not the causes of the syllabic

regularity.

To recapitulate this entire matter succinctly therefore: the *bugarštice*-singer systematically used

-To begin, seven syllables in two strictly defined cola;

-To continue, eight syllables with any one of three arrangements of cola;

[-To conclude, either five or six syllables with caesura(s) according to one of the following patterns:

- / - - - (-)
 - - / - - -
 - - - / - - -
 (-) - - - / - -
 - / - - - / - -
 - - / - - / - -]

Now it is true that the *bugarštica* as a form of epos disappeared from the oral tradition two hundred years ago at least, as it would seem from such evidence of it as survives in written records. Yet the thing that has disappeared from tradition is only the mirage of the long line, which was however, metrically speaking, never really a “long line” at all, but only a couplet of lines, each of which was formed according to one of the rhythmic schemes outlined above. For it so happens that all of the metrical forms involved in the composition of the *bugarštice* have survived robustly in the *oral lyric tradition* of the Slavic Balkans right down to our own time; only the habit of conflating the three meters into long lines has faded from tradition.

Each of the incipital and continuative meters that were “combined” to make *bugarštice* set the rhythm to which whole songs of single meter were sung widely in the Serbo-Croatian-speaking territory during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The same seven-syllable arrangement found as the *incipits* of *bugarštica*-lines (- - - - / - - -) gave the measure to such songs as these:

Pasla moma / jelenke,
 na vodu ih / navraća.
 Jelenci joj / predjoše,
 al' ne može / ta moma.
 Osvrte se / jelenak,
 Uze momu / na roge,
 pak je hit / na brege.
 Gde je moma / padnula,

to je rasla / brekinja.
 K njoj dohode / čobani:
 potsjekoše / brekinju,
 od nje prave / svirale,
 u svirale / govore:
 “Predi, momo, / darove!” (Vu 244)²

A lass was pasturing a drove of stags
 And led them to a stream.
 All the stags passed lightly o'er,
 But the lass alas could not.
 One of the stags therefore turned back
 And, catching the girl upon its horns,
 Pitched her across to the farther bank.
 There where the girl did fall to earth,
 Just there a beam-tree grew.
 Certain shepherds drawing nigh
 Cut the beam-tree down
 And out of it carved flutes.
 But when they blew upon the flutes, this is what they said:
 “Weave for us, sweet maiden, weave us
 wedding-gifts!”

Stole mi se / oženi,
 Uze žena / rabotna
 Leb ne znaje / da mesi,
 A leb znaje / da jede.
 i t. d.

(Va 318)³

Joiner's got himself a wife,
 He's married an industrious woman:
 She doesn't know how to make bread,
 But she knows how to eat it.
 etc.

Heptasyllables of the same description alternated (i.e., formed couplets) with octosyllables (4 + 4) in innumerable songs such as the following:

1. “Šta je uzrok, / moj dragane,
 Što me mladu / ne voliš?”

What's the reason, oh my love,
why you don't like me, young thing that I am.

4. Ja sirota / majke nejmam,
Tajnu ljubav / otkrivam.
Being a motherless orphan, foolishly
I've betrayed the secret of my love.
5. Čela sam ti / venac plesti
Od rumeni' / ružica,
I had meant to weave for thee a diadem
of deep red roses,
6. A sada ću / ti ga oples'
Od grkoga / pelina.
Now instead I'll weave it for thee
out of bitter wormwood.
7. U kafezu / bumbul pjeva,
Ja ga mlada / ne slušam,
A humble-bee is whirring in the lattices,
but I don't listen to it, young thing that I am,
8. Jer zbog toga, / moj dragane,
Što me mladu / ne voliš.
i t. d. (PL 50)⁴
And that, my love, is just because
you don't even like me, young thing that I am
etc.

Boga moli / mlado djaće,
Mlado djaće / Pećanče,
“Daj mi, bože, / labud-krila,
Labud-krila / da letim,
Da odletim / u Srbiju,
n.b.-> Da ja vidim / Srbijanke,
Srbijanke / devojke,
Što imaju / belo lice,
Prizrencima / groznice,
Što imaju / bele ruke,
Djakovcima / za muke,
Što imaju / alt'n čelo,
Pećancima / videlo.” (Va 4)

A young deacon prayed to God,
 A young deacon of Peć:
 “Give me, God, the wings of a swan,
 The wings of a swan that I might fly,
 That I might fly to Serbia
 To see the Serbian girls,
 The nubile girls of Serbia,
 Whose faces of light complexion
 Make the lads of Prizren tremble and blush
 as though they were seized of a fever;
 Whose light-skinned arms
 Are a torment to the men of Djakovica,
 Whose brows of radiant gold
 Illuminate the men of Peć.

