

## „Rezginia” in Europe

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING FORMS of folk transport in Europe is the *rezginia*<sup>1</sup>, a net or strings stretched on two rods or hoops, intended to enable the user to carry small quantities of hay, leaves or bedding on his back. The present article examines the discussion which has developed in recent years of the genesis of the *rezginia* in Europe<sup>2</sup>.

### I.

THE STATE OF RESEARCH. Unlike many means of transport which depend upon man's locomotive powers the *rezginia* has already been the subject of scientific analysis and description. One of the first people who turned his attention to the *rezginia* was Karl Rhamm in his studies of the Germano-Slavic borderland (1908). In Rhamm's opinion „Der Heubogen ist, wie man mir zugeben wird, ein so eigentümliches Gerät, daß kaum anzunehmen ist, daß er an verschiedenen Orten selbständig erfunden wäre. Daraus würde folgen, daß die Stämme, bei denen er sich heute findet, in früheren Zeiten in enger Nachbarschaft gelebt hätten“<sup>3</sup>. The author presumes close neighbourhood in the past, between the North and East Germans and those Germans who later settled in the Alpine region. This reasoning was based upon the then popular theory of “Siedlungsarchäologie”, developed by Gustaf Kossinna, that similar cultural products appearing amongst different peoples proves the relationship between those peoples.

*Rezginias* appear in Switzerland, Danmark, The Black Forest, the East and West Alps and Piedmont, and Artur Haberlandt has noted their existence in the Balearic Islands and in North Africa, where they were adapted for use of donkeys in transporting corn ears<sup>4</sup>.

None of these authors realised that *rezginias* appear in the Slavonic territories, and also in certain neighbouring areas. Kazimierz Moszyński has compiled information about the appearance of *rezginias* in Europe and says that they appear in Byelorussia, Southern and Western Great Russia, Southern Lithuania and Latvia,

1. It is a dialect expression used in large areas of North-Eastern Europe to describe nets stretched between two bows (Germ. Heubogen). Etymologically approximate terms are used in the Balkan and Appennine Peninsulas to describe nets or strings stretched on two stright rods. The term *rezginia* generally does not suggest any special form of the tool we are interested in. I have used the term previously in this sense in the article “Rezginie w Europie”, *Lud* vol. 58, p. 73—85, Wrocław 1974 on which the present article is based, with the addition of map 3 and the interpretation of that map.

2. Debate upon the subject stretches from the discussion of the *rezginia* in K. Rhamm, *Ethnographische Beiträge zur germanisch-slavischen. Altertumskunde*, vol. 2 *Urzeitliche Bauernhöfe im germanisch-slavischen Waldgebiet*, Braunschweig 1908, p. 1035—1038. Since that date others have discussed the subject further and in recent years the debate has become quite animated with the publication of Leopold Schmidt's, *Der Heubogen im südlichen Burgenland*. Aus der Arbeit am Atlas der burgenländischen Volkskunde. *Deutsches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, vol. 8, part 2, Berlin 1962, p. 351—360.

3. K. Rhamm (s. footnote 2), p. 1037.

4. A. Haberlandt, *Die volkstümliche Kultur Europas in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*. In: G. Buschan (ed.), *Illustrierte Völkerkunde*, vol. 3, part 2, Stuttgart 1926, p. 394—395.

and also in South-West Hungary, Slavonia, Croatia, Slovenia and parts of Bosnia. Moszyński has classified this tool as a culture product of the scattered Baltic-Adriatic areas<sup>5</sup>.

A lot of material from the Balkan Peninsula, mainly concerning the various names of rezhinias, appeared in an article by a subsequent writer Borivoje Drobñaković. He presumed that the tool has reached Europe from Egypt<sup>6</sup>.

More active interest in the rezhinia was noticeable after Leopold Schmidt published his article on rezhinias in South Burgenland in 1962<sup>7</sup>. Using new material from Austria and the Black Forest, he specified the range of his occurrence in Alpine territories. Schmidt considers rezhinias as a relic from a time when agricultural equipment was relatively underdeveloped. His arguments about the genesis of the tool proved to be controversial. Schmidt tried to prove that the bow-shape of the rezhinia was connected with the worship of the moon and old folk beliefs.

There subsequently appeared several lengthy articles arguing with Schmidt and marshalling a wide range of material.

