

6-1977

Chapter 5, Selected Papers on a Serbian Village: Social Structure as Reflected by History, Demography and Oral Tradition

Joel Halpern

University of Massachusetts - Amherst

Barbara Halpern

University of Massachusetts - Amherst

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Halpern, Joel and Halpern, Barbara, "Chapter 5, Selected Papers on a Serbian Village: Social Structure as Reflected by History, Demography and Oral Tradition" (1977). *Research Report 17: Selected papers on a Serbian Village: Social Structure as Reflected by History, Demography and Oral Tradition*. 7.

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TRADITIONAL RECALL AND FAMILY HISTORIES:

A COMMENTARY ON MODE AND METHOD

by

Barbara Kerewsky Halpern,
Joel M. Halpern
Univ. of Massachusetts, Amherst

John Miles Foley

The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, Harvard

How do individuals structure recall of their collective pasts? Is the transmitted information affected by the form of recall? How do the values of the narrator condition the data being presented? Does oral recall match archival and other written records? To what extent are the attempts of the field investigator limited by the communicative competence and reference frame of the informant?

The following discussion, integrated from three academic perspectives, seeks to look at these questions and to suggest ways in which the relationships between traditional oral recall and written records may be viewed. Anthropological fieldwork has tended to rely on key informants for a significant portion of socio-cultural data collected. It is considered good practice to cross-check accounts, where possible, with a number of informants and to augment and corroborate oral recollections with published and archival sources if available.

Given the importance of such field methodology, adequate attention has not been paid to the ways in which informants structure matters of importance to them (or of interest to the investigator)--national and regional history, customary practices, genealogical information and other data. This concern is particularly pertinent with regard to genealogical data which have figured so importantly in social anthropological research. It is vital as well to the growing field of historical demography in which demographers, social historians and anthropologists have begun to evidence much interest.

The matter is not one of merely checking the accuracy of an informant's recall against a census, vital record or other document, for this would bring into question an

underlying assumption that it is the written record which is assumed to be the more "accurate," that is, more complete. Rather, by using both types of sources and a diversity of informants and records, one can then utilize these information pools in a mutually illuminating fashion.

Realistically, however, one does not too often encounter the ideal situation of a rich oral tradition¹ coexisting with extensive documentation. Northern Europe, especially Scandinavia (and also to a considerable extent New England), has preserved abundant demographic and genealogical records; in these areas there has long been interest in such topics in an applied way, particularly by individuals wishing to trace their own ancestries. Yet this very notion of reconstruction by means of written records, and the compilation of written genealogies from such records, is a manifestation of the absence of a living oral tradition such as exists in parts of the Balkans, Africa and elsewhere. On the other hand, in areas of the world where anthropologists have done extensive studies of lineages and descent groups, as for example in parts of Africa, there has generally been a lack of census and vital records, particularly for the period before World War II and especially prior to the 20th century.

The Balkans represent perhaps an intermediate position. There exist some records from Byzantine, Ottoman and 19th century periods as well as a viable (albeit weakening) oral tradition. In the course of initial work in Orašac in the early 1950's the Halperns collected a series of genealogies as part of a general descriptive ethnography of the region. (At that time the investigators had not developed interest in either historical demography or the structure of traditional oral expression, nor were they then aware of the existence of an extensive body of archival documentation bearing on the village--so, in a way, the on-going study of Orašac village has also been one of personal discovery, reflecting as well evolving research emphases within the larger scholarly community.) Some years after publication of the original monograph (1956) J. Halpern came across the existence of a complete household census for Orašac for 1863.² In attempting to match some apparent inconsistencies between orally transmitted lineages and census data, the researchers gradually became aware that complex genealogical information was often being preserved and transmitted according to a definite structure, or mapping of the complex

data in the informant's head. Frequently this mapping strikingly paralleled the structure of traditional epic poetry.³ By the time tape recording of such data was begun in the village in 1966, unfortunately many of the most articulate members of the tradition were deceased or enfeebled.

There exists, of course, a very rich ethnographic tradition throughout Yugoslavia, including both for the study of folk poetry and folklore, beginning in the 19th century, and a highly developed, separate research tradition of tracing population movements and settlement patterns in order to reconstruct what are, in effect, lineage histories.⁴ These important works, however, are considered by Yugoslav scholars as distinctly separate fields of inquiry, and we can find no instances where the two have been linked.

Such a linkage is our goal in this paper. In order to carry it out, we propose (1) to examine the role of oral transmission in everyday village life, (2) to offer contrastive material from a contemporary English village where oral tradition exists in an attenuated form;⁵ and (3) to present in detail an analysis of how the oral "pulse" is perpetuated in the course of transition to writing.

First, it is crucial to emphasize that there is no occasion, ceremonial or otherwise, when an Orašac elder might recall his lineage. It is part of him, something he has internalized. He might transmit the information as heritage to a son or grandson when he felt the social context to be appropriate. There are no rules or rituals governing such transmission. Also of importance is the fact that in Orašac and Serbia generally there is no tradition of written personal records such as are found elsewhere, in family Bibles for example.

The presence of ever-questioning researchers motivated many genealogically relevant responses (and since this is a culture where identity of self is all-important the inquiries worked both ways: the investigators in turn often had to respond to villagers' persistent queries about our own origins and ancestors). Records do exist, beginning with 1863 as we have indicated, but it simply would never occur to a village elder to walk down the road to the village clerk's office and attempt to reconstruct his sub-lineage from the written documentation.

Most of the men who recollected their genealogies had had at least four years of schooling and thus possessed minimal literacy. Each individual appears to carry with him an idiosyncratic mapping of his particular lineage (usually endowed with positive attributes) which he is then capable of verbalizing in a range of modes (epic narrative; more economical verbally (but still poetic); with or without grammatical case-endings; in the male line only or with the addition of in-marrying brides and consanguineally related females) according to his interpretation of what the social situation calls for. Some of those immersed in the tradition can recollect the structure of other people's lineages as well, but here, not surprisingly, discrepancies with the written record appear greater.

The village church vital records (birth, marriage, death) were kept by the local priest until shortly after World War II. Official state census records reflect (in common with the orally transmitted material) a different set of needs. Collectively they all provide data on the total population, including for example infant mortality, second marriages and adoptions into a lineage (e.g. when a woman brings a child of an earlier marriage to the household of her second husband and that child adopts the step-father's surname). Interestingly, we are able to reconstruct that precisely such a case occurred in Orašac about a century ago. The adopted son appears as a counted male member of the adoptive household in the 1863 census, but in 1954, when a member of that lineage recollected the genealogy orally, the adopted male was specifically excluded by the informant.

An important factor in evaluating oral versus written accounts is the stability of the population. When a person migrates from the village he tends to drop out of both systems, although some contact may be personally maintained with his extended household. Oral recollection may include some detail on the individual himself, and he may retain land in the village and choose to be buried in the village cemetery. In such ways, therefore, he does maintain a continued existence in the collective village consciousness. Conversely, facts like these may not be reflected in some oral genealogical accounts where the descent lines of those who have left the village, for whatever reason, are truncated. (Ne znam, pravo da ti kažem. On [je] pustio selo. Posle toga ne znam šta mu je bilo. I don't know [what happened to him], to tell you the truth.⁶ He left the village. After that

I don't know how it was with him.) Prior to World War II and especially before World War I, when the population was overwhelmingly rural, there was relatively little migration of males, although many females, of course, did marry out of the village). Therefore, the fact that detailed oral genealogies exist at all appears to be correlated with a certain population stability.

