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Individual Poet and Epic Tradition: Homer as Legendary Singer

John Miles Foley

> *On je pjevac bio sto ga nije bilo u Hercegovini.*
> He was a singer like no other in Hercegovina.
>
> Ibro Basic on Isak

> From the beginning since all have learned according to Homer . . .
>
> Xenophanes of Colophon on Homer

This essay has three linked goals, all of which emerge from a comparison of Homer with the "legendary singer" figure associated with South Slavic oral epic. First, it seeks to demonstrate how the legendary singer, although represented as a once-living individual by the lesser, real-life bards who follow in his footsteps, is also a way of designating the poetic tradition. By anthropomorphizing tradition, this strategy avoids the impossible choice that modern criticism often imposes between the gifted poet and his inheritance. In the process, the latter-day *guslar* also creates an empowering lineage for himself, a genealogy that certifies him and his peers just as the poetic tradition certifies and fills out any given performance of an epic narrative. Second, the identity of the legendary singer as an instance of tradition illustrates a fundamental compositional (and receptional) feature of South Slavic and Homeric epic poetry: variation within limits. Just as phraseology and narrative patterns show a measured multiformity that reflects both their traditional structure and the singular demands of each particular usage, so the concept of the master bard--called by different names, accorded different biographies, and credited with different **[End Page 149]** extraordinary feats--adapts a continuing, immanent presence to the particular demands of the local context. Third, I will argue that to understand the legendary singer--whether the idealized *guslar* or Homer--we must look beyond the shifting surface of inconsistent details toward what each nominal figure signifies. Via a process that has been termed "traditional referentiality," these shifting signs or *sêmata* stand as concrete parts designating intangible wholes, and we read the signs--and the singers--best when we accord them *both* their individual, situation-specific *and* their traditional values. [1]

Oral Tradition and the Legendary Singer

The research conducted by Milman Parry and Albert Lord in the former Yugoslavia, now more than sixty years ago, opened a window on the Homeric poems in particular, and on many ancient and medieval works in general. It has fostered the formulation of hypotheses based on an analogy between a living, observable oral tradition, on the one hand and, on the other, manuscript texts that reveal a striking number of similarities to performances from that living tradition. From the original juxtaposition have stemmed analyses of phraseology and narrative pattern that were in turn carried into other traditions. The methods introduced by Parry and Lord, comprising the so-called Oral Theory, spread quickly and widely, especially under the influence of Lord's *The Singer of Tales*, and to date more than 100 language areas have been affected by the approach they initiated. [2]

At the same time, as with any statement radical enough to shake the status quo, reasonable objections

arose in response to their "strong thesis." With anthropological reports from other living traditions leading the way, subsequent scholarship has clearly demonstrated that certain original tenets of the Oral Theory need revision. For one thing, we know beyond doubt that oral tradition and literary works are not mutually exclusive categories but rather points on a spectrum, and that we must **[End Page 150]** carefully examine each work or tradition on its own terms and, where possible, within its own particular social context (cf. Finnegan 1988; Zumthor 1990; J. Foley 1996a, 1998). For another, we have learned that while recurrent phraseology and narrative patterning are typical of many oral traditions, such stylistic features cannot be reduced to universal forms with unitary definitions, much less be interpreted as litmus tests for "oral" or "written" provenance. In both of these areas, differences deserve full consideration alongside similarities. [3] Perhaps most importantly in the long run, we have also realized that we must come to grips with the interrelationship of traditional structure and Homeric art. If the Oral Theory is to assume full partnership in any approach to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, then the poems' excellence must be explained as drawing from, rather than superseding, their roots in oral tradition. [4]

One intriguing dimension of this last quandary is the much-discussed tension between individual poet and poetic tradition. What is the role of each and how do they interrelate? What, and how much, do we credit to Homer and what, and how much, to the bequest he received from prior generations? Strict application of the Parry-Lord methodology leaves little room for the single poet, while a strictly literary perspective underestimates the evocative power of the poetic tradition. In the case of the South Slavic *guslar*, questions concerning the tension between individual and tradition can be answered tangibly and straightforwardly, and research published over the last decade has in fact moved toward a fuller appreciation of the chemistry that underlies the interactive nature of epic performance. [5] **[End Page 151]** Because the Parry Collection of Oral Literature is so rich in multiple singers and performances of South Slavic epic, we can track the extent to which the *guslar* uses a shared traditional *koinê* to make his poems, as well as how his particular dialect and idiolect of that specialized language differ from those of his peers. [6] The same wealth of material allows us to collate many instances of a phrase or scene and thus understand what it *implies* in the poetic tradition as well as what its literal meaning may be. The art of the South Slavic *guslar*, it turns out, involves an individual who composes in an idiom or register heavy with traditional referentiality and assumes an audience or reader alive to the resonance of that idiom. The Homeric poems, composed in a comparable kind of register, have been shown to resonate similarly, so that we need not make an impossible and crippling choice: the art of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* may be understood as drawing from both the singular talent of an individual *aoidos* and the collective bequest of tradition. [7]

The present essay suggests another perspective on the interplay of individual and tradition by focusing on a proverbial figure who embodies that tension. On the South Slavic side, this figure, known by many different names, amounts to a celebrated master *guslar*, a singer so hyperbolically accomplished and revered that he can only be the stuff of legend. Nonetheless, even though they usually denied ever having encountered this paragon themselves (he was too old, or he lived somewhere else, or he was always traveling), [8] the real-life singers who described his exploits in conversations with Parry and Lord's native assistant Nikola Vujnovic insisted that he was a real person. Furthermore, he was universally cited as without doubt or qualification the most prominent forebear in their personal bardic lineages. In fact, since they had no information whatsoever about the singers preceding him, this figure assumed the role of "first ancestor," in effect the father of the ongoing genealogy of epic singers that led to them.

I will argue that this legendary singer is an anthropomorphization of what we name by the abstraction "tradition," a representational strategy that allows *guslari* to talk about what they and their peers jointly inherited **[End Page 152]** and continued to practice. For such a purpose, the apparent conflict between reality and legend actually proves functional in that it images the dyad of individual and tradition by portraying the collective inheritance as an ancestral master bard whom in most cases they never met. This strategy places the legendary singer just beyond the reach of historical and geographical fact in a liminal area comfortably unconstrained by the quotidian limits of time and place that define each actual *guslar* and his activities. Just as every performance draws meaning from the larger poetic tradition that it necessarily implies, so each individual singer legitimates himself by claiming professional descent from the great bard. Both performance and singer become instances of tradition.

I will also suggest that the circumstantial facts of the Homeric case point toward a similar conclusion, that is, that "Homer" may be more an eponym than a name, that it may designate the tradition of

ancient Greek epic poetry by construing it as a single, supremely gifted individual (cf. Nagy 1990a.89-90, 111-12; 1996a). This perspective resolves the otherwise frustrating discrepancies of "fact" among even the earliest of ancient testimonies on Homer by explaining contradictory biographical details and attributions as the natural outgrowth of a figure who lives on the cusp of real-life bardic practice and the alternate reality of legend. For how can the legendary singer serve his various constituencies, all of whom claim him as a famous and legitimizing forebear, except through his multiformity and ubiquity? If this is the case, one can easily see how the imposition of a modern model of authorship--with all of its built-in assumptions about author, work, audience, and the individual's relationship to a solely textual tradition--has impeded our understanding not simply of who Homer was, but also of the fundamental nature of his art.

