AFTERWARD

Balkan Epic Cyclicity: A View from the Languages

Victor A. Friedman

One way to approach Balkan epic is through the languages in which they are sung or recited. It is interesting to note that in this regard, the geographical extent of Balkan epics and of Balkan languages in the sense of the Balkan *Sprachbund*, or linguistic league are not exactly co terminous, but rather show interesting similarities and differences.[1] In this afterward, then, I would like to examine the topic of this volume as a linguist and Balkanist with almost forty years of field experience in the region and interests that have extended beyond the realm of grammar sensu stricto.[2]

Lord (1972:305 308) has identified the stylistic importance of Turkish lexicon in Balkan epic not unlike the importance of Turkish lexicon in the Balkan languages (Kazazis 1972, Friedman 1996a). This is an area where standardization functions like literacy (with which it is deeply entwined) in opposition to orality (and the dialects that are its vehicle). As with the standardization of the modern Balkan literary languages (except post-Yugoslav Bosnian), so, too, in the deployment of epic for representing the nation, Turkish is pushed back (historically), down (stylistically), or out (via replacement). And yet, without Turkish (and, Lord 1972 argues, Islam), an element of epic authenticity is lost.

Consider in this regard Notopoulos' (1959, 1) attempt to create a seamless connection between Homeric epic through Byzantium to Modern Greek epic by passing over the crucial Ottoman period in silence:

[1] The languages of the Balkan *Sprachbund* are distinguished by a group of shared lexical, phraseological, and morphosyntactic features that diffused among Balkan Slavic, Balkan Romance, Greek, and Albanian as well as Balkan dialects of Romani, Turkish, and Judezmo, owing to centuries of multilingualism (see Friedman 2006a). The boundary for Balkan vs non-Balkan Slavic runs approximately from the Albanian-Kosovo border south of Dečani through Kosovo and southern Serbia to the Danube south of Zaječar (Friedman 2002-2003), although some typically Balkan linguistic features in Slavic dialects and standard languages extend north into Montenegro, Bosnia-Hercegovina, the rest of Serbia, and parts of Croatia, i.e. the former Ottoman Empire.

[2] See, for example, Friedman 1996b.

> "From the days of Byzantium until recent times Greece has had to fight for survival... [The songs] have instructed the generations in the modern counterpart of the Homeric aretê, *leventyá*, the gallant attitude toward life. [...] The occasions for recitation are the many opportunities offered by the church for religious holidays and festivals, [...] and that indefinable mood for joyous expression in sheer living which the Greeks call by that unique word, *kephi*." (Notopoulos 1959, 1)

What this account fails to mention is the fact that during the period between Byzantium and "recent times" it was the Ottoman Turks who brought to Greek both *leventyá* (Turkish *levend* 'conscript, irregular troup' as well as 'handsome, strong youth' and 'free, independent, adventurer, irresponsible')[3] and *kephi* (Turkish *key[i]f* 'pleasure, delight, enjoyment, merriment, tipsy, etc.')[4]

The point is that both linguistically and culturally, it was the five or so centuries of Turkish rule that defined (and to some extent still defines) the Balkans as Balkan. To be sure, language contact occurred before, as did epic poetry, and some phenomena have their beginnings in the pre-Ottoman period. The common elements in the structure of the Balkan languages as we see them today, however, like the common themes in Balkan epic, took their current shape in the early modern period, i.e. under Turkish rule, when, as Olivera Jašar-Nasteva said many years ago in a lecture on the Balkan languages, with one *teskere* you could travel the entire peninsula.[5]

As Lord (1972, 299) points out:

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[3] The Turkish is in turn from from Persian *lewend* 'free, independent, adventurer, soldier, servant, laborer, libertine, ignorant, layabout, strumpet, gallant, etc.' Forms of *levend* are found all over the Balkans and as far afield as Hungarian and Ukrainain.

