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## A study of how Prince and the Gypsy King preserved the traditions and habits of the Gypsies (Roma) in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (XVIII century)

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### Rezumat

#### Păstrarea tradițiilor și obiceiurilor țiganilor (romilor) prin unirea Prințului și Regelui Țiganului în Commonwealth-ul Polono-Lituanian (sec. XVIII)

Acest articol include reflecțiile asupra diferitelor reminiscențe orale ale evenimentelor descrise în schița „Academia urșilor în grija regilor romi”<sup>1</sup>, care a avut loc între anii 1778–1795 în fostul Commonwealth polono-lituanian, pe teritoriul pământurilor care aparțineau regilor Radziwill, Belarus. Aceasta a făcut parte din cooperarea foarte uimitoare dintre Prințul Karol Radziwill (Panie Kochanku) și regele local țigan (rom) Yan Martinkevich din Mir și Nieswiz, parțial în Smorgon (Belarus), care a fost benefică foarte mult comunității țiganilor (romilor). Anume această colaborare a contribuit la păstrarea tradițiilor și obiceiurilor țiganilor (romilor). Articolul descrie tradițiile și obiceiurile comunităților de țigani care se aflau pe teritoriul ținutului regal al familiei Radziwill. Pentru prima dată sunt descrise tehnicile medicinei populare tradiționale, care era în slujba vindecătorilor și vrăciutorilor. Sunt dezvăluite câteva tehnici de ghicire țigănească folosite de ghicitorii țigani în sistemul ghicitului tradițional. Sunt descrise grupurile sociale înregistrate în rândul comunității tradiționale de țigani din această perioadă. Este descrisă trecerea comunităților de țigani care se aflau sub stăpânirea prințului și a regelui țiganului în Commonwealth-ul polono-lituanian (sec. al XVIII-lea) sub stăpânirea Ecaterinei a II-a. S-a menționat rolul Prințesei Basia în atragerea copiilor romi la școală, precum și în formarea lor ca ucenici.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** tradiții și obiceiuri ale țiganilor, sec. al XVIII-lea, Commonwealth polono-lituanian, uniunea regelui țiganilor și a prințului Radziwill.

### Резюме

#### Сохранение традиций и обычаев цыган (ромов) через союз князя и цыганского короля в Речи Посполитой (XVIII век)

Данная статья включает в себя размышления о различных устных воспоминаниях о событиях, описанных в статье «Медвежья академия на попечении цыганских королей»<sup>1</sup>, которые происходили в 1778–1795 гг. на территории бывшей Речи Посполитой, на королевских землях Радзивиллов в Белоруссии. Это было частью удивительного сотрудничества между князем Каролом Радзивиллом (Пание Кочанку) и местным цыганским (ромским) королем Яном Мартинкевичем в Мире и Несвиже, частично в Сморгони (Белоруссия), которое принесло большую пользу цыганской (ромской) общине. Именно это сотрудничество способствовало сохранению традиций и обычаев цыган (ромов). В статье описаны традиции и обычаи цыганских общин, которые располагались

на территории королевской земли Радзивиллов. Впервые представлены приемы народной медицины, которая состояла на службе знахарей и целителей. Раскрыты некоторые приемы традиционного цыганского гадания, используемые цыганками-гадалками. В статье отражены сведения о социальных группах, зафиксированных в среде традиционной цыганской общины; описан переход цыганских общин, находившихся под властью князя и цыганского короля в Речи Посполитой (XVIII в.), под власть Екатерины II. Раскрыта роль княгини Баси в привлечении цыганских детей к школьному образованию, а также к обучению их в подмастерьях.