The Evidence from South Slavic Epic

As they worked their way through the former Yugoslavia recording what was to amount to a "half-ton of epic," [9] Milman Parry and Albert Lord sought to provide realistic background for the South Slavic oral **[End Page 153]** performances they were engaged in studying. An important dimension of their efforts at contextualization, rare among fieldworkers during the first third of this century, consisted of carefully planned and wide-ranging conversations conducted by their native assistant Nikola Vujnovic with most of the *guslari*. As a singer himself, Vujnovic commanded an authority and offered a kind of credibility no scholar could match. Moreover, because his questions were designed and monitored by Parry, they had the added advantage of sustained pertinence to the task at hand: understanding the tradition of the *guslar* and its possible relationship to the Homeric poems.

Hasan Coso / Isak

In the region of Stolac in central Hercegovina, the first of the six districts in which they made extensive field recordings, Parry and Lord collected epic songs from 27 different singers. Of these, three emerged as especially prominent because of the substantial size and relative quality of their repertoires of Moslem songs: Ibro Basic, Halil Bajgoric, and Mujo Kukuruzovic. [10] All three of them participated in lengthy conversations with Vujnovic, covering such matters as personal data (home village, occupation, family history), the process of learning to compose epic, repertoires with sources for each song, the nature of the "word" as a compositional and expressive unit in epic poetry, and numerous specific questions about the sung and recited performances and dictated texts that Parry and Lord had already recorded. [11]

Prominent among the skein of topics was a striking and memorable figure: a bard of great achievement and consummate reputation, a *guslar* whom each man valued far above any other singer. Ibro Basic called him Isak, as did Mujo Kukuruzovic Halil Bajgoric referred to him as Hasan Coso. But whatever name was assigned to this figure--let us call him the *Guslar*--he was clearly recognizable by his highly unusual, even **[End Page 154]** unique actions and attributes, many of them legendary in character, and by his dual identity as palpable fiction and historical fact.

Most obvious among the *Guslar*'s telltale characteristics were his extremely advanced age and his chronological placement at the origin of the singer's own bardic lineage. The *Guslar* was not merely venerable; he was customarily quite ancient, having lived as many as 120 years. Kukuruzovic was the most forthcoming about the details of Isak's superficial decrepitude, noting that in his final years the toothless singer was unable even to direct his own horse. Nor at that point could he play, or for that matter hear, the one-stringed, lute-like *gusle* that was his conventional accompaniment in earlier days. But these crippling handicaps were, it turns out, only apparent, since Kukuruzovic's Isak was beloved enough to merit a companion to lead his horse for him and resourceful enough to learn to perform without the instrument--an unheard-of practice in the Moslem tradition before outsiders began to encourage oral dictation. [12] Along with emphasizing the *Guslar*'s sheer age, customarily in terms that defy ordinary human biology, all three Stolac singers thrust him at least two generations back in history, beyond their fathers' time and out of the reach of their personal experience, to the beginning of their genealogies as singers. Thus they were never actually able to meet Isak or Hasan Coso, they explain, and could report on his remarkable accomplishments only at second hand. [13]

Unlike all other singers in their experience whose breadwinning occupations of farmer, butcher,

blacksmith, and the like required most of their attention and energy, the *Guslar* earned his modest living entirely through the performance of epic. As Basic tersely put it, *To je njegov zanat bijo* ("[Singing] was his profession"). Indeed, all three bards testify, this mastersinger's unparalleled excellence qualified him to perform in the **[End Page 155]** courts of Ottoman beys and pashas, an anachronistic privilege and honor granted to no one else. [14] Paid more often in kind than with negotiable currency, the *Guslar* lived without much in the way of material goods, essentially as a pauper. In pursuit of his craft and in response to invitations from far and wide, Hasan Coso traveled "everywhere throughout the world," says Bajgoric "he never dug or plowed, never rode a horse, but always carried a rifle and a few staples on a pack-animal. Traveling lightly, he enjoyed his playing," and was very seldom to be found in his home village, which each singer located at an entirely different actual site.

Nor was Hasan Coso or Isak the least bit ordinary in his capacity for epic singing. The *Guslar* conventionally boasted an enormous repertoire, fifty songs and up, and, more significantly, his songs were regarded by the Stolac *guslari* as the finest that had come down to them. That is, while each of the three also cited "real" bards, most often fathers and uncles, as teachers or immediate sources for specific tales, they were unanimous in crediting the *Guslar* as the ultimate source for the best songs they knew. Additionally, Hasan Coso and Isak were truly seminal in their influence, transmitting the choicest of epic tales not just to the teachers of these three Stolac singers and their regional colleagues, but, against all apparent practice, to poets in other, often far-flung districts as well. [15] In range as well as depth of influence, the *Guslar* was absolutely unique.

But what stamps this seminal figure as unmistakably a creature of legend rather than history, to be sought in tradition rather than field ethnography, is the performance of one or more extraordinary feats during what each singer carefully portrays as a "real" lifetime. For Bajgoric, this was Hasan Coso's miraculous ability to leap twelve paces at the advanced age of 101, an Olympian accomplishment that he situates within the "so they say" (*kako pricaju*) frame used throughout the conversations to appeal to an unidentified authority and thus avoid the claim of eyewitness reportage. Like so many other aspects of his characterization, this duality of **[End Page 156]** extreme age and remarkable agility represents the *Guslar* as a contradiction in terms, an icon who embodies contrary roles or designs. A professional singer welcome at the courts of beys and pashas, and yet the simplest of paupers with barely enough means to support his itinerant existence, this oxymoronic figure lives outside the everyday world inhabited by his bardic progeny.

Indeed, his singing skills are so powerful that he can override the usual physical limitations to which *guslari* are subject and, on occasion, even shift the prevailing axis of cultural and religious practice. Kukuruzovic's Isak, for example, once sang for six straight hours without putting down the *gusle*, [16] a superhuman feat when measured against reality: in actual prac-tice, South Slavic epic performance is so vocally demanding that singers seldom go much more than 30 minutes without a break for rest and refresh-ment. [17] More impressive even than this incredible bardic stamina, however, was the paradigm shift he caused at the Bey of Posavina's wedding. While the *Guslar* characteristically distinguished himself by overcoming ethnic and religious boundaries and performing by special invitation at wedding celebrations hosted by all denominations, Isak, as Kukuruzovic tells the story, went a sizable step further. His performance in honor of the Bey proved so compelling that the sheet of fabric segregating the male and female segments of the audience was removed and the Moslem statute requiring the separation of men and women at a wedding was temporarily suspended. It perhaps goes without saying that this amounts to an impossible, unprecedented relaxation of a religious law that also bears supreme cultural authority; precisely because it is so unlikely, it constitutes a de-fining action, a kind of credential that identifies this singer as the legendary *Guslar*. How powerful is the poetic tradition? Kukuruzovic's Isak gives us one set of answers: powerful enough to transcend physiological limitations and to "rewrite" Qu'ranic law.

Another kind of answer, and a third kind of legendary feat, is furnished by Basic's tale of Isak and his challenge by an upstart *guslar* **[End Page 157]** named Gacanin. As the story opens, Gacanin hears about the great bard Isak and is determined to seek him out in order to see who is the better singer. Traveling to Rotimlja, where Basic (but neither Kukuruzovic nor Bajgoric) situates the *Guslar*'s home, he stops at a roadside inn for coffee. There he is able to ask directions and advice from the *kahvedzija* (coffeehouse attendant), who, though Gacanin does not suspect it, is Isak himself. [18] The attendant confirms that Isak lives in the nearby town of Rotimlja and is famed for his prowess in epic performance, and even points in the direction of the great man's residence. At this juncture Gacanin confides that he himself is also a singer of some talent, and that he has come from afar to challenge Isak to a contest.