Ants Viires — analysing the role of the rezhinia in Byelorussia and the Baltic republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics — has stated that in those territories they are typical peasant's tools connected with the development of field cultivation and cattlebreeding mainly for the transportation of hay, chaff and feedings stuffs to the stables and barns. Viires has been unable to find in Northern and Eastern Europe facts that would prove the previous use of rezhinia for the transportation of leaves or litter. However Schmidt, analysing facts from round the Alpine areas, thinks that the tool is connected with the latter purpose. Considering the rezhinia as an old tool connected with cattle-breeding he admits, that in earlier times its function could differ according to the character of local cattle farming. Basically the present writer accepts possibilities suggested by Schmidt, as well as those of Moszyński. The latter presumes that rezhinia in Europe could have been used during harvest to carry cut corn ears<sup>8</sup>.

Nils-Arvid Bringéus has corrected Schmidt's conclusions and also his basic assumptions about the functions and forms of rezhinia in Sweden. Bringéus postulates that the rezhinia in Sweden originated by way of indigenous development from the older products of folk culture such as the loop made from long

5. K. Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian [Slavonic Folk Culture]*, 2-nd ed., vol. 1, *Kultura materialna*, Warszawa 1967, p. 635—637, Elsewhere (p. 37) the author has written: "Areas of this sort sometimes appear in islands or peninsulas from the Adriatic countries down to Western or Middle Europe (for ex. Hungary), or from Baltic countries to the depths of North and West Poland or East and Middle Russia; there are sometimes enclaves in the Carpathians ... and sometimes little or big enclaves here and there in Europe; their main feature is always that their greater parts or even main core occurs round either the Baltic Sea on the one hand, or the Alpine and Dinaric countries on the other" (tr. Z. Kłodnicki).

6. B. Drobñaković, *Un instrument ancien pour le transport de la nourriture*. Bulletin de l'Académie serbe des sciences. Vol. 24 New Series, Classe des sciences sociales, nr 7, Belgrade 1959, p. 123—128.

7. L. Schmidt (s. footnote 2).

8. A. Viires, *Der Heubogen in Osteuropa*. In: *Deutsches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, vol. 10, part 2, Berlin 1964, p. 280—291.

willow plaits, for carrying on a man's back. By analysing old testaments, he has come to the conclusion, that rezginias appeared in Sweden in the first part of the 18th century and were connected with the development and evolution of indoor cattle breeding and with hay harvesting on distant and high clearings and moors. Sometimes rezginias were also used for carrying corn (sic!)<sup>9</sup>. The isolated ethnological opinion of Bringéus has criticised Sven B. Ek<sup>10</sup> and has also drawn attention to the fact that comparative material must be considered from neighbouring areas: Denmark, North Germany and North-Eastern Europe, and that close attention should be paid to the developing function of the rezginia throughout its history.

In this article, especially in the maps, I consider the work of other authors who have discussed the rezginia with particular reference to European countries<sup>11</sup>.

## II.

FORMS OF REZGINIA. A net is an old and well known tool<sup>12</sup>. The rezginia is particular kind of a net. I define rezginia for the purpose of this essay as a net with big gaps or loops or several parallel strings stretched between two rods which are stright or bent into the shape of a bow.

