

Voices From the Past: Musical Tradition of Bosnia and Herzegovina Through the Research of Matija Murko

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Matija Murko is one of the most significant foreign researchers of Bosnian folk music. In 1909, he conducted the first field research in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since he was unable to obtain adequate recording equipment, Murko took notes in the field and kept detailed records of his observations. He received a grant from the Balkan Commission of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Vienna to study epic poetry in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during the summers of 1912 and 1913. In 1912, he made the first phonograph recordings in northwestern Bosnia. The following year, in 1913, he continued his research in Sarajevo and western Herzegovina. He had planned to extend his work into the summer of 1914, but the outbreak of World War I prevented him from doing so. Murko later returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1930 and 1931. During a well-organized three-month research period, he traveled to eastern Bosnia and Sarajevo. Murko's recordings provide valuable insights into the performance of epic songs accompanied by the gusle and the two-stringed tambura, as well as sevdalinka songs performed with violin and saz accompaniment. This paper examines the significance of Murko's research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, his methodological approach, and the field materials he collected.

Keywords: Slovenian literary historians / Murko, Matija / ethnomusicology / musical tradition / folk songs / Bosnia and Herzegovina

Introduction

After four centuries under Ottoman rule (1463–1878), Bosnia and Herzegovina emerged as a “‘newly discovered’ territory on the map of Europe that needed to be explored, as well as ‘emancipated’—that is, brought closer to the currents of Western European culture at the end of the nineteenth century” (Šehović et al. 48).¹ The interest of foreign researchers in the folk music traditions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly among scholars from countries that were part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, intensified during this period. One of the most significant researchers was Matija Murko (Drstelja near Ptuj, 1861–Prague, 1952).² His interest in Bosnian-Herzegovinian epic poetry was influenced by earlier research and published collections of poems by Kosta Hörmann³ and Luka Marjanović,⁴ as well as numerous works of

¹ The article was partly developed within the framework of the project *Traditional Culture in the Digital Environment: Development of the Reference Center for Intangible Culture* (TKuDOR) funded by the European Union (Next Generation EU).

² Matija Murko completed his primary school education in Ptuj. In 1880, he enrolled in Germanic and Slavic studies at the University of Vienna. During his studies, he became interested in oral poetry, primarily influenced by Franc Miklošič. After earning his PhD in Germanic studies in 1886, he received a scholarship from the University of Vienna for postdoctoral studies in Russia. His two-year stay in Russia and collaboration with Wilhelm Radloff directed Murko and his research towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. From 1897 to 1902, Murko lectured on Slavic Philology at the University of Vienna, then at the University of Graz (1902–1917) and the University of Leipzig (1917–1920). From 1920 to 1931, he lectured at Charles University in Prague. He founded the Slavic Institute (Slovanský ústav) at that university and led it until 1941. In addition to a very successful academic career, Murko continued to return to the field, enthusiastically studying and researching epic folk songs.

³ Kosta Hörmann (Bjelovar, 1850–Vienna, 1921) is the founder of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was the first editor of the Museum’s journal *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja* (1889) and edited it for full seventeen years. In 1879 he became the secretary of the National Government, and in 1882 the Government’s commissioner for the capital city of Sarajevo. In 1894, he was appointed as a permanent director of the National Museum. He published the collection of epic songs titled *Folk Songs of Mohammedans in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2 vols., 1888–1889).

⁴ Luka Marjanović (Zavalje near Bihać, 1844–Zagreb, 1920) completed the study of law in Zagreb and doctoral degree in Vienna in 1872. He worked as a professor of Church Law at the Faculty of Law and State and then became its dean and rector. He gathered and published *Hrvatske narodne pjesme, što se pjevaju u gornjoj hrvatskoj Krajini i u turskoj Hrvatskoj* (*Croatian Folk Songs That Are Sung in the Upper Croatian Frontier and Turkish Croatia*, 1864). On the incentive of the Matrix Croatica (Matica hrvatska), he collected epic folk songs of Muslim singers and published them in the collection *Croatian Folk Songs* (vol. 3 and 4, 1898–1899).

Friedrich Krauss.⁵

From literary sources, I also studied the folk epic of the Bosnian Mohammedans, who are called Muslims, and in 1908, I delivered a lecture on this topic at the International Congress of Historians in Berlin. ... The topic aroused great interest, especially among Germanists and Romanists, and from England I received an inquiry from classical philologist G. Murray, where he might find something more on this subject. That interest provided me the initiative to further study folk epics, primarily Muslim (Mohammedan), and later also Christian epics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Murko, *Spomini* 140–141)

Based on literary sources about the folk epic tradition of Bosnian Muslims, Murko delivered a lecture at the International Congress of Historians in Berlin in 1908. At the beginning of 1909, he visited Bosanska Krajina (the Bosnian Frontier) and recorded singing accompanied by a two-stringed tambura. Three years later, he continued his field research in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During his stay in Makarska in 1927, Murko embarked on a “trip to Ljubuški in Herzegovina and Imotski in Dalmatia” with the intention of visiting the “homeland” of the famous “Hasanaginica” ballad (Murko, *Spomini* 202). His most intensive period of research in Bosnia and Herzegovina took place between 1930 and 1932. Murko’s fieldwork focused on the origins and sources of epic poetry, the role of epics within the folk music tradition, and the locations where epic poetry was particularly popular—especially Muslim epics in relation to Christian epics. Nevertheless, he also devoted considerable attention to folk singers, the performance of epic songs, the instruments that accompanied them, and other forms of folk music. His years of research have significantly contributed to the understanding and scholarly interpretation of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s folk music traditions.

