

## **Gypsies. History and music**

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### **Abstract:**

Gypsies in their migration, worldwide have integrated among the countries in which they settled, keeping their nomadic traditions for centuries. One can say that music makes an integral part of their lives. This study is presenting shortly their history in Romania, and their integrative evolution in our society, emphasizing the role music has had in their communitarian life. If through their condition of slavery, gypsies were called to entertain the people, today they are implied in many forms of the modern society. The gypsies' profession of fiddler is in a period of decline today, but very interesting, lăutaria has had a very important role in preserving the national ethos, folklore and songs.

### **Keywords:**

tradition, music, psaltic, authentic, promotion, singing.

### **Introduction. Gypsies? A nation without a country! A nation inside other nations**

In their migration, gypsies around the world have integrated into the countries where they have settled, keeping for centuries their "nomadism" and their habits. Chronicles of all time characterized them and called them gypsies.

In our country the documents speak about the appearance of the gypsies around 1241 (the Tatar invasion). Early acts of the times in the Romanian Principalities speak about the gypsy servants of the princely, boyars and monasteries, as well as their traditions, beliefs and crafts. Today, the Church has a major role in

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persuading the gypsies to practice the Orthodox faith through its extensive pastorship, catechization and singing.

### **Gypsies. A historical nation- faith and folklore**

What we know about gypsies today is due to the linguists at first, who in the end of the 18th century discovered the similarity between the language spoken by the gypsies and Sanskrit. The language of gypsies, also called ROMANES, belongs to the neo-Indian languages and is related to several languages spoken in the Indian subcontinent. Although the language of the gypsies has common elements with many of the spoken Indian languages, it has not been possible to determine the origin area of the Romanes speakers. Until today neither ethnologists nor anthropologists have been able to answer the question: what ethnic group their gypsies and their ancestors belong to. Nomadic life exists today in India, population movements are the same. It is not clear where the gypsies started from to the European continent, and the causes of leaving the Asian continent are unknown.

The gypsy dialects encountered throughout the world are due to the coexistence and influence of the peoples they came in contact with: Persians, Armenians, Slavs, Romanians, Englishmen, Poles, etc. It is generally accepted that gypsies migrated to Europe between the 9th and 14th centuries on several occasions. In Persia they arrived in the 9th century, being named by the Persian chronicles of LULI, and in the 10th century with the Arabic name ZOTT.

During the Byzantine Empire they appeared in the 19th century (the appearance of which is surely related to the appearance of the Seljuqian Turks) and were named ATHINGANOS or ATSINGANOS, from the name of an heretical sect, this name will be defining and definitive. A recent study shows that the earliest attestation of the gypsies is found in a letter from Constantinople Patriarch Grigorios II Kiprios (1283-1289), where it is spoken about the Egyptians and Athiganos.<sup>1</sup>

From Asia Minor the gypsies entered Thrace (an area inhabited by many nations: Hittites, Frigians, and Lidians). The Persians conquered Lidia, and the Persian Turks brought with them this population of Indian gypsies. Also during this period they entered also in the Balkans at Serbs, Bulgarians and Romanians, going to west. In Serbs we find under the name of CIGARIES, in the Bulgarians named AGUPOVY KLETI, which means the Egyptian hill-referring to the gypsies.

In the fifteenth century they appeared in the Roman-German Empire where they were called Tartars. In Switzerland they were called pagans, in England and Spain GYPSY, and in the Scandinavian countries they were called Tartars. All

<sup>1</sup> Viorel Achim, *Țigani în Istoria României*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1988, p. 17.

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these names show that they are the same gypsies who called themselves ROMI, name related to their stay in the Byzantine Empire. Today there is no country in Europe that has no Gypsies.

### Content

On the Romanian territory, the first information about gypsies dates from 1385, in an act issued by the prince of Wallachia, who donated to Tismana Monastery the possessions belonging to Vodica, including 40 gypsy dwellings<sup>2</sup>. In Moldavia the gypsies are remembered during the time of Alexandrucel Bun, who gave Bistrita Monastery 31 gypsy dwellings and 12 huts of Tatars<sup>3</sup>. In Transylvania the presence of the gypsies dates from 1400. Nicolae Iorga puts the gypsies in our presence in connection with the Mongol invasion from 1241<sup>4</sup>. This view was shared by other historians, argued by the coincidence of the Mongol invasion with the documentary attestation of the gypsies in the chancellery of the times.

