



# ORAL TRADITION

## Festschrift for John Miles Foley

**This article belongs to a special issue of *Oral Tradition* published in honor of John Miles Foley's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday and 2011 retirement. The surprise Festschrift, guest-edited by Lori and Scott Garner entirely without his knowledge, celebrates John's tremendous impact on studies in oral tradition through a series of essays contributed by his students from the University of Missouri-Columbia (1979-present) and from NEH Summer Seminars that he has directed (1987-1996).**

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## **Matija Murko, Wilhelm Radloff, and Oral Epic Studies**

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### **Introduction**

In modern histories of folklore scholarship, when the topic concerns pioneers of oral epic fieldwork prior to Milman Parry and Albert Lord, no scholars are mentioned more often than Wilhelm Radloff and Matija Murko.<sup>1</sup> Though the two worked in different language families and belonged to different scholarly generations (Radloff was nearly a quarter-century older than Murko), the reasons for their influence are well known: Radloff was one of the first to collect oral epics from Turkic-speaking peoples in Russia and Siberia, doing so throughout the 1860s and 1870s, while Murko, in his time as a professor in Vienna, Graz, Leipzig, and Prague, conducted extensive fieldwork in Yugoslav lands among epic and lyric singers as early as 1909 and as late as 1932.<sup>2</sup> Today both are regarded as two of the earliest observers of oral epic to have provided substantial firsthand documentary accounts of performances they witnessed in the traditions within which they worked, and both are frequently cited in debates surrounding the role played by oral epic in the twentieth-century form of the “Homeric Question.” What has never before been recognized or discussed, however, is the fact that the two were also personal acquaintances who spent time together in St. Petersburg, Russia, during the years 1887-89. In what follows I report and translate the Slovenian-language source, written by Murko himself, that mentions the friendship in a single passage (M. Murko 1951b:70-71), and I then discuss their scholarly acquaintance in a more elaborated historical context of institutions, methodological traditions, and technologies influential (but mutating) at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Prof. E. Wayles Browne for his advice in the translation of the Slovenian passages and for comments on the article as a whole; my presentation has substantially benefited from his expertise. Tanja Perić-Polonijo and the Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku in Zagreb, Croatia, also deserve thanks for their assistance with research and fieldwork during the academic year 1999-2000. Above all I would like to acknowledge John Miles Foley for his inspiring example as both scholar and teacher, as well as for his groundbreaking contributions to the study of oral tradition. In the spirit of his work as philologist, comparativist, and historian of an emergent discipline, I offer this article to a volume celebrating his research.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff was born to the family of a military officer in Berlin on January 17, 1837. He died in Russia in 1918, where he was employed as Director of the Ethnographic and Anthropological Museum, in St. Petersburg. Matija Murko was born to a family of farmers in northeastern Slovenia in 1861 and died one of the most celebrated Slavicists and comparativists of his generation, in Prague, on February 11, 1952 (Slodnjak and de Bray 1952:245).

Although Radloff did produce editions of the songs he transcribed, and though Murko did publish a small number of song transcriptions (very few in comparison to Radloff<sup>3</sup>), neither was involved in the establishment of a national epic corpus on behalf of his own ethnopolitical group—a crucial point that separates both from earlier collector-scholars such as Vuk Karadžić and Elias Lönnrot. In comparison to this earlier period of epic collection, then, both Radloff and Murko can be located at a later but still significant historical moment when the establishment of new institutions, university chairs, scholarly congresses, and academic journals had become an additional impetus for the collection and analysis of folklore. When considered from this perspective, the scholarly contributions (not to mention, friendship) of Radloff and Murko can be shown to belong to a period when European institutions were undergoing various forms of transformation and modernization, a process that took place according to different disciplinary temporalities and tempos, to be sure, but which eventually gave way to an institutional landscape, and an ensemble of methodological concerns, that more closely resemble those of the post-World War II period.<sup>4</sup> What is especially striking about Murko's autobiographical remembrance is the fact that every single person mentioned in it by name was intimately involved in one way or another, though in different cultural domains, with this particular period of methodological, institutional, and technological change. I return to this point, with expanded comments, in the second half of the paper and in the conclusion.

### Radloff and Murko in the Field

Though research on folk epic constituted only a portion of both Radloff and Murko's scholarly corpora, their reputations with folklorists today derive to a significant degree from the emphasis placed by both on rigorously collected fieldwork, an emphasis one does not typically find in the work of their contemporaries.<sup>5</sup> Outside of each's own discipline, their reports made a significant impact on Milman Parry, as has been discussed and documented on several occasions.<sup>6</sup> John Miles Foley (1990:72-130), for example, included translations of seminal writings by Radloff (1990) and Murko (1990) in a group of articles devoted to early scholarship

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<sup>3</sup> Unlike Radloff, who prepared many volumes of epic, lyric, and folk narrative, Murko's published transcriptions were few. One group of them can be found in the second volume of *Tragom* (1951a:879-901).

<sup>4</sup> I would like here to acknowledge the works by Regina Bendix addressing "disciplinary history" (1998; 1999; 2002), which are very much in the background of my discussion of Radloff in what follows, as well as Konrad Köstlin's work (1997) on the history of folklore in relation to the fragmentation and changes to the lifeworld effected by modernity.

<sup>5</sup> Foley writes (1988:14): "Of the ethnographers who reported on living oral traditions, the most dependable in Parry's own opinion were Radloff on the Kirghiz and Gerhard Gesemann and Matija Murko on South Slavic."

<sup>6</sup> Parry mentions both scholars in the same footnote on more than one occasion and cites Murko frequently. As is well known, Parry and Murko met in Paris in 1928 at the time of Murko's lectures and Parry's *soutenance*. Parry also writes in the foreword to his unfinished and only partially published work, *Ćor Huso*, that "it was the writings of Professor Murko more than those of any other which in the following years led me to the study of oral poetry in itself and to the heroic poems of the South Slavs" (1987:439). For more on Murko and Parry, see also Foley 1988:19-56, Buturović 1992:162-262, and Dukić 1995:55-57.

on oral epics. Lauri Honko (1998:177-79), in his monumental textual ethnography *Textualising the Siri Epic*, paid tribute to Radloff's rigor by giving an incisive evaluation of Radloff's transcription methods. In a more recent book on Altay oral epic, Lauri Harvilahti (2003) concluded his chapter on Altaic oral epic performance by citing passages from Radloff, one of which included Radloff's observation that "the experienced singer is able to sing for a day, a week, a month, just as he is able to speak and talk all this time" (39).

