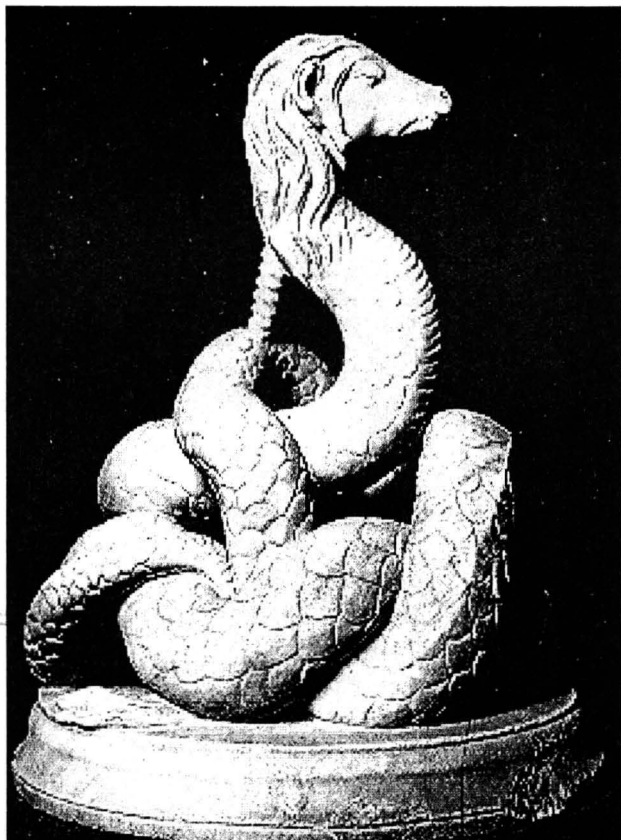


The snake in the folk productions of Aromanians

Anovska KLEANTI (Skopje)

1



The presence of the snake on Thracian reliefs provokes us to concentrate our interest on the snake's existence in folk creativity. We limited our explorings regarding the snake's problem as a symbol in folk creativity only on the Aromanians, especially on Nomads, although the beliefs and motives we have worked out are known in innumerable and different forms with many peoples around the world. We believe that both what is known now and additional knowledge will contribute to a more complete picture of the snake with Thracians². In doing so we do not analyse the numerous components which have contributed to the creation of the cult of the snake in general. We will try to represent the belief in this cult, by using the Aromanian tradition as a basic source.

According to our knowledge, many scientists have written about the snake. Here, we will mention some of the most significant: B. Malinovski³, D. D. Freizer⁴, M. Filipović⁵, T. Djordjević⁶, V. Čajkanović⁷, S. Zečević⁸, D. Marinov⁹, N. Politis¹⁰, R. Vulcănescu¹¹, A. Popvasileva¹², L. Spirovska¹³, J. Kovačević¹⁴.

Among the Aromanians of the Republic of Macedonia a belief in the existence of a snake, as a home protector, s.c. home-keeper - *nicuchiră* or house foundation - *thimej a casâljei*¹⁵ is spread out. It is also believed that the snake protects the home from magic, curses and bad ghosts which surround the house. Because of this it must be neither chased nor killed. Killing of the home snake brings bad luck. According to our informers¹⁶ the home snake lives under the threshold. There is no doubt that in Aromanian tradition this space of the house is not accidental, too. It is considered that respect for the threshold is a remnant from the custom of burying the home dead in those places. It is considered that this custom from prehistory is in relation with the cult of ancestors in which the tendency to keep the deceased person as a protector in the house or near his or her descendants is expressed¹⁷. Religions of many peoples go in favour of this thesis. Zečević also concluded that religions had existed according to which after death the human soul became incarnated in the snake. Because of this it had been thought that the ancestor's soul was in the snake¹⁸. Illyrias, imagined himself as a snake¹⁹. Thracians believed that the dead continued to live in a snake's shape²⁰. Slavs also imagined the ancestor's soul in the snake's shape²¹. V. Čajkanović assumed that customs and beliefs arisen from the idea that the ancestors had been buried in the house and from rituals which had substituted the burying in the house. On the basis of this he concluded that the cult of the ancestors is the base on which a complex of ritors, taboos and beliefs regarding the threshold are built on. He gave a special consideration to the belief in a "home snake" which lives under the threshold. The role of a snake as a threshold protector is confirmed by the belief that if anyone kills or even only expells the snake (as home protector) then a master of the house or someone en the family will die²². There is a belief in the Romanian mythology too, that when from the house snake, the so-called *ceasornicul casei* - clock of the house, a heart beating is not heard it means that someone of the family will die²³.

