

Gypsy Art in Europe

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Abstract—The article is devoted to the consideration of art as a communicative system on the example of the syncretic forms of song and dance in Gypsy culture. Reviewing the historical and cultural interactions of Gypsies with European peoples and analyzing the original forms of Gypsy art, the author examines levels and results of the intercultural dialogue.

Keywords—Gypsy art; communication; language; nonverbal communication; syncretism of arts; dialogue; dance; song; Flamenco; Verbunkos; Czardas

I. INTRODUCTION

What is art? Art, in the broadest meaning, is a spiritual sphere of human life, a creative reflection of reality reproduced by means of artistic images and transformed according to esthetic laws.

At what moment of human evolution did art appear? Ancient man wanted to *speak* but not only with people around him at a certain (limited) time and space. Interpersonal communication was not enough for him. Ancient man wanted to *speak* – with himself, with God, with his son, his grandson and his great grandson – beyond the limits of time and space.

Rock painting appeared due to man's desire to describe events occurring in his life. We see hunting scenes, animal herds, and sometimes boats and hand prints. Petroglyphs, i.e. images carved (not made with dye) on rocks do not yet have a sign system which originates in ornament and is fully expressed in pictography and ideography – both being stages of the evolution of written language.

Ancient peoples by means of drawings and conventional images – iconic signs – codified information and communicated in writing, thus developing communicative action, probably meant for centuries [7].

Song is an old type of musical creativity. Music and folk poetry came into being as a synthesis of a single genre. The old song's esthetic component was not important because of its ritual function; its rhythm dominated its melody. The ancient song tradition is primarily associated with man's desire to speak to God.

Later, song acquired a sophisticated melodic pattern, sense content and plot. Ever since, it became a way of passing experience, history and culture from one generation to another, a verbal vehicle for cultural communication.

Folk heroic epos, at the time to come, became one of the genres into which song transformed (“The Lay of Igor’s Warfare”, “Nart Epic”, “The Song of the Nibelungs”, etc.) still combining music and word. This form of folk art is performed to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. However, poetry and word became dominant in this genre.

Another, and probably the oldest form of art, is dance. Dance, combining in itself melody, rhythm and plastic, was supposed to express abstract notions and emotional experience by body movements. Initially, it had a ritual and sacral function and was performed during rituals, making it possible to address God in a metaphoric form. Later on, this type of folk art further developed and transformed into various forms.

Classical Indian dance is a brilliant example of a dance that has survived since very ancient times. A dancer, through rhythmic movements, mimics and gestures, can tell a whole story, including, among other things, abstract notions. Indian dance is a very specific way of communication that uses its own cultural plastic code.

Primarily, iconic rock drawings and dance are ways of nonverbal communication. Song is a syncretic form of art combining a nonverbal part – music, with a verbal one – word (the song's text). However, all of these forms of art were geared to an international, timeless and intercultural communication.

Gypsies are famous for their musical and artistic talents. Throughout centuries, when traveling across countries and finding their own communicative contact with local population, Gypsies have contributed and still contribute their unique identity and extraordinary character to the world culture enriching it with new forms of art.

Let us turn to the history of this people in order to understand how a unique way of communication of Gypsies with other peoples appeared and how the Gypsy art language evolved.

Gypsies are a people with whom we, Europeans and Russians, have been living side by side in the course of a millennium. Gypsies, with a population of about 10 million people, are a major ethnic minority in Europe.

Their origin and migration routes were established by linguistic studies that found the affinity of the Gypsy and old Indian languages and showed a later influence of the old

Armenian, Farsi, Greek and other languages on Gypsy dialects.

The exact time of the migration start and the reasons for Gypsy ancestors to leave their native country were not identified. The first exodus approximate date accepted by the majority of scholars is no later than the first millennium A.D. Between the 5th and the 8th centuries, a large group of people started for the West across the territories of contemporary Iran, Afghanistan and Armenia. Several centuries later, Gypsies divided into two large branches, and one group went to Egypt and Palestine while the other went to the Byzantine Empire. The Gypsy history saw several big migration waves. Scholars believe that, accordingly, there were several groups, one after another leaving India.

The second wave moved to Europe in the 14th century and got the name "the Great Gypsy March". From this time on, Gypsies began to settle down in Eastern and Western Europe.