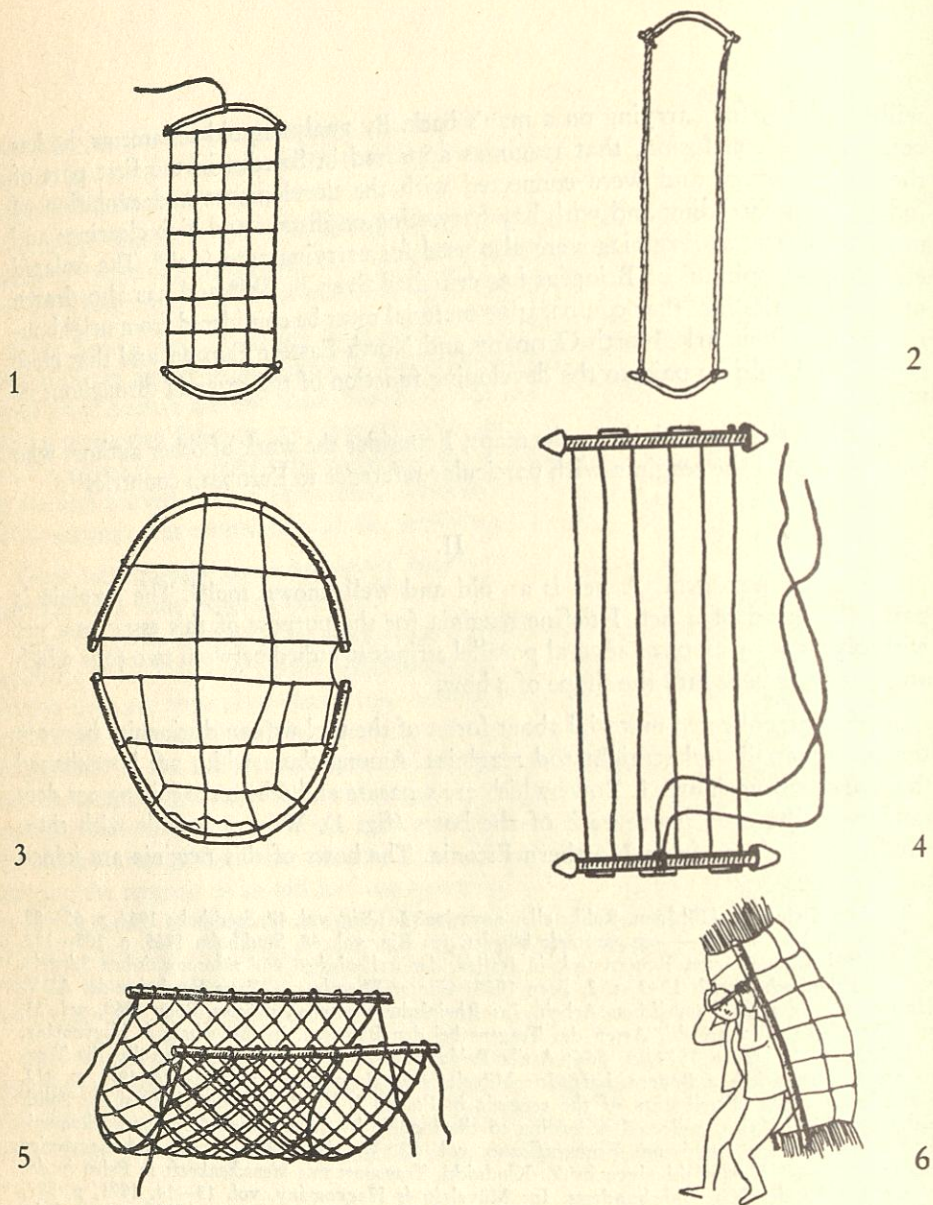
Analysing collected material about forms of the tool we can distinguish between the bow-shaped and straight-rod rezginias. Among those which are bow-shaped there are two variants: 1. Bows which are separate and where the joining net does not cover the area inside each of the bows (fig. 1). We can include with these the little rezginias from Northern Estonia. The bows of this rezginia are joined