From an historical point of view, the ability of an individual to recall a lineage of several ascending generations and two or three descending generations was maximized for those born in the last decade of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th centuries. Viewed from the perspective of these same individuals in their mature years, as on the eve of World War II, the village had already existed for a century and a half with a pattern of population stability (extensive migrations did not begin until the mid-1950's). The village population had peaked, and the lineages were at their maximal lateral extension. (The population in 1961 was at approximately the same level as in 1910, with decreases in the intervening years, but there had been considerable migration by members of the major lineages during that half century.)

Even differences noted by the researchers investigating lineages in the early 1950's as compared to twenty years later are significant because of the considerable changes caused by migration. Pertinent to this paper are those types of changes reflected in the potential for recall and also factors affecting the socio-psychological setting for discussing village-based kin groups with older villagers who recollected "how it used to be."

A contrasting perspective is provided by the baseline year 1863, the time of the first complete Serbian census. There had been censuses prior to that date, but they counted males only and appear not to have been preserved. From a detailed study of the genealogy of the Stojanović lineage, it can be established that none of the sons of the lineage founder were alive at the time of the 1863 census, but the record indicates that all of their wives were. In one instance it was apparently a second wife (the mother of the man who adopted the lineage name). At that date the eldest female recorded for the lineage was 67. She lived until 1871, and one of her sisters-in-law survived until 1888. While neither wives nor daughters are normally included in an orally recollected genealogy, they are nevertheless often recalled as individuals. When this is done it is not systematic, as in

the genealogical recall structure, but is based on particular incidents or personality traits.

In the course of discussing with Deda Mileta Stojanović⁷ outstanding events in his lifetime, he mentioned (in addition to wars and military service) specific occurrences such as the year in which his own grandfather died and the age at which his father's brother's eldest son died. In such details of oral recall there is approximate correspondence, within a year or two, to the written vital records. For more distant kin, as in the case of statements concerning his paternal grandfather's brother's great-grandchildren, who were in a collateral nephew relation to him, there is lack of correspondence between the informant's recollection and the written record. In two instances Grandfather Mileta omits mention of male children who died (including one who survived to age 5). It is apparent that these were not socially significant facts to the informant, or perhaps, put more precisely, those males born to descendants of his grandfather would be recollected even if they did not survive, while those belonging to collateral lines exhibit apparent irregular recall. On the other hand, where males survive to produce children of their own and continue residence in the village, all links are recalled in both ascending and descending generations. The particular oral genealogy which we are discussing has a multi-generational depth with 105 males recollected, 101 of whom are named. Some 10 are omitted according to the vital records; all of these died in infancy or in childhood.

In this culture women do not recount genealogies. This appears to be due to a strong prevalence of patri-locality and related emphasis on patrilineality in this formally patriarchal society with its tradition of the extended zadruga household, almost always with a male household head in the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁸ However, given the longer survival of women in the second generation from the lineage founder, as clearly documented in the 1863 census, one wonders what role they might have played in perpetuating the oral history of the particular lineage into which they married. We do not know how long the second generation wives survived their spouses, but we can measure the years of their collective survival from 1863, when the husbands of all three were not recorded and were therefore presumably deceased. (We can assume with reasonable certainty that their husbands were

then dead, because all three women are listed in the census as mothers of a succeeding generation rather than as wives). Collectively these three women, the oldest of whom was born in 1796, lived some 49 years beyond 1863. (The census of 1863, like many older population lists, tends to record ages in rounded numbers, while the death records give precise age; thus these women were listed as being ages 60, 50 and 40 respectively, while according to their death records it can be reconstructed that they were actually 67, 45, and 39 in 1863.) In any case, the stated 49 years of their combined survival beyond 1863 seems a reasonable inference. The eldest appears to have been a child of 8 at the time of the death of the lineage founder (Stojan is said to have died fighting the Turks during the First Serbian Revolt of 1804). One can reasonably suppose that these women, in the years following their husbands' deaths, played a role in orally preserving lineage history. Similar evidence is apparent among certain village women even today.

It is speculative to attempt to derive precise social structural relationships from study of the epic tradition (as compared to oral tradition generally). Nevertheless, recurrent and very prominent in many epic motifs are the strongly affective bonds between mother and son, so suggestive of a vital, positive relationship. Further, this was a relationship lacking conflicts implicit between father and son, with regard to authority and inheritance, for example. This lack of overt conflict is also evident in epic narrative and lyric descriptions of the close bonds between brother and sister as opposed to brother and brother.⁹

The marital circulation of women resulted in initial divided loyalties between lineage of origin and the lineage into which they married. These were usually resolved with the passage of time, in favor of orientation toward their sons' lineage versus the increasing temporal distance from that of their fathers and brothers. It is necessary to connect this mother/son dyad with the strongly affective relationship, often mentioned by villagers, of son to uncle (ujak), mother's brother. Unlike the case with father's brother, (stric), potential conflict resulting from co-residence, shared economy and a potentially shared inheritance was not present. This might be seen as a contradiction of the notion of mothers helping to reinforce their sons' genealogical knowledge, but on the other hand, receiving information from one's mother can have a strong reinforcing effect, for it is the women who provide

this positive affect without which an agnatic-based system cannot operate. That is, a patriarchal structure lends itself to concentration of authority, with some built-in arbitrariness and tension. The ability to resort to a mother or to mother's brother at times provides a needed outlet for lessening potential social friction. One villager recalls going to reside with his mother's parents at a period in his young manhood when his paternal grandfather, head of his household, was imposing his will in a manner seen as unreasonable. In this context it can be understood why the role of starojko, the most important ritual witness at a young man's marriage, is his ujak (his father's brother or brothers have no ceremonial role).

In considering genealogy as an oral genre we are dealing with a verbal form of self-legitimization, a framework for orienting social relationships and a nexus for structuring recall of a great range of information. Tape recorders were not commonly used field tools at the time of the earlier field work.¹⁰ The investigators tried to compensate for this by encouraging selected older men to "write down" their autobiographies. Most were reasonably prudent, suggesting that we provide the paper and pencils, and were pleased to comply (often a grandfather dictated to a 10 or 12 year old grandchild).¹¹

A striking feature of all the autobiographies, in addition to the genealogical data they provide, is the great sense of belonging, of membership in a particular lineage and of transmission of this heritage. Both parents are always stated by name, and paternal grandparents are invariably mentioned. The number of siblings and the number of paternal uncles are also recounted. Some orally conditioned features of these written autobiographies will be analyzed in detail, below. First, however, it is of interest to compare them to analagous family histories available in a recent study of the English village of Akenfield. In Akenfield fathers are mentioned, but usually only in passing; grandfathers are noted occasionally and uncles not at all. In the Serbian data, whether with reference to grandparents, parents or one's own children, the number is always specified and usually the number of members of each sex is noted as well. Birth order of the individual is usually referred to in Orašac, and the dates of birth of the informant and his father are prime data. That is, it would appear that the format of the genealogy tends to underlie even written accounts such as these autobiographies. This contrasts with Akenfield, where an individual may be aware of a

relatively long, traceable descent, but if referred to at all it is in abstract terms only. In the Serbian accounts direct descent group is distinguished from collateral groups, and the value of continuity is strongly felt. (In addition, the linking of land division to vital events provides further structuring. The quantitative family data from Orašac are particularly noteworthy in comparison to material from Akenfield. Part of these differences in the quality of recollection, regardless of whether oral or written, may reflect differences between a land-owning peasantry in Serbia and agricultural laborers on rented lands in rural England.)¹²