**Ключевые слова:** традиции и обычаи цыган, XVIII в., Речь Посполитая, союз цыганского короля и князя Радзивилла.

### Summary

#### A study of how Prince and the Gypsy King preserved the traditions and habits of the Gypsies (Roma) in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (XVIII<sup>th</sup> century)

This article includes our reflection on different oral reminiscences of the events, described in the article “The Bear’s Academy in the Care of the Romani Kings”<sup>1</sup> which took place between 1778–1795 in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in the territory of the Radziwill lands, Belarus. This was part of the very amazing cooperation between the Prince Karol Radziwill (Panie Kochanku) and the local Gypsy (Romani) King Yan Martinkevich in Mir and Nieswiz, partially in Smorgon (Belarus), which greatly benefited the Gypsy (Romani) Community. Namely, this collaboration contributed to preserving the traditions and customs of the Gypsies (Roma). The article describes the traditions and customs of the gypsy communities that were located on the territory of the royal land of the Radziwills. For the first time, the techniques of traditional medicine, which was in the service of healers and healers witch-doctors, are described. Some gypsy fortune-telling techniques used by gypsy fortune-tellers in traditional fortune-telling are revealed. The social groups recorded among the traditional gypsy community are described. The transition of the Gypsy communities that were under the rule of the prince and the Gypsy king in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (XVIII<sup>th</sup> century) to the rule of Catherine II is described. The role of Princess Basia in attracting Roma children to school, as well as training them as apprentices.

**Key-words:** traditions and customs of the gypsies, 18th century, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, union of the gypsy king and prince Radzwill.

*Yakubo* and *Radvilo* cooperated very beneficially on Gypsy power, features, and problems, de-

spite the completely different mentality: the leader of the nomadic people and the highest aristocrat. The Gypsies looked at *Yakubo* as their brother, not the king, but *Radvilo* as the highest official before them. *Radvilo* felt extraordinary respect for *Yakubo* and he joined with him with all his heart.

*Radvilo* was one of the few people who believed in the subtle psychology, freedom-loving nature and mind of his chosen one. He was not mistaken: the sharp mind of *Yakubo* grasped everything in a flash and understood every movement in the face of his patron and often said: "I so appreciate your kindness '*Pane Kohanku* (Beloved Sir)', worthy of your noble soul. May God us grant that we continue to be bound by our honour to each other"<sup>2</sup>.

But it was very difficult for *Yakubo* to manage his fellow tribesmen: he was, first of all, a gypsy king, who had to take into account the history of gypsies in Poland and its neighbours, take into account the behaviour and morality of both settled and nomadic gypsies, their special, emotional background of their culture: expressive and explosive acts – (for example, a sudden quarrel over a trifle by the Gypsy trainer and an escape from the Bear Academy during classes, when they abandoned bear training; or if the music touched his heart so that he started to dance, at which he and his the bewildered bear calmed down), rely on the age-old traditions of his people, for whom fortune-telling, prediction, mystical actions; the skill and dexterity of the profitable sale or exchange of horses lived in the minds of the nomadic people and were a source of food and income for the gypsy family, where the woman was the main breadwinner according to Gypsy customs.

On the lands of *Radvilo*, many gypsies told fortunes on cards and water, prepared drugs, knowing perfectly well medicinal herbs, as well as intoxicating plants in order to receive a reward for the service of divination. As a rule, they used wild rosemary, sage; boiled dried blueberries. Gypsy women passed on this knowledge from generation to generation. Then medicine was poorly developed, there were few pharmacies; besides, the people were very god-fearing, sometimes superstitious about relationships with nature, their psyche, the other world and the sky. It seemed to them that the gods live in heaven, and the angels accompany the chosen person all their lives: from childbirth, growing up and marriage; in relations with family and neighbours, connections with the animal world; they (especially women) often got help from people whom they considered sorcerers or clairvoyants.

Some Gypsy women, whose relatives worked at the Bear's Academy, also played a role here: some women divined, treated with herbs, predicted, 'bewitched' at the request, but they never cast curses on order.

A wild rosemary was in great demand: therefore, Gypsy fortune tellers organized the collection of plants by children in the swamps and swampy places. Various solutions were made from it: decoctions and infusions for bone diseases, inflammation, colds; in the treatment of any form of tuberculosis.