9. N.-A. Bringéus, Höbågen. Relikt eller novation? In: Rig, vol. 47, Stockholm 1964, p. 65—88.

10. S. B. Ek, Bågen — ett gammalt hömått. In: Rig, vol. 48, Stockholm 1965, p. 105—122.

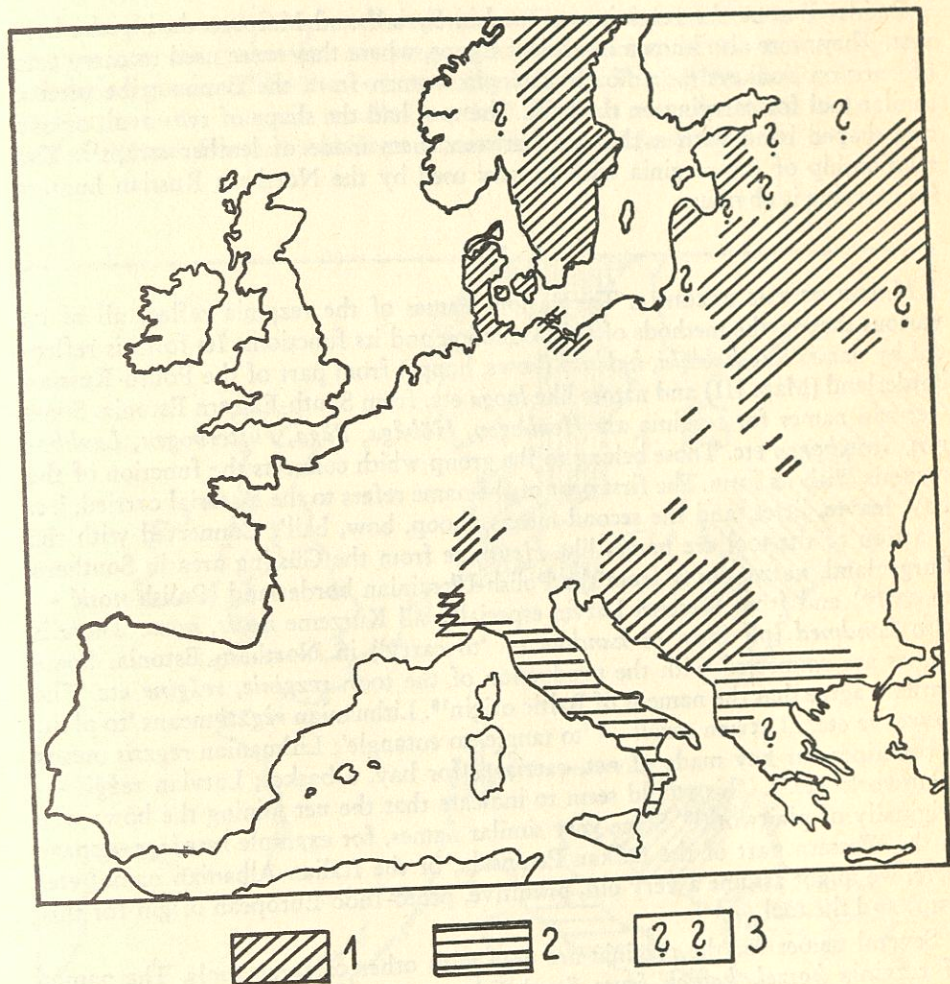
11. Paul Scheuermeier, Bauernwerk in Italien, der italienischen und rätoromanischen Schweiz, vol. 1, Erlenbach-Zürich 1943, t. 2, Bern 1956; Günter Wiegmann, Erste Ergebnisse der ADV-Umfragen zur alten bäuerlichen Arbeit. In: Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter, Bonn 1969, vol. 33, p. 213; Christo Vakarelski, Arten des Tragens bei den Bulgaren. In: Müveltség és Hagymány, vol. 13—14, Debrecen 1971, p. 664; Attila Paládi-Kovács, Einige Bemerkungen über die Traggeräte der ungarischen Bauernschaft. In: Müveltség és Hagymány, vol. 13—14, 1971, p. 412, fig. 1 (map). The distribution of the rezginia in Poland is based on materials from the Polish Ethnographical Atlas, collected according to the inquiry by Józef Gajek (Transport i komunikacja ładowa. In: Archiwum Etnograficzne, vol. 22, Wrocław 1960, p. 72) and manuscript materials by K. Moszyński given by Z. Klodnicki, Transport mit Menschenkraft in Polen in der ersten Hälfte des XX. Jahrhunderts. In: Müvelség és Hagymány, vol. 13—14, 1971, p. 597, Map. V; A. J. Cabiaruk, Nazwa prystasavannia, u jakim nosiac siena, salomu (The Name of the Tool in Which They Carry Hay and Straw). In: Dyjalektalagičny atlas bielaruskaj movy (ed. R. J. Avanesava and others), Mińsk 1963, map 254; also Polski Atlas Etnograficzny, Warszawa 1974, vol. V, map 273.

12. It was used to carry hay in Eastern Bavaria (Wiegmann, s. footnote 11, p. 213) and in Switzerland, where it was called *Netzuch*, *Heusack* and further towards the South in Trentino, Piedmont, Liguria and Apulia, where it was called mostly *rete* (Scheuermeier, s. footnote 11, I, p. 63, phot. 76, 77 and vol. 2, p. 96). A net bound with a string (giving a sort of sack) was used to carry hay, and more often to convey it on carts in Polesie and the regions of Witebsk and Mogilew (Byelorussia — Moszyński, s. footnote 5, p. 637). More to the North, nets for carrying hay were used in Latvia (the illustration of such a net called *kešels* from Łozdowa, district of Ludza in East Latvia is given by S. Cimermanis, Transporta līdzekļi latgales zemnieku saimniecības 19. gs. beigās un 20. gs. pirmajā pusē. In: Arheoloģija un etnogrāfija, X, Rīga 1973, p. 193, phot. 8) and in the part of Southern Estonia (Viires, s. footnote 8, p. 286).



## FIGURES

1. The bow-shaped rezginia *loogused*, Võnnu, distr. Tartu, Estonia. Accordingly to A. Viires (s. footnote 8), p. 285, fig. 4 d.
2. The bow-shaped rezginia *pugatsid*, Ampla, distr. Harju, Estonia. Accordingly to A. Viires (s. footnote 8), p. 285, fig. 4 b.
3. The bow-shaped rezginia, Ivankowo, distr. Vinkovici, Slavonia. Accordingly to M. Gavazzi (Moszyński, s. footnote 5, p. 634, fig. 508.5).
4. The rezginia with straight rods *rete*, in the mountains in Piedmont, in Liguria, Middle and Southern Italy. After P. Scheuermeier (s. footnote 11), vol. II, p. 96, fig. 242.
5. The rezginia with straight rods *vărzubel*, Ustovo, Bulgaria. Accordingly to Ch. Vakarelski (s. footnote 11), p. 655, fig. 9 f.
6. Carrying with the help of rezginia with straight rods „wrzmi“ Macedonia. After B. Drob-  
jaković, (s. footnote 6), p. 125, fig. 5.