Whole songs in octosyllables (4 + 4) were very common too:

Visoko se / soko vije,
 još su viša / gradu vrata:
 Andja im je / kapidžija:
 suncem glavu / povezala,
 mesecom se / opasala,
 a zvezdama / nakitila. (Vu 468)

High overhead a falcon glides,
 But the city gates rise even higher.
 Angie is the guardsman at the gate.
 For a scarf she's tied the sun about her head,
 And girded the moon about her waist,
 Put on the stars for jewelry.

“Sad moj dragi / kulu gradi,
 Oko kule / lozu sadi.
 Hoće mene / da prevari.
 Neka gradi, / neka sadi,
 Neće mene / prevariti.
 Sedam sam hi / prevarila,
 Sve begova / Tanovića,
 I jasmoga / Fazlagića. (PL 2)

My lover is building himself a house
 And planting vines about it,
 Hoping thus to catch me.
 Let him build and let him plant,
 He'll never take me in.
 For I have cozened seven beys ere this,
 All the Tanovići,
 And an eighth one too, named Fazlagić.

Octosyllables with asymmetrical cola ($5 + 3 \approx 3 + 5$ [$3 + 2 + 3$])
 were quite as common as the symmetrically divided type; thus, $5 + 3$:

Veseo Pavle / na divan,
 -> a neveseo / s divana.⁵
 Išeta pred njeg' / Jelena
 Jelena, sestra / rodjena,
 da bratu konja / privati;
 bratac joj Pavle / govori:
 -> "Tamo, potamo, / Jelena,
 Jelena, sestro / rodjena!"
 Jelena bratu / govori:
 "Tako ti boga, / mlad Pavle,
 mlad Pavle, brate / rodjeni!
 -> o čem gospoda / divane?"
 -> "O čem gospoda / divane,
 -> Već o tebika, / Jelena,
 . . .
 -> izdalek' joj se / ukloni,
 -> izbliza joj se / pokloni,
 i t. d.

(Vu 746)

Paul went to the conclave in high spirits,
 But returned from it dejected.
 Helen came forth to meet him there,
 Helen, his very own sister,
 To catch his horse's bridle.
 Paul, her brother, said to her:
 "Helen, stand aside,
 Helen, my very own sister."
 Helen said to her brother, said she:

“I conjure thee by God, young Paul,
 Young Paul, my very own brother:
 What did the lords discuss?”
 “What the lords discussed
 Was nothing, Helen, else than you.”
 He bowed to her at a distance,
 And again when he drew nigh.
 etc.

And 3 + 2 + 3:

Kol'ka je / noćca / noćasnja,
 svu noć ja / zaspat / ne mogo
 slušajuć / kolo / i pesme.
 U kolu / moja / dragana,
 sve moje / pesme / ispeva.
 Digo se, / odo / u kolo,
 ali se / kolo / raspusti.
 Sve drago / s dragim / zaspalo,
 a moja / draga / nasamo,
 metnula / kamen / pod glavu.
 i t. d.

(Vu 315)

All the long night through
 I could not fall asleep
 For listening to the songs and dance.
 The one I love was in the dance
 And singing all my songs,
 And so at last I rose and gat me to the dance,
 But no sooner had I come than it dispersed.
 Sweethearts everywhere about were falling asleep
 together;
 Mine alone amongst them all slept by herself
 With only a stone beneath her head to serve her
 for a pillow.
 etc.

Again, in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century collections of oral traditional melic poetry, octosyllables (but not heptasyllables) are sometimes followed by five- or six-syllable refrains as in the *bugarštice*. Sometimes pentasyllabic refrains followed each octosyllable of a song, producing asymmetrical couplets, each consisting

And then til dawn what happened more I myself know
not!"
etc.

But elsewhere, the same pentasyllables follow only some of the octosyllables, and were actually repeated as true refrains:

Sinoć moma / dovedena,
malo večera,
malo večera:
četir' patke, / tri goluba,
dvije tice / jarebice,
jednu ticu / prepelicu,
ticu gospodsku,
ticu gospodsku. (Vu 708)

Last night they brought the new bride home,
And little did she sup,
And little did she sup:

Four ducks, three doves,
Two partridges,
And one small quail,
A regal little bird,
A regal little bird.

Hexasyllabic refrains relate in precisely the same way to the same kind of octosyllables:

Imam muža / velikoga,
jadna ja, sirota!
i t. d. (Va 131)

My husband, he is huge,
Oh woe is me, poor orphan
that I am!
etc.

