THE BEAR ACADEMY IN THE CARE OF THE ROMANI KINGS

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Summary. On the basis of archives, fieldwork and manuscripts, the author tries to show the history of the Bear Academy in Smorgon (Belarus) in its development of events and culture. The chronology of the publications dates back to the 15th century when Smorgon belonged to the Zenovichs clan, who might have acquired the Bear school from the Jewish community. As a marriage dowry, the Zenovichs gave an ordinary Bear school to the well-known landowners and politicians Radziwills, whose initiative turned the LITTLE KNOWN ELSEWHERE activity of catching bears and further trade with them into the famous Bear Academy. This happened before the fall and partition of the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth in 1795. Three sources, namely, publications, archives and travellers’ notes, Jewish manuscripts and the Romani verbal folklore give us ground and reason to state, that regardless of the lack of the municipal and state archives the Academy functioned in reality for more than 170 years. It became a symbol of the joint Belarusian/Polish/Lithuanian collaboration with the Jewish society and the Gypsy (Romani) community

Keywords: Bear Academy, Smorgon, Belarus, Belarus-Lithuanian, elders, trainers, Gypsy overlords, partitions, Jewish-Gypsy bond.

(In Loving Memory of the National Poet of Belarus Rygor Baradulin):
Bears can learn many things from people.
Richeske isyn but te dzhinel manushestyr.
Медзведем у людзей ёсць чаму павычыцца.
Рыгoр Барадулiн.“Смаргонская Акадэмия”
[Rygor Baradulin “The Smargon Academy”]

The author is a writer and researcher on Gypsies/Roma. One part of his research is related to Belarus–Lithuanian Gypsies and therefore the Bear Academy in Smorgon is an integral part of many studies of Belarusian history: we can’t easily omit it. It has inspired great sons of the Belarusian nation such as: the writer Vladimir Karatkevich and the poet Rygor Baradulin to write about this unique school in their works. The late Rygor Baradulin also researched the Bear Academy based on Minsk and Vilnius archives.

He used to say to the author: “Val’dkô, the Bear Academy was started by Jews, which later turned into a successful collaboration between Jews and Gypsies. Jews
used to prepare boiled carrots with honey to treat bears for a good performance. They also raised money to build the initial building for the Bear Academy. In due time the Radziwills started to hire Gypsies to train bear-cubs” (Барадулін 1999: 70-106).

Rygor Baradulin was thrilled by the range of activities of the Smorgon Academy to train bears as performers especially by the Gypsy training instructors and handlers. It gave him an immediate inspiration to write his brilliant poem “The Bear Academy”

You find yourself catching your breath when you plunge yourself into reading and learning more about the “Bear Academy” in Smorgon until the moment when you set your mind to research further on its legislative and civil status. Unexpectedly, grey frustration may take you over: there is nothing in the State Archives of Belarus and there is almost nothing in the archives of neighbouring countries, Poland and Russia, while there is very little in Lithuania.

There are short notices in the Encyclopaedia in Belarus (Белорусская 1973: 697; Белорусская 2002: 50; Энциклопедия 2001: 363), Lithuania (‘Vetliva’), Czech Republic (Slovnik 1887: 710), Poland (Ilustrowana 1936: 619-620; Wielka, 2001: 27; Polska 1897: 183) and Russia (Большая 1905: 517), while there are no references in the Encyclopaedias of the neighbouring countries: Germany, Latvia, Sweden and Finland.

There are no references in any books in the UK, France, Spain and Italy. After giving up your research on this point, you might be touched by a vivid description of the activities of the “Bear Academy” in Smorgon in fiction literature1, such as dancing bears in gaudy costumes supervised by a brave man with a moustache and clutching a metal rod. You start pondering whether this coach was a Litvin (Litwin), Polish, Jewish or Gypsy daring chap. (Illustration 1).

The author often keeps wondering why it was so poorly documented.

When somebody reads this material further and further, being carried away by the narration, a certain question may come to one’s mind: “Why did it happen in Smorgon, in the PLC (Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth)”? Moreover, if we research into the history of Poland, Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the PLC another drilling question might take our imagination over: “How were Gypsies placed in the Crown during the XV–XVII centuries before it ceased to exist in 1795 after the III partition of the PLC?”

The earliest evidence of the appearance and residence of Gypsies (Roma) with the cygan(tsygan)/cyganka(tsyganka) in Poland, of which some pieces of land of Belarus and Lithuania were part of its territory, dates back to 1401 (Mroz 2016: ch.7). While with the names “Philistines” and “Egyptians” Gypsies appeared in the records much later, during the XVI century.

As the sources state, Gypsies around Nieswirz and Mir, and many of the places in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), especially on the lands of Radziwill, were mostly sedentary at that time and involved in cultivating land in the country, while in towns and cities they were engaged in trade and craft to to provide for themselves.
Some of them were warriors and displayed valour during military expeditions: thus, Stanislaw Cygan was granted a property as a reward for John Albert’s unfortunate expedition to Moldova (26 Act of 11 October, 1497) (Mroz 2016: ch.2). This is the first record of Gypsies (Cyganie) residing in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The XVI century records of the PLC tell us about Gypsies in a completely different way from the conventional perceptions about them. We can see how selective and unobjective our understanding is, how prejudiced are people against Gypsies and how incomplete historical knowledge of the past XVI century of these people is. Most of these records comprise a collection of documents referring to Piotr of Rothenberg, a Gypsy leader who together with his clan arrived from the German lands. They don’t refer to Nomadic Gypsies who had arrived in Poland on foot or horses, living in shacks or tents at the beginning of the XVI century. These documents refer to horse dealing where these are also accusations regarding horse stealing, some of which contain information on collaboration between Gypsies and non-Gypsies (Gadzhe), who either acted as accomplices in crimes or benefitted from the stolen loot. Later on, we find information that Gypsies were engaged in craft and fortune-telling – this is very characteristic of Gypsies. We should also say that further records refer to settled Gypsies engaged in cultivating land and living individually, as well as a considerable number of Gypsies being employed in service at the royal court and landed estates.

Unfortunately, we repeat again that we can’t come across in any archives of Belarus, Lithuania or Poland any written proof (records, notes in municipal and registry books), how the Smorgon Bear Academy) started to function, how and when its founders Jewish people, Litvins (Litwins), Poles or Gypsy (Cyganie) people, went about creating it: building, obtaining bears and teaching staff. What caused for this event to take place in the best circumstances?

Thus, we would like to present three different sources, versions, and points of view:

*Existing literature*, which is not much at all.

*Jewish account of events at Smorgon Academy*.

*Roma verbal stories*.

Let us start with the literature, which has been printed.

It’s very difficult to establish now who started using bears for fun: the Muscovy state/Moskovia (Russia), the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or the Kingdom of Poland. The earliest mention dates back to 1426 when the famous Polish King Jahaila, who was hunting for bears in the Belovezh forests, damaged his foot. He wanted to catch a bear for pleasure and keep it as a pet. We have no references that bears were trained as dancers at that stage of time.

Another Lithuanian Count Zhigimantas Kiastutovich started catching bears and letting them go in Nalibok forests. We don’t know whether his intention was to start keeping contact with bears, separating them from wild bears, thus domesticating them. He also invited the Prussian Count Albrecht to hunting, during which
more than 100 dogs were heard trying to catch bears alive. There was an abundance of bears in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Polish King and Grand Duke of Lithuania Stephan Batory was wounded while trying to catch a bear. Bear heads decorated the estates of the counts. Every noble estate had a bear for fun and some of them had bear heads to decorate the walls. But people were not allowed to hunt bears if they didn’t kill domestic cattle. A severe fine was imposed on people who dared to kill bears not on their territory. In the palace of the Duke Radziwill near Vilna (Vilnius), a bear met the guests and after they were seated, he delivered them food and drinks.

We should say that the Smorgen Bear Academy was founded approximately at the same time with the bear school near Kaunas by the Count L. Tyshkevich but the Radziwills developed their Bear School on a big scale and it became an Academy. In order No. 8, as a supplement to the First Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1529) during its implementation in 1566 which later was presented to the Sejm as the First Statute of Lithuania in 1529, the pet-bear owners, who had paid 8 groszy of tax, were allowed to go around town settlements and markets to entertain people. Successful people or businesses could hire bears for longer periods. People who were involved with bears tried to buy a male and female because after the cub was born it legally belonged to the owner of the mother bear. People tried to “christen” the cub. This event was followed by a big party.

The first mention of the Belarusian-Lithuanian bears should take us back to the XVI century (Катлярчук 2007: 153-155). Thus, the Italian poet Ludwig Ariosto, in his poem, Crazy Roland, introduces the Belarusian bear handler, Roland, to the European reader: “Roland is not scared of an enemy and like a bear of Belarusian/Lithuanian Buffoon is not scared of dogs’ barking” (1516). Many researchers, who travelled to the town of Smorgon, stated that all bear handlers who roamed around the world, had gone through a proper training in a high school in Smorgon which for them is like Promised Land (Nordberg). When they became professionals, they had to pay taxes like any other craftsmen.

Humorous things with bears were an inseparable part of the Belarus folk culture. Nobody knows when the Belarusian bear handlers with their trained bears started to roam across the lands of Poland, Germany, Hungary, Russia, Sweden and Italy. Another author, a Swedish priest, Olav Magnus, described vividly the Belarusian/Lithuanians buffoons in his book “History of the northern nations” (1555).

The same Olav Magnus depicted a bear on the first Sea Map of the Rus Kingdom (the Russian Kingdom) in 1539 around the time of the first mention of bears used for fun in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with the Russian Kingdom.

The majority of the writers on Smorgon Bear Academy affirm the popular assumption that it was founded and run by the Radziwills in the XVII century (Чегодаева 2003; Татаринов 2009; История 2007: 300-305).

In addition to this date, some researchers write that “Smorgon (Smargon/Smurgon, Belarusian) Bear Academy” also gained its humorous name in Belarus in relati-
on to catching and training bears, which was founded and supported in the XVI century by the Dukes Radziwill. It is also a synonym of a buffoon’s school (“skomorochy” school) (Сморгонская, Chanoch, Бутэвіч 2001: 20-22).

The study of the bear schools and the Smorgon Bear Academy allows us to see that all these teaching centres that tell us how to manage bears and use them to entertain people originated from buffoon’s activities and their schools. Buffoons in olden days were taught different skills to use with bears to amuse people. After the knowledge and skills were learnt and mastered, buffoons passed it on first to their sons and partially to other people later.

Moreover, at its peak, the Smorgon Bear Academy absorbed the overall best experience from buffoons and bear handlers throughout the whole of Europe, especially during the time of collaboration and bond between Duke Karol Radziwill and the local King of the Gypsies in Mir and Nieswirz, Yan Martinkevich.

The small unattractive town of Smorgon became popular due to its unique trade of teaching bears. About 100 years ago, the bears, in a joking way, were called “Pupils of the Smorgon Academy” who roamed with their handlers not only around Russia but throughout Europe2. This is such – an acknowledgement of the ancient trade of Russian-training bears (Большая 1905: 517).

This occupation was called miad’viedniki and was mentioned in the register of the professions for tax of the Statute of the Duchy of Lithuania (Statut Kniastva Litouskaga) in 1566 (Великое 2006: 602). It means that bear performances were an essential part of a public life and entertainment for the people. Masters of ceremonies included scenes from everyday life, funny short stories and comedies using hats, tambourines and rods.

During some performances, there were recitals by bear trainers, acrobatics, doll-presentations and music playing. Some records indicate that these funny bear scenes (miadzvezhyya paciehi) lasted until the beginning of the XX century (Ягорава 2003).

The author also added that there were other Bear Schools on the territory of Belarus apart from Smorgon: in Niesvizh, near Minsk and near Turov, in Poliesye, but we do not have any records about how they operated (Солодухо 1959). (Illustration 2).

The Count L. Tyshkevich also founded his Bear Academy in his big estate Raudonvari near Kouna (Kaunas) where the Zhmudzins/Žmudzins (an old word for authentic Lithuanian speakers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) trained male bears to entertain people. Some of these bears were offered on hire to perform: Gypsies were lucky to receive those bears to perform for people in the towns, settlements and at markets or fairs. Another group of bears was offered as pets to people during market or fair days.

Nevertheless, this Bear Academy didn’t leave the same legacy as the Smorgon Bear Academy. Moreover, the Smorgon Academy was better known for its range of activities.
Some researchers state that the Smorgon Academy was already operating in the XVI century (Zaprutko-Janicka 2011). The first academic reference to the Bear Academy dates from the XVI century according to the Polish Encyclopaedia, printed in Krakow in 1897 (Polska 1897: 183), in which the small town of Smorgon is mentioned. This town belonged to the Zenovich dynasty and its inhabitants were well-known for their special occupation: they bred and trained bears to perform across the whole of Europe.

Some sources also state that Count K. J. Zenovich acquired the Bear-School (Berishe Schule) in 1612 which in due time became the Bear Academy (Инвентарі 1977: 16, 69). This was the time when he built the famous Saint Archangel Calvinist Cathedral in Smorgon and opened the library.

Thus, we can assume that the famous Bear Academy operated for more than two hundred years (1612–1831) in the small town Smorgon, in the Grodno region, which is situated between Minsk and Vilna among the surrounding walls of forests (Сморгонская, Ягорава 2003). Its northern bounds almost touch the banks of the calm river Viliya flowing solemnly and thoughtfully through its landscape of greenery. On the other side of the city, the boundaries of Smorgon touch two river tributaries – the Groyat and Oksna. (Illustration 3).

Let us get back specifically to the founders and owners of the Bear-Academy in Smorgon itself. In 1601, the former Brest-Litovsk Governor (Voyevoda) Count Krystof (Krzysztof) Zenovich became the host of Smorgon after his father Jury (Jerzy) Zenovich passed away in 1583. When he died in 1616, Smorgon passed on to his wife Fedora until 1672 when Michael (Michał) Kazimierz Radziwill (Rybońka) inherited it as a dowry from the Zenovich family (Инвентарі 1977).

Other sources state that Smorgon was passed on to the Radziwills in 1668, when Anna Zenovich got married to Albrecht Władysław Radziwill (1589–1636) and she brought it as a dowry (Татаринов 2009, Slovník 1887: 710).

We presume that the legislative base for engaging Gypsies in the Bear Academy was formulated after the “The Sejm” (Government) of the Kingdom of Poland passed legislation on Gypsies: “The Podlasie Mandate” which allowed landlords to harbour Gypsies [Warsaw, 1607]: “0n writs of complicity bannatorium” (Ficowski 1989: 15, 31).

We have no evidence if the former host of Smorgon, Count K. Zenowicz employed any Gypsies when he acquired Smorgon with this unique school in 1612 (Барадулін 1999: 70–106).

As R. Baradulin wrote in his preface of the poem “Smorgon’ Academy”, “The Bear Academy” was founded in the XVII century by the Radziwills and he added in his notes that its initial Head was Michael (Michał) Radziwill Rybońka (A small fish) (1702–1762).

The Bear Academy and its activities was first mentioned by the French monk Philipp Ariel in his memoir about his travels to the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth in 1687–1689, where he mentioned: “I was shown an Academy where bears are trained, who also travel from town to town across the whole of Europe. This Bear
Academy is in Smorgon, where bears learn skills in order to show their tricks with such smartness and intelligence’.

Another reliable source is based on the records of the Swedish historian J. Norberg who wrote about the Swedish King Karl XII who attended Smorgon together with the Polish King Stanislaw Leszczinski in 1708 and mentioned the following: “In terms of this town, we should mention that it is better known as a place where all dancing bears, who roamed around the world, have a refuge and school there” (Norberg 1740: 89).

The Academy did not do well before his successor, “Rybońka’s son”, Karol Radziwill (Panie Kochanku) inherited Smorgon with this school, which he called “A Bear Academy” in 1762. He really made it flourish. We are tempted to call this period in the history of this unique institution Radziwill Academy.

We tried hard to sort it out: why did this event take place on the territory of Podlasie (Eastern Poland) of which Smorgon was a part?

The main explanation lies in the fact that there were many bears in the woods surrounding Smorgon, and therefore there were Polish, Litvin (Litwin), Jewish and Gypsy bear handlers, who drilled bears in their own way to perform in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (PLC). Some of them applied to Karl Radziwill for licenses to travel to Western Europe to perform with these adorable animals.

Another explanation is based on the historic reference that there were quite a few people (usually non-Gypsies, Gadzhe) who also bred domestic bears and sold them young to the Academy to train them as entertainers.

Some of these local bear owners trained their pets and some of them resorted to performing with them. In due time, they were requested to buy licenses to perform with the bears, which were very expensive. Unfortunately, some private entertainers were not able to keep their bears any longer and offered them to the Academy for a good payment. Some wealthier bear owners applied to the Academy for exams to qualify for a license (licenzija). (Illustration 4).

The third important explanation lies in the fact that a close friendship and co-operation existed between the local Gypsy King Jan Martinkiewicz and the Duke Karol Radziwill (Panie Kochanku). This enabled a solid and prosperous Gypsy and non-Gypsy Community to exist on the Radziwill properties (1778–1790). And now we will try to scrutinise this unique formation in the XVII–XVIII centuries.