Eager to help, the attendant offers to make the introductions by bringing his customer to his own home later on to meet the bard, whom he promises in the meantime to summon personally.

Now the *kahvedzija* happens to spot Gacanin's *gusle* protruding from his pouch and innocently asks to try it out. Gacanin generously accedes and the attendant strikes up a version of *The Wedding of Smailagic Meho*. [19] All those in the coffeehouse are immediately entranced and refuse to allow him to stop; he thus goes on to sing not just one but an unspecified number of epic songs to an enthusiastic response. Mightily impressed, Gacanin then orders another cup of coffee and inquires from whom the attendant-turned-*guslar* might have learned the songs he has just so brilliantly performed. Upon being told "from Isak," Gacanin blanches and has second thoughts about accompanying his host to Rotimlja and measuring himself against the paragon responsible for these remarkable songs. "I'm not going, not on your life," he tells the *kahvedzija*, "not if you heard those songs from him. I used to think there was no one better than I am, but you're better." Gacanin then effectively beats a hasty retreat homeward, still unaware of his host's true identity but thoroughly educated about what we might from our perspective describe as the difference between a *guslar* and the *Guslar*.

So what does the legendary singer represent for Bajgoric, Basic, and Kukuruzovic? Besides furnishing an idealized source for their best songs, what function does this figure perform? For a start, consider the **[End Page 158]** contradictions among the biographies ascribed to the *Guslar*. First is the variance in name and place of origin. Hasan Coso comes from Bajgoric's home village of Dabrica and is said to have been born not far from Bajgoric's father's house, while according to Basic (a native of Vranjevicci in the Mostar region), Isak hails from Rotimlja, where he can still occasionally be found. Kukuruzovic, on the other hand, mentions neither a birthplace nor a residence, insisting that Isak was always itinerant, and in fact the *Guslar*'s (fictional) life-pattern bears him out: for all three singers, the core of the mastersinger's identity is his very rootlessness or, more precisely for present purposes, his ubiquity. As a figure whose only true "home" is the performance arena--a place defined by the recurrent activity of singing epic rather than by conventional geography (J. Foley 1995.47-49, 79-82)--his most basic "regional" allegiance is to the site of his next performance, which shifts only on a superficial level. Small wonder, then, that he is so often remembered in terms of those performances and other memorable feats that can be retold and re-experienced as legend.

Linked to biographical diversity in name, birthplace, residence, and so forth is the *Guslar*'s unparalleled, virtually mythic, stature. He was the only singer who was always paid to perform, invited to weddings of all denominations, and summoned before beys and pashas; the only one for whom singing was a true profession and the sole means of support. In single-minded pursuit of his craft, undistracted by the everyday economic and ethnic concerns that affected all real-life *guslari* known to Basic, Bajgoric, and Kukuruzovic, he can be meaningfully compared to mythic luminaries like Mustajbey of the Lika, Djerdjelez Alija, Tale of Orasac, and other citizens of South Slavic heroic epic. Like those timeless and immortal heroes, the *Guslar* operates in a world that suspends the usual rules; he exists outside the customary social matrix of getting a living and sharing a family and community, and likewise outside any *bona fide* historical context that would constrain as well as define his character and accomplishments. In a sense, Hasan Coso / Isak lives alongside the heroes whom his descendants celebrate in epic performance, earning his own measure of South Slavic *kleos* as the "best of singers."

From this mythic ancestor stem not only the finest of songs, but also the unassailable authority of a bardic primogenitor. The fact that each Stolac singer ascribes different actual songs to the *Guslar*--or even that the same singer may cite him as the source of different songs from one conversation to the next--does not discredit their attributions. For one thing, the singers interviewed by Parry and Lord regularly modified their **[End Page 159]** accounts of how and from whom they learned their songs, a manifestation of the impertinence of our concept of "authorship" and an affirmation of the primacy of the poetic tradition rather than evidence of faulty memory or sloppiness (cf. Parry 1933-35.446-47). In the case of the *Guslar*, as with all aspects of traditional oral epic from phraseology through story-pattern, specific details are important only insofar as they foster the general traditional dynamic of variation within limits. The legendary figure can persist only in his multiformity: living here or there, named this or that, responsible for one set of songs or another. Unfixed by history, texts, and the feedback loop of information that they support, his Protean lack of definition serves his bardic constituency well: descendants can fashion the *Guslar*'s image differently, shaping his biography to mesh with their own life histories and experiences of epic singing.

Likewise, filtering the song-bequest through one or more intervening generations, and thus conveniently

removing the process from merely historical or ethnographic assessment, provides each poet's songs with the unmistakable sanction of legend. When a real-life *guslar* performs them, he appropriates the *Guslar* as a direct ancestor and makes himself the present day embodiment of the greatest of all bards. In the event, individual and tradition combine, the tangible instance standing *pars pro toto* for the larger, intangible whole of the poetic tradition. Such a melding is possible only if each singer can conceive of the mastersinger as a legendary figure with two distinct but complementary dimensions: he must be a named, situated, and superficially realistic individual who nonetheless has accomplished "epic" feats in singing. He must be a *guslar* with an acceptably focused, believable biography whose deeds as *Guslar* far outstrip anything one might expect of a real-life singer. He must assume the double identity of finite instance and ongoing tradition.

Cor Huso Husovic

Another figure who answers this double definition, close kin to Hasan Coso and Isak, was the celebrated master bard Cor Huso Husovic. No less a *guslar* than Avdo Medjedovic credited him with having deeply influenced his own father, and singers from throughout the Novi Pazar and Bijelo Polje regions cited him as the finest ever. [20] Our fullest information **[End Page 160]** about Cor Huso comes from two sources: the direct testimony of the Novi Pazar singer Salih Ugljanin in his conversation with Nikola Vujnovic (Parry no. 652 [*SCHS* 1.61]) and the composite profile assembled by the scholar and fieldworker Alois Schmaus (1938). [21] Vujnovic's interview has the advantage of presenting directly elicited commentary in the *guslar*'s own words, while Schmaus' summary is drawn from more extensive interviews with Ugljanin and two non-singers: Halit Hamzaric (then 83 years old) and the Moslem priest (*hodza*) Salko Hot. Ugljanin and Hot both claim to have met Cor Huso personally. On the face of it, their testimony may thus appear to segregate this *Guslar* from Hasan Coso / Isak, whom the Stolac singers never seem to have encountered themselves. But Ugljanin's vague and occasionally contradictory accounts of what he learned from Cor Huso (an example of the variation within limits so typical of legend), [22] as well as Hot's obviously romanticized remembrance of the elderly bard from the time when he was himself a child of five or six, argue against a distinction in kind. At most, we are dealing with a historical character to whom layers of legend have accrued, an ultimately historical person to whom the mantle of *Guslar* has fallen; at the least, Ugljanin's and Hot's claims of a personal encounter are simply a way of connecting meaningfully to their traditional forebear. [23] Whatever the case, although Schmaus' account is much lengthier and more specific than the Vujnovic conversation, where the two sources overlap they agree on every important point. What follows, then, is a brief digest of what can be pieced together about this master bard. **[End Page 161]**