⁵ Friedrich Salomon Krauss, known also under pseudonym Suljo Serhatlija (Slavonska Požega, 1859–Vienna, 1938), studied Classical Philology (1877–1881) and gained a doctoral degree in 1882 at the University of Vienna. By order of the Anthropological Society from Vienna and with the support of the Austrian prince Rudolf, Krauss conducted extensive scientific field research in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period from March 1884 until August 1885. Krauss published a large number of works that have a very significant ethnomusicological value (besides historical and ethnographic). One of the most significant books *Slavische Volksforschungen: Abhandlungen über Glauben, Gewohnheitsrechte, Sitten, Bräuche und die Guslarenlieder der Südslaven* (Slavic Folklore Studies: Treatises on Beliefs, Customary Laws, Manners, Traditions, and Guslar Songs of the South Slavs, 1908) is mostly dedicated to gusle players and songs accompanied by gusle musical instrument. His most important collections of songs are *Pandžić Huso and Pavečić Luka: The Song of Our Mohammedans* (1885), *Three Words of a Herzegovinian* (1885), and *Smailagić Meho: The Song of Our Mohammedans* (1886).

First field research

Based on available sources and written correspondence with Kosta Hörmann,⁶ it can be concluded that Murko had been planning his field research in Bosnia and Herzegovina for a long time. As a contributor to the journal *Wörter und Sachen*, Murko arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1909, with the aim of studying its “primitive culture” (Murko, *Spomini* 142). Although information about this trip is scarce, it appears that his field research plan closely followed that of Luka Marjanović’s earlier work. Murko intended to locate the same singers and determine whether there had been any changes in the performance of previously recorded songs. Marjanović had documented most of the information about singing accompanied by a two-stringed tambura, as well as details about the performers, in his book *Hrvatske narodne pjesme: Junačke pjesme (muhamedovske)* (*Croatian Folk Songs: Heroic Songs (Muhammadian)*, 1898). Between 1886 and 1889, he recorded the performances of some of the most renowned singers of the time, including Mehmed Kolak Kolaković, Ibro (Ibrahim) Karabegović, Salko Vojinković Pezić, Ibro Topić, Alija Prošić Babić, Ibro Dervišević, Bećir Islamović, Ibro Hrnjić, Omer Hukić, Ahmet Čaušević, Hasan Majetić, and Vele Ahmetović.

On this trip, I searched the mountains for the Muslim singer Bećir Islamović, one of the famous singers who collaborated on the release of Muslim songs by Matica hrvatska. I took him to a Muslim in Bihać, where I worked with him for a whole week and compared the singing of some epic songs, which were very different from the printed ones written down twenty years ago. The singer, who was not thinking about the song in the middle of his summer work, dryly and curtly described the action and people; but when I pointed this out to him, he went to the other extreme and extended the poems by using particularly rich poetic material. That is how I realized for the first time that the singer changes his songs quite a lot and to some extent creates them anew, depending on his mood, environment, and time available. (Murko, *Spomini* 142)

Bećir Islamović (b. Spahići near Bihać, 181?) came from a family in which the tradition of singing accompanied by the tambura was passed down from generation to generation. His father, who had learned to sing from the renowned Ćerim Čajić, was considered a “singer above singers” (Marjanović xxviii). However, Bećir’s father died young, and his mother remarried a landowner in Cazin. From the age of 12, Bećir lived

⁶ The first preserved letter from Kosta Hörmann to Matija Murko dates from 18 March 1903. Their written communication continued until the end of 1906. The letters are housed in the National and University Library of Slovenia in Ljubljana (see Hörmann).

with his paternal uncle, Islam Islamović, from whom he began to learn his first songs. In a conversation with Marjanović, Bećir noted that his father and uncle, as well as many other skilled singers, had learned songs from Ćerim Čajić and the last “singer captain,” Murat Beširević from Ostrošac. Some of these songs became part of Bećir’s own repertoire, which he learned from his uncle at home and from musician friends. Bećir knew 160 songs in total and performed 26 of them—amounting to over 20,000 verses—for Marjanović. Interestingly, Bećir first learned to play the šargija before mastering the two-stringed tambura. When performing epic songs on the šargija, he used only two strings.

When he already knew a few songs, he would take a šargija (a tambura with four strings), remove two strings, and start to sing. When the old singers heard him, they would compete among each other to sing in front of him, so that he could receive as many songs as possible from each of them. He was able to receive even the longest song in one take. When he heard it for the second time, he already knew it, as if he was reading them from a book. He says that even now he could learn every song, and even more easily when it is told to him more quickly, because he also likes to sing quickly. (Marjanović xxx)



Figure 1: Singer Bećir Islamović accompanied by the two-string tambura (Marjanović xxix).

After finishing the autumn agricultural chores, Bećir Islamović worked as a traveling musician. According to Marjanović, he performed throughout Krajina and as far as Bijeljina. He played in the homes of numerous prominent individuals in Prijedor, Banja Luka, Prnjavor, Modriča, Tešanj, and other towns, as well as in cafés, where “the café owners give him coffee, and the listeners waste their money” (Marjanović xxx). Marjanović recorded Islamović’s singing over a ten-year period (1888–1898). During their last meeting, he observed significant differences in the performance of the same song, particularly in the style of delivery and weaker diction. Twenty years later, Murko confirmed that noticeable variations in both the length and diction of songs performed by the same singers, including Bećir Islamović, were evident (V. Murko 113). Murko, and later Milman Parry, remarked that Islamović was a skilled performer. Murko’s assessment was based on recordings of Islamović’s singing, while Parry’s observations were informed by the performances of younger musicians who had learned from Islamović.