At first, we will mainly concentrate on the earliest records of the Gypsy presence in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania separately, starting in the beginning of the XV century. This was a huge state, which comprised not only the contemporary Poland and Lithuania, but also Belarus, some strips from Western Russia and Ukraine.

The Radziwills Properties

The history of the Radziwills’ attitude and policy towards Gypsies in the PLC dates back to the 2nd of February 1595 to the record in the Minsk municipal boo-
The Gypsies are mentioned here as a settled community who started to dispute within their own group, but the outcome was guided by their own court based on their verbal bylaws (Romano Chachipen/Gypsy Law). The case was rather tragic: Aleksander Matysowicz, a Gypsy, a servant of Krzysztof Radziwill, a Vil'na (Vilnius) voivode (mayor) accuses another Gypsy, Kaspar Martinowicz, initiated a big brawl and disturbance by ringing alarm bells, which resulted in the tumult among people who trampled K. Martinowicz’s wife and thus murdered her. We will return to this record later (Mroz 2016: 74-77).

Moreover, it was only on the landed property of the Radziwills that Gypsies formed a more numerous community and found such favorable conditions probably like nowhere else in the world. Here, they were treated in such a friendly and fair way. The documents indicate that they possessed the rights enjoyed by other subjects; they were not treated as troublesome characters, and they had their own leaders. The presence of the Gypsies on the Radziwills landed property again takes us back again to the end of the XVI century: in 1584 we came across the first document in PLC, which indicates that Gypsies were mostly settled people, involved and registered as craftsmen and traders, who paid taxes.

However, the document, which gives us more specific and full idea about the situation of Gypsies on the estates of the Radziwills’ expanded family in the east of the Commonwealth, comes later (Mroz 2016: chapt.2/8) This document is a “letter of liability” (obligation letter) granted by the Gypsy elder, Jozef Marcinkiewicz, to Samuel Hucin, a townsman of Mir, and states that J.Marcinkiewicz borrowed 20 Polish zlotys from Hucin with the commitment to repay it in two instalments at one week interval. We don’t know whether the Marcinkiewicz was the Gypsy elder by the choice of the Gypsy community or whether he was just appointed by Karol Stanislaw Radziwill. In this archive, there is also another letter of 1719–1720 which reads: “I, Jozef Martinikiewicz, a poor townsman and citizen of Mir, the Gypsy Elder…”, the phrase “with his company” indicates that in Mir and its neighborhood there were many Gypsies comprising one united settled community, and not just a collection of individuals.

The Radziwills who were the richest and most powerful noblemen in the Commonwealth assessed that the Bear Academy would be a very profitable business for their own wealth, including the Gypsy community, the Jewish people and the local Litvin (Litwin)/Polish population. They turned the Bear school (previously it was called just School) into a real academic institution. Since it became an institution, it started to be called Smurgon Bear Academy. A lot of money was invested in this business and the Radziwills hired many Gypsy Bear handlers, who turned out to be the best bear trainers. A curriculum and teaching programs were worked out. In due time the Smorgon Bear-Academy started to prepare the best trained bears with their handlers and became a huge success across the whole of Europe.

It also resulted in changing the image of Smorgon from a few different settlements into one solid town, which had businesses such as wooden, leather or paper and a Jewish bakery. A hospital was also built, a few schools with instruction
in the Polish language and the *Yeshivah* (Jewish Religious School). The local library expanded significantly and served as a good source for the local people in terms of self-education.

But historians in modern Lithuania (Litva (Litwa)/Lietuva) still refuse to recognise that Old Belarusian language was the state language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. They avoid using the word *Old Belarusian* by referring to it as the “official Slavonic”. At that time people used the old name *Ruthenian*.

In 1696, the Diet (Sejm/Seym) of the PLC granted the Polish language official status throughout the whole state, thus removing Old Belarusian from official usage. Since that time Litvins (Litwins), mainly lords, magnates and townsmen, began to be “polonised”, while the peasants continued to maintain the validity of Old Belarusian amongst themselves until the Uprising of 1830–1831, when the new Russian authorities started to wipe it out from any usage; it being a threat to the Russian Empire’s stability, because the majority of the insurgents of the Rebellion Army spoke *Ruthenian* between themselves and they were mainly Byzantine Catholics (Uniates). The Russian Senate started to persecute Byzantine Catholics openly by using Cossacks to force them to turn to Orthodoxy resorting to torture.

Apart from their Romani language *Romanes*, the nomadic Gypsies used mainly *Ruthenian*/Old Belarusian (which they called *Xaladytko*) when they spoke to non-Gypsies, while sedentary town Gypsies (*foritka Roma*: foro – town/city) spoke, as a rule, also Polish and *Yiddish* (Jewish dialect of PLC). When Lithuania [(Lietu vos)/Zhmudzin Republic] became an independent state in 1918, the “lithuanisation” process was brought about very quickly and strongly: we can come across many marriage photos of Gypsies in Lithuania, where they are dressed in national Lithuanian costumes for church ceremonies. Many people of Slavic origin of Eastern Lithuania and Western Belarus, mainly Orthodox, who were born before 1940, still identify themselves as *Litvins* (Litwins), while Roman Catholics see themselves more as Polish people (*Poliacy z Litwy*).

The Lithuanian /Belarus-Lithuanian Gypsy (Romani) dialects preserved many borrowings from Polish grammar and vocabulary and from the Old Belarusian languages. In contrast to this, we don’t find any borrowings from the Lithuanian language.

**Gypsy Elders, Overlords, Kings**

In 1482 the first Anti/Gypsy law was adopted in Brandenburg Germany which immediately encouraged the majority of the Western countries to authorise the expulsion of Gypsies (France, Spain, England).

The XV century brought an enormous change in the attitude towards Gypsies almost over the whole Europe by aggravating its hostilities, except the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland.

Not a single nation could boast of such a diverse variety of “Gypsy Kings” as Poland, where their different kings exercised many different forms of authority over their co-tribesmen.
While upper-class Europe enjoyed Renaissance in music, art, architecture and literature, most European governments became hostile to the point of persecuting and even killing Gypsies, with exception of the Kingdom of Russia (Muscovy/Moskovia).

Moreover, the majority of countries in Europe started to take aggressive measures to expel nomadic Gypsies outside their borders after the middle of the XVI century. As we have already mentioned, in 1482 the first Anti/Gypsy law was adopted in Brandenburg Germany which immediately encouraged the majority of the Western countries to authorise the expulsion of Gypsies (France, Spain, England).

The Western Europe continued to enjoy the Renaissance time and, sadly, it turned hostile towards Gypsies by its laws and their fulfilment.

Suppressive actions didn’t work effectively everywhere due to many reasons, and therefore Kings and their servicemen had to seek a compromise. There appeared an urgent need to look for somebody who would serve an effective liaison between the Crown and the Gypsy communities: the best candidates for this position were supposed to be heads/elders of the extended Gypsy families, some of whom were overlords of the whole Gypsy communities of a particular area. Some of them overlap the official municipal administration.

In 1557 the Warsaw State Statute adopted the first legal Act against Gypsies: “Gypsies or unnecessary people will be expelled by us from the Land and in the future should not be accepted”.

The settled Gypsies were tolerated and governments started to appoint leaders and overlords of the large Gypsy families as local or overall, Gypsy king (head) in order to keep a link between the Gypsy population and the official governments.

The model of managing Gypsies was better implemented in Poland and later in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth although it originated from the Kingdom of Hungary. Hungary was one kingdom with Poland under the aegis of the joint King and Crown (1370–1382, 1440–1444).

We might only imagine that there were other places in the Commonwealth, where the Romani Kings/Overlords of Gypsies were involved and might have applied their hand and authority to helping the Gypsies in bear catching, show business and fishing: one should dig in the old municipal records fully and thoroughly. Moreover, this office for Gypsies in the Crown functioned widely at the same time with the Bear Academy for more than 170 years.

Therefore, to a curious reader, we would like to remind of the Gypsy Kings (Overlords for Gypsies).

The first record of the appointment of a Gypsy King, officially the Elder of the Gypsies, dates from August 1652, when the royal administration under John II, Casimir Vasa decreed a Gypsy leader Mateasz Korolowicz, who presumably succeeded Jan Janczy (Mroz 2016: ch. 6).

Jan Janczy was authorised to oversee all Gypsies in Poland and Lithuania and to collect income tax from all Gypsy families and was given official permission by
the royal Chancellery, Sejms. His main task was to sort out disputes, make decisions, enforce payments of taxes, settle conflicts between Gypsies and non-Gypsies, Crown and non-crown Gypsies, local Gypsy communities (Polish, Lithuanian Gypsies) and foreign ones (Vlax, Hungarian and Slovakian Gypsy groups).

Jan Janczy could have been the first overlord of the Gypsies although we can't come across any official record on his appointment made by King Wladyslaw IV who ruled the Kingdom of Poland at that time. Janczy was also a good kobza-player and played for the King very often.

The next step was to put him in charge for solving the problem of uncontrollable volatile mobile Gypsies by embedding them into the social structure of the Polish state, and additionally of the PLC, so as to have a system of independence, duties and control. The aim was to establish a Gypsy court which was advantageous for the authorities and for the Gypsies themselves in the long run. Now we don't know the full scope of the authority and entitlement of Janczy and what Korolowicz inherited from him in 1652. We know that he was responsible for making decisions on disputes and feuds, levied tax, and overall per capita tax, for investigating offences, searching for the perpetrators and keeping order among the Gypsy communities.

K. Korolowicz’s authority lasted for 10 years and we have no other records about how he performed the duties of his office. He served more as a viceroy of the Crown and he didn’t administer the Gypsies at a large scale. Perhaps he failed to carry out his duties and obligations and therefore in 1662 John II Casimir Vasa appointed the next Elder (Overlord) among the Gypsies both in Poland and in Lithuania, Sebastian Galezowski, who was a Polish nobleman. We don’t know why the Crown administration made such a radical change in the decision to pass on the privilege and office of an overlord of the Gypsies from a Gypsy elder to a non-Gypsy Polish nobleman. We can only speculate perhaps that Korolowicz might not have been good at collecting taxes for the Crown, or maybe had not had enough grip on Gypsy communities.

Nevertheless, the new overlord Sebastian Galezowski did not rule long: either because he didn’t fulfill the obligations imposed on him, or because the King appointed another Polish nobleman Jan Nawrotynski as “the Elder of Gypsies of the Commonwealth”. So in 1668, according to the order of King John Casimir, the Crown chancellery dismissed him. The new overlord was a military man who tried to implement military order into the liasoning between the Crown Gypsies (Polish/ Lithuanian) and the Crown itself. During his ruling, the Vlach and Hungarian Gypsies were classified as “foreign Gypsies” and had tense relations with the Crown Gypsies. The former military commander who ruled them, J. Nawrotynski, tried to subdue those Gypsies in loyalty to the Crown, but he was not always very successful.

The situation started to change gradually during his reign (1668–1682) in favour of the Gypsies in contrast to the discriminatory tendencies and practices seen earlier: archive documents provide proof of wider support of Gypsy citizens who were settled and whose behaviour was acceptable to the authorities. Nawrotynski started to issue documents saying “by rights of my office and theirs” according to the headman
(which started to be called “passports” (lila – Gypsy word)). This “passport” served well in terms of passing some villages, settlements and towns. We can feel that difficulties have already sprung up after the first discriminatory law in 1557. We should imagine that there was a feeling of fear and dislike on the part of non-Gypsies. The “lil” (passport) granted Gypsies free passage and a short stay “as the Crown laws permit” and was favourable to those Gypsies who were keen or had to travel; they were half – nomadic.

We can suspect that Nawrotynski didn’t cope with his duties to help authorities to stop wandering Gypsies (224) as in 1682 the new famous King, John III Sobieski (who stopped the invasion of the Osman armies into the Holy Empire in 1683), granted the privilege to a nobleman Stanislaw Węglowski (registered in L'wow/L'wiw) to become overlord of the Gypsies in the PLC. As the records testify (Chapter on “Gypsy Kings”) Węglowski started to go about working as Gypsy King vigorously and treated his office very seriously, especially to take precautions and motions against all those people who tried illegally to prosper from Gypsies: by being intermediate between authorities and “damaged” (injured) Gypsies, living in the Crown as well as in the Duchy of Lithuania, in relation to their per capita tax. Węglowski was the first overlord of Gypsies, it is written in his “oblata” (certificate) that his duties were broadened including “to judge all Gypsies and carry out judicial decisions and punish their wrongdoings; yet he will defend with his supreme right and provide support to anyone appealing to his authority for help”.

Moreover, he also had “to take care of Gypsies and protect them from any harm”. This shows how seriously King John III Sobieski treated the office of an overlord of Gypsies as part of his Crown institution.

We learn at the same time that Węglowski received an additional authority “to protect Gypsies from any harm from non – Gypsy population”; particularly at that stage of time from the nobles, Panie Molski called him “Gypsy Advocate”. We have no any record about this man’s appointment.

The next Overlord of Gypsies was Tobiasz Bokiej appointed either by John III (Sobieski) or by Stanislaw Leszcynski. We have not any specific records of his ruling years; in a while, in 1697, there appeared a new Gypsy overlord, Lukasz Iwaszkewicz, who fervently supported August II during his election. His details of “oblata” (certificate) pointed out that he had to pass on some percentage of the collective money from the royal treasury; it was also mentioned <for the first true> that the privilege was meant to support Iwaszkiewicz, the Gypsy King, and his “ruined” fortune. The King Augustus II and his Royal chancery took the position of the “overlord of Gypsies” very vigorously and they worked out six demands (charters) to a nobleman who was looking for the title of the King of Gypsies and volunteered for the nomination. The appointment of the next Overlord of Gypsies Kingdom fell on Jan Dewältowski in 1703 (issued in Lublin).

August II’s charter to Jan Dewältowski granted him the authority over the “Vagabundorum Ciganom” for life and supplied this certificate <oblata> with instructi-
ons to the public and local administration not to hamper him in the fulfilment of his duties as the elder of the Gypsies accountable to the King throughout Poland including Lithuania and Samogitia. He was allowed to have his deputies. Sadly, Dewałtowski (Ficowski 1985: 17) and his deputies were to prove ineffectual, or at the worst harmful, in their exercise of this “Gypsy king” office, for a number of reasons: as a rule the Gypsies were suspicious, unwilling to make pacts with Gadje (non-Gypsies) and recognize direct “foreign” rule from the Polish noblemen; on the other hand they were ignorant of Gypsy law (Romano Chachipen) customs and traditions; the fact that these despised nomads according to their mentality and social view of live according to their structure of life, it was difficult for Dewałtowski and his deputies to keep in touch with the Gypsy hordes (Romane tabory) continually travelling about the country. The Gypsy people surrounded by mistrust and dislike, discriminated against by the constitution, provided thus a profitable field for exploitation by dishonest people.

J. Dewałtowski got under enormous pressure from the Crown and Gypsies and shortly resigned.

We can’t find his name in the armorial – his family gherb was not of big gentry’s lineage. Moreover, his service as the elder couldn’t be highly regarded, as King August II shortly in 1705 appointed a new elder (Overlord of Gypsies) Bonaventura Wiera “to take care of Gypsies, protect them from any harm and collect taxes”. In addition to his former overlord the profound nobleman Wiera was also given the power “to judge and punish, appoint his deputies and Gypsy judges”. He was meant to do everything that Gypsies abided by the law. For the first time it was also mentioned about his due levies and income. Moreover, Wiera was given more power: he became the ruler of Gypsies of the whole Commonwealth.

In other words, the new overlord B. Wiera was granted other privileges and commissions including appointing headmen (his deputies) and judges creating then, for the first time, his own office staff. Moreover, Wiera’s authorities got stronger based on the phrase from his charter “maintain and keep up the income thus making his position much more profitable”.

We can speculate that there were infringements of the accepted rules of dues and levies on behalf of the overlord or of his deputies, so that King August II (Mroz 2016: 234) issued an order that “offices and city halls should protect (Gypsies) in some territories” (Ficowski 1989: 18). We take notice that the position of the overlord (headman) of Gypsies acquired more authority and power, securing them some income by leasing certain amounts of money from collecting procedures after 58 years of its existence (1642–1705). Thus, the post of the “Gypsy Overlord” became increasingly profitable and prestigious. We have no records of field work about how and in what form it was carried out.

In 1720 August II granted privilege and nominated nobleman Kazimierz Wyszomirski as an “overall ruler of all Gypsies in Lithuania”. There is no such record in any archives anywhere with the only exemption saying that “although the Gypsies
have become accustomed to living indulgently”, yet they suffered of bad treatment from various people. It is also stipulated that Gypsies expected some reward for the years of military service from the King August II and his Crown during the Great Northern War (1700–1721). What was new in his privilege: “to judge and rule, protect Gypsies against any injustices; to judge them for any offences towards non-Gypsies”?

According to chronology, we should mention Stanislaw Godzemba – Nizinski next. Unfortunately, we do not know when he was nominated and how he managed his office. There is only one record that he “behaved incorrectly” and that he abandoned his Gypsy overlord office and moved somewhere to the West around 1717. His post was shortly covered for some time by another Polish nobleman Žulicki who resigned from the King of Gypsies office in 1729.

