



# ORAL TRADITION

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*Oral Tradition* (<http://journal.oraltradition.org>) seeks to provide a comparative and interdisciplinary focus for studies in oral tradition and related fields by publishing research and scholarship on the creation, transmission, and interpretation of all forms of oral traditional expression. In addition to essays treating certifiably oral traditions, *OT* presents investigations of the relationships between oral and written traditions, as well as brief accounts of important fieldwork, and occasional transcriptions and translations of oral texts. In addition, issues will include the annual Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lecture on Oral Tradition. Submissions should follow the list-of-reference format ([http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/misc/oral\\_tradition\\_formatting\\_guide.pdf](http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/misc/oral_tradition_formatting_guide.pdf)) and may be sent via e-mail ([journal@oraltradition.org](mailto:journal@oraltradition.org)); all quotations of primary materials must be made in the original language(s) with following English translations. If appropriate, please describe any supporting materials that could be used to illustrate the article, such as photographs, audio recordings, or video recordings. *Oral Tradition* publishes such materials online in an eCompanion designed to supplement the texts of articles. Most contributions will be reviewed by at least one specialist reader and one generalist reader before a final decision is reached.

*Oral Tradition* appears twice per year, in March and October. The current issue and all back issues from 1986 onward are available open-access and free-of-charge at <http://journal.oraltradition.org>.

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## Editor's Column

May 3, 2013 marked the first anniversary of the loss of John Miles Foley and a period of mourning at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition. This issue proffers to you, the readers, additional evidence of one dimension of John's extraordinary legacy, the establishment and nurturing for more than a quarter of a century of *Oral Tradition*.

We open with Nina Livesey's study of Romans 4:9-12, a dialogue between the apostle Paul and a fictitious Jewish teacher whose interpretation vexed scholarly analysis concerned with the ethnic identity of the people mentioned in Rom 4:12. At issue is the presence of a purportedly "anomalous" dative article that New Testament scholars have resolved on grammatical, ideological, or theological grounds by simple deletion. Drawing on Hellenistic authors' attentiveness to euphony and sound mapping techniques systematized by Margaret Lee and Bernard Scott, Livesey identifies six structural periods coinciding with the passage's dialogical form and elaborates compelling analyses of them. The map of acoustic patterns identifies recurring sound groups that provide an overarching structure within which certain recurrent metonyms, particularly terms for "circumcised" and "foreskinned," are located. The placement and prominence of the sound patterns authenticate the legitimacy of the dative article and direct attention toward the sense of the passage, rhetorically framing the apostle Paul's assurance to the Gentiles that the uncircumcised may by faith be legitimate heirs to Abrahamic rectitude since God declared Abraham righteous before his circumcision.

Next, four successive articles cluster around the theme Archiving Orality and Connecting with Communities of the 2010 World Oral Literature Project workshop. Under the aegis of Cambridge University's Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, the workshop explored professional and ethical issues entailed by the dissemination of oral arts through traditional and digital media.

First in this group, Carole Pegg and Erkinova Elizaveta Yamaeva report and interpret fieldwork with Altaian speakers in their practice of Ak Jang ("White Way") rituals. Biannual spring and fall rituals at the *küree* ("place of gatherings") temple complex in a recondite locale above the village are conducted for the purpose of maintaining universal order and tranquility, clan and family harmony, and personal happiness. Led by ritual specialists who are expert in ancient Altaian epic and unfolding in pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases, the ceremonies connect participants with historico-mythical space and time while also anchoring them in the present, creating a phenomenological, topographic space; a numinous performance space, and a sense of "being-in-place." This sense of being-in-place emanates from the worshippers' awareness that earth, mountains, sky, ancestors, epic heroes, temple complex, gods, planets, kin, and community are all living entities that ground Altaian personhood. Participants report experiencing "the arrival of energy and good fortune encircling them with a constantly rotating belt." An eCompanion presents photos of ritual sites and worshippers.

Next, John Meza Cuero tells Margaret Field a trickster tale in the Tipaay dialect of the Kumeyaay language (and in Spanish) in Baja California, Mexico, prompting a joint reflection on ethical questions regarding a cultural group's preferences for usage of audio or video recordings of the community's heritage. For instance, in Mexico a prevailing "variationist" attitude that accords all dialects of Kumeyaay equal status appears to warrant the sharing of traditional verbal arts with outsiders while in the United States a "localist" language ideology keeps intangible heritage exclusively within the Kumeyaay community. Tale-telling doubly indexes group identity—the larger community by the tale and the local community by its idiom—and the authors urge researchers to maintain balance in intra-communal interests by judiciously publishing recordings from various dialect groups. Without such precautions unintended language standardization may undermine language revitalization schemes, and specific groups may perceive diminished local prestige with corrosive effects on collaboration. A video-taped performance of the Rabbit and Frog tale told by John Meza Cuero is available in an eCompanion for the viewer's delectation.

A Rajasthani folk epic, *Pabuji ki par/phad* ("Pabuji with the scroll"), is the focus for Elizabeth Wickett's study of some of the consequences visited on oral tradition by the explosion in modern media technologies. The unfettered circulation of audio and video recordings can imperil traditional performances, jeopardize artists' livelihood, and promote the incorporation of exotic forms into the traditional repertoire. For example, in response to new circumstances, musicians distinguish "ritual performance" from "tourist performance," and several epic singers have assimilated a folk song, "Banjari Nomad," into their repertoire, seemingly for use in tourist performances only. Nonetheless, technical innovations also have the potential to make new opportunities possible for the continuation of traditions. See, for example, the eCompanion offering photos and video of *Pabuji ki par/phad* in performance. Wickett advocates "polymodal" documentation and calls on ethnographers to devise schemes for transforming recordings of performances into income for performers by serving as their patrons, marketers, and partners. Technologies such as DVDs and the Internet have the potential to help financially maintain tradition bearers and forestall or prevent the collapse of traditions.

With the final installment in this cluster, Jan Jansen offers a critique of UNESCO's adaptation for the Masterpieces of Oral Intangible Heritage of Humanity of the principle of *droits d'auteur* that gives priority to *national* copyright laws, and argues that the basis for decisions regarding "ownership" of intangible heritage should recognize and conform with the tradition-bearing communities' cultural norms and values. The rationale is that a *cultural* framework is preferable to a *legal* framework. Jansen recounts his experiences with renowned reciters of the Sunjata Epic, the Diabate family of Kela, Mali, among whom one is a *kumatigi*, a "Master of the Word."

Traditional methods of teaching and learning to play musical instruments in the Black Sea region of Bolu, in northwestern Turkey, are the theme of Nesrin Kalyoncu and Cemal Özata, whose report of their fieldwork characterizes the master-apprentice relationship in its dimensions of family ties, teaching techniques, practice settings, and frequency of instruction. The authors observed fourteen teachers engaged in training students to play the violin, clarinet, *kabak kemane*

(“spike fiddle”), *bağlama* (“long-necked lute”), *darbuka* (“goblet drum”), and *davul* (“double-headed drum”). Teachers make abundant use of active and psycho-motor techniques, as well as directed physical contact while sharing the playing of an instrument; photographs of teachers working with their students are available in the eCompanion. Apprentices’ abilities advance by stages of listening, observing, memorizing, and performing. Memory plays a principal role in the apprenticeship, whose goal is to attain professional status and thus secure income; music as a recreational pastime is not a consideration.

Lastly, we present in English translation a paper jointly authored by Chao Gejin and John Miles Foley that frames five key questions for comparative oral epic studies sequentially in four traditions—Mongolian, ancient Greek, Old English, and South-Slavic—and explores the implications of each one’s idiosyncratic responses for understanding fine- and broad-grain features of epic dynamics. Each oral epic tradition posits a unique version of what constitutes poem, theme, line, formula, and register, and all rely on the nature of the given language and on “necessary connotations,” or to use a term coined by Professor Foley, “traditional referentiality.” With the authors’ exploration of these five questions across four epic traditions, this piece succinctly summarizes several of their most penetrating and productive insights into the variable operations of humanity’s verbal arts.

It is my pleasant duty to gratefully recognize the Center staff, whose joint efforts bring this issue to press. Associate Editors Lori Garner and Scott Garner, John’s former students, cheerfully coordinate production and correspondence, ensuring that the standards of excellence set 28 years ago by the founding editor continue undiminished. Mark Jarvis oversees all aspects of computing at the Center while the invaluable Hannah Lenon deftly administers its business affairs. Together with them, Justin Arft, managing editor, Darcy Holtgrave, Associate Editor of ISSOT, and editorial assistants Rebecca Richardson Mouser, Ruth Knezevich, and Elizabeth Janda, we bid adieu to our departing editorial assistant Morgan Grey, express our gratitude for her efforts, and wish her success in all of her future endeavors. I also recognize and sincerely thank all of the colleagues who have graciously accepted our invitation to review submissions and advise us as to their suitability for the journal. Your expertise and thoughtful comments reliably enrich the articles that *Oral Tradition* can offer its readers.

As is customary, we invite you to send us your best thinking on the world’s oral traditions. We review submissions with the benefit of guidance from a specialist and a generalist reader and normally come to a decision within 90 days of receipt. As you know, the journal appears online and is free of charge, meaning that your work is available in more than 200 countries and territories to a readership of more than 20,000. We look forward to learning from you.

John Zemke  
Editor, *Oral Tradition*

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## Sounding Out the Heirs of Abraham (Rom 4:9-12)

Nina E. Livesey

Recent studies in the fields of orality and oral performance reveal that the recognition of oral features within texts can clarify vexing issues of interpretation and lead the interpreter to a more complete understanding of authorial intent.<sup>1</sup> Specifically with regard to ancient authors and hearers, sound played a very strategic role in conveying meaning. Not having the luxury or ability<sup>2</sup> to reread sections of texts to determine meaning semantically, ancient auditors relied upon oral cues such as repetition and word placement to convey meaning.<sup>3</sup> Ancient hearers actively listened to compositions orally declaimed. Thus, John Foley remarks (1991:59), “the ‘reader’ of an oral traditional ‘text’ is more a participant actively involved in making the work than an analyst interested only in plumbing the depths of a textual artifact.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Twyla Gibson (2011:102) writes that the recognition of “traditional poetics” [oral features within works] “clarify a number of challenging issues of interpretation.” According to her, “Critical strategies that focus exclusively on the historical and philosophical content while ignoring the overall form will be incomplete, if not misguided” (*ibid.*). See also Maxey 2009:123. In *The Oral Patterning in Paul’s Letters* John D. Harvey (1998:283-84) identified eight categories of oral features in Paul’s letters. These are chiasmus, inversion, alternation, inclusion, ring-composition, word-chain, refrain, and concentric symmetry.

<sup>2</sup> Due to the high rates of illiteracy, ancient hearers depended upon oral recitation for learning. As Margaret Lee and Bernard B. Scott remark (2009:12), “The safest conclusion is that in major urban areas not more than fifteen percent of the population was capable of reading and/or writing.” As William Harris notes (1989:13), there “was no mass literacy” in the Greek and Roman worlds; “the majority of people were always illiterate.”

<sup>3</sup> Audiences must process compositions in “real time,” whereas “readers can refer backward and forwards in the text” (Lee and Scott:135). An audience cannot afford to rely primarily on semantic meaning to make sense of a spoken composition because real-time processing does not afford the opportunity to register every word’s full semantic force. Listeners cannot even identify a series of syllables as a lexeme until after the sounds have been spoken and no longer exist as sound but only as memory (*idem*). See also Ong 1982:32, 90.

<sup>4</sup> See also Maxey 2009:99. As James Maxey states (2009:99), “Meaning is negotiated between performer and the audience.” The audience fills in the gaps and the performer relies more heavily on the traditions of his or her audience (139-41). See also Kelber 1997:15.

In *Sound Mapping the New Testament* (2009), Margaret Lee and Bernard Brandon Scott<sup>5</sup> historically trace and discuss in lengthy detail the role sound played in ancient compositions. They comment that an ancient manuscript's primary function was to "capture and record a linear stream of sound" (70) and cite, for example, the ancient Greek teacher of rhetoric Longinus (*Subl.* 39.3) reporting that a particular first-century CE author described his composition as a "kind of melody in words" (119). With the invention of the phonetic alphabet, the Greeks made possible the reproduction of sound in script, and they recorded sounds employing a style called *scriptio continua*, uninterrupted writing.<sup>6</sup> While the lack of clearly delineated words handicaps modern readers, by orally declaiming these compositions, ancients allowed the sounds to distinguish the words or lexemes for them. Ancient authors employed elements such as arrangement and sound signals within their compositions to convey meaning, elements often lacking in modern compositions intended for silent readers (80). They created their compositions with their auditory reception in mind at every level of construction and even revised their works to improve upon their sound quality (121). These compositions were dynamic in that they came to life with each new oral performance. Authors of New Testament texts composed with oral reception in mind, but so too did most if not all authors of the ancient and Hellenistic periods (80).

To aid modern interpreters in recovering the sound signals recorded in ancient compositions, Lee and Scott developed an analytical tool called a "sound map."<sup>7</sup> The tool enables modern interpreters to visualize sound patterns ancient authors would have left behind. As they explain it, a sound map is "a visual display that exhibits a literary composition's organization by highlighting its acoustic features and in doing so depicts aspects of a composition's sounded character in preparation for analysis" (2009:168). In *Sound Mapping* Lee and Scott guide modern interpreters through the entire process of map creation and analysis by means of sound features (135-95). The creation process begins by defining a particular compositional unit. Grammar is often an aid in delineating these units, as elements such as a change in verbal aspect or in person or number signal unit breaks. The next step entails the division of the unit into individual components called cola (breath units). Once defined, cola can later be recombined either "paratactically" or through "grammatical subordination" into periods (169-75). With the arrangement into cola and periods made, elements such as repetitive and

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard B. Scott is a well-known scholar of the New Testament. He is perhaps best known for his work on the parables of Jesus (*Hear Then the Parable* [1989] and *Re-Imagine the World* [2001]). He has also written on the subject of resurrection from the dead within the New Testament (*The Trouble with Resurrection* [2010]), on the subject of religion and film (*Hollywood Dreams and Biblical Stories* [2000]), and on many other New Testament themes. *Sound Mapping* is a revision of Margaret Lee's Ph.D. dissertation. Lee has worked and written extensively on the topic of orality in the New Testament, especially as it regards the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew.

<sup>6</sup> This type of writing was only possible with the invention of consonants and vowels that could reproduce sound (Lee and Scott 2009:71). Ancient readers/oral performers could decipher this script because of the aural indicators. By contrast, modern readers have a very difficult time deciphering uninterrupted script.

<sup>7</sup> John Foley (1991:43) also refers to the concept of a map. He writes, "[O]ral performance or oral-derived texts also consists of a 'map' made up of explicit signals and gaps of indeterminacy that must be bridged in accordance with certain rules and predispositions."

beginning and ending sounds become apparent and the analysis process can begin. The lengthy second half of *Sound Mapping* consists of examples of the creation and analysis of six sound maps; their detailed sample maps assist the modern novice in his or her own employment of sound maps for analysis (199-384).

By relying upon the insights of orality studies on the role sound plays in conveying meaning and upon the sound mapping tool developed by Lee and Scott in particular, I will here demonstrate how ancient auditors would likely have heard a structural unit in Paul's letter to the Romans (4:9-12). My aim in using the sound mapping tool is to resolve a long-standing interpretive problem that concerns the identity of the ethnic group involved in the last phrase or colon of Rom 4:12. I will begin with an explanation and short history of the interpretive debates surrounding this unit from Romans and then provide a sound map of the structural unit to be used in reassessing the unit on the basis of sound patterns. It is these repetitive sounds that provide the identity of the ethnic group in question.

### A Short History of the Interpretive Problem

It is frequently argued and often assumed that Paul has both Gentiles and Jews becoming heirs of Abraham on the same criterion of faith, usually understood to be faith in Christ Jesus. Pauline scholars often make their determination of Paul's standard for the heirs of Abraham by "correcting" the text of Rom 4:12, removing what they consider to be an unintended dative article (τοῖς, "to those") located just after the correlative conjunction ἀλλὰ καὶ ("but also") and just prior to the participle στοιχοῦσιν ("who walk"). The entire Greek phrase and its English translation follow; the problematic τοῖς and its English translation are in boldfaced type (Rom 4:12):

καὶ πατέρα περιτομῆς τοῖς οὐκ ἐκ περιτομῆς μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ **τοῖς** στοιχοῦσιν τοῖς ἵχνεσιν  
τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστία πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ.

and father of circumcision, to those not only from the circumcision but also **to those** walking in  
the footsteps of the faithfulness of our father Abraham while he was in foreskin.

The presence or absence of the article τοῖς significantly alters the meaning of Rom 4:12. Without the τοῖς, Paul addresses a single group of circumcised Jews who demonstrate faithfulness similar to that of Abraham prior to his becoming circumcised; with it, Paul addresses two different ethnic groups: circumcised Jews *and* then a group of foreskinned Gentiles who demonstrate this Abrahamic faithfulness.

Near the start of the twentieth century, William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam (1902:108) addressed the situation of the τοῖς and justified its omission by calling it a scribal



slip.<sup>8</sup> Their interpretive solution has held sway and influenced the majority of commentators<sup>9</sup> and translators<sup>10</sup> of Romans to the present time.<sup>11</sup> They write (108):

As it stands the article [τοῖς] is a solecism: it would make those who are circumcised one set of persons, and those who follow the example of Abraham's faith another distinct set, which is certainly not St. Paul's meaning. He is speaking of Jews who are *both* circumcised *and* believe. This requires in Greek the omission of the art[icle] before στοιχοῦσιν. But τοῖς στ. is found in all

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<sup>8</sup> The 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Nestle et al. 2006) signals the τοῖς and refers the readers to possible alternatives. By contrast, the 1899 2nd edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece* by Nestle has no critical markings in Rom 4:12 (see Nestle 1899:399). The alternatives listed in the critical apparatus of the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland are to two earlier editions, the Hort and Beza. In the 1881, 1882, 1895, and 1953 Westcott and Hort editions of the New Testament, the words καὶ τοῖς are signaled as "suspected readings," meaning that the editors suspect that the text contains a primitive error (see Westcott and Hort 1881:lxxxix, 357; 1895:356-57; and 1953:357, 582-83). In the 1906 Westcott and Hort edition (357, 586) there is a note in which the editors suggest that καὶ τοῖς is probably a "primitive error for καὶ αὐτοῖς." The Beza 1588 edition (28) contains no variation from the καὶ τοῖς to anything else. The same is true for the 1590 edition of Beza (8).

<sup>9</sup> Käsemann 1980:114; Leenhardt 1981:70; Cranfield 1985:89; Dunn 1988:195; Barrett 1991:81; Byrne 1996:150; Moxnes 1980:81; Watson 1986:222, n. 76; Hays 1985:90; Hays 1989:56; Martyn 1997:237. Anthony Guerra writes (1995:122), "Paul stresses that Abraham is the Father only of those among the circumcised who follow the footsteps of Abraham's faith, that is, before his circumcision (4.12)." See also Elliott 1990:161, 163 n. 1; Gager 2000:123; Stowers 1994:243.

<sup>10</sup> The NAB, NRSV, NASB, NIV, AB, BEB, ASV, and KJV translations ignore the τοῖς and effectively render one group of circumcised Jews, those who are not only circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of Abraham while he was still uncircumcised. By contrast, the English Darby Version and the Rheims New Testament recognize the τοῖς and effectively suggest that there are two groups in view.

<sup>11</sup> In his 1980 article, "The Curious Crux at Romans 4,12," James Swetnam (111) called attention to this issue. Although Swetnam argues for the inclusion of the τοῖς, his reasons for doing so are untenable. According to him, the two groups in 4:12 are both Christian. That is, πατέρα περιτομῆς ("father of the circumcised") refers to Abraham's spiritual circumcision. Thus, Abraham is the father of two groups; the first are physically circumcised Jewish Christians, and the second are foreskinned Christians. Swetnam follows on the thoughts of Lucien Cerfaux, who writes (1954:335), « *et il est père en circoncision (de tous les chrétiens), de ceux de la circoncision, et non seulement de ceux-ci, mais encore de tous ceux qui marchent sur les traces de la foi, reçue dans l'incirconcision, de notre père Abraham (v. 12).* » See also Fitzmyer 1993:381-82. While they both pay heed to the dative article τοῖς that occurs just prior to the στοιχοῦσιν and they both argue, as I do, that Paul has two groups in view and that the second group are foreskinned Gentiles, their interpretation of the phrase πατέρα περιτομῆς as referring to Abraham's spiritual circumcision is unwarranted and the first group likely refers to circumcised Jews and not to Jewish-Christians, as they argue. Responding to their interpretation, Robert Jewett (2007:320) comments that it is unlikely that Paul would use the term "circumcision" in two different senses in the same sentence. Maria Neubrand (1997:235-36, 40) somewhat refines the work of Swetnam and Cerfaux and remarks that there are two groups in verse 12 as indicated by the two occurrences of τοῖς; the first are circumcised Jewish Jesus-followers and the second are uncircumcised Gentile Jesus-followers. According to her, the πατέρα περιτομῆς would refer to a group of circumcised Jews and not to Abraham's spiritual circumcision. Thus, according to Neubrand, verse 12 refers to three separate groups: circumcised Jews (as indicated by the πατέρα περιτομῆς), circumcised Jewish Jesus-followers, and Gentile Jesus-followers. See also Mußner 1980:213.

By contrast, Thomas Tobin translates Rom 4:11-12 as I am proposing in this essay. Indeed, he writes that one can consider Rom 4:11-12 as a chiasmic pattern, with Abraham's promises going first to the Gentiles (Rom 4:11 or colon 5.1 and 5.2), then twice to the Jews (Rom 4:12, colon 6.1), and then finally again to the Gentiles (Rom 4:12, colon 6.2). See Tobin 1995:446-47.

existing MSS. We must suppose therefore either (1) that there has been some corruption. WH thinks that τοῖς may be the remains of an original ἀὐτοῖς; but that would not seem to be a very natural form of sentence. Or (2) we may think that Tertius made a slip of the pen in following St. Paul's dictation, and that this remained uncorrected. If the slip was not made by Tertius himself, it must have been made in some very early copy, the parent of all our present copies.

While some exegetes argue for its omission on grammatical grounds,<sup>12</sup> the majority, following the lead of Sanday and Headlam, simply ignore it for ideological/theological reasons. This latter and large group of commentators is convinced that here and elsewhere Paul is redefining Abraham's heirs to include only those who have faith similar to that of Abraham in his foreskinned state. Philip Esler's translation and comments on Rom 4:12 (2003:189-90) well illustrate the dominant interpretation. He writes,

He [Paul] immediately continues: "and father of those of the circumcised who rely not merely on circumcision but also walk in the footsteps of our father Abraham who had faith while he was uncircumcised" (4:12). Once again the argument is radical. Paul is saying that Judeans trace descent from Abraham not in virtue of his circumcision but from the righteousness by faith he had prior to it and of which circumcision was merely a sign. Paul has thus achieved a result fundamental to his communicative strategy in the letter. He has recategorized the two subgroups of the Christ-movement in Rome into an ingroup identity that is unified by virtue of their sharing exactly the same relationship with Abraham. He is the father of all of them in relation to righteousness that comes from faith.

By two subgroups, Esler has in mind the foreskinned Gentiles defined in Rom 4:11 and the circumcised Jews-in-Christ defined by Rom 4:12. He, like others, formulates this group of Jews-in-Christ by ignoring the τοῖς, the "to those" that occurs just prior to the participle στοιχοῦσιν "who walk."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, C. E. B. Cranfield (1985:89) writes that the τοῖς should be "ruled out grammatically by the position of the previous definite article in the Greek in relation to the words represented by 'not' and 'only.'" Interestingly, Cranfield acknowledges that emending the text rests on shaky ground, as there are no extant Greek manuscripts that omit the τοῖς. See also James D. G. Dunn (1988:211), who remarks that the syntax is "awkward," because for two groups to be in view, one would expect to see οὐ τοῖς at the start of the phrase rather than τοῖς οὐκ. Both of these interpreters make the false assumption that Greek grammar has a fixed syntactical structure.

<sup>13</sup> Pamela Eisenbaum comments (2009:202), "For centuries Pauline interpreters assumed Paul's discussions of Abraham were intended to show how the patriarch represents the exemplary model of faith. Jews, too, both of antiquity and beyond, perceived in Abraham the perfect embodiment of obedient faith. But traditional Christian interpreters of Paul have not seen Abraham merely as a figure whose exemplary faithfulness provided Paul with a model for Christians to emulate. Rather, the patriarch is taken to be the ultimate proof of Paul's most important theological postulate: that one is justified by faith."

In contrast to Esler and to the many commentators and translators who interpret this passage as he does, factors pertaining to sound<sup>14</sup> indicate the appropriateness of the τοῖς prior to στοιχοῦσιν. Sound patterns indicate that the τοῖς contributes to the balance and harmonic quality of the entire unit (Rom 4:9-12). Indeed, an analysis of the sound patterns of the unit reveals that while Paul emphasizes the faith (πίστις) of Abraham, his faith is important in so far as it concerns the foreskinned (ἀκροβυστία). The foreskinned are Paul's primary focus; they are the ones signaled out to receive righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). The repeated emphasis on the foreskinned throughout the unit strongly suggests that they are the group to whom Paul refers in the final phrase of Rom 4:12. Paul intended to refer to two distinct groups of people: to circumcised (περιτομαί) Jews, as indicated by the first instance of the dative article τοῖς (Rom 4:12), and to foreskinned Gentiles (ἀκροβυστία),<sup>15</sup> as indicated by the second and so-called problematic one (Rom 4:12). Paul makes the case that the ἀκροβυστία are heirs to Abraham based on trust.<sup>16</sup>

### **An Analysis of Rom 4:9-12 Based on Sound Patterns**

Romans 4:9-12 is a small portion of a larger diatribe defined by Rom 2:17-5:11,<sup>17</sup> in which Paul debates with a fictitious Jewish teacher of Gentiles<sup>18</sup> over how foreskinned Gentiles can be considered "circumcised" Jews, though not themselves physically circumcised (2:25-29), and how foreskinned Gentiles are made righteous and heirs to Abraham through faith or trust (4:9-12). The structural unit naturally divides into six periods. The periodic structure within the sound map coincides with the unit's dialogical form, in which periods one and three represent the voice of Paul's Jewish interlocutor, and periods two, four, five, and six express the voice of Paul. To facilitate the analysis of the unit, I have numbered the periods and cola beneath them sequentially. Corresponding repetitive sounds are indicated by bold-faced, italic, and underlined type. Following on the work of Lee and Scott, I have employed the asterisk (\*) between lexemes that end and begin with a vowel to indicate a glottal stop or hiatus.

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Jewett writes (2007:40), "The key question in interpreting Paul's letter is therefore how it would have sounded to its intended hearers, and what kind of participation would it have evoked." Werner Kelber (1997:xxvi) remarks that Paul's letters are "permeated with oral sensitivities."

<sup>15</sup> Other commentators have honored the τοῖς and understand Paul to refer to two groups, to circumcised Jews and foreskinned Gentiles, as I am suggesting. While Lloyd Gaston and Thomas Tobin observe chiasmic patterns, their analysis does not explicitly refer to sound. Gaston (1987:124) observes a chiasmic pattern begun in verse 11 and consisting of Gentile, Jew, Jew, and Gentile. Tobin (1995:447) also observes the same chiasmic pattern as Gaston.

<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, Krister Stendahl (1995:14) maintains that Gentiles are justified by faith on the model of Abraham without circumcision; the argument of justification by faith is "hammered out on the anvil of the question: how can Gentiles become part of God's people?"

<sup>17</sup> On the diatribal form of this unit, see Stowers 1994:231.

<sup>18</sup> For a description of Paul's dialogue partner, see Stowers 1994:168.

**Sound Map of Rom 4:9-12**

Period 1 (Jewish Interlocutor)

1.1 ὁ μακαρισμὸς οὖν οὗτος ἐπὶ τὴν *περιτομὴν* ἢ καὶ\*ἐπὶ τὴν *ἀκροβυστίαν*;

1.1 The blessing, then, (is) it on the circumcised/or also on the foreskinned?

Period 2 (Paul)

2.1 λέγομεν γάρ Ἐλογίσθη τῷ\*Ἀβραάμ ἡ πίστις εἰς δικαιοσύνην.

2.1. For we say / the faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.

Period 3 (Jewish Interlocutor)

3.1 πῶς οὖν ἐλογίσθη; ἐν *περιτομῇ*\*ὄντι\*ἢ\*ἐν *ἀκροβυστίᾳ*;

3.1 How, then, was it reckoned? / when (he was) circumcised or when (he was) in foreskin?

Period 4 (Paul)

4.1 οὐκ ἐν *περιτομῇ*\* ἀλλ' ἐν *ἀκροβυστίᾳ*;

4.1 Not when (he was) circumcised / but when (he was) in foreskin.

4.2 καὶ σημεῖον ἔλαβεν *περιτομῆς*, σφραγίδα τῆς δικαιοσύνης τῆς πίστεωςἢς ἐν τῇ\**ἀκροβυστίᾳ*

4.2 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith when (he was) in foreskin.

Period 5 (Paul)

5.1 εἰς τὸ\*εἶναι\*αὐτὸν πατέρα πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων

δι\**ἀκροβυστίας*

5.1 For him to be / father of all who trust although in foreskin

5.2 εἰς τὸ λογισθῆναι καὶ αὐτοῖς τὴν δικαιοσύνην

5.2. So that it is reckoned / also to those, the righteousness.

Period 6 (Paul)

6.1 καὶ πατέρα *περιτομῆς* τοῖς οὐκ ἐκ *περιτομῆς* μόνον

6.1 and father of circumcision / to those who are not only from the circumcision

6.2 ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς στοιχοῦσιν τοῖς ἵχνεσιν τῆς ἐν *ἀκροβυστίᾳ* πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ.6.2 but also / **to those** who walk in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham while (he was) in foreskin.

From the beginning of the structural unit through to its end, there is an emphasis on the foreskinned. The Jewish interlocutor opens the unit with a question to Paul regarding whether the blessing came (only) to circumcised (περιτομαί) persons or also to the foreskinned, the ἀκροβυστία.<sup>19</sup> The final lexeme ἀκροβυστίαν is the implied correct answer, as this lexeme is made prominent by its location at the end of the colon.<sup>20</sup> The hiatus or clash of vowels at the start of the final prepositional phrase (ἡ\*έν) interrupts the sound at that point, creating an additional auditory effect through dissonance, serving to reinforce the prominence of ἀκροβυστίαν. As Lee and Scott explain (2009:177), there was a concern for melodious sounds in both classical and Hellenistic Greek culture. Unlike modern writers, Hellenistic authors aimed to achieve harmony in their compositions. Harmony penetrated the emotions in pleasurable ways. Those sounds strike the ear with particular force, but so too do sounds that are dissonant, cacophonous, or unpleasant. Hellenistic Greek authors recognized certain consonants as being harmonious and others as being harsher. A clash of vowels was considered inharmonious, yet it could be used effectively to invoke an audience's attention.

Throughout the structural unit a recurring<sup>21</sup> sound group περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί- becomes apparent and functions to provide structure.<sup>22</sup> As I demonstrate below, this repetitive structuring device helps to provide some indication of the ethnic group Paul has in view at the end of Rom 4:12. The lexemes περιτομήν and ἀκροβυστίαν are metonyms, which feature prominently within oral works.<sup>23</sup> A metonym relies on the audience to complete its intended referent (Foley 1991:8; Maxey 2009:99); the use, repetition, and placement of these particular metonyms reveal their importance for the overall meaning of the unit; they refer respectively to Jews and Gentiles. As mentioned, in this unit Paul is in the midst of a discussion with a fictitious Jew, but his intended

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<sup>19</sup> Joel Marcus (1989:77-78) writes that the term ἀκροβυστία was most likely a derogatory one used by Jews for Gentile others. I do not assess the term as a derogatory one.

<sup>20</sup> Sounds that occur at the beginning or ending of a sound group “receive special attention” (Lee and Scott 2009:151).

<sup>21</sup> In his book *Immanent Art*, John Foley (1991:56-57) discusses the importance of repetition for oral performance and the transmission of meaning. He remarks that with oral-derived texts, the term “repetition” is really a misnomer and is better described as re-creation. Each occurrence summons again metonymic meaning. It re-signifies meaning each time. Walter Ong (1982:40) also finds that redundancy is a feature of oral delivery.

<sup>22</sup> The pattern repeats in cola 1, 3, 4.1, 4.2, and with variation in 6.1 and 6.2.

<sup>23</sup> John Foley writes (1991:8), “[A] traditional work depends primarily on elements and strategies that were in place long before the execution of the present version or text, long before the author learned the inherited craft. Because the idiom is metonymic, summoning conventional connotations to conventional structures, we may say that the meaning it conveys is principally *inherent*. The ‘author’ uses this idiom most felicitously when inherent meaning is orchestrated coherently, so that the performance or text makes sense not only at the superficial (that is, decontextualized) level but more importantly with reference to the tradition.”

audience is Gentile.<sup>24</sup> Gentiles are meant to hear from a “Jew” about how both Jews and Gentiles are related under the one Jewish patriarch Abraham. The repetitive sound group περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί- also functions in and of itself to create a connection between Jews and foreskinned Gentiles.

Acoustics makes δικαιοσύνην (“righteousness”) in period two prominent by position, and its placement also brings it into close association with ἀκροβυστίαν of period one. Indeed, both δικαιοσύνη- and ἀκροβυστί- are prominent on account of their position throughout the entire structural unit. The lexeme δικαιοσύνη- ends cola 2.1 and 5.2 and occurs within 4.2; ἀκροβυστί- terminates cola 1.1, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, and 5.1 and occurs within colon 6.2. With the exception of the final two cola, all cola of the unit terminate in one of these two lexemes. Sound itself also draws δικαιοσύνην and ἀκροβυστίαν together, as their five-syllable sound group and ending sound, the final Greek consonant *nu*, create harmony.

Period two also marks the beginning of Abraham’s prominence, a figure who remains so throughout the unit. Paul alludes to Gen 15:6 to draw Abraham,<sup>25</sup> the Jewish patriarch that Paul introduced earlier (Rom 4:1), into this discussion on circumcision and foreskin (περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί-). A hiatus just prior to the name Abraham (Ἀβραάμ) signals the name’s importance. Abraham is mentioned again at the close of the unit (colon 6.2) and thus Paul’s beginning and ending responses to his interlocutor reference Abraham.<sup>26</sup> According to Paul, Abraham is not only the father of circumcised Jews and foreskinned Gentiles (cola 5.1 and 6.1-2) but also a model for the foreskinned to follow. Abraham is the link that draws these two groups together.

At the acoustic level, period three closely resembles period one and thereby functions to reinforce sounds already declaimed. Repetitive sounds draw these two periods together. Like period one above, we hear the voice of Paul’s Jewish interlocutor, this time asking about how blessedness was reckoned. We once again see the sound group περιτομή-ἀκροβυστί as part of the question. The two periods have approximately the same number of breath-units, each contains

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<sup>24</sup> See Rom 1:5, 13-14; 11:13; 15:15-16, 18. However, the issue of the ethnic makeup of Paul’s audience in Rome is heavily debated. Werner Kümmel’s remarks reflect some of the underlying confusion regarding this issue. In his *Introduction to the New Testament* he writes (1975:309), “Rather the letter characterizes its readers unambiguously as *Gentile Christians*.” Later, however, Kümmel undermines this insight when he remarks that the Roman community is “*not purely Gentile-Christian*” (310). Lloyd Gaston (1987:7-8) writes that Paul addressed Gentiles, and his churches were “*exclusively Gentile*.” Stanley Stowers (1994:30) is convinced that Paul explicitly describes a Gentile audience and “*nowhere explicitly encodes a Jewish audience*.” See also Pamela Eisenbaum (2009:216-17, 44, 48-49), who writes that Paul’s letter to the Romans is addressed to Gentiles and concerns messages for them. By contrast, Robert Jewett (2007:70-71) acknowledges that the current consensus among the modern commentaries is that Paul’s audience was Gentile, yet he also mentions that the discussion regarding the weak and strong (14:1-15:13) pertains to Gentiles and Jews, contradicting the majority opinion.

<sup>25</sup> By contrast, Robert Jewett (2007:318) calls this verse (Rom 4:9b) “a striking rhetorical shift to the first person plural.” Ernst Käsemann (1980:114) remarks that Gen 15:6 serves to confirm the prior reference to Psalm 32.

<sup>26</sup> Abraham is certainly central to Paul’s argument for how Gentiles can be folded into God’s promises. Two recent Pauline commentators speak of Abraham. One group of scholars states, “In effect, claiming the lineage of Abraham gave one a competitive advantage over others” (Dewey et al. 2010:220). According to Pamela Eisenbaum (2009:202), Paul considers that his divine mission “*finally fulfills the promises made to Abraham*.” According to her, Paul himself functions like Abraham and now brings all the peoples of the earth into God’s family under him (Abraham).

the intervening conjunction ἢ (“or”), and each terminates with a question or the elevation of the voice. The change in the case of the περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί- group functions at the level of sound to provide “interest and sustain attention” (Lee and Scott 2009:147).

The emphasis within the period, however, is on the lexeme that regards foreskin, ἀκροβυστία, the noun that terminates the period. With regard to semantics, the first use of the noun “foreskin” (period one) is metonymic and refers to a foreskinned person, while the second (period three) is literal and regards Abraham’s condition of being in the foreskin. At the level of sound, however, both nouns harmonize, serving to bring the foreskinned person into the literary/cultural realm of the formerly foreskinned Abraham.

The fourth period begins Paul’s rather lengthy summary of this small structural unit. Aspects pertaining to sound demonstrate that Paul continues to emphasize the themes of circumcision and foreskin with special emphasis given to the Greek lexeme for foreskin. While parallel cola containing the structuring lexeme pair περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί- create balance<sup>27</sup> within the period, the κ of οὐκ (“not”) that heads the period (colon 4.1) creates dissonance, serving to shift the emphasis away from περιτομή and toward ἀκροβυστία, the final lexeme. Paul clarifies for his interlocutor that God declared Abraham righteous *not* while circumcised but while in foreskin (ἐν ἀκροβυστία). Rounding—defined as “the repetition at the period’s end of sounds heard at the beginning” (Lee and Scott 2009:171)—is achieved through the repetition of the opening and closing ἐν sound, and thus the final prepositional phrase regarding Abraham’s condition in foreskin (ἦς ἐν τῇ\*ἀκροβυστία) (colon 4.2) provides closure. Notice, too, that ἀκροβυστία not only ends the colon but also is preceded by a hiatus for emphasis.

While righteousness came to Abraham before he was physically circumcised, commentators often diminish the importance of the receipt of Abraham’s circumcision,<sup>28</sup> the first part of colon 4.2, yet sound suggests otherwise and instead indicates that Paul makes no such concession. The περιτομ- is an integral part of the repetitive sound group, suggestive of its importance. Paul, then, is not denying the importance of Abraham’s circumcision in and of itself, but is instead emphasizing for his Gentile audience that he received (ἔλαβεν) righteousness (δικαιοσύνης) while he was in foreskin (ἦς ἐν τῇ ἀκροβυστία).

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<sup>27</sup> Balance suggests parallel or antithetical cola (Lee and Scott 2009:171).