From his earliest research trips, Murko showed great interest in the folk musical instruments that accompanied the performance of epic songs.⁷ Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on the gusle, Murko was the first to document the two-stringed tambura, which was used predominantly in northwestern Bosnia. He concluded that Muslim singers performed with tambura accompaniment and that sometimes Orthodox and Catholics did the same (Murko, “Gusle” 684). He further noted that “with two tamburas, heroic songs are also sung by Orthodox singers in the vicinity of Bosanska Dubica and Derventa, and by Catholic singers around Derventa, Banja Luka (especially in Ivanjsko), and Jajce” (686). Murko’s research revealed that players of the two-stringed tambura varied in age, background, and occupation. Before him, Luka Marjanović had concluded in his own research that while most singers were illiterate, they were highly talented: “This can also be said for those who composed their first songs either based on experience, based on narration or tradition, or based on some written chronicle or history book, from which a literate person would read to them about a specific event, and they would then sing about it in a song” (Marjanović xxxvi).

Based on conversations with interviewees, Murko concluded that the career of a professional singer typically began between the ages of

⁷ He described his observations about folk musical instruments in the article “Gusle i tamburica sa dvije strune” (“Gusle and tambura with two strings,” 1924).

30 and 35 and was based on knowledge acquired through oral transmission. The learning process for singing accompanied by a two-stringed tambura or a gusle followed the same pattern. Singers would listen to performances for years, rehearsing the well-known repertoire on their own. They would learn existing songs, shape them in their own distinctive style, and also introduce new songs. Murko observed that a spoken song always contained fewer verses than one that was sung and accompanied by a musical instrument. In this way, he clearly defined the role of instrumental accompaniment in the performance of epic songs.

During his first field research, Murko did not collect an extensive amount of data. Nevertheless, his study was highly successful. By comparing his findings with Marjanović's records from two or three decades earlier, he was able to draw important conclusions about the structure and presentation of song texts, as well as the role of musical accompaniment.

First audio recordings

Based on available sources, it can be concluded that Murko's first field research was only the beginning of his systematic study of epic poetry. He established close relationships with singers and interviewees, which continued through written correspondence after his return to Vienna. Drawing on his previous experiences and contacts with the local population of Bosnian Krajina, he carefully prepared for further research.

Murko's preparations for his new research included collecting data on folk musicians from other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, initially through written communication with researchers who had previously studied folk music traditions and epic poetry. These included Ludvik Kuba, Kosta Hörmann, and Friedrich Krauss, as well as researchers of folk songs like Tomislav Maretić and Nikola Andrić. From the available archival materials, it can be concluded that Murko also contacted numerous local experts and educated individuals engaged in collecting folklore, such as Hamdija Kreševljaković and Mijo Žunić. To record epic songs, which had largely been transcribed until then,⁸ Murko studied the potential of different types of phonograph technology and the

⁸ The first sound recordings were made by Lithuanian linguist Eduard Wolter in 1908 for the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv. Those were two recordings of gusle player Rizvan Kadrović and two recordings of folk singer Pero Dragoja. The oldest commercial recordings of Bosnian music were made by Franz Hampe in 1907 and 1908 for the Deutsche Grammophon company in Hannover.

field experiences of researchers Milan Rešetar and Paul Kretschmer, who had used phonographs in their fieldwork in 1901 (see Kunej et al.).

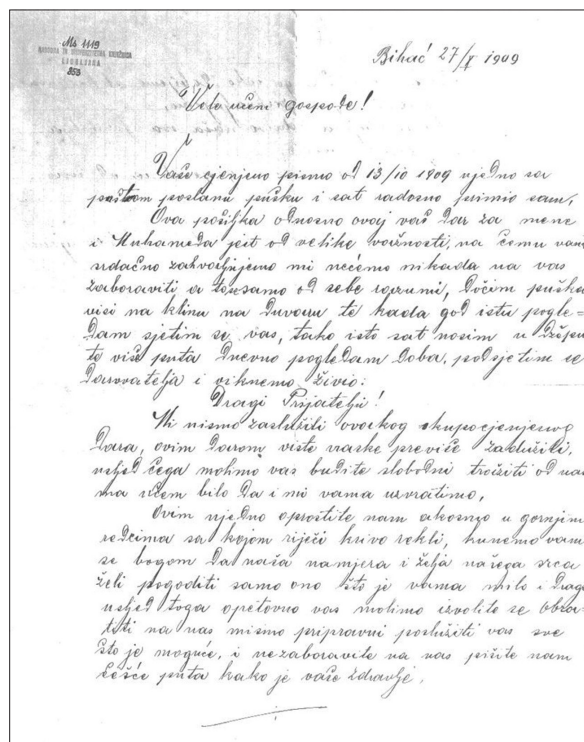


Figure 2: Letter from Jusuf Malkić to Matija Murko, Bihać, 27 October 1909.

Thanks to the recommendation from Croatian Slavist Vatroslav Jagić, Murko received a scholarship from the Balkan Commission of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna to study epic poetry in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during the summers of 1912 and 1913.⁹ He embarked on these journeys with a phonograph from the Phonogram Archive of the Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Murko's son Vladimir stated that during his second journey (1912) through northwestern Bosnia, and later his third journey (1913) through central Bosnia and Herzegovina, Murko traveled with the phonograph, realizing that even though the phonograph was bulky and technically imperfect at the time, it was still a valuable tool for researching and preserving

⁹ Murko planned to extend his research into the summer of 1914, but his brother Mihael Murko, a senior official in the National Government in Sarajevo, warned him not to travel because of the beginning of the World War I.

folk songs. According to Vladimir, the phonograph was transported in three trunks weighing 75 kg, so Murko could only travel by carriage, which limited the recording sessions to settlements near the main road (V. Murko 113).

