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Közmondások 55 Nyelven arab, perzsa, szanszkrit, kínai és japán megfelelőkkel*

Abstract

"Timing is everything." A more appropriate modern proverb could not have better described the publication of the present volume. Its research extends into proverb scholarship in fifty-five European and six non-European languages, its production requires no less than nine different fonts. No doubt, both stages of preparation have lasted a long time. The publisher gives just an inkling of the length of this labor of love by informing the readers that the manuscript "was closed in January 1990," and was slightly updated in 1994-95 before printing commenced. Like Jacob who anguished for seven years before he could marry his lovely Rachel, so did the manuscript languish in its publisher's offices and the printing plant before it saw the light of day.

Disciplines

Cultural History | European History | European Languages and Societies | Folklore | Near and Middle Eastern Studies

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European Proverbs in 55 Languages with Equivalentents in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese/ Európai Közmondások 55 Nyelven arab, perzsa, szanszkrit, kínai és japán megfelelőekkel. By Gyula Paczolay. "Foreword," by Wolfgang Mieder, pp.5-7. Veszprém, Hungary: Veszprémi Nyomda, 1997. Pp. 527.

"Timing is everything." A more appropriate modern proverb could not have better described the publication of the present volume. Its research extends into proverb scholarship in fifty-five European and six non-European languages, its production requires no less than nine different fonts. No doubt, both stages of preparation have lasted a long time. The publisher gives just an inkling of the length of this labor of love by informing the readers that the manuscript "was closed in January 1990," and was slightly updated in 1994-95 before printing commenced. Like Jacob who anguished for seven years before he could marry his lovely Rachel, so did the manuscript languish in its publisher's offices and the printing plant before it saw the light of day. Finally, when that happened, timing accorded the book with a new significance, undeclared and perhaps unintended by its author. The publication of *European Proverbs* on the eve of the consummation of the European economic union has transformed this volume from a research tool to a study of Europeanness--- its meaning, tradition and culture--- as it is represented in proverbs, idioms and metaphors. The systematic identification of the proverbs that are common to European languages and peoples underscores the idea that the European Union has its foundation not just in trade and commerce but, more deeply, in a value system, in metaphors, in a Weltanschauung and in a common historical experience.

In Europe, perhaps more than in any other continent, multi-language proverb dictionaries have a long history. The earliest that Gyula Paczolay cites is Herman Nuñez, *Refranes o proverbios en Castellano*

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(Madrid, 1555), which lists parallels in Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese and Italian. More recent such dictionaries and proverb typologies are Matti Kuusi, *Proverbia Septentrionalia: 900 Balto-Finnic Proverb Types with Russian, Baltic, German and Scandinavian Parallels*. FFC 236 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatia, 1985); Kazys Grigas, *Patarliu paraleles. Lietuviu paraleles su latviu, baltarusiu, rusu, lenku, vokieciu, lotynu, prancuzu, ispanu atitikmenimis* (Vilnius: Lietuvos TSR Mokslu Akademija, Leidykla Vaga, 1987) and Gabriel Gheorghe, *Proverbele românesti si provebele lumii romanice. Studiu comparativ* (Bucuresti: Editura Albatros, 1986). Gyula Paczolay himself has contributed to this research trend, editing *A Comparative Dictionary of Hungarian, Estonian, German, English, Finnish, and Latin Proverbs with an Appendix of Cheremis and Zyryan* (Veszprém, 1985, 1987). Although certainly more productive, the European scholars are late-comers to this kind of proverb analysis, the first record of which is known from the first millennium B. C. E. from Mesopotamia where scribes wrote in clay bilingual cuneiform tablets of Sumerian-Akkadian and Akkado-Hittite proverbs (p. 12).¹ From the humble bi-lingual fragments, multi-language collections have expanded their lists of parallel proverbs to seven and even nine languages. Yet, in the present volume Gyula Paczolay outdid himself and others.

In *European Proverbs* just the basic text is bi-lingual, English and Hungarian, the rest, as mentioned, delves into sixty one languages. Paczolay has selected 106 proverbs from 55 languages spoken on continental Europe and the British Isles, listing them in a descending order of popularity. He starts with "(There is) no smoke without (some) fire" that occurs in fifty four languages and ends with "It's an ill/stupid bird that soils its own nest" that is found in a mere twenty-eight. A proverb has to meet two criteria to qualify into this corpus: It must be spoken in at least one language of the main regional European divisions: Central, East, West, North and South, and its variant has to be known in at least 28 European languages. In other words, to be considered truly European a proverb has to pass a regional and a quantitative test which ensures its regional roots and its breadth of distribution.

