MONUMENTA SERBOCROATICA

A BILINGUAL ANTHOLOGY OF SERBIAN AND CROATIAN TEXTS FROM THE 12th TO THE 19th CENTURY

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MICHIGAN SLAVIC PUBLICATIONS
Ever since the nineteenth century, with the beginning of scholarly interest in the collecting of folklore, the Balkans have been recognized as an area rich in folklore. The geographical position of the Balkan peninsula, as a land bridge between Europe and Asia, may possibly explain some of the variety and wealth of its folklore, but the crucial factor in the preservation and continued renewal of such lore until modern times was the illiteracy of much of the population. For specialists generally agree that an oral folk tradition remains vital where illiteracy prevails.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to speak of separate Croatian and Serbian folklore traditions. As Maja Boškovic-Stull writes: "Serbo-Croatian folklore is an indivisible entity, forged not only by common themes, subjects, images, forms of expression . . . but also by the same language." (Narodne pripovijetke. Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1963, 9-10.) Serbo-Croatian folklore may be classified according to three main genres: tales (pripovetke), which are always in prose; lyric songs (lirske or ženske pesme), and epic songs (epske or junakše pesme). There are other forms of folklore, such as puzzles, riddles, and proverbs, which do not fit any of the above categories; these are sometimes grouped in a nondescript category called "kratke vrste" ("shorter forms"; for a standard discussion of the typology of Serbo-Croatian folklore it will be useful to consult Vido Latković’s Narodna književnost. Belgrade: Naucna knjiga, 1967).

Now the various folklore genres have not been found to be uniformly distributed throughout the Serbian and Croatian areas; the oral epic tradition, for example, has been concentrated in the Dinaric Mountain Range of Montenegro, Bosnia, and Hercegovina, at least from the fifteenth century on. Other folk genres, believed by some to be more ancient, such as the ritual rainmaking songs (dodolske pesme) and yuletide songs (koledske pesme) were to be found until recent times throughout the Serbian and Croatian lands.

The following three poems: "The Fall of the Serbian Empire," "The Maid of Kosovo," and "The Death of the Mother of the Jugovići" all concern the battle of Kosovo or its aftermath. First published by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić in Volume II of his Srpske narodne pesme (Serbian Folk Songs), these poems were generally believed to be remnants of a
Serbian cycle about the battle of Kosovo, one similar to the French songs about Charlemagne’s times, and the German Niebelungrlled. But there have been a few Serbian scholars who have doubted the antiquity and/or the native roots of the Kosovo “cycle.” Nikola Banašević once proposed to trace their origin to the French “chansons de geste,” which he claimed had made their way into the Balkans via Venice and the Adriatic Coast (see his “Le cycle de Kosovo et les chansons de geste,” in Revue des Études Slaves, VI, 1926, 224-244). And Svetozar Matić saw the Kosovo poems as relatively recent compositions, products of a nationalistic “epic” that developed in Srem in the eighteenth century, in the vicinity of the monasteries of Fruška Gora (see his Naš narodni ep i naš stih. Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 1964).

Whether they date from Kosovo times or not, these beautiful songs are inspired with deep religious feeling and with compassion for those who were left at home after the battle, defenseless and hopeless. Although composed in the standard Serbo-Croatian heroic epic line of ten syllables, with obligatory caesura after the fourth syllable, they are lyrical in content and should be classified as ballads rather than epic poems. For a classic example of the oral epic, the reader should examine the poem “Kraljević Marko and Mina of Kostur” which appears later in this section.

For a scholarly discussion of the composition of the oral epic one might first begin with Albert B. Lord’s The Singer of Tales (originally published as Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 24, and republished by Atheneum in 1968 and later). Also of interest will be Tomo Maretić’s Naša narodna epika (Our Folk Epic: republished by Nolit, Belgrade, in 1966). For a discussion of the antiquity of the Serbo-Croatian epic it will be useful to consult Roman Jakobson’s “Studies in Comparative Slavic Metrics” (Oxford Slavonic Papers, 3, 1952), as well as Maretić’s Kosovski junaci i dogadjaji u narodnoj epici (Kosovo Heroes and Events in Folk Epic; Zagreb, 1889). Lord’s recent article “The Effect of the Turkish Conquest on Balkan Epic Tradition” (in Aspects of the Balkans: Continuity and Change, Henrik Birnbaum and Speros Vryonis, Editors. Mouton: The Hague, 1972, 298-318) will also be of interest in this regard.
ПРОПАСТ ЦАРСТВА СРПСКОГА

Полетио соко тица сива
Од светинје од Јерусалима,
И он носи тицу ластавцу.

То не био соко тица сива,
Беће био светитељ Илија;
Он не носи тицу ластавише,
Беће књигу од Богородице,
Однесе је цару на Косово,
Спусти књигу цару на колено,
Сама књига цару беседила:
„Царе Лазо, чеснито колено!
„Коме ћеш се приволети царству?
„Или волиш царству небескоме,
„Или волиш царству земаљскоме?
„Ако волиш царству земаљскоме,
„Седлај коне, притежи колане,
„Витезови сабље припасујте,
„Па у Турке јуриш учините,
„Сва ће Турска изгинути војска;
„Ако л’ волиш царству небескоме,
„А ти сакрој на Косову цркву,
„Не води јој темељ од мермера,
„Већ од чисте свине и скерлета,
„Па причести и нареди војску;
„Сва ће твоја изгинути војска,
„Ти ћеш, кнеже, шњоме погинути.”
А кад царе саслушао речи,
Мисли царе мисли свакојаке:
„Миле Боже, што ћу и како ћу?
„Коме ћу се приволети царству?
„Да ли ћу царству небескоме?
„Да ли ћу царству земаљскоме?
„Ако ћу се приволети царству,
„Приволети царству земаљскоме,
„Земаљско је за малено царство,
„А небеско у век и до века.”
THE FALL OF THE SERBIAN EMPIRE

A falcon took off, a grey bird,
From a holy place, from Jerusalem,
And it carried a lark.