Born blind in the Kolasin region sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century, Cor Huso Husovic was later to become the most famous *guslar* in all of Montenegro and Serbia. [24] Notwithstanding the obscurity of his early years and the severity of his handicap, he was eventually to enjoy an enormous reputation as an itinerant *guslar* who surpassed all others and was the source of their best songs. In addition to his wanderings throughout Montenegro and Serbia, he spent 19 years in various parts of Bosnia, where he reportedly traveled in the never-realized hope that his vision would be restored. The sources agree that Cor Huso journeyed everywhere on horseback, fully armed and accompanied by a young guide. His appearance would have been arresting: he wore a red silk coat with sleeves embroidered in the Croatian style, green trousers, black leather boots, a fez, and a great turban, not to mention a long knife hanging from his belt along with two sterling silver pistols. Very tall and stocky, at minimum 120 kg. (more than 260 lb.), with "brimming handfuls" of mustaches, Cor Huso was literally larger than life, a challenging burden for even the strongest mount, we are told. Curiously, this vivid representation--strictly speaking, more heroic than bardic--conspicuously lacked his own *gusle*; he simply used whatever instrument was available, and prospective audiences were only too ready to provide whatever was needed to induce him to perform.

We begin to gain a sense of Cor Huso's legendary status in the reports' vagueness on certain basic facts--precise age, nature of repertoire, training as a singer, and so forth--and also by the ethnographer Schmaus' crestfallen admission that it proved impossible to pin down such details with any accuracy. None of his informants seemed interested in the *Guslar*'s childhood or early adulthood except to speculate, without any evidence, on how he might have learned the craft of epic singing. As Schmaus summarizes, clearly believing that he is dealing with a flesh-and-blood *guslar*, [25] "today it is no longer possible to establish when Cor Huso **[End Page 162]** Husovic was really born" (132); as for his training in what was to become a lifelong profession, the fieldworker-philologist is forced to conclude that

"nothing is known about from whom he learned his songs" (133). Most transparent of all is Schmaus' concession that the master bard's repertoire is not even partially recoverable: "Even with all conceivable effort, it was impossible for me to learn anything more detailed about the actual songs that Cor Huso typically sang. Everything remembered on that score was generalities" (134). [26] Like his brethren Hasan Coso and Isak, Cor Huso plied his legendary trade just beyond the reach of verifiable, everyday reality--close enough to suggest a connection to real individuals, but far enough removed to allow the projection of qualities and attributes that were more than individual. His age, training, and repertoire could not be absolutely fixed simply because, as a traditional figure, he himself could not be absolutely fixed. From this perspective, the *Guslar*'s lack of chronological definition runs parallel to his geographical ubiquity: wandering through both space and time was an essential part of his function as the nexus of tradition and individual in the performance of epic song.

But the strongest evidence that Cor Huso amounts to another embodiment of the *Guslar* lies in the litany of proverbial feats with which he is credited. For example, his immense popularity over a wide territory led eventually to his being summoned to the court of Franz Jozef in Vienna, a remarkable episode that Ugljanin related to both Vujnovic and Schmaus. The Emperor was so pleased with what he heard that he enlisted Cor Huso's bardic services for either a month or a year, depending on the version, and rewarded him with no fewer than 100 sheep (with lambs) and 100 napoleons. On return to Kolasin, the *Guslar* "gave the sheep to his kinsmen and put the money in his purse and went about the world" (*SCHS* 1.61). A real-life *guslar* could of course never aspire to such fame and recognition, the opportunities for paid performance being so few and far between that Cor Huso was, like Hasan Coso and Isak, the only singer anyone from that region knew who was able to make a living from his craft. But perhaps a month or even a year of "command performances" would not be beyond the powers of a legendary singer such as this one who, according to Ugljanin, **[End Page 163]** could sing nonstop for five or six hours and whose repertoire included "as many songs as there are days in the year" (Schmaus 1938.134).

Another anecdote illustrates the extraordinary nature of Cor Huso's reputation from a different perspective. Unlike Ugljanin and his peers who were little known outside their immediate areas, the *Guslar* apparently could go nowhere incognito, no matter how far he might stray from his native region. Here is the episode as Schmaus retells it, being careful to frame his account with the telltale acknowledgment that he somehow omitted to record the name of the Bijelo Polje resident from whom he collected the report (135):

> One evening, as the older villagers told the story, Cor Huso wished to avoid spending the night in a village house, where they might discover that he sang to the *gusle*. "For once let me get some rest," he said. For this reason he didn't even drop by the village, but went straight to a nearby mill, trusting that he would surely be left there in peace. But the millers rapidly figured out who their guest really was, and winked to one of their number who quickly ran to the village to fetch a *gusle*. As soon as the news spread that Cor Huso was there, the villagers crowded around the mill to hear him. In the meantime the young man returned with the *gusle*. They gave poor Huso no peace--like it or not, he once again had to sing the whole night long. So there wasn't any rest or sleep for him on that occasion, either.

Not only is Cor Huso so well known that he is immediately recognized even in a strange place, but he is also pictured as an individual who simply cannot escape his fate: in a word, to "publish" the poetic tradition. Notwithstanding his human limitations--manifested here as fatigue from too many prior nights of singing without a chance to recuperate--he is forced to continue "by popular demand." Such is the price paid by the individual for his alternate or complementary identity as the epic tradition.

Because he is represented as human, the *Guslar*, for all of his extraordinary feats, must also face mortality. Death may not come for 120 years, as with Bajgoric's Hasan Coso, or, like Kukuruzovic's Isak, he may continue to perform epic even though toothless and deaf to the *gusle*; nonetheless, his time to *svijet mijeniti* ("change world"), as the *guslari* **[End Page 164]** themselves formulaically and proverbially put it, will one day arrive. For Cor Huso that day is shrouded in the mystery of legend, which holds that he was killed "somewhere on the road below Pogozna next to a river in a deserted, uninhabited place, together with the boy who constantly accompanied him" (Schmaus 1938.135). No one knew, or at least no one was willing to say, who might have perpetrated the crime, or why.

Just like the epic heroes whom he celebrates in song, however, the *Guslar* never really dies, and this is perhaps the most fundamental dimension of his dual, even contradictory nature. As long as his bardic successors remember his remarkable achievements and cite him as their forebear, as long as they recreate him anew in the tales they tell and retell about singing, he continues to live and to justify their everyday activities by his legendary example. In fact, it would not be overstating the case to observe that Cor Huso had necessarily to perish as an individual in order to serve his purpose in the landscape of legend. Only when such a figure is no longer under the lock and key of temporality and finite definition but free to fit the space and time assigned to him by each of his heirs can he fulfill his double responsibility of portraying an individual *guslar* and the poetic tradition.

The Evidence from Archaic Greece

Like Cor Huso, Hasan Coso, and Isak, the multiform figure whom generations have called Homer seems to have occupied a liminal niche midway between the quotidian world of actual singers and performances, on the one hand, and the mythic sphere of epic events, legendary actions, and *klea andrôn,* on the other. The plain facts of the matter as represented in ancient sources are much discussed elsewhere,[27] so let us summarize the situation by juxtaposing two observations made by J. A. Davison on the vexed issue of the Homeric Question as posed in antiquity. Combining both the references in which the name "Homer" is used and those in which his identity must be inferred, Davison comes to "a strong impression that for the Greeks of the period down to about 450 b.c. Homer was a real person who had lived at latest in the early seventh century and had composed a **[End Page 165]** large number of narrative poems of the highest quality which were still being recited by professional rhapsodes" (1963.235). Then, as a prelude to surveying ancient authors' and scholars' comments on Homer, he notes the disparities that arose concerning the master poet's origins (1963.235): "By the early fifth century several different cities were already claiming to have been Homer's birthplace, and conflicting accounts of his pedigree were no doubt current."

