BEITRÄGE

The epic towns project – a presentation

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Supported by FOSYU and Serbian Ministry of Science and Technologies, the Institute for Balkan Studies started a new project titled *The Image and Concept of Towns in Christian and Moslem Epic Ballads*. The team engaged on it consists of the researchers of different profiles – literary scholars, linguists, etymologists, historians, cartographers, geographers, and others. Its objective is to present the results of this team-work in both electronic and standard ways: as a CD-Rom (with Web presentation) and as a printed monograph. The principal researcher of the project is Mirjana Dᴇᴛᴇʟɪć.

The project will investigate the best, classical published collections of oral epic ballads from Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, namely Vuk Kᴀʀᴀᴅžɪć' collections (‚Prosveta' jubilee edition II–IV[1]; State edition II–IX[2]; SANU edition II–IV[3]); the collections of Matica Hrvatska (I–X[4]); Sima Mɪʟᴜᴛɪɴᴏᴠɪć, *Songs of Montenegro and Herzegovina*[5]; *Songs of Bosnian Moslems* by Kosta Höʀᴍᴀɴ (I–III[6]) and *Bosnian Songs* by Esad Hᴀᴅžɪᴏᴍᴇʀsᴘᴀʜɪć[7]. This sample comprehends about 1500 songs of the highest literary value, its size emphasizing its high scientific reliability and relevance. This exclusively literary material is nevertheless a source of different kinds of data and, for that reason, will be processed multidisciplinary as a special kind of database.

The choice of material for this investigation arises from the conceptualization of urban space within epic poetry, because of its strong ideological position as a human habitation clearly defined in time and space. In all other forms of traditional culture, urban space is imagined and represented either as a miraculous or elfin place (as in

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[1] Вук Стеф. Караџић, *Српске народне пјесме* I–IV, Beograd, 1976, 1988. Abreviated as: Vᴜᴋ I–IV.

[2] Вук Стеф. Караџић, *Српске народне пјесме* I–IX, Државно издање, Бијоград, 1897–1902. Abreviated as: Vᴜᴋ VI–IX.

[3] *Српске народне пјесме из необјављених рукописа Вука Стеф. Караџића* I–IV, САНУ, Београд, 1973–1974. Abreviated as: SANU I–IV.

[4] *Hrvatske narodne pjesme* I–X, Matica Hrvatska, Zagreb, 1896–1942; *Junačke pjesme (muhamedovske),* knjiga III–IV, edited by Luka Mᴀʀjᴀɴᴏᴠɪć, 1898 (III), 1899 (IV). Abreviated as: MH I–X.

[5] Сима Милутиновић, *Пјеванија церногорска и херцеговачка*, сабрана Чубром Чојковићем Церногорцем, у Лајпцигу, 1837. Abreviated as: SM.

[6] *Narodne pjesme muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini* I–II, collected by Kosta Höʀᴍᴀɴ, Sarajevo, 1933. (short. KH I–II); *Narodne pjesme muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini*, edited, introduction and comments by Djenana Bᴜᴛᴜʀᴏᴠɪć, Sarajevo, 1966. Abreviated as: KH III.

[7] Esad Hᴀᴅžɪᴏᴍᴇʀsᴘᴀʜɪć, *Junačke pjesme Bosanske*, Banjaluka 1909. Abreviated as: EH.

fairy-tales, ritual poetry, short literary forms, *etc.*), or as a notion with a name but without a content (as in etiological and other legends). In contrast, epic poetry builds the image of urban space as a centre of power and earthly rule, equating the very concept of ‚state' with the number and potency of a state's towns and cities[8]. In epic poetry only – because it deals with ethic, social, and political norms as they effect (and affect) the complex relationship between the state, its ruler, religion, and nation – urban spaces are modeled as places with structure, important enough to go to war for. As recent experience shows, this sense of the term ‚town' in particular persists, giving rise to circumstances of the greatest risk for the survival of traditional culture.

The Epic Towns Project can be divided in five parts:

1. Introductory essay/study;
2. Lexicon of towns and other inhabited places (with two browse modes: by name of a place and by its attribute);
3. Tabular presentation of the material (with two browse modes: by juxtaposition and linear);
4. Maps (approx. 1500, one for each poem, representing its spatial image);
5. Corpus (the epic ballads themselves).