Once qualified, a proverb becomes the subject of an extensive comparative bibliographical list that has a tri-partite structure: (a) heading, (b) list of sources, and (c) conclusion. The heading begins with the proverb text, including some minor variations. For example, number 22 is "Walls/ corners/ fences/ posts have ears." The proverb serves also as a section title. In most cases further variants follow, citing the languages in which they occur. For example, the variants for number 24 "God/Heaven helps those who help themselves" are: "He who helps himself, will be helped by God. v₁; -Help yourself and God/Heaven will help you. v₂; ---God tells: Help yourself and I shall help you. v₂. ----God tells: Help yourself and I shall help you. v₁ (Blg, Cat, Cze, Grk, Ita, Prt, Rru, Scr, Spa);--Rely on (or Pray to) God but be active yourself. v₁ (Bru, Lit, Rus, Ukr, Vtk). This part is , to use Paczolay's terminology, the proverb "concrete" representation, which Paczolay interprets in a brief description that follows, summarizing the semantics of the proverb, or its "abstract idea." For the above proverb it is "When in trouble first of all every one himself should do his best to improve his condition." The final section of the heading consists of an intermittent designation of proverbs as either "common," or "universal, " after which the heading concludes with general references to Biblical, Greek, or Latin, as well as references to a few non-European languages. The final item in the heading is a figure indicating the number of languages in which the particular proverb occurs ($\Sigma = x$).

The second part, the list of sources, begins with specific references to the three languages of the Christian canon, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and then Paczolay continues with a list of proverbs in their original languages and particular alphabets, with partial or full English translation, and references to standard proverb dictionaries in the respective languages. The languages are listed in the alphabetical order of their English names and It concludes with a sub-section of "Some Oriental Equivalentents" that includes Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese proverbs in their respective alphabets, transliteration and English translation.

The third concluding part of each section consists of a chronology of the first recordings of each proverb in European languages, a list of

the languages in which a given proverb *is not* known, cross-references to other multi-lingual proverb collections and, whenever available, to specific studies of the given proverb.

This meta-paremiological analysis, a study of studies of proverbs, is breath taking in its scope. The sheer number of languages which Paczolay has considered is awe striking. In addition to uni- and multi-lingual dictionaries of proverbs in sixty one languages and key studies of proverbs, he has examined classical texts in some of these languages referring his readers not only to dictionaries but also directly to literary sources that offer historical documentation of proverbs. The capsule history of each proverb that appears in the conclusion of each section is a valuable feature in and of itself. The bibliographical references, cross-references, and correspondence with previous paremiological multi-lingual dictionaries, the indices in English, German, and Hungarian, all bound to make this volume a main stay of any proverb research library.

Yet, it is a scholarly tool that seeks to prove a thesis, namely the existence of a common European proverb tradition. While Paczolay does not state his hypothesis, he implies it in the organization of the proverbs not according to any alphabetical order of subjects or abstract ideas that proverb dictionaries conventionally follow, but according to their decrease in popularity among the peoples of Europe. The construction of Europeanness in proverbs involves not only ideological goals but also methodological assumptions that require an examination.

Implicit in the section structure is Paczolay's premise that in proverbs there is a constant, single, direct relation between text and meaning or, to resort to his terminology, between their "concrete" and "abstract" levels. Had he not held such a view he would not have summarized the proverb meaning in one or two sentences at the heading of each section. This approach stands in sharp contrast to the methodological principle of semantic indefiniteness of proverbs that Arvo Krikmann and the American paremiological ethnographers explore.² The rhetorical malleability of proverbs depends not only on social situations but also on their regional interpretations. For example Paczolay suggests that the "abstract idea" of proverb number 14 "A

rolling stone gathers (*or* will gather) no moss," is "the unsettled person does not prosper." However, this proverb which is known in forty eight European and three Asian languages, has an opposite meaning as well. Its two contrasting ideas occur in two different regions of the British Isles. As Alan Dundes notes: "The Scottish and English interpretations of the meaning of the proverb necessitate different value assignments. In England, the stones refer to the stones in a brook and these stones rarely move. Moss is considered to be wealth, prosperity, etc.---In Scotland, however, the stones are thought to be the cylindrical stones of an old fashioned roller. Such stones must not be idle or else moss (lichen) will grow on them. In the Scottish context, then, rolling is plus, stones are plus, and no- moss is plus." If such opposite meanings of a single proverb exist within two communities of speakers that live side by side, it is possible to expect even a greater semantic variation among the forty-eight European languages in which it is known, and which their speakers share even less in terms of their material culture and environment.

