

Nicola Scaldaferri (ed.), *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs. The Albanian Epic in the Collections of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord*, with the collaboration of Victor A. Friedman, John Kolsti, and Zymer U. Neziri, Paperback, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2021, 432 pp., ISBN 9780674271333.

Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord based their work on oral poetry largely on findings from their study trips in southwestern Europe. Parry's first study trip to what was then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia took place «in the summer of 1933» and the second one together with Lord «from June 1934 through August 1935» (Elmer 2013: 341, 343). After Parry's death in 1935, Lord undertook a further trip to northern Albania in 1937 (Lord 1948: 43). The researchers worked with singers who spoke and sang in Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and/or in Albanian. While important publications on songs from the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature (MPCOL) at Harvard University performed in Slavic languages followed after World War II (e.g. Bartók and Lord 1951; Parry and Lord 1954), there were only a few publications which focussed on particular issues of the Albanian songs of this collection (e.g. Kolsti 1990; Neziri 2003; Scaldaferri 2012; Neziri and Scaldaferri 2016) until the present volume. Thus, it is understandable that this publication has been greatly expected both in the field of oral poetry in general and that of Albanian studies in particular.

The volume contains a complete catalogue of the Albanian texts and sound recordings collected by Parry and Lord; the lyrics in Albanian with accompanying English translations of twelve selected songs, including a number of musical transcriptions, as well as photographs, most of them from Lord's trip to northern Albania in 1937, letters by Albert Lord from that trip, and two maps, including one about «Places touched by Albert B. Lord in Northern Albania during his research in 1937» (p. 385). The value of this very careful work increases when one considers that most of this material is published here for the first time. The volume is completed by an introductory chapter and four essays which focus on the contents and contexts of the materials by drawing attention to their significance.

The first two songs presented in the volume are *Muji e Gavran Kapetani* ("Muji and Gavran Kapetan") and *Mark e Musa* ("Marko e Musa"). They were performed by Salih Ugljanin. In the volume's preface Nicola Scaldaferri emphasizes that the «publication of these Albanian songs fills a major lacuna in the attested work of this singer, who was of central importance in Parry and Lord's research, since hitherto only Ugljanin's performances in Slavic have been made known to the public» (p. VIII).

The next three songs were performed by Fatima Biberović. The first of them, "The Song of the Turkish Cakes", was already mentioned in the publication by Albert B. Lord and Belá Bartók in the context of female song traditions (1951: 251-252, 367). However, the songs performed by Biberović «were not taken into consideration» in that volume «precisely because Fatima sang in Albanian rather than Slavic» (p. IX). Presenting songs from Biberović in this volume thus fills another gap in the presentation of Parry and Lord's work.

The other seven songs stem from Lord's trip to northern Albania in 1937. They have been chosen due to «the representativeness of the singers, who are the most important of their generation; the composition of the repertoires of the various singers» and «the connection between these texts and the other areas of research to which Parry and Lord dedicated themselves, especially the poetic repertoires of the Slavic community» (*ibidem*). The idea of the «representativeness of the singers» and their importance initially sounds questionable from an ethnomusicological viewpoint, since the researchers «realize that knowledge gained during research is not the product of objective observation but of particular interactions between individual fieldworkers and the individuals in a community with whom they work» (Rice 2014: 79). In this sense, the first of above-mentioned selection criteria refer specifically to singers who were important for Lord's research and highly esteemed by other singers and local communities. A considerable amount of information about them can be found both to the introduction to the volume by Scaldaferri and in the third essay by Zymer U. Neziri. The intention of Parry and Lord to work together with knowledgeable individuals was also noticed by David Elmer when analysing Parry's work: «Of course, like any collector, Parry looked for the most knowledgeable and proficient informants he could find» (2013: 341).