Some people catch the snakes with their own hands without being afraid that the snakes may bite them or that some evil may happen to them. They never kill a snake and a snake never bites them. They know places where snakes are hidden. For communication with snakes these people use various words which are unintelligible for other people who are present. According to our informer Marija Mišku, people who knew how to talk with snakes often used to carry the snake in their cap or tobacco case²⁴. Aromanians in the region of Macedonia still believe that if one finds a snake's horn in one's clothes then he or she is going to recieve a lot of

money. They carry the small horn as an amulet believing that it protects them from evil and that it brings them good luck²⁵. In order to protect the family, the Saracacians used to bury a snake's head wrapped up in a textile. They used to bury it by a fireplace. After the head had been left in the nearest church during 40 prayers each family used to carry it as an amulet during its long cattle breeding travellings²⁶.

The snake can be a bad demon too. It lives far away from the house and it is considered to be very dangerous. It appears as a protector of wide spaces, sources of "live water" (artesian water), "dead water" (isolated aquifer), protects hiding places with wealth so that they can not be found by a human being²⁷. It is also an enemy of cattle-breeders. Therefore bad snakes are killed. It is believed that a person who cut off the snake's head did not only destroyed the enemy, that is the snake, but that he also provided to himself the magic - the snake, which would protect him from the enemy, that is it would chase the other snakes. So, the snake's head which is cut off has the power to protect and to defend. Therefore people and cattle carry it as an amulet²⁸.

Cattle-breeders tried to make impossible the harmful effects of the snake. So, for example, various magic actions are taken against the snake's bite. The informer Kosta Paris, from the village of Dragoevo, Štip, was pointed out to us as a good sorcerer - *discântător*, against the snake's bites²⁹. Our efforts to understand the magic words were unsuccessful. We noticed that it was impossible to make records because the performer himself did not like to talk about them. He believed that the magic would not have been successful if he had told the words. And, on the other hand, these words, according to his statement, were just a muttering of the meaning of which he did not know because they were neither in Aromanian nor in Macedonian language. And they were not in Turkish either. The only thing we succeeded to learn was that he had learned these mysterious words from a 90 years old Aromanian woman, grandma Mika from the Radoviš area. Beside the magic for talking the poison out he also uses the cataplasm from unboiled milk and pestled garlic³⁰.

Aarne and Thompson introduced stories of the animals' language in the international index of folk story motives under number AT 670. Among the Aromanian folk stories with this motive many examples can be found which can fit into the world catalogue of this kind of prose. During the exploring and the study of the Aromanian stories with the snake motive their great diffusion can be noticed. And it can be noticed that the snake motive is more widely spread in the variant of types AT 670 and AT 560, while stories of type AT 155 are rare. In the Aromanian prose folk tales the snake appears both as benefactor and as enemy of the human being. With the story motif of type AT 670³¹, animals' language, our

