

SOME MOTIFS OF BULGARIAN FOLK BELIEFS IN EURASIAN CONTEXT

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Tales about the Sun who gave up his plans to get married because his future children would be hot as the Sun himself and would burn the world, are known in Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian and partly in Romanian folklore. In Europe they have close parallels among the Lithuanians and less close among Volga Tatars. The nearest parallels outside of Europe are among the non-Aryan peoples of Middle India. In European folktales “hot children of the Sun” and “cosmic marriage not realized” are combined in the same texts. In India they are found in different texts which are recorded, however, in one and the same region of Middle India among the Dravidian and Munda-speaking peoples. The Ancient Greek story about marriage of Thetis who could not become wife of Zeus and had to marry a mortal Peleus because her son would become more powerful than his father, has a close counterpart among myths of the Middle Indian Baiga where a bear substitutes Cloud (Sky) as the Earth’s bridegroom. Now Baiga speak an Indo-Aryan language but they preserve their tribal culture and formerly probably spoke Munda. The Macedonian versions contain a motif of a cock who cried and lured the hidden Sun from under the sea. It is another motif which is widespread across South, Southeast and East Asia and it could not reach Europe before the domestic chicken had become known there (probably in 3rd millennium B.C.). In Asia “hot children of the Sun” is recorded not only in India but among the Aslian (Semang and Senoi) and Austronesian peoples of Malaysia and Western Indonesia, also among the Tagals of the Philippines. The spread of this motif from Asia to Europe where its distribution is much more restricted is more plausible than the spread in the opposite direction.

According to texts recorded in the Balkans in late 19th - early 20th centuries, the Sun had to give up his plan to get married because he was told that the new suns that his future wife would give birth to, would burn the earth. Such texts were especially popular in Bulgaria and Macedonia [Kuznetsova 1998: 78; Marinov 2003: 29; Tsenev 2004: 36-37].

The most widespread Bulgarian variant tells that the Sun’s bride was his sister the Moon. Sometimes it was the Morning star (Dennitsa), or a girl Grozdanka. Various animals were invited to the wedding. The hedgehog came riding a donkey or horse. During the feast he was gnawing a stone or

put stones into the manger for his donkey and explained that future children of the Sun would burn everything, so no other food besides stones would be available. After this demonstration the Sun had to give up his marriage, either on his own initiative or by a demand from the animals. According to one of the texts, animals became angry with the hedgehog, so the Sun gave him needles to defend himself. Sometimes the marriage remains unrealized not thanks to the hedgehog but to the Devil. The Sun asks God for a permission to marry. The God in his turn asks for an advice from the Devil who answers that who else if not God himself should make the decision. God sends a bee to the Devil and it gets to hear how the Devil tells his donkey to drink water while it is still available. For if the Sun's wife gives birth to his children, it will become so hot that all rivers dry up. The God forbids the Sun's marriage.

In Serbian folklore such stories are found less frequently and are practically identical to the most widespread Bulgarian version. The Sun decided to get married and guests were invited to his wedding. The hedgehog gave stones to his donkey because everything else would be burned up as soon as the Sun's children appear. The Sun canceled his marriage [Jankovič 1951: 63-64].

The Macedonian versions contain additional details absent in the Bulgarian texts. When the Sun had to give up his marriage plans, he decided to plunge into the sea but hearing the cock's cry came back to the surface to see what was the matter and why the cock was singing while he, the Sun, had been drowning. Since then the Sun rises at the very time when the cock cries. When it comes to the hedgehog, the Sun does not defend him but curses, so now hedgehogs come out only after dark. According to another version, it was the mule who objected against the marriage, so the Sun made him infertile. In the Christianized version the Sun's marriage had to take place at the Petrovden, so it was St. Peter who warned the others about the potential calamity. It is people who decide that the Sun should not marry [Tsenev 2004: 36-37].

In the Romanian text the motif of a potential appearance of many suns is also present while the whole story is transformed into a Christian legend [Johns 2005: 269]. The God sends a bee to the Devil to get know if it would be proper to create one or several suns. Hiding itself in the Devil's hair, the bee hears how the Devil speaks to himself. "Only one Sun should be created because several ones would burn worse than hell and there would be no reason for the Devil to burn (the sinners)". It is also told that several suns would give light night and day letting people no chance to get into the Devil's power. As for stories that treat the marriage of the Sun, in the Romanian tradition they do exist but the marriage was cancelled not because of the new suns to be born but to avoid an incest between the Sun and his sister the Moon. The God puts the Sun and the Moon at the opposite sides of the sky and tells them never to meet each other [Beza 1928: 16-18; Mailand 1886: 3].