Radloff's description, Harvilahti suggests, with its emphasis on the linguistic competence by which a singer (re)composes in the epic register rather than reciting fixed, fossilized texts, agrees with much of the best work on oral epic available at the end of the twentieth century. Drawing on Albert Lord's insights, for example, Foley has long argued that something similar is true for the South Slavic epic singers whom he has studied in the field and in the Parry archive (or the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, hereafter the MPCOL), namely, that fluency in South Slavic epic singing is the result of linguistic and artistic competence within a performance register made possible by traditional prosodological rules and networks of traditional and musical referentiality, rather than the outcome of mechanical memorization or superficial techniques of improvisation (1996, 2000, and 2005). Harvilahti closes his chapter, furthermore, by showing that Radloff's account of the acquisition, training, and mastery of Turkic epic singing agrees in many general parameters with Boris Vladimircov's description of Mongolian epic singing,<sup>7</sup> with Albert Lord's account of South Slavic epic singers, and with the Altaic epic singers whom Harvilahti discusses in the same book. That we are in a position today to find so many similarities regarding the training, composition, and performance of Turkic, South Slavic, Mongolian, and Altaic oral epic singers—that is to say, the similarities in their actual *techniques* of performance, interpreted without romantic hypotheses or mystification—is a testament not only to Radloff's industry and achievements but to subsequent researchers who pushed Radloff's pioneering work on documentation and compositional process in newer, fresher, and less idealistic directions.

Matija Murko was one such researcher who became an integral, albeit slightly later, force in these developments, thanks in large part to a methodology that privileged fieldwork and attention to performance variation over fantasies of folk primitivism or romantic models of folksong production (à la the earlier period of post-Ossian and Herderian enthusiasms). Like Radloff, Murko contributed significantly to the study of folk epic in Europe and influenced every generation of Slavic scholars who came after him, including ethnologists. He was the first, for example, to investigate multiple openings<sup>8</sup> of the same song from the same singer, in fieldwork conducted from 1909 to 1913 in order to test for fixity and variation in song openings or

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<sup>7</sup> Though Harvilahti does not give the citation, Vladimircov's description of the Mongolian epic singing language, including discussion of its dialectal admixtures and occasions of use, is a valuable account that deserves to be more widely known (1983-84:5-58). Harvilahti's comment is as follows: "The core of Vladimircov's description of Oyrat singers and the one given by V. Radloff of the Kirghiz singers basically resembles A. B. Lord's account of the Southern Slav epic 'oral formulaic' learning process" (2003:40).

<sup>8</sup> The opening verses of many Serbo-Croatian epics are often flexible, malleable, and even detachable, used primarily to prepare the audience for the upcoming tale. See M. Murko 1912, 1913, 1915a, 1915b; Foley 1991:68-75; Böttcher Sherman and Davis 1990; and Pantzer 1959.

“foresongs” (*pripjevi* in Serbo-Croatian), the results of which he documented in four fieldwork reports published in German in Vienna in 1912, 1913, and 1915.<sup>9</sup>

We can be sure that the contents of these articles were known to Parry, too, since all four were mentioned on the seventh page of a text that Parry knew well and quoted from often: Murko’s Sorbonne lectures, which were published in 1929 (M. Murko 1929, 1990). By my count, beginning in 1932, Parry refers to Murko’s lectures at least eight times in print (1987:330-31, 334-36, 347, 361, 439-40, 458), so it is unthinkable that Parry did not know Murko’s attempts, struggles, and solutions in field recording as recounted explicitly within them. Murko’s same four reports were also discussed at length in another of Murko’s articles, “Neues über südslavische Volksepik,” published in 1919, which Parry also cited (1987:336). In other words, what we have here is evidence that Matija Murko’s experiences and methodologies when recording singers directly informed Parry’s later recording,<sup>10</sup> which itself pushed forward in innovative directions and found ways to solve technological problems—the result of which became the clear, permanent, and auditory documentation of vast amounts of Balkan Slavic epic singing available today in the MPCOL archive.

In all of his early fieldwork-based articles, Murko explains in detail why he did not manage to record complete oral epics. For one thing, the technology to do so did not yet exist. As a result, he tells us, he decided to focus specifically on aspects that he could, in fact, observe and document with his recording apparatus: (1) the manner of epic recitation, (2) the syllabic structure of the verse form, (3) the sung rhythm and its relation to word accent, and (4) the dialectal admixtures constituting the epic language (1913:2). Parry, however, as is now well known, asked a company from Connecticut, after his first field trip to Yugoslavia in 1933, to modify two record players so that he could record continuously from one phonograph to the other without pause, by using a mechanical toggle switch (Mitchell and Nagy 2000:x). Parry was thus able to collect and record without interruption, for the first time in the history of musicology or folklore research, entire oral epics. Murko’s last field expedition to Yugoslavia ended the year before Parry began his. Though Murko never entirely managed to perfect a two-device technique,<sup>11</sup> he did find limited success recording singers using two devices in relay and succeeded in making more than four hundred separate recordings on cylinders and records.<sup>12</sup>

Murko also went to great lengths to combat the mystification and romanticization of oral and folk epic, a necessary task in his day (as in ours), since oral epic had already become by his

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<sup>9</sup> See M. Murko 1912, 1913, 1915a, 1915b.

<sup>10</sup> In Livno, Croatia, in 2000, I had the opportunity to interview a gentleman who had been present when Parry and Lord recorded in his village of Livno in 1934. After gathering further information from local scholars, I communicated the findings in Tate 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Murko did try to use two machines to continuously record during his 1930-32 fieldwork but often lacked electricity or other necessities. He discusses the matter in the *Tragom* volume (1951a:23-27), as does his son Vladimir, who accompanied his father for six months during the 1930-32 field expeditions, in a retrospective article addressing his father’s *Nachlass* (V. Murko 1963).

<sup>12</sup> See M. Murko 1951a:23-27; V. Murko 1963:112-19; Bošković-Stulli 1966.

time a fashionable topic of debate throughout Europe and in Homeric philology as well<sup>13</sup>—a debate rarely based, in the case of Homeric scholars, on fieldwork, much less on fieldwork conducted by the same Homeric scholar referring to that fieldwork. (Parry seems to have been one of the first Homerists to take the steps necessary to experience oral epic singing for himself.) Murko had already treated the influence of German Romanticism on Czech literary thought in his 1897 study, *Deutsche Einflüsse auf die Anfänge der slavischen Romantik: I. Die böhmische Romantik*, written on Goethe's interest in Serbo-Croatian literature (1899), and published a learned review of Milan Čurčin's book, *Die serbokroatische Volkspoesie in der deutschen Literatur* (1906); he was therefore thoroughly apprised of the pitfalls stemming from a romantic conception of folklore and was not afraid to criticize them. In 1908, at the *Internationaler Kongress für historische Wissenschaften* in Berlin, and still a year before he would depart for fieldwork, Murko devoted his Berlin conference presentation to a discussion of the folk epics of that tradition—the first ever congress report or scholarly article in Europe, in any language, to discuss the Bosnian Muslim epic tradition. During the talk, Murko described how reading Croatian scholar Luka Marjanović's preface to the third volume of the seminal anthology *Hrvatske narodne pjesme* (*Croatian Folk Songs*) had helped him to jettison residual romantic hypotheses from his own thinking about folk epic (M. Murko 1909; cf. Dukić 1995:52). Murko's lecture at the *Kongress* was so well received that he decided to organize and plan his first-ever field expedition to Bosnia and Croatia for the next summer, in 1909 (1919:276-78).