Vino pije / Dojčin Petar,
Varadinski ban,
i t. d. (Va 89)

Peter Weanling drank his wine,
 Prince of Varadin
 etc.

Finally, we must note also the repeatedly documented presence in the octosyllabic melic tradition during the last two centuries of specifically dance-songs about the same Janko who appears in the fragment from Gioia del Colle. *These are uniformly short songs, epic neither in meter nor in substance*; songs of a shortness both in the meter itself and in the number of lines that is well suited to accompany the ring-dance, as the collector of the following text explicitly said was its actual function (“U Risnu pjevaju momci igrajući u kolu”):

Šator penje	Ugrin Janko	
ukraj Save,	vode ladne,	
na vilino	igralište,	
na junačko	razbojište	
i na vučje	vijalište.	5
Dok eto ti	b'jela vila,	
Ugrin-Janku	govorila:	
“Hod' otele,	Ugrin-Janko,	
Ne penji mi	šator tudar!	
Ako zapeh	str'jele moje,	10
ustr'jeliću	tebe, Janko.”	
Janko vili	odgovara:	
“Ne bojim se	tebe, vilo,	
dok su mene	dva sestrića:	
ban Sekule	s Mijailom.”	15
U to doba	ban Sekule,	
b'jelu vilu	ufatio,	
pak je vodi	ujku svome,	
ujku svome	Ugrin-Janku.	
Bogom kumi	b'jela vila,	20
bogom kumi	ban-Sekula:	
“Bogom brate,	ban-Sekule,	
ne vodi me	ujku tvome,	
ujku tvome	Ugrin-Janku!	
Do tri ću ti	bilja kazat:	25
prvo ću ti	bilje kazat—	
da ti ljuba	rodi sina;	
drugo ću ti	bilje kazat—	

da ti sablja	s'eče Turke;	
treće ću ti	bilje kazat—	30
da si stiman	u družinu.”	
Sekul vili	odgovara:	
“Luda li si,	b'jela vilo!	
Bila zdrava	glava moja,	
rodiće mi	ljuba sina.	35
Bila krepka	miška moja,	
sjeći će mi	sablja Turke.	
Bio sobom	junak dobar,	
biću stiman	u družinu.”	40
On odvede	b'jelu vilu,	
darova je	ujku svome.	

(Vu 266)

*

Yanko Ugrin pitched his tent
 Beside the Sava's cooling stream,
 Upon the *vilas'* dancing floor,
 Upon the warriors' dueling ground,
 Upon the howling place of wolves.
 No sooner done than down there came a *vila*
 all in white,
 Who spoke to Yanko Ugrin thus:
 “Yanko Ugrin, get thee gone!
 Pitch no tent upon my ground, for fear you
 anger me,
 Lest I be moved to nock my shafts
 And shoot thee dead, O Yanko!”
 Yanko answered the *vila* thus:
 “I have no fear of thee, *vila*,
 Whilst my two nephews stand by me,
 Prince Sekula and Michaël.”
 Forthwith then Prince Sekula
 Captured the *vila* all in white,
 And led her to his uncle,
 His uncle Yanko Ugrin.
 The leuconymph called God to witness
 And Prince Sekula too:
 “I conjure thee by God, Prince Sekula, as if
 thou wert my brother,

Give me not to be thine uncle's perquisite,
 Thine uncle Yanko Ugrin's thing!
 Oh do but spare me this, and I'll show thee
 the virtues of three herbs.
 The first herb that I'll show thee
 Will make thy wife bear thee a son.
 The second herb that I'll show thee
 Will make thy sword cut down all Turks.
 The third herb that I'll show thee
 Will make thee loved of all thy company."
 But Sekula answered the nymph again:
 "Silly creature, leuconymph!
 And I be well, I do not doubt
 My wife shall bear a son.
 Let but my biceps keep their wonted
 hardness,
 My sword will cut down Turks.
 And if I be, as is my wont, a goodly
 warrior,
 My company will honor me."
 And so he took the leuconymph
 And gave her to his uncle.

Having assembled the foregoing information, we are now able knowledgeably to evaluate the fragment from Gioia del Colle, together with Professor Pantić's reconstruction of it.

I proceed from my earlier observation that what were written in the manuscript collections of *bugarštice*⁶ as whole lines were in reality couplets, and that the single lines of the couplets, or hemistichs of the lines as they appear in the manuscripts, represent the actual metrical bases of this poetry. For the sake of graphic clarity, I therefore systematically divide the couplets, while recognizing that undoubtedly there was no voice-pause between the two lines of each couplet in the oral *bugarštica*-tradition, just as there was no such pause either in the more recently collected oral traditional poetry when it was sung in couplets.