narrators put the subject in the traditional way³². In variants of this motif that has been known up to the present there always appear people of the lower social classes like the shepherd, woodcutter, hunter³³. The shepherd is the one who knows the animals' language in the variant narrated by Kosta Paris. He is distinguished by positive features because although he exposes his life to danger, he believes in the words of the snake which is in trouble: "*Picurare, s-mi ascachi di aotse mini, s-nu mi ardu...Tsi vrei s-tsã dau mini tsi mi ascãpash di aoa*"³⁴ (*Shepherd, save me from here so that I won't burn down. What do you want me to give you, so that you save me from here?*) and he helped it. It did not betray him. The snake fulfilled the promise and rewarded him with the knowledge of the animals' language through a type of a flute: "*Avea nãs cãval. Ålj suflã ân gurã pit cãval. Tute tsi ùociùoea price, tute zboarãle li acãchisea*". (*He had a type of a flute. It blew in his mouth through the flute. He was understanding the language of all animals.*) In the Macedonian variant of the story no. 84 *The Woodcutter Who Understood the Language of the Animals*, recorded by Cepenkov, the woodcutter saves the snake from the fire. The snake rewards him by spitting in his mouth in order to enable him to understand the languages of all animals³⁵. Having in mind that knowing the animals' language is forbidden, only the chosen one knows it, in the variant narrated by Nikola Zikov, that person is the shepherd. The snake warns him: "*...s-nu spunj, cã va s-mori!*" (*...do not tell, otherwise you'll die!*)³⁶. As he understands the language of the animals, the shepherd learns from the conversation between the horse and the mare that the mare was brought forth by the horse and he unloads it. His wife becomes curious and she asks him to tell how he has done it. He decides to tell her although he knows what will happen to him if he breaks his word. Then the shepherd learns the lesson from the conversation between the dog and the rooster and he acts according to it.

In the story no. 27 *Fiçorlu cu nelu su limbã* (*The Boy With the Ring Under the Tongue*) from the Collection by P. Papahagi³⁷ the boy went into the mountains for firewood in order to help his mother. On his way he met a snake which was trying to swallow a deer. Both the deer and the snake turned to the boy for help when they saw him: "*Krištine, s-tãl'ari nipãrtika aestã, mari bun va-ts fak.*" (*Christian, cut off this snake, I'll do you a great good.*) "*Bun om, s-tãl'ari koarnili a tserbului aištuea, itsi s-n'i kaftsã, si štji kã-ts dau*" (*Good man, cut of the deer's antlers, I'll give you whatever you ask.*) Then the boy decides to help the snake because the deer will die poisoned by the snake. In order to repay the rescuer, the snake takes him to its father, the king of the snakes for a reward. It advises the boy to ask for the ring which its father carries under its tongue. This ring had the power to do whatever he would wish: "*Ku atsel nel, itsi s-kaftsã, pots s-ai*". (*With that ring you can have whatever you ask*). With the power of the ring the boy fills the

copper pen with gold coins and builds a big castle. Further the action of the story goes on according to the scheme which belongs to AT 560.

In the story "*Picurarlu, nipărtica sh-vulpea*" ('The Shephard, the Snake and the Fox')³⁸ which belongs to type AT 155 "*Old good is forgotten*", the snake appears as an enemy of a man. After a man saves the snake caught under the stone, the snake wants to eat him. Events are going well for the snake. It meets animals which appear here in the role of servants. They are dissatisfied because of the exploiting behaviour of their masters and they approve the snake's actions. The dog appears in the role of the first judge: "*...mine yinyits anj bānam cu prāvdzā, cu casā, ama mine tora aushii sh-nu mi va. Unā cuā di pāne nu-nj da. Nu s-cunoshce buneatsā.*" ('...I've been living for twenty years with the cattle, in the house. But I became old and they don't want me anymore. They don't give me even a piece of bread. Goodness is not acknowledged'.)

The cow is the next judge. It is not satisfied with the behaviour of its master to ward it as an aged cow. Therefore it stands by the dog: "*Mine am anj di dzāle la un om. Am fāptā dzatse-tsisprā di yitsālj. Tora nās nu mi va cā aushii. Va s-mi talje. Ti-atsea nu s-cunuashte buneatsā.*" ('I've spent many years at a man. I've brought forth young 10-15 times. Now he doesn't want me because I get old. He wants to cut me down. That's why the goodness is not acknowledged'.)

The last judge, the fox, appears in the moment when the man is expecting the worst and it solves the dispute in his favour. The act of the man tells us that the goodness is really forgotten very soon. He kills the fox in order to use its fur. This variant is identical with the story of Cepenkov³⁹. There are deviations only in some elements. So, in the Aromanian story the snake is caught in the big creek is burning in the fire; the cow is the judge in the Aromanian story while in Cepenkov's it is the ox. These variants approach by their subjects to the Greek story of Γ. Μεγάς⁴⁰.