That was not a falcon, a grey bird,
But it was the holy man, Elijah
He wasn't carrying a lark,
But a letter from the Mother of God;
He brought it to the Tsar at Kosovo,
And he dropped the letter on the Tsar's knee;
The letter itself spoke to the Tsar:
"O Tsar Lazar, noble lineage,
Which empire will you choose?
Do you want the heavenly kingdom,
Or do you want an earthly kingdom?
If you want an earthly kingdom,
Saddle your horses, tighten your saddle girths,
Let your knights strap on their swords,
And make an attack against the Turks:
The whole Turkish army will perish;
If you want the heavenly kingdom,
Then build a church at Kosovo,
Don't make its foundation of marble,
But of pure silk and scarlet,
Then give your army communion, and give them their orders;
Your whole army will perish,
And you, Prince, will die with them."
Now when the Tsar had listened to these words,
He thought all kinds of thoughts:
"Dear God, what am I to do?
Which kingdom shall I choose?
Will it be the heavenly kingdom?
Or will it be an earthly kingdom?
If I choose a kingdom,
Choose a kingdom on earth,
An earthly kingdom is only for a short time,
But the heavenly one is eternal, and forever."
Цар воледе царству небескоме,
А него ли царству земаљскоме,
Па сакроји на Косову цркву,
Не води јој темељ од мермера,
Већ од чисте свиле и скерлета,
Па дозива Српског патриарха
И дванаест велики владика,
Те причести и нареди војску.
Истом кнезе наредио војску,
На Косову ударише Турци.
Маче војску Бождан Јуже стари
С девет сина девет Јутовића,
Како девет сиви соколова,
У сваког је девет иљад’ војске,
А у Југа дванаест иљада,
Па се бише и сескоше с Турци;
Седам паша бише и убише,
Кад осмога бити започеше,
Ал’ погибе Бождан Јуже стари,
И изгибе девет Јутовића,
Како девет сиви соколова,
И њиова сва изгибе војска.
Макош’ војску три Мрњавчевића:
Бан Угљеша и војвода Гојко
И са њима Вукашине краље,
У свакога трисест иљад’ војске,
Па се бише и сескоше с Турци:
Осам паша бише и убише,
Деветога бити започеше,
Погибеше два Мрњавчевића,
Бан Угљеша и војвода Гојко,
Вукашин је грдни рана доп’о,
Њега Турци с коњма прегазише;
И њиова сва изгибе војска.
Маче војску Ерцеже Степане,
У Ерцега многа силна војска,
Многа војска, шездесет иљада,
Те се бише и сескоше с Турци:
Девет паша бише и убише,
Десетога бити започеше,
Ал’ погибе Ерцеже Степане,
И његова сва изгибе војска.
Маче војску Српски кнез Лазаре,
The Tsar wanted the heavenly kingdom, 
Rather than the earthly one, 
So he built a church at Kosovo. 
He didn't make its foundation of marble, 
But of pure silk and scarlet; 
Then he summoned the Serbian patriarch, 
And twelve great bishops, 
And he gave the army communion, and he gave them their orders. 
The prince had barely given the army its orders, 
When the Turks attacked Kosovo. 
Old Jug Bogdan moved his army forward, 
With his nine sons, the nine Jugovići, 
Like nine grey falcons, 
Each with nine thousand soldiers, 
And Jug with twelve thousand. 
Then they fought and clashed with the Turks, 
Seven pashas they defeated and killed, 
When they began to defeat an eighth, 
Old Jug Bogdan perished, 
And the nine Jugovići died, 
Like nine grey falcons, 
And all their army perished too. 
The three Mrnjavčevići moved their army forward, 
Ban Uglješa and Vojvoda Gojko, 
And with them King Vukašin, — 
Each with thirty thousand soldiers; 
Then they fought and clashed with the Turks: 
Eight pashas they defeated and killed, 
When they began to defeat a ninth, 
The two Mrnjavčevići perished, 
Ban Uglješa and Vojvoda Gojko; 
Vukašin received some horrible wounds, 
The Turks trampled him with their horses, 
And all their army perished.

Herceg Stepan moved his army forward, 
The Herceg has many mighty soldiers, 
Many soldiers, sixty thousand, 
Then they fought and clashed with the Turks: 
Nine pashas they defeated and killed, 
When they began to defeat a tenth, 
Herceg Stepan perished, 
And all his army perished too. 
The Serbian prince Lazar moved his army forward,
У Лазе је силни Србаљ био,
Седамдесет и седам иљада,
Па ражрне по Косову Турке,
Не даду се ни гледати Турком,
Да камо ли бојак бити с Турци;
Таћ би Лаза надвладао Турке,
Бог убио Вука Бранковића!
Он издађе таста на Косову;
Тада Лазу надвладаше Турци,
И погибе Српски кнез Лазаре,
И његова сва изгуба војска,
Седамдесет и седам иљада;
Све је свето и честито било
И миломе Богу приступачно.
Laza has a powerful lot of Serbs,
Seventy seven thousand;
And they chased the Turks across Kosovo,
The Turks couldn't get a look at them,
Never mind do battle with them:
Then Laza would have overwhelmed the Turks,
May God strike Vuk Branković dead!
He betrayed his father-in-law at Kosovo:
Then the Turks overwhelmed Laza,
And the Serbian prince Lazar perished,
And all his army perished, too,
Seventy seven thousand.

All was holy and honorable,
And according to God's plan.