Such differences are obvious to a degree, but contrasting the two kinds of accounts we can comprehend the frames of reference for recall and the ways in which a viable, intensely personal oral tradition provides the implicit structure for Serbian elders so conscious of their past. In Akenfield genealogical and family-household structural data tend to be episodic. Akenfield recollections, as in this passage from an account by a 71-year old farm laborer, are immediate and event-oriented:

There were ten of us in the family and as my father was a farm labourer earning 13s. a week you can just imagine how we lived. I will tell you the first thing which I can remember. It was when I was three -- about 1899. We were all sitting round the fire waiting for my soldier brother to come home -- he was the eldest boy in the family. He arrived about six in the evening and had managed to ride all the way from Ipswich station in a milk-cart. This young man came in, and it was the first time I had seen him. He wore a red coat and looked very lively. Mother got up and kissed him but Father just sat and said, 'How are you?' Then we had tea, all of us staring at my brother. It was dark, it was the winter-time. A few days later he walked away and my mother stood right out in the middle of the road, watching. He was going to fight in South Africa. He walked smartly down the lane until his red coat was no bigger than a poppy. Then the tree hid him. We never saw him again. He went all through the war but caught enteric fever afterwards and died. He was twenty-one. . . .¹³

The above passage is characteristic for Akenfield. Information is divulged only in the context of an event in an individual's life and not, as in Serbia, as a narrative of collectivity and kin continuity. In Akenfield, even where there exists a consciousness concerning ancestry, this is presented factually, in passing, but nothing more. An example of this type of awareness is provided by the beginning of the account by the Akenfield village blacksmith, age 46:

I was born in Akenfield. It was in the year 1923. I have spent all my life here. I have the family records back to the eighteenth century and my name is mentioned in Domesday Book. We were at Saxmundham then. Then there was a time when we got lost--right out Dennington way. But we found our path eventually. I have a lot of my grandfather's features, although I'm not so tall as he was. I have his hands. Hands last a long time, you know. A village sees the same hands century after century. It is a marvellous thing but it's true. My grandfather was a most extraordinary man and very headstrong. He'd got a way of his own and I tend to take after him. My father started work when he was ten and I started when I was fourteen . . . 14

Again, the account is clearly ego-oriented, yet here there is definitely a sense of links to the past. Also, interestingly, we note an echo of the need to tell things truly.¹⁵

It has been stated that in almost every Orašac account genealogical and extended family information is detailed; individuals are named and their relationships are specified (and even if some of this data were absent, the flow of narrative, consistently based not on self but on relationships within the family, would not be affected). As an example, the following is excerpted from the autobiography set down in shaky hand by Grandfather Živomir, a 73 year-old elder of the Andrić lineage in Orašac:

My father, who was born in 1843, told me about the situation after 1850 . . . And now something that I myself remember: I was born in 1881 in Orašac. My father was Milenko and my mother Leposava. My father was born into an old and rich zadruga. His father, Milivoje, who had no brothers or sisters, left the zadruga with his wife Ilinka, who gave birth to ten children: eight boys and two girls. She died when she gave birth to her tenth child. So my grandfather married Jelena, a widow from Bukovik. They had two more sons and daughters so that the total number of his children was fourteen: ten boys and four girls. Six sons and two daughters grew up and married while the rest died as children. After my grandfather's death, my father, being the eldest, remained the head of the zadruga while two of his brothers became . . . tradesmen.

My father married twice. With his first wife, Ljubica, he had two sons, both whom died in the same year, aged nineteen and twenty, and two daughters who died as children. The second time he married Radojka, a widow who brought him three children. With my father she bore four sons and a daughter, among whom I am the only one alive.

I married and I had three children. One son died in his sixth year, and the other is an engineer. He is married and has a son and a daughter. My daughter is married and has two sons . . . When I was born my father had two sons by his first wife and the zadruga divided.¹⁶

None of this information was elicited or requested. It was given because Grandfather Živomir sensed these details as among the important parameters defining his life. (This is not to suggest that Akenfield villagers consider vital family data unimportant, but rather that such data are not employed in structuring recall of their life histories, especially when those histories are requested by a stranger).¹⁷

Analyzing this fragment of an Orašac autobiography, we see that the informant begins with his father's recall before proceeding to his own recollections, thereby enhancing and legitimizing his own. By stating, "And now something that I myself remember," he relates segments of the history of his family which he cannot possibly have witnessed personally but received orally from his parents or grandparents. It is also of significance that in this prose account both males and females are included on an approximately equal basis, in contrast to the framework of the orally reconstructed lineages in Orašac.

Not all the autobiographies we collected are of this precise nature. Some of the basic dynamics, however, are present universally and persist through time. The above account was prepared by a man born in 1881; some of the same patterns appear in excerpts from the account by a 38-year old man:

I was born in 1916, in my paternal grandfather's house. My grandfather Zivota had a wife and five sons: my father Radosav, and my four uncles, Čedomir, Branislav, Miodrag and Slobodan, and two daughters, Desanka and Darinka. My Uncle Miodrag and Aunt Darinka died before my mother married my father. When my mother married my father there were eight in my grandfather's house, including my great-grandfather Marinko, and his wife, Zagorka . . . 18

Here again the genealogical setting is specified in detail in order to introduce the individual's own account (in all the Akenfield biographical data references are specifically to the informant's experiences and to what they themselves remember; there is mention of parents and occasionally grandparents, but such mention is fleeting and does not form the basis for introducing or structuring the narrative, as in the Orašac examples).

The younger Orašac man continues with statements made by his great-grandparents concerning their son, his grandfather. These comments are known to him only by means of oral transmission. He relates how his great-grandparents used to chide his grandfather:

. . . 'Oj, black Života, why don't you discuss your affairs with someone? If you don't want to with your father and mother, then do it with your sons. If you don't want to with them, go discuss your affairs with the mouse in the wall. May God kill you. Stop wandering. Don't you see that the house is going bankrupt because of you? The children are working and you are wasting.'¹⁹

With reference to our original case study of the Stojanović genealogy, Grandfather Mileta, when recounting his lineage orally, was directly in touch with an eight-generational structure. In recounting his own background he began by linking his lineage with that of two other Orašac lineages, describing how his ancestor Stojan, founder of the Stojanovići, came from Montenegro to Šumadija and settled in Orašac with his two brothers, each of whom founded a separate lineage in the newly settled village.