[4] The ultimate source is Arabic *käyif* 'state, humor, mood, good mood, pleasure, high spirits, narcotic, etc.' Derivatives of *key[i]f* have made it all the way to Russian *(kayf)*, where the meaning is 'high' especially in reference to the effects of cannabis products. The etymology of Greek *kephi* (or *kefi*), BCSM *ćef*, Albanian *qef*, Romanian *chef*, etc. brings to mind Pettan's comments (this volume) on the absence of epic in Slovenia, which can be extended to the absence of Turkish and Islam during the Ottoman period. A joke circulated in Yugoslav times about a Bosnian woman and a Slovene woman who became friends at a pan Yugoslav women's conference in Belgrade. The Bosnian told her Slovene friend: "When you come to visit me in Sarajevo, we'll drink coffee *sa ćefom* (with *ćef*)." After the conference, there was a coffee shortage in Yugoslavia. The Bosnian woman wrote to her Slovene friend that she had looked all over Sarajevo but could not find any coffee. Her Slovene friend wrote back that they had plenty of coffee in Ljubljana, but she could not find any *ćef*. (And indeed there is no such word in any Slovene dictionary; on the causes of shortages in socialist Yugoslavia see Woodward 1995.)

[5] A *teskere* is a travel document, roughly the equivalent to today's passport.

The Kosovo 'cycle' is patently impossible without the Turks. In short, most of the historical or pseudo-historical songs are post-Turkish invasions. This is especially true of the Slavic Balkans, but it applies equally well to Greece, except that we can look further back in Greek tradition than we can in Slavic, namely to events on the eastern borders of the Greek Empire in the early middle ages, which gave rise to the songs about Digenes Akritas. These songs, as such, had practically disappeared by Turkish times, although their basic patterns remained. The songs of Digenes sung in the last century and to some extent even today have little if anything to do with the Digenes of the medieval ballads and epic. (Lord 1972, 299)

For Lord (1972), authentic epic in the Balkans is Muslim epic, and secondarily Christian. And what is it today? Is it, for example, anything sung by a guslar decorated in nationalist kitsch? Živković (this volume), citing Lord, suggests that it is not. The terms *guslarske pesme* and *këngë me lahutë* are indeed one way of describing a genre, but they say nothing about the form or content of the epic itself, only the accompaniment. The question of thematics has concerned a number of papers in this volume, and it deserves further attention.

In Vuk's seminal Serbian collection, he classified all his songs as *junačke* 'heroic', but divided them into three groups: oldest, middle, and new. His *oldest* category, however, mixes Turkish (i.e. Kosovo cycle) and pre-Turkish themes. For Albanian, Shala distinguishes songs that are *legjendare* (1972) from those that are *historike* (1973), the latter beginning with the Battle of Kosovo Polje and the exploits of Skanderbeg and going up to World War Two. His texts come from all over *Shqiptaria*, (the lands where Albanian is spoken), and only the *Këngë kreshnike* 'songs of the borderland warriors', which he classifies as *legjendare* and not *historike*, have no indication of provenance.

The major Bulgarian compendium of epics, which brings together selections from a variety of collections going back to the middle of the nineteenth century, has four volumes: *junaški* 'heroic' (Burin 1961) *istoričeski* 'historic' (Vakarelski 1961), *hajduški* 'outlaw' (Osinin 1961), and *mitičeski* 'mythical' (Arnaudov 1961). The first category includes Krali Marko, and many of the poems are in the classic *deseterac* form (decasyllable with caesura between fourth and fifth). It is interesting to note that virtually all of these poems come from geographic Macedonia (Aegean, Vardar, Pirin now Greek, Republic of, and Bulgarian, respectively) or from the region bounded by Pirin Macedonia, Sofia, and the current Serbian-Bulgarian border. In

other words, these songs are all from within the borders of the medieval Serbian state on the eve of the Battle of Marica (1371, see below). It is worth emphasizing here that from a linguistic point of view, although these songs display the occasional case archaism, they are basically truly Balkan linguistically, and thus their grammatical structure differs significantly from that of the Bosno-Hercegovinian-Croatian-Serbian-Montenegrin dialects that form the basis of the corpora usually cited.[6] This is important from the point of view of poetics owing to the combination of grammatical and accentual differences between the Slavic dialects of Bosnia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia, on the one hand, and those of Macedonia and western Bulgaria, on the other. The former have complex declensional systems, the latter rely on prepositions as does English.