2–3: Lexicon and Tables

Both lexicon and tables will list *all* communally inhabited places mentioned in the collections of oral epic poetry. The reasons are twofold. First, the term ‚grad' (town) is historically unstable. What is mentioned in the epic songs as a fortified town, *šeher* or *varoš*, in the course of several centuries may have ceased to exist (for example, *Avala*), or have been down-graded to a suburb (*Višnjica*), a village (*Deligrad*), or some other, lesser form of habitation (even a farmstead). Conversely, small communities in the epic poems may have become larger. Taking all these in consideration, we decided not to proceed by any external definition of town/city, but to go exclusively by what is mentioned in the poetry itself.

The second reason is even more pragmatic. Keeping in mind the intended users (learned as well as popular), it is important to provide all categories of information mentioned in the poetry: ethnological, linguistic, onomastic, anthropological, historical, and geographic. Thanks to the great flexibility and potentials of electronic media, all these data can be processed and presented easily within a single, interactive publication.

2.1. The Lexicon of epic towns offers several kinds of these data: a) present name of the place/town; b) epic name of it (if it is different); c) its historical name (if known or even if existent)[9]; d) etymology of the name/names[10]; e) attribute to a town (words that give more information about it) with exact place of its appearance in the poem; f) short text about the place/town; g) basic bibliography.

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[8] This moment in particular will be discussed later in presentation of the *Introductory study*.
[9] Marked by this sign: ❑
[10] Marked by this sign: ❖

Example 1: a Lexicon unit

AVALA

❑ Žrnov, Žrnovan

❖ *Havala* – tur.: a place, a hill which dominates the surroundings; *Havale* – arab.: a hill, a high spot; often a name for a fortress which dominates a city.

❖ Old Serbian. *Žrьnovь, Žrьnovanь, Žrьvovanь* XV c. (Dan.), probably according to the mill stone: common Slavonic **žьrnu, žьrnve*, SC. *žrvanj* (Skok III 685 sq.).

Više Bi(j)ograda: *U Avali više Bijograda* (Vuk II,93); *Na Avalu više Biograda* (MH III,1:695)

Iznad Bijograda: *Sa Avale iznad Bijograda* (Vuk IV, 46)

Without attribute: *Na Avalu do Porčine kule* (KH I,4), *Sa Avale kad topuz otisne* (MH III, 1:703)

Turkish name for an old town called Žrnov or Žrnovan, south from Belgrade. For some time, at the beginning of their rule, Turks also used to call it *Gözelce* (gözel = beautiful).

After the Turks occupied Serbia and unsuccessfully attacked Belgrade in 1440, the Žrnov town was under Hungarian rule. When the Turkish army invaded Erdely (Transylvania) in 1442, major parts of Hungarian military left the town, so Turks got their chance and took it back. They renovated the town after the unsuccessful siege of Belgrade in 1458, and named it Avala, or Havale, which means: the checkpoint, a fortress dominating another fortress or a city. „From the ruins of the little medieval town Žrnov, which they called Avala, Turks built a real brigand's tower, covered with lead. From there, they ruled the surroundings of Belgrade, which they literally devastated."* This Turkish town is also mentioned in the old Serbian written sources: in the year 1515, May 6th „Balil beg broke the Erdely duke Janoš at Havala".** After the fall of Belgrade in 1521, the town of Avala lost its former significance and finally was abandoned in XVIII century.

The ruins of the town were visible at the mount Avala till 1934, when they were destroyed to make place for a monument of the unknown soldier 1914–1918.

According to Evlija Čelebi, the epic hero Porča of Avala was a historical personality who lived there in XV century.

Yet another medieval town Havala exists in Bosnia, on the banks of the river Una, above Kulen-Vakuf in direction of the Old Ostrovica. It was built in the time of the sultan Ahmed III (1703–1730).