The reverse relations in which two proverbial texts have a single meaning is more common, and in a study that involves careful consideration of numerical figures, it is necessary to check whether two formulations are simple variations on a single theme, or do they represent two distinct proverbs. For example proverb no. 18 "Fields have eyes (*or* see) and wood/bush has ears (*or* listen)", is semantically analogous to proverb no. 22 "Walls/corners/fences/posts have ears." Paczolay himself uses some of the same expressions to describe their respective "abstract ideas." Should not they then be a variation of each other rather than two distinct proverbs.

In another case an apparent dependence on the proverb "concrete" level prevents Paczolay from exploring the multiple metaphorical representation of an "abstract idea" several peoples share. For example, in the section on proverb no. 38 "Do not sell the bear's skin (*or* Do not drink [i.e. feast] on the bear's skin) before the bear is caught/killed/shot," Paczolay lists also "Do not count your chickens before they are hatched," "A spit is prepared (*or* Do not prepare a spit) while the bird/capercaillie/crane/duck/titmouse is still in flight (*or* in the forest, *or* on the tree/lake)," and "The kettle is (*or* Do not put the

kettle) on the fire while the fish is still in the sea/river (*or* is not yet caught)." But he does not include the popular variation in Russian and the Baltic countries that Matti Kuusi lists as Type 519, rendering it in English as "Don't leap before you reach the ditch" and in German as "Man muss nicht hopp! sagen, ehe man über den Bach ist."³ This formulation is devoid of the hunting metaphors, either around the farm or in the wild, that is characteristic of the other texts, yet it should have been included among the synonyms of this proverb in order to complete the range of metaphors that the idea has among the peoples of Europe.

The very sequence of languages within each section makes explicit Paczolay's conception of European civilization. For him, as for many others before him, Christianity and its canonical texts of the Old and New Testaments are the foundation upon which European cultures and their moral values rest. Romanticism sought to depart from such a view and search for the roots of Europe in its pagan past, in pre-Christian religions, languages and traditions. While folklore studies, including proverb research, owe a great debt to romanticism, the interface between orality and literacy in European history and the centrality of the Bible in religious services make the Christian view of European history tenable and plausible, particularly as far as proverbs are concerned. Following such a premise, whenever possible, Paczolay begins each list of languages in each section with Hebrew Greek and Latin, out of any alphabetical order. The occurrence of Hebrew in this position, a Semitic and non-European language, makes explicit his view of the importance of the religious texts in the formation of the European proverbial canon.

While Paczolay's approach is defensible his use of sources is frustrating. For example, as far as the Hebrew is concerned, he draws not only upon the Hebrew Bible but also on the two Talmuds. There is a difference of at least six hundred likely even a thousand years between the Hebrew language of these three respective texts. Furthermore many of the talmudic proverbs are in Aramaic, which Paczolay includes in the list without distinction (Nos. 37, 57). The two texts had different histories in Europe. While the Hebrew Bible was venerated and translated into vernacular languages, the Talmud was despised

and burned. Christian preachers knew and quoted from the Old Testament and introduced its stories, phrases and metaphors into European colloquial languages, but only the most learned among them had some knowledge of the Talmuds. These texts are indeed rich in the oral tradition of the Jewish societies in the Land of Israel and Babylon (Iraq). They are teeming with proverbs. Paczolay has used as his guide for Talmudic proverbs the antiquated compendium of M.C. Wahl, *Das Sprichwort der hebräisch-aramäischen Literatur mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der neuern Umgangssprachen* (Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1871). He identified five⁴ proverbs with Talmudic analogies. Had he availed himself of some more comprehensive Hebrew and Aramaic paremiological dictionaries he could have increased that number considerably. For example, the idea of self-reliance that is represented in proverb No. 24 "God/Heaven helps those who help themselves" occurs in mishnaic Hebrew in the highly alliterative proverb *ein ani li mi li* ("If I am not for me who will") (*Pirkei Avot* 1:14), which is missing from the list. The absence of any reference to God does not change the meaning of the proverb, only provides a significant variation upon its theme.