The analysis of the motif of the snake through the contemporary files in our Institute has shown that Aromanian poetic folk creative works in the Republic of Macedonia have not been recorded. But this does not mean that they do not exist. However, we will concentrate our interest on the motif "*snake in the armpit*" which is present at Gramostean-Aromanian in Tulcea (Romania)⁴¹. The main characters in the song "*Unī featī multu mșeati*" (*A very beautiful girl*) are the girl and the boy. Although some other characters appear, like mother, father, sister and brother, they are secondary regarding the girl and the boy. The lyrical poetry is one of the most beautiful part in Aromanian folk creativity and most of this poetry belongs to love songs. The way the girl appears to the members of the family is very interest, having in mind that in the Aromanian patriarchae environment love songs have been created as well as other kinds of oral folk creative works. The girl

expresses openly all her feelings and this points to changes in a woman's behaviour. And these changes appear as a normal consequence of the total social and economic changes. The girl uses symbolics in order to express her feelings and keen desire towards the boy:

- *Bagî-ni, lâi gione, mîna n-sinú,*
Ta s-ni ascoț un șarpi yiu.
- *Bîgã gionli mîna n-sin*
Și-ascoasi un șarpi yiu. ⁴²

- *Put your hand in my armpit, boy,*
To take out a bad snake,
- *The boy put his hand in the armpit,*
And took out the bad snake.

We have found the same motif analysed in the Macedonian folk creativity⁴³. This speaks of the common life and influences of peoples in the region of the Balkans.

We have met the motif of the snake in the Aromanian textile folk ornaments in our researchings at the Aromanians the so called Bănjots, that is Gramosteans who are living in Romania⁴⁴. The snake was used as a decorative element and it was represented on a textile strip decorated with different colours. This strips were carried only by boys and men in a national dance. In case a boy died, then this strip was obligatorily put next to him. In this case the importance of this thing comes not only from its decorativeness but from the symbolic meaning given to it as well. So it results from here that the snake as a symbol is connected with the human and cattle fertility and a great power is ascribed to it regarding the protection from every evil, sickness and spell.

From all that was said above we can conclude that the social and economic changes in the contemporary society were not able to push out the cult of the snake which exists with the Aromanians, as well as with other nations, although the motif among them is better represented in folk prose than in folk poetry.

Anovska Kleanti
Institute of Folklor "Marko Cepenkov"
Ruzveltova 3, PO-BOX 319, 91000 Skopje
Rep. of Macedonia

NOTES

1. The Glykon serpent, patron of the house and the family, guardian of the temple (Tomis 2nd-3rd century A.D.). Muzeul de istorie națională și arheologie Constanța, România.

2. А. Фол, И. Венедиков, И. Марзов, Д. Попов, *Траки ски легенди*, София 1981, 30-31.

3. Б. Малиновски, *Магија, наука и религија*, Београд 1971, 113: Animals which change their skin and remain young are the "underground animals" - snakes, crabs, iguanas and lizards; that is so because people have lived once under the ground. These animals comes out of the ground and they still can change their skin.

4. D.D. Freizer, *Zlatna grana 2*, Beograd 1977, 193.

5. М. Филиповић, *Култ пророка Јеремије у традицији Јужних Словена*, ГЕИ, XI-XV, (1962- 1966), Београд 1969, 143-159.

6. Т. Ђорђевић, *Природа у веровању и предању нашег народа*, СЕЗ LXII, Београд 1958, 120 -131.

7. В. Чајкановић, *О магији и религији*, Београд 1985.

8. С. Зечевић, *Митска бића српских предања*, Београд 1981,105-109.

9. Д. Мариновъ, *Народна вѣра и религиозни народни обичаи*, СБНУ кн. XXVIII, Софија 1914, 104-107.

10. Ν.Γ. Πολιτου, Μελεται περι του βιου και της γλωσσης του ελληνικου λαου. Παραδοσεις, μερος β', Αθηναи 1904, αρ. 385, 386, 387, 388, σ. 986; Παραδοσεις αρ. 502, σ. 1135.