Bibliography: Daničić 1, p. 342; 3, p. 406**; Deroko 1950, p. 101–102; EČ 329, n. 18, 24; Radonić I – 82, n. 51; Nikolić 1903, p. 907*; Vojna enciklopedija, s.v. *Avala; Grad.*

2.1.a. Names of Places

The excerption of the epic material for the purpose of this Lexicon was limited to oikonims only, omitting kthetikons (*Beograd* – yes, *beogradski* – no; *Avala* – yes,

avalski – no, etc) and other derivations[11]. Even if they made a part of a personal name or official title, adjectives derived from towns names, i.e. kthetikons, were rejected (as in kralj *budimski*, *Vrhovac* Alaga)[12], but they had to be taken into account if their noun-form was not changed (Porča od *Avale*, kralj od *Budima*)[13]. We are fully aware that this regulation is highly arbitrary[14], but it had to be made in order to lessen the entropy which is strikingly progressive when it comes to adjectives. On the other hand, derivations like ethnikons (*Beogradjanin*, *Budimka* etc.) are omitted because they make a part of quite another kind of research.

2.1.b. Attributes

Further on, what is here called „attribute" to an oikonim, is in fact a sintagm consisting in either adjective (*beli grad* Beograd) or case attributes (Porca *od Avale*, Skadar *na Bojani*). If any of the appellative parts of the sintagms appears alone, not connected with some oikonim or another (and there are 904 of those in epic ballads), it is not considered „attribute" any more, but an independent notion which can be a subject of different research (e.g. *Grad gradila* tri brata rodjena – Vᴜᴋ II, 26:1; Te ti znadeš *latinske gradove* – Vᴜᴋ VIII, 70:134; and so on).

One of the interesting results of our preliminary investigation is that there are not much more than 15 geographic appellatives defining a settlement or urban space in the epics. The most frequent among them are, of course, *grad, selo, šeher, mesto*[15], followed by *varoš, palanka, kasaba, čaršija, pazar, karaula* and *šanac*[16]. The oikonim sintagm is structured of oikonim and atributive/atribute (as in: Brže dodje *gradu Bijogradu* Vᴜᴋ II, 98:97, or in: Po *belome gradu Biogradu* SANU IV, 48:49). Contrary to this, there is a relatively small number of geographic appellatives which in epic ballads cannot form other sintagms but tripartite: oikonim + attribute + attributive. Such cases are, for example, these: (Deževa) stari *dvorovi*, (Stambol) carev *sto*, (Žabljak) krasna *kraljevina*, (Petnjica) turska *kasapnica* and so on[17].

The attributes are much more numerous (either single or with attributives), but with an unbalanced frequency: the most frequent of all is adjective *beli* (white), with

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[11] It goes without saying that excerption in fact covered all toponims in the ballads, which means the names of: countries, counties, rivers, mountains/hills, and other spatials concepts. These make quite another, separate body for investigation which shall be processed in due course.

[12] Buda's King, Vrhovi's Alaga.

[13] Porcha of *Avala*, king of *Buda*.

[14] For example, „od Budima" and „budimski" – as it is easily shown in English translation – both mean the same: belonging to Buda, being „of Buda". The same goes for „Porča od Avale" (of Avala) which is equal to „Porča avalski" (Avala's).

[15] Grad = town; selo = village; šeher = city; mesto = place.

[16] Varoš = little town; palanka = of Roman origin, formerly meaning a place with a palisade, now just a small place; kasaba = Turkish for a little town; Pazar = market place; karaula = check point; šanac = trench. Palanka once was, and the last two words still are, part of military terminology.

[17] Old *castles*, imperial *throne*, beautiful *kingdom*, Turkish *butchery*.

highly entropic distribution, as it is usually the case with stereotypes[18]. The progressive frequency line is, of course, on its peak when it comes to the case attribute with adverbial meaning, which was only to be expected (e.g. [Neretva] the town on the battlefield; [Skadar] the town by the Bojana river; [Stambol] in the middle of the Empire, and so on). In these cases, more usually than not, a location of the main event is being defined, so all kinds of language material are combined there in order to get the utmost precision in this important moment of setting the scene for the future goings on.