Map I. Broad areas of the occurrence of the rezginia in Europe 1. bow-shaped rezginias (see fig. 1—3); 2. rezginias with straight rods (see fig. 4—6); 3. territories on which rezginias perhaps appear, but they are not registered in other publications.

only with two strings (fig. 2). This small rezginia is carried in the hand and its bows serve as handles. 2. The hoops are close, so that an open rezginia is almost a complete circle; the area enclosed within the bows is covered by the net (fig. 3). Bow-shaped rezginias appear in Baltic countries, the North Danube, and parts of the Mediterranean areas (see Map. I). Rezginias with straight rods are joined with parallel strings (fig. 4) and on the Balkan Peninsula with a net (fig. 5, 6, Map. I).

Besides Europe the *rezginia* was used in Syria<sup>13</sup> and Marocco during the harvest. They were also known in ancient Egypt, where they were used to carry ears of corn on donkeys<sup>14</sup>. In South Ethiopia women from the Banna tribe used a similar tool for carrying on the back. The tool had the shape of two oval, or one ring-shaped band with a thin net between them made of leather straps<sup>15</sup>. The relationship of the *rezginia* with *kroszni* used by the Northern Russian hunters for carrying is obvious.

### III.

**NAMES OF THE REZGINIA.** The various names of the *rezginia* reflect all of its various shapes, the methods of its production and its functions. Its form is reflected by names like *kabląki*, *kabluki* (bows, hoops) from part of the Polish-Russian borderland (Map. III) and names like *looga* etc. from South-Eastern Estonia. Some German names for *rezginia* are *Heubogen*, *Höbåga*, *Båga*, *Futterbogen*, *Laubbogen*, *Streubogen* etc. Those belong to the group which connects the function of the *rezginia* with its form. The first part of the name refers to the material carried, i. e. hay, leaves, litter, and the second means, 'hoop, bow, bail'. Connected with the function of the tool are names like *Heutrage* from the Güssing area in Southern Burgenland, *nosze*, *noszy* from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland (Polish *nosić* — to carry) and from Western Latvia especially all Kurzeme *nozis*, *noza*. There is also *kandmed* (pl. form of *kandma* — 'to carry') in Northern Estonia. Some names are connected with the production of the tool: *rezginie*, *režgine* etc. The authors agree that the name is of Baltic origin<sup>16</sup>. Lithuanian *rėgzti* means 'to plait, to weave etc.'. Latvian *režģit* — 'to tangle, to entangle'; Lithuanian *regztis* means a container for hay made of net, carriages for hay, a basket; Latvian *režģis* — 'plaitwork' etc.<sup>17</sup>. This would seem to indicate that the net joining the bows was originally of plaitwork<sup>18</sup>. Since very similar names, for example *mrežage*, appear in the Western part of the Balkan Peninsula, or the Italian-Albanian name *rete*, *rjete*, we might assume a very old, primitive, proto-Indo-European origin for this name and the tool.

Several names for the *rezginia* are used with other carrying tools. The names of *rezginia* *koszel*, *kaszels* from South-Eastern Latvia are parallel to Russian *košel* — a bag, sack, *rezginia* etc. made from bark<sup>19</sup>. The same names are used in Byelorussia, Lithuania and North-Eastern Poland for bags made from bark and hung on belts from the shoulder. The name is closely related to the panslavo-

13. B. Drobnjaković (s. footnote 6), p. 125.

14. K. Moszyński (s. footnote 5), p. 636.

15. Elisabeth Pauli, *Materielle Kultur der Banna und Hammar*. In: A. E. Jensen (ed.), *Alt-völker Süd-Athiopiens*, Stuttgart 1959, p. 349 and draw. 31—2 a, 31—2 b, 31—3.

