

Linguoculturological Aspects of Studying Serbian Heroic Epos in the Works of Russian Slavists of the First Half of the 19th Century

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ABSTRACT

The present article focuses on some important facts concerning the development of Slavic studies in Russia in the first half of the 19th century. Within this context, the author of the article analyses the driving force behind the increased interest among the scientific community in studying Serbian epic poetry. This interest is claimed to have become a necessary condition for the establishment of cultural linguistics as one of the areas of linguistics, which studies certain cultural phenomena reflected in the language and significant for national self-consciousness and historical memory. Scientific research conducted by Russian Slavists (e.g. V.I. Lamansky, I.I. Sreznevsky, A.A. Maikov, N.I. Nadezhdin, etc.) lead to the conclusion that the monuments of folk literature served as a rich and valuable linguistic and ethnographic source to them in studying the history of the Serbian language and culture. The article targets the scientific and cultural community the members of which work towards consolidating Slavic unity.

Keywords: *cultural linguistics, common Slavic literary language, Serbian folk songs, Russian Slavists*

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present article is to justify the rationale for Russian Slavic scholars to study Slavic folklore, Serbian heroic epic in particular. Serbian folk songs, well-known both in the Slavic world and Western Europe by the mid-19th century, excited the attention of Russian scientists and public figures due to the fact that they reflected national self-consciousness and cultural and linguistic characteristics of the Serbian people, as well as had ideological and artistic value. Scientific interests of the kind predetermined the establishment of cultural linguistics as an area of linguistics, which studies certain cultural phenomena reflected in the language and significant for national self-consciousness and historical memory. In this regard, special attention should be paid to the idea of Predrag Piper, the contemporary Serbian linguist and academician, who believes that "every language, even a minority language or dialect is a unique view of the world embodied in the language; it is the most valuable and perfect of all creations by men. A language and a dialect are living history museums presenting the cultural past of a certain people or the culture of a particular region" [1]. The same idea was

highlighted by O.N. Trubachyov, the prominent Russian Slavist and linguist of the 20th century, who even suggested creating a "Russian Encyclopaedia" aimed at reproducing and describing the Russian linguistic view of the world based on extensive lexical material [2].

II. IDEAS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMON SLAVIC LITERARY LANGUAGE AS A CULTURAL POLICY INSTRUMENT

The idea of the key role of a language in shaping the cultural mentality of Slavic peoples was first taken into account in a broader geopolitical context in the mid-19th century. It was outlined in the works by Russian scientists, public figures and Slavophiles who advocated the unity between Russia and other Slavic peoples. This spirit of unity was not centred around political Pan-Slavism, as some Western European publicists presented it [3], but the understanding of the need to establish a Slavic people union, primarily grounded on religious, cultural and linguistic similarity. According to V.I. Lamansky, an important step in this direction and a way to continue the work of St. Cyril and Methodius on promoting literary unity of Slavic peoples was the development of the common

Slavic literary language [4]. The same idea about the common Slavic literary language was introduced in the works by M.P. Pogodin [5], V.I. Lamansky [6], R.A. Fadeev [7] and others. It should be reminded that the holy brothers, also called "the first teachers of Slavs", were venerated by Orthodox Slavs outside Russia, which greatly increased in the conditions of the Austrian and Ottoman empires suppressing their religious and national identity. The idea of the role of St. Cyril and Methodius was confidently pronounced at the All-Slavic Congress (1867). This fact was further reflected in the poem "To the Slavs" by F.I. Tyutchev, which can be considered a poetic manifesto of all-Slavic unity. Generally, the language to be potentially considered as a common Slavic literary language was the Russian language. As stated by V.I. Lamansky, the aim of the common Slavic literary language was not to assert Russia's influence over other Slavic peoples, but to provide the "integration centre for all Slavic people" [4], since it is through the Russian language that "the Slavs can achieve their full significance" [4] and establish the all-Slavic historical view of the world.

In the conditions of the early 19th century Slavic revival, traditional Russian-Serbian relations began to strengthen, thus acquiring qualitatively new dimensions as compared to earlier historical periods. This was due to the rebellions against Turkey in the Balkans, Serbian nation-building at the beginning of the century and the establishment of Slavist departments in the largest universities of the Russian Empire (e.g. Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kharkov, and Kazan). Due to these facts, the first third of the 19th century was recognized by the outset of system scientific research into the Slavic world outside Russia, which continued in the decades to come. An additional incentive to this was the discovery of the "treasure of Serbian folk poetry" (F.I. Buslaev) - a valuable source of common Slavic folklore motifs, rare dialectisms and folklore monuments. Largely, this interest in Serbian epic was inspired by the ideas of developing a common Slavic literary language and compiling a "Dictionary of Slavic dialects" [8], which could allow studying Slavic languages in their diversity and get an insight into national psychology.