Direct continuity of oral transmission of the Stojanović lineage might come to an end since Grandfather Mileta's only grandson who grew up in the village (he had two others, by another son who had long since left the village) has since become a skilled mechanic residing in Belgrade. Recently, however, that grandson joined with his father in erecting a tombstone on the gravesite of his great-grandfather. The inscription bears the information that this is a memorial gesture of respect and honor on the part of the three descending generations: the long deceased's recently deceased son Mileta, the grandson in the village and the great-grandson now in Belgrade.²⁰

We stressed earlier that these lineage connections are used as referents for chronicling events in one's own life. Grandfather Mileta once stated, "Some four years after Nikola [his own grandfather] died, when I was 15, our zadruga divided." These facts coincide precisely with the vital records of the informant's birth and with the date of his grandfather's death. A single statement like this combines the essence of the significance of lineages within the system with the identification of self and with the linking of self to a named ancestor in an ascending pattern, setting the scene for what is often the most crucial economic and emotional event in the cyclical sequencing of household formation -- the division of the cooperative household unit and of its associated

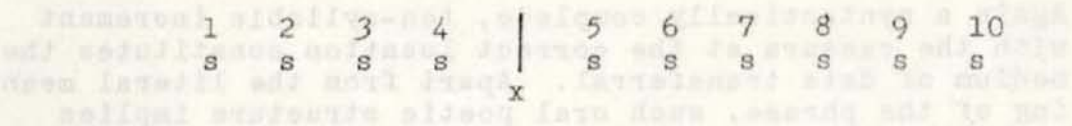
jointly held property. The remark, oriented in time by "when I was 15" is then placed in its most important kin context, "four years after Nikola died." Only then do we come to the social dynamics involved in the division: ". . . because my youngest uncle no longer got along with his brothers."²¹ Just as the autobiographical accounts of changing economic and societal conditions could have been recounted without detailed kin information, so an account of the division of the zadruga could have been presented without a ritualized introduction. Such an introduction, however, exactly parallels the epic narrative prologue, or pripev. It is just such structural features that reveal to us the most powerful values in Serbian village society, namely collectivity, continuity and preservation.²²

From the epic features of orally recollected genealogy and family history we turn now to detailed examination of the texts of the autobiographies, in an attempt to demonstrate oral characteristics even when recollection is set down on paper rather than transmitted in the traditional oral mode. The written sources, with examples translated from the original village dialect, provide this opportunity. Yet in analyzing possible traditional poetic features in the autobiographies, from the outset we must acknowledge certain aspects of the texts which call for modification of the usual analytical methods.²³ First, and most obviously, unlike the orally transmitted genealogies, these are written texts, some of them composed and set down by literate informants like Grandfather Živomir. As has been shown elsewhere,²⁴ literacy to some extent undermines retention of traditional form, and the usual oral structures soon give way to literate neologisms. In cases in which a school-age child wrote down what an elder dictated, we still have to deal with the inevitable editing, conscious or unconscious, involved in that process.²⁵

This observation brings us to a second point. Because writing adheres to a visible, recorded standard of representation, it involves a tacit but endemic suppression of oral poetic features such as elision and hyperlengthening. Whereas the oral poetic line regulates the number of syllables in a given phrase by deleting or, occasionally, doubling a relatively insignificant syllable, the written need for visual rather than aural accuracy will result in the "correction" of these "errors." When one adds the fact that the autobiographies are written in prose format, it becomes obvious that most poetic features tend

to be suppressed. Therefore, with few clues available on the surface, the statistical methods of formula analysis²⁶ are not applicable. Instead it is necessary to conduct a stylistic investigation, concentrating on the structure and significance of those textual elements that are demonstrably of traditional oral provenance. By placing these elements against the background of their prose matrix, it becomes possible to assess their real meaning and to judge their congruity in form and content with the non-poetic material which surrounds them.

Generally, notwithstanding the nature of the textual medium as described above, we can locate a surprising number of oral poetic features. The most obvious of these are phrases which approximate a whole-line structure, a decasyllable (epski deseterac), the meter of the epic tradition of this society.²⁷ This metrical structure has a number of characteristics, the most consistent of which are represented in the diagram below:



In addition to a constant ten-syllable quantity, a characteristic line has a caesura (syntactic break, marked by "x") between syllables 4 and 5, and therefore a two-part substructure of syllables 1-4 (colon 1) and 5-10 (colon 2). We observe a close approximation of this pattern in the opening phrase of Grandfather Živomir's autobiography:

Po predanju ostalom od starijih,

According to the tradition preserved by the elders,

The only divergence from the deseterac is an extra syllable in the second colon (ostalom od starijih), which results from the form of the final word, a comparative adjective used as a substantive. In poetic performance, or simply in the mouth of an elder accommodating his diction to traditional rhythm and format, this word might very well take the form ^xstar'ih (syncope of the medial syllable yields a two-syllable version) or simply starih (the "old ones"). Further, the comparative inflection of this particular word is very unusual in the epic poetry, and may have been introduced (or induced) by the process of writing; normally this would not occur in oral transmission. Lastly, from another point of view, an eleventh syllable

is a common enough phenomenon in the epic songs, where it appears as a run-over quantity which a guslar ("singer") might not avoid in the heat of performance.²⁸ As it stands the line is a very traditional one, and it takes its shape from the poetic principles of versification.

The meaning of this utterance is also traditional: it places value on the generic knowledge derived from the past and transmitted to the present. That it should occur at the opening of an autobiographical account is entirely logical, since most oral genres begin with a ritualized prelude.²⁹ Another line of similar structure and meaning, used to indicate the passage of information "s kolena na koleno" ('from one generation to the next'), occurs a few sentences later:

Po pričanju koje se prenosilo,

According to the accounts which were passed on,³⁰

Again a syntactically complete, ten-syllable increment with the caesura at the correct location constitutes the medium of data transferral. Apart from the literal meaning of the phrase, such oral poetic structure implies a traditional phenomenology, an outlook which derives value by placing the ephemeral present in the context of the past. As far as the absolute syllabic format of the line is concerned, either apocope of the second syllable of koje (e.g. *koj') or reduction of the reflexive se (to *s') would delete the eleventh syllable and make a standard deseterac unit. The line would then appear as:

*Po pričanju koj' se prenosilo.

or, *Po pričanju koje s' prenosilo.

Either of these possibilities could well have been obscured in the transcription process, since attention to standard written norms would demand reinstatement of the full lexical forms.

Some further examples of whole-line poetic phrases will serve to generalize our comments. The following five lines are taken from various parts of the autobiography, and from differing narrative and syntactic situations. (A hypothetical version of the phrase found in the text is suggested below the actual line if it does not conform exactly to the decasyllabic format and constraints.)³¹

(1) koje je bilo obraslo orasima,³²

* koje bilo obraslo oras'ma,

which was overgrown with walnut trees,

(2) Što su našli, to su zaplenili.

Whatever they found, they captured it.

(3) Počeli su kućiti iz nova.

They began to set up households anew.

(4) Radili su svi i žene i ljudi.

* Radili su svi zene i ljudi.³³

All the women and men worked.

(5) Sujeverje je bilo veliko.

There was a great deal of superstition.

Of particular interest are examples (2) and (3): each is transmitted in perfect metrical form, and each seems to carry with it the gnomic connotation so common in the epic. Example (2) describes the seizure of Serbian land and buildings by the Turks: "Whatever they found, they captured it." This phrase also shows internal syntactic balance in the colon structure; each subdivision consists of the pattern

PRONOUN (direct object) -- su -- VERB (3rd plural past)

syllables 1-4 što su našli

syllables 5-10 to su zaplenili

The colon-ends rhyme (-li) and the phrase as a whole is self-contained, with colon 1 an imbedded sentence in colon 2.