<sup>28</sup> C. K. Barrett’s remarks (1991:85, 87) best capture the diminished status Abraham’s actual circumcision receives among Pauline commentators. He labels verse 11a as a parenthesis and writes, “Abraham’s circumcision did not confer righteousness upon him, and was not a token that he was obliged henceforth to keep the law in order to be justified, but confirmed by a visible sign the fact that he had already been justified by faith.” Robert Jewett writes (2007:318), “In a skillful paraphrase of Gen 17, Paul makes the case that circumcision was not only performed long after Abraham’s reckoning as righteous, but also that it was *merely* a ‘seal’ of the righteous status that he had already received” (emphasis my own). While I disagree that Paul states that Jews and Gentiles must have faith to be heirs to Abraham, the remarks of James Dunn well capture the notion of the broadening of the definition of circumcision that I suggest is operative in this verse. Dunn (1988:209) states that the first part of verse 11 (colon 4.2) “should not be taken as a parenthesis,” but that Paul is reworking the significance of Abraham’s circumcision so that it can pertain universally to those (Gentiles and Jews) who have faith.

According to Paul, Abraham received the sign of circumcision for two purposes, each signaled by the repetitive openings (εἰς τὸ)<sup>29</sup> that head each colon of period five. Each of these purposes, however, concerns the foreskinned. The first is so that Abraham would be father to all those who trust through foreskin, or while they are themselves in foreskin (δι' ἀκροβυστίας) (colon 5.1). The second is so that this same group, as heard by the pronoun αὐτοῖς, could be made righteous (δικαιοσύνην) (colon 5.2). The repetition of the ending -ς at the end of the two leading prepositions εἰς and the pronoun αὐτοῖς reinforces the link between the two purpose clauses and the foreskinned persons. A similar auditory connection is made between the αὐτοῖς and the τοῖς sounds in the following period (six). In addition, the -ναι of λογισθῆναι (colon 5.2) refers back to periods two and three, in which the same lexeme is found. Whereas in periods two and three the reckoning (ἐλογίσθη) of righteousness (δικαιοσύνην) concerns Abraham, here it shifts to the foreskinned person.

Sound patterns associate the trust of Abraham with the trust of the foreskinned (colon 5.1). The lexeme πιστε- (“trust”) identified with Abraham alone in colon 4.2 retains that connection but now also becomes associated with the foreskinned who trust, made clear by the δι' ἀκροβυστίας that ends the colon. The long harmonious sound group distinguished by *homoioteleuton* involving rhyming and alliteration helps to strengthen the connection (πατέρα πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων). Rhyming is achieved through the repeated final -ων of several lexemes in the phrase, and the initial π- sound of πατέρα πάντων and πιστευόντων adds alliteration. Echoes of this longer alliterative sound pattern that contains the πιστε- recur in the final colon of the unit (6.2) and thus create an auditory connection back to this reference, one that clearly identifies the foreskinned as those who trust. Notice too the absence of a reference to trust required of the circumcised. Indeed, the customary and anticipatory περιτομ- heard at the start of nearly every colon of the unit is absent from this colon.

In the final period of the structural unit, Paul designates the conditions for being an heir of Abraham. Sound features indicate that Paul continues to have two groups in view in this final period but that he emphasizes the foreskinned. The first feature is a modification<sup>30</sup> of the signature sound grouping περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί-. While the lexeme περιτομῆς occurs twice in succession, the lexeme ἀκροβυστία occurs only once in the final colon, breaking the otherwise consistent one-to-one symmetry of the pattern. At first glance, this variation would seem to indicate that Paul privileges the first group, the περιτομή-, over the ἀκροβυστί-, but just the reverse is the case. Variation in the pattern does not detract from its overall effect but instead functions to call attention to it. According to Lee and Scott (2009:155), “established sound patterns shape a listener’s expectations. Distinctive sounds that diverge from an established pattern can also receive special importance because they surprise a hearer.” In this case, the ἀκροβυστί- is present by suggestion and expectation. The second feature is balance, achieved in part through the correlative conjunctions (οὐκ μόνον—ἀλλὰ καὶ), but also by the *two* dative

<sup>29</sup> While ending sounds receive special attention, so too do beginning ones (Lee and Scott 2009:151). Here, the repetitive opening sounds create rounding and balance within the period.

<sup>30</sup> While the essential form remains the same, modification is the change in one or more pattern components (Lee and Scott 2009:149).



articles τοῖς,<sup>31</sup> one prior to οὐκ (colon 6.1) and the second—the problematic one—just prior to the στοιχοῦσιν (colon 6.2). Here, the presence of the second, problematic τοῖς helps to resolve the unevenness of the signature sound pattern περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί-. Without the problematic τοῖς, there would be no emphasis on another group, yet this second group (the ἀκροβυστί-) has been indicated and featured *throughout* the unit and indeed receives special emphasis here with an additional τοῖς that follows the στοιχοῦσιν. The third feature is elongation (the lengthening of a colon), often found at the end of well-formed periods, a feature that serves to call attention to that phrase (Lee and Scott 2009:171).

Indeed the final elongated phrase at the end of the structural unit (τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστία πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ) describes the ethnic group that Paul has in view throughout this unit. Sound features indicate that this reference is to foreskinned Gentiles. It is a repetition with variation of the similar sounding phrase πατέρα πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων δι' ἀκροβυστίας of colon 5.1, in which there is an unambiguous reference to foreskinned Gentiles.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the preceding στοιχοῦσιν τοῖς ἴχνεσιν at the start of the τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστία serves metonymically as a reference to foreskinned persons (colon 6.2).<sup>33</sup> Thus, Abraham is father, πατέρα, first to the circumcised (ἐκ περιτομῆς) (colon 6.1) and then to the foreskinned, as noted by the second τοῖς of period six and the final elongated phrase of the unit (colon 6.2).<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

In sum, several factors that pertain to sound indicate the likelihood that Paul intended the last group in colon 6.2, as designated by the τοῖς just prior to the στοιχοῦσιν, to be foreskinned

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<sup>31</sup> While commentators such as Cranfield and Dunn have argued against the appropriateness of the τοῖς prior to the στοιχοῦσιν on grammatical grounds (see note 12 above), Maria Neubrand (1997:234-35) has observed that Paul employs a flexible word order. To review, Cranfield and Dunn have argued that for two groups to be in view Paul would have used the more common οὐ τοῖς construction rather than the τοῖς οὐκ. Greek grammar, however, is not restricted to a particular word order, and while the construction οὐ τοῖς is the more common one, there is nothing “incorrect” about the present τοῖς οὐκ construction. Indeed, this less common construction marks the text, making it more memorable at the level of sound.

<sup>32</sup> Lee and Scott remark (2009:154), “sounds that occur in corresponding places within parallel sound groups frequently claim special attention.”

<sup>33</sup> Pamela Eisenbaum makes the observation (2009:204), “I think the similar descriptions of Abraham and Gentile believers are there precisely to reinforce the kindred connection that Paul argues Gentiles have in Abraham. People who are kin are supposed to be similar to one another; those who belong to the same family are assumed to share important characteristics.”

<sup>34</sup> Caroline Johnson Hodge (2007:5, 138) writes that Paul “relies on the logic of patrilineal descent to create a new lineage for the Gentiles, a lineage that links Gentiles through Christ to the founding ancestor, Abraham.” According to her, Paul does not create one identical group linked to a common ancestor Abraham. Her reading of Rom 4:12, however, differs from my own. While she employs the τοῖς prior to the στοιχοῦσιν, she finds that in Rom 4:11, Paul refers to the uncircumcised and that in Rom 4:12, Paul refers to faithful Jews, to those “who are both circumcised and who follow the example of Abraham’s faithfulness” (2007:88; 188, n.27). This exegetical position, however, undermines her comment about Paul not making one identical group, as on this reading, both groups would be heirs to Abraham based on Abraham’s faithfulness.

Gentiles. The lexeme ἀκροβυστί- is prominent throughout with its placement at the end of nearly every breath unit or colon of the structural unit. Sound patterns and placement link ἀκροβυστί- to δικαιοσύνη- (colon 1.1, 2.1) and then ἀκροβυστί- to πιστε- (5.1 and 6.2). The sounds of 6.2 recall those of 5.1, in which there is an unambiguous reference to the foreskinned as being those who trust, thus providing a strong indication that the final phrase of 6.2 refers to that same group. In addition, Paul emphasizes Abraham as a model because he trusted and received righteousness while in foreskin, and Abraham is re-signified with terms and sounds that concern foreskinned Gentiles (colon 5.1).

As shown, the so-called problematic τοῖς just prior to the στοιχοῦσιν is integral to the unit; it serves as a necessary structuring device. Its sound is first introduced in colon 5.2 with the pronoun αὐτοῖς, a referent to the foreskinned. It and the τοῖς that immediately precedes it (colon 6.1) along with their associated correlative conjunctions provide balance to the period. The presence of the second τοῖς helps to resolve the tension left by the imbalance in the signature sound feature περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί-.

This analysis based on acoustic features resists the reading that all the heirs of Abraham are determined by the criterion of faith. While Paul is in dialogue with a fictitious Jewish teacher of Gentiles, his concern is with the foreskinned, the Gentiles, his intended hearers, and with how *they* become righteous and heirs of the Jewish, circumcised Abraham along with the circumcised Jews. Through the dialogue, Paul informs his Gentile hearers as to how they can be legitimate heirs of Abraham through faith and not through circumcision. As a Jew, Paul does not question Jewish descent from Abraham; that lineage is a given.<sup>35</sup> The issue for Paul is whether or not Gentiles also belong as legitimate heirs of Abraham even though they themselves are not circumcised.

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<sup>35</sup> As Pamela Eisenbaum (2009:218) cogently remarks, “Jews always stood righteous before God because of *God’s* faithfulness to the covenant.”

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# Sensing “Place”: Performance, Oral Tradition, and Improvization in the Hidden Temples of Mountain Altai

Carole Pegg and Elizaveta Yamaeva

Dedicated to Arzhan Mikhailovich K z r kov (1978-2012)

## 1. Introduction: Altai’s Ear

The snow-capped Altai Mountain range runs from southern Siberia in the Russian Federation, southwards through West Mongolia, eastern Kazakhstan, and the Xinjiang autonomous region of Northwest China, before finally coming to rest in Southwest Mongolia. This essay is based on fieldwork undertaken in 2010 in that part of the Altai Mountains that in 1990 became the Republic of Altai, a unit of the Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup>

The Altaians, known previously as Kalmyks and Oirots, engage in a complex of spiritual beliefs and practices known locally as Ak Jang (“White Way”)<sup>2</sup> and in academic literature as Burkhanism. Whether this movement was messianic, nationalist, or spiritual and whether it was a continuation of indigenous beliefs and practices or a syncretic mixture of local beliefs (Altai Jang), Buddhism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and Orthodox Christianity have been argued

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<sup>2</sup> The term “jang” (*jan*) refers to authority, belief, custom, law, principle, and canon or rules (Baskakov 2005 [1947]:47). It also has a broader meaning of “way” or “method” (Yamaeva 2010a:5). Ak Jang is sometimes translated as “White Belief” but since it includes both belief and practice, we use the broader sense.

When the Altaian literary language was created during the Soviet period, the Russian Cyrillic alphabet had to be extended to embrace non-Russian sounds, for instance, the velar nasal sound usually transliterated as “ŋ.” Although noting the velar nasal, we have simplified the orthography here for easy readability by non-linguists. *Ak Jan* is therefore rendered as Ak Jang, *Janar* as Jangar, *Enmek* as Engmek, *Tenri* as Tengri, *Teleŋit* as Telengit, and so on.



elsewhere (Krader 1956; Znamenski 1999; Vinogradov 2003; Halemba 2006; Yamaeva 2010a). Altaians argue that Ak Jang was the established religion during the reign of the seventeenth-century Jungarian prince, Oirod Khan, and that it has its roots in Tengrism,<sup>3</sup> a Turko-Mongol religious system that shares some of the same pantheon. From Pegg's experience, Ak Jang appears to draw elements from a number of Turko-Mongol belief systems, including animism, Shamanism, Tengrism, and Buddhism. However, these elements are transformed in Ak Jang practice. For instance, Üch Kurbustan ("Three Kurbustan"), a transformation of Khormusta (Sogdian Ahura Mazda) and widely recognized in Inner Asia by the thirteenth century,<sup>4</sup> has become the main Burkhan—Ulu Byrkan—and all spiritual phenomena of the Upper and Middle domains are believed to be its emanations or "burkhans." This is quite different from the rest of Inner Asia, where "burkhan" refers to "Buddha" or "Buddhist deity" (Shinzhina 2004:140).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Yamaeva (2002) suggests that Scythians in Altai during the Pazyryk (eighth through sixth centuries BCE) and post-Pazyryk (fifth through third centuries BCE) periods included Kurbustan as part of a Zoroastrian spiritual complex that embraced worship of fire, thunder and lightning, and the "Blue Sky" (Kök Tengeri) (2002:3) but in Ak Jang has additional characteristics (see §3.2 below).

Ak Jang practitioners acknowledge the Upper, Middle, and Lower levels of the shamanic universe but do not have dealings with Erlik, Master of the Underworld, or any of his spirits. For this reason, Ak Jang has been contrasted with shamanism ("Kara Jang," ["Black Way"]). Usually characterized by its concentration on spirit-beings of the Upper domains, Ak Jang also gives major importance to the "spirits of place" (*ee*, pl. *eeler*)<sup>6</sup> in the Middle Domain (Earth). In addition, it elevates figures from Altaian heroic oral epics and tales into its pantheon, reveres Altaian epic-tellers, and, as we shall see below, in contemporary practice sometimes adopts heroic epic performance modes into its rituals.

Ak Jang arose as a revitalization movement among nomadic southern Altaians<sup>7</sup> who had struggled with Russian agricultural colonization, land dispossession, and loss of traditional Altaian leaders during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The trigger was the vision of a White Rider, later to be called Ak Byrkan ("White Burkhan"), experienced in 1904 by a 12-year-old girl, Chugul Sorok, while herding. The rider instructed Altaians to cast off foreign Russian and Christian influences and to await the imminent arrival of Oirod Khan (Danilin 1993 [1932]: 86).

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<sup>3</sup> Also sometimes called "Tengrianism."

<sup>4</sup> Khormusta (Qormusta), for instance, occurs in many ancient Mongolian shamanic fire-prayers (Heissig 1980 [1970]:5).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, in Mongolian folk religion Burqan Tengri is used to refer to Buddha (Heissig 1980 [1970]: 52).

<sup>6</sup> The concept of the spirit-owners of place is widespread throughout Inner Asia.

<sup>7</sup> Soviet researchers distinguished hunter-gatherer northern Altaians (Tuba, Chalkandu, and Kumandy) from pastoral nomadic southern Altaians (Altai Kizhi, Telengit, and Teleut).

Two annual rituals held in hidden open-air mountain temples (*küree*)<sup>8</sup> are central to Ak Jang. Jazhyl BÜR (“Green Leaves”) is held in spring when “Altai’s ear opens” and the mountains’ spirit-owners awaken (Chachiyakova 2010)—an event heralded by the first “sound of the sky,” thunder (Chechaeva 2010). Sary BÜR (“Yellow Leaves”) is held in autumn when requests for “blessing-fortune” (*alkysh-byian*)<sup>9</sup> are made for the approaching difficult winter before “Altai’s ear closes” and the mountains’ spirit-owners sleep. These rituals are referred to as *mürgüül*,<sup>10</sup> a term which in its broad sense embraces the ritual performance practices described below and in its narrow sense refers to the way the body is bowed to show respect to phenomena of the Upper domains.



Fig. 1. *Küree* temple above Lower Talda, Kuroty Valley, Altai Republic, 2010, showing *tagyl* altars, *maany* banner, *kyira* ribbons, and three participants kneeling at the “hearth.” Photo: Carole Pegg. All rights reserved.

The discussion that follows will focus on creative practices within contemporary Ak Jang in the central region of Ongudai. They are based on participation at a mountain temple Sary BÜR ritual in Lower Talda, Kuroty Valley (Fig. 1), and are supplemented by recorded interviews and performances in 2006 and 2010 of those who had participated in another such ritual held at the temple above Kulady<sup>11</sup> in the neighboring Karakol valley (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. *Küree* temple above Kulady, Karakol Valley, Altai Republic, 2006, showing Ak Jang officiant Kumdus Borboshev and anthropologist Carole Pegg performing *mürgüül* prayers. Photo: Carole Pegg. All rights reserved.

<sup>8</sup> Spelling for this term follows Tybykova 2005:124. The colloquial form is *küre* (Shinzhina 2004:140).

<sup>9</sup> Oirat *alkysh* means “blessing,” “benediction” (Baskakov 2005 [1947]:17), and eulogy (Yamaeva 2010b). *Byian* is a powerful concept in Altaian meaning “good-fortune.” In Altai, the pairing *alkysh-byian* is frequently used.

<sup>10</sup> Spelling for this term follows Tybykova 2005:136.

<sup>11</sup> Place names are transliterated from Altaian rather than Russian.

We argue that three inter-related dimensions of “place” are created with respect to these rituals. The first dimension draws on that outlined by the philosopher Edward Casey; it is a place in the local landscape that, in a phenomenological and topographical sense, “gathers” together different entities, including experiences, histories, and space-time (Casey 1996:24-26). The second dimension is a place of power and transformation activated when connections are made during the performances of the ritual participants. And the third dimension is the participants’ sense of “being-in-place,” which occurs through fulfillment of those connections. It is this accumulated sense of “connection” or “relation” that is important for personhood. Anthropologists have argued that personhood comprises a series of relations that varies between societies and also historically (for instance, Strathern 1988; Morokhova 1994; Gell 1999). For contemporary Altaians, personhood includes relations to kin, landscape, and other energies within the world (Halemba 2006:145). The current essay suggests that these relations, already gathered in the *kiiree* temple, are activated by performances and experienced by participants, thereby strengthening personhood. In ritual contexts with heightened senses, these performances include ritual bodily movements, songs and oral poetry that include epic and spiritual imagery and motifs, and practices that root participants historically and situate them within the cosmos. In addition, textual improvisations link them to contemporary local and global worlds.

## 2. Purifications and Preparations

Sary Būr rituals, which mark the passage of time from autumn to winter, fall into a tripartite structure: a pre-liminal phase (separation from society), a liminal phase (transition), and a post-liminal phase (reincorporation into society) (van Gennep 1977 [1909], Turner 1969). During the pre-liminal phase, participants purify their bodies, a state they maintain until after the post-liminal phase. This purification includes abstinence from sexual activity and alcohol, food restrictions (for example, no salt or meat), and refraining from disturbing spirits by digging in the ground (Yamaeva 2010b). Taboos surround preparation of food, *archyn* juniper (a revered bush of the Altai Kizhis), and sacred *kyira* ribbons to be used in the ritual. This same process of abstinence and purification had also been followed in the Sary Būr ritual at Kulady.

Before our own ritual party left the house in Lower Talda, those women wearing trousers tied a broad scarf around them to simulate a skirt, one of several actions during the ritual process that enabled participants to sense a connection with early Ak Jang practitioners. We then set off around the base of the mountain in the path of the sun (clockwise). We followed a stream through birch woodland and washed our heads (males) and faces (females) in the icy water of its spring. As an act of reciprocity for the purification received, we left behind two branches of juniper, red and white bead necklaces, green stones, and buttons, also purified, for the young girl who is the spring’s *ee* spirit.

We paused on the mountainside beneath a birch tree for the men to carve figurines (*shatra*) from soft, white *byshtak* cheese, which would encourage the spirit-owners of the mountains to descend to the *tagyl* altars to eat. Advised by spirits, Arzhan Kōzōrōkov, who was to act as the ritual leader (*jarlyk*), enunciated the name of the form of each figurine before it was carved and, in doing so, enlivened it. Certain figurines are mandatory—for instance, a wild and domesticated

animal, mountain, traditional dwelling, horse, and hitching post. Ours also included a human figure, wedding chest, hearth, and cooking pot. Such figurines connect to tradition, rooting the participants in terms of history and location. They also influence the oral poetry included in the ritual. The ritual participants hope that these offerings will be eaten by the spirits of the place in reciprocation for a mild winter (Chechaeva 2010; Mandaeva 2010).

After the figurines were prepared, the food was carefully arranged on trays: sheep’s head and meat, meatballs, *lepyoshka* bread, rounds of fried *boorsok* pastries, Altaian butter, biscuits, sweets, and fruit juice. Arzhan tore two white cloth ribbons for each participant. Afterwards, the men led the way up the mountain to the temple, carrying the offerings (*tepshi*) of figurines and food. They moved from the place of everyday life in the valley below to a place on the threshold between worlds, where a difficult transition between autumn and winter must be accomplished and their own sense of “being-in-place” reenergized.

### 3. Ritual Participants

#### 3.1. The Living Küree Temple

In Altaian belief, every aspect of nature has its own spirit, including the architecture of the *küree* temple, which is perceived as a living participant in the ritual process. The temple, altars, and event itself are all able to grant favors and feel emotions such as enjoyment (see §4.2 below).

The temple is deliberately constructed to gather indigenous knowledge (*bilik*) and past experiences, and to facilitate connections. In a high place, usually on a mountainside, it is aligned with sacred sites on the earth below and with clear views of the planets and constellations above. As the site of the liminal phase of the ritual, it also situates the participants both physically and imaginatively on a threshold between earth and sky. It is important that the temple is not separated from surrounding landscape and sky by walls, windows, and roofs, as in most institutionalized world religions. Ak Jang participants need to interact with energies of the Upper and Middle worlds.

The *küree* temple comprises a complex of altars (*tagyl*), wooden poles (*süme*), hitching posts (*chaky*), a pair of birch trees (*bai kaiyng, jaiyk*), and sometimes a perimeter wall or fence (*cheden*) (Yamaeva 2010a:4).<sup>12</sup> The hitching post and birch trees are perceived as the *axis mundi*, or cosmic axis, the point of connection between Upper, Middle, and Lower domains of the universe. Since Ak Jang practitioners look primarily upwards, these—together with columns of smoke and fire—provide conduits along which communications with spirit-beings travel to different vaults of the Sky, and by which spirit-beings, good fortune, and benefits travel to Middle worlds. Because of these potential arrivals, the complex is sometimes referred to as *kündü-küree*, “reception” temple (Tybykova 2005:124).

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<sup>12</sup> In the early twentieth century, *küree* referred to the whole ritual site and to its main altar. Z. Khabarov’s 1908 journal, an extract from which is published in *Shinzhina* 2004:138, noted that “in old belief,” other altars were called *sang* or *shiree*—both Mongolian words. In some areas of Gornyi (Mountain)-Altai, the term *sang* is used instead of the term *tagyl* (Yamaeva 2010a:4).

One meaning of *küre* is “circle.”<sup>13</sup> Yamaeva (2010a) has proposed a possible link with the term *kur*, which also means “circle” and is used to designate “people united by relationship or common deed,” “people of one circle” (*bir kura ulus*), and “relatives” (*bir kura töröön*). In both Kulady and Lower Talda, the altars form two semi-circles, with large altars on the inner and smaller ones on the outer.

The temple and altars are oriented in relation to cosmic and earthly landscapes. Of major importance are the Sun and Moon, *foci* of Ak Jang worship as commanded by the Oirod Khan’s messenger, Ak Byrkan. The temple always faces East, the direction of the rising sun, and some altars are circular or moon-shaped. The other altars are oriented toward particular mountains, with spirit-owners that will be invited to participate in the ritual. In Ak Jang, Altai is represented as two triangles, based on three mountains in “Small Steppe Altai” and three mountains in “Great Mountain Altai.” Each triangle has three corners, together comprising the “six corners” of Altai. Stones brought from other Altaian regions are incorporated into the altars (Shodoev and Kurchakov 2003:79).

Participants in this arena have indigenous knowledge about the history of Ak Jang, their migrations, and the significance of the temple. Yamaeva stressed (2010b): “We Altaians feel ourselves to be part of unbreakable space-time.” The temple’s design connects with the deep past of pre-socialist history, with possible influences from Manichaeism temple architecture (*idem*). Perhaps more importantly, the temple gathers within itself two periods of major suffering for Altaians. The first occurred at the fall of the Jungar State in 1756, when many Oirots—including Altaian clans—fled the bloodshed inflicted by Chinese-Mongolian troops in West Mongolia, moving to their current homeland. The first *küree* temples and *tagyl* altars were built upon their arrival (Borboshev 2006). The second period was during the suppression of Ak Jang in its early years, when participants were attacked, some killed, and Ak Jang leaders arrested then brutally repressed in the early 1930s as hard-line communism and collectivization took hold (Ekeev et al. 2004).

Out of respect for this suffering, and because of belief in the power of words and the energy of sound, the names of leaders from this period as well as major deities and certain ritual terms are considered taboo (*bailu*) and deliberately not sounded. Prohibited terms include “Ak Jang” (replaced by Altai Jang), *shüüten*<sup>14</sup> (replaced by *mürgüül*),<sup>15</sup> and *archyn* juniper (replaced by *jazhyl*, “green”) (Erokhonova 2010). Chugul is called Aky Keree or “White Light,” her adoptive father Chet Chelpan is referred to as Abai or Abaiys (meaning “Grandfather” or “Uncle”) (Shinzhina 2004:140), and Barnaul Mandaev (b. 1869), who was arrested and exiled to Kazakhstan in 1936, is called Ada (“Father”) (Yamaeva 2010b).

Also gathered in the placement of the stones is a relation between temple and clan. All clans have their own sacred mountain which is referenced in the temple’s topographical location.

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<sup>13</sup> The classical Mongolian word *küriye(n)*, which means “encircling” or “monastery,” was used in the thirteenth-century *Secret History of the Mongols* to mean “Great Circle” (Da Khüree, also the pre-Soviet name for Mongolia’s capital, Ulaanbaatar [Jagchid and Hyer 1979:68]) (Lessing 1982:841).

<sup>14</sup> Sometimes spelled *shüiten*.

<sup>15</sup> *Mürgüül*, sometimes spelled *mürgül*, is of classical Mongolian (Mo. *mörgül*, Lessing 1982:549) and Oirod origin (*mörgü-*, Baskakov 2005 [1947]:111).

There is similarly a direct visual connection with the clan’s village that lies in the valley below the temple. In addition, among the large flat stones, built to a meter high to form an altar, are stones brought by clan members from their pre-migration homeland. Altar construction also varies according to clan. For instance, the Tölös clan members put white stones on top.

The temple, then, perceived as “living” by participants of Sary Bür, is already the location of multi-dimensional gatherings that connect sky and earth, cosmic and earthly alignments, and shapes and materials that relate to ancient beliefs, the histories of the clan, and Ak Jang. In this arena, ritual participants activate those gatherings through performance in order to create for themselves a sense of “being-in-place” in the contemporary world. The circular shape of the temple arena and its implications for personhood are evoked in performance by ritual circular movements and gestures all made in the direction of the path of the sun. Circular movements encourage the circulation of energy among different dimensions of the universe as do offerings of animal sacrifice and food with ritual significance as “life” (Éliade 1971 [1949]: 98, 163). The clan and that “other” dimension of lineage, the ancestors, are similarly the *loci* of circulating energy since ancestral souls are reincarnated through descendants. Circular movement therefore also expresses the circularity of death and birth. Finally, circular gestures “turn the world” by moving on the seasons.

### 3.2. Cosmic Substances, Deities, and Burkhangs

The Ak Jang pantheon includes many deities, burkhans, spirit-protectors, and spirits of place, but here we include only those who participated in the Sary Bür rituals under discussion. They participated by receiving requests for blessing-fortune (*alkysh-byian*), sending messages, and visiting the temple complex to eat, sit, and circulate as forms of energy experienced by human participants.

For Altaians, the Sky (Tengeri) does not constitute monolithic space but a series of eight levels or vaults (*chaikamakh*), which are landscaped and provide homes for particular spirits (Shodoev and Kurchakov 2003:73-77; Shodoev 2009:201). This number contrasts with the seven levels typical of Shamanism and relates to the Ak Jang preference for even numbers. At the top is located the Pole Star (Altyn Kazyk), which holds all vaults together. Above that lies Milk Lake (Süt Köl) and around it, in Üch Kurbustan, grow white and yellow flowers that govern an individual’s destiny (Yamaev 2006). Tengeri, a concept common to the spiritual complexes of Shamanism and Tengrism, is the repository of spirits, celestial beings, and special powers that, when conferred upon humans, endows them with strength and gives them protection.

In contemporary Ak Jang, Üch Kurbustan has become a complex notion interpreted in different ways. Yamaeva describes it as follows (2010b):

Üch Kurbustan is a cosmic substance of the Upper World that created everything. It is the cosmos or universe and circulates freely. Üch Kurbustan can come in the form of lightning and light, and can punish guilty people by lightning. It is a Creator [*Jaiiaachy*, “source”] that is all-seeing and all-knowing. It is also the substance within each person. While Orchylang Ochilang is the physical cosmos, Üch Kurbustan is the cosmos imbued with spirit.

During the Sary Bür rituals, messages are sent to Üch Kurbustan through the smoke from fire and juniper, the praises, prayers, and blessings of the *jarlyk* ritual leader, and spirits in receptacles (*jaiyk*) that intercede on behalf of the community. Üch Kurbustan communicates with the participants through his “messenger,” the *jarlyk*. Burkhans also descend onto the large *maany* flag mounted separately on a tall hitching post or birch tree (Fig. 1).

In nineteenth-century Bible translations, orthodox missionaries used the monotheistic notion of Kudai as an Altaian equivalent of “God.” Early Ak Jang practitioners wanted to replace Kudai with the concept of Burkhan. Burkhans are present and predominate in rituals and in the Ak Jang worldview. However, Kudai also continues to be used, sometimes interchangeably with Tengeri and sometimes as a general name for deities (*kudailar*).

Ak Jang practitioners have also adopted the shamanic deity Ülgen (Anokhin 1994 [1924]:9) but use it as a generic name for *aru tös* (pure ancestors, or clan spirits) (Vinogradov 2003:118). At the same time Ülgen is personified. His sons form the seven-star constellation Jeti Kan (“Seven Heroes,” corresponding to Ursa Major or the Big Bear), white spirit-protectors from whom are taken the foundations of Altaian clans (Shodoev and Kurchakov 2003:75). His daughters are called Ak Kystar (“White Girls”) or Mechin (“Monkey”), a constellation we call the Pleiades. These daughters are also white spirits that strengthen good deeds and give support at the beginning of life.

The *eeler* (“spirits of place”) have major importance during Sary Bür and Jazhyl Bür rituals since they are specifically invited to dine at the *tagyl* altars. In particular, the spirit-owners of surrounding mountains, including the clan’s mountain, are addressed. Ak Byrkan, who is equated with the spirit-owner of Altai, Altai Eezi, is invited to sit in a special place.

The system of “unsounding words” is applied to this spiritual complex during requests for blessing-fortune. For instance, Üch Kurbustan is replaced by phrases such as “Upper Jaiaan” or “Upper Staying Jaiaan” (*Öröö Turgan Jaiaan*) (Mandaeva 2010) or, together with other spirit beings and burkhans, called “Respected One” (*Kairakan*) and “Elder” (*Örökön*). More extended metaphors are also used. For instance, in the request for blessing Buramailu Ödükti, the traditional white felt boot references the fall of the Jungar state, how Altaians joined the Russian state and became poor, and how Altai helped them to survive (Yamaeva 2010b).

### 3.3. *Epic Heroes and the Epic World*

The epic world and its heroes permeate Ak Jang rituals and Altaian epic-tellers are familiar with the Ak Jang worldview. According to the renowned *kaichy* epic-teller Aleksei Grigor’evich Kalkin, for instance, there are eight burkhans in the Sky and seven in the Lower domains (Shodoev and Kurchakov 2003:73).

Epic heroes, part of the Ak Jang pantheon, are not mentioned by name for the reasons explained above. *Foci* of worship, such as Üch Kurbustan, Ak Byrkan, and Jer-Ene (“Earth-Mother”), occur widely in Altaian heroic epics as characters who undertake specific tasks. Üch Kurbustan, for instance, may give a hero-child to an elderly couple or a magical horse to the hero. Tengeri Kaan is also a character, whose daughter is able to resuscitate the dead.

It was the nineteenth-century Russian missionary V. I. Verbitskii who first noted that Ak Jang warrior protector-spirits were also present in epics (1993 [1893]:117, 120). Three heroes are

important: Oiroot-khan or Galdan-Oiroot, Shunu, and Amursana (Danilin 1993 [1932]:59), all of whom have links with the Western Mongol Jungar State (1630-1756).<sup>16</sup> Two of these—Galdan Oiroot<sup>17</sup> and Amursana—are historical figures, while the identity of Shunu, who features in many Altaian epics and contemporary tales and songs, is uncertain. They occur as an interchangeable “triple-hero” motif in Altaian oral literature and have been compared to Mongolia’s Genghis Khan and Tibet’s Gesar on the strength of sharing kinship with Kurbustan (Vinogradov 2003:122-26).

Standing apart from the triple-hero is the Oiroot epic hero Jangar, whose tale was widespread in the former territories of the Jungar State and found among those who migrated from those regions. The Altaian version of this epic is 38,000 lines long and embodies the main tenets of Ak Jang as well as many Ak Jang praises used in Ak Jang rituals (Yamaeva 2010b). Üch Kurbustan creates the warrior Jangar, who is raised under the protection of Jer-Ene (“Earth-Mother”). Jangar’s mission is to eliminate evil, punish wrongs, and establish world peace (Yamaeva 2010a:6).

The *jarlyk* leader of the Upper Talda ritual, Arzhan Kōzörōkov, addressed the hero of the Pole Star (Altyn Kazyk). More research needs to be done on the connection of heroes and stars in this context.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.4. Human Participants

Several ritual specialists may participate:

*jarlyk/jarlykchy* (“messenger”). This central figure may be male or female. The *jarlyk* leads the ritual event, having traditional knowledge of its order, formulae, and movements. These movements include feeding the fire, circumambulating while sprinkling milk (*süt ürüstep*) or milk-vodka (*araky*) from a sacred bowl, and purifying participants and place with juniper. S/he may also read the sacred text, utter praises (*maktal*), and request blessing-fortune. The *jarlyk* should be spirit-charged (*eeliü*), thereby having the ability to see the past, predict, exorcise, and heal, as well as see and hear spirits. Most importantly, the *jarlyk* calls burkhans and spirits to the temple to participate in the ritual. In the early years of Ak Jang, the male *jarlyk* wore a milk-white coat (*ak süt ton*) and cap (*kalban börük*) and wore his hair in a plait (Sagalev 1992:158). He used a whip (*kamchy*), “thunderbolt” (*ochyr*), copper or brass knife (*kylysh*), sacred bowl

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<sup>16</sup> The Jungar State (Mo. *Züün Gar Uls*, “Left Wing Nation”) encompassed most of West Mongolia, part of Tyva, Jungaria (southwest of the Altai Mountains), eastern Turkestan (present-day Xinjiang in China), and Buryat Mongol territories around Lake Baikal.

<sup>17</sup> Galdan-Oiroot could have been one of two historical Galdans. The first is Galdan (1644-1697), son of Karakula Bogatyr Kontaisha, who became khan of the Jungars in 1677 (Danilin 1993 [1932]:59). During Galdan’s khanship, the Dörvön Oirat (“Four Oirat”) tribal alliance was formed between Koshuts, Torguts, Jungars, and Dörbets (and their subjects, Khoits) (Fang 1943:265). The second is Galdan-Tseren, whose father Tseveen Araydan was Galdan Kontaisha’s nephew and the possible brother of Shunu (Fang 1944:757-59). According to Jungar genealogies, Galdan Tseren, who died in 1745, became *kongtaichi* of Jungaria after murdering his father in 1727.

<sup>18</sup> See Pegg 2001:116-18 for the relation of Altai Urianghai epic heroes to the seven-star constellation, Doloon Burkhan Od (“Seven Star Burkhans”).



(*aiak*), sacred text (*sudur*), small pipe (*ayus*), and juniper (*archyn*) (Ukachina and Yamaeva 1993), and he sometimes played a shamanic drum (Chachiyakova 2010).

*alkyshchy*. This is a specialist in the performance of *alkyshes*, rhythmically organized and unaccompanied poetical quatrains that are imbued with the ideological bases of Ak Jang. They both offer praises and request blessing-fortune. The *alkyshchy* is also “with spirit” since, whether ancient or improvised, the words come from the “other world” (Borboshev 2006). S/he makes aspersions and purifies with juniper. In contemporary times, a single person may perform both *jarlyk* and *alkyshchy* roles.

*shabychy*. A person who performs jangar songs (*jangar khozhong*) that praise Burkhan. During prayer-meetings in the early twentieth century, these jangar songs were performed by “clean” (virginal) girls in special costumes (Kleshev 2004:267), which included white, yellow, and blue *kyira* ribbons, buttons, and plaits (Ukachina and Yamaeva 1993).

*koitukchy*. A “helper,” whose duties include carrying food to the temple, making the fire, and refilling the sacred bowl.

Clan members participate in preparing and offering food, hanging sacred ribbons, and making ritual movements and gestures. They support the requests for blessings by uttering “Lord, let it be! Lord, let it be!” (“*Bash bolzyn! Bash bolzyn!*”) and make gestures of prayer, genuflect (*chege*), and prostrate themselves fully on the ground.

#### 4. Kulady: Kaleidoscopic Connections

##### 4.1. Cosmos, History, and Homeland

During rituals held at the Kulady mountain temple, gathered kaleidoscopic connections are activated in the following ways. In 2006, Erke Kakhinovich Yamaev, hereditary leader (*jaisang*) of the Tölös clan, demonstrated how these connections radiate out by reciting the following verse of his *alkysh*:

With Moon-Sun White-Sky,  
Altai Eezi Ak Byrkan,  
With Sun-Moon Blue-Sky,  
The Sun’s light, Ak Byrkan.

The ritual leader and participants connect the Moon and the Sun to the temple’s architecture by calling the largest and most easterly of the eight altars “Sun-Mother” (*Kün-ene*) (Mandaeva 2010) and the second largest “Moon-Father” (*Ai-ada*). The word pairings “Moon-Sun” and “Sun-Moon” not only connect these altars to the physical planets but also to the cosmic substance Üch Kurbustan. Yamaev explained how this connection is achieved through fire:

On this “fire *obo*” (*ot obo*),<sup>19</sup> sacrificial offerings (*sang*) and fire rituals are made to Üch Kurbustan. Branches are used to make fire in the round part.<sup>20</sup> Juniper, butter, and sheep are added. When the fire is high, it greets Üch Kurbustan.

Ritual participant Valentina Chechaeva elaborated:

They put food into the fire to Upper Jaiaan [Üch Kurbustan], arrange a celebration in honor of the fire. Sheep’s head, *sang*—everything is put into the fire.

In addition to linking them with the Upper Domains, the epithets “Moon-Sun” and “Sun-Moon” connect the participants to their Ak Jang history since the original messenger of Oirat Khan, Ak Byrkan, commanded them to abandon Orthodox Christianity and worship again the Sun and the Moon. As an epithet of Altai, it simultaneously connects them to their current homeland.

Ak Byrkan (“White Burkhan”) has similar kaleidoscopic properties. As one of Ak Jang’s main objects of worship, Oirat Khan’s original messenger is embodied by the *jarlyk*, who dresses in white and transmits messages to the participants (Vinogradov 2003:129; Sagalaev 1992:158). According to Yamaev, the above verse invites the original Ak Byrkan to the temple to sit on a small, white felt carpet during the ritual. This dual messenger presence in the temple ritual connects past Ak Jang events with contemporary ones, collapsing space and time. Yamaev also couples Ak Burkan with Altai Eezi, the Spirit-Owner of Altai.