In addition, the fortune-tellers themselves drank strong solutions in order to be clairvoyant and 'penetrate the thoughts' of another person; to cast out evil spirits that interfered with the 'action' of fortune-tellers and their healing effect on the patient; strong solutions of wild rosemary, as it were, armed them with courage and determination, cheered up and worked hard.

Drinking a strong rosemary solution improved hearing and vision: hunters went to fortune-tellers before their campaign and, as a rule, used rosemary with sage.

The sage was also known to healers of the gypsy communities of the PLC: healers prepared infusions from it, which they recommended to their visitors and clients, sometimes to acquaintances: from infirmity and numbness in the vessels, for slowing down the process of baldness, relieve stress and 'boredom', oppression.

It was also drunk by trainers, guide bears, and added to honey drinks for clubfooted 'students'.

People the Commonwealth believed that if the gypsies spoke an incomprehensible language, then they could read other people's thoughts, perceived the world around them better and deeper.

Guessing the future, love / revenge for passion on the side, the inevitable desire to 'enchant' someone, 'bewitch' someone's heart, cast a curse – was the most common help at the hands of Gypsy fortune-tellers who we are not related by ties of kinship with some employees of the Bear's academy. Some non-Gypsy (*gadzhe*) just made a guess, and also including the Gypsies themselves for this it was enough once. As a rule, people with serious life difficulties and troubles rushed to hear from the fortune-telling specialists. They were obsessed with the impulse to untie the knot of problems immediately.

"Fortune-telling came true, the cards did not lie", people often exclaimed.

Another type of prediction was divination, div-

ination on the water: simple one (with the help of poured water in a vessel) and extensive (with a natural source of water and using the information which they read from the foliage of an oak-tree). There was a different approach here: the healer tried to find out what kind of shock happened to a person, what illness the client had, whether it was a personal internal discord, disorders, or whether an intervention of the evil spirit bearer took place. It was important for the soothsayer to determine temperament, learning background and habits. Out of all this it was necessary to form a practical approach which was the most helpful. Often clients of the fortune-tellers were asked to describe the colour of their memories to work out and assess a full-fledged judgment about the upbringing.

According to the beliefs of old Gypsies, which have come down to them from the depths of centuries, in the sources of water like: in seas, lakes, rivers and swamps, a conductor of communication with Life and Death was embedded, which, as it were, looking at them with its eyes and giving signals with their chosen one who believes in the Almighty, prays to Him and then it does receive a revelation, like a humble child who questions Him<sup>3</sup>. During their stay by the water, the fortune-tellers offered to close their clients' eyes and 'seek' the Almighty, then after a sincere conversation they lead their wards on to a chosen place under an oak-prophetic tree, sat down for further dialogue, and listened, as the rustling of foliage in the oak-tree also carried a message.

These fortune-telling mediums usually invited their customers towards the evening for fellowship, when in the gloomy light shaggy clouds floated across the sky, driven by the breeze. According to the premonition of the same soothsayers, they sometimes received insight from these floating clouds, as if in response to a request from a soothsayer. These messages from above were especially significant in spring and autumn during the full moon.

Such predictions as mentioned were in demand: they were sedentary women familiar with palmistry and herbal treatment.

Often there were no changes for the better... people got angry and sometimes even curses were shouted to fortune-tellers, and sometimes they demanded the return of rewards.

These grievances reached *Radvilo*, who ordered *Yakubo* to deal with the intruding parties. Firstly, *Yakubo* tried to console them, and secondly, one

of his relatives went to the 'offended' to calm her down. *Yakubo* said: "I feel sorry for you, but what can I do? Well, then take the money back"<sup>4</sup>, but nobody took the money.

'Victims' were most often of two categories: sentimental-naive – they used to say, the fortune-teller would arrange everything; or adventurous – ambitious ones – to win someone's heart at any cost.

*Radvilo* posed an unimaginably difficult task to *Yakubo*: the Gypsy king had to convince and persuade the offended side not to have a grudge against fortune-tellers and not to claim the return of the reward. Sometimes *Yakubo* sent his sister *Mura* (Berry), who knew very well how to sincerely win over and she was able to *speak* so sympathetically with the 'disappointed customer' that soon both were moved to tears.