As these considerations demonstrate and subsequent scholarship has emphasized, the defining feature of Matija Murko's work on oral epic—whether addressing ethnological, lexicological, linguistic, literary-historical, or performative aspects of South Slavic expressive culture (Dukić 1995; Žele 2003)—was fidelity to the phenomenon of living transmission and performance, whether in the field, on recordings, in printed texts, or in accounts given by previous scholars. This is one of the many reasons why his writings remain essential to the study of Balkan epic today. Unfortunately, the majority of Murko's publications, including his classic two-volume study from 1951, *Tragom srpsko-hrvatske narodne epike* (*On the Track of the Serbo-Croatian Folk Epic*), have not been translated into English.

In light of Radloff and Murko's mutual and widespread influence, then, it may come as a surprise to learn that no mention has ever been made of the fact that the two scholars were not only personally acquainted but spent time together in St. Petersburg in 1887-89 during Murko's postdoctoral years in Russia.<sup>14</sup> Murko draws a vivid account of one of their meetings in his memoir, a book first published in 1949 in Czech (as *Paměti*), translated into Slovenian in 1951

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<sup>13</sup> Foley covers all of this ground in *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (1988:1-18). On Homeric philology and the Homeric Question, Luigi Ferreri's recent study (2007) documents the era from the late Renaissance to F. A. Wolf. Simonsuuri's study of the debates occurring during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (1979) is also important.

<sup>14</sup> According to Denana Buturović, this was the period when Murko developed his interest in folk poetry and ethnography. Murko studied under the eminent Russian folklorist A. N. Veselovski while in Moscow and, according to Buturović, also read the works of Hilferding and Radloff while there (Buturović 1992:106). It is worth noting that Buturović, whose bibliographical knowledge is encyclopedic, fails to mention the acquaintance of Murko and Radloff.

(by his son Vladimir, as *Spomini*), but never published or translated again.<sup>15</sup> While Murko's memoirs deserve to be read by anyone with an interest in the intellectual history of Central Europe during the first half of the twentieth century—Murko's plight during the Nazi occupation of Prague and relations with Gerhard Gesemann<sup>16</sup> are of considerable interest, to say the least—the passage from his memoirs relevant for our discussion is the one in which Murko depicts spending time in the late 1880s at a salon in St. Petersburg kept by none other than the daughter of Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff.

### **Radloff and Murko in the Salon, St. Petersburg, Russia**

At the time of Murko and Radloff's acquaintance in the late 1880s, Radloff was an accomplished scholar who had lived, traveled, and researched widely among Turkic tribes in Central Asia and Siberia. He had recently become a member of the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences, having been inducted in 1884, and had also published widely on a number of issues in Turkic philology and linguistics, including a recent two-volume account of his travels and research, *Aus Siberien: lose Blätter aus dem Tagebuch eines reisenden Linguisten* (*Out of Siberia: Loose Pages from the Journal of a Traveling Linguist*), in 1884; his six-volume collection of folk epics and other Turkic folklore, *Proben der Volksliteratur der türkischen Stämme*, with its celebrated comparison of Turkic singers to Homeric rhapsodes, had appeared a year later in 1885. Murko's account is notable, as we will see, not only for its praise of Radloff's scholarly accomplishments but for a brief and suggestive portrait of Radloff's family life and linguistic habits—a discussion that leads, somewhat surprisingly, to a digression unrelated to Radloff in which Murko recalls a particularly humorous, and according to him insightful, linguistic lesson that he himself learned in the course of committing a minor gaffe in spoken Russian one evening at Radloff's daughter's salon. This lesson, it turns out, led Murko to conceive of an entirely new linguistic tool, the “differential dictionary,” which is still used by dialect researchers and other linguists today (see M. Murko 1951b:70-71).

In the fourth chapter of his 1949 memoir, *Spomini*, Murko recalls his student days in Russia. When describing the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, he gives a brief history of the institution from its founding in 1724 by Peter the Great down to the time of his stay there in the late 1880s. Murko mentions the presence of German scholars at the Academy whose crowning achievement in years prior had been the St. Petersburg Sanskrit-German dictionary (the famous *Petersburger Wörterbuch*), published from 1852 to 1875 under the direction of Otto von Böhtlingk and Rudolph von Roth. The passage, which I translate from the Slovenian text in its entirety but with my own intervening commentary added, begins as follows. Murko has just finished describing certain German scholars at the Academy who despite their residency in St. Petersburg had never managed to learn enough spoken Russian “to hail a taxi” (1951b:70). Murko then turns to a description of Radloff as evidence of the opposite,

<sup>15</sup> See Murko 1951b:70-71. I have based what follows (including my translation) on the Slovenian text.

<sup>16</sup> Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers has drawn attention to Gesemann's relationship to National Socialism. See first Měštan 2001, but also Ehlers 1998 and 2001 for further details.



namely, of a German scholar whose family had adapted comfortably to life abroad. Murko writes (71):

Najbolje sem opazoval naglo porusenje na otrocih znamenitega turkologa Friedricha Wilhelma Radloffa. Ta zaslužni učenjak in njegova žena sta bila po rodu iz Berlina; mnogo sta skupaj potovala k različnim turškotatarskim plemenom po vsej ruski državi kjer ženske še nikdar niso videle evropske damske obleke, tako da jim je morala gospa svetnikova Radloffova pokazati svoje. Po tej poti je zbiral Friedrich Wilhelm (Vasilij Vasiljevič) Radloff svoje narodopisno, jezikoslovno in besedno gradivo ter izdal "*Versuch eines Wörterbuchs der Türk-Dialekte*" (Petrograd 1888 to 1892).

I particularly noticed the rapid Russification in the case of the children of the famous Turkologist Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff. The accomplished scholar and his wife were both by birth from Berlin; the two of them together traveled widely among various Turko-Tatar tribes and throughout the whole Russian state, in places where women had never seen European ladies' dresses—with the result that Mrs. Radloff had to show them hers. On these sojourns, Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff (Vasilij Vasiljevič) collected ethnographic [*narodopisno*], linguistic [*jezikoslovno*], and lexical materials [*besedno gradivo*], and published his *Versuch eines Wörterbuchs der Türk-Dialekte* (Petrograd 1888 to 1892).