About the slavery of the Gypsies it can be said that they are attested as slaves since the very first springs. Next to them are the Tartars, also as slaves, and they became slaves because of the war breaks. Gypsy slaves were divided into princes, monasteries, and boyars.<sup>5</sup> Initially, it seems that the only gypsy owner was the ruler. Gypsy slaves brought him considerable income. The slaves of the monasteries come from donations made by rulers and boyars. The number of this category has increased due to the marriage of the free people with them. The slaves on the estates of the boyars come from princely gives, buy inheritances, prey of war, etc. These categories of gypsies, depending on their belonging to their feudal masters, do not say at all their occupations.

Among their occupations we mention: the rudars, the bricklayers, the goldsmiths, the bears (the gypsy bears were renowned for their craftsmanship in the field of music), the linguists, the boys<sup>6</sup>, the blacksmiths, the bricklayers, etc.<sup>7</sup> Initially, they were exempt from the state duties but afterwards, about the first half of the 17th century, the slaves of monasteries and boyars are obliged to pay some taxes to the state. For these taxes, which were to be gathered as for the other

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<sup>2</sup> Documenta Romaniae Historica, B. Țara Românească, București, 1966, p.19-22.

<sup>3</sup> D.R.H. B., *Moldova*, I, București 1975, p. 124-126.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Anciens documents de droit roumain*, Paris-Bucarest, 1930, p.22-23.

<sup>5</sup> Viorel Achim, *Op. cit.*, p. 34-35.

<sup>6</sup> In the categories of Gypsies listed, the Gypsies (vatrasii) were the most. They were boyars or monasteries of Gypsies bound by a certain concern. Vatrasi had almost all gypsy traits, had become sedentary. Among them were the craftsmen who formed a separate group, trade or profession reserved for a long time only to the Gypsies.

<sup>7</sup> Viorel Achim, *Op. cit.* p. 36.

problems that arose among the gypsies, they were made from among themselves: the south, the fortress, the voivodes (in Transylvania) and the eighteenth century bulimas to oversee all their activities.<sup>8</sup>

Generally the gypsies preserved their occupations until today, the craft being inherited from father to son, generation by generation, craft that remained within the same nation<sup>9</sup>. Among the preferred crafts of the gypsies in the past and today we specifically mention metalworking. In the blacksmith are good agricultural implementers, in pottery and boilers are good armasters, goldsmiths (during Ceausescu's time were famous knights) etc. Today, there are real specialists in making eaves for homes, brass bells, aluminum pans and other household and household items.

Regarding the way of life of the gypsies compared to that of the Romanian population, this differs. The gypsy and gypsy obligations are different from those of free peasants. Gypsies had a lower status, being considered as living outside society. The world was bypassing them until long ago, not greeting them, showing them no respect, and even mocking them. In the extra-Carpathian countries, although they were Christians, they were not buried together with the others.<sup>10</sup>

Wandering through the country with their various crafts sometimes made them also practice various assassins, begging and vagabondage. Through their way of life and the miserable conditions in which they lived, they contributed to the spread of the plague.

Passing the time, the gap between the rural population (peasants) and the gypsies has diminished. From the 16th century in the Romanian Lands, the peasants were tied to the gully, unable to move from one side to the other without the consent of the landowner, the master even being able to sell them. So the enslaved peasantry was in a state close to that of slavery.

For the Gypsies in Transylvania, on October 9, 1783, Emperor Joseph II published an ordinance consisting of 59 points governing the status of the gypsies in Hungary and Transylvania. In one of these points he said that the number of the musician gypsies should be limited as much as possible. Joseph II wanted very much to take care of gypsies. Perhaps for their malleable nature tried to massively convert them to Catholicism and Magyarization (in Transylvania). The

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<sup>8</sup> At the head of the gypsy group was an authoritarian Gypsy chosen by the gypsy community group after a particular ritual. The function of these "bosses" was alive without being hereditary. His appointment was made by the prince of the country (in the case of the Romanian principalities) and had the duty to collect, print others, dajdia, judge the misunderstandings between the Gypsies, etc., being exempt from any obligations towards the state.