The Bulgarian *istoričeski* songs are likewise mostly from the territory that belonged to the medieval Serbian state in the decades leading up to the Battle of Marica, although a few are from other regions. The songs include the Battle of Kosovo, Musa Kesedžija, and also more specifically Bulgarian themes such as Tsar Šišman, and, going up to the Balkan wars, *Măkite na trakijcite* 'The Sufferings of the Thracians', which begins

> Pusta, prokleta Gărcija
> otkakto dojde v Trakija,
> Trakija cărna pocărne! (Vakarelski 1961, 590)

> Damned, cursed Greece
> since it came to Thrace
> unlucky Thrace is ruined!

The songs are in a variety of meters and line lengths, with more octosyllables and only the occaional *deseterac*. The *hajduški* songs rarely reach 200 lines in length, whereas the *istoričeski* songs reach almost 500 lines of *deseterac* ("Radul Beg, Mirčo Vojvoda, i kral Šišman", from Pirin Macedonia, Vakarelski 1961, 117-134), although most of them are considerably shorter. The *junaški* are mostly 250 lines or more. The *mitičeski pesni* are quite distinct from the other three. They rarely exceed 100 lines and show considerable syllabic and metrical variety. Moreover, they are much more evenly distributed over the territory of today's Bulgarian state as well as geographic Macedonia. The themes include vampires, succubi, plagues, human sacrifice, etc., including biblical and other ecclesiastical topoi, but with distinctly local reworking. Thus, for example, in the retelling of the *Akidah* (the binding of Isaac [or Ishmael among Muslims]), Abraham is childless,

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[6] See Kordić (2010) for a modern, pragmatic approach to the former Serbo-Croatian

promises to sacrifice his child to God if God grants him one, then stalls and stalls until the child is seven, and then at the last minute God sends him two rams (Aranaudov 1961:567-568).

As I have indicated above, most of the published Bulgarian oral epic tradition other than the so-called mythical was collected in Macedonia, i.e. the Ottoman vilayets of Üsküp (Kosova), Manastir (now Bitola) and Selânik (Salonica), during the nineteenth century, when the modern Macedonian and Bulgarian standard languages were in the process of formation, a process the completion of which was delayed for Macedonian until the middle of the twentieth century (see Friedman 2000). Like the modern Scandinavian languages, which share the Old Norse sagas as a common heritage, so, too, the modern South Slavic languages share overlapping or common epic traditions. Thus the Macedonian epic tradition as represented by collections such as Cepenkov (1972) and Penušliski (1968) draw on some of the same sources as the Bulgarian.

Lord (1972) writes that the Muslim epic is absent east of what we can call *Shqiptaria*, despite the numbers of Muslims in Macedonia, Bulgaria, and northern Greece. The published Bulgarian and Macedonian collections, based on materials collected in the nineteenth century all appear to have been Christian, in keeping with the nationalist purpose of the enterprise. I wonder, however, if prior to the mass migrations of Muslims out of Rumelian territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such songs might have been found and whether they might not survive in some villages. Pomaks (Bulgarian-speaking Muslims) in Anatolia, like Pontic Greeks in Aegean Macedonia, preserved the traditions that they brought with them into the exile labeled as a "return" or "exchange" (see McCarthy 2002). Recent recordings from Turkey and Greece attest to Pomak versions of historical events such as the massacre at Batak (Pomak Göçmenlerde Müzik ve Pesna, 1998, Kalan Arşiv serisi FRS 20296) sung with a two-stringed tambura (and with marked similarities to çifteli passages), as well as mythical themes such as the human sacrifice for a building (Tragoudia & Skopoi tōn Pomakōn tēs Thrakēs, 2005, Politistiko Anaptyksiako Kentro Thrakēs) sung without accompaniment.

Returning to the Macedonian borderlands, we can note that among the Gorans, Slavic-speaking Muslims of southwesternmost Kosovo and adjacent villages across the border in Albania (as well as two villages in the Republic of Macedonia) whose dialects are simultaneously claimed by Serbia, Macedonia, and Bulgaria (see Friedman 2008 for details and bibliography), the tradition of tambura-accompanied ballads seems to dominate (Hasani 1987). As among Albanians in Kosovo, so too among Gorans there is today a vibrant market of modern CD epic and ballad production.

