Selected Papers on a Serbian Village: Social Structure as Reflected by History, Demography and Oral Tradition (Introduction)

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SELECTED PAPERS ON A SERBIAN VILLAGE:
Social Structure as Reflected by History,
Demography and Oral Tradition

edited by
Barbara Kerewsky Halpern and Joel M. Halpern

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Dedicated to the memory of
Milenko S. Filipovic
Philip E. Mosely
Milman Parry
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Community studies of rural societies have a long tradition in American anthropology. They have perhaps been the most characteristic effort of work by Anglo-American scholars in Europe during the past half century.\(^1\) In the Balkans there has been the pioneering sociological field work by Irwin Sanders in Bulgaria in the 1930's and research on the zadruga (extended household) in parts of the Balkans by Philip Mosely during the same period.\(^2\) This coincides with the period when Milman Parry, accompanied by Albert Lord, initiated field investigations in Yugoslavia to test hypotheses on oral theory.\(^3\)

In the 1970's Sanders and Lord, who have continued their respective researches in the Balkans, directed a series of conferences on East European peasant societies which reflected viewpoints of both the social sciences and the humanities.\(^4\) The present collection of working papers on a Serbian village, under the subtitle "Social Structure as Reflected by History, Demography and Oral Tradition," similarly draws on both these disciplinary perspectives.

The contributors to the collection, sometimes writing cooperatively and elsewhere independently, sometimes as colleagues within the same field and at others as collaborators across interdisciplinary lines, include two socio-cultural anthropologists (E. A. Hammel, University of California, Berkeley, and Joel M. Halpern, University of Massachusetts, Amherst), a sociolinguist (Barbara Kerewsky Halpern, University of Massachusetts, Amherst), and a specialist in comparative oral poetries (John Miles Foley, currently a visiting fellow at the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature at Harvard University, on leave from the English Department of Emory University).

These six papers focus on data pertaining to the village of Orašac in Šumadija in central Serbia. Field work initiated there by the co-editors in 1953 has continued intermittently up to the present. The first field trip of a year's duration was undertaken with
personal funds, and work has subsequently been supported by grants from the National Science Foundation (1961-62, 1965-67, 1974-1977), the National Institute of Mental Health (1968, 1969-1970), the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (1974-1977), the National Endowment for the Humanities (1974-1977) and the National Academy of Sciences (1975). For the considerable support of these various agencies in underwriting ongoing field research we appreciatively express our thanks.

The late Milenko S. Filipović, then of the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, Belgrade, on the occasion of his visit to Harvard on a Rockefeller Foundation grant in 1952, stimulated the original impetus for our research. The late Philip E. Mosely, then Director of the Russian Institute of Columbia University, provided early contacts and subsequent guidance. The writings of Filipović, Mosely and Parry all motivated the present essays.

Our researches could not have been undertaken without the active endorsement of Yugoslav scholars and institutions, particularly the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and especially Radomir Lukić, Vice-President of the Academy, whose support under the Yugoslav-American Academies of Sciences Cultural Exchange Agreement is here gratefully acknowledged.

The initial research was for a doctoral dissertation (by J. Halpern), published in 1956, in revised book form in 1958 and later reprinted incorporating a restudy in 1967. A jointly authored study by us, using totally new materials, appeared in 1972. Since that time the editors have published a number of other studies drawing on pertinent data from Orasac; these are referenced when appropriate in papers in this collection. In addition, data from Orasac has been made available to provide American school children with an anthropological perspective on an East European rural community.

The study of a particular community for almost a quarter century has been a satisfying personal and intellectual experience. Such time depth also serves as a means of accumulating considerable ethnographic data, the justification for which can be made in terms of the new perspectives raised. Only an intensive
are based on a combination of the two approaches. By this is meant the explicit interrelating of computerized demographic and social structural data with sociolinguistic analysis of speech patterns pertaining to individual recollection, e.g., the mapping of kin relationships and other data over two centuries. This approach is hopefully seen as a step beyond describing and analyzing familial structure and kinship systems as is done in most social anthropological village studies.

The first paper, "Serbian Society in Karadjordje's Serbia, an Anthropological View," grows out of a joint research project with E.A. Hammel, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. It uses Hammel's statistical analyses of Serbian Medieval, Ottoman and 19th century census and tax records, and seeks to develop models of extended household structures in order to understand their cyclical patterns of change. This cooperative contribution is concerned with the social and household structure of Orašac at the time of its original settlement in the late 18th century and its development through the mid-19th century. It is also concerned with the interplay between ecological factors and the household cycle especially with regard to different types of land holdings and resource utilization.

The next paper, "Demographic and Social Change in the Village of Orašac: A Perspective over Two Centuries," using recent census data and vital statistics, brings analyses up to date by employing the case study approach applied to a selected sample of households principally in the period 1928-1975. Household formation, re-formation and cyclical data are combined with ethnographic observations. Taken together, papers Nos. 1 and 2 define the time frame within which traditional oral expression in the village has functioned as exemplified in the next two papers and is then treated comparatively in papers Nos. 5 and 6.