Just how disparate the earliest biographical attestations were can be illustrated by a glance at the nine extant Lives of Homer as summarized by T. W. Allen. [28] While the Herodotean account does not cite a father, for example, the *Certamen* proposes Telemachos as one possibility, with Nestor's daughter Epikastê as one candidate for mother. Where the lineage is traced further back, the results show some consistency in the nearer generations, but Homer's ultimate ancestors vary from Apollo to Orpheus. Smyrna is a popular choice for the great bard's birthplace, winning mention in seven of the nine biographies, but we also hear frequently of Chios, Cyme, Ios, Argos, and Athens. The ancient Lives are equally at odds with one another over Homer's actual date, usually assigning him a relative historical niche on the basis of proximity to a famous event or person: for example, the *Certamen* makes him a contemporary of Midas, while Life VI places him before Hesiod. The name "Homer" is consistently taken as "blind" (a synonym for *tuphlos*) or "hostage" (the common noun *homêros*), [29] but this unity of explanation may stem as much from a legendary parallel to the blind bards of the *Odyssey* as from any other source. In other words, the oldest extant attestations yield a familiar contradiction: a real singer who was the tangible source of the best songs, but whose own origins and history seem to have been uncertain, contradictory, or at least dependent on local allegiance.

And what were these finest songs for which Homer was ultimately responsible? The answer to this question depends largely on the particular ancient source consulted. For some, the repertoire extended beyond the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to the so-called Epic Cycle, now preserved only in occasional small fragments with some of the narratives sketchily summarized **[End Page 166]** by the fifth-century c.e. Neoplatonist philosopher and critic Proclus. [30] For certain commentators, Homer was considered to be at the root of poems as various as the *Thebais*, occasionally ascribed to him but more frequently pronounced anonymous; the *Epigoni*, cited by Herodotus with skepticism about its authorship; the *Cypria* (11 books), attributed by some to Stasinus of Cyprus or Hegesias of Salamis rather than Homer; the *Little Iliad* (4 books), with Homer and four other authors proposed; the *Aethiopis* (5 books), by Homer or Arctinus of Miletus; and the *Nostoi* (5 books), by Homer, Agias of Troezen, or Eumelus. [31] The *Homeric Hymns*, a collection of 33 poems addressed to various gods and goddesses and including four substantial narratives of about 300-600 lines each as well as much briefer panegyrics, were thought by some to deserve the customary attribution, but ancient sources also name Olen, Pamphos, Musaeus, Orpheus, and Hesiod as possible authors. [32]

What do we make of such a highly inconsistent pattern of authorship? Were this a contemporary literary

lineage, we might be dismayed or at least suspicious of its integrity and usefulness. But it is not a contemporary lineage, either in fact or in function. All in all, as Robert Lamberton puts it (1997.39), "there is every reason to believe that these disagreements concerning authorship stemmed from changing models of literary production and the retrospective accommodation of the body of Greek hexameter poetry stemming from oral traditions to criteria of author-ship alien to the conditions of their production." [33] In other words, the Cycle **[End Page 167]** and the *Hymns* represent poetry sung within the larger tradition of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, that is, within the tradition that generations have eponymically called "Homer." We need not wonder at, or be disappointed over, the lack of consistency in listings of the great bard's compositions; for a legendary figure, such variability is not only expectable but desirable. The very plasticity of the ascribed repertoire from one account to another illustrates how the anthropomorphization functions: each poet or commentator appropriates "Homer" as the source of all that is valuable in the poetic tradition and derives his authority and position from that legendary attribution. From the perspective of our comparison with the South Slavic *Guslar*, the variant ascriptions in repertoire as well as in parentage and geographical origins are natural features of a figure such as Homer who must be multiform in order to play his role as an anthropomorphization of the poetic tradition.

This scenario of the legendary singer meshes with what Gregory Nagy has described as a process of "retrojection" within the Panhellenic tradition of Homeric oral poetry, a process by which the individual poet is appropriated by the larger tradition, "potentially transforming even historical figures into generic ones who represent the traditional functions of their poetry" (1990a.79). Like the *Guslar* in his various manifestations, and like Homer in the sum total of ancient witnesses, Nagy's singer is "retrojected as the original genius of heroic song, the protopoet whose poetry is reproduced by a continuous succession of performers" (1996b.76). In other words, we cannot know with certainty about Homer's birthplace, repertoire, or other biography simply because his identity is a composite representation of tradition, consistent enough to be meaningful to the audiences of Homeric poetry and variable enough to satisfy the particular local milieu in which "his" songs are performed and reperformed. Retrojection and idealization remove this master *aoidos* from the matrix of time and place that defines all subsequent singers so that he is placed at the origin of the bardic lineage, understood as the primogenitor. One could say that Nagy's Panhellenic model calls for the erasure of actual, individual details in favor **[End Page 168]** of foregrounding traditional status and, indeed, that is precisely what the Stolac *guslari* are accomplishing with their invocations of Cor Huso, Hasan Coso, and Isak as legendary singers.

Singer, Song, and *Sêma*

If the *Guslar* and Homer are essentially anthropomorphizations of the poetic tradition, then their trademark multiformity mirrors the structure and dynamics of the epic compositions that are attributed to them. Just as the legendary singer and his repertoire take different shapes in each appearance--Isak with Basic and Kukuruzovic, Hasan Coso with Bajgoric, Cor Huso with Ugljanin; the *Nostoi* included in the Homeric repertoire for some ancient commentators but not for others--so the language and narrative patterns he uses to make his poems show the same kind of mutability. Neither the legendary singer figure nor the poem can ever have a single, fixed form until he or it is instanced, whether in a certain singer's individualized account of his famous forebear or in a single, given performance of a song. And even then the biography and the performance will be ephemeral as things in themselves unless texts or other kinds of records intervene to fossilize them, to transform the events they represent into factual accounts. Salih Ugljanin's two accounts of Cor Huso are not identical, any more than his three performances of the *Pjesma od Bagdata* (*Song of Bagdad*) are wholly superimposable. [34] Each item is itself an instance informed by tradition; collectively they illustrate the principle of variation within limits.

This principle proves more than a descriptive feature typical of both legendary singer and song, more than simply a way to understand how the figure and the performance proliferate. It is also at the core of their continuing viability as useful traditional constructs. To put it almost aphoristically, only by remaining plastic can the singer and song also remain ubiquitous and idiomatic; only by retaining the quality of multiformity can the legendary singer serve his many bardic progeny (each with a singular set of expectations), and the Homeric or South Slavic *koinê* suit its many applications (each with a situation-specific dimension as well as a generic relationship to the epic tradition at large). With the advent of **[End Page 169]** fixation and historical certainty, the *Guslar* becomes a mere *guslar*, caught in the web of geography, temporality, and personal biographical detail. At that point it becomes possible to speak with customary modern precision about this or that figure or event, but the price paid is considerable: the "protopoet" is removed from the lineage, the *imprimatur* he provides is deleted from the

proceedings, and the individual's virtually genealogical link with tradition is severed. When the idiomatic diction of epic-making, a register of language dedicated to one purpose only (Foley 1995.49-52, 1996b), loses its characteristic and empowering pliability, the same thing happens. This specialized language lives by virtue of its rule-governed variability, not by fossilization. Like the legendary singer, it is necessarily both individual and traditional.