We don’t know the reason of his leaving the office. We can only come across one document that on March 11, 1729, August II appointed another nobleman Jakub Trzcinski as a Gypsy overlord (the record was registered in Krakow). It was also underlined “that the Gypsy people could be kept under government and in due fear” as well as offering them protection against wrongdoings and support in their affairs. It was also referred to Stanislaw Godziemba Žulicki “who did not fulfill his duties and did not behave properly”. We should emphasize that since that time the new name “Gypsy King” was used along with “overlord of Gypsies”. Moreover, Trzcinski received a superpower to prosecute people who tried to increase their fortunes at the cost of the Gypsies while collecting levies from them. It means that some representatives of the municipals extorted additional money from Gypsies without any notice to the Gypsy overlord office thus putting extra burdens and troubles on them.

J. Trzcinski failed to cope with the duties as Gypsy King and shortly resigned one year later, in 1731.

In a while, king August II appointed another nobleman Franciszek Boguslawski as Gypsy King with his office and privileges in 1731. The document consists of two “oblata” (certificates): one was presented in Krakow and entered in the municipal books, later on F. Boguslawski registered it also in Lwiw; these two “oblaty” are identical with the “oblata” granted before to J. Trzcinski.

As we study more deeply the records of the PLC history, we can come across the name of another overlord of Gypsies, at the same time, Marcin Glowacki, in the Krakow County (Cracow Voivodeship) (Mróz 2016: chapter 6). We presume that the overall Gypsy King F. Boguslawski appointed him as his deputy somewhen in 1732. Any details of the way he administrated the office of the Gypsy Crown and helped Gypsies is missing. We have no proof who from the Crown chancellery confirmed his deputy authorities to be a local King of Gypsies. We also know that he traded in horses successfully.

Unluckily, we have not any other records about how F. Boguslawski ruled his “office” of “the Gypsy Kingdom” having been granted power over the Gypsy people in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He was the longest servicing Gypsy King in
the history of the Commonwealth. He managed the Gypsy King’s office for 30 years (1731–1761).

August III, the Polish King and Grand Duke of Lithuania, who was very narrowly elected as the Crown King in 1733, didn’t take such close interest in the Gypsy Kingdom as his father Augustus II.

In 1761 he appointed Jozef G. Boczkowski as ’regional king for the Gypsies in the Little Poland’.

August II, who during his reign had nominated a whole series of Gypsy kings, had only two more years to reign when he confirmed the last of these, Boguslawski. His successor and son, Augustus III, almost certainly did not take such a close interest in the Gypsy Kingdom. It was only thirty years after the nomination of Boguslawski, on 10 September 1761, that Augustus III issued a charter – this time for a “regional king” for the Gypsies in the “Little Poland” region of the country only: The office of the Gypsy Kingdom conferred on Jozef Gozdawa Boczkowski for the districts of “Little Poland”.

This is the only information that we possess about this Gypsy king whose appointment was confirmed by the Royal Chancery.

In 1767 another nobleman Iwaszkiewicz, who was born in Vitebsk region (how Belarus), was appointed by the last Polish king Stanislaw August Poniatowski as the Gypsy King of Lithuania. He inherited this position form his grandfather, Lukasz Iwaszkewicz (1697–1703). His name is related to the well-known “Manifesto of the Commission of Both Nations”, especially on its “The Manifesto of Gypsy Confederation”. The whole document contains polemic parts on: “different religions”, the attitude towards Jews, protestants etc. We suppose the draft version of this paper was submitted by Tadeusz Chacki in April, 1791, as the Manifesto of Gypsy Confederations came out in December, 1791. Serving for more than 8 months, nobleman Iwaszkiewicz contributed significantly and had shown extensive information about Gypsy affairs in the PLC. He showed considerable knowledge with regard to the whole Europe and was not only limited to the Gypsies in the Commonwealth. All the time he knew the common perceptions in his country, as well as the legal ads adapted in France and Spain ordering Gypsies to leave the country.

As the Russian Empress Anna, then Catherine the Great, started to interfere into the Commonwealth affairs, the Crown started to crumble, in 1780, the last king Stanislaw August Poniatowski, appointed the Polish nobleman Jakub Znamierowski as the headman of Gypsies for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He was no longer called “The King of Gypsies”, although he had been in close contact with Gypsies much longer than his predecessors had, and the personality of this brawling country nobleman, who led quite an extraordinary life, deserves a little attention. He undoubtedly possessed more “qualifications” for the post than those who preceded him, for he had been a horse trader, and therefore had followed a profession close to the Gypsy heart; this had brought him into close contact with Gypsies from his earliest childhood. He is also said to have owned Romany well – or at least the Polish-Lithuanian Romany
dialect – and was familiar to him. If we also take into consideration his black hair and swarthy complexion, we might even come to the conclusion that he had some Gypsy blood running in his veins. In addition, he was a man of great physical strength and outstanding courage, and apparently was also of exceptional intelligence. He had attended a monastery school of some kind, after which he had become a horse trader, from this profession he had made considerable profits. However, later his business fell off and he became impoverished, and his last horse was carried off by the Gypsy grouping known as the “Golden Horde”, which was one of the wealthiest in Lithuania. It was this act of horse-stealing that eventually brought Znamierowski to power over the Gypsies of Lithuania. Determined to discover the thieves and recover his horse, Znamierowski set off in search of the Golden Horde, together with two Gypsies whom he had recruited as assistants. He crossed the horde on the outskirts of a village, in the forest on the borders between the districts of Troki and Lida. There were several hundred members of the horde, but Znamierowski and his two companions managed to subdue them by force of arms. After this victory, Znamierowski bound the leaders of the horde and flogged them soundly, thereafter forcing the entire horde to swear allegiance to him. Within a short span of time, the leaders of other hordes were compelled to submit to him, and recognize him as their new leader, as proof of which they showered him with gifts – or, perhaps, rather allowed him to plunder them without resistance. After this, Znamierowski went to the marshal of Lida, Kazimierz Narbutt, and having obtained letters of recommendation from him, set out for Warsaw, where on 17 August 1780, King Stanislaus Augustus granted him the charter. “So, in his eminence”, wrote Narbutt in his book on the Gypsies published in 1830 “he judged quarrels that developed amongst the Gypsies, and approached the authorities and citizens on behalf of his people whenever occasion arose, and collected a poll tax of 15 groszy’s, or half a Polish zloty”.

In about 1789, when Znamierowski had already made a name for himself, he proceeded among his Gypsy subjects by oppressing and exploiting them, the Gypsy hordes rebelled against him, and gathering together in one place, they imprisoned their absolute ruler and condemned him to be flogged. “After which they did not release him... until they had obtained a general absolution and amnesty. Finally... this noble headman... stayed at his post, but from then on, he was graciously willing to rule his people fairly and kindly”. Znamierowski was mainly linked with the “Golden Horde”, the richest grouping of Gypsies in Lithuania, and because he had the right to collect taxation for his own use, he must have been in touch mainly with the richest Gypsy tribes, tending to bypass the poorer ones which might not prove so profitable to him. This would be all the truer in that the poorer Gypsies, fearful of officials carrying out royal decrees, hid themselves deep in the forest, and only came out surreptitiously to beg or steal, in order to keep body and soul together. The Lithuanian forests sheltered the very poorest of the Gypsies, who had no real clothes and went out even in winter in torn sheets of cloth: “They live in the Lithuanian forest and even in severe frosts they go out covered only in sheets, carrying their babies in bags hanging from their
backs”, wrote a contemporary diarist. There were also other groups who hid in the forest from the tax collectors and made raids from their hiding-places where it was very difficult to be tracked down.

In 1795, Jakub Znamierowski died: his position by now had greatly deteriorated, for he had been impoverished by the Second Partition of PLC and mass exodus of the Gypsies from Lithuania after the fall of the Commonwealth to Russia and the Osman Empire.

New Russian authorities did not display any negative interest towards Roma, but they revoked the privileges of the local and former Crown “overlords of Gypsies” to investigate offences, search for the perpetrators and keep order among the Gypsy communities. But they ascribed them to take taxes, in a while these Gypsy Kings were changed to “burmisters” (heads of extended families (‘chekar’/’celo rodo’).

Many Gypsies greeted the change of the PLC Crown to the Russian Crown: they found the Russian authorise more lenient which allowed them to travel. And on the contrary, the settled Gypsies, who were involved into business and craft, could not carry on with this way of life as the Russian authorities did not trust them; they perceived Gypsies only as entertainers. These Gypsy families had to resort to the nomadic way of life in order to survive.

The Russian Senate deployed Cossack units along the new Western border of the Russian Empire who didn’t allow people to travel freely to the West including the Gypsies whose relatives found themselves in different states.

The Gypsies who remained in Lithuania “elected as their headman Milośnicki, a nobleman of a family from the Lida district” according to an account of the Gypsy authorities written 35 years after the event. This Milośnicki, who was probably a usurper, did not enjoy a great deal of respect among his Gypsy communities. He was seen for a few years in the Lida district, where he travelled about together with the Gypsies, but shortly all trace of him vanished. He was last seen at Ejszyszki in 1799, and later two contradictory versions of what had happened to him were in circulation: the first that he had been deprived of his position, and the second that the Gypsy group, which was loyal to him, had left the region for Turkey. Whatever the case, he was almost certainly the last ruler of the Gypsies in Lithuania and partially in Poland.

Meantime, on the situation in the former Crown territories, we can read for example in a newspaper of 1811: “And that the Polish Gypsies, despite the above laws, never left Poland, but might only have fallen in numbers <...> the King and his Chancery would nominate for them a Ruler, whom they called their king and to whom they had to be in all circumstances obedient, especially in the matter of contributions to his profit”. The last “King of Gypsies” of this kind in Poland was a certain Babinski.” Unfortunately, we don’t have any records how these “Kings of Gypsies”, ruled after the fall of the Commonwealth”. This is the list of the Crown appointed Gypsy Kings (Gypsy Overlords) in chronological order (Mroz 2016: ch.6: 21):
### Gypsy (Romani) Kings, Overlords and Chiefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Surname</th>
<th>Year of appointment</th>
<th>Privilege issued by</th>
<th>Territories covered by the office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Jan (?) Janczy</td>
<td>1647 (?)</td>
<td>Władysław IV</td>
<td>The Crown and G.D. of Lith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Łukasz Michal Iwaszkiewicz</td>
<td>1697</td>
<td>August II</td>
<td>G. D. of Lith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Jan Dewaltowski</td>
<td>1703</td>
<td>August II</td>
<td>G. D. of Lith. and Zmudz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Bonawentura Jan Wiera</td>
<td>1705</td>
<td>August II</td>
<td>The voivodeship of Sanok, Lwow and Przemyśl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Kazimierz Wyszomirski</td>
<td>1720</td>
<td>August II</td>
<td>G. D. of Lith. and D. of Livonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Marcin Glowacki (king’s deputy)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>The Krakow voivodeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Józef Gozdawa Boczkowski</td>
<td>1761</td>
<td>August III</td>
<td>Malopolska (Lesser Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Iwaszkiewicz</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Stanisław August Poniatowski</td>
<td>G. D. of Lith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Jakub Znamierowski</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>Stanisław August Poniatowski</td>
<td>G. D. of Lith.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-proclaimed Heads (Overlords)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Surname</th>
<th>Year of appointment</th>
<th>Privilege issued by</th>
<th>Territories covered by the office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Milosnicki</td>
<td>1793</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Babinski</td>
<td>1794</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We should not forget that any business with bears made a substantial part of Gypsy family income and they had to provide donations to the Gypsy King (Overlord)’s office that were established and upheld by the Crown. Unfortunately, we have no records how each of the 18 Gypsy Kings (Overlords) operated through their authority over the clan to assist jester groups, bear schools and individual entrepreneurs in relation to bear performing and fishing.
Local Gypsy Kings (Overlords)

There are many records and documents in the archives of Poland, Lithuania and Belarus referring to the large families of the largest landowners in the PLC the Radziwill, the Sangushkos and the Potockis with their large properties where Gypsies were both permanent residents on these lands and frequently travelled within these territories, as well because of their business (mainly horse-dealing). This indicates that the above mentioned landowners kept their own links with the Gypsy families and established their own rules regulating the stay of Gypsies on their land. They became essential elements of the ethnic content of the places where they lived.

The long-term stay of large Gypsy families and groups, their travelling between fairs and markets with their craftwork and horses, or selling it in towns could have led to some conflicts and demanded regulation. That’s why irrespective of the King’s appointments of the overlords of Gypsies in the Crown, the Radziwills, the Sangushkos and the Potockis, nominated their local heads of Gypsies as overlords of the Gypsies within a particular area.

In 1732 Prince Pawel Sanguszko, when confirming the appointment of the Gypsy Bartosz Alexandrowicz as “scultetus”, made him Gypsy headman in the towns of Zaslaw and Stary Konstantynow. The Prince not only enjoined Alexandrowicz to ensure that the Gypsies behaved well and earned their living honestly, but also ordered him to collect the taxes, which the prince imposed upon his Gypsy subjects, and to deliver them to the princely treasure house.

We know little about the life of the Gypsies on these magnate estates from later memoirs. These show that only groups of the Gypsy “aristocracy” could successfully make a living there, since the snobbish whims and fancies of the great lords treated these “estate Gypsies” as an exotic embellishment for feasts or hunting expeditions – where the Gypsies provided an attraction which might be compared with that of the jesters and dwarves at the royal court. As we have already said some magnates like prince Pawel Sangushko and Duke Karol Radziwill – irrespective of the Crown orders and charters, granted titles of headmen (overlords) of their Gypsies (usually) settled, on their own authority in their own estates and properties as local kings.

These were usually communities of few families who used to share equal rights with the local non-Gypsy people, some of whom were servants of their own lords. These kings or headmen from the Crown were imposed on the above-mentioned headmen officially and they were mainly dealing with travelling Gypsies while local “kings” or (overlords) supervise the settled Gypsies who were littering the cultivated land or craftsmen, some trading in horses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Surname (in inverted commas)</th>
<th>Year of appointment</th>
<th>Authority granted by</th>
<th>Territories covered by the office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;Murszako&gt; Murszakowski</td>
<td>XVII – XVIII centuries</td>
<td>Franciszek (Salery) Potocki Stanislaw (Szcze- sny) Potocki</td>
<td>Dnieper Ukraine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bazyl Mikolajewicz</td>
<td>1727 – ?</td>
<td>Pawel Sangushko</td>
<td>Podolie Western Ukraine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Richer in content and more vivid was the life of the Gypsies at the court and estates of the Radziwills in Lithuania and Belarus. The Gypsy headmen appointed by the Radziwills family exercised authority over those Gypsies who lived on the Radziwill estates. In 1778, we know of the death of one of these Radziwill Gypsy kings, named Stefanowicz. In the same year Prince Karol Stanislaw Radziwill (“M’lord”), who by now had on his estates a large number of Gypsies, the majority of whom were leading a settled life, nominated a Gypsy living at Mir, Jan Marcinkiewicz, as the Gypsy headman. Thus, in contrast to other earlier or contemporary nominations, a Gypsy was this time appointed to the function. He was probably the leader of some Gypsy group, and Radziwill’s patent only reinforced his authority and broadened its scope. This Radziwill charter placed Marcinkiewicz and his immediate followers in a favored position, and enjoined him to treat other, wandering groups, severely. However, it is not likely that the rest of the group possessed the same civil rights. The 1720 inventory of Mir mentioned only Jozef Martinkiewicz. In this entry it is written that he was a rich man, having three partially developed places at “Slonimskie Przedmieście” and two other plots of land in the territory of the so-called “Wloki Staromiejskie”. All these gains played a major role in his appointment as an elder.

Really, we do not know much about the rights and duties of the local “elder” compared to the ones who were appointed by the Crown chancellery or the Kings themselves, on the points of if their designed authorities which overlap each other or just sorted out by their benefactors in their authorization letters: the overlord of Gypsies of the whole Commonwealth, was Jakub Znamierowski at that time, who was put into his position by the King Stanislaw August Poniatowski. It is a question of curiosity, – what relations were between Jozef Martinkiewicz and Jakub Znamierowski, or whether they ever communicated with each other at that stage of time, when there was no telephone.

We have no records if there was any link between Jakub Znamierowski and the “Gypsy King” in Mir and the Director of the Bear Academy Jan Marcinkiewicz.

The notable researcher Teodor Narbutt observes that these charters of protection placed the Gypsy leaders above the law and led to the oppression and exploitation of those over whom they ruled: “The authorities in power over the Gypsies”, he wrote, “while they were based on legitimacy and faithfully respected old customs, and until they encounter unshaken compliance, were respected by all and the rightful head-
men was feared and if not he was punished by a mutiny, or completely deprived of his office, and therefore in Mir the headmen sought to receive the charter of headman from the prince, so that being under his protection, he could ignore the judgment of the horde and in this way rule more freely.”

Jan Marcinkiewicz ruled over the Gypsies at Mir for twelve years (1778–1790), having died in 179011. Czacki refers to the last “ruler” of the Gypsies in the Radziwill estates as Ignacy Marcinkiewicz. This was probably the son of the privileged Jan, with whose death, according to Narbutt, “the splendor of the office died, and new national arrangements were not conducive to the liberty of the Gypsies, who therefore in large numbers, in teams and hordes, travelled to territories which at that time were under the Turkish scepter. Even the Radziwills no longer nominated a headman at Mir, for although admittedly Marcinkiewicz’s son received the honor that had been his father’s, he set off on his travels and moved to Multan”12.

