

Yearbook
for
Traditional
Music
Vol. 19

1987 YEARBOOK FOR TRADITIONAL MUSIC

DIETER CHRISTENSEN, USA
Editor

RICARDO TRIMILLOS, USA
Guest Editor

ANTHONY SEEGER, USA
Book Reviews

SALWA EL-SHAWAN CASTELO-BRANCO, PORTUGAL
Record Reviews

Published by the
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TRADITIONAL MUSIC
a founding member organisation of the
INTERNATIONAL MUSIC COUNCIL
under the auspices of the
UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL
ORGANISATION
(UNESCO)

from the Archive of the Institute of Folklore. Introduction and Notes by Tiberiu Alexandru and A.L. Lloyd. Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music, edited by Alan Lomax, vol. XVIII, 1963. KL 5799. 1 12" disc.

BARBARA KRADER

Lajos Vargyas: *Hungarian Ballads and the European Ballad Tradition*. I-II. Budapest Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983. 304 pp. + 960 pp. illustrations, notes, maps, bibliography, indices. Cloth.

What a magnificent book! Vol. I is an impressive dissertation on the entire European ballad tradition. Vol. II publishes for the first time in a language other than Hungarian a collected edition of all the most important versions of the 134 Hungarian ballads, and it analyses each of them in a European perspective. Lajos Vargyas's book may be compared to classical surveys such as W.J. Entwistle's *European Balladry* (1939), W. Danckert's *Das europäische Volkslied* (1939), and Erich Seemann et al., *European Folk Ballads* (1967). Vargyas is rather critical of Seemann, and his conclusions are quite different.

Vargyas has been publishing articles and books on Hungarian folk song and folk music since 1941. He is recognized internationally for his studies in the European ballad tradition in all its geographic and linguistic breadth—from Russia to Great Britain (USA, Canada) and from Scandinavia to Greece. The present work summarizes all this work, including the book *Researches into the Mediaeval History of Folk Ballad* (1967). The purpose of the book is "to raise all the theoretical questions of European balladry". It was originally published in Hungarian in 1976.

In such a vast field the question of definition becomes all important. Vargyas is of the opinion that the ballad arises as a genre around 1300, from a historical point of view as a successor to the epos. He comes to the conclusion that "the true nature of the ballad" incorporates brevity, strophic arrangement, a psychological approach to man and his presentation in social relations, a peculiar, conventionalized, narrative style characterized by commonplaces, repetitions, visualization, etc., and singing without performance in the stage meaning of the word. It is moreover a criterion that ballads are international in character, identical or similar among several nations. On the other hand, the time of origin is not decisive, for Vargyas includes ballads that have come into existence at various times from the 14th to the 19th century. But an aesthetic point of view plays a part in a way difficult to define, e.g., when Vargyas considers that the masterworks of the genre were created before the middle of the 16th century. All things considered, this is a rather traditional definition, apart from the fact that his emphasis on the international aspect makes Vargyas exclude from "genuine ballads" a good many of the heroic and supernatural English and Danish ballads.

Vargyas's basic approach is "the method of comparison". The method puts the major themes of the ballad into focus together with its various motifs, its characteristic details, and its form. The decisive question is, as we know, to what an extent "wandering motifs" may be found, and whether similarities may arise independently in different geographic areas, at various periods, and in different surroundings. Vargyas gives, as always, a well-balanced answer to this extremely complicated question. Basically, he subscribes to the Finnish geographical school, and he is of the opinion that it is possible to establish criteria for determining "the donor and the acceptor, and the trend of diffusion". But there are many criteria at various levels, and they may sometimes point to opposite directions, and Vargyas therefore emphasizes that conclusions should only be drawn from a careful, superior balancing. Complete certainty is not possible.

The Hungarian ballad tradition is next divided into various chronological strata. The most important result is the demonstration of a large group of ballad texts, which were taken over direct from France in the 14th century. Vargyas proves the existence of this French-Hungarian link from the actual texts, but he also demonstrates beyond doubt that there were French and Walloon settlements in medieval Hungary—that is, settlements with close contacts to their Western relatives. Another very old group has taken over motifs and stylistic figures from the earlier epic songs, and four more groups are also established.