2.1.c. Texts

The Lexicon of towns here proposed is neither geographical nor historical reference book. Its purpose is to give the basic information of the epic places, evaluated from the standpoint of the epic genre of ballads, which means from the point of view of oral literature and traditional culture. Therefore, its time limit will be the end of XIX century (when the uprisings against Turks came to an end), and the frame of its content will have three subdivisions: 1) the old history if there is any (first mentions, classical names and owners/founders, etc.), 2) contemporary situation, and 3) epic profile (epic owner, or a hero connected with it, epic founder, etc). In the case of the big European cities, such as London, Paris, Vienna, Venice and alike, the stress will naturally be on the subdivision 3), and on the subdivision 1) in the cases of Middle East towns like Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Azov, Odessa, Bender and so on. The greatest value this Lexicon will have in the case of little and unimportant places, almost or completely forgotten, after they served as upraising centres or battlefields of once important events. Such places are, for example, Čokešina (where the famous battle against the Turks was fought and brothers Nedić were killed as heroes), Višnjica (which is now a Belgrade suburb, but once was an independent village and a Prince Eugen's check point in 1717 battle for Belgrade), or Banjska (which once was an important cult place with churches and monasteries built by Serbian kings and emperors of XIV century, but today is abandoned and wasted ruin in Kosovo). Finally, there is no doubt that there will be quite a few places that will be mentioned only in this Lexicon and nowhere else, such as: Baldare (no information), Derdemez (in Monte Negro), Keleševo (obscure), Pećina Stijena (obscure), and many others.

The Bibliography under the text will correspond with the given article only. The general bibliography will be listed separately (at the end of the book in paper version, and as a separate window in the electronic one).

3. Tables

Resulting from the excerption of the epic material, two kinds of tables – General and Special – were created to suit two operational modes of dealing with the card files. Although after the completion of the final electronic database they will not be needed any more, the general idea is to keep them on as an additional tool easy to use and less demanding electronicwise.

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[18] This shall also be discussed later in presentation of the *Introductory study*.

General Tables offer the same kind of information as Lexicon units do, but shorter, faster, and aimed at different (scientific) needs.

(Example 2: a Table unit 1)

Place	Attribute	Collection/Song
Avala	– none	Vuk II, 93
		Vuk III, 24
		SM 145
		KH I, 4
		MH III, 1
	– više Bijograda	Vuk II, 93
		MH III, 1
	– iznad Bijograda	Vuk IV, 46

This kind of table is mostly used in the course of different kinds of linguistic, folk-loristic and statistic research, as well as for all sorts of investigations in historical geography. It is tightly connected with the name of the place and in its electronic version will lead to the poems cited in the right-hand corner of the table.

The other kind of table (Special) is, on the contrary, the identification card of the poem itself and, in the long run, of the collections the poems appear in. The concept of this table is similar to the former one, but the data it gives are more elaborate, including also the frequency of the appearance of a name in the poem. This kind of data presentation gives the context to a name, for example:

(Example 3: a Table unit 2)

Title of the ballad: Vuk II, 93 – „Porča od Avale i Zmajognjeni Vuk"

Present name of the place	Epic name of the place	Attribute	Number of the verse Frequency
1. Avala	Avala	– none	3, 7, 19, 29, 40, 53, 58, 61, 87, 97, 116
		– više Bijograda	2
2. Beograd	Bijograd	– none	2
		– stojni	22, 26, 145
3. Kupinovo	Kupinovo	– selo	36, 37
4. Sarajevo	Sarajevo	– none	152

which is only one specific case from the quoted General table (the first collection/poem in the right column). The same can be obtained for each and every one name in the General table (in the electronic version by simply clicking the code of an item: Vuk+number, SM+, MH+, KH+ etc).

These paper presentations are only a clumsy vision of the future electronic database which – it is hoped – will be operative easily and simply. The point is to get all the information that might be needed for a research in the way of statistics, no matter what the main subject is (literary research, linguistic, ethnological, anthropological or other).

4. Maps

The electronic media, due to their potency and fastness, are the best and – in fact – the only reasonably economic means to represent large scale mapping as an illustrative material accompanying multilevel research results performed on a huge corpus. In printed form that could never be accomplished, and for two reasons: 1) it would be too expensive and 2) the book would be too large and bulky for use of any convenience.