In recollections of old people about the 1780s, recorded by a XIX century memoirist, we can find references to Jan Marcinkiewicz, the king of the Gypsies on the Radziwill estates: “On his head he had a cap in the shape of a kind of crown; <...> in it there was struck a short peacock's feather; he wore a long black loose robe which came down to his ankles, tied with a black belt, and he wore red boots; round his neck, outside his robe, he wore a chain of broad white beads which hung down over his chest, and from it was suspended a likeness of a bear, with a monkey in a red jacket sitting upon it. In approaching His Highness, the Prince as a faithful vassal, the king of the Gypsies had taught several bears to draw a cart in harness, which pleased the prince exceedingly. A Gypsy acted as forerunner for these bear teams, and the outriders were monkeys. When once the king of the Gypsies rode in this way unexpectedly into the courtyard of the Radziwill palace at Nieswierz, the Prince was extraordinarily astonished and delighted and treated his guest royally, rushing up and saying: “M’lord, gracious sovereign! You will be received as no guest is received anywhere in the world. Your visit has done me great honor which should be held in memory through the generations. And the feast that had been prepared for one day lasted for several days, and the royal Gypsy equipage travelled to Alba, the summer palace, amidst a throng of surrounding courtiers and noblemen who had ridden there, and also a crowd of the people of Nieswierz”.

Such were the entertainments of those years – the last years before the fall of the Commonwealth.

Times were soon to come when these patterns would cease, and the approaching period of the partitions of Poland would finally deprive the Gypsies of the remains of their rights of citizenship – which in any case had existed only on paper – and drive them into forest hiding-places.

The partitions took place and the royal and Radziwill nominations of Gypsy kings came to an end. In some parts of Poland, for example in Lithuania, Eastern Little Poland and the Sub-Carpathian regions, for a certain time the settlements of Gypsies, who no longer travelled, were to remain. But the majority of the travelling Gypsies
now either escaped from the territories of the PLC, making chiefly for the Balkans and the Russian Empire, or took refuge in the local forests, where they were shortly to become subject to new legislation passed by the partitioning powers.

The idea of electing Gypsy kings from among the local gentry was not a Polish innovation. A century earlier in Poland, gentry headmen had been appointed for the local Gypsies in Transylvania and Hungary: in Transylvania Queen Isabella appointed Casper Nagy and Francis Balatfi Gypsy headmen, and the two of them sold their Gypsy subjects to one Zuchaky (1532). We can see from this that they behaved with some license towards their subjects – indeed apparently much more ruthlessly than our Polish noblemen who sat on the Gypsy throne.

**On the Eve of the Fall of the Polish Commonwealth**

The affairs of the “Gypsy Kingdom” in pre-partition Poland are interesting as a curious mode of subjecting the Gypsy people to the state authorities, but in fact this all had little effect on the life of the Gypsies, and indeed certain Gypsy groups did not come into contact with it at all. It was for this reason that towards the end of the XVIII century, attention was being paid to the idea of reforming the relations of the state to this national grouping, for we have information that Tadeusz Czacki, a famous writer and politician at that time submitted a project for new regulations that he had prepared. And less than eight months after the passing of the 3rd May Constitution, in December 1791, a Manifesto on the Gypsies in Poland based on Seym resolutions and the new Constitution was published with the signature of Michal Wandalin Mniszech, the Grand Marshal of the Crown. NB. On the 3th of May the Sejm Great (four-Year Seym), in Warsaw (Parliament of PLC) adopted the first in Europe Constitution (Governance Act [Ustawa Rzadowa]). It was designed: a) to correct the Commonwealth political flaws, b) gradual introduction of reforms, c) ensuing that year of Stanislaw August Poniatowski, the Commonwealth’s last king. It was created during the period from 6 of October 1788 till 3 May 1791. It was adopted at St. John’s Cathedral in Warsaw while deputies swore to uphold the Constitution. Apart from reforms of the constitutional monarchy, it introduced political equality between townspeople and nobility and placed the peasants under governmental protection; to mitigate the worst abuses of serfdom.

The neighbours: the Russian Empire (Catherine the Great) and the Prussian Empire reacted with hostility to the adoption of this Constitution which was a threat to their systems and joined Targowica Confirmation which included anti-reform magnates and that ended in the defeat of the PLC during the Polish-Russian war of 1792 and the first partition of Poland in 1793.

The contents of this Manifesto speaks well of those who drew it up, and although the proposals for practical solutions to the problems somewhat over-simplify the issues, this is still a document the like of which it would have been hard to find elsewhere in this period. It is worth citing in full this “Manifesto of the Commission of Both Nations”: 


“The Commission of Police of Both Nations is known to do what is its task by those whose task it is to know of it. When Providence was pleased in its goodness to accord among the many events favourable to our country, that through the Government Statute of 3 May of the year now ending, it came about that every inhabitant of the countries falling under the Commonwealth received protection, the Commission of Police of Both Nations, which has recorded in its obligations the duty to monitor the effects of this law, realizes the need to extend care to the people to date living in our country under the name of Gypsies. This people, in the severity of the law nowhere having its own home, was forced for ever to wander, and was therefore not only not useful to the country, but was indeed harmful, for it was deprived of a way of making its living by work and service, but was forced to seek ways of meeting its needs to the harm of the society amidst which it found itself. When therefore the Constitution of the 3rd May of the current year, called the ‘Government Statute’, which ensured all the protection of the government and abrogated all measures in conflict with this statute, it also annulled that law which forbade the taking in for settlement of this people under the name of Gypsies living in our country. Therefore, the Commission of Police of Both Nations, receiving constantly reports from various Civil and Military Commissions and Magistrates, that this species of people is in large numbers known in various places under the name of tramps, sees a need to inform these honourable Civil and Military Commissions and noble Magistrates and every Citizen in particular that this species of people is not excluded from government protection, and that everyone is free to receive a Gypsy to settle or to serve in one of his villages, and that furthermore, the Civil and Military Commissions and the noble Magistrates are not to arrest this species of people as tramps, but are to inform them of the government protection, of their freedom to settle, and are to encourage them to settle in the lands of the Commonwealth. When however through the above-mentioned laws they obtain the blessing of a fixed place of residence, it will be the duty of the Military and Civil Commissions and the Magistrates to take pains to ensure that they do not wander about in bands, but that each, after taking a passport from the Civil and Military Commission or the Magistrate in the district or town where he was surprised by this Manifesto, that he should try within a year at the most to choose a fixed place of abode and a certain livelihood, and if during a period of a year from the date of this Manifesto he does not find a settled place and continues to wander as before, then such shall be held to be a tramp and shall be handed over to a house of labour or prison in the area determined by the Commission of Police. And that this Manifesto may come to general knowledge, published by the Commission of Police, let it be sent to all Civil and Military Commissions and from every chartered borough to every town of its respective administrative district immediately, and attempts must be made to have it proclaimed from every pulpit.”

“Given in Warsaw at the Economic Session of the Commission of Police of Both Nations, on 29th of the month of December in the Year of Our Lord 1791.

Michal Wandalin Mniszech Grand Marshal of the Crown.”
The significant words of this Manifesto refer to the abrogation by the Constitution of 3rd May of all laws which “forbade the taking in for settlement of this people under the name of Gypsies living in our country”. It was therefore only at the end of the existence of the PLC that in 1791, that the Third Statute of 1588 formally ceased to apply – the Statute of Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which had ordered the Gypsies to be driven out of the country, and which had forbidden the harbouring of Gypsies on one's lands, on pain of the punishment provided for accomplices of outlaws. In this way the law had prevented the Gypsies from giving up their nomadic way of life. Unfortunately, later experience was to show that it was not only these legal restrictions, and not only a dislike of a settled way of life, but that was also to keep the Gypsy caravans moving. The concessions granted by the constitution did not necessarily imply that the local population was prepared to receive Gypsies. Even those who wished to give up their wanderings were unable to find a place where they would be allowed to set up a permanent home. The Manifesto permitted the punishment of Gypsies only if they did not take advantage of their new right to settle. And this is where the noble Manifesto began to make mistakes. It allowed the Gypsies too little time to change their way of life: barely a year to find themselves a permanent roof over their heads, and a source of income in their chosen place of settlement: and this after centuries of nomadic existence! Even with the best will in the world from both the Gypsies and the land-owners, who were able to “receive a Gypsy for settlement”, this time scale was quite unrealistic. And given mutual dislike and lack of any kind of help from the authorities – well! And therefore, on this occasion too, the regulations were a dead letter. The second and third partitions of Poland took place. After the setting up of the Kingdom of Poland under Russian sovereignty after the Congress of Vienna, the process of “implementing” the settlement recommendations was carried out under the watchful eye of the tsarist authorities; in practice this turned into a great “Gypsy hunt”. On 11 May 1816, the new Russian authorities issued an “Order of the Government Commission for Internal Affairs and Police” based on the provisions of the Manifesto of 1791, but providing much more detailed instructions for the effecting of provisions. Even from the date of this Order alone, we can see that the period of a year designated 25 years earlier as the deadline laid down for settlement had turned out to be ineffective.

The Gypsy courts

The most unique and important record dates to the 8th of February 1595 from Minsk municipal books, which proves that the Gypsies formed a settled community in the Radziwills’ properties and set their own courts to make decisions on serious disputes and complain. They established their own bylaws in addition to their official laws. Moreover, the Gypsy court decisions (verdicts) were recorded in the Minsk municipal books (Mroz 2016: ch. 2, case of Aleksandar Matysowicz), a servant of the Vilnius voivode Krzysztof Radziwill, against another Gypsy Kasper Marcinowicz, a leaseholder. We should not explore the details of this case further. We should only
emphasize that these Gypsies were members of the local Gypsy community who were settled people and a well-integrated body which was made of heads of families (Mroz 2016: ch.1, 2, 3).

We have no evidence as to what was included in the Gypsy oath, what its form was. We may only assume that it was based on the Gypsy Customary Code which is approximately a collection of their norms and rules, expressed in the selection of instructions for conduct and a list of things that are forbidden. It is related to food, clothes and behaviour towards Gypsies and non-Gypsies (Gadzhe) people.

We should nevertheless presume that this sort of Gypsy court was only on the Radziwills property because traditionally “Gypsy courts” don’t associate with official state courts.

We assume that these Gypsy courts (Romano sendo/sendo; Romano chachipen/ Romani phagi) were conducted independently of the Kingdom of Gypsies’ office which were approved by the Crown chanceries after the King’s order regarding the “overall overlord of the Gypsies in grand Duchy of Lithuania” and some of them were appointed for the whole Commonwealth. They were mainly from among Polish noblemen.

In contrast to this experience local “Gypsy kings” in the lands belonged to the Radziwill, Sangushko and Potocki families and were appointed from the heads of the Gypsy families and were authorised to manage the local Gypsies by these magnates themselves.

In the places where no local “Gypsy kings” were, where the authority on Gypsies was carried out from the distance just by the “Overlord Gypsy King” who, as a rule, descended from the Polish nobility and was appointed by the King of the state, Gypsy courts were held independently since their arrival in the Commonwealth, irrespective of the municipal courts in those places. We do not know, when and under what circumstances decisions of the Gypsy court went into records of municipal book. This is the example, which had been quoted before: A Gypsy Aleksander Matysowicz is at feud with another Gypsy Kasper Martinovic, May 20, 1594 on the Radziwill properties. The accused K. Martinkowicz did not turn up at the Gypsy court. It is recorded in such a way: the punishment should be carried out by municipal authorities: Gypsies and Gypsy courts did not have repressive bodies. In the same way, the Polish magnates, – who were absolute rulers in their extensive estates – also had nominated separate local Gypsy headmen (Gypsy Kings), and granted them letters of protection on the model of the royal charters, lost their power over local Gypsies.

Another example is, when the Gypsy culprits ignore entirely Gypsy courts. After the third attempt (according to the Gypsy tradition) of contacting the Gypsy offender, if ignored again, the matter should have been usually referred to municipal courts to deal with the alleged guilt.

The last example is: there were also cases when Gypsies were involved in manslaughter of non-Gypsies. These tragical cases used to go straightaway into the municipal register for crime cases and were sorted out by Crown jury of a particular city which dealt with punitive functions and executioners.
As a rule, Gypsies tried and continued to try to solve problems and feuds by themselves without contacting police or another administrative body.

The position of the *local* “Gypsy Kings” was very much like the current situation with the power of the *Shero-Rom* when he deals with all disputes and feuds among Gypsies in our time.

Exactly after 100 years after the partition of the Commonwealth in 1795 the title of the Gypsy King (Overlord of Gypsies) was restored in 1895 in the German-speaking part of Poland in the new title of ‘*Shero-Rom* (Head Rom)’13. His status allows him to deal impartially with any issues. *Shero-Rom* checks any complaints and accusations of breaching the *Romano Chacipen* (Romany Customary Code) on the way of life, food, clothes and behaviour amongst Gypsies and their attitude towards non-Gypsies (*Gadzhe*).

It is an unwritten Customary Code: according to the old tradition Gypsies should live a simple way of life observing old prohibitions and rules. This Code of behaviour governs every moment of Gypsies’ life.

The law sphere (field) of the Gypsy court includes all spheres of life and its activity is focused on the Gypsy law issues and its fulfilment of punishment if this is the case. This enjoins and provides the basis and demands for respecting Gypsy people to stick to the specific Gypsy concept of law. In the absence of written elements ensuring coherence in the Gypsy community to preserve its identity and separate character this Gypsy Customary Code defines and points out the major models for behaviour, norms living in a certain Gypsy society, it makes it possible to be self-sufficient without reference to foreign, non-Gypsy laws and authorities.

The court by *Shero-Rom* is executed by such structure: *Shero-Rom* chairs the procedure relied on by two advisers (yunkary) and the result of investigation carried out by 2/3 Romani detectives (lavniki): *lav* is a word for “word” which forms the word *lavnik* while the whole meaning is: investigating after somebody’s words.

The verdict is delivered orally and is a subject to enquire (Illustration 5).

A significant part of *Shero-Rom* time and activity is spent also on imposing and executing money fines/ payment on those Gypsies who were involved in fighting and culprits who caused and inspired a fight and offenders who inflicted a physical damage on their members of the fight. The amount of money and its deadline are announced by *Shero-Rom* or one of his advisers/ assistants (yunkary). On the designed day both parties turn up in the of presence of *Shero-Rom*, the victim is given money and he usually arranges a small feast for the Gypsies present around which ends up in reconciliation and shaking hands with hugging of the disputing Gypsies. At end of the meeting the curse *mageripen* is annulled by *Shero-Rom* from the culprit.

A very important aid which constitutes a true support for the “*Shero-Rom*” in his judging and establishing the truth thus determining the innocence or guilt of a very particular case of a Gypsy person is the element of *sovlakh* (oath), or ritual oath which verifies the accusation and is based on the appeal to God, God’s power and Divine Justice. *Shero-Rom* resorts to taking the oath if there is no evidence of guilt,
sometimes in a church. In the church, the oath should come closer to the priest; the priest should sprinkle holy water on him/her which dross should all on the person who is taking the oath. This Gypsy must include in the oath such a demand that God should punish a liar with death (te sphagel Devel man ke meriben [may God break me to death]).

A polluting curse (mageripen) if established, expels a Gypsy from the community and should live in isolation even from his own family, and he is not allowed to “eat and drink with Gypsies”. A polluted Gypsy (magerdo/magerdy) pollutes everything he/she touches. Therefore, such a person should avoid public places in order not to pollute the plates and cutlery that he uses. Gypsies usually inform the community that that particular place had been polluted.

A special and more pressure layer of Shero-Rom’s activity is concentrated on sorting out with numerous curses and accusations of pollution which bring upon a Gypsy man / woman dishonour and derision that could be pronounced on anybody by any member of the local / country Romani community. They are usually of two kinds: minor pollution (tykno mageripen) and heavy pollution (pharo mageripen).

The source of these accusations originates either from breaching the Romani Customary Code (Romano Chachipen or Romani Shtamma) or committing a nasty thing towards anybody of the Gypsies publicly.

These non-relevant to Gypsies cases degrade a person temporarily while Shero-Rom deals with investigation through his checkers of truth lawniki.

As a result of dealing with the pollution (mageripen) by Shero-Rom, the case can end up with: either the “cleaning of the pollution”, temporal or permanent excommunication from the Gypsy Community (emfam koter).

Shero-Rom is also authorised to impose a fine on any Gypsy who spreads false rumours or questions on other Gypsies alive or damaging the good name of persons already dead; for taking the oath wrongly.

Let us get back to the situation with Gypsy courts in the XVI–XVIII centuries.

We could remark that faith in truthfulness and effectiveness of such courts is alive and strong until nowadays among Gypsy local communities and Gypsy communities anywhere. The council of elders is the current form of the Gypsy court which makes decisions on complaints, disputes and feuds. We come across the first official record on Gypsies in the lands what is now called Belarus’ on November, 26, 1533 in the municipal book of Polotsk as “Gypsies from Egypt minor, who incurred damages”: This complaint was completed by sb Nekrash on Gypsy women from Miklash’s gang. He testified that these Gypsy women entered his house and were doing strange things: they were drinking and jumping around his manor. And then twenty copas of “grosses”, two signet rings and other things were gone from his case. All these damages amounted to thirty copas which was a great value at that time. The information does not point to their nomadic way of life. Vice versa, they had settled in Polotsk and represent an organized community under the authority of their elder Miklash.
There were inaccuracies in his complaint and therefore the verdict was “Gypsy women are honest and not guilty”. This record does not contain any information that they were nomads, but it is the first mention as “Gypsies from Egypt Minor”.

