

A NOTE ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SLOVENIAN GAME ŠKARJICE BRUSITI

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Although it can not lay claim to being either the oldest or the most widespread, the game under discussion is of considerable antiquity and is known in many lands under a variety of names. In the present paper it is the intention of the writer merely to indicate something of the geographical distribution of it, since obviously a full treatment of the subject would require a greater amount of space than that given it here.

As will be well-known to readers of this journal, the game of Škarjice brusiti is played by an odd number of players (usually five), all of them except one taking their positions near trees. The player without a tree walks about among them, rubbing index and second fingers together to imitate the sharpening of scissors, and at the same time calling out, "I am sharpening scissors." The instant his back is turned, the others exchange places. As they do so, the first player attempts to secure for himself one of the places temporarily left vacant. If he succeeds in doing so, then the one who has lost his tree must take his turn at sharpening scissors.

Scissors play a part also in the Hungarian form of the game, though here they are requested by the player seeking a place. She approaches another player and asks, "My sponsor-woman, where are the scissors?" to which the one questioned replies, "I have lent them to my neighbor." As the first player turns to repeat the question, all the others exchange positions.¹

Scissors are also the object sought in many of the German variants, as indicated by such titles as "Schneider, leih mir die Scheer," "Vater, Mutter, leih mir die Scheer," etc.²

In the Czech game, known as "Godmother Anne," the article asked for is a sieve. Each of four of the players, usually girls, stands beside a tree; the fifth, who is a "beggar," approaches one of the others and asks, "Godmother Anne, lend me a sieve." The other replies, "I have lent it to my neighbor." The first player then goes to the next, who returns the same answer. When she has been refused by the fourth and last girl,

¹ See the author's *American Nonsinging Games* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), p. 97. This description I owe to the kindness of Miss Mária Kresz, of Budapest.

² *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, VII, 302.

she calls out, "Change places!" and as they do so, she tries to secure a place for herself. The player who is left without a tree must be the "beggar" in the next game.³

The Greek equivalent, *Αναψέ μου το κεράκι*, is popular all over Greece. It is played usually by either five or seven children, who use posts or corners of buildings, as well as trees, for their "homes." The player without a "home" goes from one to another, begging, "Light my candle." The reply is "Go to another corner." In the meantime the others are exchanging places, and the questioner is trying to secure one for herself.⁴

It is interesting to note that in Spanish-speaking countries, too, the request is for a light (or a candle). Thus, in the Dominican Republic the seeker asks, "Una candelita?" To this the first, second, third, and fourth players answer respectively: "A la otra esquinita," "En la otra esquinita," "Por allí jumea," and "Por allí se quema." From this point the game proceeds as described above.⁵

In Switzerland the game is commonly known as "Bäumchen wechseln dich." Each of the players, with the exception of one, stands in front of a tree. Suddenly the latter player claps her hands together and cries, "All the trees must change!" At this, the other players must exchange positions, and the one in the center tries to get one for herself while they are doing so. There appears to be no limit as to the number of participants, and it will be noted that there is a complete absence of dialogue.⁶

An interesting variant is that played by Malay children, who call it "Main gâlah-gâlah anjing." First, a circle with four lines passing through the center is drawn on the ground (six lines if there are to be seven players). The player chosen by lot to be *anjing* (dog) stands in the center, and the others stand where the lines touch the circumference. The *anjing* then barks, whereupon each of the other players runs to the vacant place next to him. At the same time the *anjing* tries to get a place for himself. If he is successful, the player whose place he stole must take the role of *anjing*.⁷

The game is played also by the Iloko (northern Luzon, Philippines) under the name "Sinnulisúli." Four players, usually girls, stand on the four corners of an imaginary square; a fifth player, standing inside,

³ Erben, Karel Jaromír. *Kytice z pověstí národních* (Prague, 1924), p. 102.

⁴ Kyvernetakis, John. *Ἀνθολογία παιγνιδίων*. (Heracleon, 1938), p. 91.

⁵ See Salas, Eugenio Pereira, *Juegos y Alegrias Colonias en Chile* (Santiago de Chile, 1947), p. 272; Martínez, Maria Cadilla de, *Juegos y Canciones Infantiles de Puerto Rico* (San Juan, 1940), p. 128; Marín, Francisco Rodríguez, *Rimas Infantiles* (Barcelona, 1882), p. 86; Maspons y Labrós, F., *Jochs de la Infancia* (Barcelona, 1874), p. 81; Hernández de Soto, A., *Juegos Infantiles de Extramadura* (Seville, 1886), p. 147; Ruiz, Ramon Garcia, *Los Juegos Infantiles en la Escuela Rural* (México, D. F., 1938), pp. 56, 100.

⁶ Meier, S., "Volkskundliches aus dem Frei- und Kelleramt", *Archives Suisses des Traditions Populaires*, XXII (1918-1919), 88.

⁷ Hervey, D. F. A., "Malay Games", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, XXXIII (1903), 301.

tries to catch them when they move from one corner to another changing places. Apparently she makes no attempt to secure a position.⁸

In English-speaking parts of the world the usual name for the game is "Puss in the Corner" or "Pussy Wants a Corner," and the latter is often the demand made by the player who lacks a place. The reply is "Go to my nextdoor neighbor." Exchange of positions is effected while the player has her back turned.⁹

The Gaelic variant is known as "King, King, Come Along" or "Change All Corners." Stones are frequently used as positions. The supernumerary player, who stands in the center, suddenly calls out, "King, king, come along, and change all corners," whereupon all must exchange places and he tries to seize one left vacant.¹⁰

In Sweden the game is known as "Byta gårdar." It is played in much the same way as the English and American forms except that there is apparently no dialogue.¹¹

The game is widely known in Germany, where it bears a variety of names.¹² It is, or was, played also in Russia where it is known as *ключи*.¹³ French children know it as "jeu des quatre coins."¹⁴ It is known also by the Arabs, who call it "Biz Zowaiia."¹⁵ Japanese children play it,¹⁶ as do also the children of Turkey¹⁷ and those of the Netherlands.¹⁸ It is a popular game, too, in Italy.¹⁹ It is played among the Todas of India²⁰ and also among certain North American Indian tribes.²¹

Škarjice brusiti belongs to that group sometimes classified as Elimination Games, in which one player is without, or loses, a place

⁸ Vanoverbergh, Morice, "Iloko Games", *Anthropos*, XXII (1927), 237.