Vargyas proceeds from this to demonstrate who the lenders and borrowers are in the

European ballad tradition taken as a whole. He concludes that the ballads have spread from (Northern) France to the whole of Europe, and that Hungary has been the most important intermediate country when the ballads passed from the West to Bulgaria and the Balkans.

On the basis of sober criteria, Vargyas reaches the conclusion that the ballad genre developed its first characteristic products early in the 14th century, and soon spread out. And Vargyas is of the opinion that a new era grew up in the European peasant societies towards the end of the 13th century—characterized by a new form of economy, and accordingly by new social and psychological life conditions. The genre grew out of the peasantry's need to depict these new conditions.

The Danish (Scandinavian) ballads have always held a special place in ballad scholarship. This is because they have been transmitted so profusely through manuscripts written by the nobility as far back as the second half of the 16th century. It has, therefore, so far been generally supposed that the nobility created the Danish ballads during the middle ages. It has been unavoidable for Vargyas to take a position on this fact regarding the sources. He arrives at the conclusion that learned culture and folk culture is more intermingled in Denmark than elsewhere, and that only 203 out of the total number of 539 "official" Danish ballads fit into his common European ballad definition. (This figure does not include jocular ballads). He can, therefore, after this sorting out proceed with a chapter in which he carefully argues one of his basic views: the ballad is a creation of peasant communities. He rejects the idea that ballads are the work of individuals, and that they should represent *gesunkenes Kulturgut*. He argues instead that they resemble other peasant genres in many important ways: they are found like a tissue of variants without an original form, and, like other folklore products, they have come into existence in the gradual course of variation, modelling and remodelling. A table of the textual relationships of all the old Hungarian ballads concludes this large and thought-provoking chapter.

A chapter on "ballad areas and ballad styles" examines first the various provinces in the Hungarian area, after this the French, the Danish, the English, the German, and, finally and briefly, other linguistic areas. An impressive view on ballad themes, forms, and styles throughout a vast area, it concludes with a useful survey of the French ballad types. It will be remembered that these have never been published in a collected, scholarly edition.

Volume I also contains some reflections on "the ballad and contemporary man", a survey of "Hungarian ballad research", and a thorough bibliography. The volume is rounded off with a large chapter on "Tune and dance". It is unusual for ballad scholars to master both textual and musical disciplines, but Vargyas appears to belong to the select few. We therefore forgive him that he restricts his conclusions to Hungarian material. It is, after all, almost impossible to get a reliable view of the European ballad tunes, and the whole study of tunes is badly in need of some common European indexes and concordances. The result is that far too much depends on the individual scholar's memory. (In our era of computers, it can only be a question of time before an effective folk music index is developed on computers). But the survey Vargyas gives in this chapter is as far as I know the first thorough survey of all the Hungarian ballad tunes. He points out that the ballads are attached to a certain tune type or melodic style rather than to a definite tune, and he draws up nine stylistic groups of tunes. The question of the origin of the tunes is one of the most important to Vargyas. He produces detailed examples of "tune families" deriving from church music, secular art song, etc., and as regards the geographic origin, he finds influences from especially French tunes, but also from German and Slavic ones. Finally, Vargyas is of the opinion that he can disprove the common assumption that the ballad genre in its origin has been a unity of song and dance.

There is material for a whole book in the chapter on tunes. Vargyas presents some results in a very compressed form, but we do not get the premises in explicit form, which we did with the textual analysis. What are the criteria, for example, for reckoning individual tunes as members of the same tune family; how do we ascertain the borrowing of tunes; what is Vargyas's basic view of the compositional system of the ballad tunes—the relationship between formula, variant, version, type, and model?