Example (3) furnishes another instance of colonic composition, since the infinitive kućiti ('to build a house' or 'to set up a household') is dependent on počeli

su ('they began'). In addition, the adverbial phrase iz nova ('anew'), while strictly speaking a modifier of kućiti, also corresponds poetically to počeli su. Both expressions describe a beginning, and they balance one another at either end of the phrase. Their relationship exists outside the demands of syntax, meter, syllable count and stress: it is a purely poetic relationship, and activates in both composer and after-the-fact audience a whole series of traditional connotations. Far from representing data in straightforward prose style,³⁴ this line carries with it crucial cultural assumptions grounded in tradition and brought into play by the highly traditional form of the phrase. It is important to keep in mind this gnomic character of both form and content as we examine further stylistic evidence of the influence of oral poetics.

Having treated examples of whole-line poetic phrases, we turn now to smaller six syllables strings (the length of colon 2 in the epski deseteterac, as explained above). These shorter verse-parts do not themselves generally contain an entire syntactic utterance, but they do show evidence of being syntactically integral subdivisions of larger structures. Consider the following group of examples:

- (1) s kolena na koleno 'from generation to generation'
- (2) iz svog rodnog kraja 'of their native region'
- (3) sa zapadne strane 'on the western side'
- (4) zgrade od drvete 'built of wood'
- (5) ostalih ženskinja 'of the remaining women'
- (6) kućnim zadrugama 'in the household zadrugas'³⁵
- (7) u odelu i obući 'in clothing and footwear'
- (8) Škola nije bilo 'There was no school.'
- (9) Niko nije krao 'No one stole.'

The first of these examples has already been mentioned in connection with the line "Po pričanju koje se prenosilo" and may well be linked semantically to that formulaic verse in the poetic tradition. But the structure of "s kolena no koleno," with its morphemic redundancy and

syntactic order (preposition-noun-preposition-noun), is traditional, patterned diction in its own right. Number (3) depends as much on its acoustic pattern as it does on the semantics conveyed (assonating vowels underlined):³⁶

sa zapadne strane.

Within the colon structure there is also near-rhyme in the closing syllables of the last two words (-adne/-ane). Example (7), like (1) and (3), is organized around an opposition of sound as well as sense. In this instance, the aural dialectic extends between odelu ('clothes') and obući ('shoes'); that is, it joins both these three-syllable objects of the preposition u, both of which begin with the sound /o/. The semantic relationship furthers the integration, but is not the only factor--here we note another feature in common with the other examples discussed: it is a true colonic "word," that is, a six-syllable increment which constitutes a significant syntactic sub-unit. All of these phrases satisfy the same general requirements and, along with the numerous similar verse-parts found throughout the narrative, provide abundant evidence of oral poetic structure.

Our brief survey of traditional oral features in this written prose source would not be complete without consideration of what may be termed "non-colonic formulas." Such repeating units of speech vary syllabically from one occurrence to the next, but the association of their constituent elements and their special, limited function help to preserve them in more or less the same form. The most straightforward way to illustrate the dynamics this poetic device is to quote a fragment of the autobiography in which the phrase

od kojih je docnije postala još familija (Variant 1)

from whom came afterwards the families [lineages]. . .

and its other variants are particularly prominent. Note that the passage in question is genealogical in nature:³⁷

. . . Andrići, od kojih, je docnije postala još familija Pavlovići, Anići, Ilići, Lukići, Nedići, Stanići, Matijaševići, Janići, Lazarevići, od kojih

su docnije postale familije Simići,
Vasiljevići, Vasilići, Stevanovići,
Petrovići, Perišići; Maričevići, od kojih
su sada familija . . .

As can be readily seen, this non-colonic formula can be as extensive as the form quoted above (Variant 1) or very brief (the form "od kojih je familija" appears a few lines below the passage above). With respect to its function, this formula not only serves the informant's (and the tradition's) purpose in detailing genealogical strata, but it also gives the entire progression a firm sense of tradition: the settling and building up of Orašac is the story of people and events with a historical continuity.

We conclude, therefore, that this prose autobiography (and others elicited during the same field session) exhibit a good deal of poetic structure, with many whole-line, colonic, and non-colonic patterns of diction throughout the narrative. This is not to say that the autobiography is poetry, but rather that it clearly owes much of its underlying structure and content to the traditional oral ethos. Many of the phrases are gnomic in nature; that is, they apply not simply to the particularized needs of the moment, but evoke the generic Weltanschauung of tradition. In that sense, what the informant is composing is larger than the story of a single person, for it derives from the cumulative knowledge of many generations. The modern Western notion of time- and space-bound "accuracy" is at best oblique to this sort of perception. As Grandfather Živomir himself says of his inherited story, as a testament to its truth,³⁸

To sam čuo od moga oca i od strajjih ljudi,
koji su to opet čuli od njihovih starijih,
da dodam još nešto.

I heard it from my father and from the elders,
who in turn heard it from their elders,
and I add my part.³⁹

NOTES

¹The systematic study of oral tradition, and specifically how traditional oral poetry was composed and perpetuated, began with Milman Parry and Albert Lord; see especially The Making of Homeric Verse: the Collected Papers of Milman Parry, ed. by Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), hereafter cited as MHV; and Lord's The Singer of Tales (1960; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1968), hereafter cited as Singer. See further Edward R. Haymes, A Bibliography of Studies Relating to Parry's and Lord's Oral Theory (Cambridge: Harvard University Printing Office, 1973). For the sake of convenience, we gloss two important terms at this point. First, on the meaning of "traditional language," Parry has remarked: "To establish in the Iliad and the Odyssey the existence of an artificial language is to prove that Homeric style, insofar as it makes use of elements of this language, is traditional. For the character of this language reveals that it is a work beyond the powers of a single man, or even of a single generation of poets; consequently we know that we are in the presence of a stylistic element which is the product of a tradition and which every bard of Homer's time must have used . . . We must know that this language was the creation of generations of bards who regularly kept those elements of the language of their predecessors which facilitated the composition of verse and could not be replaced by other, more recent, elements" ("The Traditional Epithet in Homer," MHV, p. 6, 7). On the method of the "oral poet," he writes: "The poet who composes with only the spoken word a poem of any length must be able to fit his words into the mould of his verse after a fixed pattern . . . In composing he will do no more than put together for his needs phrases which he has often heard or used himself, and which, grouping themselves in accordance with a fixed pattern of thought, come naturally to make the sentence and verse; and he will recall his poem easily, when he wishes to say it over, because he will be guided anew by the same play of words and phrases as before" ("Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making, I: Homer and Homeric Style," MHV, p. 269-70). For further discussion of the Parry-Lord theory and its development, see the Part I of Foley's "Research on Oral Traditional Expression in Sumadija and Its Relevance to Other Oral Traditions," paper No. 6 in the present collection. Also relevant

is Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition: a Study in Historical Methodology, trans. by H.M. Wright (Chicago: Aldine, 1965).

²For help with this significant acquisition the assistance of Stojan Djurdjević of the Serbian State Archive is appreciatively acknowledged.

³In paper No. 4 "Genealogy as Genre" B. Halpern deals with the background to this discovery and discusses, with examples, the structure of genealogical recall as conditioned by linguistic and cultural factors.

⁴Most notable among the former are the collected works of the versatile ethnographer-linguist-historian Vuk Stefan Karadžić (1787-1864), whose 14 volumes of Srpske narodne pesme (Serbian Folk Songs), the first of which was published in 1841, continue to appear in new editions. Among the latter, specialized work by the prominent geographer Jovan Cvijić (1865-1925), author of La péninsule balkanique and other geographies of South Slav areas, include an extensive human geography series Naselja i Poreklo Stanovništva (Settlement and Origin of Populations); the series continues up to the present, published by the Serbian Academy of Sciences. (Also of note for this period is a detailed ethnographic series on selected regions (Život i običaji narodni u . . . (Peasant Life and Customs in . . .), originally under the editorship of the ethnologist Tihomir Djordjević.)