<sup>9</sup> I. Chelcea, *Țigani din România. Monografie etnografică*, București, 1944, p. 102

<sup>10</sup> D. Dan, *Țigani din Bucovina*, Cernăuți, 1892, p. 17.

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Russians, for example, completely rusified them, built theaters for them (in their own language). They also built a Conservatory where gypsies learn in their native language.<sup>11</sup>

Gypsy mourners are mentioned by foreigners who visited the Romanian Principalities. They are even struck by the mixture of picturesque and barbaric traditions and their songs. Gypsies did not know musical notes, they did not have a school, but they had talent and passion. The great boyars owned a lot of gypsy servants, chefs, bakeries, some boyars even had folks. Filip Etves talks about the description of a group of gypsies at a wedding singing “one singing at the gordon, another violin ... it was really good to get the sounds of an orchestra<sup>12</sup>.” One thing to note is that the gypsies, although they did not attend music or dance schools, they sing and dance wonderful.

As far as the gypsies' belief is concerned, we could say that they quickly adopt any faith, faster than any other. Leaving India they have lost the sense of belonging to any particular religion. We can say about them that they are faithful and pray. The Faith of gypsies? In their migration, the gypsies made a stop in Greece where they converted to form the so-called Samaritan sect in Phrygia and Lidia (the European part of Turkey today)<sup>13</sup>. In our country, there is no document attesting to attempts to attract Orthodox Christian religion. Even if they held a boyar or ruler, they were considered both Orthodox. Interestingly, these Gypsies coming from India did not bring a well-formed religion with them, but they had a strong religious spirit but no dogma. And today there are many Orthodox Christian gypsies, but not practitioners (I refer here to gypsy-language speakers), because “the gypsies of the house” are mostly Orthodox Christians, even practitioners many of them. In a very special way, a beneficial Orthodox religious influence is exercised over the monastic servants<sup>14</sup>. The Gypsies even built a monastery in Bucharest, Zlătari Monastery. Today gypsies have adopted the religions of the peoples in whose midst they live, but the misfortune is that the place of the church was changed with the markets. They imprinted with rebellious behavior, a shaky, ragged yoke, a tilt to a noisy and disrespectful speech, while the church was gentle and earnestly impressed. The analysis of this cause is necessary and the church needs to get involved more. The gypsies have chosen the faith of the country they live in, but they should also have one representative in the central church organizations. The need for a human soul of spiritual counsel is without racial limita-

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<sup>11</sup> Viorel Achim, *Op. cit.* pp.85-94.

<sup>12</sup> Filip Etveş, *Rromii un neam indian*, Deva, Editura Destin, 2000, p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> Nicoleta Maria Leuche, *Ghid complet-Turcia*, Oradea, Editura Aquilla, 1993, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

tions ... Romanians must not look at the gypsies with evil. There are many cases of pastoralism when they did not know what to do at the funerals of the gypsies.

I think that the priest has the most important role here to intervene in the gypsy families and to urge those with musical qualities to specialty schools, those who are inclined towards the spiritual ones to become priest's helps or even priests. Gypsies should be encouraged to search the church more often not only at Easter and Christmas, or for the memories of those who fall asleep.

Gradually, the life of the gypsies went on a normal path, children enrolled in schools, etc. After the Second World War, the first generations of gypsies were formed. If in the state of slavery gypsy musicians were singing to entertain the boyars, also today, through their music, they enter the environment of different people, they know how to adapt to the demands of the time. Manelele are mostly played by gypsies. The foreigners who visited the Romanian Lands have especially appreciated the musicians of the time. The description of the instrumental virtuosos singers begins with Grigoraș Dinicu, Petrică Moțoi, Fănică Luca, Barbu Lăutaru, Cristache Cioloc, Nicolae Buică, Sava Padureanu, Nica Iancu and others.