What is true of composition is also true of reception. Not only are telltale phrases and resonant scenes tectonically useful to the poet building an epic narrative; they also function as signals to the audience(s), as keys that unlock the word-hoard of context and association and point toward traditional referentiality. As has been illustrated at length elsewhere (esp. J. Foley 1991, 1995), South Slavic singers ultimately employ recurrent phraseology not *metri causa* but *artis causa*, as when they turn to one of a group of lyrical expressions to identify the period of time during which some threatening and unrelenting action takes place. They may say "three white days," "two white days," or "a month of days" with equal force; although superficially these phrases differ, idiomatically they are absolutely equivalent ways of urging the importance or intensity of any situation to which they are applied. Or *guslari* may sound the familiar knell of the typical scene of "Shouting in Prison," customarily keyed by some form of *cmiliti* ("to cry out") and following a well-trodden narrative pathway involving the prisoner's rude awakening of the ban's (the local regent) child, the banica's (his wife) complaint, and an attempt at a bargain for release of the prisoner. [35] Each phrase or scene is a multiform; each instances a complex web of expressive possibilities; and each "slots" the *differentia* of individual epic figures, actions, and situations within recognizable, resonant traditional categories.

Homeric epic likewise depends upon *pars pro toto* signification, **[End Page 170]** with the specialized idiom that is employed for composition also serving as a guide for reception of the poetry. At the level of phraseology, brief signals like *hupodra idôn* ("looking darkly"), *pukinon epos* ("intimate word"), and *all' age . . .* ("But come . . .") index the various situations they accompany with certain contextual information, thus enriching the overall presentation. Apart from their literal meaning, that is, each of these small speech-acts refers to a more than lexical reality. By conventional usage, the first conveys indignation and sets the stage for a possible quarrel; the second portends a profound change in the present course of events; and the third leads to a command and marks a rhetorical shift. [36] Such associations are not obvious from lexical content, but within the Homeric register they are part of the significative package for each occurrence of the given phrase. Examples of larger signals include the Feast scene, so common in various guises throughout the *Odyssey*, and the Lament, which occurs six times in the later part of the *Iliad* but also--as a powerful speech-act rife with implication--in Andromache's resigned but urgent plea to Hektor in Book 6. [37] In all of these cases, it is neither the traditional nor the literal, textual meaning that alone rules the day; it is rather their combination that suspends any given narrative moment in the timeless web of traditional referentiality, indexing the immediate via the lemma of the ongoing.

In order to highlight this typical Homeric strategy, I have elsewhere commented on the use of the word *sêma* in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. [38] The poet employs this term to denote a sign that points not so much to a specific situation, text, or performance as toward the ambient tradition that serves as the key to an emergent reality. Each actual *sêma* also mimics a central expressive strategy of Homeric poetry: traditional referentiality. As we discovered, *sêmata* include many of Zeus' omens, Teiresias' prophecy of the oar and winnowing shovel, Odysseus' identifying scar, and, not least, the olive-tree bed shared by Penelope and Odysseus. Although superficially **[End Page 171]** diverse, each of these signs has a common thrust: it signals an emergent reality. As keys to what is to happen, each of them marks a prolepsis, a connection from what is present and explicit to what is immanent and implied, and each of them is uniquely effective because it charts a unique revelatory pathway. *Sêmata* index traditional meanings: the omens mark divine warning, the oar summons the sea (and Poseidon [39]), the scar identifies the veteran of the boar hunt, the bed symbolizes the *telos* of the *nostos*. To put it another way, the *sêmata* work like language itself, and especially like the traditional register of Homeric epic, by encoding worlds of implication in simple, tangible signs.

The image of the legendary singer is no different in this regard. In an important sense, the *Guslar*--Isak, Hasan Coso, Cor Huso, or whatever he is called--indexes as well as names the South Slavic epic tradition. Likewise, from the same perspective, the designation "Homer" amounts to a *sêma* of the ancient Greek poetic tradition. Milman Parry was very close to this same conclusion when he wrote in his field notes more than a half-century ago, "from our literary point of view this is almost startling: the singer embodies the tradition, and what is true of the one is true of the other" (1933-35.450). I would

prefer to identify the legendary singer, that is, the *Guslar* or Homer rather than their real-life descendants, as the embodiment of the tradition, the figure who serves this *pars pro toto* function. As an anthropomorphization, he offers generations of bards and audiences both an idealized projection and a dependable, economical way to refer to the mythic context and background that they share. To invoke his name is to speak directly of the ongoing tradition of verbal art that, on the one hand, supersedes all individual poets and, on the other hand, cannot function without their active, idiosyncratic instancing of the common inheritance. Understood on his own terms, the figure of the legendary singer can perform a similar significative function for readers of texts, even for scholars who, attempting to root out legend in a vain search for biographical truth, have falsely interpreted an anthropomorphization as an *anthrôpos*. Segregating the *sêma* from its referent forces a choice no more promising than Solomon's infamous proposal; instead let us accept the merger of individual with tradition in the *Guslar* named Isak, Hasan Coso, and Cor Huso and in the *Aoidos* named Homer. **[End Page 172]**

Epilogue: A Parallel from Inner Mongolia

In late September 1997, I had the opportunity to gather information about a North Asian analogue to Homer and the South Slavic *Guslar*. During a field trip to Tong Liao and Zharut Banner in Inner Mongolia I interviewed an active, practicing epic singer, Losor by name, about his craft and his bardic genealogy. [40] In response to my questions about the source of his songs, Losor recounted tales of a prior singer, Choibang, whom he and his fellows saw as the greatest of all bards. The figure he described was strikingly similar to the legendary singer who has been the major subject of this article.

Losor placed Choibang three generations back in time, characterizing him as his teacher's teacher's teacher, and set his life span at approximately 90-100 years. Although he never actually met this epic paragon, our informant was able to provide quite a lot of personal data about his life and exploits via stories told by his grandparents and by other singers. Choibang was, he said, an extraordinarily tall man of noble blood ("people called him 'your majesty'") who was descended from a wealthy family. [41] Though his precise village of origin remained obscure, he traveled everywhere, had a great love of hunting, and was a champion at many athletic endeavors; his nickname, in fact, translates as "Official Wrestler." Along with his physical gifts, Choibang possessed a superior intelligence, as evidenced both by his fluency in four languages: Mongolian, Tibetan, Mandarin, and Manchu, and by the immense respect shown him by other epic poets, who often walked 20 Chinese miles and more to listen to him perform. **[End Page 173]**

Choibang's own repertoire of epic was unique in at least three ways. He knew a tremendous number of songs, he created numerous new compositions (against all standard procedure), and his words were so famous that they eventually became proverbial. On this last point, Losor assured us that widely circulating expressions and stories are even today cited by their speakers with what amounts to a kind of oral-traditional footnote: "these are Choibang's words." All of the best songs thus came ultimately from him. Nonetheless, like the *Guslar* and Homer, the transmission of these narratives was shrouded in uncertainty and even mystery: for example, Losor claimed to know a very old woman who had learned a song directly from Choibang, but who died before she could reveal to our informant more than an outline and a few phrases.

In short, this legendary Mongolian singer followed a familiar pattern. He was far enough removed in time and space to serve as an effective anthropomorphization of epic tradition, a kind of *sêma* for Mongolian epic. He was larger than life--in his age, pedigree, physical abilities, intelligence, and accomplishments. To put it simply, he more closely resembles the heroes of the epics he sang than he does "real-life" singers who are his supposed bardic progeny.