In addition, as it turned out at times, avid fortune-tellers who had been practicing their craft for a long time with cards sometimes ended their clairvoyance career depressingly, and sometimes tragically their lives. They complained that they dreamed of devils; they often heard the voices of some unclean spirits urging them to make an oath with them.

The saga of the Gypsy community advised these unfortunate people to immediately stop divination and reported to *Yakubo* and he sometimes to *Radvilo*. Weak former fortune-tellers were taken to the hospital because their families could not look after them, because of their aggressive attitude even towards their children.

In connection with fortune-telling other worries grew up before *Yakubo*: nomadic Gypsies usually disappeared after bad predictions, having asked for a good reward for 'performing' divination; and later the wrath of the lucky ones also extended to the settled community ruled by *Yakubo*: as he pitied in his heart, *he also* allowed nomadic Gypsies to appear in Smorgon, even in the vicinity of the Bear's academy by saying: 'let them work for a piece of bread' but he had big troubles because of this. The gypsies of the community, ruled by *Yakubo*, paid a tax for divination to the budget of the Academy and they lived more prosperously, and those who additionally also worked at the Academy or in the administration of *Radvilo* were much richer than the nomadic Gypsies. This was *Yakubo's* attitude, but *Radvilo* and Gypsy communities in Mir and Nesvizh rebelled against *Yakubo's* lenience for nomadic Gypsies: they demanded to expel them if they did not pay anything: neither in favour of Bear's acad-

emy, nor into the local treasury.

Bears tamers (trainers) after returning from their tours in Europe, in addition to money, also brought books and records about divination by the hand 'chirromancy', which they gave to their wives and relatives. Traditional fortune-tellers began to arm themselves with new, more scientific knowledge, especially in hand predictions: *divining of fate* and determining the character of a person by drawing lines and tubercles on the palms of the hand. Envious people appeared: the wives of tamers and handlers of clubfoot 'artists' turned out to be the best prophets, while traditional fortune-tellers using cards had fewer clients. Some of them accompanied their husbands with bears on tours of Europe, leaving their children in the care of their grandparents; they watched the clairvoyants there and learned their craft, and some of them chalked it up and told fortunes there: as a rule, in the German lands ('Germans' in the *Romanes* (Gypsy) language 'Sasy'), Prussia, Austria, and even 'Schweitz'<sup>5</sup>: most of Gypsies of the Commonwealth still spoke German, and some could communicate well and even told fortunes in this language.

*Yakubo's* second problem was to keep his Gypsies away from all traditional marginal practices when selling and buying horses at fairs or holiday markets. These tricks in deals, young men acquired from their parents and communication with their community by the age of 15–16, when they were strengthened in their minds that sales and purchases of horses – this is also accepted as a craft with a risk like a card game.

In the end, *Yakubo* forbade the representatives of the Bear's academy to sell and buy horses in Smorgon, and for women to tell fortunes at fairs and markets.

In the mind of *Yakubo* there was a struggle between the established Gypsy approach and new thoughts born from communication with *Radvilo* and relations with the nobles around him.

*Radvilo* demanded from *Yakubo* to adhere to the gentry practice in these deals and trade in horses, and this was difficult. Firstly, all the Gypsies and communities ruled by *Yakubo* were with him in the family bond. Secondly, this contradicted their mentality: Gypsies lost their honour if, during a deal with a 'Gadzho' (non-Gypsy) he, a connoisseur of horses, lost or gave away. Thirdly, non-Gypsies ('gadzhe'), whenever they missed or lost something, they often reproached the Gypsies for some kind of fraud and complained about it to *Radvilo*.

Individual Gypsy rebels threatened *Yakubo* even with physical violence. Although he was brave, honest, and fair and always had the support of most old Gypsies. Therefore, there were no mass rebellion against *Radvilo's* alliance with *Yakubo*; *Radvilo*, who had his own militia, never raised it against the Gypsies in his possessions, although sometimes the office of *Batsia* (Parent) *Yakubo* was threatened by the 'rebels', it was basically a riot of nomadic Gypsies.