Here we see Murko, the young scholar studying abroad in St. Petersburg, demonstrating a familiarity with Radloff's work. And that is precisely what one would expect, given the fact that "linguistic" (*jezikoslovno*) and "lexical" (*besedno*) topics were Murko's focus at the time as well, and would remain so throughout his life. Particularly noteworthy, and again not surprising, is Murko's mention of Radloff's work on "ethnographic" (*narodopisno*) materials. It is this attention to ethnographic detail that later characterized Murko's own approach to the study of oral epic; Đenana Buturović, a Bosnian scholar of Muslim oral epic, has even gone so far as to call Murko the "founder of systematic fieldwork research on the traditional oral epic of the South Slavic peoples" ("utemeljivač je sistematskih terenskoistraživačkih proučavanja usmene tradicionalne epike jugoslavenskih naroda" [1992:105]), and she furthermore records that Murko's paper at the aforementioned international congress in Berlin in 1908 was the first in Europe to focus exclusively on the Muslim epics of Bosnia (1992:107). Decades later, of course, as the result of Parry and Lord's collecting expeditions and writings, the Bosnian Muslim epic tradition would become a crucial comparand for the study of international oral epic, both ancient and modern. What we find here, however, is a glimpse of the young postdoctoral student, Murko, in the late 1880s, recounting the achievements of the esteemed scholar of Turkic epics, Wilhelm Radloff, whose methods and insights would later become hallmarks of Murko's later scholarly work as well.

But let us return to the passage itself. As we saw, Murko has just made reference to the dictionary, *Versuch eines Wörterbuches der Türk-Dialekte*, which was one of many major works that Radloff published during these years. Radloff had begun collecting the material for the dictionary while working as a German and Latin instructor at a mining college in Barnaul (*Barnaul'skoe Vysšee Gornoe učilišče*) in 1859 and had waited 29 years until the publication of

the first fascicle. It would take until 1911 for the entire dictionary, in four volumes of six fascicles each, to be completed (Temir 1955:61). In the sentences immediately following those just quoted, Murko continues his portrayal of Radloff, though this time through the lens of Radloff's daughters (M. Murko 1951b:71):

Dasi so v njegovi družini govorili nemški, je bila zlasti mlajša hči povsem porusena tudi po svojem duhu, tako da se ni razlikovala od svojih ruskih tovarišic. Starejša hči se je omožila z nekim Škotom, in tako je imel akademik Radloff priložnost, študirati jezikovni razvoj svojega vnuka ali vnukinje v nemščini, angleščini in ruščini.

Although Radloff spoke German with his family at home, the younger daughter in particular was so completely Russified, even in her mentality, that she was indistinguishable from her Russian playmates. The older daughter married a Scottish man, and so Academician Radloff had the opportunity to study the linguistic development of his grandson or granddaughter in German, English, and Russian.

According to Ahmet Temir, author of the best survey of Radloff's life and work that we have, "the available sources do not tell us much about Radloff's private life" ("Über sein Privatleben, berichten die Quelle nicht viel." [1955:64]). Temir laments the lack, and adds that "about Radloff's family life, I have learned through a communication from Nicholas Poppe of the University of Washington that Mrs. Radloff moved back to Berlin after her husband's death and died there at an advanced age, while her only son Alexander later died in Paris from stomach cancer" ("Über sein Familienleben habe ich durch eine Mitteilung von Prof. Nikolaus Poppe Universität Washington erfahren, daß Frau Radloff nach dem Tode ihres Mannes nach Berlin übergesiedelt und dort in hohem Alter gestorben ist, während ihr einziger Sohn Alexander später in Paris an Magenkrebs starb" [64]). In light of this paucity of biographical information, Murko's portrait becomes still more significant for Radloff scholarship. As for how many times Radloff and Murko may have met, and the extent to which Radloff may have influenced Murko in matters of detail, we will likely never know. But implicit in the passage is more than a passing familiarity with Radloff, since we find not only the obligatory citation of Radloff's monumental scholarly works, with its explicit mention of ethnographic and ethnological focus, but also the suggestion of an intimacy, and a degree of familiarity, with the linguistic habits of the Radloff family.

What Murko recounts from the rest of the evening in the same passage bears less on the friendship with Radloff than on a particularly significant episode in Murko's own linguistic understanding, which seems to have been memorably awakened that evening (M. Murko 1951b:71):

Po nedolgem bivanju v Petrogradu me je ob prvem obisku Radloff uvedel v salon svoje hčere, kjer bodo bojda tudi ruske dame, da bom mogel pokazati svoj napredek v ruščini. Trudil sem se pošteno, toda hipoma sem opazil čudne poglede in smehljaje mladih dam. Takoj sem zaklical: "Prosim, kaj ni 'salonfähig?'" (kaj ni primerno za salon), nakar sem dobil pouk da je to bila moja

pohvala ruskega petroleja, o katerem sem se izrazil: “Vaš kerosin ne vonjajet”; ruska beseda vonj (češki *vůně*) namreč pomeni takšen smrad, o katerem se v družbi ne govori.

After a brief stay in St. Petersburg, during my first visit there, Radloff took me to his daughter’s salon, where, allegedly, Russian ladies were to be in attendance, in order that I might demonstrate my progress in Russian. Though I gave it my best effort, I immediately noticed strange looks and smiles among the young ladies. And so immediately I burst out with the question, “Excuse me, but what have I said that was not *salonfähig*?” (“suitable for the salon”),<sup>17</sup> after which I received the instruction that it had been my praise of Russian kerosene, about which I had said “Your kerosene does not stink,” that had provoked their reaction—the Russian word *vonj* (or *vůně* in Czech), means “such a stink,” about which one does not speak in social company.

In one continuous passage Murko has moved from a description of Radloff to the memory of a linguistic misunderstanding. Most interesting is the way in which Murko treats the memory of the embarrassing moment not as a passing reminiscence but as an opportunity to recall how his confusion led to a reflection on lexicographic approaches to the modern Slavic languages. As he explains, the episode constituted a kind of epiphany, one that led him to imagine a new lexical tool. Murko first recounts the dimensions of his linguistic error-epiphany, and the reasons for it, before going on to tell how, spurred by the experience, he arrived at the concept of the “differential dictionary.” First, the error (taking up Murko’s text exactly where the previous quote ended):

V vsakem slovanskem jeziku je mnogo takšnih nevarnih besed, tako n. pr. pomeni v ruščini pozor sramoto, nesramnost, a ponos (srbskohrvatski, n. pr. Bosna ponosna) pomeni v ruščini drisko, diarrhoea. Tudi svojo mlado rusko gospodinjo sem pred kuharico spravil v zadrego, da je zardela, ko sem se pritoževal, da ne morem “privyknut k vašemu ruskomu životu” (privaditi se vašega ruskega življenja). Tudi pri Rusih pomeni v cerkvenih knjigah in pesmih “život” isto, kar v drugih slovanskih jezikih, toda v današnji ruščini ima pomen “trebuh,” medtem ko je za češko “život” (naša “življenje”) običajna beseda “žiznj.”