#### 4.2 *Jangar Songs*

Contemporary Ak Jang rituals vary according to the skills of the participants. Not all communities are able to include *shabychy* as in Kulady. Valentina Todoshevna Chechaeva and Elena Tölösövnä Mandaeva, who were both born in Kulady, fulfill this role by performing *jangar songs* (*jangar kozhong*) in rituals at their village temple. Elena explained what happened in the ritual after food offerings had been made and before they sang their songs (2010):

First, the *alkyshchy* uses a branch of juniper to purify all present. At this point, all are standing. Afterwards, that person makes *alkysh* praises. Then he circles two sacred *kyira* ribbons over the fire to purify them and ties them to a line stretched between the birch-tree poles in front of the altars. The men do the same, followed by the women and children. We tie sacred ribbons, which must be white, and make requests from Upper Jaiaan in our thoughts. We circulate the altars in the path of the sun (clockwise) and then stand. Everyone is presented with milk to drink and then we sing.

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<sup>19</sup> An *obo* is a pile of stones containing the spirit-owner of the place. It is located in numinous places in landscape—for example, at the beginning of a valley, in a high mountain pass, or by a powerful river—and offerings are made to the spirit-owner for safe passage. Here, Yamaev draws a parallel with the offerings to Üch Kurbustan.

<sup>20</sup> He is referring to the “hearth altar,” which at the Kulady temple is rectangular at the back but is shaped as a horse-shoe at its front.

Styles and texts differ according to occasion and ethnicity. Here, we look only at ritual jangar song performance in relation to the Sary Bür rituals in Kulady. As the epic-teller Yalatov said (Yamaeva 2010b): “Jangar praises Burkhan in song form.” The songs connect the participants to Ulu Burkhan (Üch Kurbustan) and to Ak Jang ideology. When we met up in the Museum in Kulady in 2010, Valentina and Elena demonstrated a jangar that they had performed at Sary Bür in 2010 (Fig. 3) in chest (*kögüs*) style, which again connected the participants to Burkhan:

In order to put into a golden bridle,  
Burkhan created a horse,  
In order to live on the White-Earth [Altai],  
Burkhan created us,  
Burkhan created people.



Fig. 3. Valentina Todoshevna Chechaeva and Elena Tölösövnä Mandaeva singing a ritual *jangar* song, Kulady, 2010. Photo: Carole Pegg. All rights reserved.

During the ritual, they had praised Altai using important Ak Jang motifs, including flowers, which are often laid on altars, and horses, important for all nomadic peoples:

Blue grass head, blue flower,  
 If my blue horse eats [it], it will become silky,  
 Blue valley’s head, sky-blue,  
 If we hold a ritual, our mood will lighten.  
 White grass head, white flower  
 If my white-grey horse eats [it], it will become silky,  
 White valley’s head, white sky [color],  
 If we hold a ritual, our mood will lighten.

Other connections were also made. Standing facing the direction of sunrise, they first created associations with Kulady village and Karakol river valley singing:

With flaming maned [horses],  
 Created place Karakol,  
 Since childhood,  
 Played-in place Kulady.  
 With light-blue maned blue-grey [horses]  
 Coddled place Karakol,  
 Growing well since childhood,  
 Our joyous place, Kulady.

Afterwards, they asked for blessing-fortune from the Spirit-owner of Altai and the places they had praised:

They say to Altai Eezi: help us, look at us. Then they praise the mountain Üch Engmek, source of the river Karakol, and ask for blessing-fortune from these places.

In addition, the mode of performance encourages a sense of community. Elena explained that first she sings a line, which is repeated by Valentina, followed by all present. “It becomes like a choir,” she said. “Even if people don’t know how to sing, this way they can join in.” Following these songs, milk was sprinkled in the four cardinal directions, and the community again came together to say “*Bash bolzyn!*” After bowing to the altars and making praying gestures, they had sung at this autumn ritual:

Brown-stoned temple,  
 May our temple like them.  
 Our brown-flowered Altai,  
 May our ritual like them.

At the spring ritual, this becomes:

Sky-blue struck stone,  
Our altar liked [it],  
Our blue-flowered Altai,  
Our ritual liked [it].

Both versions highlight the participants' perception that the temple, altars, ritual process, and Altai are living and capable of emotions.

## 5. Lower Talda: Improvising the Tradition

### 5.1. Ritual Actions

At Lower Talda, after climbing the steep, snowy mountainside, our group of twelve people paused below the temple complex. Two distinct rocks marked the eastern end of the performance place, and away from them curved three main altars. The most easterly altar, the “hearth” (*ochok*), looked down to the valley below where the clan's village nestled. Before the second, two lines were strung between three birch poles and, at the western end a large white banner (*maany*) fluttered from a sturdier, taller, birch pole. In front of the third altar stood five small altars, ending in a single rock, marking the western end of the arena.

The men entered first and made fire with wood in the hollowed-out altar, the *ochok* hearth. When the fire was lit, women and children entered the ritual space. Arzhan, who acted as *jarlyk* ritual leader and *alkysh* blessing-fortune specialist, then circled two sacred ribbons in the purifying smoke as he circumambulated clockwise around the hearth and tied them to the line between the first two birch poles. The men then tied up their ribbons, stroking their heads backwards with the right hand to connect with the plait worn by male practitioners in the early days of Ak Jang. The women followed. Valentina Bachibaeva tied her sacred ribbon to the second line and knelt deeply. After tying, each person processed between the big and small altars (Fig. 4), around the final stone, to form a semi-circle at the back of the ritual space, where they sat with one knee raised in traditional poses: the left knee raised by women and the right knee by men. Arzhan advised which figurines to put on the first large altar and which on the second.



Fig. 4. Female participants circumambulating between outer and inner *tagyl* altar crescents after purifying and tying up a *kyira* ribbon. Lower Talda *küree*, 2010. Photo: Carole Pegg. All rights reserved.

A helper knelt to fill the sacred bowl for Arzhan *jarlykchy/alkyshchy*.<sup>21</sup> Using a wooden spoon, Arzhan sprinkled milk liberally over the hearth-altar and large altars, including figurines and sacred ribbons, while quietly asking for blessing-fortune. All that could be heard was “*Jakshy bolzyn, jakshy bolzyn, jakshy bolzyn. Chöök!*” (“May it become good, may it become good, may it become good. *Chook!*”<sup>22</sup>) (Fig. 5). Valentina opened the white cloth bearing juniper branches. Arzhan took one, lit it, and waved it around, purifying the whole ritual space.



Fig. 5. Arzhan *jarlyk* reciting blessing-fortune (*alkysh-byian*) verses while sprinkling milk, his “helper” stroking his head. *Shatra* offerings are on a *tagyl* altar, *kyira* ribbons are tied on lines between hitching posts, and the clan village lies below. Lower Talda *küree*, 2010. Photo: Carole Pegg. All rights reserved.

Next, Arzhan added bread to the fire, then picked the sheep’s ribs and head from the bowl held by two male helpers, and added them while reciting a request for blessing. Valentina Bachibaeva knelt low on one knee to each altar. Then, connecting to early female Ak Jang practitioners by stroking two imaginary plaits, she bowed and touched her head to the floor before each large altar. The men added more food to the fire, taking off their hats and stroking

<sup>21</sup> See §3.4 above for explanations of these terms.

<sup>22</sup> Radlov translates *chöök* as “kneeling” or “genuflection” (1893:2034) and Baskakov as an exclamation during sprinkling for idols (2005 [1947]:180).

their heads as they did so. Valentina, taking a plate of food, knelt and circled it four times above her head before adding it to the fire (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Valentina Bachibaeva making food offerings to Üch Kurbustan via the fire in the hearth, Lower Talda *küree*, 2010. Photo: Carole Pegg. All rights reserved.

Arzhan's performance, which lasted for about an hour, combined a deep knowledge of traditional beliefs and practices with personal creativity and improvisations.<sup>23</sup> His traditional practices included milk-sprinkling, carrying juniper in white cloth, using *jaiyk* receptacles as intercessors, requesting blessings in unaccompanied verse, incorporating Altaian cosmologies into his texts, practicing sound-avoidance, and using epic motifs and concepts. His own creativity included his use of *kai* throat-singing and accompanying himself with the *topshuur*<sup>24</sup> lute. Let us look at how he used these practices to help the participants to sense "being-in-place."

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<sup>23</sup> This was not a ritual "staged" for recording but a community ritual to which we were invited. Arzhan moved around the temple altars unpredictably and, trying to remain unobtrusive and not disrupt the ritual for the participants, I recorded as much as I was able. Sometimes, even when within recording distance, Arzhan whispered or turned his head away. Oral literature is notoriously difficult to translate, and Arzhan used ancient, specialized, and obscure terms. The sections I have translated, then, are those that were recorded clearly and translatable.

<sup>24</sup> Russian: *topshur*.

### 5.2. Blessings and Place

In order to orientate the participants in traditional cosmological terms, Arzhan’s first request for blessing in traditional verse form (*alkysh*) was addressed to the hero of the “Golden Stake” (Altyn Kazyk) or Pole Star which, according to traditional Altaian knowledge (*bilik*), acts as a hitching post for the eight vaults of the Sky and connects directly to Earth through its mountains. The hero protector spirit, who is able to bestow blessings, sees from the Pure White Sky (Ak-aias Tengeri), the fourth vault, where celestial souls await reincarnation (Shodoev and Kurchakov 2003:76). Arzhan used “Kairakan,” a respectful referent of a deity or spirit-owner in the Middle and Upper worlds (Radlov 1893:22):

My Pole Star,  
Earth-Altai protected,  
Pole Star hero,  
He is with blessing,  
Sees from Ak-Aias,  
Kairakan, Bash Bolzyn!

As Arzhan continued his blessing, he referenced the Altaian belief that the Golden Stake provides balance, stability, and protection for the Earth (Jer-Altai) and its inhabitants. If this star were to shake, then so would the Earth’s axis, and disasters would follow. The Altaian perception is that Altai connects to Altyn Kazyk in the same way that the child and mother are connected by the umbilical cord and the mother’s navel. Two dimensions of life and reality co-exist, each dependent on the other. Altai, therefore, is frequently called “Umbilical/Navel” Altai (Kin Altai):

May Earth’s people live peacefully,  
Earth not diminish,  
Earth not shake,  
Six-cornered Navel Altai,  
Bash Bolzyn!  
May your strength-armor<sup>25</sup> be strong.

In order to maintain this stability, Arzhan needed to ensure peace among the spirits of the Upper and Middle worlds. He asked, therefore, that the ancestors not fight (“*Öbökölör, Öbökölör tartyshpazyn*”) and:

May Talai-Khan not become angry . . .  
May the spirit-owners of sacred springs  
Not to be angry,  
Quarrel. . . .

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<sup>25</sup> *kuiak* (“strength-armor”) is a quality of inner power believed throughout Inner Asia to be received from spirits or the Sky and detectable through the eyes.



Referring to all life as generating from Kudai (“God”), Arzhan asked:

Our people,  
 May they be with strength-armor.  
 God-given life,  
 May it be peaceful.

Throughout, Arzhan’s requests were addressed to Altai Eezi, Üch Kurbustan, Ülgen, and burkhans—avoiding their names directly. He also specified the particular cosmic vaults his requests must reach. For instance, this ritual took place in conjunction with the new moon so that its bright energies would have maximum effect on its success, rather than during the growing old moon, when dark energies are abroad. Arzhan therefore asked that his milk-sprinklings reach the home of the moon, Ai Byrkan, which is in Pure-Blue Sky (Kök-Aias), the fifth vault or level of the eight-layered Sky:

May white milk aspersions,  
 Reach the Pure-Blue Sky.

In order to reach these spiritual energies and places, Arzhan used several forms of intermediaries that intercede with gods, spirits, and burkhans.

### 5.3. *Spirit-intercessors*

The white ribbons, made by Arzhan then purified and hung up by all present, were offerings that became spirit-intercessors as Arzhan sprinkled them with milk and whispered requests for blessing-fortune. Each person also silently addressed their own sacred ribbon with their own hopes and needs.

The juniper, which Arzhan lit in order to purify the people, temple complex, and offerings, is said to be *eeliü*, that is, to contain *ee* spirits. These spirits can both hear the words of Ak Aias, the fourth vault, and converse with Üch Kurbustan. Moreover, they can use the juniper to cure people—the juniper becomes “medicine juniper”:

May the strength of our spirit-charged juniper with spirit-owners  
 Not diminish,  
 May people’s minds  
 Not be captured by black thoughts,  
 May the strength of our sacred juniper  
 Not diminish,  
 May it grow.  
     Saw good-bad things in people,  
     Hearing Ak Aias’ talk, heard,  
     Talked with Üch Kurbustan,  
     Medicine juniper,  
     May it grow, not diminish.

Arzhan addressed the large white banner (*maany*)<sup>26</sup> fluttering on the birch pole positioned at the far end of the lines of ribbons, seeking to keep this banner strong and maintain its capacity for bringing good-fortune and gaining blessings:

May people live with good-fortune,  
 May people live with blessing,  
 Sacred taboo banner,  
 Spirit-charged banner with spirit-owners,  
 Kairakan, Lord let it be!

This large banner can only be erected by the ritual leader since gods may sit there. Later, Arzhan continued its enlivenment with spirit-owners, addressing the “Koroty-Source” (Koroty-Bazhy), the mountain origin of the River Koroty running down below us in the valley:

Sacred taboo banner,  
 Become a spirit-charged banner with spirit-owner,  
 May it bless Altai,  
 May that spirit-charged cloth with spirit-owners not suffer,  
 Koroty-Source,  
 Kairakan Lord!

#### 5.4. *Epic Motifs, Throat-singing, Topshuur Lute*

Throughout his performance of oral poetry, Arzhan drew upon traditional epic imagery and motifs. He began by situating the ritual participants at the base of the “world tree,” a quintessential feature of epic landscapes that allows the hero access to other levels of the universe. Rather than making its base in the Lower World, as in shamanic cosmology, he placed it in the Middle World (where the participants were seated), as appropriate to Ak Jang. Arzhan localized it by choosing the Altaian cedar as the tree, rather than the “iron poplar” or birch tree usual to epics:

May the cedar tree  
 With nuts keep swinging,  
 People at the base of the tree  
 Take strength-armor.

Later, when referring to leaders in Altai and the world, Arzhan used 60 and 70, numbers that often occur in epics. For instance, in the famous Altaian epic *Maadai Kara*, the hero, noticed that (Marazzi 1986:38):

. . . the 60 kaans of the Altai had started to move.  
 The 70 kaans of the Earth had become agitated.

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<sup>26</sup> Also called *bairy*.

Arzhan sang:

In six corners, 60 khans, may they not fight,  
On Earth, 70 khans, may they not make war.  
Lord, let it be!

Arzhan adopted the classic Altaian performance mode of spirit-charged epic-tellers for his final lengthy communication with spirits: *kai* vocal tone<sup>27</sup> accompanied by the two-stringed *topshuur* lute (Fig. 7). No reference to this kind of performance occurs in early Ak Jang literature, but among contemporary Altai Kizhis of Ongudai region it has been embraced as integral, as the following verses from Erokhonova 2002—acknowledged as containing quintessential doctrines of contemporary Ak Jang—illustrates (2002:320, 322):

*Kai*—the people’s breast,  
The people’s road,  
The heroes’ voice,  
The heroes’ spear,  
With black [forces] struggling,  
With help from Upper Jaiaan.  
Great epic-teller—difficult roads,  
Tabooed epic-teller—honoured roads,  
The gift is deep—the hand is white,  
The gift is pure—the mind is white.



Fig. 7. Arzhan *jarlyk* playing *topshuur* lute and performing blessing-fortune verses using *kai* throat-singing before the hearth, Lower Talda *küree*, 2010. Photo: Carole Pegg. All rights reserved.

After calming his “truculent” *topshuur*, as he later put it, by warming it next to the fire, Arzhan began his accompanied requests for blessings using the rasping vocal quality of *kai*. Once more, he situated himself: “From the base of this cedar-tree . . .” and appealed for blessing-fortune from the two essential phenomena of both Ak Jang and epics—the Altai and Üch Kurbustan:

Our spirit-charged Altai,  
Üch Kurbustan, our Protector!  
Making *kai* with pure thoughts  
I ask for blessing-fortune.

<sup>27</sup> *Kai* refers to a declamatory throat-singing style used by spirit-charged epic-tellers, enabling their descent to the Underworld.

He then asked the largest altar to give voice to his *topshuur* lute and *kai* throat-singing:

May my carved *topshuur*,  
 Decorated with gold and silver,  
 Make *kai* to this seated group,  
 Give a voice to my *topshuur*,  
 My great Altar.

The next verse began with another epic formula. Although the ritual took place in the morning, Arzhan used the epic phrase “the blue evening” when asking that he might make inspirational *kai* in order to spread the “song of Sary Bür” throughout Altai:

Soften people  
 In the blue evening,  
 [May I] make inspirational *kai*,  
 Kairakan!  
 Alongside young tree(s),  
 [We go] to our Altai, golden-silver with flower(s),  
 Created [by] our Father.  
 The song of Sary Bür is spread,  
 Our Altai.

Now let us see how, throughout his performances, Arzhan used improvisation to root the participants in their contemporary geographical and societal place. First, he situated the family at the temple complex:

These people’s blessing-request is in the flames,  
 In the surrounding altars.

Then he placed them in Koroty Valley and their political state:

That people’s living place,  
 In Koroty [valley],  
 This people’s living place,  
 [In the] State-Universe.

And finally, he situated them in their village by asking for “Good fortune for Lenin Road”—Lenin Road being the name used during the Soviet period for the village now called Lower Talda.

He then placed them in contemporary space-time by addressing current problems on local, Altaian, and global levels. With the high accident rate in mind, he asked the spirit of roads:

May the road to Koroty be softened,

and later:

May the many surrounding roads not become harsh,  
Our iron horses [cars] have no accidents.

He also asked for relief from attacks by wolves and bears on livestock and people, using the Altaian practice of word avoidance for these respected creatures. Instead of the prohibited name “wolf” (*börü*), he uses *kokoio*<sup>28</sup> and instead of “bear” (*aiu*), Maajalai Öörökön (“Respected Elder”):

May the tabooed *kokoio*  
Not attack livestock,  
The spirit-charged Maajalai Öörökön  
Not attack livestock,  
May these people not be attacked.

A further problem for Altaian country-dwellers is that their children have to travel a long way to study or find work (for example, to Gorno-Altai, Novosibirsk, or Moscow), or to go fight (for instance, in Chechniya). Arzhan asked, therefore:

May the children going far away  
Travel peacefully,  
May the boys in the far army  
Return peacefully.

In general, he asked that the minds of participants remain light, illnesses and pains of the heart lessen, relatives live peacefully, and children prosper. He also asked for trees not to suffer from diseases, that animals, birds, and fish should increase, and that there be abundant milk.

On the global level, he requested:

May the northern people [Europeans]  
Not have closed minds . . .  
May the ruling people  
Not confuse people’s minds,  
Among large folk,  
May small folk live . . .  
May our people  
Not create war-blood  
Among each other. . .

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<sup>28</sup> In Turkish *kokoio* designates a type of frog. It may be used here as an Altaian combination of endearment or respect.

In addition to his mixture of tradition and improvisation, Arzhan’s creativity also manifested itself in his personalization of texts. He showed concern for talent, requesting that “people with talent increase.” Moreover, as a man who enjoys a joke, he hoped that his blessings would make Altai Eezi and Respected Elders (Örökön) “hear and laugh.”

Often Arzhan’s improvisations followed the rules of Altaian poetry, using alliteration at the beginning of lines and half-lines, and playing with or pairing words. Words are sometimes paired to embrace broader meanings, such as blessing-fortune (*alkysh-byian*) or Moon-Sun. Sometimes they enable the words to flow rhythmically. For instance, the “road to Koroty” becomes “*Koroty jolgo jol.*” *Jol* means “road” and its repetition as *jolgo* is not necessary for meaning. At other times, words are paired simply to please the ear. Arzhan’s own favorite rhythmical word-pairings cropped up regularly; for instance, *bailu* (“with prohibition”) was frequently paired with *chümdü* (“beautiful”), even though the literal meanings sit uneasily together: *bailu-chümdü*,<sup>29</sup> and *eelü* became *eelü-chüülü*.

Towards the end of the ritual, Arzhan poured the liquid into the sacred bowl for his two helpers to sprinkle. Each person present drank either milk or *araky* vodka from the cup. They sat quietly as the fire crackled. A crow flew overhead and cawed. Valentina bowed to Arzhan and to the fire.

## 6. Post-ritual Celebrations

In the third phase of the ritual process, the participants descend from the *küree* temple complex and sit at a lower point on the mountain or return to the host’s home if the weather is bad. There, they eat food including mutton and barley soup, and drink a little Altaian milk-vodka. They relax and, depending on who is present, may make music, performing jangar songs and epic tales (*kai chörchök*), accompanied by the *topshuur* lute and *komus* jaw’s harp. If they are still on the mountain, they play games to take away disease and pain—for instance, rolling on the ground or performing somersaults (Mandaeva 2010). If indoors, they discuss the proceedings, what they had felt and seen, and whether the ritual had been successful. Prohibitions continue for at least a further three days.

## 7. Sensory Experiences

Ritual participants in the “place of gatherings,” the *küree* temple complex, used their bodies to perform actions and sounds that activated those gatherings, stimulating those connections to produce a sense of a powerful, numinous, second dimension of “place.” Experience of this second dimension of place enabled feelings of the third dimension, “being-in-place.” The liminality of this fulcrum of knowledge, histories, and space-time—the first dimension of place—was essential to the sensorial process of triggering the subsequent dimensions.

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<sup>29</sup> I have been unable to establish the meaning of this word.

The senses of taste, smell, feeling, sound, and touch—already heightened by fasting, prohibitions, and other purifications—were stimulated further by the beauty of the mountainous *taiga* forest and sky; the touch of Siberian autumnal coldness, soft snow, and breeze with the contrasting warmth of sunlight and fire; the smells of burning wood, food, and juniper; the taste of milk and milk-vodka; and the sounds of birds, fire, breeze, poetry, and music. Together with these sensory experiences, visual connections with the sky, clan mountain, valley, village, river, and temple architecture aroused feelings of connection to the cosmos and its spirit-beings, Altaian history and the spirits of landscape.

The body's engagement in ritual practices—creating connections through smoke, fire, milk-sprinklings, food-offerings; bowing to fluttering ribbons and flags; and the production and reception of musical and poetical sounds—all combined to trigger other sensory experiences not yet fully researched, such as feeling and seeing invisible energies. Participants at Kulady, for instance, experienced the arrival of energy and good fortune encircling them as a constantly rotating belt (Chechaeva 2010; Mandaeva 2010), and performances at the temple changed the participants' sense of their own bodies and the everyday world in which they live (Mandaeva 2010):

After ritual, everyone feels internally purified and becomes vigorous. Jangar songs are a form of meditation and afterwards, if I feel bad, I remember that there is parallel Altai, an upper Altai.

At Lower Talda, Arzhan *jarlykchy/alkyshchy* clearly exhibited signs of changing consciousness at certain points. For instance, towards the end of the ritual, he saw and addressed beings that others present were unable to see as he shook a branch of juniper:

Respected ones,  
Spirit-owners sitting around!

And during the post-ritual celebrations, he explained that he had seen a man in white clothing high on the mountain watching and that had made him fearful. Arzhan's final *alkysh* request had therefore been:

When people of Tengeri come as guests,  
May they not steal people.

## 8. Conclusion

The Sary Bür rituals at Kulady and Lower Talda followed the same structure, involving a pre-liminal phase of separation from society, a transitional phase in a concealed mountain temple removed from everyday life, and a post-liminal reincorporation into society. The rituals in the two temples also contained the same elements: an officiant (*jarlyk*) to make offerings to Üch Kurbustan, *shatra* figurines placed on altars to invite the spirits of place to eat, sacred white ribbons hung between birch poles, gestures of prayer (*mürgüül*), and *alkysh* praises and requests

for blessings. Such rituals are now in competition with the needs of young people to leave the countryside to find work and with the encroachment of global forces. Each ritual necessarily varies in its mixture of tradition and improvisation according to the availability of participants. In the two cases examined here, Kulady is fortunate in having jangar singers, an essential element of early Ak Jang rituals, and Lower Talda in having had a ritual leader with extra-sensory abilities who also performed epics.

We have suggested that both Sary Bür rituals were creative sensory experiences involving three inter-related dimensions of “place.” In both rituals, a phenomenological, topographical place was created that was physically and imaginatively “betwixt and between,” or liminal. Before entering this place, which had been constructed intentionally to gather together indigenous knowledge and experiences, the body had to be purified. In a universe in which all of nature is alive, the architecture and stones of the *küree* temple complex—as well as gods and spirits, the sky, planets, and mountains—became living participants in the rituals. Bodily movements within the ritual process—including gestures of prayer and respect, circular movements of renewal, and performances of oral literature, music, and song—transformed the temple into a second dimension of “place” in which relations between participants were sensed and activated, and which became spirit-charged and numinous through performance.

We have shown how ritual specialists combined traditional performance modes and understandings of the world and also the characters and poetry of ancient Altaian heroic epics that connected the participants to historico-mythical space-time—with performative and textual improvisations that rooted them in contemporary life. Multi-sensory aspects of the ritual performances included sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste but also the extraordinary, such as intuitive feelings and visions. As a result, a sense of a third dimension of “being-in-place” was engendered as energy was increased and the multiple relations among humans, the spirits of sky and landscape, ancestors, epic heroes, kin, and community that constitute Altaian personhood were renewed. In the face of an approaching hazardous winter, the combination of these three dimensions of “place” enabled personal transitions to be accomplished that strengthened the participants’ negotiation of the approaching difficult season and ongoing changes of post-Soviet modern life.

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## **Kumeyaay Oral Tradition, Cultural Identity, and Language Revitalization**

**Margaret Field and Jon Meza Cuero**

Forms of oral tradition such as narrative and song often serve as important cultural resources that retain and reinforce cultural values and group identity (Bauman 1992; Bright 1993; Jahner 1999; Sekaquaptewa and Washburn 2004). This is particularly true of American Indian “trickster tales” which, like European Aesop’s fables, contain moral content and are typically aimed at child audiences.<sup>1</sup> This essay discusses an example of this genre with specific reference to the Kumeyaay community of Baja California Norte, Mexico. It also discusses how such stories are an important form of cultural property that doubly indexes group identity—once through the code that is used, and then again through the content of the narrative itself. Oral traditions such as trickster tales form an important body of knowledge that not only preserves cultural values and philosophical orientations, but also continues to imbue its listeners with these values. American Indian communities typically view their oral traditions as communal intellectual property (Hill 2002), and for this reason it is incumbent upon researchers who work with traditional texts in these oral communities to collaborate with them to ensure that collected texts are treated in a manner that is appropriate in the view of the communities from which they originate (Rice 2006; Field 2012b). Especially today, in light of the increasing availability of multimedia and the expanding capabilities for archiving oral literatures so that they might be more available than ever before in multiple formats (audio and video in addition to print), it is important for researchers to bear in mind the relationship between the recording, publication, and archiving of oral literature; community preferences regarding these aspects of research; and considerations related to language revitalization—particularly in cases where the indigenous languages themselves are becoming increasingly endangered.

### **The Kumeyaay Community of Baja California**

Kumeyaay is the indigenous language of the San Diego area as well as the northernmost part of Baja California Norte, Mexico, extending southward from the United States-Mexico

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that they are solely designed for children; rather, they serve multiple social purposes and are considered a sacred genre, especially as many of them are embedded in creation mythology. They are, however, particularly accessible to children.

border for about 50 miles. Today, Kumeyaay (specifically the Tipaay dialect of Kumeyaay) is still actively spoken by about 50 speakers who reside in Mexico, but it is very close to obsolescence north of the border. The Tipaay community extends from about 50 miles east of San Diego to the coast, encompassing 13 distinct communities, each with its own slightly different variety of spoken Tipaay. Just north of these Tipaay communities are the related 'Iipay Kumeyaay communities, which share many similar cultural values but whose dialects are very different (Field 2012a).

In all of the Kumeyaay community as well as most of Southern California, singers are important repositories of traditional oral literature, as stories are typically not only told but also embodied in song cycles (Apodaca 1999). In the San Diego area, the most well-known of these song cycles are “bird songs,” which tell the story of early migrations of Yuman people from the Colorado River area throughout southern Alta California, Baja California, and adjacent Arizona. Other Southern California song cycles include Lightning songs and Wildcat songs, among others. One of the authors of this article, Jon Meza Cuero, is currently the sole teacher of the Wildcat singing tradition and a member of the Baja Kumeyaay (Tipaay) community. Both authors have had the pleasure of collaborating together on Kumeyaay language documentation and various projects since 2005, when we started by creating a set of online Kumeyaay language lessons.<sup>2</sup> In 2007 we traveled together to each of the six Baja Kumeyaay communities to interview speakers in a pilot study on Baja Kumeyaay, to gauge how many speakers there actually were, and to determine their relative levels of fluency. This pilot study led to a larger project documenting Baja Kumeyaay dialects which we undertook together with linguist Amy Miller and anthropologist Michael Wilken-Robertson. As part of this greater documentation project we recorded several stories along with other discourse genres,<sup>3</sup> many of which may now be found at the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA), although Amy Miller and Margaret Field are still working on completing transcriptions.

For the purposes of this essay, Margaret Field interviewed Mr. Meza Cuero in the summer of 2012 about Wildcat singing in general, about its relationship to storytelling, and about one of his stories in particular: “Rabbit and Frog.” The interview was conducted in Spanish and then translated into English. Below Mr. Meza Cuero expounds on the diversity of singing traditions in Southern California, and the relationship between songs and stories:

Many times, the stories change, especially in different places. They change according to the way the people live in that place. If there's a rabbit, a rabbit here in Baja California, or a rabbit in Mexico City, or a rabbit in Hawaii, the rabbit changes. I don't tell stories from Mexico City, or from Hawaii; I tell stories from here—about rabbits from here. The way of telling is different, but the point is the same. It's the same rabbit, the same point of the story, but told in a different way,

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<sup>2</sup> Available at <http://larc.sdsu.edu/Kumeyaay/Welcome.html>.

<sup>3</sup> During this project (funded by the National Science Foundation) we did not record any ritual language or content considered too sensitive to share with the outside world. In addition to traditional narratives and narratives about how to perform traditional activities such as basket-making and pottery, we also recorded conversations and wordlists that will be used to create a multidialectal Kumeyaay dictionary.

from where the storyteller lives. It's an indigenous tradition to be different. Each group has its tradition; you go to a different place, they have their tradition.

If you can tell the story, you can sing the song. Every story has a song, every story. For all of history every story has had a song. There are songs for fiestas. There are songs for funerals. There are songs for the middle of the night. There are songs for starting the singing. For example, when I go to a traditional gathering, we start with a song. The first song is for everyone who wants to sing, if they want. If the singer stops to drink coffee, or if somebody else wants to sing, or just to give the younger singers a chance, they can. We sing for four or five days, right? Time goes by and it's the middle of the night! When it's midnight, we sing the middle of the night songs. We sing until dawn. There are songs for fiesta, for people who want to dance, for the young ones, for everything. Sacred songs are for funerals. Then there are only four songs, no more. If you are a singer,<sup>4</sup> you are going to sing just four songs, but there are many singers, one after the other, each one sings four songs. Each singing group has the right to sing their four songs, for the person who is going in the ground.

Mr. Meza Cuero's story, "Rabbit and Frog," is probably most closely related to the genre of trickster tales, which are found across all of Native North America, especially in the Western part of the United States, with the most commonly known subgenre being "coyote stories" (Bright 1993). The protagonist in the genre of trickster tales need not always be a coyote but is always a trickster who displays various kinds of culturally censured behaviors such as insincerity, gluttony, and above all egotistical narcissism. The Tipaay story of "Rabbit and Frog" does not feature a coyote, but instead a frog who displays trickster-like characteristics. The other main character is Rabbit, who is duped by the trickster and comes to regret it in the end.

When sung in song cycles, traditional stories such as this one bring together two important aspects of communicative competence: cultural knowledge in the form of social values, behavioral norms, and expectations and also traditional language. Mr. Meza Cuero is one of the few Kumeyaay culture bearers today who is able to tell his stories (in addition to singing them) in the indigenous language. Traditional stories are a key part of the process of cultural continuity. As Toelken and Scott have noted in their study of this genre, coyote stories teach children cultural expectations about appropriate behavior through the use of humor "without resort to didacticism" (1981:106). Storytelling thus becomes an important part of child socialization. The cultural knowledge learned through communicative practices such as storytelling includes cultural expectations about social roles and relationships, including, very importantly for indigenous American communities, how to treat family as opposed to strangers. Each of these communicative contexts involves slightly different social roles which may also be associated with distinct communicative strategies.<sup>5</sup> The story of "Rabbit and Frog" deals with these roles in particular. Forms of knowledge such as these are invariably tacit or taken for granted, and thus less accessible to discursive consciousness (Giddens 1979). Embedded in traditional stories, they provide good examples of what Bourdieu (1977) has called the *habitus*,

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<sup>4</sup> Here he is referring to a lead singer of a group.

<sup>5</sup> See Field 1998 for a discussion of how the pragmatics of directive-giving varies across these contexts for Navajo speakers, as well as Nevins 2010 for a discussion of these dynamics in the Apache community.

or “routine modes of perception, action, and evaluation which guide actors in social practice” (Hanks 1996:238). In this way, traditional stories and other forms of oral tradition may be viewed as interactional strategies through which cultural identity is discursively produced. Additionally, just as stories act as discourse-level vehicles for the transmission of identity, so does the linguistic variety with which the story is told. Thus, oral literature *doubly* indexes group identity (Kroskrity 2000): membership in a larger speech community is indexed through traditional storytelling, and local dialect indexes membership in a sub-community within that larger speech community.

For many indigenous communities, the dialect in which a story is told is just as valuable to the community as the content of the story, and both require the careful attention of the researcher. This is especially true in indigenous communities where local dialects are important emblems of cultural and group identity. For example, in the Tipaay-speaking Kumeyaay community of Mexico, there are distinct local dialects across six communities, all located within a 50-mile radius of each other (Field 2012a). Intense lexical variation is found in many indigenous Californian and Mexican speech communities (Friedrich 1971; Golla 2000; Field 2012a), as well as in many other indigenous communities around the world (Sutton 1978), and is closely connected to group identity.

Language ideologies in indigenous communities may also reflect beliefs concerning the relationship between local varieties and community identity, but they are not necessarily homogeneous across related speech communities. For example, members of Kumeyaay communities in the United States frequently express the belief that their dialects are each different enough to be considered distinct languages. This attitude exemplifies a typical “localist” language ideology,<sup>6</sup> which is linked to a discourse of “local control” (Hill 2002:123) often seen in the indigenous speech communities of the southwestern United States. Kumeyaay tribes on the United States side of the border are often hesitant to share language materials even with each other, let alone academics or non-Kumeyaay people. In contrast, on the Mexican side of the border, community language ideologies are typically more variationist (Kroskrity 2002; Kroskrity and Field 2009); everyone acknowledges dialect variation yet insists that all dialects are mutually intelligible and therefore one language shared by all. This difference in language ideologies between United States and Mexican communities is no doubt largely due to differences in their histories of contact with two different dominant cultures as well as other considerations too lengthy to include here (however, see Field 2012a). More to the point of the current essay, this difference in language ideologies will no doubt have profound repercussions for the development of future materials for language revitalization purposes and will also provide very different considerations for researchers working on these related dialects on each side of the international border.

Although geographically connected communities may share very similar, if not identical, versions of traditional stories, storytellers from specific communities inject their own community’s idiom into them, marking them as symbols of local community identity and making them not only very different from each other but also clearly indexical of the local community that surrounds a particular storyteller. These facts lead to two important language-related

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<sup>6</sup> See Field 2012a for a lengthier discussion of language ideologies in Kumeyaay communities.

considerations for researchers of oral literature: 1) the effects this research may have on language revitalization efforts and 2) the imperative to work collaboratively with the community and prioritize their wishes concerning access to and future uses of any collected texts. These points are expanded upon below.

First, when archiving and publishing language materials from communities without a tradition of literacy, it is important to be aware that making any materials public may affect language revitalization efforts in that community. If there is no standard dialect or orthography, published research may potentially affect what might be a delicate political balance between factions of the speech community, or it may have an impact on language maintenance. For example, if materials from only one dialect are published to a greater extent than another, this may result in *de facto* promotion of that one dialect to the status of “standard” and may privilege that variety over others for use in future language revitalization efforts (Muhlhausler 1996; Hale 2001; Eisenlohr 2004; Hill 2002).

Second, even though the goals of research on oral literatures and endangered languages may be to preserve them for posterity, indigenous communities may not all be in accord with this common academic goal, or even with the assumption that all knowledge should be shared (Hill 2002). Intellectual property concerns are always an important consideration for American Indian communities. Even though a recorded story may already be published, the language or dialect in which it is told may not be, and the language itself may be considered intellectual property by the speech community. In the United States and Canada it is standard operating procedure when working with indigenous languages to request consent from tribal governments (in addition to individual speakers and storytellers) before beginning fieldwork. As Battiste and Henderson recommend (cited in Rice 2006:133):

Ethical research systems and practices should enable indigenous nations, people, and communities to exercise control over information related to their knowledge and heritage and to themselves. . . . To act otherwise is to repeat that familiar pattern of decisions being made for Indigenous people by those who presume to know what is best for them.

In Mexico, however, most indigenous communities do not currently have autonomous tribal entities that can be petitioned by researchers. Given this situation, when beginning our research in 2007, we (the authors) approached elders in each of the six communities where a variant of Kumeyaay is spoken.<sup>7</sup> We told them we were interested in documenting the dialects of Kumeyaay within each community and creating a multidialectal Spanish-Kumeyaay dictionary as well as pedagogical materials for language revitalization purposes. We asked them if they would be interested in working with us to document the language, archive audio and video examples of discourse, and collaborate on language revitalization materials. Being keenly aware

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<sup>7</sup> One of these communities, Santa Catarina, is home to two Yuman languages, Pai Pai and Ko’alh. Although Ko’alh has been classified as Kumeyaay in the past, it is not entirely mutually intelligible with Kumeyaay today.



of the endangered status of the language, and of the fact that almost no language teaching materials exist,<sup>8</sup> every person we interviewed was enthusiastic about all of these suggestions.

Ideally, initial contact with the indigenous community should include: 1) discussion of how any resulting materials may be used to promote or enhance linguistic and cultural maintenance and/or revitalization efforts, and 2) plans for publication and archivization, including the content of consent forms specifying exactly what, if any, limitations the community might prefer in terms of future access to recorded materials. We chose to archive our recordings at the University of Texas' Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA), which is a bilingual website accessible to both English and Spanish speakers.<sup>9</sup> We explained to community members that the recordings we made of wordlists, stories, and traditional activities would be archived for posterity and available to anyone interested in learning about Kumeyaay via the Internet.<sup>10</sup> We also chose AILLA as the location to archive our documentation efforts because of the compatibility of their mission statement with the goals of our project: 1) preservation of indigenous language materials from Latin America, 2) accessibility of these materials (in terms of making sure that non-proprietary formats are used in recording, consent forms are obtained, and intellectual property rights are respected), and 3) community support for the indigenous speech communities of Latin America in terms of making sure these materials are also available for these communities to use for language revitalization purposes.