The 19th century brought about the eradication of the gypsies' slavery. During this time, the great Hungarian musician Franz Liszt gave a concert in the house of the treasurer Alecu Balș from Iasi. At this concert was also present the celebrated instrumentalist Barbu Lăutaru with the tarmac "Romano"<sup>15</sup>. Nowadays, the profession of fiddler in the gypsies is in a period of decline, as well as many of the gypsy traditions. Radio and television competition, as well as other modern techniques, have led to the decrease of gypsy fiddlers. Moreover, the gypsies lose the monopoly they have in their professions. Since this is being taught in schools, it was also embraced by Romanians.<sup>16</sup> What I notice is the fact that the higher gypsies get, they lose their identity. They have their cultural independence in their rustic, primitive stage.

The Romanian folklore sung by gypsies has not gone unnoticed by those who have visited the Romanian Lands, nor by the great artists who have concerted through the Romanian cities. In front of so many social and national oppressions, fiddler musicians have played vocal and instrumental music in front of people in all social environments.<sup>17</sup> The fiddler musicians became owners and transmitters of urban and rural folklore. George Enescu thanked them and told them: "to thank

<sup>15</sup> E. Filip, *Op. cit.*, p. 92-93.

<sup>16</sup> O. Bârlea, „*Conservatorul*” de lăutari din Rociu, în: *Societatea românească*, IV, 1942, p. 471-475.

<sup>17</sup> Petre Brâncuși, *Muzica românească și marile ei primeniri*, Vol. II, București, Editura Muzicală, 1980, p. 115.

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the fiddlers for the fact that only they have unleashed the treasure we just appreciate, the folk song, they passed it and kept it from father to son with that holy care what they have for what they have the most expensive, the song “.<sup>18</sup> Fiddler musicians were portrayed in painting in the first half of the 19th century by Carol Popp of Szathmary and others.

As other fiddlers, BarbuLăutaru becomes a symbol, an inexhaustible holder of artistic values in front of which many legends were woven, some even with romantic nuances. The one who dealt very much with gypsy folklore was TeodorBurada. The Parisian newspaper “La vie Parisienne” from 1874, translated by Burada, described BarbuLăutaru and his band in Iasi at the famous meeting with Franz Liszt: “They wore big, big antes, strapped to the chest, with leather hats lamb and lambskins, long hair, and their captain, Barbu, was old with a white beard and his eyes shone with intelligence ... “At a sign of VasileAlecsandriBarbu and his waiters began to sing in the instruments a national march, then other and other songs. After that Barbu deepened into a deep gypsy song that Liszt listened very carefully, then the musician sat down at the clavir and began singing a Hungarian song. Barbu listens very carefully, then reproduces his song entirely. The way he sang made Liszt say: God made you an artist, and you are bigger than me. <sup>19</sup>” The characteristics of the songs interpreted by the gypsies can be found in the descriptions made by George Breazu.<sup>20</sup> Under the influence of Enlightenment comes the moment when European music is highly sought after. The interest in this has led to the establishment of specialized institutions. The taste for Western-European music has led many young Romanians to take courage in professional music studying, leaving secondary music. That’s how it happened in the nineteenth century coexists cult music, the fiddler folk and the professional instrumental ensemble, described by Nicolae Iorga<sup>21</sup>, by Nicolae Filimon. <sup>22</sup>Little by little the fiddler music was left in favor of piano music and harmonic music.

If there is much talk about gypsy folklore, we cannot say the same about their religious song. The faith of the gypsies at the beginning was similar to that of the Medoperswho believed in the two principles of good and evil. And so they believe now: in DEI (God) and in beng (Satan), we often meet in the language

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<sup>18</sup> Iosif Vulcan, *Revista Familia*, Pesta 1, nr. 10, 5 sept., 1865, pp. 117-118; apud Petru Brâncuși, *Op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>19</sup> Gheorghe Ciobanu, în: *Studii de etnomuzicologie și bizantinologie*, Editura Muzicală, București, 1974, p. 202.