Pantić reconstructs the first line from Gioia del Colle as:

(4 + 3) Orao se / vijaše
 An eagle circled

This is good oral traditional diction, and metrical, and I agree with

it, while making two observations. First, Pantić has had to restore almost half the vocalism of the line: three vowels out of seven, which Rogeri de Pacienza did not write. Secondly, the particular vowels which Rogeri omitted occur in precisely the weakest parts of the line from the accentual point of view. Although accent was not a metrical generator in this tradition, it did obviously play a great part in determining what a foreigner would and would not clearly hear and record of this strange language in its even stranger sung traditional poetic form. We shall accordingly be obliged to restore more than Pantić has conservatively wanted to add to Rogeri's text, but shall find when we have properly done so that in every respect—meter, diction, and meaning—the fragment from Gioia del Colle is both much more intelligible and more familiar in kind than too conservative a reconstruction makes it seem.

Pantić's second (half-) line reads

(3 + 4) *nad gradom Smederevom*
over Smederevo city

This greatly improves Rogeri's writing, while incidentally restoring an accentually weak antepenultimate syllable. But the line is still not as sung either in meter or in diction. The first colon is short by one syllable, which we must no doubt also expect to have lost from an accentually weak position. What that syllable must be is shown by many lines of the true *bugarštice* from later manuscripts, as for example

Prvi glas mu dopade // od kralja od / ugarskoga
A on Djurdju despote // na Janka na / vojevodu
Pak mi podji, moj sinu, // u cara u / čestitoga
The first news he had of it was from the king of
Hungary
And so he came to Despot George for Yanko
Voivode's sake
Go thou, my son, to the honorable emperor

The tendency to reduplicate the preposition, and thereby to form an octosyllable, was so strong indeed as sometimes even to force an elision that need not have occurred otherwise, as for example

Kad je doš'o hrabre Marko // u slavnome u / carigradu
When that valiant Marko came to famous Tsarigrad

Consequently I restore the missing preposition and read the line

(4 + 4) *nad gradom nad Smederovom.*
above the city, above Smederevo

Pantić's reading of the next line,
Nitkore *ne* ćaše
no one desired

is unmetrical because too short; *incipits* were habitually of seven, not six syllables. The tense ending of the verb is obviously *-aše*, but the Italian orthography is ambiguous as to the form of the verbal root which we should understand before the ending. With the given tense-ending, the root might linguistically be either *hte-* or *hot-*. Following the Italian orthography, I assume it to be the former, as Pantić has, with the usual closing of the open root-vowel before the intervocalic *jod* (*e > i*), but *without* the contraction of Pantić's reading, thus: *ćijaše*. I would also accept *hoćaše*, although less willingly in view of the Italian orthography. So I read the line as a metrically regular *incipit*

(4 + 3) Nitkore *ne* / ćijaše
no one desired

and I observe that the Italian text supports this metrical reading quite as well as it does Pantić's meterless one.

The next line of the reconstruction,

s njime govorit[h]i
to speak with him

is again metrical and too short. But lines ending with the verb *govoriti* are very frequent in the true *bugarštice*, and are always octosyllables (4 + 4). They show us not only *where* Rogeri omitted a word (it was, as usual, in the accentually weakest part of the line, namely the last two syllables of the first colon), but also precisely *what* the omitted word is:

Tad podjose vrli Turci // sv'jetlu caru / govoriti
Hod' otele, hurjatine, // nemoj vele / govoriti
Tere ide ovako // bracu svomu / govoriti
Pak mi podje divojka // jedno jutro / govoriti
Podje majka starica // sinu Marku / govoriti
Neću za to Lazaru // ni r'ječi / progovoriti (3 + 5)
I još mi je, djevojci, // ove r'ječi govorio
A njemu je, Milošu, // ove r'ječi / govorio
Podje ti mu žalostan // ove r'ječi / govoriti

Then came the fearsome Turks to speak with
the illustrious emperor
Blackguard! Be gone, and say no more
To her brother in this wise she made to speak
Thus upon the morningtide the maid began to speak
His aged mother began to speak to her own son, Marko
Not a word shall I say of this to Lazarus
And these were the words he spake to me, pure maid
But these were the words he said to him, to Milosh
These were the words that thou, forlorn, wert about
to say