As it was mentioned above, the main idea is to enable the user to surf easily through many different kinds of information, including maps of places mentioned in 1500 epic poems. This does not necessarily mean that maps are also to be in that number. The technique of map-making for electronic media has very useful and applicable solutions for problem of large numbers.

The main problem in this case will be the different resolution of mapping for one and the same poem which sometimes covers space from London to Azov (North Russia), and from Vienna to Cairo, insisting at the same time on microtoponimy of local places around one of Bosnian, Hercegovinian, Serbian or Montenegrin towns (such as Udbina, Beograd, Podgorica, Jajce, Mostar etc.). This can also be solved in a few different but equally presentable ways, always taking care of user's convenience at the first place.

For these reasons, the mapping job is relatively expensive (taking considerably long time and many-hours-work of greatest scrutiny), but still cheaper then the same work in printed version. It also covers for identifying places with changed, unknown, or made-up names, for comparing the old (mostly medieval) maps with new age (XVIII and XIX century) and contemporary maps, and for „tagging" areas and regions mentioned in poems. This is the main reason why the team has to have a trained geographer within.

5. Collections themselves

This is the first time any substantial amount of Serbian epic ballads is being released in the electronic form. It could be a fact of larger significance than the very occasion, because they „are unique, and constitute the richest oral epic material in any single European language"[19]. If the enterprise also proves commercial and worth further investing, this attempt might be the basis for future larger electronic editions of oral literary works, such as fairy-tales, ritual songs, short forms (proverbs, riddles, children songs) etc.

6. Introductory Study on Epic Towns

All aforementioned items are a kind of side-product of DETELIĆ's many years long preoccupation with the poetics of epic space (started with the monograph *Mythical Space and the Epics*, 1993), and especially with the phenomenon of towns tradition. The making of team and distribution of tasks within it came naturally as the last, in fact – the finishing phase of a long, solitary work. This fact will inevitably influence

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[19] LOCKE 2002, p. XII.

the structure of the proposed introductory study, in which the following points will be especially stressed:

6.1. Due to relatively atypical historical events in the region represented by Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, two parallel streams of epic poetry were formed (Christian and Muslim), sharing the same poetics, literary form, and ideology. This resulted in two different but complementary epic models of urban space. Throughout the Ottoman empire, Turks (especially in their official role and due to their privileged social position) constituted a largely urban population, so the concept of urban space in Muslim poetry is formed from within, by people who lived inside the boundaries of urban space. It can easily be seen in most of Bosnian urban love songs and ambiental ballads called „sevdalinke", but in epics it is very scarce. The reason is in the „heroical" program the epic genre had to fulfill, and that in Moslem case is continuous warlike state, so called „krajina", which means borderline clashes with the men in arms of the opposite side. On the other hand, Christians, who after the Ottoman occupation lost their civic rights and constituted a largely rural population, created their image of urban space both from inside and outside its limits. The poetry itself had to metaphorize this by using some special literary tools.

6.2. The emblems of Christian towns and cities were main Christian symbols: church and cross. The emperor Constantine in „the beautiful place of Carigrad/ Constantinople" drinks vine in the company of the God's apostles. During his life

časni krsti na zemlji sijali,	The holy crosses shone at the Earth,
sjali krasnom narodu hrišćanskom.	Shone to the gorgeous Christian people
(Vuk II, 18: 108–109)	

In the ballad „Dijoba Jakšića" („How the Brothers Yakshich shared their Inheritance"[20] – Vuk II, 98), where all important things are given in mythical context (categories of good and evil, starting from the cosmic dimensions down to the status symbols), connotations of the church as an image in space belong to the positive semantic sequence (closed space–up–sacral–good):

Dmitar uze donji kraj od grada	To Dimitar fell lower Belgrade town
i Nebojšu na Dunavu kulu;	Where, by the Danube, stands Neboisha's tower,
Bogdan uze gornji kraj od grada	While Bogdan took the upper town, where stands
i Ružicu crkvu nasred grada.	The church of Ruzhitsa – 'twas all agreed.
(19–22)[21]	

Contrary to this, symbols of Turkish towns are not crescent and mosque, but poles with Christian heads on them:

[20] Translation by Locke 2002, pp. 138–142.
[21] On this, see: Krnjević 1989.