In every Slavic language there are many such dangerous words; thus for example *pozor*, which is “attention” in Slovenian, means “shame” or “shamelessness” in Russian, while *ponos* means “pride” in Serbo-Croatian, but means “diarrhea” (*drisko*, *diarrhoea*) in Russian. I also embarrassed my young Russian landlady in front of her cook, with the result that she turned red when I complained, “I cannot get accustomed to your Russian belly (*život*).” (In Russian, *privyknut k vašemu ruskomu životu*, intending to say “your Russian life.”) Among Russians, *život* in church books and poems means the same as in other Slavic languages, namely, “life,” or “way of life.” But in contemporary Russian it only has the meaning “belly.” In Czech, *život*, and in Slovenian, *življenje*, is equivalent to the everyday Russian word *žiznj*.

<sup>17</sup> In the Slovenian text, Murko employs the German word *salonfähig* at this juncture, which suggests that he used German, the mother tongue of many of those in the conversation, in order to clarify the blunder that he had committed in Russian.

Murko continues (71-72):

Te napake, ki sem jo zagrešil, ko je bil Jagić še v Petrogradu, nisem skrival, tako da je prav zaslovela in so jo spravljali v zvezo z raznimi osebami; pripovedovalo se je n. pr., da sem to rekel grofici Uvarovi. Takšne skušnje so me navajale, da sem pozneje pogosto predlagal večje ali manjše diferenčne slovarje slovanskih jezikov, v katerih bi se posvečala posebna pozornost enakim besedam ali besedam z enakim korenem, toda različnega pomena.

I did not hide the mistake, which I had made when Jagić was still in St. Petersburg, with the result that my error became rather well known, so much so that people came to connect the story of my blunder with various other people; it was told, for example, that I had said it to Countess Uvarova. Such experiences led me, later, frequently to suggest bigger or smaller differential dictionaries of Slavic languages, in which special attention would be devoted to identical words or words with the same root but different meanings.

With these remarks Murko concludes his only mention of Radloff in the memoir. The recollection is mildly playful and self-effacing: not only did Murko confuse his Slavic vernaculars at Radloff's daughter's salon, he tells us, but he also embarrassed his Russian landlady and himself. After Murko had reported the incident to Vatroslav Jagić, the anecdote apparently spread through scholarly circles, eventually coming to be retold as if Murko had uttered the embarrassing phrase not to his housekeeper or landlord but to Countess Uvarova, a leading Russian archeologist at the time (on whom more below). Vatroslav Jagić, the eminent Slavic scholar and one of Murko's most important teachers (after Franz Miklosich, with whom Murko had just completed a dissertation in 1886 on Slavic enclitics), must have enjoyed the anecdote since there is the hint that it was Jagić himself who had repeated it to colleagues, which no doubt added to Murko's embarrassment—after all, it had been Jagić, one of the most preeminent Slavic linguists of the period, who had invited Murko, along with František Pastrnek, to Russia in September of 1887.<sup>18</sup> Today there are indeed "differential" dictionaries of the Slavic languages, that is, dictionaries listing words that share the same linguistic root but have divergent meanings across the languages of the Slavic family. Murko's experience at Radloff's daughter's salon would appear to belong to the earliest period in the development of this particular linguistic tool.

### **Institutional Contexts, Scholarly Networks, and Radloff's Fieldwork**

From today's perspective, the account of Murko and Radloff's acquaintance may appear to be little more than a neglected anecdote from the history of nineteenth-century scholarship.

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<sup>18</sup> See M. Murko 1951b:64. Jagić had taught in St. Petersburg since 1880 but returned to Vienna in 1886. He still made visits to St. Petersburg, which is why Murko mentioned that "Jagić was still in Petersburg" at the time of the episode. For his part, Pastrnek produced important bibliographical studies on the history of Slavic linguistics (1892, 1923). Jagić 1876 and 1948 represent that scholar's works that are important for the study of oral epic.

But in reality, Murko's report can help us to revisit certain methodological developments, personal associations, and historical transformations that influenced folklore studies in the last decades of the nineteenth century and beyond; at the very least, a brief reconstruction of the anecdote's context and historicity can add to what we already know about late nineteenth-century international research networks and their relation to oral epic studies. The simultaneous appearance in the same autobiographical passage of Otto von Böthlingk, Rudolph von Roth, Vatroslav Jagić, Countess Uvarova, and Wilhelm Radloff is already a clear indication of the international character of Murko's milieu, though an account of the histories and institutional affiliations of each of these scholars would require more space than we have here. For the sake of brevity, then, let me sketch briefly the career of Wilhelm Radloff in a way that shows how his fieldwork goals were irrevocably bound to the institutions that provided geographical and cultural access to those goals, and allow me to tell the story in a way that shows how Radloff's successes and achievements helped to expand the understanding of oral epic as well as the institutions in which it could be studied. First, however, we will need to begin with a brief detour through the influence of Radloff's teacher, the linguist Franz Bopp, in order to open the frame, historically, for grasping Radloff's context in relation to three trends: the development of comparative-historical linguistics, the interest in collecting folk poetry, and the history of oriental studies.

In 1816, at the age of twenty-five, Franz Bopp published the first fruits of his early years of intensive linguistic research, the famous *Über das Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen und germanischen Sprachen* (*On the Conjugation System of Sanskrit in Comparison with that of Greek, Latin, Persian and Germanic*). As is well known, this book effectively laid the groundwork for the comparative-historical linguistic study of the Indo-European languages (Zeil 1994:31-154; Bausinger 1968:9-37; Bendix 1997:27-118). What is not always acknowledged, however, is the fact that Bopp's comparative-historical method also influenced, both directly and indirectly, the collection and interpretation of oral poetry as well, since students and scholars taught or influenced by him needed archaic linguistic forms (for example, phonological, morphological, and lexical examples) in order to do the historical linguistic comparison and reconstruction that was at the heart of the method; and of course many of those forms were thought to be preserved in fossilized form in orally transmitted epic and lyric.