I accordingly reconstruct the line as

(4 + 4) s njime r'ječi / govoriti

To pass words with him

I follow Pantić in his reconstruction of the next line,

(4 + 3) nego Janko / vojvoda

Save only Yanko, leader of troops

except that I am not sure but what it may be a continuative rather than an incipital line and use the form of the word found in the *bugarštica* proper,

A on Djurdju despote na Janka na vojevodu

He, Despot George, for Yanko, leader of troops

thus:

(4 + 4) nego Janko / vojevoda

Save only Yanko, leader of troops

Pantić's next line is a good reconstruction, clearly supported both by Rogeri's text and by the traditional diction:

(4 + 4) govoraše iz tamnice

spoke from jail

The hypothesis

Molim ti se, orle

I pray thee, eagle

however, accepts Rogeri's text in defiance of the traditional diction. This line is too short by two syllables, and it is clear where they belong, although the *bugarštice* themselves give us little help in determining what the particular word might have been. The most frequent epithet with *orao* (eagle) in the *bugarštice* is *sivi* (grey), and consequently I would prefer it thus:

(4 + 4) Molim ti se, / sivi orle
I pray thee, grey eagle

Other formulations would however be equally well within the traditional diction, including perhaps

(4 + 3) Molim ti se, / moj orle
I pray thee, eagle of mine

All that can be said with certainty is that, for whatever reason, the Italian text has omitted the epithet for *orao* and consequently falsified the meter, which is in fact perfectly regular.

Again in the next line, both Rogeri and Professor Pantić have omitted a two-syllable word, once again belonging to the accentually weakest colon of the line. What exactly the word was cannot of course be known with perfect certainty, but the context drastically narrows the possibilities to some such familiar formulation as

(4 + 4) sidi meni / ma[o]lo niže
descend toward me a little lower

Pantić's reading of the next couplet is straightforward transliteration from the Italian orthography, with two small exceptions. For Rogeri's *bigom*, Pantić reads *bogom*, which is probably correct if what we have at this point in the Italian text is indeed just one couplet and not merely what Rogeri was able to make out and record of something that was originally longer. For no such lines as

Da s tobome progovoru.
Bogom to brata jimaju
that I may talk with thee
I have thee for my brother

are to be found anywhere in any of the other early texts. They are metrically possible, but extremely improbable in regard to diction. Although he passes over the difficulty in silence, Pantić himself has appreciated the problem, as he shows in evading any effort to punctuate the second line. For *zimaiu* he transliterates and corrects to read *jimaju*, "have," which is presumably an initially *jodated* dialectalism for *imaju*. I would, however, rather prefer to follow the Italian orthography exactly here, on the grounds that it better reflects the familiar oral traditional poetic diction, and so to read the word as *zimaju*, which would again be a dialectalism, but from the verb (*v*)*zeti*, "take." Thus, "I *take* thee for my (sworn) brother" rather than "I *have* thee for my

(sworn) brother.” But as first-person singular present verbs, both *jimaju* and *zimaju* are unlikely formations that are only just sufficiently possible to prevent one’s throwing them out of court altogether. The greater likelihood is that a whole line or more is absent from the text at this point, and that we have only some nonsensically conflated syllabic fragments left of whatever it was that was actually sung. We depend at this point entirely on prior knowledge of later tradition for guidance. According to the traditional story-line, the prisoner must summon a messenger to carry word of his imprisonment to those whom it affects, and to set in motion the social process that will eventually liberate him. The first step in the process is for the prisoner to swear blood-brotherhood with the messenger, but that is habitually an *invitational act*, and not a mere baldfaced declaration such as *seems* to be meant according to the very straightforward, conservative reading of the text which Pantić has preferred. In the more usual invitational manner however, the line ought to read something like

bi l’ me ti / bratom / ’zimao (3 + 2 + 3)
wouldst take me for thy brother

or something of the same general sort. But if one is nevertheless to follow what Rogeri de Pacienza wrote just as it stands, then I would prefer to be at least thoroughgoing in that tendency, and to read:

(4 + 4 da s tobome / progovoru:
Bogom te brata / ’zimaju (5 + 3)
That I may have a word with thee:
I take thee for a brother.

regarding *zimaju* as an elision of *uzimaju* after the vowel-terminating *brata*.