But six years later, on September 15, 1539, a complaint by one Lord Mikityn about a Gypsy who had taken his horse and was keeping it, was entered into the Grodno municipal book where Gypsies appeared as servants in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. According to other records of this time Gypsies appeared as people who cultivated land, engaged in trade and craft or being lords’ and dukes’ servants.

One comes across quite a few entries between 1565 and 1566 on Jan Cygan in the Slonim municipal books who: confiscated a huge amount of hay from the estate of Romejkowicz; kidnapped a Polubinski’s servant and took his money. He also headed a group of other servants attacking and beating them up. This shows that he possessed considerable authority in those places being a zealous guardian of Duke Wisniowski’s interests.

In 1588 Radziwill’s Archives refers to a person named “Cygan” who gave silver, furs and arms as security for a loan. Since the loan was not repaid, the person who gave the money refers the matter to the court asking for permission to sell his goods to retrieve the money. The amount of money was 43 kopas of groszhes which was equivalent to a purchase to buy two large farms with tenants, altogether about 60 hectares.

In the middle of the XVI century, we come across the beginning of duality of Gypsies’ status and the perception of their ethnogenesis. The settled Gypsies lived and worked in a non-Gypsy environment, often married to non-Gypsies and stayed Gypsies only through their origin, face and name.

Whereas Gypsies leading a nomadic way of life started to be taken as aliens, wrongdoers or criminals. Unfortunately, in 1557 the first resolution came out calling for Gypsies to leave the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

**Partition of the Commonwealth**

It was a difficult and challenging time to be in charge of some Crown related organization like the Kingdom of Gypsies in the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth. A powerful huge state on the map: from the Baltic Sea to the Black. Sea (as it is sung in the National Polish Anthem) and its last king, Stanislaw August Poniatowski, being under enormous pressure to abdicate from the Russian Empire, Habsburg and Prussia, felt on the verge of destruction. He was seen as both weak and too independent – minded.

The Crown, the Polish–Lithuanian monarchy, was not hereditary. Polish Kings were elected by Polish and Lithuanian nobles, which meant that other countries were always interested and dreaming to get their favourable candidate in favours of their states on the Polish–Lithuanian throne. The Commonwealth was also not so authoritative and oppressive like Russian, Prussian and Habsburg Empires (Austria) whose monarchs considered the Polish democratic government and its new Manifest with
Constitution as a threat to their powers and they plotted to crush the weakened Poland and divide this huge largest European country, PLC between them.

In the winter of 1770–1771 Frederick II, the Prussian King, sent his brother Henry to Saint Petersburg to negotiate with Catherine II to encourage Russia to direct its expansion towards the weak Poland instead of the Ottomans. The Commonwealth was very close to fall into pieces: the Russian Empire intensified its raids on the eastern part of crumpling Poland by Cossack units which were supported by the army of the Tatar Crimean Khaganate, thus forcing the Polish-Lithuanian Crown to make further concession. As a result, the Russian soldiers were allowed to stay in that territory.

In early August, Russian, Prussian and Austrian Troops crossed the border of the Commonwealth at the same time, and on August 5, 1772 the three parties signed the treaty on their territorial gains for the partition of the Commonwealth which resulted in the First partition in 1772.

The Commonwealth was becoming the country of more anarchical style and Jakub Znamierovski started to experience enormous difficulties to manage the Kingdom of Gypsies which was becoming more volatile and less loyal to their King and his laws.

The Russian Empire gained the largest area on the northeast and the Gypsies behind the rivers Dvina, Drut’ and Dnieper were incorporated in the new state which didn’t intervene in the life of its Gypsies at all.

By 1795, after the Third Partition Poland ceased to exist. Both colourful pillars of the creating a New Gypsy community based on a new way of life and passionate supporters of the Education for Gypsies and the Bear Academy died: sadly, as a result of this many Gypsies had to return to a nomadic life in order to survive. The new Russian administration did not value the gains of the Gypsy professionals which they achieved during challenging but fruitful collaboration between the Duke Karol Radziwill and his supporters on one side, and the local Gypsy King Jan Martinkevich and his communities around Mir, Nieswirz and Smorgon in the territory of the magnates Radziwills.

There was time of partial settling among Gypsies and they could give a sigh of relief: almost nobody bothered them seriously from the local administration (volosc), municipal workers or from the office of “Gypsy overlord power”. But it didn’t last long, shortly new executive bodies sent representatives to show their interest supported always by bearded Cossacks on horseback with a whip. They had a red stripe on their trousers which made them look more scaring. These sinister figures loomed from distance, miles away and they tended to bring the fear of being whipped or flogged for minor errors and setbacks, especially Gypsy lads!

Gypsy craftsmen, estate clerks and managers, forest workers and horse-healers lost their jobs as the traditional suspicion of Gypsies to be seen only as entertaining people and horse – dealers brought about against them on the side of Russian power representatives.
New Russian authorities did not display any negative interest towards Roma but revoked the privileges of the local and former Crown overlords of Gypsies in relation to investigating offences, searching for the perpetrators and keeping order among the Gypsy communities. But they ascribed them to take taxes during the transitional period (1796–1838) before these Gypsy Kings were changed to “bumisters” (heads of extended families chekar/celo rodo).

Many Gypsies greeted the change of the PLC Crown to the Russian Crown: they found the Russian authorities more lenient and allowed to travel. On the contrary the settled Gypsies, who were involved in business and craft, could not carry on with this way of life as the Russian authorities did not trust them: they saw Gypsies only as entertainers. These Gypsy families had to resort to nomadic way of life in order to survive.

The Russian Senate deployed Cossacks units along the new border of the Russian Empire who didn’t allow people to travel freely to the West including Gypsies whose relatives found themselves in different states.

As for the “overlords of Gypsies” appointed by the Crown chancellery, their authorities were revoked as the new Russian Empire administration didn’t see any necessity of continuing such a Crown body and even, they saw it as a threat to the new tsar Pavel I (1796–1801), and Alexander I (1801–1825) because some Gypsies were keen on immigrating more to the Osman Empire and therefore, they were qualified as spies for Turks.

Moreover, the Russian authorities did not count any additional office for Gypsies as the majority of them were paying tax regularly. This was a very nice time for some Gypsies as they were allowed to nomad around the huge domain which was called ‘Russian Empire’ and which we would be impertinent to define “transitional spell in Gypsy history” that lasted for nearly 42 years (1796–1838).

Moreover, Gypsies, who didn’t travel and were registered, were freed from being recruited into the Army and Fleet.

Unfortunately, in 1838/1839 the Senate Order No. 632 was implemented which allowed the authorities “to detain Gypsies who were not registered” and make/create of them corrective labour companies. Moreover, in 1856 Gypsies were compelled to recruitment (National) Service like the rest of the men’s population of the Russian Empire.

The Bear Academy in Smorgon

The important reason for this cultural wonder comes from the personality of Karol Radziwill who loved Gypsies with their performing bears. Moreover, he was the last Radziwill who decided to persuade Gypsies and helped them to transfer to a settled way of life.

Smorgon and its suburbs was made up of a few villages where local Gypsies lived alongside the non-Gypsy population: Jews, Karaims, Tatars, Poles, Russians [Moskal]i and Litvins (Litwins) (ordinary people of the former VKL). Some Gypsies were
involved in wood craft: they made spoons, spindles, lapci (shoes) and rogozhi (mats) made from bark of a lime tree while a few of them were metal craftsmen: they made horseshoes, chains and locks.

The bravest young Gypsies were involved in many activities at the Bear Academy and were trained at first as bear handlers and then later as bear trainers (instructory). They later passed on this trade through generations gaining competence. (Illustration 6).

The Academy equipped its students with necessary skills to become bear handlers to perform with animals. Apart from Gypsy bear handlers, these other people who performed with bears were entertainers and comedians, who either performed in concerts at market-places or showed their tricks with bears on request. The performing bear–handlers entertained people by dancing with bears to music. The training course lasted for 6 years after which its graduates dispersed throughout Europe. By the way, potential bear-performers were of two backgrounds:

a/ mainly young domestic male bears who were either partially trained or untrained;
b/ young cubs who were born in the wild, caught by hunters/handlers and brought to the Academy for training.

The majority of these bear trainers (instructory) were Gypsy men who had the experience to perform with these intelligent animals since their childhood from their ancestors. The curriculum of this unique institution consisted of four modules:

• bears fighting against each other;
• bears fighting with dogs;
• bears fighting with men;
• comedies: managing bears to master dancing, bowing, marching around, looking into mirrors with music.

The essential thing for a bear candidate was to put on clogs on his paws made from lime bark. These clogs had to be well-fitted and brightly decorated. The process of training was standard and structured: all bears had to undergo an elementary training for basic dancing and bowing. Young bear cubs are prone to copy their masters relating to dancing movements and rolling over.

One room had an underfloor heating, where bears were taught to jump on their hind legs from one foot to another when the floor became very hot after the music coming either from a pipe or violin for bear cubs, who were actually resilient to learning to dance.

After the basic course of dancing, bowing down and rolling over, some bears were taught in module 4 how to imitate:

a/ women kneading the dough;
b/ men cutting the grass with a scythe;
c/ putting out the fire;
d/ chopping logs with an axe;
e/ offering drinks to people;
f/ imitating drunk people walking.
For module 2 “Fighting other bears” pets were also taught how to wrestle with each other.

There was a slight difference in approach towards female bear cubs. Usually, they were gentler by nature and therefore they were trained slower and were not beaten.

Adult female bears turned out to be the best adapted players on wooden pipes and were always dressed in colourful clothes. Some of them managed to become real partners with their trainers in dancing at the landlord’s events: their benefactor K. Radziwill, counts Tyshkevich, Glinsky, Oginsky, etc.

In 1762–1790 the peak of the Bear Academy fell at a time when the Smorgon’s area belonged to the Duke of Lithuania, the famous Karol Radziwill, with the nickname Panie Kochanku (Beloved Sir). He particularly cared for the Gypsies’ wellbeing and their involvement in the Bears Academies teaching process and therefore he gave preference to Gypsy instructors. He also appointed the Gypsy King of Mir, at that time, Jan Martinkevich, as Director of the Bear Academy and ordered 20 of the best Gypsy bear handlers to be upgraded as instructors of the training course.

Jan Martinkevich appointed bear trainers (instructors) and other staff:

a/ for the coaching process of new bears,

b/ groomers for keeping different rooms and compounds for bears in order, together with making sure that the bears had sufficient food;

c/ managing finances, which came into the treasury of the Academy from travelling bear handlers, in order to keep the Academy running.

A new candidate was supposed to undergo a six-year training course to become a licensed bear-handler. If the bear was trained by another instructor from the Academy, the owner would have to pay an agreed sum of money for the food and training course. The Academy closed for holidays once a year: from the 1st of November until the 15 of February, as this was the time bears went into hibernation.

The grooming staff used to bring huge piles of leaves and fur-tree branches into a special big room, dug – out in the earth leaving a little bit of light. After a while the bears were brought in for hibernation and were released from their leads or chains. The groomers then looked through a small window to make sure the bears would pick up these leaves and branches to make comfortable dens for themselves to sleep.

After the 15 of February all bears who woke up by themselves were involved in a cruel, intense course under their instructors and handlers for the whole month. When spring came, successful “graduates” were blessed to go on different pilgrimages across the whole of Europe until the 15th of October.

Bear graduates from Smorgon even went to Hungary although this country had already established their own bear school.

In autumn, bears returned to Smorgon with their instructors and bear handlers who were paid wages. Some money was deducted from the instructors for hiring bears (if the animals were not private). There was also an agreed sum of money if the bear died or was lost. During those pilgrimages across the world the bear handlers had to keep the collection from the audience with themselves and collect it before
they handed the money to the Director of the Academy, Jan Martinkevich, on their return to Smorgon in the autumn. He in turn, had to pay the salary to bear handlers for the number of months in which they performed deducting the agreed rent payment for using the bears as a contribution for keeping the Academy running and a donation to the Duke K. Radziwill.

There was always a queue to buy trained bears with people who had basic skills to manage bears. They were given a test to show their knowledge and skills. Usually, Gypsies had priority as they were better with animals than non-Gypsy people.

When they appeared in Western Europe, they had a challenge with the Hungarian bear handlers: they were both good but represented different types of training and managing bears on the stage.

The Smorgon bears with their handlers or instructors did not travel to the Russian Empire as a rule; the Volga bear school prepared better performances in terms of comedies. The Russian trained bears were mainly domesticated bears, with a better bond to their owners: they were like equal partners during performances.

Many Russian people had bears as pets even in towns.

The Smorgon bears mainly amused the audience with basic dancing and fighting and were persuaded to execute the programme with sticks. Russian handlers rarely used physical violence and offered a wider variety of different tricks. The bears approached the audience in a polite way and asked them for their hats and when given bowed down to them. They put the hats on the bear’s head and showed their gratitude with mimic dancing against the raucous laughter of the public. The bear handler would go to the bear, take his paw and say loudly: “Michael – you did very well” and then presented him with a honey covered carrot.

Bears which were trained were usually well looked after and encouraged to perform by being bribed with treats. Besides being fed with carrots cooked in honey prepared on the orders of the Bear Academy and made by Jewish cooks, while the gypsy handlers used an additional method of encouragement. They cooked salted bagels (baranki). These round bagel treats were made using salted dough that had been well prepared in a frying pan without oil or fat and then smoked on logs infused with mint. The smoking of the bagels acted as a preservative and their handlers when performing away from the Bear Academy used these treats to encourage the bears on tours (Солодухо 1959).

Among the trainers, there were also agents (agenty) whose main job was to collaborate with the private bear owners around Smorgon and other parts of VKL who bred and trained bear cubs at home within the family environment. These animals used to grow up with children and all other domestic animals.

They were also taught to have meals together with the family. They were trained by their owners together with dogs according to the programme delivered by the Academy agent.

These bear owners could go on pilgrimages on behalf of the Bear Academy and after the tour contributed to the Academy’s income. Being a lover of art, Karol Radzi-
will had his own theatre in his palace and sometimes hosted some theatrical perfor-
manences in his Mir castle. Karol Radziwill invited Gypsies to his parties where they
played music, danced and sang. The most exciting part of those parties was when the
Gypsy bear handlers from the Bear Academy in Smorgon would come forward with
their bears into the inner yard of the castle. We think it was a tear-jerker scenery:
performing bears in gaudy costumes who would dance with their instructors almost
as equal partners. Do you see how meticulous was the job of an instructor to teach a
wild animal to follow the music and bow to people? Later on, some of the guests were
couraged to come forward to dance with these hairy dancers as well: usually for
this part of the performance the Gypsy instructors offered them those bears who had
had their claws cut, but there were very few volunteers. (Illustration 7).

Sometimes there were scary mishaps between Duke Radziwill and the Bear
Academy. One event nearly cost him his life. One day he came to the cart which was
harnessed to bears with his inquisitive daughters to set off somewhere. All of a sud-
den one of the bears with the nickname of “Devil” made a quick step to the Count
trying to touch his shining buttons which attracted him immensely.

K. Radziwill managed to dash back from the bear while his daughters ran off.
Then the brave, mighty local Stasius, stepped in to fight the attacker with his mighty
fists before the animal whined, leaving him with a scar on his face which he would
never forget after a one-to-one duel with the “Devil” who was severely lashed by
other servants. Panie Kochanku left the battlefield with the bear without a word of
gratitude to Stasius. At Radziwill’s request the unfortunate bear “Devil” was shot and
after a while he bought a new bear.

The Duke, K. Radziwill often went to extremes trying to impress people with
bears. In 1782 the last King of the PLC Stanislaw August Poniatowski summoned his
governors and vojevodas (heads of administration) to come to Wilna, to his palace
for a Seym session. The governors and vojevodas started to arrive and report to the King
after which they took their seats. The atmosphere was formal and solemn. All of a
sudden, the people around the King started to hear loud shouts and shrieks from the
street which led to the palace. After the noise became unbearable, King Poniatowski
rushed to the window, opened it and was horrified. One of his vojevodas Duke Karol
Radziwill, who was approaching the porch of the palace in a special cart pulled by 4
enormous bears, pulled up in front of other horse-drawn carriages. This caused chaos:
horses started to give alarming neighs and tried to rear up after seeing bears. The ser-
vants rushed to the horses and tried to calm them. The people around were all over-ex-
cited and shouted: “Bravo, Panie (Sir)”. The King became indignant by this reckless ac-
tion of Duke Radziwill. While the people from outside were shouting with amusement
from this unique scene, the huge stature owner of Smorgon, Duke Radziwill, Prince
Karol, (as he was also promoted to this title by the Holy Roman Emperor) in his gaudy
red costume, with a crown tiara on his head, stopped his five-toed “friends”, passed the
reins slowly to one of the palace servants and magnificently started to climb the stairs
of the porch of the King’s palace (Shishigina-Potockaya 2001: 4).
At the end of his life Panie Kochanku started to develop his own relationships with bears: he started to ride in a special cart in summer or in a sledge in winter drawn by bears to the amusement of people who saw it.