The introductory chapter by Scaldaferri is an attempt to reconstruct «an overall picture» of the research by Parry and Lord «by locating it within the context of its time and the methodologies that were then in practice» (p. XI). This is done by discussing the results of an extensive range of studies on the subject up to today. In addition, Scaldaferri draws attention to elements that «could provide stimulus for future readings and re-examinations of these materials not least with regards to new research paradigms that are being developed as we speak» (*ibidem*). In this context he mentions for example aspects of «the creation of the audio recordings, which were fundamental for the success of Parry and Lord's travels in 1934 and 1935» and which offer subjects for enquiry into areas such as media archaeology, sound studies, sensorial approaches, the entwinement of material music objects, technology and memory (cf. Roy 2020) or issues of repatriation and national patrimony (p. 8).

In addition, for Scaldaferri, Parry's work presents «in numerous aspects [...] strongly modern characteristics, which one would not hesitate to describe as dialogical: his research, in fact, can be described at various levels as collaborative» (p. 9). This remark is based on the ways Parry cooperated with singers and local collaborators, which was also the case in Lord's work (p. 25). The method of dialogic fieldwork has been discussed more intensively in the anthropology from the second half of the 1970s onwards (e.g. Dwyer 1977), which means decades after Parry's fieldwork. The discussion on this method became necessary over the course of the debates on the so-called «crisis of representation» in the 1980s and 1990s referring to the power relations within which anthropological research had been historically conducted (cf. Clifford and Marcus 1986). For James Clifford «the principle of dialogic text production goes well beyond the more or less artful presentation of «actual encounters». It locates cultural interpretation in many sorts of reciprocal contexts, and it obliges writers to find diverse ways of rendering negotiated realities as multisubjective, power-laden, and

incongruent. In this view, ‘culture’ is always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* [italics in the original] subjects in relations of power» (Clifford 1986: 14-15).

Of particular interest in the introduction to the present volume are also the focus on and insights from Lord’s trip to northern Albania in 1937, putting this undertaking in the context of the time and presenting a large amount of useful information from Lord’s records about the everyday life, customs and traditions in the areas in question.

Other insights into the research work of Parry and Lord are given in the following essay by John Kolsti “Milman Parry, Albert Lord, and the Albanian Epics”. Kolsti studied with Lord and completed his dissertation on the bilingual singers (1990) under Lord’s supervision. One of the issues in Kolsti’s essay is the discussion about the aim of Parry and Lord to «comprehend the manner in which they [the singers] compose, learn, and transmit their epics» (Lord 2000: XXXV). Elmer also has noted that Parry «deliberately spent time recording multiple versions of songs he had already documented, so as to understand better the manner in which they were recomposed in performance» (2013: 341). Based on his own research, Kolsti states that this approach «applies to bilingual as well as monolingual singers» (p. 48). It is also of interest that Kolsti calls attention to the observation made by Lord concerning the musical instruments with which the singers accompany particular repertoires. The one-string bowed lute called the *lahutë* in Albanian and *gusle* in Bosnian is the instrument with which epic songs are accompanied, while with the long-necked plucked lute called the *çifteli* and *tambura* are accompanied mostly historical songs (p. 50; see also Lord 2000: 28-29). Interestingly enough, this still holds true even today in the majority of the local practices in question.

In the next essay Zymer U. Neziri discusses the contexts and contents of the songs collected by Lord in northern Albania in 1937. Neziri provides substantial new information about singers and individuals with whom Lord collaborated as well as about local collectors in the areas where the songs were and still are part of local practices. Neziri acquired the information about them for the most part during extensive fieldwork he has conducted since the 1970s, unlike almost any other.

Neziri also notes in his essay that: «A complete thematic index for Albanian epic does not yet exist. Such an index would have to take into account all of the material collected by scholars in Tirana and Prishtina. This material, in combination with the material from Lord’s collection, amounts to some four hundred thousand lines, many of them still unpublished» (p. 60). He himself initiated and is working on the realisation of the long-term project *Epika Legjendare e Rugovës* (The Legendary Epic of Rugova) for the publication of over 100,000 lines of recorded material (Neziri 2009: XVIII-XIX) and presenting the results of the collaboration with each performer.