Glave sam im na kolje natico,	I put their heads on poles,
niz kapije na bedeme meto.	Above the gates I put them on the city walls.
Na kapiji glava gospodarska,	Above the city gate its master's head,
da se znade, tko j' u gradu bio	Just to be known who owned the city before.
(MH II, 67: 17–20)	

Or:

pogledajder na bedem od grada	Have a look at the city walls
k'a se crne crnogorske glave –	And observe the black Montenegrin heads –
i tvoja će onjen, ako bog da!	Yours will soon be there, so help me God!
(Vuk IV, 13: 70–72)	

And:

Za tose /sic!/ je bedem napravljao,	The city wall was made for this purpose
da se kiti junačkim glavama	To be ordained by the heroes' heads.
(SM 139: 73, 74)	

These poetic symbols of the power over towns, both Christian and Turkish, can be grasped in their full meaning only if approached as a spatial image of those objects. Church with the cross, both as the symbol of Christianity and as the highest edifice in its surroundings, stands in the very centre of a city as a basic element of its structure. It is also the meeting point of all social events, and the best protected place within the city walls. This position it usually shares with the imperial or royal palace (as in Prizren, Kruševac, Constantinople, Prilep), which is also a typical case of the classical and medieval towns. They are all looked at and recognized from within, which means that – from the standpoint of the „singer of the tales" (to use Lord's term) – they belong to the pre-Turkish times, when all the towns in the region were Christian.

Contrary to this, symbols of the Turkish rule over cities are located on the city-walls and city-gates, which means at the borders between the city and the space without. They are intended to be looked at from the position out of the city for, naturally, from the inner parts of the city they simply cannot be seen.

6.3. Thus positioned, these symbols (both Christian and Turkish) are seen by one and the same spectator, and the changes of his point of view are caused by shifting the powers that be (historical dimension) and by shifting the epic models of earthly rule (traditional dimension). These models are two (of the singer's past and of his present), created to match the historical reality of building, founding, and then losing the cities which were in many respect the main part of national history. The „golden age" of Serbian rule is best depicted in the ballad „Margita djevojka i Rajko vojvoda" („Maiden Margita and Rajko the Duke" – Vuk III,10) as the posession of 25 fortified towns, mostly „white". This can be easily seen by the means of a special table:

Vuк III, 10 „Margita djevojka i Rajko voivoda“

Present Name	Epic Name	Attribute[22]	Frequency – verse no.
1. Beograd	Bijograd	– stojni	42
2. Bukurešt	Bukreš	– grad bijeli	73
3. Vidin	Vidin	– grad bijeli	70
4. Vučitrn	Vučitrn	– bijeli grad	79
5. Kosovska Mitrovica	Dmitrovica	– bijeli grad	36
6. Kostajnica	Kosajnica	– ravna	63
7. Kratovo	Kratovo	– grad bijeli	121
8. Kruševac	Kruševac	– grad bijeli	53
9. Kumanovo	Kumanovo	– bijeli grad	123
10. Kuršumlija	Kuršumlija	– bijeli grad	59
11. Niš	Niš	– grad bijeli	65
12. Novi Pazar	Pazar	– grad bijeli	84
13. Peritorij	Piritor	– bijeli grad	96
14. Prizren	Prizren	– mjesto pitomo	109
15. Prilep	Prilip	– grad bijeli	127
16. Prokuplje	Prokuplje	– grad bijeli	57
17. Sjenica	Sjenica	– ravna palanka	86
18. Skadar	Skadar	– na vodi Bojani	105
19. Slankamen	Slani kamen	– none	5, 33
20. Smederevo	Smederevo	– bijeli grad	45
21. Solun	Solun	– grad bijeli	125
22. Sofija	Sofija	– grad bijeli	119
23. Stalać	Stalać	– none	51
24. Travnik	Travnik	– grad bijeli	91
25. Šekular	Šekular	– lomni	103

Such as they were, these cities performed the model of the singer's past, with which he usually connects epic motives of imperial, royal and gentry weddings, knightly tournaments, great feasts, building of churches, monasteries, and other memorials, and so on. Lamenting over the bitter destiny of these towns, the singer is fully aware that national history, of which they once were the major part, exists no more. Within the new world order, which completely belongs to the model of singer's present, old cities became an element of somebody else's history, strange and foreign to the indigenous population. They are not welcome in these towns, and the reason is very simple:

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[22] Attributes to town-names are: grad = town; bijeli = white; ravna = flat; mjesto = place; pitomo = tame; palanka (see before); voda = water (na vodi Bojani = by the river Bojana); lomni = made of stone; steep.