In due time during the time of Pane Kochanku a special building was erected which consisted of 2 sections: a deep pit with the two storied iron cage and rings. On the ground floor there was a stove to heat the cage with one or two bears inside. In due time the floor of the cage warmed up and the bears had to stand up on hind legs and when it became unbearably hot the animals started to jump from foot to foot. During this special session, a trainer would start to beat a tambourine. This lasted for 1-2 months and bears learnt to step from one foot to another to the music of the tambourine which was followed by a test.

After 10/15 days of rest the same bears had to undergo a similar process when the pipe was played. This was an elementary stage 1: dancing to tambourine and pipe music. The bears, who were better trained, were suggested for the next modules.

The least trained animals, who had an aggressive temper, had to undergo a special intervention: rings were put into their noses and lips and their claws were shortened. The most unfortunate ones all had their eyes plucked. The Academy had different programmes for adult bears and cubs. There was a special section for cubs where the owner of the bear would have to undergo basic or advanced training in order to become a licensed bear-handler (guwerner-tutor).

The best prepared cubs were given to Duke Radziwill, while the rest of the animals were put on sale during special events at markets and fairs. On some occasions there was a full programme including bears fighting against each other, fighting with dogs and looking into a mirror.

The local Gypsy King Jan Martinkevich was one of the closest friends of Panie Kochanku. The Gypsy King gave orders to bear handlers to turn up in a festive way for either official visits or performances. He also asked them to harness bears and come to the Duke’s palace or estate in special carts pulled by four bears. When the Gypsy King arrived at the Duke’s palace with bears, he would immediately rush to bow down before the Master, then the Count would hug him while the orchestra played. Then somebody from the Duke’s entourage would announce loudly: “His Highness, the Gypsy King” and Jan Martinkevich would then report to the Duke any news or other items about the Gypsies”.

They discussed very often the wellbeing of nomadic (who were very few) and sedentary Gypsies and the ways in which to improve their way of life: bear handlers, peasants, land owners/renters, royal servants, craftsmen, horse dealers, hunting stewards, fishing supervisors, fortune-tellers, foresters and warriors.

During this time, the Bear Academy was also called the “Gypsy Bear Academy”. (Illustration 8).

In the Belarusian famous comedy, Vakhanalia (1725) the magician Diogenes turned a landlord into “The Smorgon bear”. “The Smorgon teacher with a rebellious student” became very popular in the XVII–XVIII centuries at the puppet theatre Bat-
lieyka. Moreover, a new nickname came into use portraying an “irresponsible pupil/student” from the Smorgon Academy. Those meetings at the karchma became a central part of the local people’s cultural interaction of Gypsies with their non-Gypsy neighbours: Litvins (Litwins), Poles, Jews, Tatars and Karaims. The plots of these sub-theatricals were mainly related to marriages and the rituals of funerals. Dolls were an essential part of those plays and performances (Nekrylova 2004: 2-3).

Sometimes old people were asked to recollect scenes from their early lives or episodes they recollected from their ancestors’ life stories. These stories were recorded and considered for inclusion in the theatre plays. They were assessed on two points: firstly, if they taught and educated young people to love God and their own families; secondly, if they coached to love and defend the Commonwealth. When discussions went on too long and late, and sometimes it turned into bickering or even arguments, then the karchma owner, or keeper with his attendants, blew out the candles at the command of either Jakubo or Siomka and then the participants, found themselves in total darkness and the voice appeared as though advising “Come down and go home with God”.

We presume that the Bear Academy began to fall into decline immediately after the death of its inspirer and supporter, Duke Karol Radziwill (Panie Kochanku) in 1790, his favourite King of Gypsies, Jan Martinkevich, immigrated to the Ottoman Empire, Turkey, with his loyal supporters after this part of Poland was incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1795. The new authorities revoked Martinkevich’s authority over Gypsies.

During 1790–1805 Smorgon belonged to a relative of Karl Radziwill, Dominik Geronim Radziwill, who was 13 years old. For a short time Przedzcecki had Smorgon until the Noble Association on behalf of a minor Dominik Radziwill sold it for 35 000 zloty to Bogdan Oginski (who was related to the famous composer Michael Kleofas Oginski).

In December 1812 when the Napoleon Army was retreating via Smorgon, the Polish officer, who was in the ranks of the cavalry, Karl Brand, left his records of the Bear Academy at that time.

“There was a round shaped construction with steady high walls inside a spacious building. (His memoirs give us another description how bears were trained – V. K.). There was a heated tiled floor to which ‘a student bear’ was brought, his hind legs were put into sandals made from lime-tree bark. The heat started to burn his paws and the bear would stand only on hind legs trying to step from one foot to another. Whenever he tried to lean on the wall, his trainer would return him back to the centre by lashes with a powerful stick. Sometimes the poor animal tried to attack the abuser, so the defending trainer would whack him severely on his head with a heavier stick. After a while a painful operation was carried out when a ring was pierced through the bears lip. The next step was to teach bears to dance to tambourine and pipe music (pishchalka-piszczalka). After this course, these bears set off with their trainers to travel around Europe.”
Unfortunately, the existing sources give different information about the Bear Academy’s facilities, although some state that it was just one building, other writers state that there were buildings and rings.

It could be that Panie Kochanku was so delighted by the range and success of his Academy that he financed to construct an additional building.

It became a private Bear School until its provisional closure in 1820 together with the “Polacak” Academy. Some sources indicate that the Bear Academy was officially closed in 1831 when Mikhail Muravyov was the governor of the North-Western land of the Russian Empire. Moreover, it is also possible that the Academy functioned until the First World War, 1914–1915.

When the Belarusian lands were incorporated into the Russian Empire during 1795 under Catherine II, bear-handlers started travelling with their animals throughout the huge domain of Russia. Some Russian people bought bears and kept them as pets. It was common to come across a man with his pet bear on a rope in towns and cities, including St. Petersburg. The image of a Russian man with his bear came into the lexicon of Western people who travelled to Russia and saw men with pet bears. This confirmed in the Western mind the strange behaviour of Russian people, who ignored the strict ban on bears, after Peter the Great, tried hard to turn Russia into a Western country and issued a ban on people appearing with bears in cities in 1712.

Some bear-handlers joined circuses to perform with other animals. Gradually this business was transferred to Gypsy camps as the majority of them travelled within the Russian Empire, performing with bears on chains.

These bear performances amused the people very much throughout Europe and America. At the same time these programmes with bears caused concerns and problems for authorities where such concerts took place. Some bear entertainers who performed with bears after receiving a good collection, would get drunk and forget to chain the bears up. Inquisitive animals being free would start roaming about the streets and other public places and scared people to death while looking for food.

In 1861 the Russian Senate issued a ban on hunting bears.

On the 30 December 1866 the Russian Tsar, Alexander II, authorised the veto “to walk the bears in towns and villages” by the Committee of Ministers who prepared these documents. When complaints reached their peak in 1870, the Senate of the Russian Empire, under Alexander II, issued a decree on banning any public activity with bears and strict penalties attached for breaking the new law.

The fate of some of those performing bears was quite tragic:

- Gypsy handlers were allowed to continue to care for the bears (feeders) by taking them into the camps;
- Some of the bears were set free but people scared them by gunfire pushing them into the woods where they disappeared, thus becoming wild bears once again.

Tragically, some of the bears were shot dead by soldiers (as a rule police did not dare to kill these animals). The overall situation within the whole Russian Empire was becoming more hostile to any activities done with bears.
In 1892 the Governor of Warsaw issues a ban “on taking the bears around the villages and settlements because these animals scared people and horses” thus narrowing the range of scenes with bears to a zero level. As the Western Lands of the Russia Empire included Lithuania, Belarus and Eastern Poland, which were under the Congress of Poland, this legislation affected the most vital points, where the experience to train bears reached its peak at the end of the XVIII century and after these malicious acts all hard work to gain competence to entertaining people with these adorable five-toed animals was destroyed.

Y. Soloduho, the author of the article in 1959, dates us back to the beginning of the XX century, when he being a child, came across old experienced bear hunters who used to wake up bears during their hibernation in their dens, with a big wooden thong and to deliver them to the Bear Academy for training. The Academy was based on the outskirts of Smorgon on the so-called French hills. Another part of bear hunters would catch and deliver them to the French hills before their training. The bear cubs were easier to train and after 1-2 months of practising, they were ready to dance to tambourine music. Then they were released from their training cage and continued to learn new tricks in the ring (Солодухо 1959).

The Jewish Story of the Bear Academy

The Jewish version of the origin of the Bear Academy in Smorgon strikes the reader with a vivid enough imagination and seems to imbue it with magical powers. And this is their piece (Chanoch 2018).

1. The author, Chenoch Lewin, whose ancestors originated from Smorgon, tells us that from ancient times, the nickname “Bear Chasers” was given to the Jews of Smorgon. They were not pursuers of profit, or pleasure, rather their main concern was caring for bears. The bears of Smorgon achieved recognition, and their fame spread afar.

“We are not talking about bears who are found in forests; not of the sweet-toothed glutton that puts its paw in its mouth during a long slumber in its den for the entire winter as it dreams a pleasant dream of the honey of the world, and not of its sting – but rather of that trained bear, with a beautiful back and soul, whose paws are made up and whose breath is sweet, walking upright and standing on its hind paws, understanding hints and distancing itself from the fist and metal rod. All its steps are human steps, bearing grace and charm to its owners and to everyone, knowing how to dance according to the musical instruments and the tunes. After each dance, ‘our master the bear’ would place itself before its audience, spread its arms, as if to say:

‘I did my part, and now you do your part...’ During its performance, it did not intend anything other than the good taste of this sweetness, the honey liquid that is called ‘miod’.

Where was this school of bears founded?

In Smorgon, at the end of the long road, as you come to the wide market along the way to the Przyboz Forest. There, Potocki founded it and set up its doors. From time immemorial, this street has been called “The Street of the Bears”.
2. There was a Jewish man
   In Smorgon the capital.
   Bedecked and decorated.
   But not graced with property.
   Lit up with good deeds.

   The man’s name was Moshe Ber (Moshe the bear). Not that his education was such, but rather because of something that happened with him.

   This is what transpired: Reb Moshe was a straightforward man, happy with his lot. He was also poor; may it not befall you. He lived in a small hut, with his wife and many children. And his work? – he put his hand [in] at all jobs.

   He was a water drawer, he lit the oven in the bathhouse, but his main livelihood was from the trees of the forest. Immediately after the High Holy Days, Reb Moshe would go out to the nearby forest, cut down trees, and load them on his wagon. Together with his children, he dragged them back to town to sell the wood to the residents. Reb Moshe conducted great publicity for his merchandise.

   He stood in the market, and declared to the public:
   In the Forest of Przyboz I was.
   Lofty trees I saw
   I cut down the tree – I will gird my loins
   I will bring it to your houses, and pay, my sirs!

   The children saw and responded:
   We will bring the wood; we will light the fire
   The heat will spread, and the cold will disappear.

   Once, in the middle of winter, the householders of Smorgon saw Reb Moshe return from his work in the forest. He was pulling his wagon laden with wood, and the kozowka (the furs, a short winter coat made of hides with the hair inside) was not on him. They went to greet him, and found that he was only wearing his kaftan, and was shivering from cold and hunger. They asked him to explain the situation, but he did not answer them. He only gestured to his wagon laden with wood. The people standing around turned their eyes, and saw his outer coat, the kozowka, folded on top of an [obscure] bundle on top the wood in the wagon. One of them approached and opened the bundle. What do you think they saw there? A wounded bear cub.

   After some time, Reb Moshe told his story in a short form:
   In this forest, there are chopped trees.
   Among the trees, there was an abandoned bear cub.
   He removed his coat and wrapped up the animal
   He brought it hope, and raised it with the children.

   One cannot describe the great joy when Reb Moshe brought the little “child of the forest” to his home. The joy of the children was boundless. He fed it on their bread, gave it to drink from their cup, and set up a bed for it on top the hot stove. When the stove was especially hot, the “berish”, the little bear, stood up on his hind legs. The
children stood below, turned their thin necks upward toward the oven, shouted out loud, clapped their hands, and the “berish”, this little bear, danced to the tempo of their song.

As time went on, the cub grew up and became an [adult] bear. His “beary” soul was bound to the members of the household. He was their guard and their shadow.

They gave it food at the right time
And it kept them from its kicks
It rejoiced and danced on the oven.
And drank a pitcher full of mead.

From that time, Moshe Ber Dov was given the nickname Moshe “the bear.”

3. News spread through Smorgon: the only daughter of Count Potocki, the apple of his eye and breath of his spirit, was dying. Already this news had stopped being a secret, for the young princess had fallen into a “black melancholy,” may God protect us, some time before, and she was “flickering like a candle”. All the physicians that her father brought from the large land of Poland, as well as from overseas, left as perplexed as they came. Even the various soothsayers and strange women in white could not find any cure – nothing helped. The delicate girl sat dully in a room inside a room. Food did not enter her mouth, and a smile did not appear on her pale lips. She only stared ahead with hollow eyes. People said: “She is flickering like a candle.”

A Jew, Reb Shmelke of Danyshev lived on the estate of Count Potocki. He was the steward of his house and a wonderful advisor to his master. Count Potocki did not do anything simple or complex without asking the advice of “his” Jew. In time, Reb Shmelke married off his daughters to the sons of householders of Smorgon. He regarded himself as a resident in all aspects in his new city of residence. (Illustration 9).

One day, Reb Shmelke was sitting with the elderly count, conducting business with his merchandise and discussing many business matters. The door of the parlor [opened] in which the count and the Jews were sitting, and the elderly nanny burst in, wailing:

“My master, your graciousness, a terrible thing has happened. Your daughter the princess has fallen down, and who can rise her up?”

The elderly count was perplexed, and called out loudly.

“Please save, oh Jew, pray to your God, Shmelke Sardacza!”

The steward responded:

“I will do as you say, only be strong and brave.”

After he spoke, he hastened out to the street, running the entire way.

The Jews of Smorgon were standing in the market, perplexed and astonished – where was Reb Shmelke from Danyshev running? The women looked out the windows of their houses and said to each other:

“What happened to Reb Shmelke?”

The children of the cheders [Cheders are traditional Jewish elementary schools] heard the tumult from the street. They peered through the cracks and said:

“Our master, Reb Shmelke, is running…”
And he, the Danyshever, Reb Shmleke, arrived at the house of Moshe "the bear," roused up the residents of the house, and called out, saying:

"Reb Moshe, take the bear and follow me!"

"To where?" asked the owner of the bear to Reb Shmelke, "What is the hurry?"

Even though he [intuitively] knew that if Reb Shmelke was saying something, he knew what he was talking about.

Reb Moshe took the bear down from the oven in his house. He whispered in its ear, placed a sugar cube in its mouth and a chain around its neck, and pulled the bear after him. The bear uttered a growl of understanding, as if to say: "I am invited to a celebration." It lifted its legs, shook its head this way and that, blinked its eyes as the dandies do, wiped its nose with its paw, spat out its spittle – and went onward! As if to say, "Take me after you, let us hurry!" [Song of Songs 1:4].

Reb Shmelke of Danyshev ran
Reb Moshe "the bear" ran after him
Dragged behind them like a householder sitting
Our good "berish".
The town was in ferment
The householders shouted in anger:
'To where, is this convoy going,
If not to Potocki the count?
The convoy already passed the market
Along the way to the Przyboz Forest.
The lambs [i.e. young children] had already left the cheders
In which their souls were marching mightily?
And the good animal was then pacing.
Up the steps of the palace
To save the dying daughter of the count
To prevent a tragedy for Potocki.

You have probably figured out for yourselves that the Danyshever went to the count in this manner, and Reb Moshe "the bear" and the good berish following after them.

They were brought into the room of the dying princess. The delicate one was lying on a shiny silk mattress. A dull light shone whiteness on her golden hair, as the white rose of death sprouted upon her lips.

Then Reb Moshe approached the good "berish" and whispered in its ear... The bear checked and lifted one paw, and then checked its other paw. It stood upright, grasped the cymbals in its front paws, and clanged them!

Clang the cymbal
And sing with all strength
A Divine song, the hymn of life
From the angels with white wings.
And the “berish” is dancing and dancing, clanging the cymbals,
Say to the eyelids of the delicate girl
Open her eyes, the pitiful one.
Let the agony disappear, let the grief pass
From the bitterness of death that is with her – let her rise.

When Count Potocki saw the charm of life that was in the dancing bear, he commanded his servants to go out to the forests and hunt bears, starting from the forests of Smorgon and reaching to the forests of Bilo Bzh’ – throughout the entire lands of Count Potocki.

Then, through the advice of Reb Moshe, the count built a brick, two-story house, with a large opening between each floor. The bears were placed on the second floor. A large oven was built for the house, whose fire did not extinguish day or night. Tongues of flames rose up from the oven, flowing through the heat ducts leading to the open space under the floor of the second floor. The floor got hot, and who would not be burnt through the heat?