In Europe besides the Balkans a story about the cancelled marriage of the Sun was also recorded among the Lithuanians [Liobytė 1965: 400]. Having found out that the Sun plans to get married, frogs decided that his future

children will burn the earth and make all bodies of water dry. They went to the God to complain but he was not at home. The Sun punished the frogs by depriving them of his warmth. Now frogs are afraid of the sun and croak only after dark. It is not told how the problem with the Sun's marriage was solved but it is clear that the Sun remained alone.

The motif of "the good adviser punished" links such texts to a version of the Volga Tartars [Zamaletdinov 1992: 57]. The Tatar story is not about the Sun's marriage but a number of other details are the same. The Moon and the Sun decided to stand together and not to move from their place. They gathered birds and animals to hear what they think about it and nobody objected. Then the bat answered that if the Sun and Moon's plans would be realized, the wind would be blowing all the time in one direction, trees would grow crooked, cereals would not produce grain. The Sun became angry and prohibited the bat from flying during the day. The parallels with the punishment of the hedgehog in the Macedonian variant and of the frogs in the Lithuanian one are obvious.

In most of the texts cited above two principal motifs are combined, "the Sun's children can destroy all life on earth" and "marriage of a powerful personage can be fatal for the world's existence". Both motifs find parallels in South Asia. In Europe "hot children of the Sun" and "cosmic marriage not realized" are usually linked to each other and in India they are found in different stories. Such stories are recorded, however, in the same region of Middle India among the Dravidian and Munda-speaking people.

According to the Asian versions, the Sun and the Moon each had their own children. The Sun's children were so hot that the earth was burning. To save people, the Moon makes believe that she has killed her own children (i.e. the stars) whom she really hid. After this the Sun also decides to kill his children. In the evening he gets to see that the stars are alive and begins to pursue the Moon. Such texts with minor variations are recorded among Southern Munda (Bondo and Sora) [Elwin 1950: 138-9; 1954: 57-58; Vitebsky 1980: 56], Northern Munda (Santal, Turi, Ho, Birhor) [Bompas 1909: 402-4; Elwin 1949: 74; Hatt 1949: 75; Tylor 1989: 171], Central Dravidians (Bhattra, Binjwar, Kond, Muria) [Elwin 1949: 41, 64-65; 1954: 39-40, 47-48, 54-55, 57] and Northern Dravidians (Oraon) [Elwin 1939: 332]. In the same region the myth was known to the Baiga and Bhuia [Elwin 1939: 332; 1949: 56-7] who speak Indo-Aryan languages but preserved a large part of their traditional tribal culture and formerly probably spoke Munda languages [Rahmann 1955: 203].

Similar texts were found among the Semang and Senoi of Malakka Peninsula [Evans 1918: 191; 1937: 167; Schebesta 1931: 107] and among the Austronesian peoples of Malaysia and Western Indonesia (Aboriginal Malays, Batak, Mentawai, Yavanese, Western and Eastern Toraja) [Adriani and Kruyt 1950: 377; Kruyt 1938: 370-271; Kühn 1936: 74; Schefold 1988: 71-2; Skeat and Blagden 1906: 320, 328; Warneck 1909: 43-44]. The Tagal version of the Philippines is known thanks to the English and Russian translations made from popular editions [Rahmann 1955: 202; Rybkin 1975: 261]. Both texts seem

to reproduce the same original one. Whether it was only recorded among the Tagals, is not quite clear but the names of the protagonists are definitely from a Philippine language.

A myth of the Kachin of Upper Burma combines traits typical for the stories of Middle India, Malaysia and Western Indonesia, from one side, and of East Asia, Mongolia and continental Southeast Asia, from another side (according to the latter, the extra suns are killed by a hero who hit them with arrows [Yamada 1909]). The Sun had nine daughters as hot as their father and the Moon had many star-children. To punish people for their misdeeds the Sun sent all his daughters together to the sky. People began to shoot them not with usual arrows but with alive snakes, after which all the Sun family hid and it became dark. Only the cock got to make the Sun come back after which the Sun broke his daughters to pieces and they turned into bright stars [Gilhodes 1908: 691-693].

There are Tropical African parallels for Indian and Indonesian myths but in Africa the Moon provokes the Sun to kill his children or mother in order to simply play a trick and not with a special aim to save the earth from burning. Even more remote parallels are found in Southeast Australia [Berezkin 2009: 8]. The plot under discussion can have very deep roots that go back to the time of the early Homo sapiens, but the European versions with their accent on the potential danger of the appearance of many suns stand much nearer to the Indian and other Asiatic cases than to the African versions.