Regarding the issue of mutual influence of language and mentality, Russian Slavists and folklorists shared the views of some Slavophile thinkers. For instance, when discussing linguistic phenomena and processes, Yu.F. Samarin highlighted that "a language is a people's creation and, presumably, the brightest representation of its spiritual nature" [9]. Therefore, from the perspective of the author of the present article, it is no coincidence that "The Songs of the Russian

People" collection by P.V. Kireyevsky was created in the Slavophile environment. The activity of Vuk Karadžić, the Serbian ethnographer, in collecting and publishing the works of heroic epic originated against the background of creating of the Dictionary of the Serbian language and the linguistic reform that he implemented based on vernacular dialects [10]. Additionally, Vuk Karadžić's collecting activity encouraged the creation of "The Songs of the Russian People" by P.V. Kireyevsky, while his "Dictionary of the Serbian Language" (its second edition was published with I.I. Sreznevsky's assistance) contributed to the development of the Russian scientist's lexicographic skills, which he later applied when working on his well-known "Materials for the Old Russian Language Dictionary Found in Written Monuments" [11]. Another significant contribution to studying the history of the ancient Serbian language through the investigation of ancient inscriptions and relatively unknown monuments of Serbian literacy is the fundamental work by A.A. Maikov entitled "The History of the Serbian Language in the Cyrillic Literature Monuments Reflecting the History of the People" (1857) [12]. Of Slavic scholars outside Russia, the greatest contribution to the research and diffusion of Serbian culture, language and history was made by the famous Slovak Pavel Šafárik. He corresponded regularly with many of his Russian colleagues and anticipated some scientific research further conducted by them. In his opinion, folk songs were significant for the purpose of studying Slavic languages mostly due to vernacular dialects [13].

III. SERBIAN EPIC POETRY THEMES AND IMAGES IN THE WORKS BY RUSSIAN SLAVISTS OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

The analysis of the artistic features of Serbian heroic epic and some valuable linguistic observations made led Russian scientists to interesting conclusions. Thus, I.I. Sreznevsky, P.I. Preys and N.I. Nadezhdin, independent of each other, identified the cultural and linguistic unity of the historical Serbian territories (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dalmatia) through common themes of Serbian folk poetry and the distribution of the Serbian language across the territories. Thus, N.I. Nadezhdin claimed that he had the opportunity of studying the Serbian language in its diversity "in southern Hungary, in Slavonia and Croatia, in Dalmatia, Montenegro, and even Istria" [14]. Special focus in this regard should be given to the fact that the similar idea, valuable both in terms of its linguistic and historiosophical importance, was expressed by the academician O.N. Trubachyov, according to whom

"a great country spreads farther than its borders do. The influence of its culture extends significantly, which almost always is due to its language" [15].

The research by I.I. Sreznevsky on the Serbian language, history and culture is also worth mentioning. The scientist explored many Serbian and other Slavic territories, collecting epic songs and the evidence concerning ethnographic and cultural characteristics of the Balkan Slavs and historical figures he happened to meet and work with. I.I. Sreznevsky described his observations in "The Travel Notes of Izmail Ivanovich Sreznevsky from Slavic lands: 1839-1842" [16]. Its genre and stylistic peculiarities are addressed in the article by O.A. Cherepanova "The Travel Notes of Izmail Ivanovich Sreznevsky from Slavic lands (1839-1842) as a fact of language, culture and science" [17]. The researcher highly values the cultural and historical significance of I.I. Sreznevsky's observations considering them an important information source and a remarkable fact of the "linguistic culture of the epoch" [17]. On his scientific journey, Sreznevsky continued his research, collecting Serbian epic songs, which he mentioned in his joint report with P.I. Preys to the Minister of National Education, Count S.S. Uvarov, "People sing, especially Montenegrins. They still keep many old songs alive, including the ones dating back to the Battle of Kosovo, etc." [18].