Great care should be taken in recording and archiving oral traditions for posterity. The website E-MELD (Electronic Metastructure for Endangered Languages Documentation<sup>11</sup>) is one of the best places to find information on how to do this. The main goal of this site is to educate researchers on how to archive their audio and video data in non-proprietary formats so that it will be universally accessible and remain that way indefinitely. This site also offers useful information on recommended models of recording equipment and methodologies for archiving recordings and associated metadata. If the indigenous language requires special characters not found on an English keyboard, it is especially important to employ a non-proprietary Unicode font so that transcribed texts will still be legible in the future.

Keeping all of these caveats in mind, as part of our project to document dialect diversity in Baja Kumeyaay communities, we, aided by linguist Amy Miller, recorded and transcribed the following story. It was originally recorded in 2007 in both Kumeyaay and Spanish, translated from Spanish into English, and the Kumeyaay was roughly transcribed by Jon Meza Cuero and Margaret Field. This first effort was then significantly improved by Amy Miller a year later. The translation and transcription of the opening presented here is Amy Miller's. The entire

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<sup>8</sup> The Mexican government has created one or two pamphlet-sized picture dictionaries for Kumeyaay. We are currently collaborating with the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) to share the pedagogical materials we create with community schools.

<sup>9</sup> Available at <http://www.ailla.utexas.org>.

<sup>10</sup> AILLA's registration process requires each user to agree to the Terms and Conditions for the fair use of archive resources. This precludes their use for radio and/or television, for which some of our contributors specifically denied permission.

<sup>11</sup> Available at <http://emeld.org/school/>.

transcription may be found in David Kozak's *Inside Dazzling Mountains: Southwest Native Verbal Arts* (2013:111-23).

### “Rabbit and Frog”: A Kumeyaay Trickster Tale

The Tipaay trickster tale of Rabbit and Frog begins with a formulaic opening:

<i>Ke'nápa nyuuchs</i> <sup>12</sup>	It's an old story.
<i>Nyuuch yúsa.</i>	It's old.
<i>Nyuu,</i>	It's old,
<i>nyuu yus 'i mat.</i>	it's old, I say.
<i>Ke'nápa nyuuch nyáasa:</i>	It's an old story I am telling you.

This formulaic opening is a good example of what Richard Bauman has described as “an act of authentication akin to the . . . antique dealer's authentication of an object by tracing its provenience” (1992:137). In doing so, the storyteller is explaining that this story has been passed down to him from the ancestors.

The genre is made clear in the next few lines of the tale, which indicate that the setting is a mythic time period found across most of Native America, and especially in California creation stories, in which animals figure largely as creators:

Long ago, people were here, they were in this place. They were not people, they were animals. They were animals, but they were like people. They spoke the People's language. They came, and they went, they went all over the world, and they spoke the one People's language [Tipaay].

Cultural values are also evidenced in the last line of this orientation (Labov and Waletzky 1967), which indexes the variationist language ideology most commonly espoused by the Mexican Kumeyaay community; that is, that despite the existence of multiple dialects, Tipaay constitutes one language.<sup>13</sup>

The following is an abbreviated<sup>14</sup> English translation of the story (see Meza Cuero et al. 2013 for the complete version in both English and Kumeyaay):

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<sup>12</sup> This work is based on material supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant no. BCS-0753853.

<sup>13</sup> There is also a northern cluster of dialects known as 'Iipay. Whether 'Iipay and Tipaay were entirely mutually intelligible is not well understood and cannot be attested to today as there are no longer enough fluent speakers of 'Iipay.

<sup>14</sup> The full version of this story is 336 lines (intonation units) long and requires 16 pages of space. Since this essay is not focusing on the style of the text itself (apart from the formulaic introduction and very beginning) but rather on its basic content and overall significance in terms of cultural values, we have shortened it here to 43 lines. Intonation is reflected in punctuation, following Du Bois et al. 1992.

There was a Rabbit. He had a house.  
Rabbit was in his house, and was warm.  
Frog passed by the house.  
Frog peeked inside.  
Rabbit was sitting inside. He was eating.  
Frog passed by and went away.  
A few days later, Frog came passing by.  
“Hi! How are you?” he said as he arrived.  
“I’m fine, and you?” (said Rabbit).  
“I’m fine. Gee, it’s very cold outside!” (said Frog).  
“It’s cold? It’s nice and warm in here.” (said Rabbit).  
“I’m really cold.” (said Frog), rubbing his hands together. “Gee, it’s really cold.”  
“Oh?” (said Rabbit). “Walk around and you’ll be alright.”  
“You are from outside and you must stay outside. God made you so that you would live outside. I do not, I am a rabbit, and I must stay in my house.”  
“Alright, see you soon.” said Frog. “I’m going now.”  
And he went hopping away—hop! hop! hop!  
In two or three days, he came back.  
“Hello Brother!” he said. “How are you?”  
“I’m fine. How are you?” (asked Rabbit).  
“Oh, I’m really cold.” (said Frog).

This exchange happens three times, but the third time, Rabbit changes his mind, lets him in, and goes out to find some food for both of them to eat:

Rabbit went out looking for food.  
He came back much later.  
“What’s up?” (Rabbit) said.  
“Nothing, I’m fine here.” (said Frog).  
(Rabbit) gave him food, and (Frog) just sat there eating.  
“Oh, the food is really good!” (said Frog).  
One day went by. Two days went by.  
(Rabbit) went out again looking for food.  
When it was late he came back.  
Frog was just sitting in there, big and puffed up.  
“Hello Brother! How are you? Are you sick or something?” (asked Rabbit).  
“No, I’m fine” (Frog said).  
“Why are you so big?” (asked Rabbit).  
“Why am I big? Everyday you bring me food!  
I’m just going to sit here getting fat!” (said Frog).  
Three days later, Frog was at his biggest.  
“Your belly is really very big!” (said Rabbit).  
“Oh? So what if it is very big?” (said Frog).

“If I am to fit in the house, you have to leave!” (said Rabbit).  
 “No, no, it’s my house!” (said Frog).  
 “It’s really, really, really good, my belly is very big.” (said Frog).  
 “Okay then, you stay here, and I’ll go away.” (said Rabbit).  
 He did it very reluctantly.  
 Frog stayed in the house.  
 He stayed, and Rabbit went away, looking for another house.  
 That’ll be the end of it, this thing that I’ve been telling.

As is usually the case in trickster tales, there is no overt evaluation (Labov 1967) by the storyteller (Beck and Walters 1977; Toelken and Scott 1981); rather, the listener must infer the moral for themselves. But it is easy to discern the moral of this story: after inviting Frog into his home, industrious Rabbit loses it to the ungrateful and selfish Frog. What did Rabbit do to deserve this fate? He acted against his initial better judgement (concerning frogs belonging outside) and embraced Frog, a relative stranger, as a kinsman and brother. Following traditional Kumeyaay protocol, Rabbit feeds Frog, but Frog just sits there getting fatter and fatter until there is no room for Rabbit in his own home. One can infer from this tale that in the traditional Kumeyaay view it is important both to be selective in deciding whom to offer hospitality, and also to be suspicious of strangers who are quick to claim a kinship relation. When interviewed on the subject, Mr. Meza Cuero was happy to explain:

The frog wanted to control the rabbit, so the rabbit would believe in him, and he could do what he wanted with him. The frog knew that the rabbit was a good person, a very good person. So the frog made the decision to kick him out of his house. He thought “Aaa, nice and warm, I’m going to kick you out of your house,” that’s what. The frog was never cold because they live outside all the time. He put on a very innocent face, the frog. This is why he called him “brother.” The frog was thinking bad things, that’s why he was rubbing his hands together: “I already know how I’m going to get that rabbit out of his house.” The rabbit made a mistake by being such a good person. If you are a very good person, you are going to make mistakes. People are going to take advantage of you. That’s the way it is.

The possibility that this kind of suspicious attitude toward strangers might be a traditional Kumeyaay interactional stance is supported by the following observation made over half a century ago by the anthropologist Roger Owen, who spent a great deal of time in Baja Kumeyaay communities working on his dissertation (1962:24):

Sib<sup>15</sup> membership, or merely genealogical connection in the absence of legitimate sib identity, serves to organize the great bulk of social interaction: one tends to interact with other members of one’s sib or with other close relatives. With the rest of the world, Indian and non-Indian alike, some social distance if not hostility is maintained. In dealings with non-relatives and non-Indians, adult individuals tend to be diffident and suspicious; even with some relatives hostilities of a low

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<sup>15</sup> The Kumeyaay word for the anthropological term “sib” is *shimulh*, or extended family group.

order of intensity may be maintained. With one's sib-mates, however, amicable relationships usually prevail.

Lowell Bean makes a similar observation concerning California Indian cultures in general being suspicious of strangers in his discussion of power in *Native California* (1975:27):

If security, predictability, and sociability are associated with one's home base, everything beyond is associated with danger. The forest and other places not inhabited by man are unsafe because they are defined as uncontrolled . . . thus, travel away from one's home base increases the chances of encountering danger. The danger of uncontrolled power is believed to increase in a series of concentric circles the farther one moves away from one's immediate social universe. For this reason, the presence of strangers in a community may represent a source of danger and must be viewed with suspicion.



Fig. 1: Juan Meza Cuero as Frog. Photo by Margaret Field.



Fig. 2: Rabbit and Frog: a traditional Kumeyaay story.

[http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/27ii/field#myGallery-picture\(2\)](http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/27ii/field#myGallery-picture(2))

Like any good trickster, Frog displays several negative behavioral characteristics, including laziness, insincerity, and greed (Bright 1993). As Toelken and Scott (1981) point out, children learn cultural values from trickster tales by learning how *not* to behave—in this case, from the actions of both the trickster and Rabbit. Stories such as this one are classic examples of traditional indigenous pedagogy. When we first recorded this story, we were unsure exactly how we could incorporate it into language revitalization efforts, as our main goal at that point was the creation of a multidialectal dictionary of the Kumeyaay spoken in Baja California, which we are still working on. It was Mr. Meza Cuero's idea to turn it into a puppet performance, which we then filmed. We will distribute the video along with the transcript (in the form of a seven-act play, in Spanish and Kumeyaay) to schools and homes in the Baja California Kumeyaay community on DVD, as few homes or even institutions have reliable access to the Internet. Through such distribution we hope to present the Kumeyaay language in a context that appeals specifically to children, the target audience of our language revitalization efforts. We will also illustrate a use for Kumeyaay literacy while in addition carefully annotating the speaker's home community and pointing out that other dialects and their spellings may differ. We end this essay with an observation from Mr. Meza Cuero regarding the important role children play in the

process of cultural continuity:

I like to plant my songs in “soft ground,” so that they can bloom and grow, you know what I mean? So that we will have songs for a hundred years. I teach songs to little kids, and they are like soft earth, they grow. When the kids grow up, they sing my songs.

*San Diego State University*

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## Patronage, Commodification, and the Dissemination of Performance Art: The Shared Benefits of Web Archiving

Elizabeth Wickett

### Introduction

This essay addresses the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of documenting oral performance on film, the evolution of a polymodal form of archival documentation leading to online monographs, and the question of how performers may benefit from the archival process—specifically with reference to performances of the epic of Pabuji in Rajasthan, India.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to digital technology and the emergence of the Internet as a broadcasting forum and marketing agent, a phenomenon has occurred which we might term the “commodification” of expressive culture. In this technological universe where sounds and images are sold for the benefit of some (but not others), issues of copyright, intellectual property rights, and the commercialization and marketing of expressive culture on the web have become paramount.<sup>2</sup> Video excerpts are being broadcast around the world in free and open formats.<sup>3</sup> Whereas documentation of oral performance traditions *by* scholars and *for* scholars was once the norm, I propose that we—as ethnographers, linguists, and folklorists—must ensure that such performers can also benefit from the process of academic study and documentation, with support for the perpetuation of their livelihood as well as their cultural and artistic legacy. How do we as scholars and ethnographic filmmakers respond to these challenges and use these media to the performers’ benefit?

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to the Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research for their funding of the filming and archival documentation of four performances of the oral epic of *Pabuji ki par* across Rajasthan in 2008 and its production as five films in 2009 (Wickett 2009). I am also indebted to the World Oral Literature Project at the University of Cambridge for publishing my monograph that analyzes the epic and results of this research (Wickett 2010b). Thanks also to the World Oral Literature Project for undertaking the archiving of the filmed epic performances, interviews, photographs, and texts in the archive DSpace@Cambridge with online access available to researchers via their website (Wickett 2011).

<sup>2</sup> In fact, as recently as on January 18, 2012, the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP Act or PIPA (Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act) were both thrown out, according to the Guardian’s Dominic Rushe (2012), as governments around the world refused to sign up to these legislative instruments on the grounds that they endangered freedom of speech and privacy.

<sup>3</sup> These forms of broadcast range from YouTube snippets to instant “I am here” picture and video messaging via mobile phones and the Internet.

## The Project

As a folklorist and student of Dan Ben-Amos, Dell Hymes, and Henry Glassie, I have always turned in my scholarly interests to the study of performance in context. In this particular instance, I set out to film traditional performances of the folk epic known as *Pabuji ki par/phad* (meaning “Pabuji with the scroll”).<sup>4</sup> This genre has survived in oral form for six hundred years, but it had not yet been documented digitally. The project was to document performances and



Fig. 1: The *phad* belonging to Patashi Devi, Mohan Bhopa, and family, filmed during the performance of the epic by Patashi Devi and Bhanwar Lal Bhopa at Pabusar, District Churu, Tehsil Ratangarh, Shekawati, Rajasthan, May 6, 2009. All photographs accompanying this essay were taken by Elizabeth Wickett.

texts for an archive funded by the Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research and dedicated to the recording of linguistic and anthropological traditions under threat of extinction. My intention was to film a random series of performances by noted singers of the epic from Pabusar—a hamlet near Ratangarh, Jodhpur, and Jaisalmer—in the contexts determined by the performers,<sup>5</sup> transcribe and translate these performances *in situ*, and publish them as a series of videos and texts. The project culminated in the production of four DVDs featuring the entire performances (as sung without editing) plus transcripts and a final film, *To Earn Our Bread*,

<sup>4</sup> The terms *par* and *phad* are synonymous. The particular genre of performance of the epic of Pabuji in which a *bhopi* and *bhopa* perform has been described in the literature as “*Pabuji ki par*,” meaning “the performance of the epic of Pabuji with the “*par*.” However, during filming in Rajasthan, I observed that the pronunciation of the word used to describe this cotton screen tended to be “*phad*” rather than “*par*,” so I have used this throughout the paper.

<sup>5</sup> The Jaipur performance with musicians from Pabusar was filmed on the grounds of the Meghniwas Hotel, Jaipur; the Pabusar performance was filmed in the musicians’ home village with a local audience; the Jodhpur performance occurred in the courtyard of Sugana Ram Bhopa and his wife, Man Bhari Devi Bhopi; and the Jaisalmer performance was in the village of Manopia, courtesy of Jethu Singh Bhatti.

comprising excerpts from what are clearly among the audience's favourite episodes: the tale of the snake-god Gogaji who bites his future bride Kelam (Pabuji's niece and a higher caste Rajput) to secure their marriage and the celebratory account of Pabuji's gala wedding that is interrupted by the theft of cows by his evil stepbrother (Wickett 2010a).



Fig. 2: Gogaji transformed into a cobra bites Kelam (with Parvati Devi and Hari Ram).

[http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/27ii/wickett#myGallery-picture\(2\)](http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/27ii/wickett#myGallery-picture(2))



Fig. 3: Harmal Devasi is propelled across the salty sea to Lanka by the blessing of Pabuji (with Patashi Devi and Bhanwar Lal (Pabusar).

[http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/27ii/wickett#myGallery-picture\(3\)](http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/27ii/wickett#myGallery-picture(3))

Folklore was long ago defined by Dan Ben-Amos (1972:13) as “artistic communication in small groups,” and in this epic genre the definition is particularly apt. The epic of Pabuji is performed, on request, for small audiences across Rajasthan by professional musicians of the Bhopa caste. Patrons request performances when they wish to invoke the blessing and intercession of their revered saint and intercessor, Pabuji.<sup>6</sup> For this project, I decided that I would emulate this tradition and become a patron.<sup>7</sup>

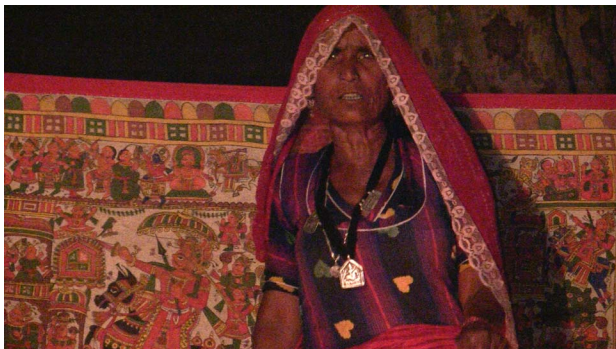


Fig. 4: Patashi Devi Bhopi in Pabusar.

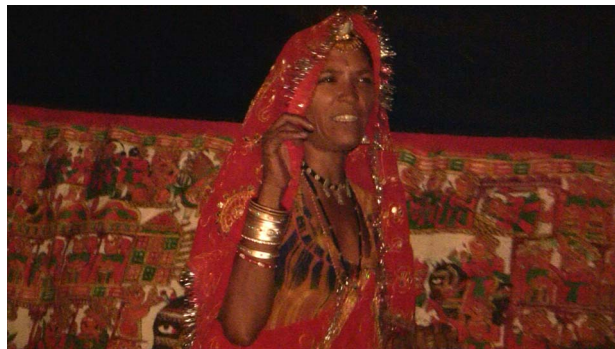


Fig. 5: Man Bhari Devi Bhopi in Jodhpur.

<sup>6</sup> Patashi Devi informed us that performances are enacted for marriage, to bring the rain, and to protect cows and fields from pestilence.

<sup>7</sup> The transcription process was conducted immediately following the filming over several days with a Marwari translator and transcriber, Dr. Suraj Rao, and a Hindi/English interpreter, Dr. Priyanka Mathur. As a team, we undertook to transcribe and translate the complete written texts of the performances *in situ*. (Suraj Rao worked on the Marwari and the Hindi translation; Priyanka and I produced the English translation.) The Marwari texts were later retyped on a computer and the English translations polished (with the help of a colleague, Puneet Sharma); these texts, along with the four finished films, were then deposited in the Firebird Foundation Archive in Maine in 2009.



Fig. 6: Parvati Devi Bhopi in Jaisalmer.



Fig. 7: Santosh Devi Bhopi in Jaisalmer.

The epic of Pabuji is noteworthy in that its principal singers are women. Known as *bhopis*, these women sing this visually and musically complex epic, accompanied by their husband *bhopas* on the single-stringed viol known as the *ravanhatta*. Trained to sing in a high-pitched operatic voice, *bhopis* achieve fame within their communities as famous vocalists. They also gain enhanced social status and respect within the family as “earners of their own bread.” Whereas Rajasthani women normally remain silent, veiled, and deferential in front of their husbands and elders, in this case, when faced by two female interlocutors—Priyanka Mathur and myself with a camera—these *bhopis* (Patashi Devi, in particular) felt able to unveil and speak confidently about their lives, “empowered by the blessing of Pabuji.”



Fig. 8: Hari Ram Bhopa performing in Jaisalmer on the *ravanhatta*.



Fig. 9: Sugana Ram Bhopa performing in Jodhpur on the *ravanhatta* during the performance of the epic.

The main protagonist of the epic, Pabuji, is a fourteenth-century folk hero who is also regarded as a local deity by herdsmen, some traditional castes of Rajasthan (Rajputs, Jat, and Meghwal), and certain sects of nomads<sup>8</sup> who eke out a livelihood through animal husbandry and *bajra*<sup>9</sup> cultivation in the harsh terrain of the Thar desert. Pabuji’s reputation as a divine intercessor is based on his miraculous feats and extraordinary ability to protect cows from theft and illness. As I discovered over the course of this project, the significance of this epic extends far beyond the moment of performance. This particular caste of performers belongs to the *adivasi* Bhil tribe; they regard their life’s work and act of performance as a sacred vocation. They derive

<sup>8</sup> There are several distinct communities of nomads acting as healers in Rajasthan who are also known as *bhopas* or *bhomiya*s. Unlike the *bhopas* who sing the epic and regard Pabuji as their patron, these *bhopas* may act as religious priests, undertaking healing rituals within their own communities. They do not sing the epic of Pabuji.

<sup>9</sup> Pearl millet, a crop requiring minimal rainfall.

their livelihood and prestige from their proficiency as musicians and Pabuji's enduring legacy as a divine healer who saved cows. During performances, devotees (and occasionally but not often *bhopas* as well) become possessed by the spirit of Pabuji and pronounce healing remedies.<sup>10</sup> *Bhopis* are never possessed because, as Hari Ram Bhopa says (Wickett 2010a), "Pabuji would never possess women;" their counterpart deity is the female goddess, Mataji.

### **Film As an "Archival" Medium: Issues and Constraints**

The first conundrum I encountered during filming was the issue of how to "document" an artistic performance for the purposes of an archive. The inclination to create a "personal composition"—determined by framing of the subject, camera angles, use of close-ups, non-chronological editing, and so on—is natural to any filmmaker. Additionally, in recognition of the fact that the interrelationship between filmmaker and performer in ethnographic filmmaking necessarily impinges on the nature of the performance record and creation of the final "product," it still should be acknowledged that no visual and aural document is neutral, nor even a "document." It is an individual work by the ethnographer, and it will become an object of analysis and interpretation not only by film viewers and fellow anthropologists, but also by the performers themselves. I was ever-conscious of this conflict between the analytic gaze and the subjectivity of the filmmaker, the task of providing an objective document for archival purposes and the desire to make a film from which the performers could benefit. In executing this difficult balancing act, I wondered if the performers would agree in the end that the film had portrayed them in a way in which they would take pride.

### **Evolution of a Poly-modal Form of Archival Documentation**

In the case of the musically intriguing and visually stunning epic of Pabuji, several issues present themselves to any ethnographer: the performance is captivating but relatively static and logocentric,<sup>11</sup> devoid of dramatic gesture, and therefore incomprehensible except to Marwari speakers, and even then only to those familiar with the language and archaic diction of the epic of Pabuji. In fact, this particular artful form of language—derived from Dimgal, an ancient form of the Rajasthani language known to the Charan poets, traditional reciters of the Pabuji epic, and former scribes of the epic—is the epitome of what Richard Bauman (1977) described as the essence of verbal art in performance: a shared communicative register and linguistic code that only the devotees and those familiar with the language understand. The comprehensibility of an epic performance such as this one depends also not only on the words, but on the devotees' belief in the spiritual epiphanies that take place during the performance. Each dramatization in front of the *phad* is a re-creation of those historic events in which Pabuji enacted miraculous deeds. The

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<sup>10</sup> The healing process is described in detail by Hari Ram and Santosh Devi in Wickett 2010a.

<sup>11</sup> "Logocentric" has several meanings, but in this case I use the word to mean "centered on language."

deity, Pabuji, becomes incarnate *in* the performance, and his acts of beneficence, it is believed, are revived and re-invoked in performance. In a sense, the singing of the “words,” the eloquent descriptors, is part of the pageant that is inherently musical, but it is only one of several factors contributing to the ritual and ethos of the performance. My act of filming could only capture a two-dimensional representation of that far more profound, three-dimensional process. I would never be able to capture on film the way in which a living god, Pabuji, becomes present and works acts of healing. Therefore, how best to communicate these aspects of epic performance in a film, while at the same time conveying the simultaneity of image, voice, instrumental accompaniment, and poetry? How important, finally, are the words?

The translation of oral poetry for an unfamiliar audience is problematic because the language of performance in an epic like Pabuji is redolent of invested meanings, prior contexts, and recondite echoes of poetic phrases and formulae known to the performers but not to others. The ability of an ethnographer like myself to comprehend the nuances of meaning—especially those involving irony—during performance (as the transcripts of the epic of Pabuji reveal)<sup>12</sup> is almost always constrained unless many long years have been spent in the field before filming or recording, which, of course, is desirable but not always achievable. Had I presented the visual and aural aspects of performance only as “the film,” it might have passed muster, but it would not have stood up to scrutiny as an academic study of oral tradition: it would not have been able to communicate the significance and meaning of the epic to its patrons and performers. I concluded, therefore, that a visual or aural document alone would not, and could not, suffice as a mode of documentation of the epic genre. Such an expressive genre as epic requires a poly-modal approach to penetrate and convey the spectrum of understandings that the *cognoscenti* of a tradition have imbibed over many hearings and a lifetime of oral performances, and which they now comprehend in their various contemporary, evolving forms. It required a finely honed translation and analysis to unpack the layers of meanings inherent in the “text.”

Ethnographers traditionally deploy a variety of tactics to bridge the comprehension divide. Subtitles could have been added to each scene—as is the norm in anthropological documentary—but had I added subtitles to all four performances (a very expensive and difficult process), the performers’ actual words would have appeared to be largely meaningless. In some cases, the “text” relates to a historical and cosmological context that cannot be condensed into a few words. Moreover, subtitles cannot be strung continuously along an entire performance without distracting the eye of the viewer from the visual impact of the epic and the performers themselves. As opera companies have learned, subtitles cannot be placed along the stage, and as a result are often accommodated elsewhere. This is a problem not particular to epic, but it is one found in all poetic performance requiring translation. I felt that all information relating to the epic, its history, the scenographic and dramaturgical requirements for performance (the unwrapping of the *phad* at dusk), its function as a healing medium, and synopses of the plot as performed was needed to show the comparative emphases and inflections of meaning in the performers’ individual renderings. Translations of the full texts were also, I felt, important to provide this vital cosmological context and ethos of belief. Consequently, this rationale was the

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<sup>12</sup> In Appendices A and B, synopses of three performances are provided that show the way in which the musicians invest the story with contemporary ironies.

one underlying my monograph published by the World Oral Literature Project in 2010 (Wickett 2010b). By that time, I had come to envisage the archiving of the performances of the epic of Pabuji as necessarily poly-modal, requiring the creation of a set of films, music, photographs, texts, and translations, amplified and unpacked through literary and contextual analysis.<sup>13</sup>

### Ritual Contexts of Power

In most performance contexts, the ethnographer is generally required to respect the ritual setting and not interfere with a performance as it evolves. In this form of performance of the epic of Pabuji, known as *Pabuji ki par* (or *phad*),<sup>14</sup> the *bhopa* begins by setting up the scene and ambiance with the unfurling of the *phad* at dusk (Bharucha 2003).<sup>15</sup> The *phad* is a spectacular multi-colored scroll, believed by performers to be invested with the power and blessing of the *bhopa*'s god, Pabuji. Offerings of *pan* (betel nut) and corn flour are made to the god, vials of coconut oil are burned, and the devotional prayer—known as *arthi*—is sung by the *bhopa* priest in front of the *phad* to invite the god to become present and infuse the performance with his

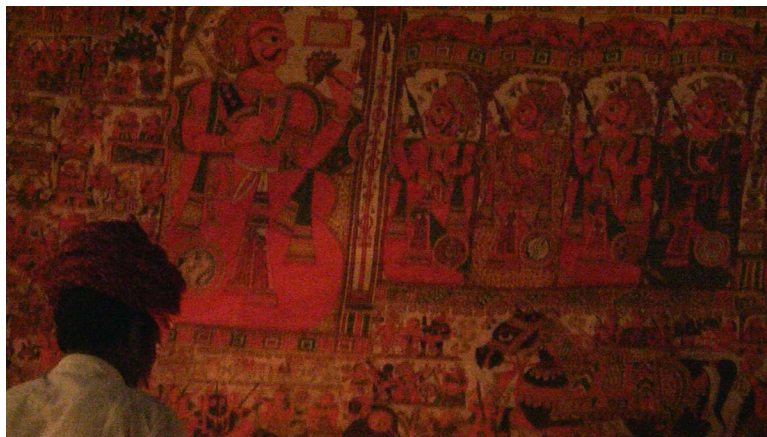


Fig. 10: Priest at Pabusar performing the rituals before the *phad*.

beneficent and healing grace.<sup>16</sup> In an extraordinary reversal of the norm, however, I did decide to resort to a form of interference in the course of filming the epic performances: although the *bhopis* were veiled during the first part of the filmed performances, for the second part I asked them if they would agree to remove their veils so that we could see their faces. Earlier, the first performance I had seen of the epic featured a *bhopi*,

accompanied by her husband in Amber Palace in Jaipur, in which she was unveiled. Now behind the camera lens, I was disconcerted when I saw the women perform with completely obscured

<sup>13</sup> The full texts of the epic performances have been published in English in booklets and integrated into the cases of the four individual performance DVDs, currently being sold by the performers at local festivals and fairs, and by the author to university libraries. Editing and publication of the full texts plus analysis remain a work in progress.

<sup>14</sup> Most information about the epic of Pabuji I derived before embarking on the archiving project was from notes and analyses done by the famous Rajasthani folklorist, Komal Kothari, published posthumously by Rustom Bharucha (2003).

<sup>15</sup> Another form of the epic performance of Pabuji is known as *Pabuji ki mata*. Unlike *Pabuji ki par*, this genre involves men only chanting the epic and playing drums.

<sup>16</sup> A short excerpt presenting the litany of prayers to Pabuji against a backdrop of the *phad* and performed at the beginning of a recitation may be viewed in the DSpace@Cambridge online archive's Pabuji collection (Wickett 2011) as sung by Parvati Devi with accompaniment by Hari Ram in Jaisalmer.



faces. I was afraid that such performances would not be easily viewed by audiences unfamiliar with the epic. Moreover, having already seen the constrained economic circumstances in which these musicians lived, I was concerned that the veiling would allow for no empathy with the audience through visual contact, in turn making it difficult for an audience to comprehend the emotional thrust of the epic or film. Only later was I informed of the logic of the veiling in ritual performances of the epic. I was told by Patashi (Wickett 2010a) that “the god Pabuji is a high caste Rajput and women must show respect to his esteemed presence in the *phad* by veiling both before him and before other elders in the audience.” When women perform unveiled, it may be construed as dishonoring Pabuji and the elders. I pursued the question afterwards and was told that in an instance such as this—filming the epic performance for an archive—women do perform without veils and justify this breach of traditional male protocols by defining what they do as engaging in “tourist performances.”<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 11: Santosh Devi Bhopi describes healing rituals during performance of the epic in Jaisalmer.



Fig. 12: Bhanwar Lal reads the *phad* in Jaipur.

As professional singers, *bhopis* are sometimes required to perform in many types of circumstances to survive, including invitations by local or even foreign patrons to perform at folk music festivals or venues such as the University of Pennsylvania (as Patashi Devi and her husband Mohan Bhopa were), and this increased performance variability may require a new configuration of tradition in order for them to be able to communicate their art to new audiences.<sup>18</sup>

Other filmmakers and documentarists will need to make similar decisions if the aim is to make archives of performances for posterity. Such decisions admittedly challenge the traditional and sacrosanct rules about context. Other scholars/filmmakers might have decided otherwise; I justified my decision at that point by thinking not only of the function of the archive as a “repository” of a record of the tradition, but also of the receptivity of the epic and its music in the public arena. I do not think that I transgressed the rules of contextual analysis, but I instead believe I adapted them to a format that would allow the perception of the contemporary tradition to be as it currently is: in transition. Dell Hymes (1975) observed that tradition is a matter of “re-creation” and rests on perceived notions of situation, creativity, and performance. For performers

<sup>17</sup> This information was conveyed to me by my colleague and translator, Dr. Priyanka Mathur, after informal discussions with the *bhopis* off-camera during the filming of Wickett 2010a.

<sup>18</sup> Patashi Devi is very well-traveled. My folklorist colleague, Joe Miller, recently informed me that he had invited Patashi Devi to perform at the University of Pennsylvania as part of her tour of the United States.

of the epic of Pabuji, I would suggest that the tradition is in constant flux and that this transformational process is one that is being modulated according to the diverse types of audiences encountered by the musicians.

### **Technical Constraints and Issues of Authenticity and Receptivity**

Technical issues may also intrude into decision-making processes while filming, and with the epic I was faced with a major technical hurdle that appeared only during shooting. A sole plug on my non-professional Canon HF11 (AVCHD) camera was available for both the external professional stereo mike and the video light. Few venues of performance of the epic were furnished even with electric light, and filming in total darkness meant that the image would be captured with considerable image blur, technically called “noise.”<sup>19</sup> Had I been properly prepared, I might have found an alternative arrangement, but in the end I decided to use the light and boost the sound quality later during the editing, an achievement that fortunately I was indeed able to accomplish. In any case, most ethnographers would disapprove of the use of too much artificial lighting in filming “a night wake” such as the epic of Pabuji, which is only performed between dusk and dawn. These issues impact adversely the quality of the final documentary film and its replicability (for commercial sales) and so should be dealt with, preferably in advance.

A second technical obstacle arose, which was both a consequence of a constrained budget and the fact that as the sole ethnographer/filmmaker I was attempting to film a performance tradition in which audience participation was the norm. It would have been detrimental to the ethos of documentation to exclude this participation, but with a single camera the challenge existed to balance the attention given to the movements and singing of the performers (and for musical continuity the camera should never stop recording) with the filming of audience reactions and asides through well-focused cutaways. Such a dilemma is not easily resolved. Ideally, one should have two cameras and two filmmakers, but for budgetary reasons this arrangement is seldom possible, especially in such remote environments. Yet how determinist and prescriptive can an archivist/documentarist or a folklorist be in formulating the boundaries of a work of art and its dissemination? Probably not very, since the very essence of a digital recording reproduced on a DVD is its replicability without loss of quality, either as a DVD image or as a disc. This positive facet of digital media production needs to be much more exploited by scholars if these performers are to continue to earn their livelihoods through singing, even in a changed form.

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<sup>19</sup> In an interview by Michael Sullivan (2012) on National Public Radio with Ashotosh Sharma, a creator of a distribution network (entitled Amarass) of music by traditional Rajasthani musicians, Ashotosh described a similar situation in which his field recordings had to be made by candlelight in an area of total darkness in the desert outside Jaisalmer.

### Promotion and Commercialization of Traditional Performance Art

The commercialization of artistic performances by traditional artists themselves is not, of course, new. One epic poet I recorded singing Egyptian epic in Upper Egypt, ʿAwaḍallah ʿAbd al-Jalil from Edfu, actually referred to himself as a *tājir al-fann*, “merchant of art,” a phrase that my colleague Susan Slyomovics (1988) used as the title in her dissertation and subsequent book on his performance of the Egyptian *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* epic. ʿAwaḍallah was aware of his role as purveyor of his talents. Perhaps it is even more crucial now as “folklorismus”<sup>20</sup> becomes more prevalent. Current trends influencing the form and content of traditional performance in India also appear to be influencing the transformation of the traditional repertoire of songs and dances into more and more flamboyant “entertainment.” Musicians in Rajasthan, in particular, are being urged to add drums to “spice up” epic recitation (which is more usually sonorous and sober) and encouraged to “modernize” their music in studio recordings so that it becomes what foreign musicians and impresarios (and even the nomadic Jogi Nath singing community of Rajasthan) now call *jermatīyya*, or “fusion.” Such modifications correspond well to Henry Glassie’s view of what we call “tradition” as a dynamic process that “flows into and from the process of convergence” (1995:409). Adaptation to new contexts is a facet of cultural production and one to which traditional musicians, attempting to survive in the twenty-first century, are becoming well attuned. Accordingly, while ethnographers may seek to retain the “traditional” and authentic context of performance in ethnographic recording (particularly for archives) as closely as possible, it is not always feasible to do so, particularly for technical and logistical reasons. To ensure the quality of recording and image, folklorists and documentary filmmakers recording such events may need to resort to what Kenneth Goldstein (1967) referred to as “induced natural context.” This could mean deliberately filming a public event such as the performance of an epic in an isolated stretch of desert or inside a house in order to preserve sound quality. For example, in the 1980s I made recordings of laments while accompanied by my infant son. On occasion, my son would start caterwauling, a noise that was distracting to the lamenters and unfortunate, but I had no choice. I was recording alone, without assistants.

When I filmed the epic of Pabuji, it became clear that the musicians identified two distinct genres of performance: “ritual performance” and “tourist performance.” The latter, I conclude, is an innovative or hybrid form in which perceptions of how the true epic should be performed are still being retained but with significant transformations and inclusions. I also experienced another form of innovation: the integration of popular folk song into the dramatic environment of the epic. The singers from Jodhpur, Man Bhari Devi and Sugana Ram, asked if they could sing “Banjari Nomad,” a song recently incorporated into the repertoires of several

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<sup>20</sup> The term refers to the adaptation and transformation of folk tradition into new and modern permutations and (sometimes) unrelated and bowdlerized versions of what once were meaningful rituals and genres. Venetia Newall (1987:131) offers a complete translation of the definition first proposed by Hans Moser (1962) in the German publication *Magazine for Volkskunde*, namely: “the performance of folk culture away from its original, local context, a playful imitation of popular motifs by another social class and thirdly, creation of folklore for different purposes outside any known tradition.”

epic singers we met during that stint of fieldwork, as a finale to their epic performance.<sup>21</sup> I agreed, and in response they sat down in front of the *phad* and sang, using the visually stunning, sacred scroll of Pabuji as a backdrop. In this re-secularized context the musicians gave no hint that this combination of secular and sacred might be considered a violation of traditional mores. In my view, this was a performance feature that they had developed individually for “tourist audiences” as an interlude between episodes of the epic, and they were anxious that it should be included in the film document.

The transformation of performance domains from sacred to secular is not peculiar to epic. In Rajasthan, where tourism is pivotal to their livelihoods, artists belonging to certain castes who sing as part of their religious vocation have allowed the trend of “Bollywoodization” to permeate their folk genres. This incorporation seems almost inevitable, traditional singers complain, as the sound of famous Bollywood songs rings out from all streets and markets. Seeking to earn money and survive in an increasingly cash-based economy, and in response to popular taste, younger *Jogin* who would traditionally “sing for their supper” in the tradition known as *feri* (“roaming and singing for alms”) are abandoning their distinctive folk repertoire. They are choosing to sing fast, percussive, and occasionally racy Bollywood songs, deemed to be “what the audience prefers, occasionally with *punghi* (flute) accompaniment.”<sup>22</sup> *Jogin* dancers employed in desert camps outside Jaisalmer also feel compelled to gyrate to melodies of widely disseminated Bollywood songs. The incursion of foreign songs into the repertoire is strongly rejected by older women but unquestionably accepted by the younger generation of performers. Foreign tourists in India may have prompted these waves of popularization, but the youth also seem to be responding to the challenge of urban culture with willful transformations to the style of dance and epic performance through innovations that will inevitably impact over time the performers’ perceptions of their own artistic skill and repertoire.

### **Ethical Issues and the Future**

As ethnographers and scholars of oral tradition, we have recognized the palpable threat to traditional oral performance genres and performers from commercial television, tourism and the perceptions of tour guides as to “what tourists like,” and environmental factors. As I learned in Rajasthan, desertification is affecting the livelihoods of many performers who were formerly peripatetic and dependent on animal husbandry to survive. Performers are being forced to adapt to the whims of the tourist market while retaining their knowledge of increasingly archaic sung traditions. We must recognize, accordingly, the value of the performers as conservators of the traditions that we, as ethnographers, wish to document and place at the center of our projects. Our efforts should be directed towards enabling the performers to pursue their skills. To a certain extent, their survival as performers depends on us. We cannot continue to record and film these

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<sup>21</sup> Santosh Devi in Jaisalmer defended this introduction of songs into the repertoire by saying, “We cannot sing only epic.”