O sinovi, moji sokolovi,	My sons! You pair of falcons! Do you see
vidite li prokleto Lijevno	Before us Liyevno, that cursed town –
dje u njemu bijeli se kula?	Its great white tower shining in the sun?
Ondje će nas biti i mučiti,	There they will beat us, and will torture us.
prebijati i noge i ruke,	There they will break our bones, our arms, our legs,
i vaditi naše oči čarne.	And tear our staring eyes from our heads.
(„Starac Vujadin" –	(„Old Vuyadin", Locke p. 124)
Vuk III,50: 21–26)	

Vuyadin and his sons were outlaws who lived the life of hiding in the hills and mountains, as did the majority of Christian population at one time of the Turkish rule. Even as law-abiding *raya*, Christians did not have many opportunities to see towns from within, unless they had to buy something there, or were themselves sold into slavery. But, if not for their former owners, towns still were the safe place for whoever got hold of them, which is also confirmed by ballads, for example – through the words of this Turkish gentleman:

Od šta ćemo stražu da čuvamo?	Why should we take a watch tonight?
Za nama su dva bijela grada:	Behind us there are two white cities:
grad Omutić i Trubjela kula,	City of Omutich and Trubyela castle,
a iznad nas sve nikšićke ovce –	And above us all shepherds from Nikshich –
slobodno je kako i u gradu.	It is safe as within the city itself.
(Vuk IV,5: 123–127)	

6.4. As they became the safe place for the enemy of his nation, towns and cities were replaced in the singer's ballads by epic towers and palaces, which – owed by epic heroes – never ceased to exist in the singer's repertory as the important emblems of chivalry. From this point of view, epic towns (so easily replaceable by towers and palaces) have in fact never been anything else but accompanying equipment, a kind of ornament for an epic hero, equally important as a horse, outfit, weapons, home, and so on. But, while in the stories about personal adventures of an outstanding individual a singer could afford the so called „epic objectivity" even in respect of an enemy knight if he was worth of epic praise, in singing about towns such a generosity was not allowed. For towns, beside their ornamental use, have had another very important function in the epics: to symbolize the power and its possessor. Because of that, the adjective „white", one of the main epic attributes to the hero's tower and palace, when it is attached to a town, loses all ethic connotations it had in its former use. When it is connected with a hero as a symbol of his virtue (white palace darkens when the hero is in trouble, or it is dirty if the hero is not virtuous enough), the adjective „white" is a wholly functional sign. In the context of literary studies, such a sign can be treated as a separate motive. But, when it is connected with cities, its significance lessens and becomes empty because it can hardly match the leading (and superior) ideological attitude. Once it becomes an empty sign, within literary poetics it is treated as a common place or stereotype.

6.5. Although for a literary scholar the former can be a point of the greatest interest, for a historian it means little or even less. Yet, for wider historical and geographical studies it is potentially of great significance that these bipolar attitudes appear to have

been largely formed in the region from the seventeenth century onwards, during the same period that ideas of civic Europe began to develop (as opposed to ideas of the medieval city-state). The roots of present antagonism and ambivalence towards urban space, now a regular part of the social pathology of everyday life in the Balkans, can still be traced in epic poetry because a primary clash was reflected in the content which has survived unchanged.

Finally, from both the historical and literary point of view, this project may help to prevent further political misuses of mythical and epic genres in traditional culture such as witnessed during the past ten years. In multi-ethnic and multi-confessional contexts, which characterize the region strongly enough, it is easy to link religion and its myths with epics and their ideology. In an objective and responsible re-evaluation of mythic and epic genres, urban spaces are a good starting point because their description offers a clear picture of real, mutual life at a shared place.

Abreviations

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