For Greece I shall cite a sample from the James Notopoulos Collection mentioned by Scaldaferi (this volume) and published as Notopoulos 1959. Intended as a representative sample, the songs indicate the extent of Modern Greek epic at the turn of the last century. The recordings were made in Yanina, Salonica, Cyprus, Crete, and the Peloponnese, but in fact the epic recorded in Salonica was by a Pontic Greek. The Cypriot and Pontic epics are from the Akritan cycle, which, as Lord indicated, is now a vehicle for the mythic/legendary songs. The Cretan epic of Daskaloyiannis, like the klephtic ballads from Epirus and the Peloponnese all depend on the Turks for their thematics, while the example of *rizitiko* from Crete is adapted to describe the German occupation during World War Two. It is worth remembering that prior to the ethnic cleansing (called "exchange of populations") mandated by the treaty of Lausanne in 1923, there were tens, of thousands of Hellenophone Muslims living in contact with their Christian neighbors in Crete and along the upper course of the river Bistrica (Greek Aliakmon) in western Aegean Macedonia, just as there were also Turcophone Christians in Anatolia. And, of course, prior to the 1974 Turkish Peace Action/Invasion (depending on the point of view) in Cyprus, Hellenopohne Christians and Turcophone Muslims (as well as Arabic-speaking Christians) often lived in mixed communities with high degrees of bi- and multilingualism that is reflected in Cypriot Greek and Turkish dialects.

Notopoulos observes that the Pontic, Cypriot, and Cretan traditions are the best preserved. When contrasted to the Hellenic peninsula, we see that these are the regions with the heaviest and longest contact with Islam. Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace were also regions of tremendous linguistic and religious diversity prior to the wars of the early twentieth century. Moreover, further south, large parts of territory were Albanian (Arvanitika)-speaking, and Ruches (1967) is a valuable source of Tosk (south Albanian) Christian epic and ballad from Greece. As Gavrilis (2008) shows, prior to the ethnic cleansings both forced and "voluntary" migrations (Turkish *serbest güç*) that accompanied the rise of nationalism and nation-states in the Balkans, Muslims and Christians lived and cooperated together even in the Peloponnese and were driven apart by order from the respective centers of their nation states. Given the homogenization that occurred especially in Greece, we can only speculate on what has been lost. Still, as Kappler (2002) has shown, Greek participated actively in multilingual literature, a topic to which we shall return below.

In the Romance-language epic tradition, as Beissinger (this volume) points out for the Romanian part, there is no cycle like the Kosovo cycle for South Slavs that serves as an anchor for nationalism. Rather, the national epic, so to speak, is *Miorița*, which is a pastoral elegy. It is worth noting that this song also occurs in Aromanian (Saramandu 2003), which has other

widespread mythic epic themes such as those involving human sacrifice (Papazēsē Papatheodōrou 1985, 26 30).

The cultural continuity of Balkan Jews was disrupted by the inlfux of Hispanic-speaking Jews expelled from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497). It is these communities rather than the older Romaniote (Greek-speaking) Jews who dominated life in Ottoman lands. They brought with them *romances* (epic ballads), which they preserved so well and which they sing with such clear diction that a colleague of mine at a large state university in the U.S. has used recordings of them in his Spanish classes.

Both Beissinger (this volume) and Pettan (this volume) mention Roms as the keepers of other language traditions, and we can also note that Notopoulos' (1959) example from Epirus was performed by Gypsies.[7] It is worth observing, however, that there is also a Romani-language epic tradition. In a sense we can say that just as nationalism hijacked the possibility of Yugoslavia making a peaceful transition, so, too, historical songs have hijacked the analysis of epic poetry.[8] Pettan is most poignant in this respect. Completely absent from consideration are the kinds of songs Lord identifies as "core", such as the song of a building that requires a human sacrifice. Marushiakova and Popov (1997) have published 38 Romani versions of this song collected between 1891 and 1997 from Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey.[9] While it is true that many Roms are professional musicians, and, moreover, in some regions, dominate specific kinds of ensembles (e.g., the *lăutari* of Romania, players of zurla and tapan in Macedonia, the *mıtrıp* of Kurdistan), it is also true that Roms sing in Romani for themselves.[10]

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[7] Although the Romani plural of *Rom* is *Roma* (except in some Kalderash dialects, where the zero-marked collective *Rom* is used), when writing in English, the use of the Romani plural is a form of exoticizing political correctness. We write *Turks* and not *Türkler*, *Magyars* and not *Magyarok*, etc. Only groups considered too marginal to be integrated into English are excluded from English grammar, e.g. the *Tikopia*. There are, however, groups of Romani descent who do not speak Romani, and who sometimes do not identify as Roms. The term Gypsy can be used as a cover term for both groups together.

