

NINA PAVELČÍK AND JIŘÍ PAVELČÍK
68801 U. Brod, Czech Republic

Myths of the Czech Gypsies

Abstract

In this article two Gypsy myths that are recorded in a manuscript by Rudolf Daniel are introduced and described. These two myths are significant because they indicate that some of the oldest Gypsy traditions on record were long preserved in the Gypsies' oral traditions. On the basis of the individual elements that make up these myths and others like them, the authors suggest that a more exact determination of the location and time of the Gypsy migrations can be determined.

Keywords: European Gypsies—origin of Gypsies—etiology of disease—Gypsy mythology—cosmogony

THE MAJORITY OF EXPERTS are of the opinion that the Gypsies originated from central India, from where they had been forced to emigrate in several great waves. These experts look to the Gypsies' old homeland of India to discover the roots of the anthropological, linguistic, and sociocultural differences that characterize the main ethnic subgroups of the present European Gypsy communities. Most of the Gypsies, after their arrival in Europe, lived isolated from the majority of the population in reclusive, clan-based communities. For a long time they preserved their traditional ways of life, the rituals related to their life, and the myths that told of their origins and conceptions of life. Being faithful to these traditions ensured the survival of individual communities as well as the whole ethnic group. During the twentieth century, under the impact of industrial society and the political developments in the communist part of Europe, there began a rapid destruction and loss of the Gypsies' original ethnic cultural system, with its traditional habits and a wealth of original verbal art. This destruction has been particularly prominent among the majority of the settled Gypsies.

The traditional culture of the individual subgroups among the Gypsy population has mainly been upheld through oral tradition. Some items of this tradition were recorded and published already during the nineteenth century, but only during the last few years have ethnologists begun to attempt a more thorough analysis of the diversity of these forms of tradition. In the following, one item of this tradition will be introduced: a text whose source is not well known among specialists. It is an authentic and rare document written by the teacher Rudolf Daniel, who was one of the first academic Gypsies in Moravia to write about his people. In the manuscript, which carries the somewhat poetic title *Housle a kůň* (Violin and Horse), he describes in detail the history, the customs, and ways of life of his predecessors and contemporaries in order to preserve knowledge of them for future generations. The sources that Daniel uses for the text are his own personal experiences, narratives of his relatives and friends, and published literature

that was available at the time of his writing (circa 1955). Among other items, he recorded very old myths that were believed to have disappeared from the memory of most Czech and Slovakian Gypsies in the second half of the twentieth century. For specialists in Romany studies, this part of Daniel's record is particularly interesting because it indicates that many of the Gypsies' oldest oral traditions that were recorded and analyzed in texts were actually preserved in the people's minds for a rather long period, and survived throughout a much wider territory than what the majority of experts have hitherto assumed.

THE FIRST MYTH

Out of the many mythic narratives that can be found in Daniel's manuscript, two in particular attract our attention.¹ The first of them takes us back to the times when, according to this tradition, Mother Earth and Father Sky had a quiet and untroubled marriage. Together they had five king-sons whose names were Sun, Moon, Fire, Wind, and Haze (Rain) (cf BERGER 1984, 794–95). While the sons were still small, they were a wellspring of pleasure for their parents; they were well-behaved and sweet children. But when they started to grow up they began to quarrel among themselves. In order to prevent the worst, a fratricidal fight, the parents put their sons between them and nestled so strongly against one another that only a small space remained where the quarreling sons were locked in.

But even this tactic did not help. The young kings still quarreled and looked for reasons to fight. The space between the parents was so tight and narrow that the sons were afraid they would suffocate. So once during a virulent fight, the sons decided to separate the parents by force and to escape into the world. If they could successfully escape by attacking their parents, they planned to part and go as far away as possible to a place where each of them could have his own new home and create his own sovereign kingdom.