It is appropriate to emphasize the peculiarities of the Gypsy mentality: 'I was born by the will of God free from the violence of some kings and other people's 'Gadzhe's' norms. My traditions, habits and manners also came to me from the depths of centuries of my dear ancestors, who were wise and free from violence and 'Gadzhe's' rules of life.

In our society there were no kings and servants, I respect you, my neighbour and brother, *Batsia* (Parent), *Yakube*, however, I have my own head on my shoulders and leadership from the Almighty, but I want to do according to my own mind. What you have decided, with Mr. *Radvilo*, does not always suit me, although the craft with bears is in our hearts.

I might be doing bad things, performing bad deeds in the eyes of these 'gadzhe' and *Radvilo* but I am not guilty of violating my Gypsy honour (*romanipen*) and my traditions. God is my judge, who created us Gypsies. I answer to him, the Almighty One, if I am a sinner before Him, if I have crossed the limits of the permissible, then will You punish me! Well, our *Yakubo* was also made a king over us by 'Gadzhe', who does not understand us. Our temperament and customs are different: we have modelled our will for centuries, we are all brothers and sisters, but they are divided into masters and serfs. Yes, and everyone and their books teach their 'Gadzhe' behavior: we are peaceful people, but they kill each other, dreaming of conquering, capturing more, as if everything what belongs to them, they might take to the next world? They build palaces with gold, while we usually shiver with cold in winter in tents. In the summer, in the heat, mosquitoes bite us, but fierce animals spare us: we are also children of nature.

Your art is vicious: you marvel glorify the dominance of the body over the spirit: the spirit, after all, is our leading force. Pictures with naked women only provoke people, their morality is a shameful occupation for Gypsies, the attitude is wrong. Many works and heroes of your art tempt a person,

especially an unbalanced one, call him to look for something beyond his own abilities and opportunities that God has given him; he wants to step over this bar, the measure (this is also the Gypsy word 'measure' – 'scale of moderation') of his self-esteem. Ultimately, these attempts prevail to become more important, thoroughly shake his spirit and, the actions taken by him, lead to the collapse of the soul, even death, either of themselves or those who were close to them: after all, the "campaign" through the measure can be carried out only at the expense of other people: their spiritual balance and moral health; and the subsequent arrival of a Darkness. In addition, a person begins to feel that he no longer needs God.

And without God, we are nothing and nobody: then we are dumb animals, and we only are in the power of the elements, of darkness.

I don't want to be like them at all, I'm not afraid of what I said.

*My God, give me another chance to be better in Your eyes.*

But We thank God for any moment of our difficult Gypsy fate"<sup>6</sup>. In the description of the literature about the Bear's Academy, everything sounds almost perfect: the bears studied and danced, amusing the audience: everything seemed to be smoothly arranged, as if according to military regulations (my suggestion is V. K.).

A tangible problem in the activities of the Academy was the educational element: to quickly teach the bears not to quarrel over food and refreshments, to correct their needs at a certain time and place. The bears often got angry at their 'teachers', sometimes they attacked them but they were armed with whips or sticks. Gypsy trainers were especially bad at training food skills: the bears squabbled, the teachers were very nervous and beat their 'students' with an iron stick, sometimes severely, until the Jewish hero *Itska* appeared in Smorgon from Ukraine: charming and tall, possessing great strength: he easily fought a bear, wrapping his right hand with a special leather bandage with metal needles.