[8] Lord (1972:318) expresses a similar sentiment when he writes: "thanks to the conservatism of Moslemized bards in the Balkans, the oldest mythic patterns of oral epic in the peninsula were preserved, elaborated, and strengthened. A significant and meaningful core of stories was protected from the movements towards excessive historicizing that influenced so many of the Chirstian songs at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries."

[9] Two versions are from Moscow, but the singers are Kalderash, i.e. they arrived in Russia from the Balkans during the nineteenth century.

[10] Strictly speaking, the *mıtrıp* speak or spoke Domari, a different Indic language, clearly related to Romani, although the historical details of the relationship are unclear (see Matras 2002).

The Turkish-language epic tradition today is dominated by the same kind of nation-forming ideology that was part of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Turkish Republic. In keeping with Turkish nationalist ideals, the national epic playing a role similar to that of the Kosovo cycle for Serbs is that of *Dede Korkut*, which is oriented eastward, toward Central Asia (i.e., Turkestan sesnu largo) and Azerbaijan, rather than toward Europe (i.e., the Balkans). Nonetheless, there are also Turkish *destan*s sung in the Balkans about Balkan wars and catastrophes as well as those with mythical or religious themes and also humor and satire (Hafiz 1985, 115 181).

The division of Balkan epic traditions into the languages in which they are sung brings us to code-switching, i.e. the mixing of languages that occurs in Balkan conversations, folk songs, and poetry, as well as in folk tales, but, curiously, not in epic. Friedman (2006b) discusses the use of code-switching in both urban and rural music in the Balkans in a volume cited by Bohlman (this volume). Like the examples of mixed-language Balkan poetry in Kappler (2002), these folk and literary productions demonstrate the creation of a shared multilingual heritage. In folk tales, however, such as those collected in nineteenth-century Macedonia, code-switching is used to highlight what we can call ethno-regional difference as different characters speak in different languages or dialects (see Friedman 1995). Thus, in the prose genres, as opposed to poetry and song, code-swtiching simultaneously creates a shared world (that of the hearers of the tale, who understand the code-switching) and creates linguistic distinctions within that world (the code-switching itself).

The epic, however, although sometimes sung by bi- or multilingual singers, does not seem to display this kind of behavior. Moreover, the constraint cannot be said to arise from, e.g., the language specific nature of the *deseterac*, since that form also occurs in Albanian (Skendi 1980, also Kolsti 1990) as well as Slavic, and, as I noted above, the form is used in Macedonian and Bulgarian as well as the former Serbo-Croatian, despite the very different grammatical and accentual structures of these South Slavic languages. When we look at the thematics of epics, especially those with so-called "historical" topics, i.e. battles, raids, and other conflicts, there is ample opportunity for characters on different sides to speak different languages. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, therefore, it appears that the epic genre, unlike other traditional and literary genres, avoids the creation of a unified world across certain kinds of linguistic boundaries, despite the fact that all the necessary conditions are present and that such unity was a part of everyday life.

This kind of segregation is brought out clearly by the name *Mujo*. Ahmedaja (this volume) cites the Albanian form *Muji* and its folk

etymologization from *me mûjtë* 'to conquer' (also 'to be able'), and indeed this form and the occsional dative/genitive *Mujït* (although never with the nasal vowel <û>) point to the adaptation of this name as if the base were *Muj*. The more frequent dative/genitive form *Mujes*, however, reveals that the name comes from the nominative *Mujo*, which is in turn a Slavic hypocoristic from a Muslim name such as *Muharem* or *Muhamed* (although *Mujo* has also been used as a nickname by *Milivoje Nikčević*, a Christian Montenegrin guslar). The other heroes in Albanian Muslim songs all have straightforward Islamic names, whereas their opponents, when characterized as *shkja* 'Slavs' (from *sclavenoi*), a term which entered Albanian via Latin at a date much earlier than the arrival of the Turks, are ethnolinguistic and not religious opponents, at least in terms of lexicon. On the one hand, the complexity of *Mujo* points to cultural interchange between Slavic- and Albanian-speaking Muslims, on the other hand *shkja* indicates ethnolinguistic contestation.