King Moon carried out the first attack against Mother Earth trying to rip her away from Father Sky. He failed, probably because he did not have enough strength to carry out his plan. The second attack was performed by King Haze who attacked Father Sky. But he, too, failed and so did King Fire. Even the strength of the fourth son, King Sun, was not enough to destroy the parents' grasp on one another, he got the parents only to twitch. King Wind, however, seized the moment of his parents' twitching and by smashing himself up against Mother Earth using all his wild power, he was able to push her off Father Sky. In this way, earth and sky became separated forever. The sky spread above the earth and their sons were free.

However, because of the young kings' innate restlessness, they were still not satisfied. They decided that they did not want to go into the wide world

anymore. So they started to wrangle about who was going to stay with mother and who with father. The strife was decided by Mother Earth. She said, "King Sun, King Moon, and King Wind, you have opposed your mother; you attacked me. Therefore you stand back. You two, King Haze and King Fire, you caused me no pain, so stay with me!" In one of the preserved versions of the myth, the story ends here with the five sons of Mother Sky and Father Earth incessantly quarreling.

In their collection of Wallachian fairy tales, Artur and Albert SCHOTT (1845) included this myth in a version from the nomadic Romany of Wallachia. According to this version, the winner of the feud was Wind because he proved to be the most powerful—he separated the mother from the father. He became, therefore, the leader of the brothers.

In the traditional narratives and cosmogonic myths of many nations, the bipolarity of the principles of fertility constitutes a basic element. And yet, we can hardly find a direct genetic connection between these narratives. For example, in myths of ancient Greece, Mother Earth (Gaea) is fecundated by the sky, Uranos, and from this union other gods are born. From ancient Egypt we know the core of a myth in which the roles of sky and earth are cast in the opposite way: the female element (the goddess Nut) represents the sky and the male element (Nut's brother Geb) represents the earth. They, too, were separated by force but the agent was their father, the god of air (Shov).

Daniel also presents a different and more detailed end of the myth, one that accounts for the traditional respect Gypsies have for mountains. In contrast to the first (cosmogonic) part of the myth, this second part has the character of an orographical myth, i.e., a myth about mountains. In it the reprobated sons did not want to depart from the mother whom they loved, and none of them wanted to break with her forever. However, the parents were ruthless. Father Sky decides to haul Sun, Moon, and Wind away. The sons react by clinging to their mother with all their strength. They dig their fingernails into their mother's clothes, but her clothes are torn from her when the father pulls them off her and carries them away. From the pieces of the mother's clothes that fell from their hands after being pulled away, grow small and high mountains. Wind tried to carry the pieces, but since he was very tired, he let the pieces that were a memory of his mother fall onto Mother Earth. This is how the high mountains appeared in this world. Because Mother Earth took pity on her bad sons, she left the pieces of her clothing where they had fallen in order to stay as close to her children as possible. She let them build their castles on the tops of the mountains as shelters for times when they grew weary of staying with their father. But she was careful to prevent other attacks against her person and populated the mountains

with good nymphs and bad demons who were supposed to be the guardians of her sons and their progeny. According to Daniel, Gypsies respected the mountains as happy places and expressed this feelings in songs and prayers up to the time he was writing; their curses also frequently allude to a “happy mountain” as the residence of bad demons (e.g., “May the devil have you perish on the happy mountain,” “May the dogs eat your heart on the happy mountain”).

Gypsies from Serbia preserved a further variant of this mythic story. According to their version, earth is situated between the horns of an ox (a cosmic animal representing the sky²), which shakes its head from time to time and by doing so causes earthquakes. Jan Filipický of the “Orientální institut AV ČR” in Prague has recorded the same myth among the Gónd and the Bhíl in India, and among the Indian “Gypsy” ethnic group Kandžar.