All doubt vanishes, however, from this point onward in Rogeri’s text: its final six lines are absolutely too corrupt to be taken at anything like face value. Because it is unswervingly faithful to the Italian record, Pantić’s reconstruction of the sixth line produces a monstrosity in his seventh line, which is both a metrical impossibility and hopelessly disfigured by an enjambement with line six of a kind unknown to the oral tradition (whether of the *bugarštice* or otherwise). Similarly unheard-of enjambements also disqualify both the ninth and tenth lines of the Pantić reconstruction, and the hypotactic dependency of the second

hemistich upon the first hemistich in his hypothetical eighth line is equally alien to the syntactic customs of the tradition. In his own comments on his reconstruction, Pantić called the apparent rhythm of the poem as he construed it “awkwardly heavy” (*trom*), without however offering any surmise as to how thirty Slavic émigrés in Gioia del Colle could possibly have *danced* to such a rhythm. The answer, of course, is that they danced to a song that was both rhythmically and phrasally something very unlike Rogeri de Pacienza’s text, and unlike any reconstruction of that text that does not reckon with its omissions.

The crucial difficulty with the line (i.e., couplet) six, which Pantić read as

podji do smederevske gospode da s’ mole
Get thee to the lords of Smederevo, let them beseech

is the one which Pantić has tacitly recognized as such by his boldest emendation, namely his introduction into the text of the word *gospoda* (nobles): the problem is that we cannot tell from the fifteenth-century Italian’s *incomplete text* exactly *to whom* Janko Vojvoda sent the eagle. Being a deservedly eminent scholar of renaissance and baroque literature, Professor Pantić has, to the great benefit of us all, spent the best part of his long professional life thinking about courtly nobility, who were of course the proprietors and patrons of that same literature in which he is so splendidly knowledgeable; and not unnaturally for him therefore, he invokes just such a courtly nobility as the agents that are to intervene on behalf of Janko with the despotic ruler of Smederevo city. Now there are literally hundreds of texts that have been collected from all ages and all regions of the South Slavic oral tradition that treat the release of a captive from his imprisonment, but the nobility as a group (*gospoda*) are not generically the agents of that release. The oral epic tradition did not conform to renaissance prejudices in this respect. A single male or female intimate either of the captor or of the captive is commonly the agent of intercession for the captive, or else a jailer or guard who keeps the prison where the captive is held. It happens that one of the true *bugarštice* in the later manuscripts does actually narrate a captivity of Janko Vojvoda, and there it is indeed the guards whom Janko induces to intercede for him with the despot. In all likelihood the agent of the intercession in the piece from Gioia del Colle was someone else—multiformity in the oral narrative

tradition being what it is—but we shall never know for certain one way or the other. What we must do, however, is reconstruct in keeping with the traditional diction and meter, and the extant *bugarštice* provide the models. Professor Pantić especially dislikes the surviving *bugarštica* about Janko's captivity on aesthetic grounds—he dislikes precisely what is epic about it, dislikes the oral epos in general—and much prefers the aesthetic qualities of the oral melic poetry (again, scarcely unnatural in a renaissance scholar; one remembers vividly how Petrarch proudly owned the Laurentian manuscript of the *Iliad*, but never read it). We shall therefore surely disappoint him in his desire to redeem the disgustingly bloody and hard-minded epic tradition by posing such little lyrics as the piece from Gioia del Colle as sweeter antecedents to the morally and artistically corrupt epos; but that cannot be helped. For the inescapable truth is that such little dance songs, of which Pantić has not discovered the only specimen, uniformly draw their imagery and their allusions from the full-blown epos, which pre-exists and explains them, and not vice-versa.

So we recognize that, as in the epic poems (and because such melic poetry as Rogeri de Pacienza's fragment derives its diction from the epos), the imperative verb *podji* at the head of couplet six needs a vocative noun to complete the phrase in keeping with the traditional diction; and then, as in that same diction once again, we immediately specify in the selfsame incipital line of the couplet to whom the messenger is to go, thus:

(4 + 3) podji, orle, / do straže //
Get thee, eagle, to the guard

Then in the same couplet's second, continuative line, we take the poor broken sherd which Rogeri has given us, *smedersche*, and using it for all it is worth in conjunction with the extant *bugarštica* about Janko's captivity, we reconstruct about it the best semblance we can of what *smederesche* obviously belonged to, namely the definition of *where* the eagle was to find its addressee:

(4 + 4) // na miru od / Smedere[sche]va
on Smederevo's wall

The form *smederesche* in Rogeri's manuscript we explain meanwhile as a hyper-correction which he must have made after the fact by observing that form (as nearly as he understood it) where it did actually occur twice later in the poem in the only repeated whole-line formula of the entire piece, *iz tamnice smederevske* (out

of Smederevo prison).

In this way we are able to continue our reconstruction without any untraditional enjambements whatever, either in the next line or in any that follows, and our reconstruction is, not surprisingly, incidentally also entirely regular in respect of meter.