In a variation on Čolović (2002), we can ask, whose is the epic? Does it belong only to the Dumézilian categories of the warrior and the king, and must the priest serve them as the Franciscans served the South Slavs who became Croats (cf. Fine 2006) and the northern Albanians? Primorac and Ćaleta's (this volume) description of gusla players as folk journalists rather than as folk historians, chronicling their own age rather than past glories and defeats, resonates with Longinović's (this volume) point that "poetic history" is oxymoronic. Epic history thus becomes journalistic spin. Nonetheless, while the historical facts about the Battle of Kosovo Polje are indeed scarce and disputable, we know enough about the events leading up to that battle to put it in a useful historical context, which in turn helps us contextualize the epic itself. As Fine (1987) points out in his authoritative work:

> The battle on the Marica [1371 VAF] was far more significant in opening up the Balkans to the Turks and in weakening Serbian resistance then the more famous Battle of Kosovo (1389).[11] Owing to its vast losses at Marica and the increasing separatism that followed it, Serbia became ripe for the picking. [...] Serbia ended up being reduced to half of what it was before the battle. No subsequent ruler of Serbia bore the title tsar. (Lazar, though called "tsar" in the epics, was actually entitled prince.) Vukašin's son Marko, who survived the battle, had already been crowned "young king" and after Vukašin's death was crowned king. George Balšić [...] took Prizren [...] Lazar grabbed Priština

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[11] [It is worth noting that the battle was fought at Chernomen, now Ormenion in Greece, across the river from Svilengrad in Bulgaria and about 20 km from Edirne in Turkey. - VAF]

[...] the Balšići gained Peć [...] and thus Marko found himself stripped of most of his Kosovo holdings. [...] By 1377 Vuk Branković had Skopje, and an Albanian named Andrew Gropa had Ohrid. [...] [I]n fact, weaker than the Balšići, Lazar, and probably by the end of the decade the Brankovići, it was all [Marko] could do to maintain his reduced principality around Prilep in central Macedonia. However, despite his unfortunate career, Marko has gone down in history, as a result of his role in the epics, as Serbia's epic hero par excellence. The Serbian epics call him Kraljević the king's son. The title is incorrect, for he actually was crowned king, a fact reflected accurately in the Bulgarian and Macedonian epics, which call him Krali (King) Marko. [...T]he great nobles (Lazar, the Balšići, Altomanović, Vuk Branković) established their own separate states, each having its own individual interests. [...] Hostile to one another and involved in enriching themselves at the expense of their neighbors, the nobles were blind to the ever increasing Ottoman danger and unwilling to co operate against it. And as they skirmished and fought among themselves, further manpower, sorely needed to resist the Turks, was lost. [... M]uch of Serbia's territories seceded under local lords who made themselves independent of any central authority. Serbia ceased to be a state. (Fine 1987, 379 82)

As Lord (1972:299) observes: "I should like to suggest that they ['mythological' subjects] and not the historical songs are the central core of any oral narrative tradition, either ballad or epic, and that the historical songs are a later development."

The political effect of epic songs, however, is well attested not only in the nineteenth century, but also in the Yugoslav period. It is worth noting that the production of 33 and 45 rpm records with epic fragments mostly from the Kosovo cycle but also from the "mythical" songs was sponsored by the Yugoslav state in the 1960s and 1970s. The covers of these 45s invariably featured a photograph of the *guslar* holding his instrument. I also know of one example of a *guslar* from Kumanovo singing about Krali Marko in Macedonian. Bosnian 45s featuring epics accompanied by the *saze* were also produced. During the same period (especially 1968-1980), records of Albanian epics sung to the *çifteli* were produced in Belgrade for sale in Kosovo and Macedonia. For the most part, the Albanian-language themes were about battles for liberation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the song about Bajram Curri (e.g., on the 33 rpm *Kosova këndon dhe*

vallëzon 'Kosova sings and dances', RTB LPV 1251). It would appear that songs about struggle against Turks were promoted by the state regardless of language, although Bosnian Muslim songs were also permitted. The situation changed after the Kosovo uprising of 1981. Albanian songs were perceived as irredentist, and an ethnic Albanian acquaintance of mine in Macedonia was jailed in the early 1980s for singing the song of Bajram Curri at a wedding.