The communities around and on the lands of *Radvilo* began to separate and formed different social groups at the time of the collapse of the Republic of Poland in 1795 and the transition under the code of laws of the Russian Empire:

a) working Gypsies: 'bear trainers' and those engaged in other craft or business; their women proved to be the most successful fortune-tellers;

b) close to the local Catholic church, as a rule,

former Calvinists, some families from mixed marriages, living from employment in the administration of the Bear's Academy, and other services of *Yakubo* or *Radvilo*; they rejected any divination or forecasting of the future as an ungodly occupation;

c) partially settled Gypsies, as a rule, engaged only in horses, and their women by any kind of divination;

d) separate families, continuing to live in the forests during the warm season, and sometimes partially moving within the possessions of the Radziwills, Zenovichs, Aginskis (we assume that between them there could have been some kind of agreement); they earned a living sometimes by being hired to work in the fields, some of the women begging;

e) a small group of 'sausage makers' (*goèngire* < *goj* (sausage) – in *Romanes*, the Gypsy language) which consisted of some Gypsies who were in prison, as well as those, who did not return debts or did not pay taxes regularly. They hunted in any way, not even disdaining petty theft.

It was incredibly difficult for *Yakubo* to regulate the life of such a versatile Commonwealth society for 17 years (1778–1795) until the fall of the once mighty Commonwealth and the arrival of the 'Bigs' (a 'big' is figurative word for a 'Russian') along with a word 'xalado' (soldier, guard), under the dominion of the powerful monarch Catherine II. She immediately demonstrated her power by sending daring bearded Cossacks with impressive red stripes along the new border to intimidate new subjects: Russian tsars were proud of the loyalty of their Cossacks in suppressing uprisings.

There was another person who was also deeply involved in life and whose contribution was significant to the Gypsy Community in Mir, Nieswicz and Smorgon. And this was quite a unique, half-Gypsy [Romani] woman, *Basia*, who was related through her mother to the Gypsy king, *Yakubo* Martinkevich. She was also considered a prophetess and was brought up mainly by her Polish father and his relatives who were ardent Catholics, therefore she spent some years at the Covent boarding school, because she harassed them with questions about God and Divinity. After school she took a few apprenticeships and tried to help young Gypsy girls to master a profession. When she became a young lady, she was approached many times by young men to marry her, but she always refused on the grounds that a marriage would distance her from God.

When Prince Karol Radziwill (*Radvilo*) ap-

pointed her distant relative on the Gypsy side, Yan Martinkevich (*Yakubo*), a local Gypsy king, she left her convent to come to Mir and Nieswierz and was very helpful in bringing Gypsy children to school and apprenticeships.

She used to be called by *Radvilo* and gave him a moral support whenever he was in trouble or alarmed. She also was a caregiver for her aging Polish father who had no other children except her and was rather wealthy. By the way, her father fell in love with *Basia's* mother and asked her parents for permission to marry the young Gypsy lady: she was 17 while her fiancé was 43. After a while both sides agreed on this marriage: the Polish family and the local Gypsy community. *Basia's* mother gave a birth to *Basia* and became a very charming hostess at the Grabinki estate. Unfortunately, she died young when *Basia* was 5–6 years old. As we know *Basia* was mainly raised by her Polish father and his relatives who decided to send her to a Covent boarding school as the girl was very religious. She spent much time in prayers and fasting; she had visions from time to time, sometimes in color, which she cordially shared with the Gypsy and non-Gypsy (*Gadzhe*) people, to whom it was somehow relevant to. Some people around her considered her a saint. She also alerted some Gypsy people: ‘You should be less aware of the municipal court, than of God’s court. Nobody cares for you except our Lord’.

It was impossible to notice anything Gypsy in *Basia's* appearance: grey hair, blue eyes, and fair skin which she must have inherited from her Polish father. *Basia* was casual in appearance: she was small with a long aquiline nose; she was also short-sighted.

She spoke quite a few languages and was very intelligent. Most of her time she spent on reading the Bible and attending Gypsy families.

*Basia* was one of those noble-hearted people who try and are ashamed to assume bad things in another person. She lived, as it were, in an ideal world, and in case of failures, she blamed herself first.