European Gypsies are not a single ethnos. They are divided into ethnic groups whose names are often connected with their habitat or occupation. Considerable differences in language, spiritual and material culture, traditions and customs are observed among various ethnic groups due to their contacts with the population of the countries across which Gypsies traveled. The Gypsy people have never had their own statehood, but, nevertheless, they have maintained their culture and national features, traditions and uniqueness.

Gypsies have not left any trace of material culture: architectural buildings or paintings, sculpture or decorative applied art objects. They have left only spiritual non-figurative art forms – dance and song. It should be mentioned that Gypsy art is always syncretic as a close relationship of song and dance. However, unique Gypsy dance and music culture was born only in three countries as an exceptional synthesis with the art of the peoples among whom they lived. This is Verbunkos and Czardas of Hungarian Gypsies, Gypsy Flamenco in Spain and Gypsy choirs in Russia. This article deals with the European Gypsy art created in Hungary and Spain.

II. VERBUNKOS AND CZARDAS OF HUNGARIAN GYPSIES

After the fall of Constantinople, some Gypsies remained on the territory of the former Byzantine Empire, and in the early 15th century, under the Ottoman rule, most of them lived a semi-settled life. They adopted Islam and paid taxes to Turks. They lived in special villages and settlements where, just like at the Byzantine time, they engaged in crafts: forging iron, tatting baskets, wood carving. They settled down on the territories of contemporary Serbia, Hungary, Romania and Albania.

N. Bessonov and N. Demetr, Gypsy culture experts, believe that some laborious part of Gypsies - in a way, handicraft "intellectuals"- remained on the former Byzantine Empire territories after its fall. But another part, more adventurous and indifferent to moral and ethical principles, and hence, more mobile, moved to Western Europe.

Such countries as Hungary, Slovakia, part of Serbia and Transylvania became under the control of Austria, with its West European anti-Gypsy laws. A mass extermination of Gypsies began.

In the 18th century, under the rule of Maria Theresa, the extermination was replaced by a forced assimilation. However, this policy did not yield success since no law gives the right to go counter to nature and morals. Nevertheless at this time, Gypsies were granted civil rights, they got passports, education, and were liable for military service. When Maria Theresa's anti-Gypsy policy proved to be unsuccessful and was forgotten, some Gypsies went back to the nomadic life, their own traditions and language. It was in the Austro-Hungarian Empire that such sub-ethnic Gypsy groups as Calderary and Lovary completed the formation of their national identity. However, a biased attitude towards Gypsies still survives in Eastern Europe. And to date, the attitude towards them is mostly negative.

These are the circumstances under which Gypsy art of dance and music playing evolved as syncretic with the Hungarian one. Verbunkos and Czardas are the main genres of this art in Hungary.

Verbunkos (Hung. "Verbunkos") is a genre of Hungarian folk music and dance that appeared in the mid 18th century. Its special features come from the way of dancing, initially, at Austrian Imperial Army recruiting centers. So, Verbunkos is a dance performed in a circle only by men. Its composition consists of two parts. The first part is slow, when young men facing one another move in a circle stamping their feet. The second part is fast, with dancers' jerky and swift movements.

By the mid 19th century, Verbunkos was danced at various popular festivals and holidays, and also at aristocratic ballroom dancing parties. As it merged with Palotas (Hung. "Palotas"), a twosome dance - Czardas (Hung. "Czardas") - came into being. It is performed by men and women. It begins, just like Verbunkos, with men's slow movement in a circle. The second part is very fast and is performed as a twosome dance.

Both dances are performed to the instrumental accompaniment of a violin, contrabass, dulcimer and clarinet. Time measure is common time or four time. Musical accompaniment is characterized by a piercing, sad and sometimes sharp performance.

Gypsies that settled down in Hungary gradually integrated Hungarian musical folklore. Czardas and Verbunkos, when performed by them, acquired a new sounding and color. Gypsies are virtuoso improvisers; they lend an expressive melodiousness and rich ornamentation to the Hungarian folk tradition.

The 18th century saw the formation of the first Gypsy musical groups. It was Gypsies who popularized Hungarian-Gypsy music and dance culture across the country and its boundaries, performing in village and city taverns. Here is what one of the 19th century authors writes about Gypsy artistes: "Actually, only Gypsies can play Hungarian melodies... Gypsies sometimes present these melodies with unsurpassed emotion and fire. Their talent is displayed not

only in perfect singing, but also in imaginative variations...” [2].

By the 19th century, Gypsy companies became so popular that their professional mastery was acknowledged by the Austro-Hungarian authorities. Violinist Yanos Byhary, one of the most famous artistes of the time, performed at the royal court and various theatres and his orchestra was recognized as the national heritage.