⁵The data from Orašac are from Joel M. Halpern, A Serbian Village, New York, Harper and Row, 1967; the Stojanović genealogy appears on pp. 152-53. Fragments of several written autobiographies were published in the same book on pp. 30, 214, 220-22 (and, in an earlier Columbia University Press edition, (1958) on pp. 301-302), hereafter referenced as Village. Material from the English village is from Ronald Blythe, Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village, New York, Dell Publishers, 1969, hereafter referred to as Akenfield.

⁶The expression "Pravo da ti kažem" (or, since Serbo-Croatian has free word order, "da ti kažem pravo"), "to tell you the truth" is much more than an idiom -- it is a kernel of traditional diction, heard over and over again in this society and in other traditional cultures. Compare, for example, the following fragment of a conversation Parry's assistant Nikola Vujnović had with the guslar

Avdo Medjedović in Montenegro in 1935, almost 20 years before the quoted remark was transcribed in Orašac:
A: ". . . Ho' l' da ti slažem, ali [ili] da ti kažem pravo? N: "Pravo, pravo! A: "E!" N: "Pa tako treba."
(A: ". . . Do you want me to lie to you, or tell you the truth?" N: The truth, just tell me the truth!"
A: "Aye!" N: "Yes, we've got to get to the truth.").
Conversation trans. by David E. Bynum, in Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs, Vols. III and IV, The Wedding of Smailagić Meho (as performed by Avdo Medjedović); Trans., with introduction, notes and commentary by Albert B. Lord, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1974. Serbian text from Vol. IV, p. 49; English translation from Vol. III, p. 74.

But on this point we can go further afield both in time and space, to any traditional oral society, and note abundant evidence of the important value of getting at the heart of reality, of telling the truth. Consider, for example, this Old English fragment:

Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
sipas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum
earfoðhwile oft þrowade....

I can utter a truthful song about myself, tell of journeys, how I suffered in times of hardship, in days of toil . . .

(lines 1-3 of The Seafarer, ed. by I.L. Gordon (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966). Or, from Homer, a line which appears verbatim 13 times in the Odyssey and 4 times in the Iliad:

ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τόδε εἶπε καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον·

But come, speak it to me and tell me truly.

The references for these figures are: Henry Dunbar, A Complete Concordance to the Odyssey of Homer, rev. by Benedetto Marzullo (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962); and Guy Lushington Prendergast, A Complete Concordance to the Iliad of Homer, rev. by Benedetto Marzullo (Hildesheim, Georg Olms, 1971).

Returning to South Slav areas and to the present, the adjectival and adverbial form for 'true, real (pravo)' is synonymous with 'straight'; the contemporary vernacular, identical to the older, traditional expression, can therefore be glossed "Let me give it to you straight" or "Let me tell it like it is." The prevalence of this value attests to its continuity and importance among speakers in a traditional oral society.

⁷This kinship chart is reproduced in paper No. 4.

⁸Joel M. Halpern and David Anderson, "The Zadruga: A Century of Change," Anthropologica, 1970, N.S. 12: 83-97.

⁹The mother/son and brother/sister dyads are features of traditional social structure which continue despite many aspects of social change. One need only analyze the kin relationships as manifest in the epics, in the Kraljević Marko cycle, to name one example, to realize that the same values of pride, protection and honor are still very much part of the contemporary rural ethos.

¹⁰The village was not then electrified, portable battery-operated recorders were unreliable and on the one occasion when we arranged for relatively sophisticated recording equipment borrowed from Belgrade, some villagers and commune officials alike appeared intimidated. By the late 1960's battery-operated recorders had become part of our standard equipment (homes were by then electrified, but the villagers viewed plugging into their power as a situation fraught with unknown technical difficulties and, more importantly, as a financial imposition, so battery-operated units were used exclusively. Upcoming work in 1977- 78 will include a portable video-pack. So goes progress or, as the villagers call it, teknika.

¹¹This project turned out to be a bonus, for it provided the type of transitional (oral to written) data analyzed as the third part of this paper.

¹²Land tenure systems have influenced the formation of household structures generally. We know from the work of social historians such as Peter Laslett (The World We Have Lost, England before the Industrial Age, New York, Scribner's, 1971) that the nuclear family was prevalent in England even prior to the Industrial Revolution. In

Serbia, the destruction of the Serbian medieval kingdom at the time of the Turkish invasion in the 14th century was a key factor in preserving the patriarchal extended zadruga household and, importantly, in preserving a sense of origins and tradition.

¹³Akenfield, p. 33.

¹⁴Akenfield, p. 221.

¹⁵See note 6.

¹⁶Village, p. 200.

¹⁷(In the Akenfield study the investigator was a writer.)

¹⁸Village, p. 214. It is not our purpose to attempt a psychoanalytical approach to these autobiographies. It does seem pertinent, however, to note how individual personality orientations also structure recall. As the reader will observe, this particular villager mentions his mother before his father in two succeeding sentences, a rare situation in patriarchal Serbia. In subsequent commentary on his family history, he mentions an abusive and arbitrary paternal grandfather. We can note that within a formal patrilineal and patriarchal framework there may be strong negative affect and a degree of alienation from agnatic kin.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰In 1975, a few years after Grandfather Mileta's death, this now urban grandson, temporarily in Orašac to help his father with the haying, sat in the twilight on a three-legged stool his grandfather had made years ago, tilted it against the house foundation, looked across the yard to where the 'old house' had once stood, and began to recite the Stojanović genealogy.

²¹For a discussion of household cycles see Joel M. Halpern and Barbara Kerewsky Halpern, A Serbian Village in Historical Perspective, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972, pp. 39-40 and paper No. 2 in the present collection.

²²The characteristic epic opening sets the scene temporarily and spacially for the narrative about to unfold. See also note 29.

²³The classic procedures, developed by Parry and Lord for poetic texts (see note 1), involve a statistical analysis for repeated phrases and scenes. These techniques have been highly developed (see, for example, Berkley Peabody, The Winged Word [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975]), but are unsuited to the study of prose texts.

²⁴See "Writing and Oral Tradition," in Singer, pp. 124-38.

²⁵The edition of oral material, whether formal or informal, is one of the most neglected aspects of the analytical process. In situations where the material in question cannot be preserved as sound (i.e. on tape or the equivalent), many editorial assumptions -- from those involved in handwritten transcription to their counterparts in a standard scholarly text -- must be made. What is known of the Homeric editing process is well described in J.A. Davison, "The Transmission of the Text," in A Companion to Homer, ed. by A.J.B. Wace and F.H. Stubbings (London: Macmillan, 1962, rpt. 1969), pp. 215-33. The corresponding problem in Old English literature is discussed by Kenneth Sisam, "On the Authority of Old English Poetical Manuscripts," in his Studies in the History of Old English Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953, rpt. 1967), pp. 29-44.

²⁶Parry defined the formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea ("Studies I," p. 272).