*Basia* was struggling with the Bear’s Academy policy on treating bears while teaching them: some of the tamers beat the bears severely who didn’t cope with their trainers’ instructions. She took pity on these cute big animals and asked the staff to release them from chains. After a prayer *Basia* would enter the enclosure where ‘students’ were assembled and spoke nicely to them in a soft voice. Bears turned calm and some of them whined pitifully as

if they missed their life in wild at freedom without chains.

She was very resentful and discouraged Gypsy women to tell fortunes and she was skeptical about the icons with different saints except one: Saint Mary, holding the child, Jesus. We do not know when these protestant ideas came to her mind. She was also very unsympathetic about the oral Gypsy customary code [*Romanipen/Romani shtama*] and shared it with other people on the points: the Gypsies’ choosiness to cheat on non-Gypsy people without a feeling of a guilt, fortune-telling, and early marriages; she even resorted to intervening on these matters. She also added: “There is no special God for Gypsies who allows to cheat. God’s requirements should be met by each nation”.

In general, what is your Gypsy nobility and honor at the expense of other people ‘*gadzhe*’? There is no soul in all this, and there is no heart either. What, on the whole, then is Gypsy choosiness and luck in your life, if there is no universal virtue, but only for Gypsies? This is against God! There is no happiness without God!

*Basia* understood that the main feature of Gypsies which interfered with their development was their lack of patience. Her advice was firm: “A Gypsy person, must try hard to keep his/her temper in your fist before evil overpowers you. You can’t master any trade or profession: you drop out of your training in the middle as you are not patient enough properly. Close your eyes and wait patiently for the responds from the Lord, then pray for your needs. We can be closer to Him only through our painful humbleness and patience!

*Basia* sharply spoke about the continuing practice of indulgences in the Catholic Church: she argued that governorship in the form of priesthood is not necessary; a priest can only help in joint prayer to God for the remission of sin.

*Basia*, was critical of the dogma of the Trinity: she spoke with a challenge: “How is the spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, can be equal and is equivalent to Jehovah, the Creator of ‘heaven and earth’, God (Yahweh / YHV; Elohim)?”<sup>7</sup>.

She also spoke even more radically: ‘We are all related, children of God. It is revealed to us in our minds when we contemplate the light or admire the horizon, how keenly we feel the presence of Someone Existing, we call Him God. He is inaccessible to our physical organs: only in the spirit we experience a meeting with Him. When we do good and

wish good things to people; there is nothing surprising here: we physically do not feel and cannot explain, what is love... it is that spiritual essence through which we encroach kinship with God”.

Such reflections of *Basia* delighted some of the surrounding people, but most of them were in fear: “this is heresy, for which you will have to answer?!<sup>8</sup>”.

Her protestant ideas threatened Catholic clergymen and they started to challenge her and instigated other people to deal with her... like burning her house as a heretic woman. *Basia* was brave and used to come out to talk to her accusers, but her former denouncers retreated in disbelief. There were rumors about improper behavior of the local Catholic pastor *Dominic* at that time in relation to girls and young women. It went so bad that the females started to refuse to go to *Dominic* for making a confession. It reached *Radvilo*'s ears, but he did not take any measures.

“I will spread the truth you hide, *Panie Kochanku!* I was sent by God to expose the unrighteous clergy. I am ready to climb a high tree and speak loudly about it”.

“*Basia*, where is God's forgiveness applicable to you as well? Who gave you the right and authority to judge *Dominic*? Where is your good nature? What, can't you forgive? You yourself often carry some kind of nonsense, heresy to people?”<sup>9</sup>

In a due time, the Catholic clergymen of that area excommunicated her from fellowship; therefore, *Basia* started inviting people with any background for a fellowship to her house: they fasted, prayed, and saw visions. Occasionally she prophesied. *Basia*'s doctrine was simple: one must fast to the extreme if you want to see a vision or reply from God. You should plant trees and flowers as it is the image of the God's Garden (Paradise). She went further and used to state that people do not need clergymen: they are allowed to pray to God directly. These charges made the local priests horrified against *Basia* and they complained to *Radvilo* and *Jakubo* about her performance. One might say that the whole Catholic society rebelled against her heretical views excluding her loyal supporters who still supported her freethinker point of view.