Although Choibang has been historicized by singers and folklorists in the Tong Liao region, much in the same way that Alois Schmaus historicized the South Slavic *Guslar*Cor Huso and generations of textual scholars have historicized Homer, the "facts" of his biography prove elusive from one account to the next. Even the carefully drawn genealogy of epic poets published in Sampulnorbu's compilation of field-elicited biographies (1990.213-16) cannot be taken as an authoritative document since the "data" shift as one biography about Choibang is compared to another. [42] This is not to say that the various sources (oral or written) are confused or corrupt; it is to observe that the life story of this greatest of Mongolian epic singers is, after all, a traditional story, and traditional stories are characterized **[End Page 174]** by their multiformity, by their variation within limits. A final anecdote about the great man's demise will illustrate the traditional nature of the singer as a legendary figure.

Speaking, of course, through the filter of "another singer's father," who, in turn, had "a friend who knew Choibang," Losor described how this greatest of bards enjoyed special privileges beyond those accorded normal citizens of the region. He was not only a professional craftsman free to go anywhere he wished, but he was also permitted by the political leader of Zharut Banner to carry a gun. How mysterious, Losor continued, that such a brave, well-respected community figure should be covertly murdered and then beheaded. Stranger still was the episode that followed: in keeping with the folktale belief that a bard's head would do wonders for a batch of wine, Choibang's detached head was actually dropped into an ongoing fermentation process, and "people said" that the yield was indeed improved in quality. Like his South Slavic and ancient Greek brethren, Choibang was a bard beyond all others, a truly legendary singer. [43]

University of Missouri

Notes

1. On traditional referentiality in Homer, South Slavic epic, and Old English poetry, see esp. J. Foley 1991.6-8 and *passim*, 1995, 1997.

2. For a history of the Oral Theory and its spread, see J. Foley 1988; for bibliography, J. Foley 1985, with updates in the journal *Oral Tradition* (1 [1986].767-808; 3 [1988].191-228; forthcoming 1998), now available electronically at http://www.missouri.edu/~csottime. With specific reference to Homer and oral tradition, see Edwards 1986, 1988, 1992.

3. For a comparative view of phraseology and narrative patterning in ancient Greek, Anglo-Saxon, and South Slavic epic, see J. Foley 1990. For specific comparisons and contrasts between the Homeric and South Slavic poetic languages, see J. Foley 1996b.

4. Let me state explicitly that the arguments advanced in this article do not depend upon viewing our *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as oral performances. We must leave the Great Divide model behind and take into account the demonstrated fact that the *language* of oral tradition--its specialized idiom and its implications--can and does persist into texts (see further J. Foley 1995.60-98 on "the rhetorical persistence of traditional forms").

5. See Lord 1991, 1995; J. Foley 1991.63-124; on the musical dimension of performance, Erdely 1995. See also the *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs* series (hereafter *SCHS*), esp. vols. 1, 3, and 14, that contains valuable information about and conversations with the singers whom Parry and Lord recorded. Given the present historical and political state of affairs in the former Yugoslavia, I choose to call the singers (as well as their language and the epics they perform) "South Slavic," rather than "Serbian," "Croatian," "Bosnian," or "Serbo-Croatian." Although "South Slavic" is employed by linguists to denote the language family that also includes Bulgarian, Slovenian, and Macedonian, it seems better to err on the side of inclusiveness rather than parochialism or segregation.

6. On dialect, idiolect, and the pan-traditional level of language in South Slavic epic, see J. Foley 1990.158-200, 278-328.

7. Cf. J. Foley 1991.61-134 (on South Slavic epic), esp. 135-89 (on the *Iliad*); also 1995.136-80 (on the *Hymn to Demeter*).

8. As we shall see below, even when an informant does claim to have encountered the legendary singer, his account is either contradictory, obviously romanticized, or both.

9. In lectures, as well as in a videotaped presentation recorded in 1987, Lord used this phrase to refer to the enormous collection of oral epic he and Parry made in the years 1933-35, much of it encoded on aluminum disks. For a description of the fieldwork expeditions, see Lord 1953, J. Foley 1988.31-35. For a full index of the 1933-35 collections, see Kay 1995.

10. Parry was especially interested in Moslem songs because they were generally much longer and more ornate than the relatively brief songs from the Christian tradition and therefore more like Homeric

epic (Lord 1953.16). For brief biographies of these three singers from Stolac, see J. Foley 1990.42-51.

11. What follows is drawn from unpublished conversations with the three singers: Parry nos. *6598* (Basic), *6698* (Bajgoric), and *6619* (Kukuruzovic). All translations from South Slavic are mine. On the nature of the "word" (*rec*) in an epic performance, as opposed to the lexical item featured in texts, see J. Foley 1990.44-50, 1996a.151-59; cf. Martin 1989.10-26 on *muthos* and *epos*.

12. One internal indication of the performative and symbolic importance of the instrument is a common proem that begins: "O my gusle, maplewood gusle, / Speak now and ever, / Speak softly, loudly, / The gusle is mine and it's played for you" (version by Bajgoric, Parry no. 6703.1-4). Note that performance without the *gusle* was not unknown in the parallel Christian tradition of epic: Tesan Podrugovic, one of the most celebrated of the oral poets collected by Vuk Karadzic, always performed a cappella (see Koljevic 1980.118-23, 311-14).

13. Bajgoric first says that he does not know how his father, who taught him, learned to sing; he later changes his story, citing Hasan Coso as his father's teacher. Kukuruzovic claims that Isak taught Huso Tarahija, who in turn taught him. Basic's claim is at once less personal and more expansive: according to him, Isak, who died some 70 years before and "was not even my father's father," taught all of the singers in the Stolac region.

14. See below the discussion of the legendary singer Cor Huso Husovic (Cor Huso Husein), who was reputed to have performed before the court of Emperor Franz Jozef in Vienna.

15. Parry and Lord found that the ecology of South Slavic traditional oral epic was basically regional with distinctive styles and repertoires developing in modest-sized areas or districts as a result of both learning and performance patterns. Both their fieldwork and their publication plans reflect this analysis (see Lord 1953.16-17, also 1960.13-29). Of course, this does not mean that idiosyncratic and multi-regional levels of language and narrative organization did not exist as well; see note 6 above.

16. The phrase used here is *baciti gusle* (lit. "throw [down]," better "cast aside," the *gusle*); it idiomatically signals the end of a continuous performance session.

17. Parry estimates the average length of a performance session at 20-40 minutes, citing a single stretch of two hours (about 1300 lines) by Camil Kulenovic in Kulen Vakuf as "quite unique in my own knowledge, and I have never heard nor read of anything which approaches it" (1933-35.458). My own more limited experience with epic singers in Serbia corroborates this estimate.

18. We may wonder whether Basic's own part-time occupation as a *kahvedzija* made this story especially attractive or meaningful to him.

19. Cf. Avdo Medjedovic's remarkable 12,311-line version of this song, published in *SCHS* vols. 3-4.

20. Lord 1953.10. This is the same singer whom Parry and Lord came to see as the symbol of excellence in the composition and performance of South Slavic heroic song; thus the title given to Parry's field notes (1933-35) and Lord's series of "Homer and Huso" articles (1936, 1938, 1948a; also 1948b). See Lord 1970 for a list of those *guslari* who claimed to have known or heard Cor Huso (15, n. 4) and an explanation of why his songs cannot be reconstructed from performance by later "disciples" (16-18).