Murko's research primarily focused on epic but also epic-lyrical songs. From 10 August to 2 September 1912, Murko made 46 recordings in northwestern Bosnia, including Cazin, Bosanska Krupa, Bihać, Kulen Vakuf, Bosanski Petrovac, Ključ, Sanski Most, and Prijedor. According to available records, 13 of these recordings were destroyed in 1945 during street fights in Vienna,¹⁰ and others were lost over time. The 17 preserved recordings contain 11 songs,¹¹ including three epic songs, three accompanied by a two-stringed tambura, four with a fiddle, and five lyrical songs—two accompanied by a saz, one by a violin, and two without instrumental accompaniment.¹² Murko presented the results of the research in his *Bericht über eine Reise zum Studium der Volksepik in Bosnien und Herzegowina im Jahre 1913* (*Report on a Trip to Study Folk Epic in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1913*, 1915). From 27 August to 18 September 1913, he traveled throughout much of Bosnia and Herzegovina. His journey included visits to Bosanski Novi, Bosanska Kostajnica, Bosanska Dubica, Grahovo, Bosanska Gradiška, Derventa, Mišince, and Doboј, before continuing through Posavina to the border with Serbia.

I also travelled to Teslić, Blatnica, Jelah, Tešanj, Maglaj, Žepče, Visoko, Kiseljak, Gromiljak, Ostružnica, Fojnica, Kreševo and Kraljevska Sutjeska. For a long time, I stayed in Sarajevo, where I made phonograph recordings in the surrounding places. Since it was not possible to go to the southeast, I went to Upper Herzegovina, what is today the district of Mostar: Konjic, Jablanica, Blagaj, Buna and Hodbina, Žovnice, Knežpolje and Široki Brijeg; Nevesinje, Odžak (headquarters of Ljubovići), Rilje, Fojnica, Gacko, Pustopolje, Stepen,

¹⁰ Court advisor Dr. August Loehr, immediately after World War II, informed Vladimir Murko that part of the recordings had been destroyed. "During my visit to the Phonogrammarchiv, I was very pleasantly surprised when its director Univ. Assoc. Dr. Walter Graf told me that the news about the failure of the recordings in question was indeed true, but he could still have shown me not only the metal plates on which all the original recordings were transferred on time, as well as my father's notes that related to individual recordings, therefore also various texts" (V. Murko 117).

¹¹ Some of the songs were recorded in sequels on two or three phonograms.

¹² In 2014, Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna and Institute of Musicology at the Academy of Music of the University of Sarajevo started the project *The Collection of Matija Murko (1912/13)* in which participated: Tamara Karača Beljak, Franz Lechleitner, Gerda Lechleitner, Jasmina Talam, and Johannes Spitzbart. As the result of the project the issue was published under the title *Series 16: Epic Folk Songs from Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Collection of Matija Murko (1912, 1913)*.

Plana, Bileća, Dobričevo, Miruše, Mosko, Jasen, Trebinje, Lastva, Duži, Ravno, Ljubinje, Stolac, Pileta, Počitelj, and Čapljina. On the way back, I picked up data in Dubrovnik and got information about the epic singing of the surrounding areas, which was strongly under the influence of Herzegovina. (Murko, *Bericht über eine Reise* 3)

The interviewees came from various regions, including Kraljeva Sutjeska, Mokri and Pazarić near Sarajevo, Gromiljak near Kiseljak, Trebinje, Kalinovik, and Mrežica near Foča, Gradeljina near Konjic, Prijedor, Kruševljani and Hodbina near Mostar, Radimlja near Stolac, Posušje, Crnač and Britvica near Široki Brijeg, Sopilja, Bratač, Rabina, and Zovi near Nevesinje.¹³ The 36 recordings contain 28 songs accompanied by gusle, one instrumental melody played on gusle, one conversation about the gusle player's life, two recordings of conversation in the local dialect, and four lyrical songs accompanied by violin.

In accordance with the practice of the Phonogram Archive, Murko prepared protocol forms and filled them in for each recording. The protocol consisted of three parts:

(1) *Phonographierten* ("phonographed"): In this section, the protocol number and information about the speaker were recorded (name, surname, gender, religious affiliation, age, occupation, place of birth, and residence).

(2) *Der Aufnahme* ("the recording"): This part included details about the recording itself, that is, date and place of recording, type of song, language, dialect, musical accompaniment, information about the musical instrument, method of recording, and the signature of the person recording.

(3) *Inhalt* ("contents"): This section contained the lyrics of the song. Since one phonograph cylinder could record a maximum of around twenty verses, most songs were only partially recorded.

¹³ In his research report, Murko stated that fans and connoisseurs of folk songs helped him find suitable singers and write down the lyrics: "[I]n Sarajevo, Jos. Milaković and L. Dvorniković, professors of Teacher Education, Hasan Hodžić and Stevan Marković, teachers from the same institution, Hamdija Kreševljaković and Jos. Šebečić, elementary school teacher, editorial staff of the official Sarajevo newspaper, especially the district director Ivan Miličević and editor Dmitrović, and finally Vejsil Ćurčić, an assistant at the The National Museum. In Mostar, the teaching staff of the grammar school provided me with special services: Mrs. Hadži, Muhamed Behlilović, Muhamed Dizdar, L. Jamnický, Dr. N. Krulj, L. Kurbanović, and Dr. A. Lovrić. The help in choosing the singers was provided by the parish priest Franjo Vrebac in Gromiljak (Fojnica district) and the Franciscan monastery in Kralj. Sutiska, municipal district office in Mostar, poet Aleksa Šantić in Mostar, and teacher Stevo Miladinović in Hodbina near Mostar" (Murko, *Bericht über phonographische Aufnahmen* 4).

