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Joel Halpern

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, jmhalpern@anthro.umass.edu

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MILENKO S. FILIPOVIĆ
1902–1969

MILENKO S. FILIPOVIĆ was born November 8, 1902, the eldest son of a railroad employee, in the town of Bosanski Brod, on the Sava River, the boundary between Bosnia and Slavonia. His elementary and high school education were completed in Visoko and Tuzla, and his university studies were pursued from 1921 at Belgrade under the direction of Jovan Cvijić, the founder of the school of human geography that has had such impact on the orientation of Balkan folk ethnography, and of Tihomir Djordjević and Jovan Erdeljanović. Professor Filipović earned his bachelor’s degree in 1925, taught high school in Sarajevo and in Veles (Macedonia), and was awarded the doctorate at Belgrade in 1928, with a thesis on the ethnic origins of the population near Visoko. He taught as a docent on the Belgrade faculty from 1928 to 1930, moving then to the post of associate professor at Skopje. Regarded as an undesirable by the occupation regime after the Axis invasion, he was pensioned in 1941; he found another post on the Belgrade faculty but was again pensioned off in 1943. In 1945 he assumed the position of curator at the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade, leaving it in 1950 for the status of research fellow in the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences until 1955. At that time he became professor of human geography and ethnology at the University of Sarajevo, where he remained until his retirement (after a severe heart attack) in 1962. In 1964, after long efforts, he succeeded in finding a home in Belgrade, where library facilities were better, and where he continued to occupy himself with field work, research, and writing. His death came suddenly on April 22, 1969, in a period of great scholarly productivity and during the completion of his magnum opus on the ethnology of Serbia.

Filipović’s contributions to Balkan ethnology were unusual in their number and importance. His bibliography contains about 380 items, including a number of papers in languages other than Serbo-Croatian. (A bibliography, 1924–1959, was published in 1960 in Zbornik matice srpske za društvene nauke 28:159–170; it contains 280 items, not including many reviews and minor notices.)

Filipović’s work is of particular interest to colleagues outside Yugoslavia because his theoretical and methodological orientations were considerably more modern than those of many other European students of European peasant society. To be sure, his interests would be regarded here as folkloristic and ethnographic, heavy on detail and with little theorizing; but these differences from American, English, or French fashion must be viewed in perspective. His works are devoid of the evolutionistic reconstruction popular in Europe until at least the first World War and reintroduced into several areas with the advent of Marxist influence and a revival of Morgan. Filipović’s ethnographies are unusual in their detail and scholarly documentation, and, even if not explicitly theoretical to the modern Western taste, they provide crucial data for the in-
vestigation of most modern questions. A large number of the ethnographic descriptions making up the remarkable corpus presented in the volumes of Srpski etnografski zbornik, Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena, and publications of numerous museums and local and national scientific societies place almost sole emphasis on population movements, material culture, and the exotica of folkloristic "customs." Relatively little emphasis is placed on social organization, but Filipović's works are outstanding in this respect. The experience behind them was wide, as well as intensive; he had done more than forty years of fieldwork on separate projects such as the following: Bosnia and Hercegovina 1925–1941, 1950–1957, 1962–1969; Montenegro 1933; Kosovo-Metohija 1933, 1940, 1947, 1949; Serbia 1950–1951, 1954, 1956; the Vojvodina 1947–1950; Macedonia 1929–1934; Slovenia 1966–1967, and others, and his research included a long interest in Serbs in the United States.

Professor Filipović's death, although a sudden one, was not unexpected. He had had continuing difficulties since his heart attack of 1962, but his tempo of work abated only when he was too sick to write, speak, or move. He went about his research with a grim determination to document the folk life of the Balkans in accordance with the highest standards of scholarship. Among his friends, he was sometimes referred to as "stari vuk," the old wolf. His life and his relations with the world had always had the character of a contest. He was regarded with suspicion under the Austrian occupation of Yugoslavia in World War I and as an unreliable during the several regimes of the interwar period. He was again suspect during the Axis occupation and in the postwar period he continued to assert his points of view vigorously. It is difficult to be an objective scholar, with a congenital distrust for compromise or sham, and an internationalist in a small and beleaguered country, but Filipović maintained just that position with characteristic stubbornness. He was fluent in English, French, and German as well as in his native tongue and was well acquainted with Macedonian, Slovenian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Albanian, Latin, Greek, and a variety of other languages. Many of his Serbian monographs had article-length English summaries. He spent a year at Harvard in 1952 with a Rockefeller grant, an experience that greatly broadened his theoretical views, was a Foreign Fellow of the American Anthropological Association, a Fellow of Current Anthropology and of the American Geographical Society, a permanent member of the Science Division of Matica Srpska in Novi Sad (the oldest Serbian cultural organization), a member of the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore in Paris, the Academy of Arts and Sciences of Bosnia-Hercegovina in Sarajevo, and the editorial board of Ethnology, and was editor of Etnološki pregled (Belgrade). He was one of the founders of the Ethnological Society of Yugoslavia and was its first president, before World War I. For years he had maintained the most cordial and helpful relations with his American colleagues. Many of us owe our initial field orientation in the Balkans to him; we have profited from distillations of his lifetime of experience and we have entrusted our students to his care and courtesy when we sent them into the field.

Milenko Filipović leaves his wife Marija (a former teacher), a daughter Radmila (curator of ethnology at the Sarajevo Museum), another daughter Mirjana (a gymnasium professor of mathematics), and four grandchildren. He leaves also a host of friends and of admirers, in Yugoslavia and abroad, who remember him with gratitude for his kindness and with admiration for his scholarship, energy, courage, and determination. His life was one of achievement and, with pregnant symbolism, it came full circle only ten days before his death when he returned to Visoko, in his beloved Bosnia, the town in which he went to primary school, the area covered in his doctoral dissertation and in yet another monograph, to
receive from the people of the region a medal honoring him as a scholar, a man, and a patriot on the anniversary of their liberation from the Axis powers.¹

JOEL M. HALPERN
University of Massachusetts

E. A. HAMMEL
University of California, Berkeley

NOTE

¹ The authors are indebted to Dr. Vera S. Erlich of Zagreb and to Radmila Fabijanić Filipović for their courtesy in furnishing some of the data for this obituary. Dr. Erlich’s own obituaries of Professor Filipović are published in Südost-Forschungen, Sociologija sela, and Current Anthropology. An article entitled “The Life and Work of Professor Milenko S. Filipović” (with English summary) was published by Manojlo Gluščević and others in Geografski pregled 6:13–24, 1962, on his retirement from the University of Sarajevo.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MILENKO S. FILIPOVIĆ

(Works in English, French and German only)