Each of the next three lines (hemistichs in Pantić's treatment) are also defective as Rogeri wrote them, each omitting at least one entire word, at which we can only guess, guided by the extant poetry in the later manuscripts. Consequently, I read:

(4 + 4)	da se mole / <u>gospodaru</u> , //	
	slav[o]nomu <u>Djurđju</u> / despo[s]tu,	(5 + 3)
(4 + 3)	<u>brzo</u> da me / [s]o <u>prosti</u> ? //	
	is tam <u>nice</u> / smedere <u>ske</u>	(4 + 4)
	Let them beseech milord	
	The famous Despot George	
	That he quickly set me free	
	From Smederevo jail	

I agree with Pantić that a new period commences with the second word in the eighth line of the original text, *Jakomi*. I see in the initial consonant of this “word” the first of three coordinating conjunctions *i* (elided with the following vowel of *ako*), each conjunction marking the onset of a full (half-) line, thus: *i . . . , // i . . . , // i . . . , //*. The function of the three phrases that were thus coordinated was to enumerate the several conditions that would have to be satisfied before Janko's promise, which is introduced in the penultimate line of Rogeri's text by *Jatechui*, can be fulfilled. In other words, *the entire remainder of the poem consists of a three-part protasis followed by a correspondingly three-part apodosis to balance it*. The protasis must have three parts because the social mechanism for Janko's communication with the despot of Smederevo is tripartite: 1) the eagle must first do as Janko asks and carry Janko's message to the (human) intermediary, who in turn will 2) actually implore the despot of Smederevo to release Janko, and then 3) the famous despot must do what he will be asked to do and actually set Janko free. So what we have here is in fact a miniature chain-tale with six “links.” The last three links are, in the apodosis, 4) Janko's promise to the eagle (which must be an “eagle” only in the same sense as was the γύψ in Homer) of 5) nourishing drink and 6) abundant solid meat. We know that there are three elements in

the protasis not only because the story-line clearly established in the first part of the poem requires all three, but also because only the presence of all three maintains the established metrical form of the poem and its traditional diction (free of enjambements). No trace of the second element in the tripartite protasis has survived in Rogeri de Pacienza's text, a lacuna which is not however surprising, since we have already seen how in couplet after couplet he failed to record (and probably therefore to hear) especially the words in the accentually weak third and fourth octades of the continuative lines, but sometimes also all but part of the last, most heavily accented word in those lines (as in the line already discussed) above:

na miru od / Smedereva
on Smederevo's wall

So it is again in the present instance, where Rogeri omitted an *entire* continuative line, perhaps indeed because of its very parallelism both in lexicon and in syntactic construction with the line before it. To an alien ear it must have sounded like a mere repetition or prolongation of the line before it, which in a sense it veritably was, thus:

(3 + 2 + 3)	Jako mi / Bogom / pomoš'te, //	
	jako mi se / mole straže,	(4 + 4)
(4 + 4)	I slavni me / despot pusti //	
	is tamnice / smederevske	(4 + 4)
	If, in God's name, you help me,	
	And the guardsmen petition on my behalf,	
	And the famous Despot sets me free	
	From Smederevo jail,	

(or the last line, if one prefers, as Pantić has read it, 5 + 3, with inversion of the word-order that has already been seen above in the previous occurrence of this whole-line formula,

is smederevske / tamnice
from Smederevo jail)

So we reach the end of Rogeri's text, which I read substantively just as Pantić has, with only minor differences in the phonetic interpretation of Rogeri's orthography, and of course with the proper metrical arrangement:

(4 + 4)	ja ću to / napitati //	
	crvene krvce / tureške,	(5 + 3)
(4 + 4)	belog tela / viteškoga.	

I shall feed thee
 Crimson Turkish blood,
 White flesh of mounted warriors.

The gory *envoi* to the vulture at the end of this short dance-song must of course be taken in the spirit of the times, which was one of virtually perpetual hostilities with the Turkish infidel. That spirit was no doubt a considerable unifying influence as between the Slavic settlers who sang the song and their Italian patrons and hosts; it must have constituted one significant reason at least why the Slavic émigrés would have been accepted in Italy. The attitude expressed toward the Turks in this poem may even go some way toward explaining how they came to settle in so relatively inland a location as the district about Gioia del Colle; for, almost a century later when Montaigne travelled through a region of northern Italy contiguous with the Tyrrhenian Sea, he would still have to record in his *Journal*: “Le 22 [juillet, 1581], au point du jour, trois corsaires turcs abordèrent au rivage voisin, et emmenèrent prisonniers quinze ou vingt pêcheurs et pauvres bergers.” It was a dangerous age for living near the sea.