There is no clearer example of this impulse and procedure than the career of Wilhelm Radloff, whose intellectual development was indelibly altered by his studies with Franz Bopp. According to Ahmet Temir (who to date has written the closest thing to Radloff's biography that we have<sup>19</sup>), it was Bopp's success as a comparative linguist that motivated Radloff to reject comparative Indo-European philology in order to strike out on his own with Turkic language research, that is to say, in order to try his hand at work on linguistic documentation and reconstruction within lesser known language areas—in Radloff's case, the languages of Central Asia and Siberia (Temir 1955:52-55). While still a student, and before deciding upon the subject

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<sup>19</sup> Denis Sinor has also provided a brief discussion (1967); what follows is my own presentation of Radloff's biography based on Temir, Sinor, and the chronologies and information given in Radloff's own publications.

of his further graduate studies, Radloff attended the lectures of Bopp, as well as those of Pott and Steinthal (both also linguists: Pott an Indo-Europeanist, Steinthal a comparativist in the mold of von Humboldt), but also studied Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Manchu, Mongolian, Persian, and Russian. According to Temir, Radloff had hoped to do for the Turkic languages what Bopp had already accomplished for the comparative study of Indo-European languages, namely, to use linguistic reconstruction and synchronic comparison to establish branches, classifications and sub-classifications, grammars, phonologies, dictionaries, and the like. The concrete example provided by Bopp's successes in linguistic comparison were thus influential not only for leading Radloff to Turkic language research but to the domain where so many of the important specimens of that archaic language could be found: oral epics. It was also during these student days that Radloff read Otto von Böhtlingk's *Über die Sprache der Jakuten (On the Language of the Yakuts)*, which had appeared in 1851 (Temir 1955:54)—the same Böhtlingk whom Murko mentions as an editor of the St. Petersburg Sanskrit-German dictionary in the passage of the autobiography describing Radloff (1951b:69-70).

Radloff finished his undergraduate studies in Berlin in 1854. He went next to Jena for doctoral work, and completed a dissertation in 1858 on the role of religion in folk belief. He then departed for St. Petersburg, where the Faculty of Oriental Languages had been recently established (in 1854), so that he could pursue work on Turkic languages and lexicography. Without a doctorate from a Russian institution, Radloff was unable to lecture in Russia and so was forced to seek other means of support for his research on Turkic languages. Hence, in May of 1859, only one year after beginning his postdoctoral studies in St. Petersburg, he moved to Barnaul, Russia, to take a job as an instructor of German and Latin at a mining school, a position that enabled him to travel throughout Turkic-speaking regions collecting material (epic, lyric, and prose tales) from Turkic language communities, exactly as Murko describes in the passage above. From 1859 to 1871, Radloff spent every summer but one doing fieldwork, documenting languages, observing singers, collecting songs, and notating the linguistic practices of the Turkic-language communities he visited. These expeditions furnished the materials that would appear in the multi-volume collection of folk items known as *Proben der Volksliteratur der türkischen Stämme*, published in 1885, where hundreds of songs and tales became textualized and available to the public for the first time, and where the now-famous comparison of Turkic singers to Homeric rhapsodes also appeared within a preface to volume five (Böttcher Sherman and Davis 1990:73-90). In addition to these volumes, during the same period Radloff also published his enormous two-volume work documenting his travels from these years, *Aus Siberien: lose Blätter aus dem Tagebuch eines reisenden Linguisten*, which came out in 1884.

After a decade in Barnaul, Radloff accepted a promotion to Kazan as Inspector of Turkic Schools for the region. He held the position from 1872 to 1883, and during that time continued to travel, research, and write. Finally in 1884, the year in which *Aus Siberien* appeared and *Proben der Volksliteratur der türkischen Stämme* was being prepared for publication, Radloff's scholarly achievements earned him membership into the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences, a momentous opportunity that now guaranteed him the time and institutional support to work more freely. As a result, Radloff gave up his administrative position in Kazan and moved to St. Petersburg, where he was able to devote himself entirely to research and publication as a member of the Academy. It was precisely during this period, between 1887 and 1889, that Murko's

episode in the salon with Radloff took place. After ten more years of study and publication, Radloff became Director of the Imperial Academy's Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in 1894, a position he held until his death in the tumultuous year of 1918. During these later years, Radloff remained productive, publishing a remarkable number of works and making important trips to study Old Turkic inscriptions in the Orkhon Valley of Mongolia in 1891 and to Turfan in 1898.

What this brief survey of Radloff's career makes clear is that his institutional affiliations were chosen first to allow access to fieldwork—fieldwork that helped him produce several *magna opera* of scholarship—but that these same achievements in turn made possible his entrance into and acceptance within institutions to which he did not earlier have access. During all of these periods, but especially after he returned to St. Petersburg as a researcher with a number of monumental publications to his credit, Radloff joined the international community of scholars whom Murko so vividly describes in his autobiography. This community, and the institutions in which they worked, eventually became venues where significant amounts of late nineteenth-century analysis of folklore and oral epic took place.

The scholarly community was not composed exclusively of linguists and ethnologists, however, since there were other analytic desiderata that motivated humanistic research at the time, including the competitive urge felt by many Russian scholars to vie with Germany and France for supremacy in the study of the "Orient." Oriental studies and the institutions devoted to them began later in Russia than in England, France, and Germany. For this reason, when the argument for a Russian oriental program was finally made, and made explicitly in writing, the belatedness of the argument meant that it needed to appeal not only to scientific goals of knowledge acquisition but to two additional tasks: competing with European universities and improving Russia's knowledge of its own non-Slavic languages and peoples. It is in this connection that one of the people mentioned in Murko's anecdote, Countess Uvarova, leads us back to Radloff, as well as to the institutions in which Radloff worked. A brief note of historical explanation regarding Uvarova's personal history will provide the necessary context and clarification.