The bears stood on top, checked their paws, which were indeed burnt by the fire. They began to jump and grunt in anger. They could not stand on their paws, for the fire was burning hot. They ran and danced, the poor things. Boiling tears flowed from their eyes, and their noses sniffed with flames. Reb Moshe “the bear” and his sons stood below, on the first floor, throwing blocks of sugar to the bears.

They did this task for many days. They heated and cooled the floor in succession, and the bears danced. After a time, Reb Shmelke of Danyshev brought an instrumental troupe of Jews, who played below while the bears danced above.

When the bears concluded their “course of study”, their bellies were filled with Torah and wisdom: How, does one dance before the bride? And how does one pace upright? And how do you execute a bow with a friendly face, and other such manners and customs? They would sell each bear separately for a great deal of money, in royal currency, to Gypsies who travelled many countries, to distribute them throughout the wide world, where they would stand in the markets as the bears danced to the enjoyment of the audience. Then the gypsies would fill their pockets with “jingles” [Jingling coins – i.e. pocket change], so that they could sustain their bones with all good food as for Olnnishke the bear. Thus, they called it (perhaps on the name of the first benefactor Reb Moshe “the bear”), so that it would not forget its master:

The block of sugar will be put in its mouth
And its cheeks will be full of sweet mead
For who is as nice as he
Understanding music and dancing in a circle.

This bear school existed for many years in Smorgon. It was the famous Bear Academy. It existed all the days of Reb Moshe the Bear, and his sons who followed after him, “the bear pursuers.”
And I was still a youth, in my young days
I did not stand among the adults,
I did not demonstrate in the gates.
My ears only heard legends and isolated stories
Told by my blind grandfather, to the honorable gathering
The story of Reb Moshe and the good “berish”
Who danced in the markets and growled on the street
Who tasted sweetmeats and sampled nectar
I will conclude my story with wishes of “all the best”.

What a fascinating story: the bear’s dancing rose the young Princess Potocka
to life. Regardless of the charm of the tale we would doubt its accuracy in terms of time.

The Gypsy Version

It is based on verbal reminiscences, when the elderly Gypsies contributed to this
version of the history about the Bear Academy by sharing their memories and knowl-
edge which they had heard from their ancestors. The author summarized their stories
in terms of chronology.

PERFORMING WITH BEARS was always a family business of the Polish Gyps-
ies (Pol'ska Roma) who were supported by the richest landlord of Belarus' Radvilo
(I presume this is Radziwill). He had a beautiful castle with many towers in Niesvizh
where Gypsy women were allowed to tell fortunes while Gypsy men used to make
horse-deals. The Head (Baro Raj) himself knew a lot on horses and was very strict
on keeping his word and forced Gypsies and non-Gypsies (Gadzhe) to stick to this
principal.

He loved Gypsies and mastered the Gypsy language (Romanes). His best friend
was the Gypsy man Yakubo and Radvilo gave him more power and authority to deal
with the Gypsy disputes. In due time Yakubo was appointed to be the Gypsy King by
Radvilo. Radvilo and Yakubo became bosom friends: Yakubo was always invited to
Radvilo’s office when he held important meetings with other Polish landlords to scru-
tinise those people on one point: whether they spoke the truth and were not hostile
to Radvilo. He could also read other people’s minds and thoughts. By the way Yakubo
was taught to read and write on Radvilo’s advice. He was a handsome Gypsy man
with a sharp mind and intellect. Knowing Radvilo’s passion for bears, he learnt basic
skills on handling bears at the bear school near Oshmyany. He started buying trained
bears and harnessing them in a specially constructed wagon to appear before Radvilo
who used to meet him at the main door to his castle. Everybody was commanded to
stand at attention. Yakubo would leave his bears’ wagon and approach Radvilo. He
would deliver a short report on Gypsy affairs in two languages: Polish and Romanes.
Yakubo and Radvilo would rush to hug each-other while an orator would announce:
“His Highness, Duke Karol Radziwill; His Honour, The Gypsy King, Yakubo”. On
big holidays, like Easter, Midsummer, Covering and Christmas, the castle orchestra
played as well. Their friendship grew stronger and stronger which later turned into a mutual bond.

Duke Karol (Radvilo) was often invited to Gypsy proposals, bethorals and wedding-parties where he was asked to “tie hands” [phandes vasta] of a bride and groom. He especially liked elopements of young couples and encouraged the sides for truce encounters where he would initiate togetherness with Yakubo.

On the contrary he was very cross with some Gypsies who arranged and abducted young Gypsy girls before 15 years old.

Radvilo spent much of his time in his attempts to transfer Gypsies to a settled way of life: in and around Niesvizh and Mir where there were different workshops; smithies, processing of wood, tanning and sewing. He and Yakubo persuaded Gypsy lads and girls to sign up for apprenticeships and paid their fees. Having not enough patience and perseverance some Gypsy candidates used to drop out of this education. They were caught, severely reprimanded and lads were given lashes and forced to clean stables while girls were made to work for several hours by spinning yarn. There was a bit of luck in this, as those young boys and girls who were given into apprenticeships with Jewish masters who tended to forgive them and reset the training.

Radvilo used to tell offenders: “Your skilled hands will not harm you, rather help you get a piece of bread and you still remain Gypsies [Roma]. Tricky Gypsy horse deals can only make trouble for you. Listen! Rather learn from Jews”. The bear training and performing was a very profitable business at that time across the whole of Europe, especially in German lands, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Osman Empire, the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Kingdom of Muscovy/Moskovia (Russia).

Regarding some hardships the Gypsy society in Central Belarus started to get its momentum based on collaboration between Panie Kochanku and Yakubo. They discussed very often the wellbeing of nomadic (who were very few) and sedentary Gypsies and the ways how to improve their way of life: bear handlers, peasants, land owners/renters, royal servants, craftsmen, horse dealers, hunting stewards, fishing supervisors, fortune-tellers, foresters and warriors. Some Gypsies had well respected jobs like foresters, hunting stewards and fishing supervisors within lands belonging to the Radziwills. There was much concern about Gypsy labourers or day-labourers and all other people who were not involved in bear handling or any other business.

The approach supported by Radvilo and Yakubo was that a poor Gypsy man had to earn enough money to get bread for the family by his handy labour that he won't resort to nomading and stealing regardless of the situation whether he was a bear handler or not. Moreover, the other idea was to assist Gypsy men to become good husbands regarding their families. He was supposed to be prepared to subside himself to travel abroad to neighbouring nations to seek service in case he couldn't earn enough money performing with bears.

In rare instances some young Gypsies resorted to becoming soldiers although it was not popular and even shameful: traditionally Gypsy lads did not fill away the
armies because it placed them away from the Gypsy community and work which kept them at home. We should not forget that some people in those times (Gypsies and Non-Gypsies) who owned and cultivated land or even day-labourers for landlords, who were foresters or earning labourer or artisan wages, not to mention bear trainers, could eat while most other people starved.

In those schools much attention was paid to drama and comedy. The lessons were useful: to learn and improve the Latin language (which was in use in the PLC), to train students to use the best vocabulary for stage at public places, teach rhetorical skills and train young Gypsies to use gestures and necessary mimics. These lessons were aimed at improving performances with bears in the long run. These activities were mostly of religious-moral character and based on the plots from the Bible, legends, letters of patristics and general history: either from Greek or Roman history.

They were conducted in such a way as to follow ancient mystery plays. Everywhere a Gypsy hero was implemented and was allowed to speak Gypsy (Romani) language, while other characters used Jewish (Yiddish), other simple characters used old Belarusian/Ruthenium (Litvin/Litwin) language while town people and upper-class people spoke Polish. The image of the Devil was omitted and the figurative word “Na lachho” – “Not a good one” was used.

Gypsy children were taught at least to read and write and had also special training such as: boys dealing with horses, managing performing bears. The girls were in apprenticeships becoming good cooks and learning to weave and knit. They were also taught how to deliver a baby and babysit. Much attention was paid to learning “Katehizyz” (Elementary Christianity Studies).

There were new Gypsies who were accepted by nobility and ostracized by nomading Gypsies on the ground that they abandoned the traditions of their ancestors. The main target was to teach Gypsies to be humble and accountable; to override the Gypsy pride: “I am a Gypsy and Gadzhe (non-Gypsy) which is not a good example for me to follow on how to live: I should stay as a Gypsy whatever costs me”.

Karol Radziwill (Radvilo) struggled with Roma about the nomadic way of life: he counted it lawless and unpromising for the future. He even introduced an unwritten punishment: for Roma who were caught with letting their horses graze on somebody else’s pasture and damaging crops. The owner of the horse had to pay a fine of “70 zloty” which was equal to 1/5 of the horse’s price. If the offense was repeated, the transgressor would have to pay a double fine.

If it happened for the third time the horse would be confiscated from him, sold and 50% of money would go to the benefit of the Bear Academy and another 50% to the horse’s former owner.

All these groups of people, who were somehow affiliated to the Bear Academy, started to build up their own businesses and formed an Association based at the local karchma (tavern). It was situated on the outskirts of Smorgon and run by a Jewish family. When the Academy gained its prosperity, this karchma became a venue for everyone: Jews, Gypsies, Litvins (Litwins), Lietuvis/ Zmudins (Lithuanian speakers)
and Polish-speaking participants for their weekly discussions, during weekends and on festive days.

During Jewish Sabbats as a rule the karchma was closed from 6 p.m. on Fridays until 6 p.m. on Saturdays.

Saturday evenings doors were opened for different activities such as: akademii (official celebrations and festivals): meetings with the Radvilo and other important people, wedding-parties, competitions in wrestling, music festivals, bear performances, Bible sessions and discussions. When urgent meetings were to be held, boys were selected to run round the villages and Smorgon itself, letting people know about such meetings. Whenever the Radvilo intended to speak to people, then lads on horseback would also round up people to come to the tavern for the meeting.

Miedyviedniki (bear keepers and trainers) always congregated in front of the tavern behind the specially carved decorated armchair with carvings which was provided for the Radvilo. As a rule, he spoke Polish, and asked Jews and Gypsies to summarise his talks translated into Yiddish and the Romani languages. The Radvilo spoke authoritatively and passionately and while speaking he moved his black moustache “like a beetle”.

Other speakers were Jewish leaders Siomka and Itska (Itshok), “Yakubo” and the Official King of Gypsies, the Polish landlord who was also called “Yakubo” was invited. Miedyviedniki and other people always looked forward to the Radvilo’s talk on the relations between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its neighbour the Muskovy (Kingdom of Russia). The Radvilo was often asked to update the people on America, a state where there was no king.

It was very significant for people who were not wealthy when the Radvilo persuaded people to adopt a by law not to allow money lenders to exceed 12% of the borrowed sum.

On some occasions the announcements about the gypsy courts (Romano sondi/phagi) used to be made which were held at the Jakubo’s mansion. The Gypsy elders (phureroma), who in turn chaired these court sessions, were reminded about preparing all documents to be brought to the civil court clerk in Mir for a final check before the commencement of the gypsy court. These chosen elders in succession were also given a month’s notice to choose and appoint investigators (lavniki) for the accused and plaintiffs.

Usually, men used to come to those meetings at karchma during big celebrations like Christmas and Easter days on Christian and Jewish dates and the local people would attend in families. There was plenty of music: there was Jewish music and solo Gypsy performers. On some occasions Jews played music together with Gypsies.

At Yakubo’s requests Gypsies used to perform camp energetic dances. Moreover, there were concerts when all national groups participated including also Litvins (Litwins), local Tartars and Polish musicians and dancers. The Judaism adherents, Turkic—speaking Karaims, who had also originated from the Crimea like Tartars and who were known to be good craftsmen, used to contribute with their music just at the end.
of this period somewhen during 1787–1790. There were very often challenging discussions which sometimes lead to arguments over the Karaims’ identity and religion.

Similar activities were conducted at the karchma in Mir, near the Radvilo castle and Yakubo mansion but on a smaller scale. During the spring – autumn period many shows were delivered in the open air on a big field near Mir castle. Sometimes it coincided with Mir fairs which lasted 12 days.

A lot of different activities with bears were carried out in the Commonwealth like teaching and mastering the bears to become experienced in catching fish but not to eat the fish they have caught. As we know, some bears are prone to catch fish at waterfalls but the local small river around Smorgon, Oksna is very quiet. Moreover, domesticated bears are not keen on swimming or going into the water. Some people were singled out including Gypsies and non-Gypsies (Gadzhe) to come restore the fishing skills among their bears in summer. The course was made up of two stages: encouraging bears to step into water and watching fish swimming by; showing them fish in pails and letting them only sniff but not allowing them to eat. The sessions in fishing were always surrounded by local cats who waited patiently for their treat.

Yakubo tried to stand up for the Gypsies who broke the rules before Radvilo by making his point; “Sir, nomadism is a state of mind for Gypsies which has built up over the centuries. When Gypsies live in houses, they regard it as a temporal ‘accommodation’. We are children of nature and when we travel it gives rise to look more at nature and at the world God created”. Those meetings at the karchma became a central part of the local people’s cultural interaction of Gypsies with their non-Gypsy neighbours: Litvins (Litwins), Poles, Jews, Tatars and Karaims. The plots of these sub-theatricals were mainly related to marriages and the rituals of funerals. Dolls were an essential part of those plays and performances.

Sometimes old people were asked to recollect scenes from their early lives or episodes they recollected from their ancestors’ life stories. These stories were recorded and considered for inclusion to be in the theatre plays. They were assessed on two points: firstly, if they taught and educated young people to love God and their own families; secondly, if they coached to love and defend the Commonwealth. When discussions went on for too long and late, and sometimes it turned into bickering or even arguments, then the karchma owner, or keeper with his attendants, blew out candles on the command of either Yakubo or Siomka and then the participants, found themselves in total darkness and the voice appeared as though advising “Come down and go home with God”.

In a due time Radvilo and Yakubo had a candid meeting which resulting 3 targets in their joint approach:

- to combat diseases, ignorance, squalor and Gypsy idleness;
- to aid Gypsies to become equal citizens of PLC;
- to assist Gypsy women and help they alleviate their domestic burden.

Women’s concerns were generally ignored, because they did not have a low profile in the Gypsy community. Women were able to influence a little control through
the men in their lives. Primarily, Gypsy (Romani) society system is run by men who questioned the role of women and their contribution to the Gypsy community. Women were powerless and had no political sway; they were tied to domestic life, thus contributing to their community. Women were not organized in any group. All attention of women had its emphasis on domestic skills.

Radvilo also took domestic violence committed by Gypsy men very seriously. He opposed the trafficking of women; and he voiced the concerns about respect for women, especially older ones. There was an ongoing discussion about the role of Gypsy men and women. Ideally, Gypsy women were expected to be pure (as a virgin when she married) spiritually and morally, strong in her place in the house (which could be also a tent) looking after men, their children, parents and grandparents or her husband's parents or grandparents and domestic cattle. Regarding widows and single women, who had no children, Radvilo was involved in finding work for them: either at their churches or as a governess. Sometimes Yakubo authorized them to help families whose parents were imprisoned.

They also discussed very often the wellbeing of nomadic (who were very few) and sedentary Gypsies and the ways how to improve their way of life: bear handlers, peasants, landowners/renters, royal servants, craftsmen, horse dealers, hunting stewards, fishing supervisors, fortune-tellers, foresters and warriors.

The bear school was run mainly by the Jewish (Čhindlengiri) community who used to sell trained bears to Gypsies who were keen on learning how to perform with them.

Radvilo and Yakubo chose 20 brave Gypsy lads to learn at the bear school to become bear instructors to teach other Gypsies how to handle cubs to master tricks. Radvilo paid for the fees and appointed Yakubo to become the Director of the bear school which caused disagreement with the leadership of the Jewish community mainly on the ground that Yakubo was not able to run the school properly as he was not trained. Yakubo and Radvilo were invited to the Jewish annual meeting Kagal to discuss this dispute. Radvilo declined the invitation, due to his urgent matters away in Vilna (Vilnius), so he authorised Yakubo to attend Kagal.

The Jews were lenient to Yakubo and agreed on the matter of his appointment as Director of the bear school. It was also decided that his deputy would be a Jewish man called Siomka (I presume it was “Simeon”) who was the best bear instructor. After 6 months of hard training, 10 Gypsy young men became instructors to teach others regardless of the nationality of candidates. After that the bear school was called the Bear Academy which blossomed for the next 20-25 years until the death of Radvilo.

The Smorgon Bear Academy gained and built up its glorious reputation throughout the whole world at that time. There were other places where bears were trained: in Koydanova near Minsk, Davidko (I presume this was the name of David –Gorodok) and somewhere in the depths of Lithuania, but their bears could only perform a few tricks: dancing movements and pulling carts. That’s why people who trained bears in those places came to Smorgon and asked Yakubo for permission to see how
the bears were trained in Smorgon. These people were mostly non-Gypsies. Sometimes they would come with their bears and ask the Smorgon Bear Academy if they could leave their bears with trainers to teach them new tricks for an agreed sum of money. Radvilo and Yakubo, in collaboration with a Jewish Deputy of Yakubo, Siomka, worked out a very sophisticated programme on how to train bears from scratch. At its peak, the Smorgon Bear Academy held courses, covering the whole extent of what was possible to teach bears to perform. Many people from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and abroad would come to observe and learn basic skills in handling bears and were accommodated in and around Smorgon. Every activity at the Smorgon Bear Activity had been perfected. In addition, there were staff whose daring job was to catch bear cubs and young bears in the wild forests without harming them. The Old-Believers Russians and some Lithuanians (Lietuvis/ Žmudins) turned out to be the best at catching bears, while Jewish people and Litvins (Litwins) were the best bear trainers. Additionally, the management, grooming/feeding of bears and business issues were run by Jewish people. As for performing with bears in front of people, Gypsies were the best and that is why most of the bear handlers, at that time, who travelled across Europe were Gypsies.