Thanks to their music and dance Gypsies managed, at least partially, became integrated into Hungarian society. However today, Gypsy Verbunkos and Czardas are on the decline. Hungarian society's attitude towards Gypsies remains rather complicated and strained. Hungarians try to separate Hungarian and Gypsy cultures once and for all, thus breaking a synthesizing link of the mutually created art.

Nevertheless, East European Gypsy companies go on with their performances, developing other genres of music and dance.

III. GYPSY FLAMENCO IN SPAIN

Up to the 15th century, the majority of Gypsies lived in Byzantine Empire. However, historical developments, starting as early as the 13th century – in 1204, participants of the Fourth Crusade ravaged its capital, Constantinople, and occupied the most part of the country. Then, the following military Moslem attack led to the fall of the Empire – made Gypsies go to Western Europe.

The late 14th and early 15th centuries saw the second Gypsy migration wave or “the Great Gypsy March”. Backlend, in his study, writes: “By 1348, Gypsy nomads appeared in Serbia; some of them moved farther on to Wallachia and Moldavia. By the end of the 14th century, they settled down in Peloponnesus, Corfu, Bosnia, Transylvania, Hungary, Bohemia, and in the early 15th century – in Western Europe, having reached Rome, Barcelona, Orleans, Hildesheim and Paris. Their Southern group went over Egypt along the North coast of Africa, crossed the Gibraltar and reached Granada, Spain.” [1] Also, Gypsies obtained an apostolic charter (whether authentic or false – not known) giving them the right to free migration and lack of jurisdiction to local authorities.

As Gypsies came to a new place, the main version they presented to the authorities and local people was that they were pilgrims under a 7-year penance. Their migration allegedly was to atone the sin of paganism, according to some sources, and according to others – the sin of changing their faith under the pressure of Turks. So Gypsies had a comfortable living at the expense of the local population, but that 7-year term would come to an end while Gypsies were not going to change their way of life.

Thus, by the late 15th century, the first anti-Gypsy laws were adopted in Western Europe. Gypsies were banished from the places where they lived, and disobedience was severely punished: men, most often, were executed immediately, and women were tortured by whipping. Such laws were passed in every West European country.

In the context of an economic crisis and religious conflicts (witch processes, decreased influence of the Catholic Church, appearance of Protestantism), it was extremely difficult for a Gypsy to find a job, even with a strong drive to be hired. Vagrancy flourished in Gypsy communities.

The completion of the formation of national European states led to a growth of nationalism. The lack of possibility to work, engage in handicrafts and feed their families caused an increased delinquency among Gypsies. They got even more stuck in the status of “marginal individuals”. All these factors brought forth a “conservation of the nomadic way of life”: Gypsies did not assimilate nor go over to a settled living.

However, the persecution of Gypsies gradually ceased. By the early 19th century, anti-Gypsy laws were repealed in some countries, following which positive developments – integration of nomads into society – began.

Nevertheless, the vestiges of the nationalistic attitude to Gypsies survived till the 20th century, which led, after all, to a catastrophe. “But especially cruel was the treatment of Gypsies in the mid 20th century. During World War II, in France alone, eleven concentration camps for Gypsies were set up by Nazis. At least a quarter of a million Gypsies perished in death camps. According to some opinions, altogether about 600000 Gypsies were killed on the territories occupied by Germany”. [1], - writes Backlend. The genocide of the Gypsy people –“Poraimos” - was a culmination of anti-Gypsy propaganda and struggle. Some laws aimed against Gypsies have not been repealed until now.

The first mention of a Gypsy presence in Spain was documented in 1425. That year, the king of Aragon, Alphonse the Fifth, granted a pass charter to the camp leader Don Juan of Minor Egypt and allowed the newcomers a three-month stay in his land.

By the end of the 15th century, Gypsies spread all over Spain. However, Ferdinand and Isabel came to power at this time. Their policy with regard to Gypsies demanded that these people should speak only Spanish, submit to feudal lords and live just like ordinary Spaniards did. The Holy Inquisition supervised whether respective laws were observed, and for disobedience Gypsies were tortured, killed or exiled from the country. The European treatment of Gypsies is paradoxical – as a people they have never been accepted, but Gypsy art has evoked a stable love, especially on the part of common people.