²⁷For a detailed account of Serbo-Croatian epic meter, see Roman Jakobson, "Studies in Comparative Slavic Metrics," Oxford Slavonic Papers, 3(1952), 21-66. Since most informants were male and since autobiography is, generally speaking, a narrative genre, it is not surprising that the meter of the epic, sung by male guslari and itself a narrative genre, should be the influential meter for the autobiography.

²⁸These hyper-syllabic lines occur even in oral performances paced by the accompanying instrument, the gusle, but are especially prevalent in the unaccompanied dictation of songs.

²⁹The epic counterpart is the pripev ('proem'), which acknowledges the collective and ritualistic function of the oral performance; see John Miles Foley, "The Traditional Oral Audience," Balkan Studies, 17(1976), forthcoming; and Eugene E. Pantzer, "Yugoslav Epic Preambles," Slavic and East European Journal, 17(1959), pp. 372-81. See also note 22.

³⁰Translating pričanju as "account" is an accommodation. This gerund derives from pričati, "to say, tell, converse," a verb that carries with it the notion of a speaker-audience situation in which information is exchanged by narration.

³¹It is worth recalling at this point the fact that both long and short lines appear even in the compositions of epic singers.

³²Another possible deletion is: *koj' je bilo obraslo oras'ma. The starred form printed in the text is, however, more likely, since the auxiliary je is very often omitted in the poetic genres.

³³Another possible deletion is: *Radili su svi i žen' i ljudi.

³⁴We should not lose sight of the fact that prose also activates certain responses simply through its form. But because this form is more similar to everyday speech, we need not pause here to describe its particular impact.

³⁵On the zadruga, see Joel M. Halpern and Barbara Kerewsky Halpern, A Serbian Village in Historical Perspective op. cit., pp. 16-44.

³⁶Compare Albert B. Lord, "The Role of Sound-Patterns in Serbo-Croatian Oral Epic," in For Roman Jakobson (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), pp. 301-5; and Roman Jakobson, "Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry," in Studies in General and Oriental Linguistics, ed. by Roman Jakobson and Shigeo Kawamoto (Tokyo: TEC, 1970), pp. 302-8.

³⁷See Barbara Kerewsky Halpern, "Genealogy as Genre," paper No. 4 in this collection.

³⁸See note 6.

³⁹In order to present this analysis in context, we give below the complete text, in the original and in translation, of the approximate first third of Grandfather Živomir's autobiography. We have been careful not to edit, with one exception: in his text he underlines all lineage names (a significant fact in itself); we have chosen to remove his underlining in order not to confuse it with our own underlining (for ease of location only) of the utterances we cite as examples of patterned speech (plus a few others which are similarly illustrative). The original spelling and punctuation is preserved in the Serbian text.

Po predanju ostalom od starijih, sadašnji Orašac nije tako staro naselje. Možda je se počeo naseljavati najviše od 20- 30 godina pre I Srpskog ustanka 1804 god. Tada je bio sav obrastao u lepu i bujnu šumu, ime "Orašac" dobio je kažu po jednom mestu usred sela, koje se nalazi sa zapadne strane od tadašnjeg puta Arandjelovac-Mladenovac kod groblja koje je bilo obraslo orasima, nekad pre mlogo godina sudeći po ostacima groblja i puteva izgleda da je bilo jako naseljeno, ali kada i kakvim stanovnicima i u kojim razmerama i kako je to naselje nestalo niko nije ostavio nikakve podatke niti se o tome šta zna. Po pričanju koje se prenosilo s kolena na koleno selo je dobilo ime i naseljeno je od izbeglica iz Crne gore, većinom, a jednim manjim delom i iz drugih mesta, koji su prilikom dolaska doneli i običaje iz svog rodnog kraja, ova seoba bila je iz velike nužde i turske obesti, žuluma i tiranije da se sačuva goli život, pošto su prvi doseljenici u ovom pitomom i šumovitom mestu udaljenom od glavnih puteva našli koliko toliko skloništa i lične i imovne sigurnosti pogradili kuće i nužne zgrade od drveta zauzeli zemlje koliko im je trebalo a za stoku su koristili ogromne šume koje nisu bile ničije, počeli su pristizati i drugi mahom njihovi bliži i dalji rođjaci i naseljavati se, tako da je pred prvi Srpski ustanak bilo već selo sa toliko kuća koliko sada ima familija i to: Andrići, od kojih je docnije postala još familija Pavlovići, Anići,

Ilići, Lucići, Nedići, Stanići, Matjaševići, Janići, Lazarevići, od kojih su docnije postale familije: Simići, Vasiljevići, Vasiljići, Stevanovići, Petrovići i Perišići, Maričevići, od kojih su sada familije: Minići, Jovanovići, Todorovići i Obradovići i Anicići, Veselinović, Ćirjanić, Joksimovići od kojih je familija Dimitrijevići, Jokići, Pajevići, Vasovići, Stojanovići, Jakovljevići, Pejovići, Savići od kojih su familije: Gajići, Lukići, Milovanovići, Radovanovići, Petrovići, Juškovići, Starčevići, posle I ustanka doselili su se iz Sandžaka, Milojevići i Miloradovići i iz pomoravlje Rajići iz Bugarske Rodojevići. Kada je podignut I ustanak 1804 god. Orašac je brojio oko 20 kuća u kojima je bilo 3-5, 6, 7 i 8 sposobnih muskaraca i ostalih ženskinja, muške i ženske dece, ljudi su bili hrabri, srčani i odvažni. Kućnim zadrugama zapovedao je i upravljao najstariji muskarac koga su svi ostali bezuslovno slušali.

Kada su janičari uzeli svu vlast u Beogradskom pašaluku u svoje ruke tada su postavili svoje ljudi po selima zvane "Subaše" I u Orašcu je bio subaša neki turčin zvani Ibrahimčiji han selo sagradilo više sadašnje crkve on je imo potreban broj naoružanih ljudi oni su bili neograničena vlast u selu a tako isto i svaki drugi turčin koji dodje u selo i u koju hoće kuću sve je to narod izdržavao i davao što su oni tražili oni su činili razne žulume i nasilja na primer da tera starešinu kuće da mu vada konja drugog da mu vada opanke žene da mu gotove jelo i svako drugo nasilje. Ko se naimanje usprotivi ubijali su ga bez milosti i presude, ako je pokušao da digne ruku u odbranu tada su palili kuću zgrade i ostalo grabili i pljačkali imovinu odvodili žene devojke i decu o kojima se dalje nije ništa znalo posle propasti Isrpskog ustanka 1813 god. sav je narod prebegao u Austriju turči su spalili celo selo i sve zgrade, stoku i ostalo sto su našli to su zaplenili i opljačkali tako kada su se posle vratili počeli su kućiti iz nova.