11. R. Vulcănescu, *Mitologie română*, București 1985, 524.

12. А.Попвасилева, *Змијата како симбол на добротворство во приказните на некои балкански народи*, Македонски Фолклор, год. IV, бр. 7-8, Скопје 1971, 137-140; Пророк Еремија во народната традиција и кај Македонците во Егејскиот дел на Македонија, МФ год.VII, бр. 13, Скопје 1974, 153-159.

13. Л. Сировска, *Култот на змиите во селото Орман (Скопско)*, Македонски Фолклор, год. IV, бр. 7-8, Скопје 1971, 141-145.

14. I. Kovačević, *Semiologija rituala*, Beograd, 1985,166-174.

15. AIF (The Archives of the Folklore Institute) ml. 3546, informer Marija Mišku, born in 1924 on the mountain of Plačkovica, Štipско. Registered by K. Anovska in 1996 in Štip.

16. AIF ml. 3546

17. M. Garašanin, *Sahranjivanje u balkansko-anadolskom kompleksu mladeg neolite*, Glasnik Zemajskog muzeja XI, Sarajevo, 1956, 226.

18. С. Зечевић, *Митска бића српских предања*, Београд 1981, 107.

19. Цитирано според Зечевић, *op.cit.*, Нико Жупанић, *Илири, Народна енциклопедија С. Станојевића II*, 25.

20. *Ibid.*, М. Филиповић, *Трачки коњаник*, Нови Сад 1950, 6.

21. *Ibid.*, L. Niederle, *Život starych Slovanů II*, Praha 1924, 47-48.

22. В. Чајкановић, *op. cit.*

23. R. Vulcănescu, *op. cit.*

24. AIF ml.3546, informer Marija Mišku, born in 1924 on the montain Plačkovica, Štip. Registered by K. Anovska in 1996 in Štip.

25. AIF ml. 3546: informer Sterju Pura, born in 1926 in the village of Čanaklija, Štip. Registered by K. Anovska in 1996 in Štip.

26. G.V. Kavadias, *Pasteurs nomades méditerranéens, les Saracatsans de Grécé*, Paris, 1965, 281.
27. R. Vulcănescu, *op. cit.*
28. Д. Антонијевић, *Обреди и обичаји балканских сточара*, Београд 1982, 85.
29. *Ibid*: AIF ml.3546: Informer Kosta Paris, born in 1926 on the mountain Ograzden, Strumica. Recorder by K. Anovska in 1996 in the village of Dragoevo, Štip.
30. *Ibid*: We find the same at Š. Kulišić, P. Petrović, N. Pantelić, *Srpski mitološki rečnik*, Beograd 1970, 145.
31. A. Aarne, S. Thompson (AT), *The types of the folktale*, Helsinki 1964, 587.
32. А. Попвасилева, *Двојазичното раскажување на народни приказни (влашко-македонски и македонско влашки релации)*, Скопје, 1987, 272-277:
33. Б. Русић, *Немушти језик у предању и усменој књижевности Лужних Словена*, Скопје, 1954, 43, 81, 82.
34. AIF ml.3546: Informer Kosta Paris, born in 1926 on the mountain Ograzden, Strumica. Recorder by K. Anovska in 1996 in the village of Dragoevo, Štip.
35. М. Цепенков, *Македонски народни умотворби во десет книги*, кн. III, Скопје, 1972, 66-69.
36. К. Ановска, *Социјалната припадност на народните раскажувачи Власи*, Скопје 1955, 165.
37. Р. Рарагаџи, *Vasme aromâne și glosar*, București 1905, 62-65.
38. К. Ановска, *Социјалната...*, 259-261.
39. М. Цепенков, *op.cit.*, 89-95
40. Γ. Μεγας, Ελληνικά Παραμυθία, εκδοσις τεταρτη, σ.α.σ.λ. 23-26.
41. N. Gh. Caraiani, N. Saramandu, *Folclor aromân grămostean*, București 1982, 144-145.
42. *Ibid.*, 146.
43. АИФ мл. 291: Прошета се мома новата градина (Walked the girl in the new garden). Informer: M. Gramatikova, born in 1943 in Nov Dojran. Recorded R. Prodanov in 1961 in Štip.
44. Informer Tana Nuțu, born in 1953 in Beidaud (Tulcea, România). Recorded in 1996 in Skopje. Personal note.