<sup>22</sup> Personal communication from *Jogin* singer, Bayli, who comes from Jawar Nath ki *dhani* in Jaisalmer.

exceptional performers whose traditional shows are being supplanted in the popular imagination with American-inspired television and soap opera, without taking action. As I learned in the Thar desert of Rajasthan, we must give traditional performers, such as *bhopas* and *bhopis*, a financial lifeline if their performances are to survive and they are not to lose their livelihoods and become professional manual labourers. This has already been the fate of the Jogi Nath snake charmers of Rajasthan.<sup>23</sup> We must give them back the tools for their survival as musicians and performers. To accomplish this goal, I propose that we need to shift the way we film, publish, and publicize our filmed documents and recognize the fact that the copyright of an artistic work rests with the artists. They do not have the means to produce their own works for sale, and it is incumbent on us as audience and ethnographers to instigate the process.

This task is less easy if one's intent is to record secret or religious texts in private performances. In all cases, however, performer and scholar should agree concerning the appropriate performance context prior to recording (fully cognizant of the ramifications and consequences of web archival reproduction), and when the film is finished, view and approve the final product together. This process is expensive, as it inevitably involves returning again to the field (a facet that budgets presented for grant funding seldom include), but it is an increasingly vital element in any such research project.<sup>24</sup> Good sound and image quality (as I learned) is vital if the resultant DVD is to be sold. As recognized earlier, technical quality may be compromised if performances are spontaneously enacted and filmed in remote, non-electrified environments. Filming and audio recording need to be done as closely as possible in conformity with professional standards to ensure a good product; DVDs are more easily reproduced and copied for profit by the performer if these standards are respected. In adopting this new methodology, the ethnographer then becomes both patron and marketeer, acting in partnership with the performance artist. The archive, once a passive repository, becomes a dual-purpose facility: a potential launching pad for sales and a site of comparative research. If the performer is to be assisted in earning money from the sales, then uploading of the films to the Internet should be held in abeyance until at least a high proportion of DVDs have been sold for performers' profits.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, just as the process of determining the shape and content of the final film version should be agreed upon with the performers, reproduction rights and the contexts for such reproduction also need to be negotiated and determined for each party prior to web broadcast.

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<sup>23</sup> The Jogi Nath of Jaisalmer who formerly practiced snake charming are also known as the Jogi Nath Kalbelia.

<sup>24</sup> In my first subsequent trip to Rajasthan, I screened the video for Sugana Ram Bhopa and Man Bhari Bhopi in Jaipur. I was unable to go again to Pabusar, but fortunately DVDs sent by the very competent Indian postal service arrive even in the most remote destinations.

<sup>25</sup> Since its placement on YouTube in 2010, a trailer for the film, "*To Earn Our Bread: Performing for Pabuji*," featuring music by Sugana Ram Bhopa from Jodhpur has been downloaded onto more than ten different Indian websites, an indicator of its potential commercial viability, but also of the tendency of agencies to copy and download without attention to intellectual copyright or attribution. Publication of the full performances and the film that comprises both interviews and performances on DSpace@Cambridge (Wickett 2011) has been delayed for this reason, though excerpts are currently available for viewing via this Internet archive. In July 2013 even greater access to these materials (videos, photographs, and transcripts of interviews and performance texts) will become available via DSpace.

Issues of copyright, propriety (in the case of Rajasthan, the traditional veiling of women performers in deference to Pabuji and male elders), and disclosure are always involved in such situations.

Artifacts (digital or material, but in this particular case the performance of the epic in digital form) are invested with power, and when they become separated from their original context, they acquire new meanings. Words, like artifacts, are similarly embodied in the context of performance and may become “dangerous” in the eyes of the performers if uttered in inappropriate performance domains and contexts. This is especially true for genres of oral performance that are vehicles for recondite political critique. It is thus important to agree upon the form of the final version of DVDs involving performers. Once, after recording a session of funerary lament with women in Upper Egypt in which they deplored the rise in the price of bread, one of the women came to me the next day and asked me to erase the tape. She believed that she and her friends might be tracked down by the secret police for criticizing the government during their lament. I agreed to omit the overtly political critique from the transcript but not to erase the tape itself, which I kept for my own private records.

## Conclusion

In light of all these considerations, during the course of the project I determined that my own approach to ethnographic film would have to change: I would have to weigh my scholarly approach to archiving of epic performances against the acceptability of the film to the performers. Moreover, I would have to balance these factors with the design and marketability of the final “product,” if the musicians were to gain financially from their participation. I also realized that I would need to create a source of livelihood for the performers through the filming and documentation process.

Accordingly, I invested in the production of several hundred copies of the four individual performance DVDs that the performers could sell. I saw this investment as a first step towards sustaining the ancient but dynamic tradition of the epic of Pabuji while also confirming artists’ perceptions of the value of this epic and promoting its proliferation. To make these DVDs attractive, I commissioned a hardboard cover to be made in India for the final film, and I designed and produced DVD covers and booklets (with full English translation) for each of the performance DVDs. These DVDs were then sent to the performers in bulk via the Indian post. I also encouraged scholars and libraries with holdings in South Asian materials to purchase both the DVDs and the final film in order to help publicize the epic and offset the additional costs.<sup>26</sup>

The continued production of DVDs in the future may become difficult, but let us hope that the artistry and skill of the *bhopas/bhopis* will be recognized and that they will ultimately benefit through an increased numbers of gigs, sales, and recording sessions.<sup>27</sup> If we can use the

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<sup>26</sup> This was done via a web network established for scholars working in Rajasthan.

<sup>27</sup> As of 2012, it appeared that sales of the original copies have been successful and are continuing to take place, and on a recent trip to Jaisalmer, Hari Ram Bhopa requested an additional 50 DVDs to purvey at festivals, having sold the previous lots.

Internet as a promotional tool and the epic can become digitally replicable and accessible, I believe that it is more probable that the epic of *Pabuji ki par* will survive the globalization process and continue to be performed by the truly remarkable traditional musicians who sing the epic, albeit in a new, hybrid form.

*Anghiari, Italy*

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## Appendix A: "The Wedding of Gogaji"

### *A Summary of the Performance at Jaisalmer by Parvati Devi and Hari Ram*

Pabuji is standing on the *ghat* at Pushkar Lake, and Gogaji, the snake god, is watching. Pabuji slips on the steps into the water (but before this happens, the *bhopi* asks Gogaji what he is contemplating, suspecting that the snake god has plotted to make him fall, only in order to be able to save him and receive a reward).

Pabuji is rescued by Gogaji. In gratitude, Pabuji promises his niece, Kelam, to him in marriage. But her family objects to the marriage on the ground that he is not of the right social class, and therefore Gogaji decides to play a trick on them.

Kelam and other young maidens are sitting in the garden, dressed in wedding ornaments for the festival of Tij. Gogaji has transformed himself into the sacred Vasu *nag*, and as Kelam



swings on the swings blissfully unaware, Gogaji bites Kelam. The poison spreads through her body; Kelam's body stiffens, and she falls into a deep coma.

Kelam's family is urged to tie a *tantti* (a magical thread) seven times around her finger in the name of Gogaji. The family is warned: if they do this and she survives, they must marry her to king Gogaji; if not, they will have only "a heap of ashes" to show her beloved uncle Pabuji!

## Appendix B: "The Wedding of Gogaji"

### *Part I: A Summary of the Performance at Jaipur by Santera Devi and Bhanwar Lal*

Kelam has been "saved" by Gogaji and is to marry Gogaji. Pabuji promises Kelam a dowry gift of she-camels. But Kelam is dubious and enquires of Pabuji where such she-camels could be found. Pabuji replies that he will invoke the aid of Kesar Kalmi (the magic mare, his nymph mother) and with her help, he will be able to find herds of she-camels.

Kelam weds Gogaji, and the wedding procession departs for his home, a clutch of *Nagas* and snakes trailing behind their patron.

Later on, Kelam and her friends are sitting under a tree spinning, when Kelam is teased mercilessly. She has not received the promised she-camels. Upset by this teasing, she starts to weep. Her mother-in-law asks why she has gone pale, and Kelam reveals that she is being taunted by her friends. The mother-in-law suggests that she write to her uncle, Pabuji, and ask him to fulfill his promise, even if he has to give her baby camels made of silver or gold.

She asks a Brahman to come and write a letter to her uncle, asking him to provide the she-camels. The messenger dispatches the letter to Pabuji, who asks his aide, Chandoji, to read it "by the gleam of his sword." Pabuji dismisses her letter initially but then decides that one of his Bhil courtiers should go off and reconnoiter the promised she-camels. They pass around a tray of *pan* (betel nut), the traditional way of drawing lots, hoping that one of the courtiers will accept the challenge. No one takes it until finally his aide, Harmal Devasi, takes up the gauntlet and sets off for Lanka.

At home, Harmal's mother asks him why his face has gone pale. He replies that dealing with Rajputs (such as Pabuji) is tricky but that he has volunteered to make the dangerous journey to Lanka. She suggests that he leave Pabuji's employ and work for Buddho Rao, Pabuji's rival. But Buddho Rao's offer of employment is absurdly low, so Harmal decides to fulfill his vow to go to Lanka.

Disguising himself as a *sadhu* with necklaces of pearl, clothes, and a *dhumri* pot, Harmal goes to the banks of the river where he dyes his clothes with saffron-colored mud. At the same time, a *jogi* and his devotees pass by. Devasi offers the *jogi* a hairy coconut and begs to become his devotee. Baba Balinath, the guru, refuses, saying that he has hundreds of thousands of devotees already. Nevertheless, he advises him, "You are going to the dangerous land of Lanka to bring back she-camels. If you give me just one, you could become my devotee." Devasi offers him a whole herd, so he is accepted. Baba Balinath gives him another begging bowl and a finger ring to act as an antidote to poison. He warns him not to drink milk from she-camels since, if he does, his neck will stretch into the sky, his ears will expand, and he will start grazing on the grass

of Lanka. He also asks him to check to see if his own mother recognizes him, despite his disguise.

Harmal Devasi gathers up his saffron clothes and goes home. His mother fails to recognize him and urges her daughter-in-law to give alms to the “*jogi*.” When his wife sees him, she drops her veil. Her mother-in-law chastises her: ‘Why have you dropped your veil? Are you attracted to this man?’ ‘Certainly not,’ she replies. ‘I thought I saw in him some features of your son.’ The mother says, ‘Ridiculous! Beat him with a stick, instead!’ Harmal Devasi reflects on his bad luck. His mother does not recognize him, and his wife wants to flog him. But at this point, his mother realizes her mistake and sees that it is, in fact, her son. . . . (*The story is continued in the next segment.*)

*Part II: A Summary of the Performance at Pabusar with Patashi Devi and Bhanwar Lal*

In his guise as a *jogi*, Harmal Devasi ventures forward. On meeting two she-devils on the path, he invokes Baba Balinath, his guru, to quell their attack. He escapes, but on reaching the huge ocean he must cross to reach Lanka, he shivers with fear. As a last resort, he murmurs the name of Pabuji and miraculously awakens in Lanka, at the place the she-camels reside.

Feigning the pose of the *jogi*, he sits cross-legged on the ground. The Lankans eye him suspiciously and rush off to consult the Goddess of Prophecy, Sicotha Mata, as to his real identity. She reveals that his credentials as a *jogi* are suspect. He is not who he says he is. He is a spy and will overstay his welcome. . . . (*And the story continues on from there.*)

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## **“Copy Debts”?—Towards a Cultural Model for Researchers’ Accountability in an Age of Web Democracy**

**Jan Jansen**

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The highly standardized oral narrative about Sunjata, nowadays known as the Sunjata Epic, has been governing society since—at least—the fourteenth century when Arab travel writer Ibn Battuta on a trip along the Niger River reported a Sunjata tradition. This epic tells about the foundation of society—called “Mali” or “Mande”—and expresses values that go beyond the borders of countries: it explains the relationships among clans. It also prescribes how, based on patronymics and clan-related praise songs, every person should behave in public. The epic is also now much esteemed as Mali and Guinea’s medieval history and as a national and supranational charter, maintaining prominence both in the mass media and in educational programs (cf. Bulman 2004; Adejunmobi 2011). The name “Mali” itself, which in 1960 became the official designation for the territory, is definitely the most striking example of this heightened status of the Sunjata Epic.<sup>2</sup>

Several villages in Mali and Guinea have families living there that have much prestige because of their knowledge of the Sunjata Epic. In Mali, the Diabate family from Kela are among the most authoritative interpreters of the Sunjata Epic (cf. Austen 1999; Jansen 2001). I use the case presented in this article—about a Sunjata Epic recording in Kela and the discussions of ownership that the recording raised—to argue that researchers whose work deals with such an intangible heritage may have to reposition themselves. They must work from a radically different perspective than the one behind the usual discourse, which is based on concepts of permission/approval, individual author rights, and informed consent. A new attitude, based on the idea of “copy debts,” may meet the local deep concerns and unexpected claims that underlie a

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<sup>1</sup> My gratitude to Seydou Camara, Boubacar Diabate, Daniela Merolla, Nienke Muurling, Natalie de Man, Simon Toulou, Mark Turin, and an anonymous reviewer of the journal for discussions and comments.

<sup>2</sup> The Sunjata Epic is unique. For centuries it has been passed down orally, yet versions all over the West African savannah are remarkably similar, contrary to the belief that oral traditions vary over time and place. The epic’s stability has been a topic of ongoing academic discussions. Many scholars have attributed this lack of variation to the griots’ remarkable memory. However, there is insufficient evidence for such a claim since in-depth research on the griots’ memory has never been carried out. Personally, I seek to explain the narrative’s stability through structural characteristics of the socio-political organization in which the griots work (Jansen 1996).

prestigious and intangible heritage. It is the property rights of this intangible heritage that form the main focus of this article.

Any attempt to publish an oral tradition is a political statement in line with supporting an open society and an agenda of web democracy. One may even argue that researchers, in their academic attempt to maximize access to oral traditions and in their professional search and fascination for optimal recording and documentation technologies, are tempted to practice a “WikiLeaks mentality” by making accessible as much data as possible. However, the approach of researchers differs from WikiLeaks practices in the fact that researchers are concerned with the rights of their sources. The accountability of researchers in their desire to combine web democracy with a concern for local population groups will therefore be a central concern throughout this article, and the present-day concern for intellectual property rights provides its context. These rights are conceptualized in terms of copyrights and author rights (*droits d’auteur*). UNESCO’s program for Masterpieces of Oral Intangible Heritage of Humanity has definitely increased the focus on these rights and has institutionalized them. Unfortunately, UNESCO has institutionalized these rights in a primarily legalistic way, thus conceptualizing copyrights primarily from a written text perspective that prioritizes *national* copyright laws along with the idea that a group is, legally, a collection of individuals.<sup>3</sup> I will argue here that it may be problematic and even undesirable for a fieldworker, who is closely related to the performers and the recording of the oral traditions, to follow UNESCO’s ideas and procedures for establishing property rights. My case thus illustrates the limits, and even the shortcomings, of UNESCO’s program of Masterpieces and the copyrights/*droits d’auteur* that it implies.

Based on a representative case study of an epic text recorded in 2007 in Mali, this article calls for a methodological discussion: what does one do when terms of ownership are intrinsically impossible to conceptualize in a legal framework? First of all, I will describe the social tension created by my recording. Subsequently, I will describe the conceptual framework that I developed to deal with this tension in a culturally appropriate way. In this article I suggest that determining ownership in terms of copyrights easily runs the risk of imposing a Western political standard. As an alternative, I have explored a *cultural* framework, based on a permanent dialogue, in which the performing group determines the terms and central values of ownership/property.

### The Background to My 2007 Recording: A 1995 Dispute

In West Africa, centuries-old manuscripts—if they even ever existed—cannot have survived the harsh climate and the devastating appetite of termites. Therefore, as an oral tradition originating from the Middle Ages, the Sunjata Epic is a fascinating historical source. The Sunjata

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<sup>3</sup> See the UNESCO website for copyrights ([http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=14076&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=14076&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)) and author rights (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001206/120677e.pdf>). Clearly, UNESCO explicitly rejects families as owners/representatives of intangible heritage; it accepts only governments and NGOs. However, in practice it is more flexible: in the case of the Cultural Space of the Sosobala, a monument of intangible heritage from Guinea that is closely related to the Sunjata Epic, UNESCO was willing to work with an NGO whose members are *exclusively male* family members of the Kouyate family from the village of Nyagassola (cf. Jansen 2011).

Epic may indeed be West Africa’s most important masterpiece of intangible heritage, and the Diabate family members of Kela are definitely among its most renowned performers. Although from a literary and textual point of view the Kela version resembles versions collected elsewhere (see Belcher 1999), the organization around the recitation and the manner of performance grant the Kela version a special status in African literature and history. The recitation of this version of Sunjata is organized in a septennial ceremony in and around a sanctuary called the Kamabolon (known in local French as *la case sacrée de Kangaba*, “the sacred hut of the town of Kangaba”). The recitation during this ceremony attracts hundreds of visitors (Jansen 2001). During the event the “Master of the Word” (*kumatigi*) recites the epic *inside* the Kamabolon only in the presence of his own family, thus making the most prestigious performance of the epic an event shrouded in secrecy. Given its prestige and its secret character, public recordings of the Sunjata Epic are rare (exceptions that resulted in publications are Ly-Tall et al. 1987; Jansen et al. 1995) and extremely complex socially, not only during the preparation of the recordings, but also afterwards.<sup>4</sup> It was therefore like entering *terra incognita* when in 2006 I asked *kumatigi* Lansine Diabate (1926-2007) to let me record him reciting two narrational themes that are specific to the Kela version of the Sunjata Epic.



The Kamabolon sanctuary in Kangaba in 1992. Picture by Jan Jansen.

The preparation for this video recording took almost two decades, which is a fact of major relevance to my argument. Since 1989 I have been visiting Kela almost annually, and in 1991 and 1992 I spent a considerable amount of time in the village for my Ph.D. research. In Kela I was always hosted by *kumatigi* Lansine Diabate. During this research, I recorded a performance of the epic, which I published as a co-edited source edition (Jansen et al. 1995). This book became a major point of debate in the village of Kela.

In 1992, at *kumatigi* Lansine Diabate’s own initiative, I made an audio recording of him reciting the Sunjata Epic. Of course, I was very enthusiastic to do so. In 1991 I had asked Lansine to be my teacher and host in Kela in order to be as close as possible to the Sunjata Epic from an ethnographic point of view. This appeared to be a fruitful strategy; I knew from senior colleagues how difficult it was to arrange a recording in Kela.

In 1992 Lansine, who had been a *kumatigi* since 1989, told me that he was responsible for arranging the necessary approvals for recording and told me to follow his instructions. This is a normal reciprocal arrangement in the case of a host-guest relationship and a master-apprentice relationship. The recording itself took place in the local health clinic. Only two *ngoni* players,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Historian Seydou Camara, a now retired researcher at the Institut des Sciences Humaines in Bamako and a member of the team that recorded the epic in Kela in 1979 and published it much later (Ly-Tall et al. 1987), reports having had similar experiences (personal communications 1991-2011).

<sup>5</sup> Lansine’s younger brother, Sidiki Diabate (or “Super”), and his son, Brehman.

who accompanied Lansine, were present aside from Lansine and myself. Although at least some members of Lansine's family must have known about the recording, Lansine forbade me to refer to it in public. Moreover, I had to promise never to show the recording to Malians. Clearly, the recording was a delicate topic.

In 1995, after I had sent my publication of the epic to the Diabate families in Kela, a dispute arose. Lansine was accused of having sold the family secrets. He was also accused of claiming rights over the Sunjata text by putting his picture on the back cover of the book, even though it was communal property; of having falsely informed his guest (me) with regard to appropriate behavior; and of receiving 450,000 CFA francs (at the time equivalent to 4,500 French francs, now approximately 700 euros) from me every month into a bank account in Bamako. The book itself did not matter to the Diabate families; that was just paperwork for outsiders with bad memories. Remarkably, the Diabate continued to give my work and research their blessing. It has become clear to me that the Diabate intended to intensify their brotherly rivalry with Lansine, as brotherly rivalry is a *structural* characteristic of settlement strategies in this area and *not* a matter of personal animosity (Jansen 1996). When I visited Kela in April 1996, it took me weeks of negotiation and several public statements before El Haji Bala (also known as Kelabala, 1919-1997), the most prestigious Diabate of his generation, decided that the whole issue should be buried.<sup>6</sup>

In my opinion, the dispute between Lansine and his brothers was a process of retrospectively adapting the prestige of the recording. People who are accused of forgetting certain groups may feel guilty or ashamed and blame themselves for having been ignorant and insensitive to local customs. It may indeed be possible that people, researchers or others, overlook the importance of certain social rules. However, I believe that the "forgotten group" is often constructed, deliberately and *a posteriori*, in order to challenge a person; it may spontaneously come into existence as an expression of changed social relationships.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The recordings were a public scandal. In 1996 I met an American Peace Corps volunteer from a nearby village whom I told about my research. To my astonishment he replied: "Aha, so you are the guy who stole the secrets of the people of Kela." It had become a widespread rumor!

<sup>7</sup> The following two examples illustrate the diplomatic strength of the forgotten group with regard to recordings of the Sunjata Epic recited by the griots from Kela. The first example is of the first recording of the Sunjata Epic that resulted in a book (Ly-Tall et al. 1987). The authors of this book were accused *a posteriori* of having forgotten to ask the right people for permission to record the epic (personal communication with Seydou Camara; cf. note 4). The second example is of a film team from Mali's national television broadcaster, ORTM, which suffered a similar fate to that of the aforementioned authors. The team had permission to record the 1997 Kamabolon ceremony. In the weeks before the ceremony—and even during the ceremony itself—groups continuously presented themselves to grant their approval of the recording, while in reality they merely added restrictions to the recording of the performance when visiting the film team. A month before the ceremony the team had full permission, but at the end they returned to Bamako with empty tapes. A performance like that of the Sunjata Epic during the Kamabolon ceremony is such an important event that almost everyone feels responsible for it; the closer the day of the ceremony comes, the more people feel responsible. Therefore, people come and claim that their approval of the performance and its recording should be requested. In my case of the 1992 recording, the recitation for a scholarly text edition was not prestigious at the moment of recording itself, but the publication in the form of a book transformed the recording into something prestigious. Moreover, the next Kamabolon ceremony was approaching, which was to be held in 1995; the last one had been held in 1989. An increase in the number of groups that claim to have the right of approving the performance is a direct result of this increase in prestige.

Of course, one may argue that Lansine and I were opportunistic or that we had misunderstood the local rules and failed to ask the appropriate “owners” of the Sunjata Epic permission to record the performance. However, such owners are impossible to locate in space and time: a performance is a social event and its prestige as a communal property is related to the *dynamic* social context in which it is performed. The discussion of whom to ask and who grants permission for recording a performance is very dynamic, stretching from before the recording until years after.

I think that many scholars have faced similar situations, irrespective of whom they asked for permission to record. After a while others want to be incorporated in the result of the recording, as publication turns a modest event—an induced performance—into something prestigious. The more prestigious the social context of the performance, the fewer people are allowed to perform and the more people claim that they should have been given the opportunity to grant their approval.

### **The Setting of the 2007 Performance**

Much has changed since this dispute about my text edition, which took place between 1995 and 1997 in Kela; people have access to new mass media and the inhabitants of Kela have hosted dozens of scholars and students. Moreover, the Diabate from Kela have gone on international tours and have often appeared on Malian television, with their CDs having been distributed all over the world.

In addition, a major aspect of my fieldwork setting changed. Not only had I proven to be an annual visitor for two decades, which is highly appreciated, but I had also become part of the Diabate family network. In 2005 Nienke Muurling, currently a Dutch Ph.D. student under my supervision, married Boubacar Diabate, son of El Haji Yamudu, El Haji Bala’s younger brother. This marriage has placed me in a sort of transnational in-law position as the Kela people know Nienke as *my* student, while they do not know her family.

My social relationship with the Kela people changed, but so did my academic status as a Sunjata researcher. In the previous decades more than once a European filmmaker had proposed making a video recording of the Sunjata Epic. I always dismissed such proposals for two reasons. First, I had never forgotten the dispute that was triggered by my 1992 audio recording; I did not want to be involved in such a delicate issue again. Second, I believed that a Sunjata Epic recitation would be a visually unattractive event. I came to this conclusion based on my observations of Sunjata performances, which consist of a *kumatigi*, who makes hardly any gestures while reciting the epic, supported by two *ngoni* players, who sit on the ground. However, in 2006 I agreed to participate in Daniela Merolla’s *Verba Africana* project on oral traditions and new technologies. This meant that I had to put the idea of filming the Sunjata Epic explicitly on my research agenda.

The reason I accepted the challenge of joining the *Verba Africana* project was related to the fact that so much had changed since the mid-nineties. This time I sought permission through my “academic son-in-law,” Boubacar Diabate, who is a member of the kin group that had argued most with *kumatigi* Lansine Diabate during the 1995 dispute. In the fall of 2006, during a visit



with Boubacar and Nienke in Soest (the Netherlands), I explained my case to Boubacar, who was about to leave for Mali for a visit to his family. I wanted Boubacar to ask permission to film Lansine reciting two narrational themes from the Sunjata Epic that are specific to the Kela version: the story about the Diabate's ancestor, Kalajula Sangoyi, and the story about the Diawara's ancestor, Sitafata. Some weeks after his return to Mali, Boubacar informed me that I was granted permission. However, I was skeptical and expected a discussion to arise about this topic upon my arrival in Kela. As a result, I had planned to visit the village for only one night and expected to actually record the performance only in 2008 or later, if at all.

In January 2007, I arrived on a Saturday at 3:30 p.m. in Kela. After a warm but quick welcome I was instructed to wash myself up quickly and prepare my camera for the recording. I could not believe my ears. After my bath, I was accompanied to the compound of the lineage chief where all the senior Diabate members were seated on chairs; musicians and younger Diabate members were seated on mats, ready to perform.<sup>8</sup> Now, I could not believe my eyes either.

### **A Silent Man at the 2007 Performance Setting: More Than a Small Detail**

I was already seated and ready to start filming, when I saw Fantamadi Diabate enter the scene and sit down on a chair right behind Lansine, who did not himself notice Fantamadi's entrance. In retrospect, I think I made a wise decision. I stopped the camera and walked over to Fantamadi to greet him.

Greeting Fantamadi was a strategic choice. Lansine and Fantamadi do not like each other, even though they are members of the same patrilineage. Lansine's lineage lives in one compound, but Fantamadi lives separately from them.<sup>9</sup> Although he hardly ever visited Lansine's compound, over the years I had learned to know Fantamadi as a gifted and often consulted diplomat (for details, see Chapter 2 in Jansen 2000), who often operated jointly, and in perfect harmony, with Lansine during diplomatic missions *outside* Kela.<sup>10</sup> I took this all into account when I decided to greet Fantamadi.

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<sup>8</sup> I agree with Nienke Muurling's suggestion (by personal email, October 2, 2008) that the role of kinship in the process of getting permission to record should be emphasized. El Haji Yamudu Diabate's first wife, Setu Diabate, is a classificatory sister of Lansine, which makes him Boubacar's "mother's brother." In this region, the relationship "sister's son—mother's brother" is a classic format for peaceful negotiations and receiving acceptance from the mother's brother. For instance, as Nienke and Boubacar once told me, in 2004 Lansine refused to give up his central role in the septennial Kamabolon ceremony until it was demanded in public by Boubacar's older brother Seydou (also known as Yaba); a man cannot refuse something to his sister's son.

<sup>9</sup> In 1993 Fantamadi had severely criticized me—in private—for inviting five Kela griots to the Netherlands. He argued that I should have invited other people, namely his daughter Amy Diabate and her husband, Sidiki Kouyate, because I had worked with them in 1988-1989 on my M.A. research. In 1991 Fantamadi had also suggested I make a recording with him, but when I asked my host Lansine for permission to do so, the latter did not approve.

<sup>10</sup> The Diabate belong to an endogamous status category called *jeliw* (better known in French as *griots*). In West African Sudan, these people are often employed as diplomats in service of other non-*jeliw*, the large majority. For a detailed description of *jeliw*, see Jansen 2000.

After this short break, the recording started and Lansine recited the narrational themes I had requested. From a literary point of view his words were less eloquent compared to his performance of these narrational themes in 1992. I assumed this difference was a result of Lansine getting older: in 2004 Seydu Diabate had already replaced Lansine in the Kamabolon ceremony,<sup>11</sup> and after Lansine’s death in June 2007 Seydu succeeded Lansine as *kumatigi*. Moreover, I think it is difficult for a *kumatigi* to start reciting the Sunjata Epic somewhere in the middle on command. However, the recording itself (available in the enhanced publication of Jansen 2010) took place in a relaxed atmosphere, which shows that both Lansine and the other elder men were pleased with the performance.

Nevertheless, there was one exception to this overall positive mood: Fantamadi. To my surprise,<sup>12</sup> Fantamadi behaved as though he was uninterested, even unappreciative, of the performance. For instance, he ate peanuts, ordered water, yawned, picked his nose, and smeared his nasal mucus on the wall. When I watched the recording with Boubacar Diabate back in Holland, he also immediately noticed and commented on Fantamadi’s behavior. Why did Fantamadi behave that way? Both Boubacar and I believe that Fantamadi’s behavior is related to the fact that I made a video recording of the performance instead of an audio recording as I had done previously. Had he realized this, he would have probably found a more subtle way of demonstrating his disapproval.

But Fantamadi would definitely have shown his disapproval publicly! It seems to me that Fantamadi found his behavior necessary because of his position in relation to the group of elder men who attended the performance. Fantamadi’s behavior was a perfect demonstration of the potentially “forgotten group.” In order to understand this point of view one has to be aware of the social dynamics involved in gaining approval from the senior Diabate in Kela to record a performance of the Sunjata Epic. In view of the fact that Lansine himself was the compound chief, his permission automatically implied that all his brothers had given their permission as well. This permission could never have been granted by younger brothers within the same patrilineage, as a junior will always defer to a senior.

However, with the death of Lansine—who was in good health in January 2007 but died in June 2007—a new situation *may* arise in the future, and the men from Lansine’s patrilineage *may* claim that their permission had never been granted; they will present themselves as a “forgotten group.” Yet it is tricky and potentially harmful for them to make such a claim unanimously, as such a claim would be against me, a respected long-term friend of the compound. Therefore, they need a relative from whom they can distance themselves in case their claim against me is not supported by the other Diabate family members in Kela. In short, they need a person like Fantamadi, who is one of the oldest members of the patrilineage but lives outside the compound. Fantamadi’s social position allowed him to express his disapproval *only* without saying so in actual words, and as a result diplomatic liberties were granted to him for possible future negotiation. This reminds me of something Lansine Diabate once said (Jansen et al. 1995:34): “[ . . . ] *mògò kumabali ye hòròn di; n’i kumara, i bara i yèrè dòn jònya rò,*” which can be

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<sup>11</sup> The nocturnal recital in the Kamabolon ceremony requires a person to be in top condition physically: he has to speak, almost non-stop, for about eight hours.

<sup>12</sup> I noticed Fantamadi’s behavior only when I watched the recording back in Holland.

translated as: “A person who does not speak is free; a person who does speak just put himself in a condition of slavery [to his promise].”

### Towards an Attitude of Copy Debts<sup>13</sup>

When I present my recording from 2007 at conferences, I am often asked whether my choices have been ethical. Should I not have asked Fantamadi for permission, given that I explicitly argue that his permission was overlooked? My reply to these concerns is that I refuse to impose legalistic concepts such as *property*, *ownership*, and *individuality* on the Diabate from Kela. I argue that if Fantamadi had not been there, another person would have represented the “forgotten group” since this is a structural factor in any “performance of ownership.” This is the way the Diabate from Kela preserve their status as the authoritative owners of the Sunjata Epic. Moreover, I am disinclined to come to a formal agreement with the community with regard to ownership, as defining a community excludes other present and future forgotten title-owners.

However, this anti-legalistic argument does not explicitly justify the choices I made in this process. I seek instead to justify my choices by following local, culturally defined ideas about ownership. Terms for *inalienable* ownership do exist in this area but only in a limited number of cases.<sup>14</sup> For instance, you can say in Bambara/Bamanakan<sup>15</sup> “I own my arm/I have my arm” (*Bolo bè n bolo*)<sup>16</sup> or “I have three sons” (*Denkè saba bè n bolo*). Similar constructions are possible with the postposition *kun* (instead of *bolo*). However, the use of the verb “owning/having” with regard to possession often appears to be highly problematic. Let me illustrate this with a standard discussion that I love to initiate. I ask someone how many cows he owns (*Misi joli b'i bolo?*). When the person replies that he owns/has X cows, I suggest selling them and using the money for an investment. At this point people start to smile and explain to me that it is impossible to sell cows because their ownership is embedded in kinship networks. In addition, the usufruct of the cow depends both on the social position of the “owner” in relation to the person who may need the cow and also on the age of the cow—old cows can be consumed at marriage ceremonies and funerals; younger cows can be used for breeding. People have assured me that my question, by using *bolo*, is sound, but they explain that one should know that “owning/having cows” does not mean legal ownership, only a limited economic ownership.

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<sup>13</sup> When presenting this case to a French-speaking audience, I find it more suitable to replace the French concept *droits d'auteur* with *dettes du médiateur*.

<sup>14</sup> Here I follow ideas and explanations of Charles Bird in his Bamanakan language course for Peace Corps volunteers (Bird et al. 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Here I follow standard Bamanakan (“Bambara”) orthography. The people of Kela speak Maninkakan (“Malinke”), which is linguistically and conceptually closely related to Bamanakan. As Bamanakan is Mali’s *lingua franca*, it has a well developed orthography.

<sup>16</sup> *Bolo* means both “arm” and the postposition “with.” (As a linguistics term, a “postposition” is an adposition that occurs after its complement, just like the preposition “in” or “at” is an adposition that occurs before its complement.)

However, terms such as *bolo* and *kun* are rarely used. Rather than using expressions that refer to ownership, people use expressions that refer to responsibilities, such as *-tigi* (“a person who is possessing, responsible for, or mastering something”). For instance, both Malians and scholars translate *kumatigi* as *maître de la parole* (“Master of the Word”), but a literal translation would be *responsable pour la parole* (“responsible for the Word”). Thinking in terms of *-tigi* is the rule: someone riding a bicycle is called a *nègèsotigi*, which literally means “responsible for the bicycle”; someone selling containers of cold water is a *jitigi*: you cannot know whether the person riding the bicycle or the seller of the water (*ji*) is the true owner. When asked about ownership, people either present themselves as *-tigi* or say that they are “guarding” (*maara*) an object for someone. Moreover, if you point out to them that they actually possess something, they will reply that this is because of or “thanks to” another person, using the postposition *kosòn*.

The idea of not owning something is related to economic principles according to which it is bad to have something, since this is always at the expense of another (Shipton 1995). I have observed that according to these principles people also tend to borrow money from poorer people in order to lend it to richer people, thus fabricating networks of social capital (cf. Bradburd 1996:144 on the shah of Persia) in which the richest person has the largest debt. It is noteworthy that in my research area the term *juru* is never translated as *dette* (“debt”), but as *credit*.

I plan to present my publication of the 2007 recording<sup>17</sup> to the Diabate of Kela as well as deal with future negotiations related to this publication in accordance with these principles. I intend to emphasize that I have a debt to the Diabate of Kela, that is, I have taken something in credit from them. I will stress that any success in my research is thanks to them. I cannot predict what this will mean for the financial aspects of my relationship with them. Nor can I foresee whether this approach will avoid any sort of dispute. However, I am convinced it is better to discuss these issues according to the local conceptual framework rather than to speak in *tubabukan* (literally meaning “the white man’s language,” referring to French), a language full of concepts that I refuse to impose upon them.

Although ethnographically well grounded, my argument has its flaws. In science it is, of course, unacceptable to generalize on the basis of a single case, even when the case regards West Africa’s most authoritative performers of the Sunjata Epic. Nevertheless, I think that my case can be useful in challenging the dominant discourse, which conceptualizes ownership of oral and intangible heritages in terms of rights. My case, which thinks of ownership in terms of debts, argues that it is necessary to take cultural norms and values into account and to search for alternatives to legally defined copyrights in order to express our ongoing accountability to the performers of a recording, especially in an age of web democracy and constantly-developing new media for archiving and representing oral tradition.

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## **Instrument Teaching in the Context of Oral Tradition: A Field Study from Bolu, Turkey**

**Nesrin Kalyoncu and Cemal Özata**

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In almost all industrial and post-industrial societies of the modern age as well as in a majority of developing countries, musical-cultural accumulation is documented via writing, musical notation, and similar audio-visual tools to achieve transmission with minimum information loss. As a consequence of the formation of written culture and widespread use of musical notation, musical works could then be registered on permanent documents to enable transmission not only to the immediately following generations but also to many generations over future centuries. The use of writing and the consequential transmission of music via writing, however, are comparatively new yet noteworthy developments in the long history of humankind.

The earliest traces of using symbols or writing in music can be seen in the musical cultures of “ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, and Greece” (Michels 2001:159).<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, “music writing with a notation system” (Rösing 1997:79) and its written transmission is a practice that gained popularity amidst European culture, though it was not so widespread among other global musical cultures. Western notation started with letters and neumes, but it then became more systematized when the ninth-century Dasia Notation gained prominence through the spread of the printing press and then underwent several evolutionary steps up through the sixteenth century. It reached its peak use in the twentieth century, when it was then renewed and reused by New Music composers or abandoned completely by other composers. Still, this traditional European notation system bears remarkable responsibility for the transmission of music culture from one generation to the next.

The traditional European notation system has been employed to register not only the musical background of western cultures, but also a variety of regions’ traditional, artistic, and contemporary musics worldwide.<sup>3</sup> Within the context of attempts to transmit the musical cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the essay that follows is based on Özata 2007.

<sup>2</sup> English translations in this article that are from German- or Turkish-language sources have been made by Nesrin Kalyoncu.

<sup>3</sup> However, as can be seen in Bela Bartók’s (1881-1945) Turkish Folk Music transcriptions, the application of the traditional European notation system in other music cultures can trigger challenges. For examples, see Bartók and Suchoff 1976.



heritage of humankind to future generations without losing it, “in Amsterdam, Berlin, Bloomington/USA, London, Los Angeles, Paris, and Vienna next to the leading international musical archives the formation of national archives has also been realized” (Simon 1987:139). However, since the Second World War, despite the numerous efforts to register oral notes that were transmitted by the musical creators of several cultures through oral communication, presently only a small portion of musical traditions have been documented, as noted by Simon (*ibid.*).

Oral culture, which varies greatly from written culture, is the way societies create, live, and transmit their cultures through language alone without consulting any literary source but relying instead on social memory. Oral cultural practices were initiated as early as human existence long before the invention of writing; they have left their trace on a great part of human history and persist until the present day via their continuation even after the invention of writing. The global spread and prevalence of written culture has not necessitated humankind to abandon oral culture altogether.

In the societies or social groups where primary oral culture is dominant,<sup>4</sup> cultural context is transferred to the future through verbal/oral transmission that corresponds to transmitting via human memory alone without using any registering tool. In the formation and sustainment of oral culture, the contributions of people with high levels of attentiveness, perception, permanent memory, cognitive ordering, and interpretation are substantially remarkable. In oral culture, knowledge and experiences are transmitted to future generations by wise elders, and, as noted by Ong and Batuş (Ong 2003:57; Batuş 2004:821), since information is priceless and hard-to-get, there was traditionally a high degree of respect shown towards those who were professional in preserving information, familiar with the past and capable of narrating such tales. In oral transmission of music, too, experienced musicians with strong memories and capacious experience of several social happenings/events play vital roles as resources. The repetitious practices of these musicians enable the integration of music with social memory by keeping the music of society on the agenda with all its liveliness; they also transmit music to future generations by preserving its stylistic essence. Musical products are transmitted in a continuously transformational process by which basic stylistic structure is conserved but a “variant formation” (Elscheková 1998:231) is repeatedly experienced; this process is also shaped by personal creativity.