Ljudi su sebi gradili kuće, zgrade, kace burad i sve druge potrebe, žene su prele bojile i tkale i plele i odevale sve kućane, bili svi skromni kako u odelu i obući tako i u ishrani, sve kuće i zgrade bile su od drveta koga je bilo u izobilju. grejali su se oko vatre koja je gorela u jednom odelenju zvanom "kuća" ishrana je bila hleb većinom kukuruzni redje pšenicni koji je bio crn, jer nije bilo sprava za prečišćanje pšenice, radili su svi i žene i ljudi, stoke su imali jer su imali dosta jer su imali gde da čuvaju i hrane, škola nije bilo pa prema tome i pismenih ljudi, vera je imala presudan značaj i propisi vere su strogo poštovani smatralo se za greh i to ne oprostivi jesti mrsno na posnom danu a postilo je se mlogo na primer: sreda i petak svake nedelje, 42 dana božićneg posta 42 dana pred uskrs, 15 dana pred veliku gospojinu 15-45 dana pred Petrov dan, zatim 7 dana koncem septembra 7 dana pred sv. Ahrandjela Mihaila pa 7 dana pred sv. Savu, uz posne dane je jelo kukuruzni hleb kuvan pasulj (grah) krompir luk sirce kiseo kupus paprika, a mrsnim danom sira kajmaka jaja slanine o većim praznicima mesa, a ko je bio siromašan nije ni toga imalo, proizvodisu bili jeftini sa novcem je se uvek oskudevalo niko nije krao, niko nije psovao ništa što je se smatralo za sveto kao dokaz nečeg istinitog važila je zakletva o koju se niko nije hteo da ogresi pa makar ma šta izgubio i stetio. Sujeverje je bilo veliko (rećimo, valja se i ne valja se bilo je pravila bez diskusije) sve ovo što sam nabrojio, to sam čuo od moga oca i od starijih ljudi koji su to opet čuli od njihovih starijih, da dodam još nešto: kum koji krštava decu i venčava supruge nije se smeo naljutiti i uvrediti ni u kom slučaju i to je kumstvo prelazilo sa oca na sina. kum je davao deci imena po svom ukusu i nahodjenju. momak i devojka nisu se pitali za pristanak za sklapanje braka već su to njihove starešine zadruga sami ugovarali, obavezno je bilo bar najmanje jedan put godisnje prečestiti se u crkvi posle predhodne ispovesti kod sveštenika, sve ovo što sam napisao bilo je pre i posle I srpskog ustanka i posle II srpskog ustanka 1815 god. do 1850 godine, od tada pričao mi je moj otac koji je rodjen 1843 godine . . .

According to the tradition preserved by the elders, present-day Orašac is not a very old settlement. It began to be settled perhaps at most 20 to 30 years before the First Serbian Revolt in 1804. At that time everything was overgrown with beautiful, dense forest. They say the name "Orašac" comes from a certain place in the middle of the village, located along the western side of the then Arandjelovac-Mladenovac road near the graveyard, which was overgrown with walnut trees [Orašac derives from orah, 'walnut']. Many years ago, judging by the remains of a burial ground and trail tracks, it seems that the area was once thickly settled, but when and what kind of population, and in what numbers and how that settlement disappeared, no one left any records, and no one knows anything about it.

According to the accounts passed on from generation to generation the village got its name, and the settlement is of refugees from Montenegro mostly, with a small number from other places, who arrived bringing their customs from their native region. This migration resulted from great need and from Turkish oppression, hounding and tyranny, in order to hold onto life itself. Because the first settlers to this pleasant and wooded place far from the main roads found such refuge and personal and material security, they built houses and necessary outbuildings of wood. They took as much land as was needed, and for the livestock they used the vast woods which didn't belong to anyone. They began to make a livelihood, and a few of their near and distant relatives settled there, so that before the First Serbian Revolt there was already a village with as many houses as there are now families [lineages], and these are: the Andrići, from whom later are descended the families Pavlovići, Anići, Ilići, Lucići, Nedići, Stanići, Matijaševići, Janići, Lazarevići, from whom later are descended the families Simići, Vasiljevići, Vasilići, Stevanovići, Petrovići, Perišići, and Maričevići, from whom come the present-day families the

Minići, Jovanovići, Todorovići, and Obradovići, and Anićići, Veselinović, Ćiranić [one household each], the Joksimovići, from whom come the families Dimitrijevići, Jokići, Pejovići, Vasovići, Stojanovići, Jakovljevići, Pejovići, Savići, from whom are descended the families Gajići, Lukići, Milovanovići, Radovanovići, Petrovići, Juškovići, Starčevići.

After the First Revolt the Milojevići and Miloradovići settled from the Sandzak region, from Pomoravlje the Rajčiči, and from Bulgaria [Southeastern Serbia] the Radojevići.

At the time of the uprising in 1804 Orašac numbered about 20 houses in which there were 3-5, 6, 7 and 8 able-bodied men [in each household] with their wives and male and female children. Men were brave, hearty and courageous. They were organized into household zadrugas, each governed by the eldest male whom all the others obeyed without question.

When the Janissaries took over complete control of the Pašaluk of Belgrade they put their own men, called "subašas," in the villages. And in Orašac the subaša was some Turk named Ibrahim whose han [residence/guest-house] the village built up the hill from the present church. He had the required number of armed men and they were the unquestioned authority in the village. Also, for any other Turk who came to the village and who wanted a house, all that the people complied with and gave whatever they [the Turks] wanted. They carried out various oppressive acts and violence: for example, they forced the head of a household to lead his horse, another to carry his sandals, women to prepare food for him, and every other act of force. Whoever dared refuse was killed without mercy or trial. If he [a Serb] attempted to raise his hand in defense then they set fire to his house, outbuildings and all the rest, they confiscated his holdings, and took away his wife, daughters and children, about whom nothing was ever heard.

After the failure of the First Revolt, in 1813 all the people fled to Austria [that is, across the Danube]. The Turks burned the whole village and all the buildings, livestock and all that remained. Whatever they found, they seized and carried off, so that later, when they [the villagers] returned they began to establish homesteads anew. The men themselves built the houses, outbuildings and vats, barrels and all other necessities. The women spun, dyed, and wove and knit garments for the entire household. They were as simple in clothing and footwear as in diet. All the houses and buildings were of wood, which was available in abundance. They warmed themselves around a fire which burned in a section of the house called "kuća" [then 'hearth,' now the contemporary word for house]. Food was bread, mostly of corn, more rarely of wheat, which was black, because there was no device for refining wheat. All worked, women and men alike. They had plenty of livestock since there was room to herd and feed them. There was no school, there were no literate people. Religion had the greatest meaning, and religious rules were strictly respected. It was considered a sin, and one that was unforgivable, to eat meat products on fast days of which there were many, for example, Wednesday and Friday of every week, the 42 days of the Christmas fast, 42 days before Easter, 15 days before Assumption, 15-45 days before St. Peter's Day, and then 7 days before St. Sava. On fast days food was corn bread, boiled beans, (peas), potatoes, onions, vinegar, pickled cabbage and peppers. On non-fasting days there was hard cheese, soft cheese, eggs, bacon and, on important feast days, meat. Whoever was poor didn't even have these. Goods were cheap, but cash was always in short supply. Yet no one stole, no one swore by anything considered holy, as when an oath is invoked by someone as proof of his truthfulness. No one wished to sin, even if he lost or damaged something. There was a great deal of superstition (let's say this was both good and bad -- that's the way it was, without further talk).

All this which I have recounted I heard from my father and from the elders, who in turn heard it from their elders and now I add my part: the kum [godfather] who christened the children and witnessed the marriage ceremony was not supposed to become angry or to be rude under any circumstances; this godfather relationship passed from father to son. The godfather gave the children names according to his own choice and consideration. A young man and a girl did not question the agreements for contracting a marriage; the heads of their households arranged this between themselves. Without question, one was obligated at least once a year to be absolved in the church, after having confession heard by the priest.

All this which I have written took place before and after the First Serbian Revolt and after the Second Serbian Revolt from 1815 to 1850. It was related to me by my father, who was born in 1843