For this reason, the protocol also included the remaining lyrics that the interviewee would later recite or sing. Some protocols also contained notes from prominent Bosnian and Herzegovinian ethnographers, such as Hamdija Kreševljaković, who would check the recorded text and clarify lesser-known words or Turkisms that had remained in the Bosnian language in their original or modified form.

s Phonographieren Platte Nr. 2140

Vor- und Zuname: Rizvan Kadrović
 Geschlecht: m
 Alter: 46
 Beruf: Musikant aus Sarajevo
 Geburtsort-Provinz-Land: Sarajevo
 phant-Provinz-Land: Oslovački kraj, 30. Aug. 1913
 ist früher seßhaft in: Sarajevo
 ist viel, viel gereist, wann? wo? in der Banovina
 phant-Provinz-Land der Eltern: Bosnien
 Name des Vaters: Abdullah der Mutter: Ante

Der Aufnahme Touren pro Minute 20

Datum: Ort-Provinz-Land: 30.8.13 Sarajevo
 Art des Gegenstandes: Op. Folklore
 Eigener, Fremder, schon Gedrucktes
 Sprache, Dialekt, Mundart: Oslovački, volksmäßig
 Musik, vokal oder instrumental: Gusle / solo
 ein- oder mehrstimmig:
 Stimmungung oder Instrumente:
 Geräusche, Schwingen etc.:
 Art der Membran: Schallholz des Trichters
 Name des Phonographisten: Murko Berul

Inhalt:

Endung des Liedes:
Vuk Jajčanin i Gjeorgij Derzelez
30.8.1913
Bosnien, Teufel:

Dozvon ti dvori sarajlija salko
Ja salkom i jedinstvo momaka,
U Sarajevu gazi sinovi ptiču;
Povo ti se Čekodare Mup
5. Džaga i ležnjač Kuseine,
Džaga je na dvanaest godina,
Jedna jutro pita podanica
Da on zove Bijelčana vraga
Bijelčana sarajlija salko:
10 Čusei mene sarajlija salko,
Panas ti se kellek potpuno,
A kad Turci idu u džamiju,
Ti ču' moga ala opremiti,
Jer sam valja u džamiju sici,
15 Ja klanjama džamiju pa i podan,
A kad ču sarajlija salko,
Tad pita ala opremiti,
Pa odloži a džamiju caraku,
19 Tada pita džamiju salko,
20 Tada pita džamiju salko, 32

Handwritten note at the bottom:
Handwritten note: Murko's protocol for the song "Vuk Jajčanin and Alija Derzelez" (gusle player Rizvan Kadrović), Sarajevo, 30 August 1913.

Figure 3: Murko's protocol for the song "Vuk Jajčanin and Alija Derzelez" (gusle player Rizvan Kadrović), Sarajevo, 30 August 1913.

During his research, Murko collected a wealth of information about the folk singers, their repertoire, the places and occasions on which epic songs were performed, and the songs' social functions. In addition to the data recorded in the protocols, Murko's written works provide significant insights into the lives of the narrators, their social status, and the way they organized and carried out their musical practice. The social status of musicians depended on the quality of their singing and playing, as well as their poetic creativity. Murko believed that the singers paid a great deal of attention to logical content. He also confirmed

Luka Marjanović's viewpoint that each song can be divided into three parts: an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion. "All the beauty of the song lies in the introduction, so the plot and denouement of the main act can be discerned from it. The ending is almost uniform in all songs" (Marjanović xxxviii). This method of presenting the song would evoke specific feelings in the listeners, which would then become the subject of conversation during the evening.

Considering that he recorded both the recited and sung texts of songs, Murko observed that the recited versions always had fewer verses than the sung ones. He concluded that "the singers did not learn the material by heart but re-created it each time thanks to their knowledge of the language and of folk verse; in other words, they were outstanding improvisers" (Talam, "Creation" 210). Throughout all his research, Murko also confirmed his earlier assumption that the way a song is performed and its duration depend on the mood of the singer, as well as the place and occasion of the performance. Through conversations with interviewees and singers, as well as participant observation, Murko concluded that epic songs were favored by people and were performed on various occasions and in different places:

People sing during long winter nights around the hearth and during gatherings (*sijelo, silo*) in the houses of well-to-do peasants, throughout the evenings, at the time of ritual and familial celebrations, and in general on all joyous occasions, especially weddings, which until recently lasted an entire week when they took place in the parents' household, and longer still when the bride was brought from a distance. ... One also sings publicly in the coffeehouses, principally among the Moslems, at the time of *zbori* (masters' assemblies or celebrations), [or] near the monasteries and churches, as at the markets. People would also often sing while traveling on horseback, mostly at night, but in this case without the *gusle*. Among Moslems in the north and northwest of Bosnia, there are singers who during winter spend entire months journeying from territory to territory; in the season of Ramadan certain villages and their coffeehouses engage these singers for all or a part of the thirty-day duration. The pashas and feudal lords summoned such singers for Ramadan and for other occasions in order to entertain themselves and their guests. ... In a word, the national epic poetry was and is—for the nobility, the middle class, and peasantry—what concerts, theaters, and other amusements are for us. (Murko, "Singers" 116)

Murko confirmed that the singing of epic songs without instrumental accompaniment or with the *gusle* is widespread, while singing with the two-string tambura is exclusively associated with a specific area. In contrast to the diverse repertoire of songs performed with the *gusle*, the two-string tambura was used exclusively to sing "*krajišnice*—Muslim

epic songs of the narrower Krajina region” (Rihtman 16), as well as songs about significant events in the life of the local community. Murko made a very interesting observation about the repertoire:

The epic *tamburica* is known everywhere, where the Krajina type of Muslim folk songs reaches and where it is spread by Krajina singers, who travel in the winter in the month of Ramadan throughout the whole of Posavina and all the way to Sarajevo. But the Krajina type gives way to the Herzegovinian type, especially in Sarajevo and in the Bosnia River valley, so the Krajina singers carry with them not only *tamburica*, but also *gusle* with one string, which are characteristic of the penetrating Herzegovinian type. (Murko, “Gusle” 685)

Based on this, it can be concluded that Murko established the existence of two types of epic poems: Herzegovinian type and Krajina type (Buturović 74), which can be further classified into the following categories:

(1) Krajina songs (*krajišnice*) in which singers would sing about the heroes of Krajina from the Ottoman period.