21. See also Murko 1951.212-13, chiefly a reprise of Schmaus 1938.

22. For example, in the conversation with Vujnovic (Parry no. 652; *SCHS* 1.61), Ugljanin mentions learning ten songs from Cor Huso over a proverbial period (a month of days: *mesec dana*), the same period that the *Guslar* was resident bard in Franz Jozef's court (see below), while he told Schmaus he learned only a single song over an unspecified period and claimed that Cor Huso stayed an entire year with Franz Jozef (1938.135). In neither case does he name the songs supposedly learned from the great singer except to characterize them vaguely as Bosnian border songs.

23. Cf. Lord 1948b.473: "Cor Huso Husein was a blind singer whom we never met because he had already gone to his reward in 1935, but who had become a legendary figure among the singers in the

Sandzak of Novi Pazar, where we first heard of him, and in Montenegro." Cf. also Bynum 1979.8 on attribution to Becir Islamovic, a *guslar* who apparently really existed, but whom legend significantly magnified.

24. *Cor* in fact means "blind." Murko 1951.206-17 surveys available sources on the phenomenon of blind bards in the South Slavic epic tradition, finding an appreciable number mentioned at second hand, but also noting that the popularity of the celebrated blind singer Filip Visnjic (whose performances were recorded via dictation by Vuk Karadzic in the early nineteenth century and widely published) had a great deal to do with the general prevalence of the sightless bard as a symbol and a "Homeric Demodokos" (216). On ancient attestations of Homer's blindness, see below.

25. Also Schmaus 1956.323, n. 5: "Huso ist der Name eines südslav. mohammedan. Sängers, der bei Parry und Lord stellvertretend für die südslav. mohammed. Epik steht."

26. Less obviously a mark of his unusual repertoire is the fact that, according to Salko Hot, Cor Huso knew and performed both "border hero" songs (classic Moslem epic tales from the earlier Ottoman era) and songs about local Kolasin heroes, a combination Schmaus finds unique (1938.134).

27. See esp. Lamberton 1997; also Davison 1963, Turner 1997, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1982. For internal poetic evidence on the role of singers in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which I do not consider here because it represents a non-homologous source, see esp. Segal 1994.

28. 1969.11-41. See especially the comparative chart between 32 and 33, from which these examples are drawn. Allen's sources are the Herodotean life, accounts by Plutarch and Proclus, the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* (*Contest of Homer and Hesiod*), the Suidas' tripartite chapter, and four anonymous lives.

29. Cf. Nagy 1979.296-300 on an etymology yielding "he who fits [the song] together."

30. For a dependable edition of all relevant evidence (fragments, descriptions, and authorial attributions), see Davies 1988, from which the general remarks below are derived. Possible reconstructions of content and context are available in Davies 1989.

31. Cf. the shorthand summary in Hammond and Scullard 1977 s.v. Epic Cycle. Reports of *nostos* (Return) poetry are particularly intriguing given the widespread occurrence of Return songs that very closely approximate the narrative pattern of the *Odyssey* throughout the former Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and elsewhere. See further J. Foley 1990.359-87.

32. See Allen, Halliday, and Sikes 1980.lxxxiii-lxxxviii for what is known about these and other poets as possible hymnists; also Clay 1989.5-16, 270; H. Foley 1994.28-30; and Shelmerdine 1995.1-10. Cf. J. Foley 1995.136-80 on traditional referentiality in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

33. I take approximately the same position as Lamberton, viewing the Cycle as a critical construction that conveniently names some of the epic songs that constituted the Homeric poetic tradition; thus I do not see the poems as existing in a truly intertextual relationship wherein one could influence another *as texts* (cf. the similar, textless model suggested by Davies 1989.4-5). As Holmberg puts it in relation to apparent variations among the Epic Cycle poems, "a fruitful approach to the supposed inconsistencies of the epic cycle might be to understand them as remnants of the living oral tradition, and to accept the inherent multiplicity, rather than insisting upon determining the one true version" (1998 forthcoming). Cf. Burgess, who argues that "the Cyclic epics, even in their ultimate fixed condition as texts, were independent in content and even form from the Homeric poems" (1996.78). For other views stressing the uniqueness of Homer and the presumed textuality of the Cycle poems from a Neoanalytic perspective, see Huxley 1969, Griffin 1977, and Willcock 1997.

34. See n. 22 above. For Ugljanin's three recorded versions of the *Pjesma od Bagdata*, see *SCHS* 2, nos. 1, 2, 3.

35. For a discussion of these traditional signs, see J. Foley 1990.191-92 (phrases for a period of time), 288-327 ("Shouting in Prison" pattern).

36. On *hupodra id&ocircn*, see Holoka 1983; on *pukinon epos*, J. Foley 1991.154-56. *all' age* is a common and extremely general sign that marks (1) a change in direction within a speech and (2) a change in mode by introducing a command in the form "Come do something" or "Come let us do something." It occurs a total of 154 times in Homer (65 in the *Iliad*, 84 in the *Odyssey*, 5 in the *Hymns*).

37. Lines 405-40. On Feast scene morphology, see J. Foley 1990.265-77; on Lament as a traditional form, J. Foley 1991.168-74.

38. See J. Foley 1997. For further remarks on *sêma*, see Nagy 1990b, Ford 1992.131-71, and Holmberg 1997.19-21.

39. See Hansen 1990.246-49.

40. Let me express my sincere gratitude to Professors Chao Gejin and Zhalgaa of the Institute of Literature of National Minorities at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing who arranged the fieldwork trip and served as translator and liaison, respectively; and to bard Losor who patiently answered all of our questions as well as performed for our group. Thanks also are due to all those colleagues in Tong Liao and Zharut Banner, especially Sampulnorbu, who welcomed us into their midst and joined in the series of performances and interviews. For general sources on Mongolian epic, see Chao Gejin 1998, Heissig 1987; on the contiguous epic traditions of the central Asiatic Turkic peoples, which share with Mongolian epic some tales, heroes, and performance characteristics, see Reichl 1992.

41. These last two details set Choibang apart from all contemporary singers who practice an art that, although widely respected as a cultural institution, is also relatively unremunerative and of low social status. For a noble and wealthy individual to have assumed the position of bard constitutes a reversal of (at least contemporary) expectation.

42. Sampulnorbu 1990 lists a primary Zharut Banner "family tree" of 46 epic singers, 27 of whom were still alive in 1990. Choibang's dates are given as 1836-1928, a life span of 92 years. He is shown as one of the two protégés of Dansannima, the "first" bard, whose dates are set at 1836-1889. Of course, the Mongolian epic tradition goes back far beyond the mid-eighteenth century, but singers trace their lineage only as far as Dansannima and Choibang, who epitomize the collective inheritance. Losor's account, and the stories told by others from this region, vary both among themselves and in comparison with the published "historical biography" in Sampulnorbu 1990.

43. Versions of this article were presented at the 1996 American Philological Association and 1996 American Folklore Society meetings, as well as at the Centre d'études homériques, Université Stendhal, Grenoble, France. I am grateful to the many colleagues who offered reactions and advice on these occasions. Let me acknowledge with particular gratitude the helpful comments contributed by the two anonymous readers commissioned by *Arethusa*. I also very much appreciate the express permission given by Stephen Mitchell, Curator of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature at Harvard University, to use and quote from the unpublished South Slavic performances in the Collection.

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