In oral cultures learning and teaching bear a vital significance that is related to the fact that, although in written culture the acquisition of knowledge is possible via documents, in oral culture the demise of the knowledge bearer also permanently terminates the availability of knowledge. That reality indeed points to one of the weakest aspects of oral culture. Edmonson

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<sup>4</sup> In oral culture research, the cultures that have no linkage to writing or the press and establish communication through spoken language alone are described as “primary oral cultures” (Ong 2003:23; Schlaffer 1986:7). Such spoken language encompasses some use of body language as well, “although gestures mean a lot of things, sign languages are developed to replace speech and even if they are employed by natural born deaf people they are still bound to verbal communication systems” (Ong 2003:19). Additionally, in a majority of modern societies, the fruits of advanced technology—including the telephone, radio, television, and other electronic tools—because of their oral qualities as well as their production and function, themselves turn into spoken language soon after the transmission from script and text, and are described as “secondary oral culture” (Ong 2003:23; Schlaffer 1986:7).

reports that in the course of history only 106 out of thousands of spoken languages were able to survive through literary texts, and most have never used writing at all (cited in Ong 2003:19). In addition to the languages that have vanished in the course of time, a remarkable number of orally produced traditions, myths, stories, and musical works also face the danger of extinction due to the failure of registering. Therefore, in oral culture, teaching and learning act almost like the rings in a chain or, in Behar's words, perform the mission of "*harç*" ("mortar," 2006:13). Thus, in oral culture, transmission and learning-teaching are two remarkably connected dimensions that depend upon and complement one another.

Learning that takes place within the context of oral culture can be evaluated within the scope of social learning. Social learning takes place in daily life unconsciously or consciously through interaction with others. In social learning, other people are taken as models, observed, and their behaviors mimicked. Acknowledged for his social-cognitive learning theory, Bandura specifically emphasizes that learning through observation and learning through imitation are not two divergent concepts that can be used in lieu of each other. According to Bandura, learning through observation is "not merely imitating others' acts but gaining knowledge by cognitively comprehending the events taking place in the world" (cited in Senemoğlu 2002:223) and is achieved through the four basic steps of paying attention, keeping in mind, putting into action, and motivation (Senemoğlu 2002:231).

Learning and teaching music within the framework of oral culture and tradition are perhaps most apparently relevant to vocal types, such as folk songs. However, in oral culture, learning music does not merely comprise verbal elements; it also integrates the instrument-teaching process that has no written method but relies on memory as well as the interrelated forms and behaviors of performance. Music teaching in this type of culture usually takes place through the master-apprentice relationship that is one of the basic exemplifications of social learning. Any individual in the process of learning acquires the necessary qualities to play a certain instrument, sing in certain styles, or learn the profession of musicianship and similar attributes by modeling senior musicians and observing, internalizing, and imitating their practices. As demonstrated by Ong's Yugoslav minstrel sample (2003:77), individuals learn by repeatedly listening for months or even years to the songs in standard pattern. Hebdige's researches on West Africa (2003), Rutledge's studies on Japan (cited in Ong 2003:81), and Krüger's researches on Spain (2001) have provided extensive data on music learning-teaching within the context of oral tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Turkish people are also among the societies that have traditionally taught music via oral tradition, and this practice dates back to the Central Asian period. For instance, Uçan notes "that during the age of pre-Huns, customs played a vital role in music learning and teaching, the prospective *şaman* ["shaman"] was trained by an experienced, wise, and respected senior master" (2000:19). Another example is the traditional Turkish military music *mehter* ("janissary band"), "which used the oral transmission tradition" (Popescu-Judet 1998:67). Teaching via the master-apprentice relationship in oral tradition is typical within Turkish folk music, too, particularly in *aşıklık geleneği* ("minstrel tradition"). Özarlan describes the stages that a

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<sup>5</sup> The creation and transmission of music within the context of oral tradition is a common practice throughout all countries, particularly in connection with "Africa, Oceania, Asia, North American Indians, Latin America, and Eskimos" (Oesch 1987:255).

prospective *aşık* (“minstrel”) has to complete by acquiring knowledge through the traditional method in order to rise from apprenticeship to mastership as “the training process of the minstrel” (2001:107), and he also reports that this was an informal and random training structured mainly upon traditional practices such as observation, admonition, and advice.

Another area that has received comprehensive analysis is traditional Turkish art music (also known as Ottoman/Turkish classical music). Behar, a celebrated researcher in this area, points out that teaching of this music style was based on *meşk* (“practice” or “exercise”), and it was only after the sixteenth century that this practice could be documented. Behar describes the term *meşk*, which is reminiscent of calligraphy, as (2006:16):

müziğin yazıya dökülmediği, notaya alınmadığı ve yazılı kağıttan öğrenilip icra edilmediği, icad edilmiş bazı nota yazılarının ise kullanılmayıp dışlandığı bir müzik dünyasının eğitim yöntemidir.

the teaching method of a music tradition where music is not penned, noted, learned, or played from a written document, and where some notes are not used or even discarded completely.

It is possible to learn the music pieces by taking private lessons from music masters, listening, observing, and imitating their singing and playing practices. *Meşk* is also more than a teaching method, as noted by Behar (2006:10):

Dört buçuk yüzyıllık Osmanlı/Türk musiki geleneğinde meşk sayısız müzisyen kuşakları tarafından bir öğretim yöntemi olarak benimsenmekle kalmamış, aynı zamanda ses ve saz eserleri repertuarının da yüzyıllar boyu kuşaktan kuşağa intikalini sağlamıştır.

In the four and a half centuries of Ottoman/Turkish musical tradition *meşk* has not only been adopted as a teaching method by a good number of musicians, but has also enabled the transmission of vocal and instrumental repertory to the next generations for centuries ahead.

Parallel to the rest of the world, the replacement of oral culture with written culture has also affected music teaching in Turkey, particularly after the beginning of the twentieth century. In modern Turkey, formal music education is provided in public schools, music schools, and private music schools under a plan within the framework of written culture. Yet in different regions of the country, informal teaching and learning of music is still practiced in a variety of forms among local people. The traditional music genres that constitute a remarkable share of national music culture are learned and taught via oral tradition amidst amateur music bands or traditional musicians within a master-apprentice relationship and interaction. This essay aims to analyze the way instruments are taught by means of such oral tradition in the Turkish city of Bolu and the surrounding province’s central villages.

## Research Method

The working group for this field study consists of instrument trainers and learners performing oral traditions in Bolu and the nearby villages. Bolu is located in the western Black Sea Region of Turkey and is situated between the two largest cities of Turkey, İstanbul and Ankara; Bolu has vivid connections with these metropolises. According to the year 2000 General Census results, the total population of Bolu province is 270,657. 26.8% of this population dwells in the city of Bolu itself and 51% in the villages (Ulusoy 2003:2). Ulusoy explains that population in the Bolu villages is being pushed to cities because of unfavorable living conditions in the outskirts.

In the city of Bolu—as is true for many other cities as well—customs and traditions, authentic garments, rituals, traditional music and dances, and many other unique features have now been assigned a role of little importance within the modern way of life. Bolu's folkloric culture has been reshaped with its own dynamics parallel to the changes in external conditions, though attempts have been made to preserve it by some local institutions such as the Cultural Center and Public Education Center. Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University, founded in 1992, has also played a role in reshaping the urban socio-economic structure of the city as well as its socio-cultural dimensions.

One of the leading restrictions on current research has been the fact that the above-mentioned working group lacked an inventory or any kind of registration. In such cases, at the onset of research, it is generally impossible to locate the working group. Accordingly, we employed a snowball or chain sampling methodology since it was possible to reach the trainers only by passing through several stages. The first step was to make contact with traditional musicians in central Bolu and the surrounding districts and with Public Education Centers. These interviews revealed that musicians teaching in the traditional style were mostly residents in and around the city of Bolu, and we were able to contact two individuals practicing oral traditional instrument teaching. Guided by these two trainers, we had by January 2006 gradually formed a working group consisting of 15 trainers and 14 learners. The 14 trainers whose teaching methods can be placed within the context of primary oral culture are the main focus of the present article.

Research data related to this field study have been compiled through empirical methods. In order to detect the basic characteristics of the teaching process, 15 lessons were personally attended, observed, and video recorded. Additionally, narrative face-to-face interviews were conducted with trainers and learners. The data obtained have been analyzed via a qualitative content analysis method and the qualities of the process with respect to trainer, learner, setting, teaching frequency, objectives, taught instruments, taught musical genres, and employed learning-teaching methods were all described. The frequency of some findings has also been quantitatively displayed.

## Results

### *Trainer*

In Bolu, the practitioners of instrument teaching within the oral tradition mostly reside in villages.<sup>6</sup> Four trainers live in Bolu itself, but three trainers dwell in Bahçeköy village nine kilometers away from Bolu; one trainer resides in Çaygökpınar village eleven kilometers away; one trainer lives in Demirciler village seven kilometers away; two trainers inhabit Ovadüzü village four kilometers away; and three trainers reside in Yenigeçitveren village seven kilometers away. These villages are basically situated near the D-100 Highway and have the transportation means—though not direct and periodic—to reach the city of Bolu.

The instrument trainers identified during our research process are all men. Gender-based roles widespread in Turkish society are clearly visible in this traditional teaching process as well. The age of the trainers—as seen in Figure 1—varies between 26 and 70. Around one third of trainers are above 50, but most of them are near 30.

Fig. 1: Information about Instrument Trainers

Trainer Name	Age	Residential Area	Profession	Instrument
Cevat BÜYÜKKIRLI	56	Bolu	Retired Class Teacher	<i>Kabak Kemane</i>
Yılmaz ERDOĞAN	45		Musician	<i>Bağlama</i>
Engin TOKUŞ	36		Self-employed	<i>Darbuka</i>
Yılmaz ARAÇ	32		Musician	<i>Davul</i>
Selahattin YAMAN	70	Bahçeköy	Musician	Violin
İmdat DEMİRKOL	27		Musician	Clarinet
Tuncay ADA	27		Musician	<i>Darbuka</i>
Mustafa KUŞ	40	Çaygökpınar	Worker	<i>Bağlama</i>
Tahsin CAN	59	Demirciler	Farmer	<i>Bağlama</i>
Tahsin ARAÇ	56	Ovadüzü	Musician	Violin
Ahmet ARAÇ	26		Musician	<i>Darbuka</i>
Nail TOKUŞ	39	Yenigeçitveren	Musician	Violin
Yetiş TOKUŞ	35		Musician	<i>Davul</i>
Hacı TOKUŞ	33		Musician	Violin

Most of the trainers are professional musicians and some are blood relatives. They have learned the profession not within a formal education system but through a traditional master-apprentice relationship. These musicians play in local celebrations such as weddings, engagements, or circumcision feasts, and they usually work in the city center. Aside from this general profile, one of the trainers is a farmer, one is a worker, one is self-employed, and one is a

<sup>6</sup> 128 villages are registered under Bolu Central District (Bolu Valiliği 2006).

retired school teacher. The last trainer is the only one who acquired his profession (teacher) through a formal educational process.



Fig. 2: Violin trainer and learner from *Ovadüzü* village. Photo by Cemal Özata.

The monthly incomes of instrument trainers vary between 250-1000 Turkish lira. None of them has additional income beyond what is earned through his profession. They charge no fee for their music/instrument teaching either, which clearly indicates their commitment to transmitting this tradition to future generations.

There is diversity in the educational levels of the instrument trainers: half of them are primary education graduates; only one of the trainers is a secondary education graduate; two of the trainers failed to complete their primary and secondary education; and four trainers are illiterate with no educational background at all. In addition, none of the trainers can read any musical notes, including those used by the traditional European notation system. These features make it impossible for the sampling group to practice their music/instrument teaching within the methods of written culture.

*Learner*

In Bolu, 14 traditional trainers are engaged in helping 40 children and youngsters to gain musical instrument playing ability within the context of oral tradition. Most of the learners are either family members of trainers or relatives or neighbors. Youngsters try to learn playing a musical instrument or performing music from their fathers, elder brothers, or other senior relatives; hence, they act as a bridge that transmits the accumulation of musical culture and its practices into the future.

Most of the 14 students chosen and observed as the sample group are males like the trainers themselves; only two learners are female. Both of the girls live in the city of Bolu itself and thus help to show the cultural difference between rural and urban settings. The age range of the sampled students is 7-18. Only two students are still of childhood age while the rest are in the stages of puberty, corresponding to ages 11-18. Almost all learners are at the primary education level and two are high school students. It has also been detected that, despite being of school age, one of the learners—due to socio-economic reasons—is not attending school.



Fig. 3: *Darbuka* trainer and learner from Bahçeköy village. Photo by Cemal Özata.

### *Learning-Teaching Setting*

In Bolu, a high number of trainers reported that they had no difficulty in finding a setting and believed that the characteristics of any specialized kind of setting were not effective in the learning-teaching process. The most frequently used settings are houses and open areas such as yards, village squares, or fields. In addition to such places where the trainer and learner establish direct communication, other places where wedding and circumcision ceremonies are held are also used to learn through observation. Weddings provide an especially favorable setting for students to watch and learn. It is usually the trainer who determines the educational setting and students' preferences are mostly ignored. The main determinants in the choice of setting are usually related to weather conditions and a desire for silence and isolation so as not to disturb others.

When the trainers were asked to list the characteristics of their ideal teaching setting, most expressed their desire to teach in peaceful, sound-isolated places without others nearby. Additionally, some trainers expressed their preference to teach in a naturally beautiful and clean setting that motivated students to practice; such an ideal would seem to be related to desires connected with one's inner expectations and feelings of beauty.

### *Teaching Frequency*

One of the differentiating factors between traditional and formal educational instrument teaching is the absence of a definite schedule or plan. In Bolu the frequency of lessons varies with respect to each trainer and is determined by several factors. Half of the trainers teach during their own free time and students' free time, while the rest try following a regular schedule. These trainers attempt to practice with their apprentices at least twice per week. Additionally, all but three trainers stated that they feel no discomfort regarding the current frequency of lessons, yet they also believed in the necessity of practicing together each day.

During interviews, trainers were asked to list the factors that determined the frequency of lessons. The most common responses obtained were: (a) school time of students; (b) free time of both the trainer and student; (c) time intervals that prevent forgetting previously learned knowledge; (d) trainer's work; and (e) trainer's other pursuits.

### *Learning-Teaching Objectives*

In Bolu, instrument teaching in the oral tradition is basically shaped by a single objective: to gain a profession. Since a majority of people maintaining such teaching traditions are musicians, passing on this profession matters just as much as continuing the family bloodline. In addition to gaining a profession, the other objectives listed by trainers are as follows: spreading instrument playing, popularizing the playing of the instrument, and preserving the master-apprentice relationship. Parallel to their trainers, most learners stated that they aim to professionalize their instrument playing. It has been noted that in the city center few children play music out of sheer fun and curiosity.





Fig. 4 and 5: Violin trainer and learner from Bahçeköy village. Photos by Cemal Özata.

### *The Instruments That Are Taught*

The violin comes first among the instruments that are taught. One noteworthy point in the playing and teaching of the violin is that, as opposed to common practice, it is not played by leaning the instrument on the neck. Instead, masters and apprentices play the violin by placing it on their knees like a *Byzantine lyra* or *kemane* (“kamancheh”) while sitting (see Figures 2 and 4). When standing, they hold the violin as they would a *Karadeniz kemençesi* (“kemenche of the eastern Black Sea Region in Turkey”) without leaning or placing the instrument over the body.



Fig. 6: *Bağlama* trainer and learner from Demirciler village. Photo by Cemal Özata.

Other frequently taught instruments are a Turkish folk music instrument, the *bağlama*<sup>7</sup> (see Figure 5), and a percussion instrument, the *darbuka* (“goblet drum,” see Figure 3). On the other hand, the *davul* (“double-headed drum,” see Figure 6), *kabak kemane*,<sup>8</sup> and clarinet—despite its long history in Bolu music culture—are less commonly taught instruments. The instruments are usually taught without an accompanying instrument; however, in some violin teaching the *darbuka* is used as an accompanying instrument, and in turn the violin has been observed as an accompanying instrument for *darbuka* instruction as well.

<sup>7</sup> The *bağlama* is the most common stringed instrument used for folk music in Turkey. This instrument has a deep round back, like the Western lute and the Middle-Eastern oud, but a much longer neck.

<sup>8</sup> The *kabak kemane* is a bowed Turkish folk music instrument without frets, like the *Azerbaijani kamancheh*.

### *The Music Genres That Are Taught*

The musical pieces practiced during the instrument-teaching process are generally assigned by the trainer, with the trainer's own repertoire serving as the main source of the music being taught. In the learning process, pieces that represent the various genres of Turkish musical culture are taught. The most widespread type is Turkish folk music, within which anonymous folk songs, composed folk songs, and instrumental dance music are the most popular choices. The trained apprentices are usually taught dance music forms, which consist of popular songs for weddings and similar occasions, but the teaching of free-measured, free-rhythm, improvised, and slow-paced folk songs (*uzun hava*) receives less emphasis. The teaching is not restricted to the unique works of Bolu folk music; songs from different regions of Turkey are also favored. In addition to folk music, Arabesque music and traditional Turkish art music pieces are also taught.

The mentioned vocal forms are—regardless of minor deviations—taught instrumentally, and there is no song teaching accompanying the instrument. During the teaching process, there are common variations reflecting the oral context: the melodic and rhythmic structures of pieces go through minor changes and can be performed with different accents, additions, and ornaments in each performance.

### *Learning-Teaching Methods*

In Bolu, instrument teaching within the context of oral tradition is, parallel to the formal educational instrument-teaching processes, conducted through personal lessons with teacher-student interaction at the core. In some cases a third person playing an accompanying instrument is integrated, yet this practice is so uncommon that it has no measurable effect on general tendencies.



Fig. 7 and 8: Clarinet (Bahçeköy) and *davul* (Bolu) learners at the beginning stage. Photos by Cemal Özata.

Three main approaches are widespread in the instrument-teaching process. These approaches can be described as follows:

a) *Co-practicing on a single instrument*: This method is particularly popular when teaching beginners, with the trainer and student performing the targeted skills together. For instance, when instruction is focused on playing the *bağlama*, the child may practice holding the instrument and performing movements with the plectrum in the right hand while the master simultaneously creates sounds by beating on frets with his left hand (see Figure 5). After sufficient practice, the roles are reversed. Similarly, children who start to learn to play the *davul* learn basic beats by playing concurrently with their masters who hold the child's hand in their palms (see Figure 6). With such learning types, there is intense body communication.

b) *Presentation-performance*: This approach can be performed by playing one or two instruments. The trainer first presents the required skill himself and then guides the learner to do the same. Presentation-performance is basically implemented in part-to-whole stages. Learning-teaching activity is alternated until the learner performs the musical behavior at a desired level. In such a form of practice, the student is continuously observing and listening, and an active chain of perceiving, memorizing, and performing is foregrounded (see Figures 2 and 4).

c) *Playing concurrently*: Another common learning style involves objective skills being gained through the concurrent practice and performance by trainer and learner. This approach is generally conducted with students who have already gained the basic skills of instrument holding and sound production techniques and have therefore advanced to a certain stage. The most salient features of this learning type are listening, observing, and mimicking the trainer (see Figure 3).

We also identified several smaller-scale learning-teaching methods: presentation-performance, simultaneous performance, narration, listening, observing, mimicking, and repeating. Presentation-performance and repetition occupy a central position in all courses. It is noteworthy that most of the trainers gave brief verbal explanations but also benefited greatly from making efficient use of body language. During the learning-teaching process, no auxiliary teaching material is used and the whole process relies on memorization.

In the interviews, trainers stated that they usually based their teaching method selection on student-centered factors (see Figure 9). The primary factor determining the method selected by all trainers is the failure of the student to play properly. Several teachers make their selection with respect to the physical capabilities of the children (such as the ability to hold the instrument or use their hands properly), sensory and cognitive abilities (such as observing, perceiving, and memorizing), and also the overall level of their instrument playing. Only one trainer underscored the complexity of the playing technique.

Fig. 9: Factors Affecting the Teaching Method Choice

Factors	f
Failure of the student to play piece properly	14
Initial level of student	2
Ability of student to hold the instrument properly	2
Ability of student to use hands properly	2
Student's lack of familiarity with the piece	2
Difficulty with the student in being able to follow the trainer	2
Student's lack of familiarity with the instrument	1
Physical difficulties faced by student	1
Complexity of playing techniques	1

### Conclusion and Discussion

In the present study, it has been noted that throughout the city of Bolu and the surrounding villages, 14 people are engaged in instrument teaching within the primary oral culture. Instrument teaching is conducted by adult trainers who have no musical literacy but lead their lives as traditional musicians. As exemplified by the Tokuş and Araç families, some of the musicians are from the same family. Likewise, many music learners also have similar backgrounds, often as members of the same families. Therefore, as these students closely observe from a very early age those individuals who are heavily responsible for determining and modeling their social and educational standards, they also have the opportunity to experience the musical atmosphere that permeates their culture. In instrument teaching itself, the prioritized objective is learning-teaching the profession of musicianship, and it is considered possible that this is a reflection of the desire of families to preserve their tradition. In the relevant literature, there are similar findings exemplified by different societies; in the Balkans—Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Greece—and among the Romans of Romania and Valachie (Elscheková 1998:224), or in the tradition of Flamenco teaching (Vounelakos 2009:21), the longevity of the musical tradition is secured by the same families.

A majority of the instrument teachers reside in villages. Although they mostly work in city centers, they are residents of villages and it is believed that this arrangement is related to the restricted socio-economic conditions in villages. Villages are the kind of habitations where written-culture-specific practices and forms of communication are severely limited. Thus, the villages of musicians present favorable settings to preserve and sustain music-teaching practices that are shaped predominantly by oral culture.

In the oral tradition around Bolu, almost all instrument trainers and a great majority of the learners are men. This situation is consistent with the traditionally acknowledged role of women in Islamic culture that places constraints upon the musical activities of women with respect to

certain settings and occasions. We believe—though we have not studied the issue during this particular research—that gender is not a determinant in the teaching of vocal genres. Furthermore, male dominance in the oral traditional teaching of instruments is not unique to Bolu: Simon (1987:137) draws attention to the fact that, in a variety of cultures, musicianship, musical activity, and the playing of certain instruments are all acknowledged to be part of male-specific codes of behavior. Krüger (2001:101) has reported that in oral traditional Flamenco teaching, there is no such gendered attitude as regards *cante* (“song”) and *baile* (“dance”), but on the other hand *toque* (“guitar”) is taught exclusively to boys.

Master trainers coach a total of 40 children and youngsters, almost all of whom are attending formal educational institutions. A majority of the research sample group of 14 students are in the puberty stage. Krüger (2001:101) also reports that in Flamenco culture dance, song, and guitar teaching are more successful during the puberty stage, a time when the human organism is open to faster comprehension and development in various forms and also more easily affected by environmental conditions (Senemoğlu 2002:16). In formal educational processes, this age is considered to be the appropriate time to acquire the required instrumental skills (Gembris 1998:404).

Traditional trainers do not specifically search for a certain setting with predefined qualities appropriate for learning objectives; hence, places already familiar within the participants’ daily lives are also used as teaching settings. In addition, lessons are usually rendered without a plan, and it can reasonably be argued that instrument/music teaching within the context of oral tradition is not regarded as a special event, but as just another daily routine. One of the factors that facilitate the integration of musical performance and teaching activities into daily life is the fact that a good number of instrument trainers are themselves musicians.

It has also been observed that weddings and circumcision ceremonies are sometimes used to conduct teaching. This practice is common in the musical traditions of Turkish people. Ataman (1992:viii) emphasizes that weddings play a prominent role in the living and spreading of local artistic movements while also providing an instructional influence upon folk music culture more generally. From this perspective, it can be suggested that local musicians of Bolu origin have strong ties with the larger tradition.

In Bolu, the most commonly taught instrument within the context of oral tradition is the violin. The other instruments are the *bağlama* and *darbuka*, the most common popular instruments throughout Turkey. The leading position of the violin as the most taught instrument is expected since in the traditional music culture of Bolu violin-*darbuka/davul*, clarinet-violin-*darbuka/davul*, clarinet-*darbuka/davul*, and other bands of similar composition are widespread; however, it is surprising that the number of clarinet trainers is so small. Additionally, the bow contact and holding position for the violin are taught rather unusually compared to European and other national forms of teaching. Such different forms of use that are prevalent among the Tunceli Çemişgezek (Yönetken 1966:102) and Silifke Tahtacı Türkmen groups (Seyhan cited in Parlak 2000:12) are undoubtedly important considerations here. The relevant literature has no explanation accounting for the emergence of such differences, but we believe that the origin of such usage dates back to the historical/traditional playing styles of Turkish instruments. In the musical culture of Anatolian Turks—and other Turkish communities as well—bow instruments have occupied a major position since the Central Asian period. Known as an ancestral

instrument, the *kopuz* (“Kyrgyz komuz”) is also a bow instrument played like the *kamancheh* (Ögel 1987:7, 237), and during the Anatolian period the *kemane* (“Turkish fiddle”) was played on top of the knee and use of the *kamancheh* or *kemen* (the Nomads’ term for the *kemane*) was also quite widespread (Ögel 1987:298). In light of information obtained from Silifke Tahtacı Türkmen groups, it seems that playing the violin on the knee started when the *dirnak kemane* (the local version of the “Classical Kemenche,” as noted by Çolakoğlu 2010:151) players got acquainted with the *gırbız kemani* (“the red violin,” meaning the western violin) (Parlak 2000:12). Based on this deduction, we assume that the holding and playing style of historical Turkish bow instruments may have reflected that of the modern European violin as well.

In Bolu, Turkish folk music pieces reflecting the oral transmission tradition hold a noteworthy place in teaching, a position that is likely related to the fact that the music learning-teaching process is maintained for the most part in villages. However, thus far no close or direct relationships have been determined between socio-cultural context and the music genres that are taught. In addition to Turkish folk music, other music genres that have found a place in rural culture, via mass media in particular, are also being taught. We assume that the attempt to fill the repertoires of trainees with different music genres is an expected result of musicianship training.

The educational level of trainers does not for the most part rise above primary education; there are even some trainers who are illiterate. Therefore, most trainers have limited acquaintance or no acquaintance at all with the learning-teaching process and practices found in formal education institutions. Nevertheless, the instrument trainers possess a teaching-oriented awareness and successful teaching methods that are unique to themselves. Traditional trainers participate in the teaching process quite actively. The short and compact narrations they employ during lessons are related to their abundant use of active and psycho-motor teaching methods. It can also be asserted that the body communication they share with the learner is, compared to the formal music-teaching processes, much stronger. Aside from memorizing, trainers and learners make use of no other auxiliary teaching materials or helpful notes.

Learning instrumental skills most often takes place through the stages of listening-observing, memorizing, and putting into action phases that are consistent with Bandura’s social-cognitive learning stages. Ong (2003:21) also underscores that listening and repeating are among the leading learning methods of apprentices raised in oral cultures. Consequently, a lack of writing, the foregrounding of memory, and progression through the mouth-to-ear, ear-to-memory, memory-to-performance stages (with slight variations) can all be understood as important components of the oral traditional instrument learning-teaching process that takes place in and around the city of Bolu.<sup>9</sup>

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## **Challenges in Comparative Oral Epic**

**John Miles Foley and Chao Gejin**

### **Introduction (by Chao Gejin, November 2012)**

The present paper was composed by the late John Miles Foley and myself more than ten years ago, during the time I held a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Missouri granted by the Ford Foundation. We met frequently on campus, discussing issues covering a wide range of topics, especially oral epic traditions. During these conversations, we recognized the need to write something in response to significant challenges in epic studies that would illustrate the richness and diversity of epic traditions in particular. With these goals in mind, we started to work on this piece together two or three afternoons each week throughout the summer of 2001, sitting side by side, composing paragraph by paragraph, and incorporating examples and scholarship from our respective experiences and backgrounds. We moved forward steadily and eventually fulfilled our plan. A Chinese version of this article appeared in 2003 in a collection of papers focusing especially on Oriental Literature.<sup>1</sup> At the time, it provoked reflections on basic dimensions of epic poetry and, furthermore, facilitated multiple ways of understanding epic, moving beyond a purely Homeric criterion of epic poetry.

At a personal level as well as professional, I highly regard this paper because it reflects both our long-term friendship and our common interests. John made his first trip to China soon after I returned to Beijing. He delivered lectures in our institute, conducted field trips to Inner Mongolia, and visited a number of scholars working on related research. As a result of these early collaborations, his own compositions began to include additional Mongolian examples, such as the singers Choibang and Losor, among others. From then on, he visited China regularly. He was the first speaker to initiate the yearly “IEL International Seminar Series on Epic Studies and Oral Tradition Research,” and he held appointments within the Institute of Ethnic Literature, most notably as chief advisor of the “Center for Oral Tradition Research.”

It was a great misfortune that our newly designed program on oral tradition and the Internet with partners in Missouri, Helsinki, and Beijing was interrupted by John’s unexpected absence. Still, the blueprint of this international program will be followed and fulfilled without a doubt. His cutting-edge thoughts will continue to shed light on our explorations. In Mongolian epic tradition a true Baatar (“hero”) would never truly pass away. John is, by any measure, just such a Baatar, and he, too, shall be with us forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Foley and Chao Gejin 2003.

## An Overview of the Study

In this paper we propose to examine some fundamental issues in comparative oral epic. Our investigation will proceed across four epic traditions widely separated in space and time. Two of them, the Mongolian and South Slavic epic, are or were recently still living and therefore observable by fieldworkers. The other two, the ancient Greek and Old English epic traditions, are preserved only in manuscript form. Although no comparative treatment can ever claim to be exhaustive or universal, we feel that these four witnesses represent considerable diversity and collectively offer a chance to forge a suitably nuanced model for oral epic. We welcome responses from scholars in other fields, especially Africanists, as we all search for ways to understand the international phenomenon of oral epic.<sup>2</sup>

In order to provide a clear path through this complex subject, we propose a five-section structure, with each section keyed by a question that reflects an issue of contemporary importance. Thus the paper will begin by asking “What is a poem in oral epic tradition?” Scholars have argued from many different perspectives about the large-scale organization of oral epic; are the smaller tales integral parts of a single whole, facets of a single gemstone, or simply individual narratives that collectors have assembled into “anthologies” based on a literary model? On a slightly smaller scale, we will then consider the question of “What is a typical scene or theme in oral epic tradition?” The focus here will be on those recurrent passages, such as the arming of a hero or the boast before battle, that epic bards use as “large words” in their tale-telling vocabulary. How are they configured in each tradition and what kinds of flexibility do they show from instance to instance?

From macro-structure we then move to micro-structure. The third section will set the stage by asking “What is a poetic line in oral epic tradition?” This turns out to be a more difficult and open-ended inquiry than it might at first seem; once we leave the narrow sample of Greco-Roman meters, for example, the line-unit draws its definition from features other than syllabic criteria and word-breaks. Additionally, there is the matter of a performed line, a voiced verse-form, as distinguished from the kind of poetic line that we come to know spatially as a creature of the manuscript or printed page. The fourth section will deal with the question of “What is a formula in an oral epic tradition?” It will concentrate on the recurrent phrase, the smallest “word” or unit of utterance in the oral epic poet’s compositional lexicon. Basing our conclusions on the poetic line that is the vehicle for the formula, and working over the four quite different poetic traditions, we aim to show how this smallest increment of poetic structure can vary both within its own tradition and from one tradition to another.

Finally, our fifth section will address what may be the most urgent question of all: “What is the *register* in oral epic poetry?” By posing the query in this way, we mean to ask about both major aspects of the specialized poetic language: its overall structure (from cycle through story-pattern to typical scene to formula) and, crucially, the meaning that each of these structures bears. In this part of the essay we will be summarizing the results of the first four questions and then inquiring into the traditional implications that each one carries. How do we understand one

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<sup>2</sup> See esp. the publication of the Siri Epic from southern India (Honko et al. 1998a and 1998b, with context in Honko 1998) and the comparative digest of articles on the recording and publication of oral epic (Honko 2000).

canto of the Mongolian *Janggar* epic in the context of the whole cycle? What bearing does a boast before battle have on the events to follow in Old English epic? Does Homer's phrase "but come" mean anything beyond what we can establish by reference to a dictionary? In short, what is the *traditional referentiality* of each "word"—from the smallest phrase to the whole performance—in an oral epic tradition?

### Corpora for Analysis and Illustration

We begin by citing the collections of oral epic material to be used for analysis and illustration over the four traditions and the five sections that follow. For Mongolian oral epic we have drawn from the published performances of *Janggar* by the singer Arimpil, as transcribed and edited by D. Taya (1999). Arimpil was himself illiterate; he had no formal education and thus could not learn songs through his own reading. Nonetheless, he was able to perform about twenty cantos, a total of approximately 20,000 lines of orally performed epic. This collection of his works is unique in at least two ways: it was the first collection of the *Janggar* cycle from a single singer in China, the homeland of *Janggar* oral epic, and it is also the only anthology to be published without editorial interference.<sup>3</sup>

How this unusual edition came about is a story in itself. A young girl had read to Arimpil from a highly edited anthology of *Janggar* epic, which consisted of both his own versions and versions by other singers. He was disappointed that the songs had been changed, observing that they weren't his. As a result, he asked D. Taya, his nephew and the only one in the family who had received enough formal education to fulfill his wishes, to transcribe and publish his performances just as he sang them, without any editorial changes.

All in all, Arimpil is the most prominent illiterate *janggar chi* (epic singer) ever recorded in China. Born in 1923 to a family that belonged to the Torgud Tribe, now resident in the Hobagsair Mongolian Autonomous County of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, he enjoyed the privilege of listening to Holbar Bayar, one of the most famous *Janggar* singers, from the age of 7 or 8 years. The majority of Arimpil's repertoire derived from him. Because Arimpil's father believed in Buddhism, he sent Arimpil to a lamasery. But the son was more fond of singing the heroic stories than of reciting Buddhist scripture. Arimpil also had the chance to practice *Janggar* in front of a native audience in his spare time through the 1950s and the early part of the 1960s. After 1980 he was invited to local singing pageants and also had the

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<sup>3</sup> The *Janggar* epic cycle has been regarded as the Oirat peoples' national poetry. It matured in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, in other words, from the time the Oirat peoples moved to the Tian Shan Mountains and the Four Allies of Oirats appeared on the banks of the Volga in 1663. Another epic cycle, shared by both the Tibetan and Mongolian peoples, is the gigantic Gesar (Mongolians call it Geser) epic tradition, with a large number of cantos and many variants. Besides these two cycles, hundreds of large and small epic poems have been recorded during the twentieth century; some of them are more likely regional, while others extend more widely. For example, the epic Khan Kharangui is considered the source of the Mongolian epic, and its hero Khan Kharangui is thus known as the Epic Khan.

opportunity to visit Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, and Beijing, where he sang *Janggar* for domestic and foreign scholars. He died in Hobagsair County on May 20, 1994.<sup>4</sup>

The South Slavic oral epic tradition is a vast conglomerate of regional and ethnic traditions that can productively be categorized as Moslem and Christian songs. Of course, the Balkans have seen enormous unrest and social change over the past 700-800 years, and the tradition reaches far beyond the former Yugoslavia to cognate epics in Bulgarian, Russian, and other Slavic languages. But we can frame our discussion usefully by concentrating on the Moslem and Christian epics performed in the language once called Serbo-Croatian and today spoken by residents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia. We will attempt to cover both types of South Slavic epic in this article, even if briefly, in order to give a truer picture of the whole genre.<sup>5</sup>

The chief collection of Christian oral epic was made mostly in Serbia by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, a nineteenth-century ethnographer, linguist, and reformer of the two alphabets. Via a network of amanuenses around the country, he gathered written transcriptions of singers' performances, with special emphasis on the heroic deeds of the Serbian hero and mercenary Prince Marko and on the events surrounding the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, at which the Serbs were defeated by the Ottoman Empire. Unlike virtually all other nineteenth-century fieldworkers, Karadžić did not frequently intervene during the editorial process; for the most part, he published what the singers sang without addition, subtraction, or emendation. We will draw our examples of Christian epic from the second of his original four volumes of *narodne pjesme*, or "folk songs," which he entitled the "oldest heroic songs."<sup>6</sup>

The largest and most thorough collection of Moslem oral epic was the product of a research expedition undertaken by Milman Parry, an American specialist in ancient Greek epic, and his assistant Albert Lord, who was later to carry on Parry's analytical work. Their accomplishments would eventually produce what has come to be known as the Oral-Formulaic Theory.<sup>7</sup> In making the field trip to the former Yugoslavia, Parry and Lord were attempting to conduct an experiment: they wanted to test their hypothesis about Homer's orality in the "living laboratory" of South Slavic oral epic. For this purpose they sought the longer songs of the Moslem tradition, mainly from *guslari* ("singers") in Bosnia. We will take our examples of Moslem epic from this archive of materials, known as the Parry Collection of Oral Literature at Harvard University, drawing both from the publication series *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, which has so far presented performances from the Novi Pazar, Bijelo Polje, and Bihać areas, and from unpublished performances from the Stolac region in central Hercegovina.<sup>8</sup>

In turning to our two examples of oral-connected traditional epic, the ancient Greek and the Old English (or Anglo-Saxon), we will be analyzing poems that reach us only in manuscript

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Chao Gejin 2000:120-24.

<sup>5</sup> On Moslem versus Christian epics, see Foley 1991:61-134, 1999b:37-111, and 2002:188-218.

<sup>6</sup> The standard edition is Karadžić 1841-62.

<sup>7</sup> On the Oral-Formulaic Theory, see Foley 1985 (online at <http://www.oraltradition.org>, with updates) and 1988.

<sup>8</sup> For published material, see *SCHS*; for unpublished materials, J. M. Foley wished to thank Stephen Mitchell, the Curator of the Milman Parry Collection.

form. While there is little question that these poems have a strong and vital link to oral tradition, the fact that they were recorded in the ancient and medieval periods means that we cannot ever be confident about the precise nature of that relationship. Without the opportunity to do fieldwork, much will remain uncertain. But scholarship generally supports the existence of ancient Greek and Old English oral epic traditions, and we find irrefutable evidence not just of the fact of that medium but of its importance for our understanding of the poems concerned.

Homer's epics—if indeed there ever was a real Homer rather than a legend assigned that name—probably stabilized in something like their extant form in about the sixth century BCE, or about two centuries after the invention of the Greek alphabet. We know very little about the history and transmission of the epics for the next 1500 years, that is, between their probable time of origin and the date of the first whole *Iliad* manuscript in the tenth century CE. The manuscript record includes many variants, and the partial texts preserved in fragmentary papyri offer additional witnesses to a variable, complex tradition. Nonetheless, research has established the structural importance of oral tradition for the Homeric texts, and our overview will proceed from the solid base of that scholarship. We will cite example lines and passages from the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and related works from the Oxford editions,<sup>9</sup> and we will use the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, a searchable CD-ROM that contains original-language texts of all ancient Greek works, as the key to unlock Homer's phraseology and narrative patterning.