(2) Lika songs that were also sung in Bosnian Krajina, in which singers would sing about the battles of heroes from Lika.

(3) *Undjur*¹⁴ songs in which singers would sing about the events in Slavonia and Hungary.

(4) Hajduk-uskok songs in which singers would sing about *hajduci* warriors from the western border areas of the Ottoman Empire and, after the fall of Bosnia in 1463 and Herzegovina in 1482, about *uskoci* who fled from the Ottoman army.

(5) Herzegovinian-Montenegrin songs in which singers would sing about events related to the battle in Kosovo (pre-Kosovo and Kosovo cycle), as well as about heroes from Herzegovina and Montenegro (see Murko, *Tragom*).

In his works, Murko also pointed out the great popularity of singing epic songs, especially in Herzegovina. He stated that the principal of the Franciscan Grammar School in Široki Brijeg, Br. Didak Buntić, “arranged a real singing war” for him by gathering a large group of singers, and that there would have been more of them if it had not been for the bad weather (Murko, *Bericht über eine Reise* 8). Due to limited technical possibilities, Murko listened to the singing for three nights and made a selection of singers to record later. The district office

¹⁴ Murko explains that *Undjurovina* (*Undurovina*) is Hungary, and that he heard the interpretation from a singer that the area up to the Sava River is Bosnia, and across the Sava is *Undjurovina* (Murko, *Tragom* 1: 223).

in Nevesinje gathered an even larger number of singers, so Murko was able to choose the singers he considered exceptionally good.



Figure 4: A group of singers, Nevesinje, 1913 (Murko, *Spomini* 328).

During his research in 1912, Murko mentioned that lyrical-epic and epic-lyrical songs were sung accompanied by the šargija or saz. His later research showed that the local population in Brezovo Polje, Brčko, Tuzla, and Bijeljina mainly used the tambura¹⁵ to perform narrative forms. He noted that in the Tuzla region, “Muslim songs about old heroes are sung with the šargija in decasyllable, and also in eight-syllable verse, mostly about heroes from more recent history, such as ‘Pogibija Himzi bega’ [‘Death of Himzi Bey’] in the Serbian-Turkish war of 1876” (Murko, *Tragom* 1: 336).

Although his attention was primarily focused on the epic, Murko also showed interest in urban love songs, *sevdalinkas*. During his research in 1912, he recorded three songs: “Viče vila sa vrha Porima” (“A Fairy Shouts from Porim Mountain Top”) performed by the saz player Suljo Ramić from Prijedor, “Pošetala pembe Amša” (“Strolled Beautiful Amša”), and “Kad izgori šehar Sarajevo” (“When the Sarajevo City Burns Down”) performed by Jovo Ostojić Vidić from Prijedor, as well as the lyrical-epic poem “Pogibija Himzi-bega” (“Death of Himzi

¹⁵ In this context, tambura denotes šargija.

Bey”) sung with the accompaniment of the violin by Ale Kadić from Bosanska Krupa. In 1913, he recorded the *sevdalinka* “Kliče vila sa b’jela Porima” (“A Fairy Shouts from Porim Mountain Top”) performed by Maša Kužić from Mostar, and the ballad “Je li rano, je l’ sunce visoko” (“Is It Early, Is the Sun High) and “Sitna knjiga na žalosti” (“Small Book of Mourning”) sung with the accompaniment of the violin by Avdo Mehić from Mostar.

Murko’s field recordings from 1912 and 1913 represent the first scientific recordings on which one can hear different vocal and vocal-instrumental forms of the folk music practice of Bosnia and Herzegovina. From an ethnomusicological viewpoint, Murko’s recordings are extremely valuable because they capture a way of performing epic songs that has not been present in folk music practice for a long time. Literary theorists have noted that odd syllables attract attention in our dominant epic decasyllable. The ninth syllable attracts the accent even if it appears in the place of the second syllable of the three-syllable foot. In such cases, the accent shifts from the first to the second syllable. When two monosyllabic words are found next to each other, the stress falls on the first monosyllabic word, or, if there are two monosyllabic and two-syllable feet next to each other, the stress falls onto the monosyllabic one. However, this is not the case when monosyllabic and two-syllable feet appear at the end of a ten-meter verse. In this case, the monosyllabic is attached to the previous article, forming a four-syllable foot, and the two-syllable one becomes an independent article with the stress on the first syllable, which is, in fact, the ninth syllable of the decasyllable (see Maretić; Jakobson). This is why the singers connected the last, tenth syllable with the first syllable of the next verse.

