

[<-BACK TO INDEX](#)

# THE HORNS AND THE SPIRAL

Distribution, structure, functions and origin of a Eurasian children's rhyme about snails  
by Giovanni Grosskopf [www.GKweb.it](http://www.GKweb.it)

## 1 - INTRODUCTION

When I was a little baby, they taught me a children's rhyme, to be sung when one was seeing a snail. It was asking the snail to put its horns out, threatening the animal in case it wouldn't obey. Many years later I discovered that, in hundreds of variants coming from all Europe, the snail is not only threatened if it doesn't obey the request, but also rewarded if it extracts its horns, and that great advantages are expected from its gesture: the arrival of good weather, help in case of illness, the possibility to have some good food again, or to have drinkable water, or new garments. Anyway, when I was a child I ignored all this: I was just chanting the rhyme, softly, staring at the little animal. The music was incantatory, hypnotic, and it exerted a special fascination, which will be hardly forgotten. I did not forget it, actually: now, as an adult, I want to try to investigate the origin of this children's rhyme, its nature, its mystery. Far from being a shallow childish pastime, this rhyme is deeply rooted into a very ancient past and has to do with an unsuspected ritual, the memory and awareness of which have now been lost.

A research has therefore been started, using many strategies: personal reports, requests made to friends and acquaintances, contacts with scholars of ethnology and linguistics, very deep searches through the Internet, bibliographical researches, the study of essays and papers, both modern and ancient ones, in order to find all the materials that have been possible to collect about this kind of children's rhyme, all the possible existing versions that could be traced, all the variants, any news about them: place of origin, function, context, way of singing them or dancing on them, gestures or rites connected to them.

The most innovative research means has been the opening of a public discussion on the natural science forum [www.naturamediterraneo.com](http://www.naturamediterraneo.com), attended by a huge number of people who study the nature (mainly Italians, but not only them): in this way, anybody had and still has the possibility to bring his contribute to the research, to write the versions he or she knows, to report interesting materials.

Thus, the amount of data to be studied has really become very remarkable.

What follows is the story of this research.

The complete materials concerning this fascinating adventure are published here:

<http://www.GKweb.it/spiral/>

If you want to contact me directly to discuss this research, to make suggestions or requests or to report any new version of a traditional children's rhyme about snails that you may know, please send a mail to [studiomusica2004@gmail.com](mailto:studiomusica2004@gmail.com)

This is the aforementioned forum, to which anybody can still contribute now, by registering and entering it (at no cost):

[http://www.naturamediterraneo.com/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC\\_ID=90109](http://www.naturamediterraneo.com/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=90109)

Each forum user must choose a nickname: my own is "Forest", because I love to walk in the forests.

This is the great database with all the versions found so far:

<http://www.GKweb.it/filachio/databaseenglish.pdf>

The rhyme I used to chant when I was a little baby is No. 7 in this database.

If you want to follow me in this journey, my suggestion is to start from here:

<http://www.GKweb.it/filachio/listenglish.html>

and to follow any development that will be presented to you, one step after another.

Also the comment annotations, included in the database beside each version of the rhyme, will have a particular importance and we cannot but recommend to give them an adequate, or even more, a particularly relevant role when reading this research, since they will make you understand the vastness and depth of all the problems related to our children's rhyme, to its nature, origin and diffusion.

At the end, one will return to that baby, who, as an unaware heir of an extremely long and widespread tradition, like hundreds or thousands children before him, was subject to the fascination of the things that have meaning and depth, because they are linked to our human nature, to the way we, human beings, are, since the remotest ages.

Because this is *our* story.

*This research comes legitimately only from the websites [www.GKweb.it](http://www.GKweb.it) and [www.naturamediterraneo.com](http://www.naturamediterraneo.com).*

*Do not publish and do not use in public this research, nor whatsoever materials connected to it, without the explicit written permission of the administrators of those websites.*

[<-BACK TO INDEX](#)