Vol. II presents texts and tunes for 92 old and 42 younger Hungarian ballads. Vargyas publishes 237 textual variants out of a total 6456. Virtually all tune variants for each textual type are given, and considering that the various textual types have often been recorded with 20 or 30 tune variants (in isolated cases with close on 100 tune variants), this is also a very noteworthy tune edition. With each type there is a list of textual divergencies in those

variants which are not published, their earliest (Hungarian) provenience, known variants in and outside Hungary, textual relationship with other ballads, and there is a small treatise on the origin and ways of dissemination in a European perspective. The volume concludes with an account of ballads not included in the publication, and with indexes of conflict plots, themes, scenes, characters, and details of formulation in Hungarian ballads.

Vargyas's book is on all its 1264 pages densely packed with material, and it is a rewarding book. His "method of comparison" is not new, but rather a little old-fashioned in the 1980's. I think there is a direct methodical line from Vargyas and all the way back to Svend Grundtvig, the great Danish editor of *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (Old Danish popular Ballads) in the middle of the 19th century. It is as a matter of fact striking how many of the early ideas about the ballads reappear in a new way in Vargyas's book: the idea of the collective creation of the ballads, the peasants as the most important carriers of the tradition, the aesthetic idea that "the true nature of the ballad" can be defined quite generally, the opinion that the oldest ballads are artistically the best, the strong focussing on oral tradition (and the resulting diminishing of the importance of the broadside ballads), to a certain extent the idea that every nation has its own peculiar ballad tradition, etc. But the ideas certainly get a new and more concrete shape than they used to have, and Vargyas supplements them also with new and quite unromantic ideas. He holds, for example, a basic view that the ballads arose as the peasantry's protest against their life conditions in the late feudal times.

A number of questions could be raised about the book. One is whether Vargyas with his comparative method and his overall view does not argue too generally, e.g., when he describes the European peasantry's life conditions around 1300, when he nearly makes the peasantry appear as one homogenous mass without internal social differences, or when he discusses whether certain motifs are characteristic of the nobility or the peasantry. But my scepticism is probably a question of basic attitude. Vargyas is not very interested in the actual situations in which ballads have been used or in their function in a specific surrounding, and he does not, for example analyse the complete song repertoire of one individual. Another question is whether Vargyas should not have included jocular ballads to a larger extent. More than 70 such ballads with a presumed medieval origin are known in Scandinavia alone. They run like a parallel stream beside the serious ballads, but the protagonists are common people, and they may also in other ways throw a new light on the ballad genre as a whole.

There are many more aspects of Vargyas's book, which could have been stressed here. This is not a book to be easily finished. Vargyas has given us an impressive survey. Methodically, it continues the best in a long tradition of scholarship, but it is also packed with opinions, analyses, questions, and assertions, so that it will inspire and provoke criticism for many years to come. And then it reminds us how unnatural the present division of Europe between East and West is.

TRANSLATION: OLE MUNCH-PEDERSEN

JENS HENRIK KOUDAL

Baud-Bovy, Samuel. *Essai sur la Chanson Populaire Grecque*. Nauplion: Fondation ethnographique du Péloponnèse, 1983, musical examples, map, photos, bibliography, index, recorded musical examples on two cassettes, booklet with transcriptions of recordings, xvii + 123 pp. [Available in Greek].

In this, his last book, Samuel Baud-Bovy (1906-1986) summarizes the problems and questions that occupied him over the 50 and more years during which he studied traditional Greek music. Perhaps the most revealing chapter is the first, in which he shows that many of the features of the musical-poetic structure of the Modern Greek Demotic Songs (MGDS) do not originate in Byzantium, as supposed until recently, nor in the period of Turkish rule, but come straight from the folk music and folk poetry of ancient Greece. He adduces examples in support of this view from various sources: for example, the 1st century A.D. 'Epitaph of Seikilos' is used to demonstrate the ancient origin, not only of certain modern Greek couplets on the vanity of human life, but even of some morphological, rhythmic and melodic elements met with in one of the most popular of modern Greek dances, the