The method of linking verses had already been known to earlier researchers (see Maretić). It is important to emphasize that their observations were largely based on written records of epic song texts. Only a few scholars pointed out that epic songs should be studied as melopoetic forms, and that it is essential to analyze both the meter of verse and the rhythm of melody simultaneously (see Zima). Murko was the first researcher to identify this specific form of melostrophic performance in *gusle* songs based on actual performances of epic songs and direct conversations with performers, as well as analysis of recorded material. Thus, Murko provided an audio recording as material evidence to support his theory. Although Bosnian-Herzegovinian ethnomusicologists of the older generation sometimes criticized Murko’s work, it can be concluded that this kind of research approach inspired numerous ethnomusicologists and literary theorists to conduct joint fieldwork

on epic songs as well as other traditional folk melopoetic forms (see Talam, “Razvoj”).

Murko wrote that his “studies on the folk epic of Bosnia and Herzegovina remained unfinished because of the war” (Murko, *Spomini* 151). He stated with regret that his information about the singers and the material upon which he based the “presentation of the folk epic on an important territory remained unused” (151). Murko concluded that his material was not sufficient for a larger work on epic and, in a certain way, implied the continuation of research in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Research from 1930 to 1932

In his memoirs, Murko states that his “main scientific task in the year before my seventieth birthday and two years after it was a trip to study the Serbo-Croatian epic in those parts of Yugoslavia that I had not visited until then” (Murko, *Spomini* 228). Thanks to the scholarship he received from the Slavic Institute of Charles University in Prague, Murko carried out field research during the period from 1930 to 1932. Murko’s trip in 1930 lasted three and a half months. The journey began in northwestern Serbia and continued through eastern Bosnia. He conducted research in Zvornik, Bijeljina, Brezovo Polje near Brčko, Tuzla, Kladanj, Srebrenica, Bratunac, Vlasenica, Han Pijesak, and Sarajevo. During 1931, Murko traveled to south-eastern Bosnia: Višegrad, Rudo, Rogatica, Goražde, Foča, Ustikolina, Kalinovik, Trnovo, and Sarajevo. Murko stated that these trips “brought him an abundance of new, interesting, and detailed material” (Murko, *Spomini* 203). According to the list published in the second part of the study *Tragom srpsko-hrvatske narodne epike: putovanja u godinama 1930–1932* (*In the Footsteps of the Serbo-Croatian Folk Epic: Travels in the Years 1930–1932*, 1951), it can be concluded that Murko recorded a total of 349 cylinders, of which 208 were made during his travels in 1930, 96 in 1931, and 45 in 1932. Of these, 138 cylinders were preserved, and 45 cylinders were digitized, on which 38 epic songs, four lyrical songs, one humorous-agitational song, one instrumental introduction on gusle, and one toast were recorded (Murko, *Tragom* 2: 540–555). Murko stored the recorded material and other field materials in the Slavic Institute in Prague. From 1963, Murko’s son Vladimir tried to move the material to one of the Yugoslav scientific institutions (V. Murko 118–119).

His efforts were not in vain and, in 1966, the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb received Murko's legacy and stored it in its archives. The Zagreb-based Institute for Folk Art (today the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research), which was actively involved in the acquisition of the material, examined the legacy and found that, in addition to photographs, negatives, and travel notebooks (a total of twenty-two small eight-format travel notebooks), it also contained seven boxes full of wax cylinders (the total number of cylinders was 138) and a phonograph ("broken"). (Kunej et al. 40)



Figure 5: Murko's recordings from 1930–1931, Oriental collection, Archive of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (photo by Irena Miholić).

Unfortunately, only one recording from Bosnia has been preserved in Murko's collection, on which Ilija Četković sang the song "Poljem se vija oj zor delija" ("In the Field Walks Hajdar the Hero").¹⁶ Murko describes that on the way from Tuzla to Zvornik, he listened to the singing of the bus conductor Ilija Četković, who was originally from Podgorica (Montenegro). Četković sang "Bosnian Muslim sevdalinks and other love songs, including Montenegrin and Macedonian, and he wanted us to phonograph his singing" (Murko, *Tragom* 1: 110).

¹⁶ The wax cylinder is part of the legacy of Matija Murko housed at the Archive of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, while a digital copy of the recording is held by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb (see Murko, Recording).



Figure 6: Ilija Četković, Kalesija, 30 May 1930
(photo by Vladimir Murko).

Although no sound recordings have been preserved, Murko left very significant information in his notebooks¹⁷ and the most extensive and significant study *Tragom srpsko-hrvatske narodne epike*. Unlike his trips in 1909, when he was primarily looking for singers, whose singing had been previously recorded by Luka Marjanović, and in 1912–1913, when he mostly recorded the singing of established singers based on recommendations, on this trip he used every opportunity to find good singers. This is illustrated by the example of Ilija Četković. He recorded a large amount of data about interviewees, their ways of interpretation, their status, and role in society. Information about the contexts in which they practiced music is especially important. For the first time, Murko explains in detail the differences between coffee bars *a la turca*,

¹⁷ The material stored at the Archive of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts includes, in addition to wax cylinders, 22 field notebooks. These notebooks contain notes written with an ordinary pencil during field research conducted in 1930 (7 notebooks), 1931 (8 notebooks) and 1932 (4 notebooks). There is also a notebook marked with the year 1927 and a notebook which contains a list of photos. The collection also includes many negatives on glass and a few photos but only some of them were labeled. The material has not yet been archived.

which were opened as a result of Ottoman influence, and the newer type *a la franca*, which appeared during the Austro-Hungarian administration (Talam and Paćuka 78). He focused considerable attention on the richness and variety of folk musical instruments, especially those used as accompaniment to the performance of epic songs and other narrative forms. In addition to the two-stringed tambura and gusle, Murko also mentions other chordophone instruments of the long-necked lute type, which are known in folk terminology under the common name of tambura. He explains that epic and epic-lyrical songs are performed accompanied by šargija, and urban love songs—*sevdalinkas*—by saz. Murko was the first to point out the singing of narrative songs of different content accompanied by the “thick” violin string.