<sup>20</sup> George Breazu, *Lăutarii*, în: *Pagini din istoria muzicii românești*, vol.I, București, Editura Muzicală, 1966, p.130.

<sup>21</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Călători, ambasadori și misionari în Țările române*, București, 1926, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Nicolae Filimon, *Ciocoii vechi și noi*, București, Editura Eminescu, 1967, p. 115.

of the gypsies the words: Devla, Devla, that is, Lord, Lord or “letobenga” - go to Satan. Even though not all of us are practitioners of the Orthodox faith, they still have in their own language prayers, they are asking for God’s help. In such cases, these prayers are invoking: “O Del and Baro,” “God is great,” or “Devlana more mundar ma” (God do not kill me) or “Ajutil to Del” , “Delo Del ma but” (to give the Lord more) etc.

Superstition is part of the gypsies’ lives. In order to attract their faith to France in 1966, the organization entitled “The Gospel Mission of the gypsies” was set up, it was initiated by a group of Pentecostals who managed to bring together a large number of gypsies; similarly happened to us.

A great musician is Anton Pann(1796-1854) - a writer and gypsy writer, on his real name Antonie Pantaleon Petroveanu, the son of Pantaleon Petrov and Tomaidei, born in Sliven (Bulgaria), in a family of calderari gypsies, was one of the founders of the Romanian popular cult literature. From the writings of Pann, the works of church music were first printed. Anton Pann has contributed a lot to the romance of singing songs and even arranging and grinding texts.

Ion Budai-Deleanu is also a gypsy writer, the son of a priest from Hunedoara, he studied theology in Vienna (where he was a psalt at St. Barbara Church during his studies),<sup>23</sup> but he was not a priest but magistrate at Lvov. He was contemporary with Sincai and Petru Maior, who also had gypsy roots. He also writes some poetic compositions, of which the most famous is Tiganiada. Tiganiada or Gypsy Camp, an heroic-comic-satirical poem, composed from 12 songs by the master singer Leonachi Dianeu. With Ioan Budai-Deleanu’s Tiganiada, the linguistic experiment of the Transylvanian School reaches its peak. What is remarkable in Tiganiada is that it makes a praise to the singer and gypsy fiddler.

## End

Today there is the Holy Mass translated into the gypsy language, more than that, it is even written on the psaltic notes sung in melodic variants already known (and even sounds good).

A large number of gypsies have turned to neo-Protestant Christian faiths (Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, Christians after the Gospel, etc.) due to the intragroup solidarity of these religious communities and to the fact that the gypsies are ethnically found within these cults: the religious music includes elements from the traditional gypsy music, many of the most important elements of the traditional gypsy identity are encouraged, such as the traditional dress, the rules

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<sup>23</sup> I. B. Deleanu, *Țiganiada – Notiță biografică și bibliografică*, Ediție îngrijită de Ion Pilat, București, Editura „Cartea Românească”, 2011, p. 7.



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of purity and morality, the respect of the age and status hierarchy, the values of honor and of faith.<sup>24</sup>

The Gypsies especially worship the Virgin Mary. The most important feast of gypsies calderari is the day of Holy Mother Little (September 8)<sup>25</sup>. It is very important, at gypsies, the faith in fate, equivalent to luck.

It is worth noting that in churches where there are only gypsies, they are full of enthusiasm in singing, especially in neoprotestance houses, especially in Pentecostals.

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.oportunitatiegale.ro/pdf\\_files/Contributia%20romilor%20la%20patrimoniul%20comun.pdf](http://www.oportunitatiegale.ro/pdf_files/Contributia%20romilor%20la%20patrimoniul%20comun.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> The special faith of the Roma in the Virgin Mary can have an additional explanation: putting Her in relationship with the mother goddess venerated by the pre-Aryans in India. Moreover, in the same spirit of the divinization of the sacred mother, the Roma have a special veneration for the holy, higher than for the saints, as demonstrated by two other great pilgrimages: the Roma of the West of Europe at Saint Sara (France - Camargue, 24 May-25) and that of the Orthodox Roma in Romania (but not only Orthodox and not only in Romania) at the relics of St. Paraschiv.