Like Homer's works, the Old English poems stem from an oral tradition; also like Homer, they interacted with writing and texts in unknown ways between the time of their commission to manuscript (no later than the last third of the tenth century) and their modern rediscovery and edition in the nineteenth century. Approximately 32,000 lines of Anglo-Saxon poetry survive to our time; of that corpus, only *Beowulf* (3,182 lines) and the fragmentary *Waldere* are truly epic. But extended narrative poems—especially saints' lives or retellings of the Bible—abound, and the same kind of poetic line supports all of the surviving poetry. In practice, this means that different genres interact easily with other genres, so that phrases and motifs migrate readily from one type of poem to another. We will be quoting *Beowulf* and related poems from the standard collective edition, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, and employing the Bessinger-Smith concordance to that edition in order to establish the recurrency of phrase and narrative unit.<sup>10</sup>

## Question # 1: What Is a Poem in Oral Epic Tradition?

### 1. Mongolian

*Janggar* has always been the most prominent epic tradition in Mongolia, with the *Gesar* epic, which also lives in Tibetan epic tradition, the next most significant of many dozens of mostly interrelated oral epic traditions. To determine the nature and dynamics of a poem within such a large and complex tradition, it is necessary to grasp its fundamental organization. Instead of existing as freestanding parts or incomplete fragments, the “cantos” (*bölög*) of *Janggar* are

<sup>9</sup> See Monro and Allen 1969.

<sup>10</sup> See Krapp and Dobbie 1931-53; Bessinger and Smith 1978.

simultaneously two things: stories complete in themselves and also parts of a larger whole, to which scholars give the name of “cycle.” One result of this organization is that most cantos can be combined in numerous different ways and in various sequences without acknowledging the real-world passage of time that we expect in novels, for example. In *Janggar* epic the heroes are always 25 years old, as are all the characters, and all four seasons are spring. Likewise, almost all cantos have a happy ending, returning to the same state of affairs with which the canto began; each unit both starts and ends with a feast.

To speak of a poem in Mongolian oral epic tradition thus involves a complicated set of assumptions. In one sense each canto is a poem: it tells a story with a beginning, middle, and end; it features one or a few heroes; and it follows one of a limited number of story-patterns (battle, wedding, bloodbrotherhood, or biography), or some combination of those patterns. But in another sense each canto is itself incomplete since it presumes knowledge of other *bölög*. Even though the singer may not actually perform those other cantos, the actions and characters that they involve are traditionally associated with what he happens at the moment to be singing. This larger, composite network of cantos—both those actually sung and those that remain implicit—is the cycle, equivalent to the unpublished book that contains all the chapters or the constellation that takes shape from all of the individual stars.<sup>11</sup> “A poem” is thus a slippery and contingent term; Mongolian epic tradition consists of performed parts of an implied, untextualized whole. A canto is “a poem,” to be sure, but the cycle to which it always refers is also a poem.

Two perspectives—one story-based and the other scholarly—will give further evidence of this interactive, part-and-whole structure of “a poem” in the Mongolian *Janggar* tradition. First, the various cantos of the cycle seldom feature *Janggar* himself in the main heroic role; usually another subsidiary hero, often *Honggur*, undertakes the actual task or adventure. *Janggar* is, however, always present, and the singers explain his distance from the main action by citing him as a patron deity to the hero centrally involved in the action. Whatever the case, *Janggar* serves as the uniting focus for all of the disparate characters, the major link between and among their diversity, and the very naming of the entire cycle after him indicates his central prominence in the tradition as a whole. Correspondingly, scholars refer to the cantos and the cycle they study not as one or a series of items, and not by means of separate, carefully calibrated titles. Rather, they name the entire tradition by the hero’s name, *Janggar*, again placing him at center-stage, locating him at the heart of the network. Citing particular editions is one thing; referring to the epic is quite another.

## 2. *South Slavic*

In some respects the answer to “What is a poem in South Slavic epic tradition?” will sound quite similar. Although each performance is to an extent complete in itself, each also remains contingent—dependent not only on an implied constellation of stories and characters but

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<sup>11</sup> The singer *Arimpil* himself indicates this underlying network at various places in his repertoire. Cf. *Vladimirtsov* (1983-84:17-18), who observes that “the fact of the matter is that *Janggar* has far more internal similarity of action of the separate song-poems; they are linked not only by internal connection (by one and the same *Khan*), each of them is a natural continuation, a development of the preceding; contradictions almost never arise; the singer performing any given song calls others to mind, he sketches them on a distant background.”

on the particular circumstances of the individual performance, singer, and audience. That is, every poem is inherently linked to other poems, and what emerges in any single instance will always amount to one of myriad possible instances. We textualize this kind of natural multiformity at our peril.

In the case of the Christian tradition, in which the performance-texts are relatively short (seldom exceeding 250 lines), poems behave like “chapters” in an unwritten “book.” Adventures in different poems are loosely tied together, if at all, and direct reference to prior or parallel events or biographical specifics is very rare. Rather, the parts become a whole by simple agglutination in audience experience, with the listener or reader drawing the connections between and among “chapters” that the tradition leaves inexplicit. Do you wonder why Prince Marko loses his temper with the Turkish tsar, defiantly placing his boots on the Moslem leader’s prayer-rug in the single poem called “Marko Drinks Wine at Ramazan”? Then you need to know that it is in Marko’s personality to be hotheaded, to act impulsively when challenged; you also need to know that he takes great enjoyment in disobeying the ruler for whom he fights as an unwilling mercenary. None of this information is contained in the poem you are reading, however, so depending exclusively on that performance-text will leave you without evidence for the hero’s motivation. Only by bringing these other implied “chapters” into consideration—by consulting the unspoken context attached to Prince Marko as a character who lives beyond any single poem—will his behavior make any sense.

The Moslem tradition of longer epic, which can run to ten thousand lines and more, also exists in an implied network of mythology and story. Once again characterization and events are larger than any single performance-text, and once again our understanding of South Slavic epic will fall short if we focus only on the single instance at the expense of the much larger unspoken context. But there are other factors involved as well. In the Moslem tradition, epics are not so much chapters in a single unpublished book as a shelf of books that belong to a single series treating a single subject. More complete in themselves, the Moslem songs follow particular story-patterns—such as Return, Rescue, Wedding, and Siege of a City. We can describe them as belonging to a huge cycle of stories as long as we clearly understand that their primary reference or linkage is not to each other but rather to the tradition at large. Contingent on the aims and day-to-day realities associated with different singers and audiences, these longer epic performances overlap one another in structure and content. Thus, Mustajbey of the Lika will always be treacherous, but exactly what shape his treachery takes depends on which story-pattern (as well as particular story) lies underneath the narration. Likewise, Tale of Orašac will idiomatically seem like a lazy and selfish buffoon even as he proves indispensable to any Turkish army’s encounter with the Christian enemy, but we do not come to translate his unpromising appearance because of any single poem. Tradition operates on a larger canvas in the case of Moslem epic.

### 3. *Ancient Greek*

With the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* we enter the realm of oral epics that today survive only in manuscript. That is, although both historical and internal evidence point toward an origin and currency in oral tradition, the exact relationship between the poems and their tradition will always lie outside our certain knowledge. For that reason, the question of “What is a poem in



ancient Greek oral tradition?” must be answered by piecing together different kinds of materials: the two major works themselves and the other poems, fragments, and summaries that reach us from more than two millennia ago.

That evidence collectively indicates a thriving epic tradition from at least 1200 BCE, with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* being recorded in textual form no earlier than the invention of the Greek alphabet about 775 BCE. Evidence of other poems about the Trojan War and the heroes involved in it can be found in references made by ancient authors to such epics as the *Cypria*, the *Aethiopis*, the *Nostoi*, and so forth, as well as quoted fragments of these poems. These lost works form the so-called Epic Cycle,<sup>12</sup> which some scholars understand as a well-organized and interlocking series of accounts surrounding the Trojan War and other analysts see as a looser constellation of orally performed stories that were later recorded in writing. Together with the poems of Hesiod (especially the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*), the Epic Cycle indicates that a great deal was going on in the ancient Greek epic tradition in addition to performance of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the two poems that we ascribe to the probably legendary Homer.

What seems to have happened in the decades and centuries following the invention of writing is the gradual establishment of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as the “canon” of ancient Greek epic. That fossilization of a living oral tradition into only two texts has obscured our vision of a dynamic traditional process and led to some unfortunate assumptions. First, it was not until Milman Parry’s initial investigations of the 1930’s that western scholarship began to realize that these were originally oral poems. From Parry’s analysis a comparative field quickly emerged, affecting dozens of different traditions around the world, and yet the full impact of the Homeric epics’ oral traditional genesis and context was not to be felt for many years. Only recently have scholars come to grips with the reality that—as oral (or oral-derived) poems—the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* must also be understood differently. They are individual poems, to be sure, but they also share traditional elements and strategies such as formulas, typical scenes, and narrative patterns both with each other and with poems like the Homeric Hymns.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, trying to understand the nature of an individual poem in the ancient Greek tradition is similar to attempting to project the nature of prehistoric life from fossils. The best we can do is to remain aware of the dynamics and expressive usefulness of the features we can recognize—formulas, typical scenes, and narrative patterns. Analogies from living oral traditions such as Mongolian and South Slavic are crucially important in this effort.

#### 4. Old English

The question of “What is a poem?” provokes a series of answers in relation to Old English or Anglo-Saxon poetry. First, as mentioned briefly above, these poems derive from an oral tradition brought to England by Germanic settlers from about 450 CE onward, but the exact relationship between the manuscripts that survive and this long-lost oral tradition must remain uncertain. Second, and much more so than ancient Greek, for example, the Old English materials are very different from one another by genre. Within the 32,000 extant lines, we find

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<sup>12</sup> See Davies 1989 and Foley 1999a on cycles.

<sup>13</sup> For examples, see Foley 1995:136-80 and 1999b:115-237.

approximately 10% epic (chiefly *Beowulf*), with the other 90% consisting of elegies, charms, riddles, lives of saints, histories, Biblical stories, and other forms. Focusing on the epic, we find that *Beowulf* has no direct parallels in Old English, although it shares mythology and poetic style with Germanic poems in medieval languages such as Old Norse, Old Saxon, and Old and Middle High German. From all of this disparate evidence it seems that *Beowulf* was part of a pan-Germanic oral tradition of which very little actually survives to us.

Even though the genre of epic and the story of *Beowulf* are very rarely paralleled, the Old English poetic style is well attested. Unlike many other traditions, all Anglo-Saxon poems—no matter what their genres—share the same meter and, to some extent, the same poetic diction. Thus, traditional units such as typical scenes and formulas occur across the spectrum from one narrative form to another (for example, *Beowulf* and the Biblical stories share the theme of Sea Voyage as well as formulas for ships, heroes, and so forth). Even non-narrative genres such as charms and riddles draw on the same phraseology as does epic. As a result, *Beowulf* is suspended in a network of formulaic and narrative patterns that can be observed in other genres; in other words, all genres depend on the same traditional register. As we saw in relation to Mongolian, South Slavic, and ancient Greek works, Old English poems are both complete in themselves and yet idiomatically linked to a much larger network of structure and implication.

## Question # 2: What Is a Typical Scene or Theme in an Oral Poetic Tradition?

### 1. Mongolian

Albert Lord defines *themes* or typical scenes as multiform narrative units, as “groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale in the formulaic style of traditional song” (Lord 1960:68). In the Oral-Formulaic model, these are building blocks of story, flexible in themselves, that can be molded to suit their immediate narrative environment. Thus, the same theme serves many singers, and many songs, as a sort of “large word” or unit of utterance in the oral epic vocabulary. Indeed, as we shall see below, the South Slavic epic bards and their counterparts in other traditions think of “words” as just such integral units, and not as lexical entries in dictionaries. Simply put, the theme is a story-byte, a tale-telling increment.

Many cantos in Mongolian epic follow a fairly stable series of events, starting from a stock beginning with citation of the time, a Golden Age, and the famous place in which the action is set. The canto then continues with a description of the hero’s remarkable horse as well as his aide or companion before a subsequent threat emerges in one of many forms, including attacking monsters, invading armies, and the like. Depending on the particular story-pattern, a maiden may be involved; if the maiden is captured and the homeland ruined, the hero will be called upon to rescue and restore them. Fighting against a monster or another hero is often implicated, and victory over a human adversary may bring that adversary over to the hero’s side. A wedding can follow, and the story comes to closure with the hero’s return home.

However the individual canto of *Janggar* proceeds, it regularly begins with a theme or typical scene that we can call the Palace Scene. Based on available evidence, the only exception to this rule occurs when the information contained in this theme is assumed already to be part of

the audience's prior knowledge. The Palace Scene consists of Janggar together with his 6,012 warriors drinking and singing boisterously, with Janggar astride a bench with 44 legs. Typically, the singer mentions that Janggar's face looks like a full moon. Depending on the version, the Palace Scene may be very brief. In other cases, the singer may include elaborate detail about the grandeur and opulence of the dining hall: its great height (15 stories and attached to the sky) and its decoration with animal skins, gems, gold and silver, and so on. Other adjustments can include a detailed physical description of Janggar, an account of his early childhood deprivation or other aspects of his biography, or his unique horse, sometimes with a biography of the horse as well. The length and elaboration or brevity and starkness of the Palace Scene theme are functions of the singer's ability and performance situation and of the audience's reception.<sup>14</sup> The idiomatic presence of this starting element provides evidence of how the singer and audience conceive of the individual canto as an entire world in itself—the single instance complete with a larger implied background—rather than as a fragmented, freestanding folktale.

Within the *Janggar* cycle the same typical scene can vary substantially from one singer to another, with differences in characters, description, and smaller details that depend on the particular bard's version of the given canto. The song-to-song morphology is even greater, however, since a given typical scene can be linked to a long series of other narrative patterns, producing a lengthy canto, or connected to a relatively brief series, in which case its form will be briefer.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the actual formulaic language in which typical scenes are expressed changes more from one singer to another than from one song to another. There is, in other words,

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<sup>14</sup> Here are two instances of the Palace Scene:

Example 1 (Arimpil [Taya 1999:64]):

Arban tabun dabhur	Inside the 15-story
Altan čarlig bambalai dotur-a	Golden shining palace
Aldar noyan Janggar ni tolugailagad	Famous ruler Janggar, the head,
Araja-yin naiman minggan bagatur-ud ni	And his 8,000 Araja warriors
Dagulaldun nayirlaju bayital-a	Are singing and feasting

Example 2 (Arimpil [Taya 1999:18-19]):

Aru bey-e-yi ni	[The palace's] rear side
Arslang-un soyug-a-bar	Lion's canine teeth
Sihan daramalan boshagsan	Were placed upward,
Emün-e bey-e-yi ni	Front side,
Ölü manghan bugu	Remote Gobi deer
Jagan hoyar-un soyuga-bar	And elephant teeth
Sihan daramalan boshagsan	Were placed upward
Jegün bey-e-yi ni	At the east side,
Usun sil-iyer	Water-mirrors
Önggelen boshagsan	Stood with colors,
Baragun bey-e-yi ni	At the west side
Badmarag-a Erdeni čilagu-bar	Precious rubies
Sihan daramalan boshagsan	Were placed upward,
gadanah-i dörben önčüg-i ni	The outside four corners
gal sil uglan barigsan	Fire-mirrors were built

<sup>15</sup> For example, consider two versions of the same canto, *The Wedding of Honggur*, sung by Bosugomji and Li Purbai (*JMC*). The two songs are roughly similar, while their length and constituent scenes are apparently different. For further discussion, see Rinchindorji 1999:238-43.

a sense in which traditional phraseology consists of traditional idiolects. But while individual epic poets may use slightly different diction as they work through different parts of their repertoires, different singers depart from one another in many more ways, furnishing evidence of traditional dialects within the specialized epic language.<sup>16</sup>

Within any singer's inventory, certain typical scenes are linked to specific story-patterns. For example, the theme of the hero's shapeshifting into a pauper and changing his proud steed into a shabby, two-year-old colt is associated with cantos following the overall pattern of winning a maiden. The typical scene thus helps to predict what will happen: it provides a kind of map for the epic journey. To take another example, a messenger arriving at a feast when all present are singing and drinking indicates that eventually the story will turn toward battle as its major subject. Or consider the typical scene of the hero or his wife suffering through a nightmare, which betokens a threat of some sort, often an invasion, and again eventually a battle. In all of these cases the typical scene is more than a cipher, more than an item or tectonic strategy; it foretells future events, reveals the direction of the story-pattern.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. South Slavic

The sketch of the typical scene given above corresponds closely to the realities of South Slavic epic, which of course furnished the original data for the Oral-Formulaic model. As with Mongolian narrative we find the singer, or *guslar*, thinking and expressing himself in terms of what he calls *reči*, or "words," by which he means "units of utterance" rather than typographically defined words. For the South Slavic oral epic singer, "words" are never as small and partial as printed units, whether Chinese characters or European groups of letters. Instead, *reči* are tale-telling increments—as small as a phrase, as large as an entire performance or the story-pattern that underlies it, or as action-centered as a typical scene. The *guslar* composes in "words," not words.<sup>18</sup>

Typical scenes vary widely in length, detail, and flexibility in South Slavic epic. As we might logically expect, the shorter compass of the Christian songs means that fewer typical scenes are found across a variety of text-performances; since the expressive style of these narratives is spare and direct, such scenes, which can exceed hundreds of lines by themselves, are simply not as useful in composition. When they do occur, the shorter format makes for a briefer unit, as well as restricts song-to-song variability somewhat. To put it proverbially, Christian South Slavic epic is more the product of line-length and performance-length "words" than of typical scenes.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, in the typical scene "Encounter a stranger," the singer Arimpil uses "Nigur tala-ban gal tai / nidün tala-ban čog tai" ("with fire on your cheeks / with embers in your eyes"), while in the epic *Gants Modon Honogtoi*, the dialectal variant is "nüürendee galtai / nüdendee tsogtoi / shilendee ööhte / shilbendee chömögtei" ("with fire in your face / with embers in your eyes / with fat on the nape of your neck / with marrow bones in your shin"). See further Chao Gejin 2000:207.

<sup>17</sup> See further our discussion of *register* in Question 5 below.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of what the epic singers mean by "words," together with their own comments, see Foley 2002:11-21.

That is emphatically not the case with Moslem epic, whose style depends crucially on narrative units that belong not to one or a few but to many songs, taking many different forms according to the influence of story-pattern, specific story, singer, and individual performance.<sup>19</sup> If a *guslar* is singing a story of Return, for example, he must know how to use the “words” we can call “Shouting in prison” and “Readying the horse.” The first of these tells how the long-lost hero, separated from his family and his people for years, laments so loudly that he keeps the entire town awake all night. Worst of all, his shrieking prevents his captor’s baby son from sleeping and thereby endangers the boy’s health; if nothing is done to quiet the prisoner, the captor’s wife warns, the infant will die and the royal line will be extinguished. However the particular story may go, whatever the prisoner, captor, and others happen to be named, and regardless of exactly how many nights the intolerable lamenting goes on, the general shape of the typical scene of “Shouting in prison” is roughly the same. Beneath its superficial variation, it is the same “word.”

Likewise with “Readying the horse,” a description of how a hero prepares his or her horse for the inevitable journey found not only in Return narratives but in other kinds of Moslem epics as well. Here the action usually starts with the hero running down to the stable and leading the animal out into the courtyard, where an extensive cleaning and grooming process takes place. Of course, just how extensive the *guslar* makes it depends on a host of situational factors, but common elements include washing the horse’s coat and rubbing him down with a goatskin pouch. After these preliminaries the singer continues with a description of the blanket, saddle, bridle, and reins—usually in that order—before closing the unit with some notation of the animal’s ability to prance around the courtyard without a rider to direct its actions. In his performance of *The Wedding of Mustajbey’s Son Bećirbey*,<sup>20</sup> the singer Halil Bajgorić added a simile to this last section, comparing a careless young shepherdess to the riderless horse. But whatever form the typical scene may take in the hands of this or that singer on this or that occasion, its structure and content are idiomatic features of South Slavic epic. Without such items of traditional vocabulary, a *guslar* cannot fluently compose his song. Nor, as we shall see in answering Question 5 on register, can an audience fully understand that song.

### 3. Ancient Greek

Typical scenes in Homeric epic include such recurrent passages as Feasting, Assembly, Arming the Hero, Lament, and many more. Although we are limited to about 28,000 lines in the surviving corpus of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, that sample is sufficient to observe how some of these scenes work. The typical scene of Feasting, for example, occurs no fewer than 35 times over the two poems, 32 of them in the *Odyssey* alone.<sup>21</sup> As a “large word” in the poet’s compositional vocabulary, each instance includes four flexible parts: the act of seating the guest(s), the serving of food and drink, a line or two marking the satisfaction of the feasters and the closure of the

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<sup>19</sup> See further Foley 1990:278-328.

<sup>20</sup> An edition of his performance is available in Foley 2004.

<sup>21</sup> See further Foley 1999b:171-87.

meal, and an impending mediation or solution of a problem. Whatever the geographical location, whatever the identity of the host and guest(s), and whatever the particular moment in the story, these elements are always present. Like other traditional units, the Feasting scene is a nexus for convention and unique detail; it meshes an expectable frame of reference and the particular moment at hand.

Another example of a typical scene in Homer is the Lament, which occurs six times in the *Iliad*.<sup>22</sup> In this pattern a woman is mourning the death of a fallen warrior, either her husband, her son, or someone with whom she has had a deep and longstanding relationship. The basic sequence is in three parts: an address to the fallen hero, a narrative of their personal history and the consequences of his death for those left behind, and a final and intimate re-address of the hero. This form underlies passages as different as Andromache's and Helen's laments for the fallen Hektor, for instance, or Briseis' mourning for the slain Patroklos. Since each lamenter's relationship to the hero (and there are of course different heroes involved as well) is by definition unique, the typical scene must leave ample room for variation. At the same time, it must also be cohesive and focused enough to be useful compositionally and expressively. As we shall see below in the answer to Question 5, the typical scenes of Lament and Feasting are aspects of the traditional epic register, and as such they also add idiomatic implications whenever they appear.

#### 4. Old English

In Anglo-Saxon narrative poetry, themes or typical scenes work somewhat differently than in the other three poetries. Although scenes such as Sea Voyage, Exile, and the Beasts of Battle reveal a consistent sequence of ideas, their individual instances do not correspond as closely as in other oral epic traditions. What varies is the line-to-line texture of the instances, a phenomenon that results from the differing nature for formulaic structure in Old English, as described below in the answers to Questions 3 and 4.

One of the most thoroughly studied scenes in Old English is that of Exile.<sup>23</sup> Critics have shown that it consists of four basic elements: status, deprivation, state of mind, and movement in or into exile. In other words, this narrative pattern begins with description of a character's loss of social and/or familial status. It should be stressed that separation from the network of society and family in Anglo-Saxon is a crippling condition, one that leads to complete loss of identity. Nothing worse can happen to a person in the poetry. The typical scene then continues with a statement of exactly what the character has left behind, often including the Anglo-Saxon formulaic system "X *bidæled*" ("deprived of X") or an equivalent as a marker for this stage. The third element focuses on the exiled figure's state of mind, which is of course very sad and quite hopeless. Finally, the theme closes with some notation of movement (always negative) in which the principal character's woes deepen or at least his or her condition fails to improve. Importantly, this typical scene is applied to a wide range of different characters: the protagonists in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, two lyric poems, are exiles, as is Grendel in *Beowulf*. Like so

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<sup>22</sup> See further Foley 1991:168-74.

<sup>23</sup> See further Foley 1990:330-31.

many other traditional structures in Anglo-Saxon oral-derived poetry, the Exile theme crosses generic boundaries, occurring in epic and non-epic genres.

The Sea Voyage offers us another example of a typical scene, this time a pattern found chiefly in *Beowulf*.<sup>24</sup> We can describe it as a sequence of five elements, again with very flexible line-to-line composition: the hero leads his men to the ship; the ship waits, moored; the men board the ship, carrying treasure; the ship departs, sails, and arrives; and the ship is moored and the men meet a coast-guard in the new land. This theme occurs twice in *Beowulf*, once when the hero journeys from his home in Geatland to Hrothgar's territory in Denmark and again on Beowulf's return trip. Each time the five-part outline provides the basic structure for the action, moving the hero across the sea via a traditional and recognizable series of actions. A third instance seems to occur at the very beginning of the poem with the ship-burial of Scyld Scefing, a legendary hero long before Beowulf's era. In narrating the Anglo-Saxon funeral rite of burying the hero in a sailing ship with treasures alongside him, the poet of *Beowulf* appears to be using the same typical scene with appropriate modifications. In the answer to Question 5 as applied to Old English, we will see that this is more than just a convenient ploy designed to take advantage of a ready-made compositional structure; it is also a clever artistic strategy.

### Question # 3: What Is a Poetic Line in Oral Epic Tradition?

#### 1. Mongolian

The Mongolian poetic line is a subject that has not been addressed by either native or foreign scholars from the perspective of comparative oral epic prosody. In fact, we need to start by observing that the performances sometimes include both poetry and prose, and in that way are parallel to other traditions whose hybrid medium is called prosimetrum.<sup>25</sup> As a general rule, the more capable and experienced singers compose entirely or almost entirely in poetry, while the more amateurish and less experienced performers depend on prose to a greater degree. As for the texture of individual songs, highly traditional elements such as typical scenes will tend to be sung as poetry regardless of who performs them, while prose emerges between these units as the bard pushes his narrative forward. From within the singing tradition, poetry is understood as the "original" medium: as the bard Jonggarab observed during fieldwork, "In olden days singers sang their songs; nowadays they speak their stories [in prose]."<sup>26</sup>

The onset of poetry in Mongolian epic is marked in a number of ways, with some features appearing in every line as a condition of metricality and others occurring regularly but not as a required constituent of each verse. Among required features we include the melodies of voice and instrument, which are integral parts of the line in performance although they are usually not transferred to texts. For *Janggar* epic, the most common accompanying instrument is

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<sup>24</sup> See further Foley 1990:336-44.

<sup>25</sup> For a crosscultural view, see Harris and Reichl 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Chao Gejin 2000:312.

a *topšuur*, a two-stringed, lute-shaped instrument that is strummed by the singer as he produces his vocal melody.<sup>27</sup> This is a crucial dimension of the poetic line as a performative entity. As in South Slavic oral epic, to remove the phraseology from its musical context is to delete an important and defining dimension of what a poetic line is. Given the textual medium in which we are presenting these ideas, we must be content with characteristics that can be presented and discussed on the page, but we start by acknowledging the very prominent feature that this approach necessarily leaves out.

Hand in hand with the musical aspect goes another feature that recurs in every poetic line: the vocal pause between verses that defines the boundaries of the unit. In performance the Mongolian epic singer makes a clear break between lines by hesitating briefly before continuing with the next verse. As with Native American poetry, an important measure of line structure and integrity is thus the breath-group, the spoken unit delimited by pauses. The succession of words that the singer isolates and foregrounds in this way is coincident with the succession of words defined by the vocal and instrumental music, so that the breath-group and musical unit are best understood as different but coordinated symptoms of the same reality. For the purposes of the poetic line and its definition, the two dimensions are superimposable.

Most lines of *Janggar* epic exhibit a characteristic parallelism with its nearby counterparts, an arrangement that produces an additive structure common in a wide variety of oral epic poetics, including those we treat in this paper. The side-by-side, paratactic structure of the lines leads to a lack of necessary enjambment and also more generally to an overall organization in which the poetic line is usually complete in itself. Lines may be continued into the next verse-unit by apposition, enlargement, coordinate structures, and the like, but there is also an integrity to each line-unit that identifies it as expressively complete in itself.

In addition to these required features, the poetic line also depends for its definition on characteristics that recur regularly and symptomatically if not in every verse. Foremost among these second-level features is sound-patterning, which falls into a number of types. Very prominent is the aspect called head-rhyme, or initial rhyme between lines. This acoustic bridge connects lines in a series, and seems to act as a mnemonic: verses that are related in this kind of latticework are more stable and less subject to change from one performance to another. The following passage illustrates the phenomenon of head-rhyme:

<u>A</u> ma-tai hümün	People who have mouths
<u>A</u> malaju bolusi ügei	Dare not to gossip [about him];
<u>H</u> ele-tei yagum-a	Creatures that have tongues
<u>H</u> elejü bolusi ügei	Dare not to talk [about him],
<u>H</u> ümün-ü način	Eagle among the masses,
<u>H</u> ündü gar-tai Sabar	Mighty-armed Sabar.

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<sup>27</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary* (Sadie 1980:q.v.) defines the *topshuur* (Topšuur) as a “two-stringed plucked lute used to accompany heroic epics in contemporary west Mongolia. Two-string lutes have been associated with the Mongols since Marco Polo’s description of instruments played before battle in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. There is evidence to suggest that Kalmyk Mongols used a three-string lute during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and that they were also used to accompany epics.”



Correspondingly, the feature of *tail-rhyme*, or rhyme that involves successive line-ends, also helps to bind successive verses together. In this case the pattern takes advantage of the preferred location of verbs in the final position in the verse, with similarly inflected verbs producing morphological rhyme:

Utul <u>hul</u> -a	When to be incised,
Ulagan čilagun <u>boldag</u>	It turns to be red rock;
Čabč <u>ihul</u> -a	When to be cleaved,
Čagan čilagun <u>boldag</u>	It turns to be white rock.

Sound-patterning can also take the form of *intra-linear alliteration*, with as many as four words per line participating in the matrix:

<u>B</u> aga <u>b</u> ičihan <u>b</u> agatur <u>b</u> ayin-a	Little young hero to be
--	-------------------------

or of *assonance* or internal rhyme, which binds the line together via a recurring vowel sound:

Arban luu-yin čahil <u>an</u> gilbal <u>an</u> bayiba	Ten dragons' lightning flare.
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In that connection it is interesting to note that assonance builds on the natural language characteristic of vowel harmony in Mongolian. Indeed, this is an obvious but sometimes overlooked rule of thumb for all of the oral epic traditions we examine here: the structure of the poetic line, and therefore of the phraseology that is in symbiosis with that line, depends directly on the nature of the given language in which the line occurs. This is the reason that universalist definitions of poetic lines and phraseologies are of such limited usefulness.

In the spirit of comparison and contrast, let us also mention some features familiar from Western (especially Greco-Roman) poetries that do not apply to the Mongolian poetic line. For one thing, there is no syllabic constraint to speak of. Within our sample a line can range in length from four to eleven syllables, with the different configurations being sung according to the same rhythm and melody. Second, there is no ictus or metrical stress. Instead of the kind of stress-based pattern that underlies a trochee or iamb, for example, Mongolian epic follows the natural-language reflex of initially accented words. That is, it is the linguistic stress on the opening syllables of successive words that produces the impression of trochees, but that impression is an illusion. Finally, the word-order in the Mongolian epic line is as a rule no different from the order of elements in the everyday language. Once again the explanation seems to lie in the natural dynamics of the language. Since Mongolian is chiefly an analytic language, dependent to a substantial degree on word-sequence rather than inflection, it tends to maintain a regular order. By dismissing such irrelevant features as syllabicity, stress, and alternate word order, we can focus more clearly on what really matters about the poetic line in *Janggar* epic: music, breath-groups, parallelism, and sound-patterning. Moreover, with such distinctions in hand, we may perhaps be more prepared for the necessarily disparate definitions of the epic line in South Slavic, ancient Greek, and Old English.

## 2. South Slavic

The epic poems of the *guslari* depend principally on the so-called *epski deseterac*, or epic decasyllable.<sup>28</sup> As the name implies, the poetic line consists of ten syllables, but that is not its only—or even its most important—dimension. The verse form also has internal organization and performative characteristics, and these features are crucial to understanding its symbiosis with traditional phraseology.

Internally, the *deseterac* consist of two parts, called cola, of four and six syllables, as in the following examples:

Rano rani Djedjelez Alija	Djerdjelez Alija arose early,
I Alija, careva gazija	Even Alija, the tsar's hero

Word-break always occurs between the fourth and fifth syllables, and normally the two cola that are formed by that break are complete grammatical units. Of course, they can and do combine with the other colon in a variety of ways, but each colon is independent to the extent that it can combine with other cola. For instance, singers can use the metrical phraseology to introduce other heroes—“Rano rani lički Mustajbeže” (“Mustajbey of the Lika arose early”) or “I Alija, više Sarajeva” (“Even Alija, above the city of Sarajevo”) would be alternate realizations of the same patterns.

In addition to its four-plus-six syllabic base, the South Slavic poetic line shows other kinds of structure. Originally, scholars thought that it was trochaic (that it consisted of five feet with trochaic stress: / x), but this schema has proved to be an illusion generated by an irrelevant Greco-Roman model. In fact, stress occurs primarily on syllables 3 and 9, and somewhat less regularly on syllables 1 and 5; syllable 7 is usually unstressed. Accordingly, there are bridges or zeugmata between syllables 3-4 and 9-10 where word-break is prohibited and where in-line rhyme occasionally appears. An example of these features is:

U bečara nema hizmečara	For a bachelor there is no maidservant
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Syllables 3 and 9, both *-čar-*, bear stress in the line, and they also rhyme. The stress is a necessary and defining feature of the South Slavic epic line, as is the lack of a word-break between 3-4 and 9-10; the in-line rhyme is an optional feature that occurs approximately once or twice every fifty lines, particularly in proverbs.

Along with formal characteristics such as decasyllabic definition, the two cola of four and six syllables, stress, and bridges, the *deseterac* also has a musical definition. Most epics in the Moslem tradition, and many in the Christian tradition, are sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument called the *gusle*. This is a single-stringed, bowed, lute-shaped instrument that singers use not just to ornament but to help voice their performances; the vocal melody follows the pattern of the instrumental melody and is a crucial dimension of the epic. For example, at times the singer begins the ten-syllable line with a vocal pause, allowing the instrument alone to

<sup>28</sup> See further Foley 1990:85-106.

contribute the first one or two syllables of the *deseterac* and only beginning to sing after that vocal rest. Here is an example from Halil Bajgorić's *The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Bećirbey*:

[X] Zavika Djuliću Nuhane      [Pause] Djuliću Nuhane began to shout

In most other instances, singers begin this line with *I* ("And") or *Tad* ("Then"), forming a full ten-syllable increment. But at times they do as Bajgorić has done here, pausing for a single syllable (or more) and effectively using the music to help make the poetic line. This is a difficult and unfamiliar lesson for those of us trained to understand poetry and the poetic line as a textual phenomenon in which "the words are primary," but in performance the non-textualized aspects of the poetic line can often play a crucial role that texts are not well equipped to represent.

### 3. Ancient Greek

The poetic line in Homeric epic is a very complex instrument, but we can gain a basic understanding of how it works rather quickly by considering both its "external" and its "internal" structure.<sup>29</sup> From an external perspective it amounts to a dactylic hexameter, that is, six feet of the shape – ∪ ∪, or long-short-short, with occasional substitution of spondees (– –, or long-long). Thus, lines can have different numbers of syllables, theoretically from 12 to 17 since the final foot is always a two-syllable spondee. According to this point of view, then, the line is composed of six metrical units; the closure of the hexameter is rhythmically marked by the fifth foot usually being a dactyl and the sixth foot always being a spondee (– ∪ ∪ followed by – –). No contemporary metrical or musical notation survives, so we must be content with this kind of textual analysis.

The viewpoint from internal metrics is, however, much clearer. According to this perspective, the poetic line in ancient Greek oral-derived epic is composed of four unequal parts. Instead of the six feet, then, we have four cola, and each of the four cola turns out to be a common length for a Homeric formula. In other words, the unit of the colon in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is the metrical basis for formulaic structure. Whereas the external measure of six feet does not correlate with the system of traditional diction, the internal dynamics of four cola helps to explain how *aidoi* (ancient Greek epic singers) actually made their lines. Here is a simplified diagram of how the four cola work:

– ∪ ∪ / – / ∪ ∪ – / ∪ / ∪ – / ∪ ∪ / – ∪ ∪ – –  
 A1 A2    B1 B2   C1   C2

The slashes (/) mark the possible word-divisions in the poetic line. Each of the three word-breaks must occur at one of two possible positions (either A1 or A2 for the first, B1 or B2 for the second, and C1 or C2 for the third), yielding three divisions and four parts in every line. Colon 1 thus extends from the beginning of the line to A1 or A2, the second colon from A1 or A2 to B1 or

<sup>29</sup> See further Foley 1990:68-84.

B2, and so forth. In its combination of structure and flexibility, the Homeric poetic line acts as a functional partner to ancient Greek epic phraseology, the subject of Question 4 below.

#### 4. Old English

The poetic line of *Beowulf* is quite unlike the lines of the other three epic traditions, and in this difference we can see how traditional regularity can take different forms within the various sets of rules that underlie different oral and oral-derived poetics.<sup>30</sup> First and foremost, the Anglo-Saxon poetic line does not depend on syllable-count: the verses in *Beowulf* have between 8 and 16 syllables, and there is no systemic pattern to their various lengths. This means in turn that the phenomenon of cola (as in ancient Greek and South Slavic) is irrelevant, and more generally that any feature deriving from syllabic regularity is impertinent. Also, although there is mention in *Beowulf* and other poems of an accompanying instrument, as well as archaeological evidence of its existence, we know nothing about the role of vocal or instrumental music in the performance of this traditional poetry.

What *does* characterize the Old English poetic line? The two primary features are alliteration and stress. Similarly to the Mongolian line, the Anglo-Saxon unit is defined in part by a sequence of matched initial sounds, as in the following examples. We have marked the alliterative sound by underlining it in each line, as well as indicating the sound in brackets (*Beowulf*, lines 51-54):

seccan to <u>s</u> oðe, <u>s</u> elerædende,	[s]
<u>h</u> æleð under <u>h</u> eofenum,    hwa þæm <u>h</u> læste onfeng.	[h]
Ða wæs on <u>h</u> urgum <u>B</u> eowulf Scyldinga,	[b]
leof <u>l</u> eodcyning <u>l</u> onge þrage.	[l]

truth to tell,    hall-counselors,  
 heroes under the heavens,    who received that burden.  
 Then in the strongholds was    Beowulf of the Scyldings,  
 Beloved people-king    for a long time.

Notice that the poet includes at least one matching sound in each half-line, and there are often two such sounds in the first half-line. Without such alliteration the poetic line is flawed; it is an absolute requirement of the verse-form and participates actively in the composition and systematic usage of formulas. These examples also illustrate how the poetic line divides into two halves, each unit containing a varying number of syllables. The alliterative meter, as it is called, is thus a two-level meter: it is organized in both whole lines and half-lines.

The other chief feature of the alliterative meter is stress, or emphasis (what linguists call “ictus”). Germanic languages are collectively stress-based, and Old English is no exception, with four major emphases in each poetic line and favored patterns of ictus throughout the line. This regularity contrasts with the irregularity of syllable-count, providing an organization based on

<sup>30</sup> See further Foley 1990:106-19.

emphasis rather than sequences of syllables or cola. For example, the first of the lines quoted above features stresses on the alliterating syllables and on *-ræd-*, the root of *-rædende*:

/        /        /    /  
 secgan to soðe, selerædende,

Both features—stress-patterns and alliteration—characterize not only epic but also non-epic poetries. As mentioned earlier in regard to typical scenes, Anglo-Saxon tradition units are shared across the boundaries of genre.

In addition to alliteration and stress, the structure of the Old English poetic line leads to frequent parataxis, apposition, and enjambment. The poets have the opportunity to continue their thought beyond the extent of a single line, often adding one phrase to another in multi-line sequences of independently viable, highly flexible increments. Clearly, its unique set of rules allows for much more variation than either the South Slavic or ancient Greek poetic lines, and more than the Mongolian line as well. This relative freedom from encapsulation has significant implications for the kind of formulaic structure that can arise and be maintained in Anglo-Saxon poetry.