Murko’s last trip brought a plenitude of extremely important data related to folk singers and players, shedding light on numerous musical forms and contexts in which they are performed, pointing to the folk sound aesthetics of certain regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and roughly establishing the spread of certain musical forms and the way they are performed.

Conclusion

Matija Murko’s many years of research provided a unique image of the soundscapes of almost all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. His approach to research, as well as the results he reached, often received negative criticism from scientists at the beginning of the last century and later. They believed that Matija Murko’s research did not bring any new knowledge about epic poetry and that he did not find new songs or exceptionally good singers who had been mentioned as such in the past (Čubelić 178). Regardless of all the criticisms, most of which cannot be considered objectively justified, Murko’s research brought a new perspective on the study of oral tradition. Murko experienced and described the tradition of singing epic songs with two-string tambura and gusle accompaniment, as well as the continuity of their performance, as a form of folk creativity that represents the spiritual expression of a specific time. He perceived the singers as exceptionally talented individuals capable of singing a loose and well-thought-out plot of the song. He admired the power of their memory, their creative ability, and the way they presented songs. While reaching the core and meaning of epic poems, he described them as a form of perfect artistic expression and often compared them to Greek epics. Murko concluded that the

singers of epic songs were members of all social strata, of different ages, education, and interests. Their ingenuity was reflected in the fact that they often added new verses to existing songs and created new ones according to established traditional patterns. Especially talented singers stood out, whose interpretations were based on knowledge acquired through oral tradition and many years of experience, as well as on the ability to create and improvise existing texts and melodies. Murko concluded that the singing of epic songs should be considered a productive, not only a reproductive art because the singers do not learn the songs by heart but shape them according to their singing abilities and knowledge (Murko, *Tragom* 1: 510). He also devoted considerable attention to lyrical songs. During his research in 1912 and 1913, he made scientific sound recordings of *sevdalinkas* accompanied by *saz* and violin. It should be added that this type of singing was recorded only by Gerhard Gesemann during the *Bosnienfahrt* research expedition in 1937. Given that this way of singing has not been encountered in folk music practice for a long time, Murko's recordings represent extremely significant evidence of an almost forgotten practice of folk music-making. It is interesting to mention the recording of the epic song "Knjigu piše srpski knjaže" ("A Serbian Prince Writes a Letter") performed by Ala Kadić from Bosanska Krupa (see Murko, Recording). This unique recording reveals that even epic songs are sung to even tunes, that is, in the manner of performing lyrical songs. Furthermore, Murko pointed to the performance of narrative forms accompanied by violin that were characteristic of rural practice. Playing a "thick string" means playing on the last G-string. The playing technique is very similar to the *gusle*-playing technique. The way, or the conception, of the performance of the song is almost the same as the performance of the *gusle* player.

We also see recognition of Murko's knowledge in the (available) letters he exchanged with researchers of similar interests. Nikola Andrić, the editor of six volumes of *Hrvatske narodne pjesme* (*Croatian Folk Songs*) published by Matica hrvatska in 1908, wrote to him for help with editing the collection and for advice on additional literature (see Andrić). Luka Marjanović, the collector whose traces Murko followed in his research, in a letter from 1914 shares with Murko information about undertaking the translation of the published verses into German, "so that the rest of the educated world (people) can learn about this unusual national treasure" (Marjanović, Letter). In the letter, he also asks for advice about the publisher, as well as describes in detail the difficulties surrounding the translation and the decision to add a glossary to the translation of the verses. It would be interesting to explore other correspondence that is hidden in

the archives and complete the picture of the life and communication of the researchers with each other, as well as their communication with the field at the beginning of the last century.

From all this, it can be concluded that the rich legacy of Matija Murko is immensely important for illuminating the musical image of Bosnia and Herzegovina as it once was, and thus for ethnomusicological, historiographical, and comparative research.

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Glasovi iz preteklosti: glasbena tradicija Bosne in Hercegovine v raziskavah Matije Murka

Ključne besede: slovenski literarni zgodovinarji / Murko, Matija / etnomuzikologija / glasbeno izročilo / ljudske pesmi / Bosna in Hercegovina

Matija Murko je eden najpomembnejših tujih raziskovalcev bosanske ljudske glasbe. Leta 1909 je opravil svojo prvo terensko raziskavo v Bosni in Hercegovini. Ker mu ni uspelo dobiti primerne snemalne opreme, je delal terenske zapiske in natančno evidentiral svoja opažanja. Nato je dobil štipendijo Balkanske komisije Akademije znanosti na Dunaju, ki mu je omogočila, da je lahko v letih 1912 in 1913 med poletjem raziskoval ljudsko epsko poezijo na Hrvaškem in v Bosni in Hercegovini. Leta 1912 je v severozahodni Bosni naredil prve fonografske posnetke, naslednje leto pa je nadaljeval z raziskovanjem v Sarajevu in zahodni Hercegovini. Svoje delo je nameraval podaljšati do poletja 1914, vendar mu je to preprečil izbruh prve svetovne vojne. Pozneje, v letih 1930 in 1931, se je vrnil v Bosno in Hercegovino. V okviru dobro organiziranih trimesečnih raziskav je obiskal vzhodno Bosno in Sarajevo. Njegovi posnetki ponujajo dragocen vpogled v izvajanje ljudskih epskih pesmi ob spremljavi gusle in dvostrunske tamburice, pa tudi v izvajanje sevdalink ob spremljavi violine in saza. Članek obravnava pomen Murkovega raziskovanja v Bosni in Hercegovini, njegov metodološki pristop in zbrano terensko gradivo.

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