Despite the cruel policy, Gypsy art penetrated Spanish society. Initially, it was manifested during processions on the occasion of religious holidays. Gypsies performed dramatized shows that immediately won Spanish city dwellers' love. And gradually, no holiday – religious or secular – was celebrated without Gypsy songs and dances. Gypsy culture “came into fashion”. A vivid description of Spanish Gypsies' life of the time was made by M. Cervantes in his short story “Gypsy Girl” written in 1613, one of his “Didactic Short Stories”.

By the end of the 18th century, anti-Gypsy laws were passed no more; the majority of Gypsies came to live a settled life: quite many of them settled down in Andalusia. Since that time on, a special Gypsy subcultural system of song and dance – Flamenco – started its development. Noteworthy is the fact that Flamenco is a synthesis of dance and song tradition of Mauritians, Andalusians and Gypsies. However, Gypsies raised this tradition to the level of a world popular phenomenon.

Flamenco (Sp. “*Flamenco*”) is a dramatized art combining dance (Sp. “*baile*”), singing (Sp. “*cante*”) and guitar playing (Sp. “*toque*”). An important thing in modern Flamenco is a special style of costume including, for women: a dress with a long hem decorated with abundant flounce, a shawl with tassels, a fan, castanets and special shoes with resounding heels; for men: dark pants and shirt and a mandatory wide waistband.

Song is an emotional and musical part of Flamenco. Musical accompaniment “*cante*” is characterized by a variability of sounding of one and the same phrase and melismatic wealth. Improvisation and the absence of a regular meter of a vocal part are typical for Flamenco. Two or more independent rhythmic patterns are combined within the framework of one meter. Flamenco singing is emotional and passionate, often dramatic. It is supposed to convey vivid emotions and is accompanied with occasional shouts.

Flamenco rhythm is tapped, when dancing: by heels – “*zapateado*”, - by fingers – “*pitos*”, by palms – “*palmas*”. For this dance, an important thing is a special technique of leg and waist movements as well as the expressiveness of arms and hands and overall plastic. We have stated, on the example of Indian dance, that a body plastic combined with music and rhyme is one of the most universal communicative systems. Flamenco grew out of ancient dances that had been a sacred language of communication with God.

However, Flamenco is not just dancing and singing or a set of gestures and sounds. It is a whole philosophy where a central concept is the so-called “Flamenco spirit” – “*duende*”. Without it, no communication with a spectator is possible. Duende is a special emotional system, a state of one’s soul and an outburst of inspiration. It is a fire with which a performer kindles and warms a spectator’s heart. F. Lorca, following up M. Torres’ thought, describes this phenomenon in this way: “These black sounds are a mystery, they are roots grown into a mire known to us all and about which we know nothing, but which gives us the main essence of art” [4].

In the 18 and early 19th centuries, Flamenco became a popular public dance. The first profited clubs for teaching and developing this music and dance phenomenon were opened. As of today, there are more than fifty Flamenco variations, each with its special features. Flamenco is loved not only in Spain, but also all over the world. Like any dance or language it is a living dynamic system. Flamenco is evolving and transforming, sometimes acquiring entirely new forms, yet remaining an indispensable nonverbal way of intercultural communication.

IV. CONCLUSION

The art of dance and song born in ancient times as a syncretic form of art went through thousands of years’ of evolution without losing its communicative function. We have reviewed Gypsy art to see how a people with its own traditions and subcultural features, having come, due to certain historical changes, from outside to a new ethno-cultural space is developing its ways of an interethnic dialogue. Knowledge of another people’s national identity, its traditions and cultural codes is a major stage in the interaction of cultures and peoples.

Gypsies went through several stages of “immersion” in a new culture:

- Safeguarding, their own identity closure, sometimes rejection on the part of a receiving country;
- Acquaintance with a new culture and learning a new language, social and cultural integration;
- Adaptation of folklore, cultural assimilation;
- Creation of their own national and cultural system.

It should be noted that not everywhere did Gypsies manage to go through all these stages or to come to a necessary result. In most cases, Gypsy culture merges with that of a people that Gypsies have to live with as neighbors. To be sure, this also depends on the readiness of one or another national community to enclose and involve something new, and even more so – on its intercultural dialogue ability and desire to understand the language of an interethnic communication.

We have reviewed three variants of relationship of Gypsies with other peoples. Not all of them were initially successful. However, we can see the results: three quite unique music and dance syncretic national art systems were created. They are not just alive, but they, just like language or any living organism, are evolving and moving forward.

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