Meanwhile, *Basia* established a good relationship with the local Orthodox church who attracted her with a better treatment of Gypsies with her pro-Protestant Christian approaches. Nevertheless, in a due time the Orthodox priest forbade *Basia* to

turn up at the Orthodox church. More and more non-Romani people [*Gadzhe*] around Mir and Nieswirz turned to avoiding meeting and talking to her; Gypsies endured her with a hidden wariness while majority of Jews continued to communicate with her as usual. One day *Radvilo* with *Yakubo* summoned her to *Radvilo*'s palace and asked her to stop disseminating her ‘heretic views’: otherwise, they pointed out that she would have to leave the Vilnius Province. *Basia* resorted to sharing with them her pro-Protestant points on the Bible and the role of its clergymen which ended in *Radvilo*'s motion to the door with his hand.

*Basia* did not expect such a denouncement, whatever she thought about it. In these moments of the breakage of their tense communication, a thunderstorm broke out and heavy rain pounded on the windows. Silence fell. These three people seemed to be dumbfounded. Then *Basia* began to pray quietly... silence again.

After a while *Basia* raised her head with a kind tender glance and looked round *Radvilo* and *Yakubo*: “God. Forgive me and you both, as I judged *Dominic*. Nevertheless, I absolutely love you, my brothers. Stay with God!”

It was clear that *Basia* did not lose heart: she was just about to utter something... Then suddenly *Radvilo* said: “Forgive me, *Basia*. I see that you are tired, forgive me, I can be so harsh, I am a person of a restless spirit... Would you like some tea, or something to refresh yourself with? I'll order now”.

“Food? *Basia* asked doubtfully.

“First you kicked me out, and then you offer to ‘refresh me’. Do you want to heal my heart wound with your treat?”

No thanks!

My truths remain in force for every nation: work hard, endure, hope and pray<sup>10</sup>.

I'm leaving anyway<sup>11</sup>.

Then she stood up and stepped through the door into the dark night.

There were rumors that *Basia* sold her estate, which she inherited from her Polish father and emigrated to either France or Switzerland for good! The other sources said that she went to Russia and married a regimental priest who was a widower and blissfully raised his children.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the work in this context: The Bear's Academy in the Care of the Romani Kings. In: Salvagardarea și conservarea digitală a patrimoniului etnografic

din Republica Moldova. Materialele Conferinței Științifice Naționale (Chișinău, 13 decembrie 2022). Coordonator Ion Duminica. Chișinău: S.n. (Notograf Prim), 2023, p.179-240.

<sup>2</sup> This is a Romani way of greeting other people with respect (Oral Romani Customary Code).

<sup>3</sup> Now the hypothesis is widespread that water has a memory.

<sup>4</sup> An ordinary Romani person in conversation with a non-Romani companion.

<sup>5</sup> The name in the Gypsy language [Romanes] for Switzerland.

<sup>6</sup> An author's personal reflection on the situation: never beat the disobedient toe – footed 'student' but twisted the offender's ear until his angry roar turned into a plaintive whining for mercy. Then Itska gave these 'corrected animals': donuts or dried fish, rarely berries and they were allowed to rest.

<sup>7</sup> The author's reflections based on the experience of the BRMS (Baltic Romani Missionary Society, registered in London, nr. 119, 15.03.2015), page 13,14.

<sup>8</sup> This and other quoted sentences contain personal meditations and reflection by the author bases on the Baltic Romani Bible which he translated and published in 2014, in Minsk, Belarus by PRINT-CORP.

<sup>9</sup> Reflecting and interpreting the direct meaning of the verses from the Bible: Matthew's Gospel about forgiveness, chapter 6: 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> Reflecting the direct meaning of the verse from the Bible: 1 Corinthians 4:12.

<sup>11</sup> This and other quoted sentences contain personal meditations and reflection by the author bases on the Baltic Romani Bible which he translated and published in 2014, in Minsk, Belarus by PRINT-CORP.

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