THE SECOND MYTH

The second story from Rudolf Daniel’s collection is a myth about demons that cause particular diseases. Daniel probably drew the core of this long myth from a written source, and most probably from the work of H. von WLISLOCKI (1892). It is noteworthy that the names Daniel attributes to the individual demons are not in accordance with the pattern of names that, according to H. BERGER (1984),³ issued from the terminology known only to the Turkish and Serbian Gypsies at the end of the nineteenth century. However, Daniel states that central European Gypsies knew (or even created) this myth, and he presents the names of the demons in the forms that, according to him, correspond better with the forms used in his own homeland. It should be noticed that the elements of this myth can be found also among Slovakian Gypsies.

The story tells of Queen Ana, who was the queen of the Keshali nymphs (“Kešali” according to Filipický) who were the daughters of King Haze living in the mountains. Three of them visited the queen every morning, and each one gave the queen one drop of blood from her left hand. This was the only food that kept the queen alive. As long as the queen was alive, the Keshali nymphs would not be attacked and eaten up by the Locolics (“Loholiči” according to Filipický) who were a bunch of humans cursed by elves and changed into ugly demons (devils). Such was determined in the treaty concluded a long time ago between Queen Ana and the king of the Locolics.

The story begins at the time, thousands of years ago, when Queen Ana was the most beautiful and desired virgin in the world. At that time, the king of the Locolics fell in love with her, but the queen did not like him and refused his proposal to marry him. After her refusal she became afraid that she might be abducted, and therefore took cover in a black rock castle. The

king was outraged and his mind was clouded by his passionate love. In his anger he and his subjects attacked the innocent Keshali nymphs and began to eat them. When the unhappy Ana saw the effect of her refusal, she left the castle and agreed to marry the king. From their union nine children were born, who were all mischievous demons because they were all products of a love-deficient marriage. The later in the marriage that a child was born, the more mischievous that child would be compared to his or her older siblings. When the ninth demon was born he had such horrible looks that even his own father suffered a shock. By the time this ninth child was born, the king of the Locolics had finally learned from his own experience that his forced marriage had no future. He therefore allowed Ana to go free, and the two signed a divorce agreement that was to be valid until the queen's death (see treaty mentioned above). The agreement contained the important clause that every Keshali nymph had to be given away to the Locolics after she had reached the age of 999 years.

According to Daniel's version, the origin of the name "Ana" is the word *ana*, which means "pass" or "bring." With this word she calls lonely walkers in the mountains, and when they hear it, they have to grab a frog, a beetle, or some other animal and throw it into the nearest bush. If they fail to do this, they must run away very fast lest they be in danger of being crushed by the rock the queen will throw at them. The great danger for mankind are Ana's children. Unfortunately, they remained on the earth and became the demons that cause diseases. When they grew up, they began to copulate among themselves and became parents and grandparents of subsequent generations. In general, their degree of propinquity to Queen Ana and the king of the Locolics, determines how deadly the diseases are that they cause.

The oldest of the demons is Ana's son Melalo ("The Dirty One"). He causes many psychic and physical malfunctions. He has the form of a little grey bird with two heads. The person in whom he enters falls into a rage, destroying and murdering without mercy. Daniel reports in this context that people in his place in the 1950s still said "*Yov hin jiamutr Melaskero*" (He is Melalo's son-in-law) in reference to a ruffian or a brutal person.

Melalo's wife is his sister, Ana's second child, Lili (according to Daniel, her name is Lilyi and her form that of a hagfish). She has the form of a fish with a woman's head and causes inflammation of the mucous membranes that result in, for example, coughs, influenza, and dysentery.