Turning now to the general question of orality, we see that the epic cycle participates in what we can call the cycle of the epic. If an epic is not written down, it is eventually lost and in any case is eventually replaced, as the Homeric cycle was in Greece. As the historical record allows us to reconstruct, epics begin as oral, are written down, and thus become literature, while new oral epics like languages arise, related to but different from their predecessors. This process was already taking place in Mesopotamia thousands of years before Homer. We owe this knowledge to the fact that scribes wrote down epics such as Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgamesh on clay tablets. It is worth noting here that these epics involve conflict resolution rather than war (although threat of war is certainly present), and Enmerkar even describes the invention of writing as an aid to memory (Vanstiphout 2003). Here we can also note that in the decades since Parry and Lord's discoveries, the concept of the formula has been refined, and, as Watkins (1995, especially pp. 16 19, 297 544, and references therein) demonstrates, the various Indo-European-language epic traditions enable us to reconstruct what may well have been a shared poetics characteristic of the shared language whose name we do not know and so we label with the geographic term Indo-European.[12]

But even if it is written down and subsequently preserved or (re)discovered, still, like language itself, the living version is never identical to its ancestors, just as, for example, medieval Latin was different from the colloquial medieval French or Italian with which it was co existent. It is only the relatively recent invention of writing that has enabled us both to discover ancient epic traditions and to see that the oral epics of today are "timeless" in much the same way that language itself is "timeless." A structure or grammar is always there, but every constituent part is subject to change. Just as there is no such thing as a language that does not change, so, too, there cannot be an unchanging epic cycle. To be sure, in both cases individual elements can be extremely hardy. The <n> in the English preposition *in* is as old

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[12] It is interesting to note that the thematics of Ancient Sumero-Semitic epics differ so significantly from those of Indo-European epics that it has been suggested that the Biblical Samson story is an importation from another, possibly Indo-European, tradition (see Kugel 2007:396-401 and references therein).

as the <s> at the end of some masculine singular nominative nouns in Greek and Lithuanian, and both features go back to Indo European, but none of these languages today is "older" than any other, and none is identical to the Indo European from which they all descend. Like language, epic is a process. It can be living or dead, vital or irrelevant, oral or written.

As an illustration of epic processes we can note that by the time Homer wrote, the epic was ceasing to be oral and its values became subject to criticism. In the epic world itself, as Straus (2006:64) notes:

> "When it comes to the ranks and file, the silence of the sources and the clamor of reality are typical of the Bronze Age. Hittite and Egyptian texts, for example, often tell the story of a battle the same way: the Great King or pharaoh single handedly defeats masses of enemy soldiers. An extreme case is the offical Egyptian version of the battle of Qadesh: Pharoah Ramses II killed so many Hittite soldiers that the plain of Qadesh became impassable from all the blood and corpses. Pharaoh had the help of the gods alone in this victory. In other words, the enemy is a crowd of common soldiers but our side has one divinely inspired hero."

By the time the themes of the Homeric poems became the subject of Classical Greek tragedy, however, Peleus (father of Achilles) could criticize Menelaus in Euripedes' *Andromache* (693 705) in the follwing terms:[13]

> Oh, how perverse the customs are in Greece!
> When the public sets a war memorial up,
> do those who really sweated get the honor?
> Oh no! Some general wangles the prestige.
> He brandished his spear among countless others
> and did no more work than a single warrior,
> and yet he gets more praise.
> Those self important fathers of their country
> think they're above the people, though they're worthless.
> The citizen is infinitely wiser,
> gifted with nerve and purpose, anyway.
> You and your brother sit puffed up over Troy and your command,

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[13] My translation is based on those of Nims (1959:584 585) and Henderson (2005:336 37) and the Greek original in Henderson's edition.

made arrogant by the sufferings and toils of others.

With this in mind, we can agree mostly but not entirely with Lord (1972:295) when he writes: "With the coming of the Turks, in the mountains of Bosnia, Hercegovina, northern Albania, and elsewhere in the peninsula, epic poetry lived again for a brief final spin in the Balkan peninsula." Given the evidence of the historical record that is available to us, while the Balkan oral epics recorded by Parry and Lord are part of a larger process of circulation between orality and literacy, between tradition and invention (recall the linguistic distinction between transmission and diffusion), the word *final* seems too final.

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