Paczolay makes the same indiscriminate use of Greek and Latin sources. He lists proverbs from classical Greek and Latin sources as if they had the same value in European societies as those that appear in the Septuagint and the Vulgate. This is obviously is not the case. While the occurrence of a proverb in Homer and Horace, the Greek playwrights or the Latin rhetoricians is of an historical importance, documenting its antiquity, its appearance in the translations of the Bible made it available to the religious functionaries who transmitted it into vernacular languages.

The major strength of *European Proverbs* is the comprehensive linguistic coverage of the continent. Like the American Senate the volume offers equal representation to each language regardless of the number of its speakers. All the languages, from the English with its half a billion speakers to the Balto-Finnic language Veps with its three thousand speakers count as a single unit in this construction of the canon of the European common proverbs that relies on numerical calculations. Pacsolay points out (p.14) that he did not have access to

Macedonian and Tatar proverb dictionaries, and these languages remain inevitably unrepresented and uncounted. The linguistic map of Europe (pp. 520-521) provides a telling picture. Romany appears as the quintessential European tongue, spoken everywhere on the continent, while Yiddish has been eradicated and being considered a dead language in Europe, in spite of its two million speakers (p.510).⁵

A valuable supplement to the European variants of each proverbs is the list of "Some Oriental Equivalents" which includes Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese examples. While bibliographical and paremiologically these appendices are an important asset, methodologically they are questionable. Paczolay explains the inclusion of these Asian proverbs because "European proverbs are not only confined to Europe. They are widely known outside this continent where English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian are spoken. In addition to this a number of European proverbs have already been adapted in some languages spoken outside Europe, for example in Japanese and other Asian Languages (pp.13-14). No doubt, in some cases Paczolay is correct in his Euro-centric view of proverb diffusion. The spread of European languages through travel, commerce, colonialism, religious missions, literature and the mass-media contributed to the use of European proverbs beyond their continental boundaries. However, as folklore research has long demonstrated, use, even when extensive, is not an evidence for origin. Speaking makes these proverb European not origin; they may have reached Europe from Asia or Africa. After all, as far as cultural and communication are concerned, commerce, even colonialism, is a two way stream.

This volume celebrates Europeanness in a most positive manner, but when glancing over at other territories it is necessary to abandon the Euro-centric perspective and adopt a more universal view, considering parallel proverbs as variations on a theme. They need not belong to any specific continent or language, but to all. On several occasions Paczolay describes a proverb as "universal" or "common." These attribution appears in the volume rather sparingly. But the Asian equivalents that all the hundred and six proverbs have, suggest

that more are worthy of such a designation, opening up the question of localism versus universalism of proverbs.

Notes:

¹W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 222-282.

² See Arvo Krikmann, "On Denotative Indefiniteness of Proverbs." *Proverbium* (N.S.) 1 (1984):47-92; Roger D. Abrahams, "Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore." *Journal of American folklore* 81(1968):143-58; idem, "A Rhetoric of Everyday Life: Traditional Conversational Genres," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 32(1968): 44-59. Peter Seitel, "Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor." *Genre* 2(1969):143-162. Reprinted in pp. 125-144, *Folklore Genres*. Ed. Dan Ben-Amos. Publications of the American Folklore Society Bibliographica and Special Series, Vol. 26 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976). Mark E. Workman, "Proverbs for the Pious and the Paranoid: The Social Use of Metaphor." *Proverbium* 4 (1987):225-241.

³ See Matti Kuusi, *Proverbia Septentrionalia: 900 Balto-Finnic Proverb Types with Russian, Baltic, German and Scandinavian Pralleles*. FFC 236 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatia, 1985), p. 298 and Dan Ben-Amos, "Meditation on a Russian Proverb in Israel," *Proverbium* 12 (1995): 14

⁴ In the introduction and the index he refers to six talmudic proverbs, but he cites only five texts. In section No. 91 for the proverb "Big fish eat little fish" he mentions the Talmud but does not list a proverb nor a reference.

⁵ Such ominous predictions, as the map implies, have been rather common about Yiddish. The title of the book about its survival is symptomatic, see Joshua A. Fishman, *Never Say Die! A Thousand Years of Yiddish in Jewish Life and Letters*. Contributions to the Sociology of Language 30 (The Hague/New York: Mouton, 1981).

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