The third essay, written by Nicola Scaldaferrri focusses on the lyrics, music and performance of the songs, paying attention to the *performance philology*, structural components of the music and its cultural meaning (p. 70). Scaldaferrri argues for the importance of musical

aspects in the analysis as indispensable for the songs' performances. From this perspective the recordings of entire performances by Milman Parry «marked a turning point in the research» (p. 73). Scaldaferrri mentions the impact of these recordings, among other things on the work of Béla Bartók and of George Herzog, one of the founders of the Society for Ethnomusicology. In the second section of the essay there is a detailed analysis of the song *Muji and Gavran Kapetan* performed by Salih Ugljanin and in the third one a discussion about the movement of rhythm and writing of the body, in which an analysis of recent performances of the songs is also included. In this context the role of the accompanying instrument is of special importance, since «it is extremely difficult for singers to perform verses of epic song without the help of the instrument» (p. 83). The fact that the music performed on the instrument is not included in the musical transcriptions of the volume might be connected with the technical quality of the chosen recordings. In the analysis of the song *Muji and Gavran Kapetan*, for example, Scaldaferrri writes: «It is not possible to establish with precise certainty the metronomic indication (the exact tempo indication in beats per minutes) because of certain irregularities in the audio recordings owed to the type of apparatus employed (in addition, during the switch from one disc to another there can be some oscillation in pitch due to some irregularities in the speed of each disc)» (p. 77). In this context it should be mentioned that the inclusion in the analysis of the music performed on the instrument has helped in previous studies to new perspectives in the research of verse structures (cf. e.g. Zheji 1988).

In the fourth essay of the volume, Victor A. Friedman, a well-known specialist in linguistic studies of several languages, discusses in detail the epic admirative in Albanian. He analyses the use of admirative forms as «an element of Albanian epic poetry that is both unique to it in a Balkan context and not translatable [...]. The Albanian admirative is a set of verb paradigms that, in ordinary usage, convey surprise, disbelief, or the unwillingness of the speaker to confirm a report – without, however, casting any doubt upon it, but rather simply emphasizing that the information is second hand» (p. 85). After giving «some general orientation regarding the history of the admirative and its use in everyday speech» (p. 86), Friedman analyses in detail the use of admiratives in Albanian epics and their specificities in relation to the spoken and written Albanian prose.

At this point I would firstly like to emphasize that the results of the work presented in this volume constitute a strong basis for further research on a repertoire which still exists in the everyday life, enabling at the same time its understanding as a part of local traditions. In relation to this, I would like to refer to two issues. The first is connected with the main title of the volume: *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs*. The noun “song”, as a translation from the Albanian “këngë” or rather “kâng” in the corresponding language variety, and as discussed by Scaldaferrri in the introduction based on a rich background literature, is still used in everyday practice, and is therefore most appropriate for the title of the volume. The same can be said about the adjective “wild” as a translation of the Albanian term “të egra/t'egra”. This term has obviously been taken over from Ernest Koliqi's work with the singer Gjergj Pllumi from Theth in northern Albania (p. 22). This adjective is still used often until today by performers

to characterise these songs. The second adjective, “sweet”, which would be “të ëmbël/t’àmël” in Albanian, is not. A discussion about the use of the second adjective in the title would have been helpful to know more about its possible connections with the local terminologies, which would mean with the understandings of the performers and the communities among whom the songs have been and still are part of everyday practice. As is well known, local terminologies are a basis upon which local aesthetics are deployed and they influence everyday practice and its perception substantially.

The second issue arises from the special significance given to musical components in the research of the songs in this volume as well as the perception of their practices as part of manifold traditions in which the singers of these songs have an active role. The research since the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has shown that these singers also perform other musics as well as dances and play on other instruments. Including this aspect in the analysis of their performances and their behaviour would help to better «explain the social and cultural environment» in which the skills and talents of the performers are «developed and supported» and the ways in which they participate «in social and cultural systems» (Rice 2014: 79).

The collaboration between specialists from different fields of research in the making of this volume multiplies the importance of its results. On the other hand, the intention to make «the MPCOL Albanian materials [...] directly accessible online» (p. X) as an additional step for their dissemination would be all the more a step to also inspire future readings and farther interactions, including those by diverse artists, similar to cases depicted by Scaldaferrri (p. 74) and McMurray 2020.

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