The third child is Tculo ("The Fatty One"; according to Filipský he is also called Thulo). He has the form of a ball covered with spines, and his attacks, especially of the intestines, cause great pain. He likes to attack pregnant women more than anyone else. His wife is his sister, and Ana's fourth child, Tcaridyí ("The Hot One"; according to Filipský she is also called

TABLE 1: Queen Ana's Children

Name	Order of birth all children	Sons	Daughters	Relationship
Melalo	1	1		
Lily	2		1	couple
Tculo	3	2		
Tcaridyí	4		2	couple
Shulalyi	5		3	
Bitoso	6	3		couple
Lolmistro	7	4		
Minceskre	8		4	couple
Poreskoro	9			epicene

Tharidi). She is a worm with long hair and attacks only women. She moves through women's veins and arteries, where she gradually loses her hair thereby causing fever and inflammations. Her attacks are most painful after childbirth. All the diseases caused by this incestuous couple and their children are women's diseases.

The third of Ana's daughters is Shulalyi (Šilali, "The Cold One"). Her mother hated her because she was not born the normal way—she was born out of her mother's mouth. She has the form of a white mouse and causes all types of fever and rigor. According to Daniel, such diseases were treated with a powder made from the dried lungs and stomachs of mice, and liquefied in firewater (alcohol). To prove how strong this folk belief was Daniel cites a story about an event that allegedly happened in Banská Bystrica (central Slovakia) in 1845:

Two Gypsies entered a pharmacy to offer their services, and there they saw the cage in which the pharmacist bred white mice that he probably intended to use for experiments. One of the visitors grabbed the cage and both ran with it to the end of the town, where they threw it into a well. When the police interrogated them for theft, they declared that the pharmacist should be punished for his breeding of such dangerous demons in a publicly accessible place.

Shulalyi's husband Bitoso ("The Fastening One") is Ana's third son and sixth child. He is a small multiheaded worm moving quickly through the human body and causing banal affections, such as qualms, gripes, and stomach pains. But his children are worse. They cause toothaches, leg spasms, and tinnitus.

The name of the fourth son corresponds to his form. In Daniel's text his name is Lolmistro ("Red Mouse"; according to Filipský his name is Lolimišo). This mouse runs on a person's body at night and causes diseases such as hives and ulcers that are very common among the Gypsies. His wife is Ana's eighth child, Minceskre (Minčeskre according to Filipský: "The One Who Came Up From The Female Genitals"). The Gypsies visualize her as a hairy beetle that creeps over the body and leaves on it the tracks of its destructive work (Figure 1). She causes all venereal diseases including syphilis. Daniel says that old people still remember the procedures for treating this scourge. A patient was buried in manure and "watered" with firewater. The drastic method frequently drove out the beetle and, if the disease was already in its second stage, the ulcers disappeared.

Ana's youngest child is Poreskoro ("The Caudate One"). He has four dog heads and four cat heads; his body is that of a bird and his tail is like a serpent. He is the most fulsome of all of Ana's children because he is an epicene creature. He lives together with his descendants deep under the ground and appears on the surface only occasionally. But when he appears "it is always a terrible event," because he causes destruction and confusion. He is the originator of the plague, cholera, and smallpox.



FIGURE 1: Ana's eighth child, Minceskre.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The daughters of King Haze, the Keshali nymphs that live in forests and on mountains, figure in the myths and tales of Gypsies from southern Russia, Ukraine, Transylvania, and the countries on the lower Danube. Their name originates from their long silky hair. (The term Keshali derives from either the Sanskrit *keś*, which means "silk," or from *keśa*, which means "hair.") As we have mentioned before, at the end of the nineteenth century scholars

thought that the names of these demons could be found only in myths transmitted among the Gypsies from Turkey and in part of Serbia. However, the myths recorded by Daniel and other authors prove that these names were also found in myths that were current and widespread among Moravian and Slovakian Gypsies even in the twentieth century. This makes us think that the common source of these myths is older than the local traditions mentioned.