#### Question # 4: What Is a Formula in an Oral Poetic Tradition?

##### 1. Mongolian

Perhaps the most direct way to begin discussion of the formula, or traditional phrase, and its identity in Mongolian epic is to quote Milman Parry's foundational concept: "a group of words regularly used under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea."<sup>31</sup> With this definition Parry was pointing the way toward a composite unit of expression or utterance more extensive than the words we use; he focused instead on what we might call "larger words" as the basis of the singer's compositional ability. For instance, the ancient Greek heroes are time and again called by noun-epithet formulas such as "swift-footed Achilles" or "goddess grey-eyed Athena." Each of these combinations acts as a unit, each one fits into a particular segment of the Homer's poetic line, and each conveys a simple idea (in the two cases above, simply "Achilles" and "Athena").

Noun-epithet formulas in *Janggar* epic can range from one to five lines, and multiple formulas can be added to produce a traditional sequence of attributes as long as six or more verses. This is a flexibility beyond that of the other three traditions examined later on in this paper. For example, here is a one-line formula describing Honggur:

Asuru ulagan Honggur

Giant Red Honggur

Compare a two-line phrase for the same hero:

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<sup>31</sup> Parry 1971:272.

Aguu yehe hüčü tei	Very great strength,
Asuru ulagan Honggur	Giant Red Honggur

and a five-line version:

Agčim-un jagua-r du	The moment eyes blinking,
Arban gurba hubildag	Transfigured 13 times,
Amin bey-e düni ügei	His anima is out of the body,
Aguu yehe hüčü tei	Very great strength,
Asuru ulagan Honggur	Giant Red Honggur

Along with affording the singer great flexibility in his performance, and despite their obvious differences, these phrases share some core qualities. For one thing, the name “Honggur” occurs at the end of the last verse, regardless of how many verses the formula has. That is, its position illustrates the typically “right-justified” style common to many oral epics. For another, each of them acts as a unit; no matter how long or short it may be in terms of line units, it operates as a kind of traditional adjective modifying the hero.

In addition to formulas for heroes, many other traditional phrases proliferate throughout Mongolian epic. One example is the one-line speech introduction that literally means “he or she is saying loudly” (*hüngginen helen baib-a*). More than simply marking the onset of direct discourse, this formula alerts the audience that a certain kind of speech is about to begin. At a general level, that speech will be forceful and will contain important information; more specifically, it will concern a warning, threat, or prediction about future events. Since it can combine with a virtually infinite number of subjects, this phrase provides the singer and his audience a way to both introduce and frame the speech. Whatever the particular, situational content, this line provides a resonant and familiar traditional context.

Another example, whose literal meaning is similar but whose idiomatic usage is quite different, is the formula “it comes out loudly” (*čüingginen garb-a*). This phrase occurs in only one situation, namely, when Janggar is in serious danger and is calling out for assistance. His voice always enters a person’s left ear and exits through the right ear with great loudness. In some cases the voice goes to Honggur’s ears directly; in other cases it passes through the ears of Honggur’s wife, who then awakes Honggur and tells him of the threat. As a result, Honggur comes to Janggar’s aid, driven by the sound embodied in this formula and by the context that it invokes.

Other formulas group around these actions, as when Honggur’s wife is set the task of waking a husband whose sleep was brought on by excessive toasting with no fewer than 6,000 comrades. In order to pierce through his deep slumber, she employs a highly traditional strategy: she tugs at his braided hair.<sup>32</sup> In specific terms,

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<sup>32</sup> A pigtail or *šaluu* is a very old custom among Oirat Mongols. Within the epic, the making of pigtails begins at age five. In every subsequent year the hero receives another *šaluu*, so that an experienced champion like Honggur will have many such braids.

Malmagar hara šaluu-yi ni	The soft, dark black <i>šaluu</i>
Hoisi-ban tatan	she pulls backward;
gurba dahigad	three times she repeats it.

As is common with Mongolian traditional phraseology, the last line is a parallel and optional addition; a singer may use it in one performance and not in another. How the action develops from this point depends on the particular story. But the story sequence eventually leads to the preparation for battle, including readying of the horse, and Honggur riding off to help Janggar.

Correspondingly, we should mention that a deep slumber is understood in the epic tradition as a heroic sleep, a state from which it is difficult to rouse someone. Thus, it is only logical that Honggur's wife should have to resort to tugging at his pigtailed. Another formula that helps to certify this phenomenon is the widespread description of a hero's sleep in the form of a double simile:

suhai metü ulaigad	As red as willow
sur metü sunugad	As soft as a leather thong

This example also illustrates the variable length of formulas in heroic epic (two lines as opposed to one) as well as their divergent prevalence ("tugging the pigtail" is localized while the "heroic sleep" simile is known throughout the Mongol world).

In summary, then, the Mongolian epic formula acts like a "large word," a composite unit of utterance based on the metrical foundation of the epic line. It may be as short as a single line or as long as five lines, and one formula may follow another to yield a compound series of yet greater length. The compounding of formulas is always at the discretion of the singer, who suits his performance to the audience, the song, and the moment. Formulaic phrases not seldom bear considerable idiomatic force, such as the introduction to a particular kind of speech or a plea for help spoken so loudly that it is destined to reach even the deeply slumbering Honggur. What the singer controls is therefore not only the structure and morphology of the phraseology (and of course the rule-governed poetic line) but also the traditional implications of his formulaic diction. Those traditional implications will be the subject of our fifth and final question.

## 2. *South Slavic*

Like Mongolian epic, South Slavic epic consists of "large words," composite phrases and patterns that are used as wholes by singers.<sup>33</sup> In this tradition the smallest possible formula is an entire colon of either four or six syllables, and many formulas are an entire ten-syllable line in length. The *guslari* maintain a flexible vocabulary of such larger increments, suiting them to the particular story they wish to tell through combination and adjustment. In effect, they are composing in a specialized language used only for the making of epic songs.

Many formulas in South Slavic are in the category of noun-epithet phrases, that is, a hero's name plus some adjective or noun that helps to identify him or her via the traditional

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<sup>33</sup> See further Foley 1990:278-328.

idiom. Together these elements make up a six-syllable byte—a single *reč*, as the singers refer to such a “word”—that fills the second colon in the line. Here are some examples drawn from the tradition at large that illustrate how the same formula can combine with different partners to produce quite different kinds of whole lines:

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| a. Rano rani Mustajbeže lički   | Mustajbey of the Lika arose early           |
| b. I besjeda Mustajbeže lički:  | And Mustajbey of the Lika addressed (them): |
| c. Posle toga Mustajbeže lički  | After him Mustajbey of the Lika             |
| d. “Pobratime Mustajbeže lički” | “Oh blood-brother Mustajbey of the Lika”    |

In each of these examples the first colon of four syllables joins with the second colon of six syllables to produce a poetic line. But, taken together, the four sample lines demonstrate how wide a variety this process can produce, from simple statements of narrative fact (a) to lines of speech introduction (b) to part of a catalogue of heroes (c) to a direct address by another character (d).

Composite phrases may work in other ways as well. For instance, whole-line patterns with both constant and variable parts are quite common. In this kind of formula a syntactic pattern governs the decasyllabic line, so that the various realizations are in one dimension more similar than are lines that involved noun-epithet phrases such as those cited just above. Here is a series of three syntactic formulas that all follow the same general pattern. They describe a hero’s pledge to rescue a kidnapped maiden in the *guslar* Halil Bajgorić’s *The Wedding of Mustajbey’s Son Bećirbey* (lines 542-44):

- |                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| jO tako mi mača,ji junaštva, | O by my sword and by my heroism,      |
| vO tako mi mojega bjelana,   | O by my white steed,                  |
| vO tako mi četer’es’ godina! | O by my fourteen years (of fighting)! |

Here a famous Turkish hero named Djerdjelez Alija is swearing to find the girl who was carried off by the enemy and return her to her bridegroom for their planned marriage. He makes his vow formulaically, pledging “Oh by my . . .” in the first colon and filling the second colon with his sword and heroism, his white horse, and his fourteen-year battle record. In a sense this pattern is the reverse of the noun-epithet examples in that it is the first colon that recurs and the second colon that varies. But there is also the additional factor of the whole-line syntactic pattern that unites the series of lines grammatically.

As a final instance of South Slavic formulaic structure, let us cite a phrase that is precisely one whole line in length. It cannot be subdivided beyond that decasyllabic unit without compromising its usefulness as a compositional tool and its idiomatic meaning. We will reproduce a few different versions of this whole-line formula in order to show its adaptability for different narrative situations:



A1. A od tala na noge skočijo	He jumped from the ground to his feet
A2. A od tala na noge skočila	She jumped from the ground to her feet
B1. I skočijo na noge lagane	And he jumped to his light feet
B2. I skočila na noge lagane	And she jumped to her light feet

These four lines collectively illustrate how singers employ two basic forms of the whole-line phrase, each of which can be adjusted for gender difference. That is, depending on the dialect of a particular geographical region or on a singer's personal idiolect style, he may use either "jumped from the ground to one's feet" (A1, A2) or "jumped to one's light feet" (B1, B2). Furthermore, either of these forms can be inflected for a male (A1, B1) or a female (A2, B2). In this way the group of formulas exemplifies a system of diction, a flexible pattern that is highly useful to the *guslar* composing in performance.

Naturally, this small sample does not exhaustively answer the question of "What is a formula in South Slavic epic tradition?" For a more thorough analysis and additional examples we would have to summon many other examples and derive the traditional rules that govern the phraseology.<sup>34</sup> But perhaps it does begin to point the way toward an appreciation of formulaic structure: singers and audiences communicate by means of these "large words," which may be a colon, a line, or multiple lines in length. As in the case of Mongolian epic, we cannot subdivide phrases beyond their identity as units of utterance, both for structural reasons and, as we shall see in answering Question 5, because of the specialized meanings they bear as composite "large words" in traditional context.

### 3. Ancient Greek

Simply put, Homeric meter and Homeric formulas operate as partners; they are cooperative members of a symbiosis or mutual system. As shown above, the ancient Greek epic line provides a flexible structure for the organization and maintenance of traditional diction, with formulas fitting into the pattern of the meter. To put it another way, the poetic line supports the formation of "large words" that match its metrical pattern, and we will understand the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* best when we realize that because of this match its most fundamental units are traditional.

Formulas may cover from one to four cola in the poetic line. Multiple formulaic lines can occur in sequence, but scholars ascribe these series to a combination of units rather than single multi-line units. Here are a few examples of some recurrent phrases that fill different cola and combinations of cola:

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<sup>34</sup> This is an important distinction. Although we focus on the product (the actual formulas and lines), the traditional rules that govern the process are much more fundamental. On the role of traditional rules, see further Foley 1990:121-239.

ἀλλ' ἄγε . . .	beginning > A1	But come . . .
τὴν δ' ἠμείβετ' ἔπειτα	beginning > B2	Then [he] answered her
γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη	B2 > end	bright-eyed Athena
ποιόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων	A2 > end	what word escaped your teeth's barrier!
ἦος ὁ ταῦθ' ὄρμαινε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν	whole line	while he pondered these things in his mind and in his heart

Each of these phrases satisfies two major criteria: it occupies a significant segment of the poetic line (one or more of the four cola), and it recurs frequently enough in the Homeric poems to demonstrate its usefulness to a composing poet. The shorter formulas, those of less than an entire line in length, readily combine with other phrases to make up a whole linear unit.

To illustrate the systemic nature of formulas in ancient Greek epic, let us add one further set of examples. All of the following noun-epithet phrases can and do combine with a partner phrase, “And again addressed him/her/them” (τὸν/τὴν/τοὺς/τὰς δ' αὐτε προσέειπε), to make a whole poetic line. This composite line is used hundreds of times in the Homeric poems to introduce an immediately following speech. Here is a sample of names that can occupy the variable portion of the formula:

πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς	B2 > end	much-suffering divine Odysseus
θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη	B2 > end	goddess bright-eyed Athena
μέγας κορυθαίολος Ἕκτωρ	B2 > end	great flashing-helmeted Hector
ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων	B2 > end	king of men Agamemnon
Γερήνιος ἱππῶτα Νέστωρ	B2 > end	Gerenian horseman Nestor

This small and partial series is just one instance of how highly functional such formulas are in ancient Greek epic. Using only this single pattern, a poet can introduce speeches by a wide variety of humans and gods. When we consider that there are many such series and combinations, it is possible to get some idea of the systemic dynamics for formulaic structure in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

#### 4. Old English

As indicated above, the Old English poetic line is very flexible: as the partner of traditional diction, it therefore allows for a great deal of variation in formulaic structure. Instead of encapsulated phrases, Anglo-Saxon poetry consists largely of *formulaic systems*, patterns in which one or more constituent words can change from one use to the next. Principally, it is the stressed or alliterating elements that tend to remain stable and constant, and the unstressed and non-alliterating elements that tend to vary. Of course, there are formulas that are exactly repeated every time they are employed by poets, but the majority of the phraseology is much more fluid and systemic.

As one example of how Old English formulaic language works, consider the following series of half-line phrases, all of which mean approximately “in the old days”:

in geardagum ( <i>Beowulf</i> , line 1)	in year-days
on fyrndagum ( <i>Andreas</i> , line 1)	in olden days
Ʒe git on ærdagum (“The Husband’s Message,” line 16)	when you two in earlier days

Notice that not only can the preposition change (*in* to *on* over the first two examples), but the first element of the compound shifts from “year-” to “olden” to “earlier.” From the poet’s perspective, this flexibility allows him both to use an idiomatic, readymade phrase and yet to vary it to suit the most immediate context. The third example shows further flexibility: since there is no syllabic constraint, the poet of “The Husband’s Message” can include more words in the half-line, making it into a more complex unit while still maintaining the pattern. Formulaic structure in Old English is highly adaptable.

Another example of adaptability within limits is the following series of phrases, drawn from a wide variety of Old English epic and non-epic poems:

Ʒæt wæs god cyning ( <i>Beowulf</i> 11)	that was an excellent king
ac Ʒæt wæs god cyning ( <i>Beowulf</i> 863)	but that was an excellent king
Ʒæt wæs an cyning ( <i>Beowulf</i> 1885)	that was a peerless king
wæs ða frod cyning ( <i>Beowulf</i> 2209)	he was then a wise king
Ʒæt wæs god cyning ( <i>Beowulf</i> 2390)	that was an excellent king
Ʒæt is soð cyning ( <i>Juliana</i> 224)	that is a true king
Ʒæt is wis cyning ( <i>Meters</i> 24.34)	this is a wise king
Ʒæt is ædele cyning ( <i>Andreas</i> 1722)	that is a noble king
Ʒæt wæs grim cyning ( <i>Deor</i> 23)	that was a savage king
næs Ʒæt sæne cyning ( <i>Widsith</i> 67)	that was not a negligent king

The word *cyning* (“king”) plus an adjective (“excellent,” “peerless,” “wise,” “true,” “noble,” “savage,” or “negligent”) make up the core of the formula, with the adjective bearing the alliteration for the half-line and linking the formula to the other half-line. In addition, the traditional phrase has a syntactic pattern of “that was/is” with small variations. Taken as a whole, this formula provides the poets of these five different poems a ready-made way to celebrate the achievements of an effective king, as well as a way to criticize the shortcomings of a leader. The phrase becomes an idiomatic mode of expression, extremely useful to the *Beowulf* poet, who employs it no fewer than five times to help characterize Scyld Scefing, Hrothgar (twice), Beowulf, and Hygelac. In the other poems the celebrated king is either Guthhere, Eormanric, or the Christian God. Obviously, this formula has wide applicability.

### Question # 5: What Is the Register in an Oral Epic Tradition?

Thus far we have concentrated on four interdependent dimensions of oral epic tradition: the nature of a poem, the unit of a typical scene or theme, the identity of a poetic line, and the morphology of the formula. Each of these aspects has taken an idiosyncratic form in each tradition, as would be expected. A Mongolian epic formula is not simply equivalent to a Homeric

formula, for instance, any more than the poem-cycle structure in South Slavic is identical to that same relationship in *Janggar* or typical scenes in Homer and Old English poetry answer precisely the same definition. The lesson has so far been one of balanced, judicious comparison between and among traditions, leavened by a commitment to an appreciation of differences as well as similarities.

We now embark on the fifth and final question, which will prove in many ways the sum of the other parts. By inquiring about the *register* of each oral epic tradition, we are addressing all of these four aspects—the poem, the typical scene or theme, the poetic line, and the formula—as phenomena that embody the rules of composition and reception. We are asking about the overall nature of these varieties of speech, the specialized versions of languages that are meant not to carry on broad-spectrum verbal commerce in the everyday world but exclusively to access the world of epic.

For the anthropologist Dell Hymes, registers are “major speech styles associated with recurrent types of situations,”<sup>35</sup> and we follow that definition of a socially selected sort of language, adding only that both sign and signification must be included in the concept. That is, we will not be content with identifying the repertoire of units and patterns that oral epic poets use to make their poems; we must concentrate equally on what and how these units and patterns mean against the background of the poetic tradition. Our focus is as much on idiom as on structure and morphology.

### 1. *Mongolian*

In some ways the register of *Janggar* is very like the unmarked, everyday language of contemporary Mongolia. Children enjoy the stories in part because they find the register interesting and intelligible; what they do not immediately recognize they can quickly learn through repeated experience with tales that resort time and again to recurrent expressive strategies of all kinds. Indeed, *Janggar* singers not uncommonly begin to learn the art of performance before age 10. As noted above, the epic word-order is in many aspects approximately the same as everyday speech, and morphology follows the same rule. But there are also significant differences, discrepancies that mark the diction as epic and alert the audience to the special assumptions of performance.

One of these discrepancies is the presence of archaic words. Two examples of this tendency are terms for measurement: *bal* and *bere*. The former has a definite meaning—it is parallel to “degree” in measuring temperature, as for a fire—but is never used in contemporary situations outside the epic arena. The latter, *bere*, is less exact; it seems to indicate a distance of about two kilometers. For singers, however, the precise measurement suggested by these terms is less important than their almost ritualistic role as an appropriate epic terminology. They are idiomatically a part of the register, indexing temperature and space in an approved, expected manner and linking the measurements involved in any single instance to other measurements that are expressed via the same coding. To speak in terms of *bal* and *bere* is to speak fluently in the epic register.

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<sup>35</sup> Hymes 1989:440.

Another discrepancy is between the literal meaning of commonly used formulaic language and the special idiomatic meaning that traditional referentiality provides. A listener or reader unfamiliar with the register would be unable to grasp the singer's full meaning, simply because of a lack of fluency in the epic language. It is as if the uninitiated listener or reader lacked a proper dictionary.

One example of the special meanings in this encoded register is the following three-line formula, a frequently occurring structure and a common signal in Arimpil's singing:

ermen čagan hōdege	endless white wilderness
ejegüi čagan bōgereg	masterless white desert
elesün sir-a tohui-du	yellow sand with corners carved in it

Bound together acoustically by head-rhyme as well as semantically and metaphorically, this unit bears much more than a literal signification. It regularly coincides with one of three narrative situations: a rest break during a long journey, a site for a battle soon to be joined, or a lonely place in which a hero contemplates what his next action should be. Note that there is nothing explicit in the three-line increment that in any way divulges its implicit content; nonetheless any person fluent in the epic register—not simply in the everyday language—will understand the encoded alternatives. Because the poetic tradition links this verbal sign with specific implications, the singer and audience can share a deeper and fuller level of communication. As structurally important and useful as these three lines are, as a formula its most crucial contribution is to the overall sense of the story in its traditional context.

A second example of traditional referentiality in formulaic diction is a four-line segment that Arimpil and other singers employ numerous times in their oral epic performances:

dugtui dotur-a bayihul-a	When a banner is in its container,
dolbing sara-un önggetai	It flashes with moon light;
dugtui-eče-ben garhul-a	When the banner is outside its container,
dolugan naran-u gereltei	It burns with the light of seven suns.

Although the description seems to be focusing only on a banner and its position, with apparently unconnected phenomena stemming from its placement either inside or outside a protecting jacket, in fact what is at issue is much larger and more momentous. Without exception, this cluster of lines identifies Janggar and his great army of 6,012 or 8,000 men (depending on the singer's idiolect), and furthermore indicates that a battle is imminent. Among the assumptions that a fluent listener or reader will make are that the enemy is already present and that a full-scale engagement—which can amount to a massive conflict or an individual duel—will very soon take place. The important connotation is the power and strength of the enemy. More than a well-wrought series of poetic lines (notice the head-rhyme using [d]) or a convenient building block, this carefully structured formula is resonant with implicit implications.

Traditional referentiality also operates at the level of typical scenes, as implications surrounding recurrent actions come to enrich the narrative not simply by their literal meaning but also by what they necessarily connote. A common example of this structural and expressive strategy is what we may call "Healing the wounded hero." When any champion from the "White

Side,” that is, from Janggar’s group, is wounded, he is treated with a standard series of three items: magical rain, a special kind of water, and a particular medicinal balm. The first of these is called down by Altan Ćegeji (“Golden Chest”), Janggar’s famous and brilliant aide who boasts many supernatural powers. Next the hero washes his hands and face with the water, whose origin remains unspecified, and sometimes ingests it as well. Finally, the ointment, called *üyeng* and *ćagan* (“*üyeng* medicine”<sup>36</sup> and “white medicine”), is applied directly to the wound.

In one respect “Healing the wounded hero” can be understood as a useful structural device. It can be applied to any hero from Janggar’s troop, whether he was injured in a battle against the enemy or in a duel with a rival from the White Side. But the idiomatic implications of this unit run deeper and mesh with the most basic conception of heroism in Mongolian epic tradition. Because the three-part treatment never fails—always rescuing the hero from potential death and restoring him to good health no matter what the situation—mere invocation of this typical scene guarantees how the narrative action will proceed. This dependable link between action and result is crucial not just to any one story but to the cycle of *Janggar* tales as a whole since in Mongolian tradition the heroes never die. Indeed, we can say that in this instance the traditional referentiality of the register is instrumental in maintaining the nature of Mongolian heroism, with respect to both the characters who fit that role and the ideal as a whole.

As a final example of the idiomatic implications of the traditional register in Mongolian oral epic, we point toward the singer’s customary closure to performance of a canto. As indicated above, cantos begin and end with activities associated with the palace: conviviality and feasting frame whatever action intervenes. As a canto draws to a close, the following series of lines regularly occurs:

jiran honug-un jirgal hijü	Sixty days to share happiness
dalan honug-un danggarai hijü	Seventy days to enjoy a banquet
nayan honug-un nayir hijü	Eighty days to celebrate together

At the structural level, this fixed series of lines signals the ending and completes the figure of ring-composition that surrounds the particular story. The traditional referentiality of that ring is independent of what it contains; its idiomatic meaning is thus much more general than many other expressive strategies. Whatever has happened since the canto opened with the scene at the palace, and whoever has figured in the action, this three-line increment dependably announces closure and completeness.

## 2. *South Slavic*

What does a “word” mean in the context of the epic tradition? What implications does a formula, a typical scene, or a story-pattern have inside the special performance arena? What is an

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<sup>36</sup> The literal meaning of the term *üyeng* cannot be explained by either singers or scholars. This is actually a common feature of traditional oral epic registers, where archaisms survive within formulaic phraseology long after they have dropped out of everyday speech. See further Foley 1999b:23-24, 74-75, 80-83.

epic singer communicating to an audience in addition to literal, dictionary-based meaning? These are some of the questions we must address as we consider the South Slavic epic register.<sup>37</sup>

To begin, consider the final example of a formula discussed above in relation to Question 4. This whole-line phrase takes two main forms, which, for the sake of simplicity, I reproduce here only in the masculine inflection: *A od tala na noge skočijo* (“He jumped from the ground to his feet”) and *I skočijo na noge lagane* (“And he jumped to his light feet”). Of course, this line has an obvious literal sense, and singers can and do use it in a wide variety of different songs and situations. From a grammatical and compositional perspective, it is one of the most adaptable and transportable sound-bytes in the *guslar*’s epic language.

But that is only part of its value. As an element in the register, this formula traditionally designates “an honorable response to an unexpected or threatening turn of events that demands the principal’s immediate attention.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the physical act of jumping to one’s feet is only the external signification; what is far more important—although it remains implied and idiomatic rather than directly stated—is the fact that this formula keys a familiar traditional situation. No matter who the character may be who is undertaking the action, the register certifies that a heroic mission is about to take place in response to something dire or unforeseen. Someone is about to distinguish himself or herself, and to assume a well-known traditional role. By convention, then, the person identified by this formula will soon leave on a life-threatening errand, whether to rescue a maiden, join an army, perform a secret spying mission, or whatever. The poetic tradition does not specify the exact mission or the outcome, but it does identify the character as a particular type and his or her actions as of a particular sort. The “large word” provides a traditional context—an implied verbal map—for what follows.

Noun-epithet formulas such as those examined above also have an idiomatic force within the poetic register. Phrases such as “Mustajbey of the Lika,” for example, identify the person (Mustajbey) and his homeland (the Lika, a border territory between Turkish and Christian territory), and in that function they are certainly accurate and informative. But again that literal force is only part of the story. In this and corresponding instances we will find no specific reason for identifying the character via this formula in any of its occurrences; Mustajbey’s homeland in the Lika is likely to be entirely irrelevant, no matter what his actions are in any given epic story. What matters is that he is *traditionally* named by employing this or another “large word” from the epic register. When the singer uses such a phrase, he implies the entire characterization of Mustajbey that the audience knows from their experience of his adventures in the epic tradition as a whole, not just the character as he appears in the song that is presently being sung and listened to. The formula opens the door to realizing that this is the Mustajbey who commands the Lika’s armies, who fights heroically against Christian enemies, who has a son named Bećirbey, and who despite his noble status can regularly prove traitorous to his own comrades. None of these attributes is literally described by the formula “Mustajbey of the Lika,” but all of them are implied in the traditional poetic context it engages.

Nor do formulas always need to name an individual in order to serve the needs of the compositional and expressive register in South Slavic epic. The short phrase *kukavica crna*, or

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<sup>37</sup> See further Foley 1999b:65-111.

<sup>38</sup> Foley 1999b:108.

“black cuckoo,” designates not a dark-colored bird, but rather a woman who has already lost her husband or is in imminent danger of losing him. By giving her this formulaic name, a *guslar* both engages a traditional implication and adds the character he is describing—in whatever situation or song—to the list of other “black cuckoos” in his and the audience’s experience of epic poetry. Similarly, by using the adjustable “word” that translates as “But you should have seen . . .” where the blank is filled by the name of the chief character in the next scene, a singer can bridge the narrative gap between events by invoking what he understands—and his audience also recognizes—as an idiomatic phrase for transition. Or a *guslar* might turn to one of hundreds of proverbs, all of them ten-syllable poetic lines, to add traditional context to a specific narrative moment. By virtue of such proverbs, a unique situation or event can be framed in terms of the poetic tradition; the poet effectively connects its individuality to the recurrent, idiomatic realities of the tradition as a whole.

Narrative units, much larger than formulas, also help to make up the epic register, or way of speaking, connecting individual, apparently unique scenes to the larger world of storytelling. By employing typical scenes that carry encoded meanings, *guslari* link immediate descriptions to an implied network of signification. One example of this strategy involves the theme of “Readying the horse” examined above. In addition to simply getting the job done by providing a ready-made, capsule account of cleaning, grooming, and caparisoning the animal, this typical scene also forecasts both the arming of the hero (itself another typical scene) and a trip to be undertaken by the hero or his substitute. This “large word” does not predict the precise nature of the arming, nor does it indicate the exact purpose of the voyage, which may lead to rescue, battle, espionage, or other heroic actions. What it does predict is a general pattern of activity: Readying the Horse, then Arming the Hero, and finally a life-or-death adventure far from the hero’s home.

The typical scene of “Shouting in prison,” whose basic structure we also examined earlier, offers another example of how the traditional epic register functions. Here the focus is on the lamenting hero who disturbs his captor’s son and threatens the survival of the royal lineage until a powerful female figure, usually the captor’s wife, intervenes and negotiates the prisoner’s release. That set of characters and events produces the literal force of the typical scene, but there is more to its meaning than that. From the moment it begins, customarily with a formula starting with the verb *cmiliti* (“to cry out, scream”), the “Shouting in prison” pattern forecasts a hero who, once released from longtime captivity, will successfully make his way back home to test the faithfulness of his wife. He will face severe challenges en route, and his wife (or fiancée) will have to defend herself against the advances of suitors who are trying to win her in marriage, but at some future point they will meet and some resolution—positive or negative—will take place. There can be no doubt of that outcome; the resolution will happen. All of that embedded story-material is implied when the *guslar* sings the typical scene of “Shouting in prison.”

### 3. *Ancient Greek*

Similarly, the traditional register of ancient Greek oral epic is far more than a useful compositional device; it is also a finely made instrument for expression. By encoding idiomatic



implications, Homer's "way of speaking" conveys much more than a literal level of meaning.<sup>39</sup> Both individual phrases and typical scenes make implicit reference to the traditional network of ideas, which is of course much larger and deeper than we can discover in a dictionary or lexicon. Understanding the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* depends on working toward a fluency in this specialized language or register.

In the area of formulaic diction, noun-epithet phrases such as "much-suffering divine Odysseus" or "goddess bright-eyed Athena" are considerably more than fillers. They amount to a coded message: by using their recognizable and recurrent form, oral epic poets can gain direct access to the entire complex characterization of the people they name. It is not often immediately important that Odysseus is called "much-suffering" and "divine"; these adjectives do not apply specifically to any one appearance in any single situation any more than a greeting like "Hello" or a wish like "Have a pleasant weekend" applies only to any one moment in one person's life. They are idiomatic phrases, pathways to the larger identity of the figure, methods for characterization on the largest scale. Such coded names access the traditional network and enrich any one episode with global, tradition-wide implications.

Two other formulas mentioned above work in similar ways. The small phrase ἄλλ' ἄγε, which occurs 149 times in the Homeric poems, regularly serves two idiomatic purposes: (1) it divides one section of a speech from another, preparing the listener or reader for a change of focus; and (2) it leads to a command or prayer. Note the impressive economy of the phraseology. Two words (or in our special sense, a single three-syllable "word") carry a complex, multilayered connotation; they organize a speech, mark a transition, and predict the nature of the next action. Likewise, the exclamation "what word escaped your teeth's barrier!" (ποιόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων) not only occupies a significant subdivision of the poetic line, but it also furnishes a built-in traditional context. When it appears, the fluent audience or reader knows that the speaker—an older or socially superior figure—is scolding another person for something the younger or socially inferior person should have known or done. Although it is far more than the literal meaning of the phrase, that larger frame of reference is the implication of this recurrent frame. Again we can see how the *ainos* communicates very economically.

Fundamentally the same strategy underlies the use of typical scenes in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Whereas the Feast scene consists of a regular and expectable pattern of elements, it also carries with it a regular and expectable set of implications. Whatever the situation and whoever the host and guest(s) may be, Feast always leads to mediation. In other words, the fluent audience or reader who encounters a Feast scene will expect at least an attempt at solution of a problem as the next narrative increment in the epic. Thus in the first book of the *Odyssey*, for example, the Feast hosted by Telemachos for the disguised Athena leads to the young man's speaking boldly to his mother's suitors and eventually to the trip to Menelaos' and Nestor's homes that prepares him for the reemergence of his father Odysseus later on in the story. According to the same pattern of implication, a Feast precedes Kalypso's release of Odysseus from captivity, Kirke's assistance to Odysseus, and many other corrective episodes.

Finally, the three-part typical scene of Lament—an address to the fallen hero, a narrative of their personal history and the consequences of his death for those left behind, and a final and

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<sup>39</sup> See further Foley 1999b:115-239.

intimate re-address of the hero—is also more than a structural convenience.<sup>40</sup> Although it does provide a “map” for exploring the mourning speeches given by Andromache, Helen, Hekabe, and Briseis in the later part of the *Iliad*, the typical scene does more than that. In the sixth book of the poem, while Hektor is visiting his wife and son in a brief respite from battle, Andromache asks her husband to remain away from the fighting, to preserve himself for their sake. Of course, Hektor denies her sad request and eventually returns to the battlefield, where he will die by Achilles’ hand. But if we listen to the poem’s special language, its register, we will notice that Andromache’s plea for her husband to stay safe within Troy is expressed in the form of the typical scene of Lament. If we are a good Homeric audience, aware of the way things are said, we will realize that she is already mourning the death of her husband—even though he stands alive before her. Such is the power of the traditional register.

#### 4. Old English

One way to describe the expressive power of the register in Old English oral-derived poetry is to inquire into the idiomatic meaning of the typical scenes and formulas mentioned above in the answers to Questions 3 and 4. What traditional implications do these units bear? In addition to dependable, ready-made structures that are useful for composition, what do the singers accomplish idiomatically by employing these larger “words” in their storytelling?

As already noted, the Exile theme or typical scene occurs very widely across a broad spectrum of different poems and different genres. In every case, it brings with it the idea of a person separated from essential networks of kinship and society, and it implicitly compares that person—the character under immediate examination in the given poem—with other exile figures in the poetic tradition. By aligning this particular character with a host of other exiles in the audience’s prior experience, the poets take advantage of the expressive resources not just of one poem but of the entire tradition. This kind of resonance helps to deepen our appreciation of the speaker of the poem entitled *Deor*,<sup>41</sup> for example, an oral singer who has lost his job and position at the royal court. His poem is a lament over the fact that he has been displaced by a new singer, Heorrenda, and he compares the misfortunes of a number of familiar figures from Germanic oral legend in order to convey his sense of loss and estrangement. But when the character Deor says that he “had knowledge of exile” (line 1) and “winter-cold exile” (4), he places himself in a traditional category—a cognitive slot—with which the audience is familiar. Deor is not simply estranged; he is idiomatically a Germanic exile, and that status helps us understand his pain and desolation.

Likewise, the three instances of Sea Voyage in *Beowulf* are structurally very similar but expressively quite different.<sup>42</sup> The two actual trips—from Geatland to Denmark and back again—are straightforward enough: in each case a hero leads his men on a journey. But the third is not even a real voyage; it chronicles the ship-burial of a legendary hero. First, the dead hero and his

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<sup>40</sup> For a full explanation, see further Foley 1998b:188-98.

<sup>41</sup> See further Foley 1999b:263-70.

<sup>42</sup> See further Foley 1990:336-44.

men go to the ship (element 1), which waits, moored (element 2). They board the ship and place treasure in the form of grave-goods by the mast (element 3). Metaphorically, the ship is said to depart and sail (element 4). But here is where the poet brilliantly manipulates the pattern of the typical scene and the audience's expectation. Instead of the anticipated landing at the other end of the journey, which customarily involves a coast-guard, the *Beowulf* poet indicates that "men don't know, to say truthfully, hall-counselors, heroes under the heavens, who received that burden" (lines 50b-52). The typical scene is serving not only as a structural convenience but as a strategic ploy. The poet is saying that no one can be certain about the afterlife of Scyld Scefing; both his destination and his reception are beyond our knowledge. Here the traditional idiom of the register adds a great deal to the poem.

As for the idiomatic content of formulas as another aspect of the register, both of the examples discussed above are heavy with implication. The phrase "in X-days," where X is a substitutable element bearing the alliteration, is involved in a larger cluster of phraseology that signals a beginning of a narrative and invokes traditional mythology. Combined with the interjection *Hwæt* ("Lo!" or "Listen!"), this formula identifies the onset of a heroic tale and the background of other stories against which the present poem is presented. Many Anglo-Saxon narratives start with a version of this cluster.<sup>43</sup>

The half-line formula "that was an X king," where X again is a substitutable element bearing the alliteration, also has a traditional meaning beyond its literal force.<sup>44</sup> Wherever it appears, this unit certifies the character as a fine leader and protector, a figure whom both his people and succeeding generations will celebrate as an ideal king. This status is automatically conferred by tradition; it is not open to argument nor is there need for independent verification. Thus, for instance, Hrothgar is certified as an excellent king (line 863), even though under his reign Grendel has been able to ravage his people, killing them at will during the night. Hrothgar's excellence derives from his earlier effectiveness, this phrase affirms, and Grendel's ability to overcome his followers is simply a measure of the monster's unprecedented strength and fury. Additionally, this phrase can be turned to a negative purpose, as when the *Deor* poet says the following of the cruel king Eormanric: "that was a *savage* king" (line 23). Using a traditional structure, the poet reverses the idiomatic expectation; while the audience anticipates the positive certification of Eormanric as an effective leader with concern for his people, what they actually hear or read is just the opposite—he is not an excellent but a savage king. By using the implications inherent in the register, the *Deor* poet creates a memorable characterization.

## Conclusion

These four epic traditions—Mongolian, South Slavic, ancient Greek, and Old English—represent an enormous variety. They cover an extensive geographical area, from Northern Asia to Western Europe, as well as a time period of at least 3,000 years. As we have attempted to answer

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<sup>43</sup> See further Foley 1991:214-23.

<sup>44</sup> See further Foley 1991:210-14.

each of the five questions for all four of the epic traditions, we have come to appreciate their diversity even more deeply.

To start, we asked “What is a poem in an epic tradition?” Although this may seem like a simple, straightforward question, we *discovered it depends upon that tradition* for both structure and meaning. Poems follow story-patterns and depend on implied (rather than explicit) reference for the development of characters, events, and situations. Asking “What is a *typical scene* in an epic tradition?” led to similar conclusions. Each of the poetries discussed here uses narrative increments as building blocks, and the patterns change with each performance according to the terms of the individual language and tradition. Typical scenes in Mongolian epic are shared from one canto to another; they take slightly different shapes in the mouths of different singers. Correspondingly, Mongolian typical scenes are in some ways quite unlike the units of ancient Greek, South Slavic, or Old English epic. Each tradition has its own language for composition and reception.

Our third question—“What is a poetic line in an oral epic tradition?”—again addressed the phenomenon of unity and diversity. Some lines are measured by syllables, some by stress or emphasis, some by musical melodies, and others by head-rhyme, tail-rhyme, and assonance. The lesson here is to realize that each oral epic language must be understood on its own terms, and not by imposing irrelevant criteria. The same is true of the *formula*, the initial subject of our fourth question and a unit that exists in cooperation with the poetic line. Since formulaic phraseology is defined by its metrical component, it also will vary from one singer to the next and even more from one epic tradition to another.

These questions and answers led us to our fifth question and our final concern—“What is the register in oral epic poetry?” With this focus we reached beyond the level of structure and utility to the level of idiomatic meaning. Mongolian cantos begin with a “palace scene” and end with feasting; this ring structure acts as a frame for whatever action it encloses. Homer, the ancient Greek legendary singer, uses a feast scene to signify upcoming mediation. The South Slavic *guslari* can refer to a woman as a “black cuckoo” to indicate that she either has been or soon may be widowed. And Old English scops certify a leader’s effectiveness and heroism by saying “That was an excellent king!” All of these bytes of narrative or phraseology mean much more than they seem to mean; their traditional, idiomatic sense goes well beyond their literal sense. In their various ways, each of the four epic languages has great resources of implication.

In closing, we hope that this comparative analysis of Mongolian, South Slavic, ancient Greek, and Old English oral epic has proved useful for scholars in various fields. There is an enormous amount still to be done: we need to understand the structure of these performances thoroughly enough to hear and read them on their own terms; we need to assemble dictionaries of “words” (formulas, typical scenes, story-patterns) for each tradition, and we need to take full account of the fact that, no matter how many real similarities we may find among traditions, differences will also remain of fundamental importance. In short, we must strive to become better, more fluent audiences for epic singing.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Electronic materials on oral epic are available via the Internet at the web site of the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, University of Missouri (<http://www.oraltradition.org>).

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