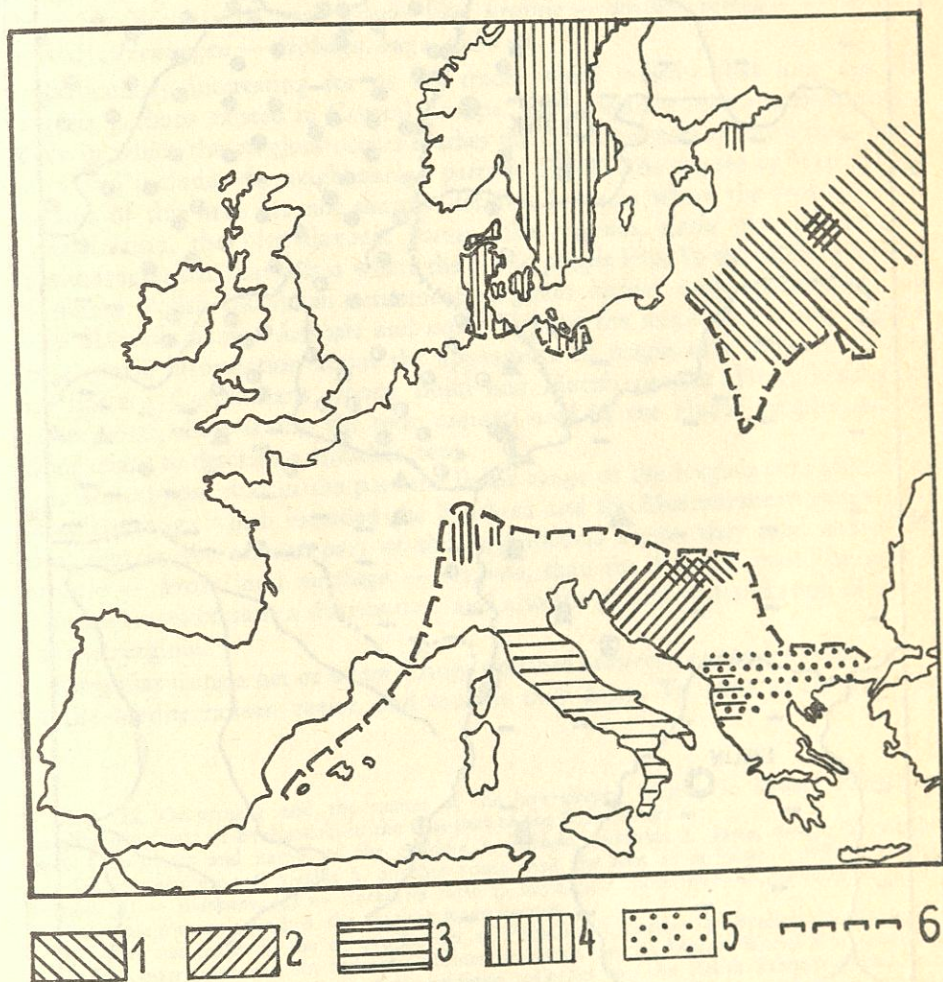
16. K. Moszyński (s. footnote 5), p. 636; A. Viires (s. footnote 8), p. 288; G. Wiegmann (s. footnote 11), p. 213 and others.

17. A. Viires (s. footnote 8), p. 288 after E. Fraenkel and M. Vasmer.

18. In museums there are still a few examples of *rezginia* with the net made of bast. Information about such *rezginias* can be found in the literature; see: N.-A. Bringéus (s. footnote 9), p. 87; A. Viires (s. footnote 8), p. 282—283 and manuscript materials by K. Moszyński.