The essay "Thoughts on Communicative Competence in a Serbian Village" presents commentary on the more salient formal speech acts and aspects of informal speech in the village. It represents a preliminary analysis of an ethnography of communication in Orašac, currently being further worked out and expanded as fruitful approaches to this field of inquiry continue to develop.
"Genealogy as Genre" documents a discovery process. It chronicles how, in the course of eliciting kinship data, transmitted orally by informants (and duly committed to writing and diagrammatic triangles and lines by us as members of a literate society), we eventually came to understand that the complex lineages preserved "in the head" and orally transmitted had to be received aurally as well. By appreciating this it was possible to put down our pencils, listen, and abstract the underlying structure of genealogical recitation. Its epic mode is based on the teller's perception of his lineage as his own personal epos. An oral text is given with transliteration, accompanied by matching data from a previously elicited kinship chart. The data are analyzed structurally and metrically, and an Afterword provides corroborative data from other genealogical recollections.

The three-way collaborative effort in the paper, "Traditional Recall and Family Histories: A Commentary on Mode and Method," is an attempt to see how the recollecting of genealogical data relates to written (census and vital) records. Allowing for individual oral patterns of recall, motivation, selectivity and constraints, the two sources appear to match very well. A limitation in this analysis is that official records do not begin until the 1860's while genealogical recall starts at the logical beginning, the settlement of Orašac in the late 18th century. However, by using death and marriage records to establish birth dates the two types of data are brought into approximate chronological parity. This article also is comparative in that it contrasts patterns of recall among the villagers in Akenfield, England and those in Orašac with respect to the use of kinship data and traditional modes of expression. The relationship between form of expression and process of recall is stressed here.

An ideal objective for data analysis would be to code and program computer linkages in the vital statistics and census data and relate these to individual conceptual mappings and also to suggest the process of selective recall among the possibilities theoretically available. While some data linkages have been established by hand and by machine, this remains a project for the future.
As a result of the kinds of data presented in this collection, we can now go beyond simple verification and begin to envisage total matrices within which individuals structure recall. The alternate pathway of recollection mapped by the old man who laments the end of his particular descent line in the "Genealogy as Genre" paper sums up the essence of this series of essays: he is simultaneously in touch with the beginnings and with the end of a village-centered oral tradition, the existence of which is documented in the first two articles.

Recollection of kinship links is, of course, only one kind of oral genre; at the same time the analysis of kin ties is but a single perceptual strand in studying social structural and demographic patterns. These factors are stressed in this Introduction because connecting the two establishes a fruitful means of analysis for understanding an essential dynamic which can be seen as the core of societal functioning. This is not to say that an oral tradition can exist and persist only within a lineage framework, but rather that once sets of social structures are defined, a matrix is established within which larger groupings--village, region and nation--are integrated.

Ideally one can envisage a multi-dimensional model of kin linkages, agnostic and affinal, with shared values articulated in patterned oral utterances in a constantly altering time frame. Such a model does not explain "everything," but it does present a way of viewing sociocultural process as means which is more comprehensive than discussing economic, sociostructural and ecological processes on the one hand and oral tradition and speech patterns on the other. We do not feel that these working papers have set up such a model, but perhaps they can begin to suggest kinds of relationships of conceptual entities which had previously been considered quite separate. Milman Parry and Philip Mosely might have approved. Milenko Filipović would have understood how it was done, but then he lived according to the epic pulse.

As a result of current collaborative work under National Endowment for the Humanities sponsorship, the editors invited John Miles Foley to contribute his particular expertise to the final paper in the collection, "Research on Oral Traditional Expression in Šumadija"
and its Relevance to the Study of Other Oral Traditions."
This was a fortuitous decision: in addition to a pre-
cise summation of field work carried out by the three
of us in Orašac in 1975 and analyzed through mid-1977,
he presents as background a succinct review of work in
the field of oral theory and concludes with a look at
our findings in relation to work in other oral tradi-
tions, particularly Old English. This added dimension
provides considerable comparative substance to the work
in Šumadija. (We are grateful to him as well for assist-
ance in the preparation of this collection for publica-
tion.)

Foley is careful to note, however, that all material
pertaining to Orašac and other villages in the area,
the field work situation itself and analysis of field
data to date is a cooperative venture, mainly between
himself and B. Halpern. Each has provided stimulation
to the other from his/her respective field. This
results in an analysis with a scope considerably broader
than that confined to conventional disciplinary boundaries.
Concrete results of these collaborative efforts include
"'Udovica Jana': a Case Study of an Oral Performance" and
the forthcoming publications, "Hybrid Prosody and Single
Half-lines in English and Serbo-Croatian Poetry" and
"Bajanje: Healing Magic in Rural Serbia."

The contributions to this Selection of Papers on
a Serbian Village stand on their own, each having been
written as a separate essay in the course of the past
several years. One was originally prepared for a
specialized conference and two to meet the topical con-
straints of panel presentations. Only papers Nos. 5 and
6 have been prepared especially for inclusion in this
collection, the former as an endeavor innovating inter-
disciplinary linkages and the latter to place the human-
ities aspect in comparative perspective. As a conse-
quence of these varying contexts, there is considerable
overlap in referencing.

Finally, writings by the present editors have
always acknowledged the hospitality and patience of local
officials and especially of the people of Orašac in aid-
ing our research and enhancing it as a meaningful human
experience. Over the years we have found that the
Orašani have more to teach us about the intricacies of
their cultural tradition than we could hope to learn in
two lifetimes.

Amherst
May, 1977

Barbara Kerewsky Halpern
Joel M. Halpern
NOTES


4These conferences were jointly sponsored by Boston, Brown and Harvard Universities, and the proceedings are currently being prepared for publication.


7. Social and Cultural Change in a Serbian Village, New Haven, Human Relations Area Files, 1956.


10. A Serbian Village in Historical Perspective, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972. Its Bibliography lists all publications pertaining to Orašac which appeared up to that date.