In 1810 the aristocrat and classical scholar Sergei Uvarov, who was the godchild of Catherine the Great and on collegial terms with German intellectuals, wrote what has been called "perhaps the most politically and culturally eloquent expression of Russia's urge to take the East under scrutiny" (Layton 1994:76-77; cf. Whittaker 1984:19-29). Uvarov's document, entitled "Projet d'une Académie Asiatique" and published in the *Herald of Europe* in 1811, effectively established Russia's arrival in the field of Asian language research (Ouvoroff 1845). In it Uvarov expressed his discomfort with the notion that the "renaissance of oriental studies" seemed to be passing Russia by, and so responded by forcefully arguing that Russia devote itself intellectually and financially to the study of the languages of the empire hitherto neglected (Layton 1994:76-77). The essay won praise from many quarters, including from Goethe, Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Maier, Langlès, and Napoleon (Whittaker 1984:23, with bibliography). Making the connection between British policy in India, the study of Sanskrit in Paris, and the new Russian plans for research, the great historian of oriental studies, Raymond Schwab, writes, regarding Uvarov's activities (1984:450):

Looking naturally to Asian languages, she [Russia] was at first particularly interested in those that served commercial or political interests. The fire of curiosity that the Calcutta Society [in India] sparked touched her at an early date: in 1810 and 1818 we see Uvarov, rector of the University of Saint Petersburg and later a government minister, planning an Asiatic Academy and inaugurating the instruction of oriental languages, with preferential attention to Sanskrit. It was the decade in which the first chair of Sanskrit was created for Chézy in Paris.<sup>20</sup>

For these and other efforts, Sergei Uvarov was inducted into the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1811, and made president of it in 1818; he would later serve as Minister of Education from 1833-49, as Schwab mentions. Uvarov's son, Aleksey, would co-found the Russian Archaeological Society and the State Historical Museum in Moscow in 1864, effectively becoming one of Russia's earliest archeologists. In 1858 Aleksey Uvarov married Praskovia Sergeevna Scherbatova, a young woman of noble birth. When Aleksey died in 1884, Praskovia Uvarova became the chairperson of the Moscow Archaeological Society in her husband's place, a post she served with aplomb, pioneering archeological work in the Caucasus and elsewhere for decades. Countess Uvarova was inducted into the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences in 1895, and thus was a colleague and contemporary of Radloff, as Murko described. She held other positions in Tartu and St. Petersburg as well, until the 1917 revolution, after which she spent her remaining years in Serbia, where she wrote her memoirs and died in 1924. Known as Countess Uvarova, she was the same person to whom the story of Murko's linguistic confusion of the terms "belly" and "life" eventually became attached. Thus in an indirect but still legible way, almost as if the founders of historical linguistics and orientalism were present in a ghostly palimpsest, we can observe through Murko's recollection that a number of intertwined and parallel scholarly streams—historical linguistics, oriental studies, intra-European scholarly rivalries, the tradition of folk poetry study dating back to Karadžić and before—flowed through the salons and academies of late nineteenth-century Russia—so vividly that Murko was able to recall the memories of this period more than fifty years later when writing his memoir in 1948.

### **Conclusion: Method, Technology, and History**

We began with an episode from a St. Petersburg salon during the years 1887-89 when Matija Murko and Wilhelm Radloff shared a conversation that included, among other things, a discussion of kerosene. The fact of their meeting, and of their having known each other in the first place, seems to have passed unnoticed in the intervening century. What the recovery of this autobiographical reminiscence has allowed us to recall, however, are changes that were taking place in the study of oral poetry at the close of the nineteenth century—changes inextricably linked, no less, to the emerging traditions of comparative linguistics and the novelty of studying eastern "oriental" languages and peoples, among other methodological developments connected more directly to fieldwork on oral epic. These methodological developments included: (1) an increasing emphasis, as seen in the work of Radloff, on firsthand observation, description, and

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<sup>20</sup> Schwab continues in his next paragraph by discussing Otto von Böthlingk and Rudolph von Roth.



documentation, which allowed for the first time an actual glimpse of the *techniques* of singing instead of mere mystifications of the content of singing and its poetic products; (2) the continued expansion of interest in oral epic and lyric traditions beyond Europe's boundaries, specifically throughout Russian,<sup>21</sup> Turkic-speaking, and Mongolian-speaking lands, among others; and (3) the emphasis on linguistic tools for studying the actual language of the poems, whether those tools be dictionaries, grammars, anthologies, historical reconstruction, phonology and morphology, or other tools, as witnessed in both Radloff and Murko's published corpora.

The last point that I should like to make in connection with these three developments and Murko's autobiographical anecdote, however, refers to the emergence of a historical seam or breach, visible to us today, that separates the work of Murko from Radloff with respect to collection methods. The source of this seam has a name: technology; better yet, it can be understood as the roles played by technology and the media used to record, encounter, and study oral epic. Wilhelm Radloff devoted an enormous amount of energy and effort, over many decades as we have seen, to collecting and transcribing the words of singers and storytellers in Turkic languages, though he had no choice but to work by hand.<sup>22</sup> Matija Murko continued this tradition, and belonged to it in an explicit fashion, as he makes clear in his autobiography, yet Murko was able to accomplish one particular task of which Radloff could have only dreamed during his fieldwork in the 1860s: recording the singers and songs themselves in analog audio form. Not only did Murko take the first important step of encoding the audible legacy of folk singing in semi-permanent form, but he used that technology to pry open the phenomenon of oral epic technique from a perspective previously unavailable to him. In conclusion, I will give one example of the innovative use of a recording apparatus in order to show how Murko's new methods revealed something about oral epic singing techniques that no scholar before Murko, to his knowledge, had known or described. I do so in the hope of demonstrating not only that Murko's and Radloff's careers belonged, to a certain degree, to a continuous tradition of concerns about oral epic transcription and documentation, but to show that they were also separated by the encroachment of an entirely new historical and technological regime, to which Murko would belong and function within—the increasing technologization of the lifeworld, which would include new and revolutionary possibilities for documenting and recording oral epic and lyric singing.

In order to bring into view an example of this kind of technological change, a change that had significant consequences for fieldwork methods, let us return to Matija Murko's field report from 1913. On the second page of the article, Murko explains how he came to discover, accidentally and to his great surprise, that an elastic variability (what we might today call a "multiformity") lurked at the very heart of the oral epic singing technique he was observing for the first time. (It is important to keep in mind that this was his first field report, written to

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<sup>21</sup> In the opening paragraphs of his 1908 conference presentation (published in 1909), Murko mentions the importance of Alfred Rambaud's 1876 study of Russian oral epic, which includes a chapter devoted to the possibility of "l'origine orientale" for Russian epic tradition.

<sup>22</sup> An early discussion of the difficulty of writing down oral epic by hand during transcription, in a South Slavic context, can be found in Luka Marjanović's preface to a song collection that he published in 1864. See further Tate 2011.

describe his early fieldwork experiences.) This variability often occurred in the epics' opening segments, which are referred to as *pripjevi* or "foresongs." Murko had borrowed a recording apparatus from the Vienna *Phonogrammarchiv* for his first field excursion. When using the device, Murko noticed that epic singers never performed the *pripjevi* in exactly the same way—never were the openings word-for-word identical, and never did they follow the same sequence of verses. Quite to the contrary, he tells us, there was always variation, and sometimes quite significant variation. Verses were often substituted, resequenced, remade, added, recombined, or simply dropped. Expressing his surprise, Murko writes, "No one had observed that [phenomenon] until now, at least not on Slavic soil, and it would not have occurred to me either to get the same singer to recite the beginning of a song to me three times in succession" ("Das hat bisher wenigstens auf slawischem Boden niemand beobachtet und es wäre auch mir nicht eingefallen, sich den Anfang eines Liedes von demselben Sänger dreimal nach einander vortragen zu lassen") (1913:2).<sup>23</sup> To repeat, this discovery occurred in 1913, almost twenty years before Parry's fieldwork.