⁹ Newell, W. W., *Games and Songs of American Children* (New York, 1911), p. 256; Gomme, A. B., *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1894—1898), II, 88.

¹⁰ MacLagan, Robert Craig, *The Games and Diversions of Argyleshire* (London, 1901), p. 210.

¹¹ Tillhagen, Carl-Herman, *Spenska Lekar och Danser* (Stockholm, 1950), I, 221.

¹² See *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, V (1895), 285; VII, 302; XXVI (1916), 366; Böhme, F. M., *Deutsches Kinderlied und Kinderspiel* (Leipzig, 1924), p. 649 f.; Rochholz, Ernst Ludwig, *Alemannisches Kinderlied u. Kinderspiel* (Leipzig, 1857), p. 449; Zingerle, Ignaz V., *Das deutsche Kinderspiel im Mittelalter* (Innsbruck, 1875), p. 157; Liebrecht, F., *Zur Volkskunde* (Heilbronn, 1879), p. 392.

¹³ Gavrilova, N. P., *Igry oktiabriat* (N. p., 1937), p. 11.

¹⁴ *Mélusine*, II, 450; III, 254—255.

¹⁵ Jessup, Henry Harris, *The Women of the Arabs* (New York 1873), p. 320.

¹⁶ Griffis, William Elliott, *The Mikado's Empire* (New York and London, 1915), p. 465. See also Hunt, Sarah Ethridge, and Ethel Cain, *Games the World Around* (New York, 1941), p. 148.

¹⁷ Hunt and Cain, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

¹⁸ De Cock, A., and Is. Teirlinck, *Kinderspel & Kinderlust im Zuid-Nederland* (Gent, 1902—1908), I, 84 f. (*Vierhoecken*).

¹⁹ Pitre, Giuseppe, *Giuochi Fanciulleschi Siciliani* (*Biblioteca delle Tradizioni Siciliane*, XIII) (Palermo, 1883), p. 272.

²⁰ Rivers, W. H. R., *The Todas* (London, 1906), p. 597.

²¹ *American Anthropologist*, n. s., I, 277; IV, 342.

and must try to regain it or to find another. Typical examples of this kind of game are the German "Reise nach Jerusalem"²² and the Estonian "Kõrand-spel".²³ In the former the players are seated on chairs, the number of chairs being one fewer than the number of players. The latter march around the row of chairs to a musical accompaniment. Suddenly the music stops, and there is a scramble for seats. The player who is unsuccessful must leave the game, and at the same time one chair is removed. This continues until only one chair remains. The player securing it is the winner of the game. In the latter game the players are given the names of villages. When the leader calls the names of two of these, the players bearing them must exchange places, and the leader tries to secure one of them before it can be occupied.

Other games of the same general character are the Spanish "Fui a Cadiz",²⁴ "Musical Chairs", "The Ocean Is Stormy", "Mauerblümchen",²⁵ etc.

Not the least interesting feature of the game in question is the request of the odd player and the nature of the object requested. When such a request is present, it is usually, as we have noted, scissors, a sieve, or a candle that are asked for. Whether the mention of these particular articles has any significance is, of course, problematical; however, their mention raises certain questions in the observer's (or the reader's) mind. For instance, are we being taken back in this game to a time when such now common articles were owned by only one person (e. g. the tailor) in the community? Was the player who repeatedly asks for a candle (or a light) originally conceived of as a witch? One is inevitably reminded of the Witch in "Mother, Mother, the Pot Boils Over"²⁶ and "The Witch,"²⁷ who asks for fire or for a light for her pipe and thus gains admittance to the house. These are interesting speculations, but hardly within the scope of the present paper.

Povzetek

O RAZSIRJENOSTI SLOVENSKE IGRE »ŠKARJICE BRUSITI«

Gornje igre ne igrajo samo po večini evropskih deželá, marveč tudi — v isti ali drugačni obliki — v Severni in Južni Ameriki, na britanskih otokih, v Aziji, Afriki in Polineziji. Po navadi sodeluje pet ali šest udeležencev, včasih pa tudi več. Nekatere inačice vsebujejo kratek dvogovor med preostalim udeležencem in ostalimi; v nekaterih je edino besedilo ukaz, naj udeleženci menjajo prostore. V nekaterih oblikah igre prosi preostali udeleženec vse druge udeležence po vrsti za škarje, za sito, za svečo. Ali se predmetu, po katerem vprašuje, pripisuje kaj pomena ali ne, ni jasno; vsekakor se avtorju zdi, da bi nadaljnje raziskovanje o tem moglo biti hvaležno.

²² Description furnished through the kindness of Miss Christine Baumann.

²³ Loooris, Oskar, *Volkslieder der Liven* (Tartu, 1936), p. 95.

²⁴ Salas, *op. cit.*, p. 272. Cf. Ruiz, *op. cit.*, p. 67 (*Sálbese quien pueda*).

²⁵ Hunt and Cain, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²⁶ Gomme, *op. cit.*, I, 39—40, 397, 398, 400.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 394, 395.