Moreover, during the pilgrimages of bear handlers to Western Europe, they managed to sell performing bears upon request for a good sum of money in accordance with the leadership of the Academy. Two thirds of such purchases went to the Academy while one third to the bear handler upon the return to Smorgon in autumn.

After the First Partition of Poland in 1772, the creative bear handlers with their performers poured into domains of the Russian Empire, where there was a bigger demand for domesticated clumsy adorable animals, especially in cities and towns among wealthy Russians. (Illustration 10).

After Radvilo’s death in 1790, which was a radical blow to the Bear Academy, Yakubo lost influence and power over the Academy which resulted in his weakening of the position as the King of Gypsies.

In addition, Yakubo’s confidence and grounds vanished to carry on his duties to transfer Gypsies to a settled way of life, which they started with Radvilo.

When Belarus became part of the Russian Empire in 1795 the new authorities didn’t like the existing Gypsy autonomy and its King. In a while Big People (Russians) revoked his authority as Gypsy King and immediately brought their own Gypsy leader from St. Petersburg, called Baro (Big).

He arrived at the Mir castle escorted by the Cossacks around the big field of Mir castle. Yakubo was ordered to assemble the Gypsies on the field to discuss the new situation. The Russian official, surrounded by armed Cossacks introduced Baro to become the Burmister (leader) of Gypsies of the western lands of the Russian Empire, while Yakubo was named as his deputy and advisor.

Baro was a tall gypsy man with an eloquent speech in which he outlined the new life for Gypsies within the Russian Empire. He also specified that Gypsy camps could move around the huge domain of the Russian Empire avoiding entering St Petersburg
and Moscow. He also mentioned the taxes Gypsies were supposed to pay and underlined the restoration of the power of the camp heads. Some Gypsies shouted with joy while others were silent as they had abandoned the nomadic way of life and were engaged with different professions. (Illustration 11).

What a blow was it to them on that day! So the Radziwill/Yakubo bond resulted in numerous achievements being destroyed within a short time, which had been meticulously gained during 1767–1790.

Yakubo immediately lost interest in being director of the Bear Academy and resigned verbally in favour of his Jewish deputy Siomka. Many Gypsies stayed loyal to Yakubo and encouraged him to stay as their leader and to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire, Turkey.

The diarchy set in, in western Belarus: the majority of Gypsies still supported Yakubo and were subjected to him, while some nomadic families preferred to rush under the power of Baro, who carried on calling them to travel to Russia, promising them milk and honey. Some settled Gypsy people started to be pushed out of their businesses after Radvilo’s death while Yakubo’s voice was not considered anymore.

Furthermore, Gypsy children and young children in apprenticeships started to drop out because training fees were not covered by Radvilo. Funding wasn’t done anymore due to the general decline of the Bear Academy and a sudden drop in profits.

Yakubo tried hard to help young people but couldn’t cope with this. Baro’s voice started to be heard and he always appeared among Gypsies being escorted by 2-3 Cossacks which put him into suspicion by the local Gypsies. Why was he scared of going to Gypsies by himself? Baro shared with Gypsies that he served in the Cossack’s detachment for some time and was discharged on the grounds of his wound he received from Turks. The Cossacks liked Gypsy lads for their knowledge and skills with horses and managed to recruit 3 Gypsy volunteers to carry out sentry services. The recruits were immediately sent somewhere to Ukraine to a Cossack camp for training. In a while a group of Gypsies, at Baro’s advice, went to Russia where they succeeded in profitable horse deals. After a while they naturally started to miss their families and set off to return home but near the old border between the Muscovy state and Poland a group of robbers in balaclavas attacked them and deprived them of their income, which they had gained on horse deals in Russia. After this disaster Baro dropped into disrespect by local Gypsies near Mir and Smorgon and they rose against him. The local officials in Mir, Wojt Yuziu, asked Yakubo to gather Gypsies on the field. More than 60 Gypsy men came to Mir castle and waited patiently for Baro but he didn’t turn up and Yakubo tried to dismiss the congregation, but many Gypsies came forward and asked Yakubo to give up his responsibility as King of Gypsies. The discussion carried on until late into the night and the conclusion sounded like they couldn’t expect anything good from the new Russian authority. Some Gypsies suggested that they should rather immigrate either to the Kingdom of Hungary or the Ottoman Empire. The official fell asleep during the meeting and the Gypsies were dismissed late at night.
In a few weeks after Yakubo gathered the Gypsies on a Mir field to which Baro failed to turn up, news started to arrive that Baro was severely mugged during the day before the appointed meeting. He was unconscious for one week and after some time he gained his confidence in walking due to the intensive care of an old Gypsy woman who healed his wounds with medicine made from different herbs and who brought him fresh food. When Baro became strong enough, his loyal Gypsies paid him a visit and brought him a lot of food presents. Baro himself raised the question of robbery in Russia and took a heavy oath on an icon that he had nothing to do with that robbery. He also mentioned that after a full recovery he would go to that place and investigate the matter on the spot by himself. He also stated that he would resign from the position of the Burmister of the Gypsies in Belarus, in favour of Yakubo. By the way, Gypsies told him that Yakubo was in hiding. After full recovery his wife and children joined him and they went northward closer to Saint Petersburg.

In due time Yakubo sent 2 messengers to Hungary and Ottoman Empire to sort out the feasible entry of Gypsies under the leadership of Yakubo. Other messengers were sent across the new Western land (a new name given to Belarus lands) incorporated after 1795 to enlist Gypsy families under leadership of Yakubo to emigrate.

The new Russian authorities didn't like Yakubo's activity for immigration and warned him immediately to stop. Yakubo refused to comply with the demands and went into hiding in forests. Unfortunately, the Gypsy messenger who had been sent by Yakubo to the Russian/Hungarian border to approach the Hungarian border officers was detained by the Russian border officers and later was lashed by the Cossack Guides.

On the contrary, another messenger who had been authorised by Yakubo to negotiate with the Ottoman Empire authorities was successful and received written permission for 60 people to immigrate to the Ottoman Empire as craftsmen: smiths, wood carvers and horse surgeons. They were also allowed to take their bears with them.

The Jewish Friends of Yakubo found out from the Mir office that Yakubo was wanted at the Office for questioning and possible punishment which would be lashings. They made their own way to go and see him in the forest where he was hiding with his family and some Gypsies, who were loyal to him until death. They also shared with him that it has been said that his luxurious mansion in Mir might be confiscated if he emigrated.

As a result of their advice, Yakubo managed to sign prepared official unsigned documents in order to sell them his luxurious house in Mir and wrote a resignation letter indicating his resignation from the position of director of the Bear Academy, in favour of his deputy the Jewish man Siomka.

“You see, guys, it was a big help and rescue in his situation”.

Meanwhile, the Russian officials from Grodno sent a detachment of Cossacks to comb forests and arrest Yakubo. The search lasted for a few months before he was found and chained. On the way back to the Grodno Governor’s office Yakubo ran off: allegedly some sympathizing Cossacks helped him to deceive the guards. Afterwards
the authorities turned their backs on pursuing Yakubo, who took a risk to meet with his family and loyal Gypsies. Late into the night they harnessed the horses, loaded their carts with their belongings and set off southwards in the direction of the Russian Ottoman Empire border. After 3 weeks of dangerous tiresome travelling, they set up camp in the forest somewhere in Western Ukraine being totally exhausted: they lurked in the forests and ravines during the daytime and moved as fast as possible during nights. They were fortunate, maybe God looked after them, to miss sentry positions and approached the Ottoman Border somewhere in Bessarabia (Moldova). When the Gypsies at last came to a check point on the Russian Empire and Ottoman Empire in Bessarabia, some Cossacks at the frontier lodge started to persuade Gypsies not to cross the border for the reason that they would be defying the Christian faith as the Osman officials would force them to turn to the Basurman (Muslim)21 religion area. These words deeply touched the minds of some Gypsies, especially women who started to cry and sob. Everybody was looking questionably at Yakubo who kept silent, being very puzzled. Being sad and confused he muttered: “Each family should make their own decision. As for me I would stay on this side in Bessarabia. I would not stand in anybody’s way who wants to cross over the border to the Ottoman/Turkish State“.

Silence reigned for some time, before a question was raised, from the Turkish border guards, through an interpreter: “If the Gypsies wanted to cross the border line, they could do so near the pole with a red flag flying with a green crescent”. 

Yakubo discussed it rapidly with his co-tribesmen who wanted to follow the call from the Ottoman/ Turkish side. Three families consisting of 22 people with three horses and a bear received the document from Yakubo who then went round the Roma with tears in their eyes when he departed from them and in a while, they crossed the border.

The remaining 14 families, headed by Yakubo, packed up and set off on another journey to the south of Bessarabia, as they found out from the local administration that there were free lands there.

Shortly afterwards Yakubo was seriously wounded in a fight between his Gypsies and the Cossacks and died: “Cossacks started to extort money from Gypsies because they stayed illegally in the land. Such is the Gypsy reminisces story about the Bear Academy and all other event characters related to it”.

We presume that some of those remaining Gypsies became part of the Russian Empire experiment project in Kair (Cairo) and Faraonovka (Pharaoh's village) during the Tsar Nikolas, the First, after 1836. Shortly they established themselves as bear handlers and teachers of the local Gypsy lads to perform with these marvellous animals. As we see the experience of training bears to perform spread further to other lands, in our case Bessarabia, and further throughout the whole Ottoman Empire.

The success of the Bear Academy is immortalized in the sculpture of the native of Smorgon Vladimir Terebun, who erected the three-piece stone composition. (Illustration 12).
The Coat of Arms of Smorgon depicts a dancing bear in its heraldic composition (accepted in 2004). The famous Belarusian poet Rygor Baradulin wrote a brilliant poem *The Bear Academy* in which he depicted lyrically Gypsy bear-handlers.

**Conclusion**

The legacy and the history about the Smorgon *Bear Academy* and its successors did not vanish entirely. Different sources give us different dates on the closure of the Academy in 1820, 1831 and 1866. Many trained bears with their handlers continued to travel along the huge domain of the Russian Empire and its neighbours: the German Empire, the Swedish Kingdom, Austria–Hungarian Empire, Romania and the Ottoman Empire. Some could have reached even the British Empire: as a result, we have some borrowings of the Russian-Belarusian origin not only among its neighbours Polish/ German/Swedish/ Finnish Romani speakers, but much far off - among the English Gypsies (Romani chavs, Romani Foki and Welsh Kale): *kirchima* (tavern), *kvatsera* (apartment), *gurusha* (money), *moniya* (lighting), *shliehta* (background, tribe), *greho* (sin), *knuuto<kunto* (corner) etc.

Another layer of examples indicates the cases where the borrowed words from Russian and Belarusian languages substituted initially Romani lexicon among Gypsies in Germany, Holland, Sweden, UK and Finland, which is in use in the Baltic Romani dialects in Belarus, Lithuania, Russia and Poland in Romani (in Callibri light script): *stolbo*/ *stylbo* (pillar), *gurusha*/ *love,ghastalia* (money), *boko*/ *rig,pashvaro* (side), *stala* (parno saster (steel), *sila*/ *zor* (force), *prosiba*/ *mangipen, promangipen* (request/pardon), etc. It is natural that the bear handling and the performing skills, knowledge and experience left its legacy in those countries to local bear trainers.

Bears began to become the second most popular animal after the horse in the XVIII-XIX century fairy tales. We all remember the exciting stories from our childhood about “Masha and the Bear”, “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”, “Three Bears”, “The Bear”, “Winne the Pooh” and other stories in which bears are depicted as a man’s best friend.

**Notes:**

2. It came also into the lexicon of the people in Belarus while referring to a bogus professional “he/she is a graduate of the Bear Academy”.
3. There is a discrepancy on this point, as Michael Radziwill (Rybońka) and Albrecht Radziwill were not close relatives.
4. Radziwill’s collection in Minsk.
5. Officially, there were no Gypsies in the Kingdom of Russia (Moscovy/Moskova), the tolerant attitude was ended and the locals, the state administration started to impose its own governmental laws more diligently, especially recruit Gypsy men as soldiers. Gypsies were not officially known to the Kingdom of Russia until the XVIII century.
6. The Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania united into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (PLC) in 1569.
Samogitia – was a place in the northern Lithuania including a part of Latvia.

Ficowski J. 1989. *The Gypsies in Poland: History and customs*. Warszawa: Interpress publishers, 18-19. This researcher suggests that J. Dewaltowski could have been abdicated or died. It is a historical region situated in southern and southern-eastern Poland.

Belarus National Library [Archiv Radzivillov], file 1279.

Some sources [Romani verbal reminiscers] indicate that he died much later, after the fall of the PLC and his exodus to Bessarabia with his loyal group, somewhen between 1799–1811.

An old name of the Moldova province which was under the Osman Empire rule.

We should say that all the unofficial “office” of “Shero-Rom” is busy with retaining strong ties, based on the observation of the traditional prohibitions and rules of the local community. This code of life and practice is only relevant to groups of Roma who are under the umbrella of “Shero-Rom” in Poland: *Polish Lowland Roma* (*Pol’ska Roma* (*Nizinna*), “Russian” Gypsies (*Gypsies from Belarus, Lithuania and Northern Ukraine* (*Khaladytka*)) and “Pluniaki” (*Polish-German Roma*). Kelderari, Lovari and Polish Highland Gypsies (*Bergitka*) are not members of this Union governed by “Shero-Rom”.

A name in English for Lithuania [Lituva] while the Slavonic speakers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were called Litviny (Litwiny), it is also a synonym to a Belarusian subject; while the Lithuanian-language speakers of PLC were called “Lituaniants” or “Zhmudzins” or “Lietuvis”.

Radziwill’s Archives. Warszawa, rozd. XXIII, t. 34, teka 7.

VKL – Wielkie Ksęnstwo Litewskie / Grand Duchy of Lithuania).

The Romani stories give us quite different information, that *J. Martinkevich* (*Yakubo*) didn’t cross the border of the Ottoman Empire and stayed in Bessarabia with 12 families a little longer. The guards, Cossacks, started to extort money from Gypsies for their illegal stay which resulted in a fierce fight between the parties. The Cossack officer aimed a shot at *J. Martinkevich* and severely wounded him. After a while *J. Martinkevich* died and his loyal Gypsies bewailed the loss.

The magnates *Potocki* couldn’t have founded the Bear Academy in Smorgon as they did not have any properties in Belarus until the XIX century: They bought the following estates: Vysokoye, Brest region – 1815 and Berezino, Minsk region – 1856.


This policy granting Gypsies (Roma) their personal freedom and allowing them to have gypsy courts had been in use by the Radziwill family since the XVI century. See: Ficowski 1989: 31; Mroz 2016). The entry in the Minsk municipal records regarding the verdict by the Gypsy court issued on May, 1594 in Jarszewicze.

This is the term used by the Russian Orthodox believers for the Muslim adherents.

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Illustrations:

Illustration 1. The author and the bear exhibition at the Smorgon Local History Museum are cordially greeting each other, photo taken in September, 2022, Smorgon.
Illustration 2. At the edge of the former Danysheva Estate where forests spread for miles around and bear traders used to catch bear cubs with their trained dogs, Danysheva village, 12 km. from Smorgon, photo taken in September, 2022.

Illustration 3. This is the place where the Bear Academy was situated before its closure in the early years of the 19th century. Smorgon, photo taken in September, 2022.
Illustration 4. The assessment by instructors of a bear candidate, for training at the Bear Academy. A painting by Svetlana Gnutova.

Illustration 5. The ‘Sheró-Rom’ in Poland conducting a meeting with his Advisers (Yunkary) and Investigators (Lawniki). A painting by Svetlana Gnutova.
Illustration 6. A bear who was caught in the forest, then taken to the Bear Academy, the monument is on the outskirts of Smorgon, photo taken in September, 2022 near the former place where bears were brought for sale.

Illustration 7. Duke Radziwill is riding on a sledge pulled by his trained bears on festive days of pan cake celebration, thus shocking his friends and guests near his palace in Mir. A painting by Svetlana Gnutova.

Illustration 9. Former Danysheva Estate, an effigy of Jesus dating back to the 18th century, photo taken in September, 2022; Danysheva village, 12 km. from Smorgon.
Illustration 10. A Russian aristocrat walks with his bear in the streets of Saint Petersburg. A painting by Svetlana Gnutova.

Illustration 11. 'Baro (Big)', a new Gypsy King (Overlord), appointed by Russian authorities, tries to convince Gypsies of a better future under the Crown; some Gypsies doubted his statements and rebelled. A painting by Svetlana Gnutova.
Illustration 12. Monument to the “Bear Academy” in Smorgon, where the author is with his Grandson Edgar, during their research trip to the Smorgon area, photo taken in September, 2022.

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