But how did Murko come to make the novel observation? Was it something that the contemporary folk epic scholarship of his day had predicted? Was the discovery the result of some sort of discourse-internal deduction that Murko had made prior to his first field trip? Not at all. Murko's discovery resulted from an entirely external cause—a cause unforeseen by him, he tells us in the article. As Murko explains, he had borrowed his phonograph recording device from the Vienna *Phonogrammarchiv*, which was at that time loaning recording apparatuses to fieldworkers to help them record examples of folk singers for deposit in the archive's fund.<sup>24</sup> The *Phonogrammarchiv* maintained its own protocol for recording and documentation, which included, Murko explains, a rule (*Vorschrift*) requiring that the text of every recording be written down *before* the actual recording of the song. This was a simple methodological procedure: in order to deposit a folksong text in the archive's collection, one had to first write down the text of the song from the singer and only then make the recording itself, after which the recordist was expected to supply the relevant information from the recording session (singer, date, time, place, title, genre, and related information) when donating the recording to the institution. It was precisely because of this stricture, Murko tells us, that he discovered that the openings were never performed word-for-word, identically in the same way by the same singer; when he wrote down the opening of the song to be recorded, and then moments later recorded it, the results never matched (M. Murko 1913; Graf 1975).

It is difficult to imagine a more explicit example of inflecting the technological documentation of oral epic in a new way—by means of a new medium, no less—than this one.<sup>25</sup> Though Murko had been contemplating textual examples of folk epic and oral epic for more than two decades, it would require an institutional rule, deriving from a cause external to the local

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<sup>23</sup> Foley has referred to the phenomenon of the *pripjev* as a convincing example of "multiformity" (Foley 1990:162, n. 13; 289; 289, n. 22; 29; 360, n. 2; 364; 370; 1991:67-75; 77; 217, n. 56; 1996:14-15; cf. Lord 1960:72).

<sup>24</sup> Burkhard Stangl (2000) has written an excellent study of the *Phonogrammarchiv*'s history and practices.

<sup>25</sup> The analysis of recording technology in relation to specific media and the effects of various recording technologies has been the subject of much of Friedrich Kittler's work (for example, 1990 and 1999), a discussion of which would lead us too far afield in this present study. See also Stangl 2000:28-74, 149-78.

tradition and scholar studying the phenomenon, to open the analysis onto the possibility of a multiform lurking at the heart of the epic technique.<sup>26</sup> And yet today, the notion of multiformity—and the fact that multiformity is fundamental to the very essence of oral epic singing technique—is a bedrock component of our understanding of oral epic production. What is more, the notion of a variable *pripjev* that can be modified, expanded, added, or subtracted according to the singer's or audience's or occasion's needs, is practically a commonplace in South Slavic oral epic research. Lord, Pantzer, Foley, and others have written about the phenomenon with sagacity, and all have shown that the structural possibility of multiform variation *is built into the epic performance technique itself* and therefore not only represents a hallmark of performance but also qualifies as essential to the very production, transmission, and survival of the South Slavic epic tradition and its many other poetic counterparts around the world.<sup>27</sup>

What we have then is a striking example of an initial shock to theory and analysis that came directly from an encounter with the living phenomenon—or better yet, from a technologically new medium and mode for revealing that phenomenon—rather than from speculative models of epic production or the imaginative scenarios sometimes envisioned by text-based philologists with no experience in the field. Furthermore, the example is an excellent one in which oral epic textualization, institutional procedure, and fieldwork realities have collided unpredictably to turn research in a new direction. No amount of textual criticism, comparative linguistic studies, or book-based erudition could have produced the insight that came to Murko during his first living contact—in the full experience of a private, directly observed epic performance—with the living materiality of oral epic. The point helps to illustrate just how irreducible and fundamental the observation of living tradition had become for the study of oral epic in the opening decades of the twentieth century—oral epic exists, after all, as a living phenomenon in a fluid sociopolitical, temporal, and multimedial reality—and the point also reminds us that the study of oral epic must never lose sight of the lived realities and living techniques upon which it is based, and to which all later textual analyses must likewise always bear some relation, no matter what historical conditions one finds oneself working under.

In conclusion, the identification of the friendship between Radloff and Murko has allowed us to open a new window into the world of late nineteenth-century oral epic research. The friendship can be viewed in a wider and more elaborated historical context as an example of scholarly collaboration and acquaintance among an increasingly internationalized community of researchers spread from Paris to Ljubljana to Berlin to Vienna to St. Petersburg and beyond, all of whom were working on similar and in some cases inextricably linked questions and problems. Radloff and Murko both belonged to a particular strand of scholarly tradition nested within that network, and both resembled a certain profile of scholar who very deliberately and self-consciously combined work on historical-comparative linguistics, comparative philology, and *Volks poesie* research into problem-topics that found their natural place in the academic journals, universities, and scholarly congresses of the day. Both scholars also took advantage of the many venues for publication proliferating at the time to report their findings from fieldwork to a wider

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<sup>26</sup> See further M. Murko 1913:4.

<sup>27</sup> See especially Foley 1991:68-75; Pantzer 1959.

audience. It was ultimately the frequent contact, however, through fieldwork with living oral epic that led to this scholarly tradition of *Volkspoesie* research becoming a more comparative international discipline. During the 1880s, in Murko's autobiographical anecdote, we may still be far from the level of interest that erupted after the publication of Albert Lord's *Singer of Tales* in 1960, but we can at least retroactively see that these changes were beginning to become imaginable and that comparative studies of the kind carried out by Foley, Honko, and Harvilahti would one day be thinkable. Radloff and Murko were essential to this transformation, and can be located more or less on its cusp; one may even reasonably claim that they were instrumental in bringing it about. Together with the linguistic knowledge and the observations of singing that they acquired through fieldwork, the two scholars isolated questions that would pique later researchers' interests as well, and both helped to place the study of oral poetry on firmer textual, performative, and linguistic ground than existed before. What that firmer ground needed, of course, has become clearer to us from the vantage point of more recent work: further supplementation from the phenomenological viewpoint (including performance-based analysis), the analysis of epic singing from the point of view of craft and technique, attention to the folklore event *as* event, and the consideration of folklore and its event-contexts as sociocultural phenomena with communicative and political dimensions, including the roles played by gender, race, and class in the constitution, identity, and self-understanding of countless groups spread across time, space, and tradition.

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