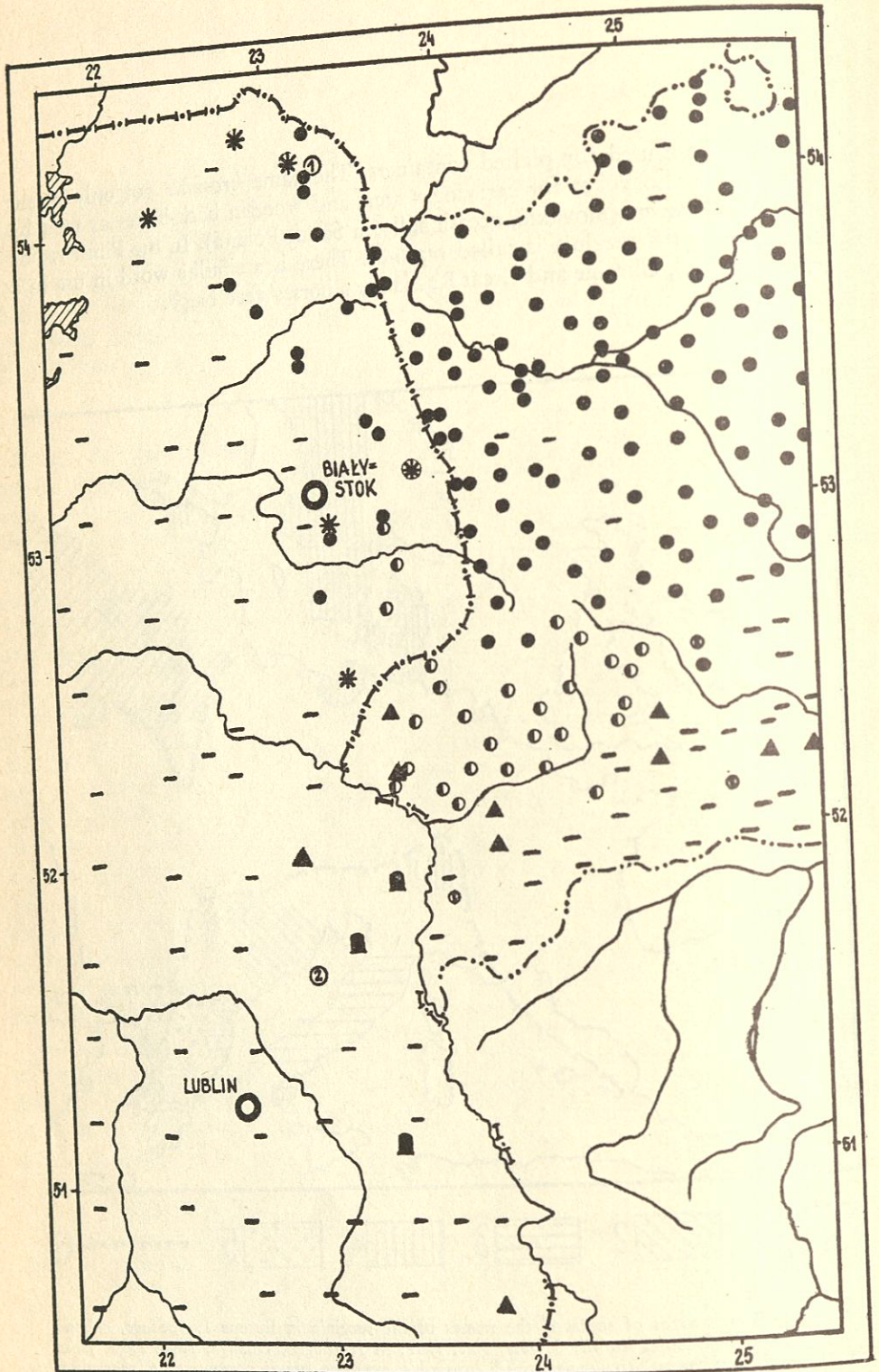
19. Franciszek Sławski, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* (Etymological Dictionary of Polish Language), vol. 2, Kraków 1958—1965, p. 539; A. Viires (s. footnote 8), p. 284.

nic word *kosz* used for plaited containers. The name *krosznie* not only means rezginia but also yokes for carrying water, and wooden back-boxes as used by wandering glaziers (Slovakia, occasionally in South Poland). In the Pinsk region (Byelorussia) the rezginia is called *rept'uch*. There is a similar word in use in a part of Poland, Ukraine and Great Russia for a horses' feed bag<sup>20</sup>.



Map II. Rough areas of some of the names of the rezginia in Europe 1. *mreżage, reżgine, rezwiny* etc.; 2. *krośnje, krośni*; 3. *rete, retë, rjete*; 4. *Heubogen, Hëbäga, bäga, buga, puka, Futterbogen, Laubbogen, Streubogen* etc.; 5. *vrzòbla, verzome, vrzmi, vrzum* etc.; 6. generalised areas of the occurrence of the rezginia (see Map I).

20. F. Sławski (s. footnote 19), vol. 3, Kraków 1966—1969, p. 88—89.



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## IV.

SCATTERED DISTRIBUTION OF THE REZGINIA. The European rezginia occurs in two rather separate and closed areas creating a scattered Baltic and Mediterranean distribution. This fact can be proved by analysis of the map of forms and names for the rezginia. The bow-shaped rezginia appears in the Northern, Alpine parts of the Mediterranean distribution and is the only form to appear in the Baltic regions. Areas where the variety of names occur follow this geographical pattern (Map II). Both areas repeat names like: *krošnje* — *krošni*; *mrežage* — *režgine*, *rezwiny*; *Heubogen* — *Höbäga*, *buga*, *puka* etc.

Particularly interesting for us are traces which indicate that long ago the rezginia perhaps existed in Central Europe. The consistent North-East-European circle in which the rezginia occurs reaches the Northern part of the Pripet river-basin and includes the neighbouring parts of Poland. As we see in Map III the borders of this area are not sharply defined. In areas where the tool occurs in concentration, the Non-slavonic names, like *rezginia*, *rjeski* etc. predominate. It is characteristic that this is where the Slavic people live. To the south in an area of mixed Polish-Ukrainian settlement rezginiacs appear only sporadically and have Slavonic names: *kablaki* and *nosze*. Beyond the scope of this map there is some sparse information about the appearance of rezginiacs in Western Podole, the Eastern Carpathians among Bojki and Huculi peoples. Here, besides the name: *noszi*, there is also the term *szaragli* used by the Huculi peoples and the Hungarians to describe a stretcher, too.