The motif of a cosmic marriage that can bring a catastrophe if realized is rare in world mythology. The well known Ancient Greek variant is related to the story of Peleus and Thetis (Apol., III, 13, 4). Zeus decided not to marry the sea goddess when he found out that her son would be more powerful than his father, and accordingly Thetis was forced to marry a mortal man. Besides Lithuania and the Balkans, the motif of a cancelled cosmic marriage is only found in South Asia. The South Asian texts also speak about the destiny of gods and in this respect they are very similar to the Ancient Greek story. The records are made among the Gonds, the Pardhan and the Baiga. The first two groups speak Central Dravidian languages and the Baiga, as it was mentioned above, now speak an Indo-Aryan language but probably formerly spoke the Munda. Here are some short abstracts adopted from V. Elwin [1949: 87-88, 105, 207].

Gonds. The Sky had to marry the Earth and called all the gods to his wedding. Bhimsen decided that if the Sky and the Earth marry, they crush people who live between them. Therefore he created a cock who announced the beginning of Kali Yuga. Gods declared that during this age of darkness it would be improper to celebrate a marriage. The Sky's semen fell to the earth and birds and insects were born from it.

Baiga. Earth had to marry the Cloud, and all living creatures were invited to the wedding. Chachahundarmal Raja is absent, Bhagavan sends for him. When he comes he warns that all the gods will be crushed to bits if they

remain between the married couple. Therefore Mahadeo creates the bear whom he married to the Earth. The bear fondles the Earth and plays with ant-hills for these are her breasts.

Pardhan. The Sky and the Earth had to marry each other, gods were afraid to be crushed. Guru Mahadeo “whispered a seed-charm” in the ear of Desphiri Mata who became pregnant and gave birth to the wind. The wind went in search of his father. Bhimsen broke the boy’s eyes and since then the wind is blind.

The Baiga version is especially important because, like the Peleus and Thetis story, it contains the motif of a substitute mortal bridegroom who replaced the sky god.

A partial analogy for the motif of a marriage that is dangerous for the gods and should be cancelled, contains a story from West Africa recorded among the Mosi of Gur linguistic family [Frobenius 1986: 47-50]. Nyaka (a dwarf antelope which is the smartest personage in the Mosi folklore) promises to give his daughter in marriage to anyone who brings him buffalo’s milk, a leopard’s skin and an elephant’s tusk. Though the hare gets everything using tricks, Nyaka does not give him his daughter and explains that an offspring of two so smart creatures as he and the hare would become more clever than the God himself. The similarity with the Indian and European stories is superficial, the Mosi text is of another genre and the motif of a marriage that was dangerous for the gods and was therefore cancelled seems to be a chance peculiarity. Though the Mosi story has numerous parallels in its region, no other African text contains a closing episode of this kind.

The fact that two such rare and well recognized motifs as “extra suns are children of the present one” and “cancelled cosmic marriage” are both present in the mythology of the Balkans and South Asia is a proof of historic links between both traditions. The existence of the third motif also shared by both regions makes a chance coincidence completely unlikely. By this I mean the motif of the cock whose morning cry, according to the Macedonian versions, made the Sun come back into the world. The cock is also mentioned in the Gond and Kachin texts retold above, and across the Northeast India, Burma, Thailand and South China the motif of the cock who lures the hidden Sun with his cry, is typical for many Tibeto-Burman and Miao peoples [Graham 1954: 88: 265-266; Hutton 1914: 485; Ling Ling and Ustin 1959: 17-19; Symonds 2004: 215-218]. A less specific motif of luring of the hidden Sun (not by the cock) is known practically everywhere in South, Southwest and East Asia (the most renown case related to the Japanese Sun-goddess Amaterasu is in “Kojiki”)

It is more probable that the motifs used in the Balkan stories discussed above were diffused into Europe from Asia and not in the opposite direction. As it is already mentioned, the motif of the “hot children of the Sun” is much more widely known in South and Southeast Asia than in Europe. The motif of a cosmic wedding that had to be cancelled is rare in both regions, but it



*Fig. 1. 1. The Sun had or could have children which almost burned or could burn the world.
2. It became known that if the Sun or the Sky god got married, great calamity would be inevitable.
The Sun or the Sky god decided not to marry.*

is important that in South Asia it is found among the non-Aryan groups of Middle India and not among the Indo-Aryans. Were it related to the early Indo-European tradition, the opposite situation would be expected. Cock who lures the hidden Sun certainly has Asian sources. Not only is this motif much more widespread in Asia but the hens themselves were most probably domesticated in the Southeast Asia. They got into Mesopotamia from the East via Iran in the 3rd millennium B.C. [Ehrenberg 2002: 53-54] and from there were probably introduced into Europe.

The 3rd millennium B.C. as the time for the spreading of the mythological motifs in question is plausible, though at the moment it is hardly necessary to insist on such a dating. As I tried to demonstrate earlier, folklore of the Southeastern, Eastern and Northern Europe contains many motifs that are typical for the South, Southeast and East Asia but that are absent in the early sources on the Near Eastern and Mediterranean mythology [Berezkin 2010]. The areal distribution of such motifs helps to follow ancient cross-continental cultural links that still remain unexplored.

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