Consequently, short though it is, we may reasonably accept Rogeri’s text as a true report, however imperfect, of all that he heard; for the song as he reports it is surely all the Slavic performers sang, at least of *that* song. It is a reasonable inference too that the Slavs chose their song with a certain regard for the occasion, and in keeping with the community of shared attitudes which sanctioned their presence among the Italian populace of the place. Their song amounted in all to only twenty-three verses—not too much to bore Lady del Balzo—arranged in eleven couplets, with a single cadent verse to close, all done in a manner of singing-while-dancing which could have as readily occurred almost anywhere in the Serbo-Croatian-speaking Balkans at any time within more than four centuries *after* 1497 as it did in that year itself:

Orao se vijatše
 nad gradom nad Smederevom.
 Nitkore ne ćijaše
 s njime r’ječi govoriti,
 Nego Janko vojvoda
 govoraše iz tamnice:
 “Molim ti se, sivi orle,
 sidi meni malo niže

da s tobome progovoru.
 Bogom te brata 'zimaju.
 Podji, orle, do straže
 na miru od Smedereva,
 Da se mole gospodaru,
 slavnomu Djurdju despotu,
 Brzo da me oprosti
 iz tamnice smederevske.
 Jako mi Bogom pomož'te,
 jako mi se mole straže,
 I slavni me despot pusti
 iz tamnice smederevske,
 Ja ću te napitati
 crvene krvce tureške,
 belog tela viteškoga.

An eagle circled
 over Smederevo city.
 No one desired
 to pass words with him
 Save only Yanko, leader of troops, 5
 who spoke from (where he lay in)
 prison:
 "I pray thee, grey eagle,
 descend toward me a little lower,
 So that I may talk to thee:
 I take thee (as my sworn) brother. 10
 Get thee, eagle, to the guard
 upon the wall of Smederevo,
 let them beseech their lord,
 the famous despot Djuradj,
 That he quickly grant me release 15
 from Smederevo prison.
 If, in God's name, you help me,
 and the guard petition on my behalf,
 And the famous despot sets me free
 from Smederevo prison, 20
 I shall feed thee
 crimson Turkish blood,
 White flesh of mounted warriors."

**

As I have already shown, this is a lyric song from the melic oral tradition of the South Slavs, and not an epic, although it relates to the epic in the same manner as much else in the melic tradition did also. This fact may be a disappointment for Professor Pantić, who had hoped that he had found the earliest recorded oral traditional epic of the South Slavs, a true *bugarštica*. It seems to me that he has nevertheless discovered something even more valuable in Rogeri de Pacienza's little text: a true forerunner of the *bugarštica-form* and a precious revelator of that form's actual prosodic origins. For this service, the field of comparative epic studies as well as scholarship on the South Slavic cultural tradition must remain permanently grateful to him.

Spread upon the written records of the South Slavic oral epic tradition are many thousands of texts, most of them numbering not tens but rather hundreds and thousands of lines each. The four greatest collections of the tradition all happen to have been made upon the Serbo-Croatian-speaking territory. The first in date was formed by the Serb Vuk Karadžić; the second by the Croat Luka Marjanović; the third by the Serb Andrija Luburić, and the fourth by the American Milman Parry. No text in any of these four huge collections of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries poses fewer problems for understanding than did Rogeri de Pacienza's twenty-three lines of lyric from 1497; and no collection has done as much to advance such understanding as that of Milman Parry, upon which even the present paper is in part dependent. But the scope and influence of these four greatest of collections is another subject for another time.

Cleveland State University

Notes

¹The line is starred to indicate that it is hypothetical.

²Vu 244 signifies that the quotation is drawn from text no. 244 in Karadžić 1953. This same method of notation is used also to show the derivation of the other texts which I have quoted from the same volume later in this paper.

³Va 318 signifies that the quotation is drawn from text no. 318 in Vasiljević 1950. The same method of notation is used also to show the derivation of the other texts which I have quoted from the same volume later in this paper.

⁴PL 50 signifies that the quotation is drawn from text no. 50 in Bartók and Lord 1951. The same method of notation is used also to show the

derivation of the other texts which I have quoted from the same volume later in this paper.

⁵The arrows indicate lines incapable of division other than 5/3.

⁶Throughout this paper, the references to and quotations of *bugarštice* all pertain to the texts as found in Bogišić 1878.

⁷I prefer to read the verb *oprosti* here rather than *pusti*, even though *pusti* does occur later, both because the modern epic diction uses it and because it is the expression found for the equivalent moment in verse 49 of Bogišić no. 11.

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