Interestingly enough, the expressions in the Serbian languages used in the Notes are found in folk songs and are likely to have been introduced in writing for the sake of expressiveness. Thus, in one of the notes addressing his friend A.L. Metlinsky, Sreznevsky wrote, "I ask you about one thing, my dear Amvrosy: be more cheerful, more indifferent to the current affairs in the world, and – *Ходи по свијету, као пчела по цвијету*" [19]. In another note, willing to convey the atmosphere of a journey, in an inn on his way back from Belgrade, Sreznevsky started his letter dated October 8, 1841, with the words of a common epic formula often found in Serbian folk songs, "*На колјену ситну књижу пишем*" [19]. These examples illustrate that the images and the very spirit of Serbian epic poetry penetrated deep into I.I. Sreznevsky's heart. The evidence for it is found in his work "Notes on the Epic Metre of Slavic Folk Songs", where assessing the influence of decasyllable folk songs on the everyday speech of the Serbs, I.I. Sreznevsky wrote, "This meter appeals to the Serbs most: they use it in various songs, no exception of epic songs. It became so close to people, to the language that even ordinary, everyday speech, if given enthusiastically, involuntarily falls into this meter" [20]. Nowadays in Serbian literature, journalism and homiletics, one still can find figurative expressions from Serbian epic poetry, which eloquently convey the author's thoughts.

Nevertheless, such expressions are not less common in modern colloquial speech (*куку мене*¹, *brate мили*², etc.). Of particular interest is the Serbian idiom "*Све му је равно до Косова!*"³, as it also emphasizes the importance of the Kosovo Myth for the Serbian national self-consciousness and culture. According to the Matica Srpska dictionary of the Serbian language, this expression means indifference to something [21]. Following N.I. Tolstoy, it exemplifies how a language reflects national culture, psychology and philosophy [22] established through collective experience.

The naturalness of epic images and ancient legends was preserved in the Serbian self-consciousness along with the epic tradition and was gradually introduced into everyday life presenting the sign of genuine friendship and gratitude. It is known that Vuk Karadžić in his letters to the Kazan Slavist V.I. Grigorovich (1815–1876) sent regards from his daughter Mina to him, calling her his "sworn sister". This custom was rather widespread among the Serbs: sworn brotherhood is also found in the "Notes of a Naval Officer" by V.B. Bronevsky. He reported that the Serbs in Montenegro, when doing trade with people from the Adriatic coast, started close relationship, as a rule, with godfathers and godbrothers (this is what sworn brothers are often called, since they exchanged crosses as a sign of their friendship, after which the godbrother was treated like a close relative) [23]. The works of Serbian folklore excited the interest of scientists and public figures in the following generations of Russian Slavists, many of whom were related to the Balkans by the nature of their professional duties. For instance, a significant contribution to studying and collecting Serbian heroic epic was made by I.S. Yastrebov, A.F. Hilferding, P.A. Rovinsky and others. This experience and knowledge played an important role for A.F. Hilferding when creating "The Onega Epics" collection of Russian folk songs (1871).

IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it should be mentioned that in the first half of the 19th century, when the number of studies of Slavic culture and literature was increasing and Slavic Studies were establishing as a science, Russian Slavists and public figures were actively developing theoretical provisions of the "Slavic Question", which implied a most diverse range of topics covering ethno-historical, cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnographic peculiarities of Slavs outside Russia. Russian and European

¹ Literal translation: Cuckoo rings in my head.

² Literal translation: dear brother.

³ Literal translation: Everything is straight to him all the way to Kosovo. Equivalent: He is an easy-going person.

cultural and scientific community was attracted by Serbian epic songs, which reflected linguistic and national characteristics of the Serbian people. Moreover, Russian Slavic scholars identified the distribution area of Serbian epic themes and images, which allowed making a conclusion about the historical and cultural unity of the Serbian territories, then the parts of the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary or belonging to Montenegro, independent from Turkish yoke. Amidst Slavs originally gravitating towards Russia as the historical safeguard of Slavic interests, the members of Slavist scientific circles (e.g. I.I. Sreznevsky, V.I. Lamansky, P.Y. Šafárik, ect.), introduced the idea of establishing a common Slavic literary language as an important cultural policy tool that would consolidate Slavs, primarily Orthodox ones, outside Russia. In this regard, greater emphasis was placed on studying and collecting Slavic folklore, and Serbian folk songs, in particular, in order to understand the peculiarities of national self-consciousness reflected in the language.

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