

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

DEBUNKING THE BOHEMIAN/GYPSY CONNECTION

Guest Column by Wallace Oliva

“Gypsies have fascinated Western man ever since they penetrated Europe in the 1400’s after their 600 year trek from their ancestral home in India. The origins of the Roma, or Gypsies, based on Romanic history and language, now points strongly to an origin in the Rajput population in northwestern India a millennium ago. The Romani people moved out of that area probably sometime between AD 800 and AD 950, migrating westward toward Europe and arriving there sometime after AD 1400.

Why the Gypsies left their original homeland in northern India is not known, but it was about the time of the incursions against the Ghaznavids. Groups traveled constantly westward, wandering in the guise of penitents on pilgrimages. They attracted attention, because of their unusual appearance. They made a living by begging, telling fortunes, performing magical tricks, trading horses, peddling and thieving.

These activities were compatible with their nomadic life-style, since the Gypsies did not establish permanent residence or ties to local communities. In the lands of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, the general attitude of the people and the government toward Gypsies resembled that of the rest of Europe. Gypsies were considered a worthless and undesirable element that had to be ignored or expelled.

Following the outbreak of fires in Prague in 1541, blamed on the Gypsies, who were suspected of being mercenaries of the Turkish. Legislation against them was passed in Bohemia in the seventeenth century. Many Gypsies were hanged from trees along the border to discourage others from entering the country. Also, signs warned that hangings awaited Gypsies if they moved across the border. The westward movement of Gypsies from Bohemia was toward and into France. The unfortunate usage of the term “bohemian” being connected with Gypsies originated in France, because at that time it was believed by the French that Gypsies actually originated from the Kingdom of Bohemia.

The following is an excerpt from an article published in the newsletter *Morava Krasna*, by Robert Janak, a native Texas Czech, who has a B.A. in history from Lamar University and a M.A. in history with specialization in East Central Europe from the University of Kansas:

“The term Bohemian has been popularly used in a pejorative or derogatory sense as was used to describe Greenwich Village. A bohemian (small b) in this context is a vagabond, an artist, a hippy, or a person who follows an unconventional lifestyle. In reference to a person’s nationality, Bohemian is with a capital B.”

“It is remarkable that in the present age of sensitivity to every one’s racial, religious and ethnic heritage, the misuse of the term Bohemian has not been abandoned along with other such slurs. Other words such as avarice and vandalism are still in good favor as well, but there are not too many Avars or Vandals running around today to be offended.”



“Nine Bohemians stare in nine different directions (1886)”, photo from Bohemian Grove; a 2,700-acre campground located in Monte Rio, California, belonging to a private San Francisco-based men's art club known as the Bohemian Club.

Mluvíte Český? Do You Speak Czech?

Dvakrát měř, jednou řež (“DVA-kraht MYEH-rzsh, JED-noh RZSH-zh”) - Measure twice, cut once.

Když kocour není doma, myši mají pré (“K-dyzh KOTZ-ouhr NEH-nee DOH-ma, MI-shee MAH-yee PREH) - When the cat is not home, the mice will play

As a rule, you should always stress the first syllable of a Czech word!

If you have any contributions or suggestions for topics for future columns, please contact me by email: tkadlec@gmail.com or call me: (651) 271-0422 or send your letters to my attention: 1408 Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105. See this article online at: www.kadlecovi.com Děkuji! Tony Kadlec