According to Czech Indologists, no direct parallels with this myth from Indian mythology can be found in the available literature. However, specialists agree that various migrating streams of the Gypsy population passed through Iran and took either a southern or a northern route around the Caucasus on their way to Europe after they had been displaced from India. According to the estimates of historians, they may have stayed in Iran for 600 or even 800 years under their original name *Domos* or *Lomos*. There are some indications in the text of the second myth related above that suggest a possible connection with myths of the nations or traditions the Gypsies could have encountered on their journey to Europe. For example, the name *Lili* or *Lilyi* reminds us of the Babylonian-Sumerian female demon *Lilit*, the Sumerian *Lillake*, and of Adam's apocryphal first wife *Lilith*. All these names designate demonic entities that were said to cause numerous diseases or death, including the murdering of babies during the night. In a similar vein, the goddess *Lamaštu* could correspond with *Tharidi* of Assyria. Like the Gypsy demon, this goddess had an unnatural form: she was imagined as having the head of a wolf or lion, the body of a woman down to the waist, and below the waist her figure was described as being similar to that of an eagle.

Researchers in present European Romany literature, using fragmentary historical records and studies of the development of Gypsy dialects, are looking for the roots of the Gypsies as an ethnic group, and for the routes their waves of migration might have taken. They pay great attention to the traditional habits and the sociocultural systems of the Gypsy communities and compare these with the ways of life of past and present populations in India (see, for example FRASER 1993 and HÜBSCHMANNOVÁ 1998). Even though there has been a tradition of collecting Gypsy oral folk art in Europe since the second half of the nineteenth century, no in-depth study has been made so far that compares the Gypsy narratives with the mythologies of those nations with which the Gypsies had come into contact during their long migrations.

As I have tried to indicate in this short article, the chapter of Daniel's manuscript that deals with old mythical images of the Gypsies offers a feast of interesting food for reflection as well as themes for comparison with mythic stories of the Asian nations with which the Gypsies lived for a part of

their history. More in-depth studies of individual elements of the myths that belong to the oldest parts of the oral tradition could contribute to (beside other scientific results) a more exact determination of the time and locations of the migrations of the Gypsies. We assume that specialists of Asian mythology would be able to find many further possible connections that might guide us when looking for prototypes and parallels of the myths of the Gypsies now living in central Europe. Rudolf Daniel's manuscript, introduced in this article, and some of the contexts of the information he cites will no doubt be of use to future studies. His manuscript and the information in it should spur an interest among the scientific community for cooperation in searching for indicia that may help to clarify the details of the origin and the courses of migration of the contemporary European Gypsy population.

NOTES

1. We do not offer a translation of Daniel's manuscript, but paraphrase those sections we deem to be relevant for the purpose of this article. We believe, in fact, that it is nearly impossible to accurately translate the manuscript. Daniel indulges in digressions and remarks that are difficult to understand when translated into English. It is also not quite clear how much Daniel might have known of the literature available.

2. It should be a bull, not an ox.

3. We wish to thank Jan Filipický for having drawn our attention to this fact.

4. The idea that the name "Melalo" means "The Dirty One" is supported by the fact that the Gypsies of eastern Slovakia called him Bižužo, "unclean" (see LACKOVÁ 1997).

REFERENCES CITED

- BERGER, Hermann
 1984 *Mythologie der Zigeuner*. In *Wörterbuch der Mythologie, 1. Abt., Band V*, Hrsg. Hans Wilhelm Haussig, 775–823. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- DANIEL, Rudolf
 n.d. *Housle a kůň* (Violin and Horse). Manuscript, collection of the authors.
- FRASER, A.
 1993 *The Gypsies*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- HÜBSCHMANNOVÁ, M.
 1998 *Šaj pes dovačeras—můžeme se domluvit* (We can make ourself understood). Olomouc: PU.
- LACKOVÁ, E.
 1997 *Narodila jsem se pod šťastnou hevezdou* (I was born under the Happy Star). Praha: Triáda.
- SCHOTT, Artur und Albert SCHOTT
 1845 *Walachische Märchen*. Stuttgart.
- WLISLOCKI, H. von
 1892 *Aus dem inneren Leben der Zigeuner*. Berlin.