If we suppose that in the past the Baltic range of the rezginia was part of an complete range which included the Southern and the Mediterranean ranges, and also, that in the eastern part of this hypothetical region they used names like *krošnje* — *krošni* and *mrežage* — *rezginiacs*, than the Map III could be said to indicate traces of such a distribution, and also the process of slavization of names for the rezginia.

Rezginiacs using a net or a few strings stretched between two straight rods appear in the Mediterranean region and are the only form. To some extent Estonian

Map III. Occurrence and the names of the bow-shaped rezginia in Eastern Poland and neighbouring part of Byelorussia in the first part of the 20th century.

A. Occurrence and names of the rezginia 1. *kablaki*, *kabluki*; 2. *nosze*, *noszy*; 3. *rezginiacs*, *rezgini*, *rezginy* etc.; 4. *rjeski*; 5. another name with the root as in items 3 and 4; 6. other names: (1) — *wantuch*, (2) — *siatka na siano* (a haynet); 7. occurrence of the rezginia noticed but its name not registered; 8. the rezginia is not known.

B. Other designates 9. the eastern border of Poland; 10. borders of Byelorussian Republic<sup>1</sup>. On the map there are not indicated influences caused by the Second World War migration. The map is worked out including the evidence collected by: the Polish Ethnographical Atlas Study in 1960—1963 (J. Gajek enquiry sheet, s. footnote 11, p. 72). K. Moszyński — manuscript materials from 1924—1926, the author in 1973. On the Byelorussian part materials are taken from the above mentioned map of Čabiaruk.

1. The Northern border of the Byelorussian Republic and Lithuanian Republic is at the same time the language and national border between Byelorussians and Lithuanians in the 20th century.

rezginias are slightly similar. They are sometimes slightly bent and connected with a net or with a pair of strings (fig. 2). It is, therefore, tempting to suppose that the rezginia with straight (or almost straight) rods, which appears on the peripheries of Europe, is older than the bow-shaped ones. This form is connected with the peripheral distribution and also with the more primitive forms. The strenght of this conclusion is weakened, however, by the fact that in ancient Egypt the bow-shaped rezginia is known to have been used. As also mentioned already, the tools from Southern Ethiopia and from Northern Greater Russia are close, in their forms, to the bow-shaped rezginia. So then perhaps the bow-shaped rezginias are older than those with straight rods.

## V.

SUMMARY. It seems an indisputable fact, that the rezginia is a very old folk-culture product, for the following reasons:

- a) The product is typically residual; both the name of the tool and the tool itself have a scattered Baltic and Mediterranean distribution.
- b) It is a very simple construction originating from strings or even from plaited willow loops and nets for carrying things on the back.

Nowadays the rezginia is used mainly for carrying feeding stuffs or bedding for cattle in areas in which cattle breeding is of less importance than agriculture. However, where the shepherding or pastoral life predominates in the Alps and Carpathians, the rezginia is generally unknown. In many regions in Europe, especially in region of deciduous forest, hay farming is a quite recent development. If we compare this fact with the antiquity of the rezginia it becomes a very plausible assumption that we are dealing with an ancient farming tool used previously for carrying the cut corn ears. As farming advanced, it so happened, that instead of cutting only corn ears the entire stalks were harvested, and in cattle-breeding there developed the system: of winter pasturage of cattle in deciduous forests. Then, for hay-farming, the rezginia, having lost its purpose in arable farming became a typical tool for the transport of hay, leaves and bedding.

21. B. Drobnjaković (s. footnote 6), fig. 4.

22. J. G. D. Clark, *Prehistoric Europe. The Economic Basis*. London 1952, p. 119; "oxen (...) benefited from the leaves and branches of foliaceous trees, notably of the elm and the lime, for winter fodder, and this applied with especial force to the period before hay-making was developed during the Early Iron Age". Further down on p. 125: "The harvesting of hay on an extensive scale, symbolized by the appearance of the balanced iron sickle and, during the Roman Iron Age, of the scythe, dates from the closing stages of the prehistoric period". On pages 109—111 the author writes about prehistoric harvesting based on cutting corn ears only. K. Moszyński (s. footnote 5), p. 120—121 has given several examples which can testify to the fact that only in the 19th century here and there in Europe "for ex. in some distant parts of Lithuania, in winter cattle had to do without hay and straw, grazing all days in forests ... for instance, not long ago in some corners of Podlasie, in the Dawidgródek area, some farmers fed their cattle this way all winter long". Further (p. 206) the author writes about "an ancient way of cutting corn ears only — which is an older way than the contemporary custom (i. e. cutting whole corn stalks together with corn ears — Z. Kłodnicki) and it still exists here and there in Europe (for ex. in the Alessio area, Albania)" (tr. Z. Kłodnicki).