

Anna G. PIOTROWSKA
(Institute of Musicology, Jagiellonian University
Krakow Poland)

Saved by their music. Gypsies in the 18th century Europe

The paper dedicated to the situation of the so called Gypsy people in the 18th century Europe concentrates on the relations between Gypsy and non Gypsy communities by presenting various, but predominantly negative, approaches towards these people. The paper is divided into four parts: (1) the beginning of academic interest in Gypsies, (2) the political situation of Hungarian and Spanish Gypsies in the 18th century, (3) social interactions between Gypsies and non Gypsies (gadje) illustrated by the Polish situation, (4) Gypsy music in the 18th century.

key words: (Spanish and Hungarian) Gypsy, 18th century Gypsy music, Anty Gypsyism

Knowledge on Gypsies in general and on Gypsy music especially was very scant in Europe before the end of the 18th century – it did not extend far beyond the boundaries of legends and common beliefs propagated by chronicles or stage plays. However, in the late 18th century this situation was about to change with the sudden spurt of academic interest in the Gypsy topic. Yet, I will claim in this paper that the stereotypes and the oppressive politics applied toward Gypsy people in Europe strengthened in the 18th century and were possibly represented to the best extend in that period, both politically and socially. The 19th century, somehow romanticised, vision of the Gypsies contributed much to the slight change in the common attitude towards this ethnicity; still the 18th century deserves in my opinion much more attention than it has been so far awarded, on the basis of strong paradoxes typical for this period. On one hand it was marked by the radical political actions undertaken against Gypsies in Europe and consequently the social dislike towards them took extreme forms, but on the other hand the interest in studying these people was awoken. Finally, it was in the 18th century (although the previous era also contributed sufficiently) when the stereotype of a talented, preferably self – taught Gypsy musician was established. Music by Gypsy people soon became not only their trade mark but also helped to counter – balance the overall negative picture dominating in the whole Europe and the Gypsy musicians became respected and often hired

musicians, in towns and in aristocratic courts alike, although perhaps less popular in villages.

In order to prove the above mentioned theses the paper concentrates on the following issues. 1) the beginning of academic interest in Gypsies; 2) the political situation of Hungarian Gypsies and Spanish Gypsies in the 18th century; 3) social interactions between Gypsies and non-Gypsies (gadje) in the 18th century – illustrated by a Polish case; 4) Gypsy music in the 18th century

1. In the mid –18th century, the century enthralled with the possibilities of providing scientifically verifiable knowledge on various topics by the means of – among others – encyclopaedias' entries, the Gypsy in an academic discourse appeared commonly portrayed as vagabonds, good-for-nothings or even criminals. In the monumental work entitled *Universal Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Kuenste* from 1749 (brought about by Johann Zedler) it was already assured that Gypsies were godless and wicked people.¹ In his *Encyclopédie* published between 1751-1772 Denis Diderot defined them as musically talented vagabonds willingly dancing, singing and telling the fortune.² Supposedly, around the same time (mid 18th century) European intellectuals discovered that Gypsy people were ascendants from India. Istvan Vali, a Hungarian pastor, while staying at the University of Leiden was struck by the fact that some of the students studying there, who were coming from the island Malabar, spoke a language similar to the one he had heard among Gypsies. Following this discovery, in the years 1775-1776 a series of over forty articles in German *Wiener Anzeigen* appeared describing Gypsy life. The newspaper was in fact a Hungarian one and the author of these articles was a Hungarian pastor Samuel Augustini ab Hortis.³ In his writings he drew attention to a very important fact that there was no single, unified Gypsy nation, but many different groups classified under a common label Gypsy. Johann Rüdiger – a German scholar – continued the investigation into Gypsies, concentrating much on their Indian connections. He published in 1782 the book entitled *Von der Sprache und Herkunft der Zigeuner aus Indien*. The most influential, however, book of the late 18th century turned out to be a synthesising work by Heinrich Grellmann from the Goettingen University.⁴ Not only did he accumulate the findings of the previous authors, but he also approached his project in a very systematic way. He published his book entitled *Zigeuner* in 1783, and because of the merits of the book, as well as a result of the growing interest in the topic, it was soon translated into English, Dutch and French. Most European scholars became acquainted with the book and direct and indirect quotations from it as well as references were to be found in

¹ See: <http://mdz10.bib-bvb.de/~zedler/zedler2007/index.html>. Accessed on 29. 8. 2008.

² See an on-line version in English at <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>.

³ Angus FRASER, *The Gypsies*, Oxford 2005, p. 190.

⁴ Istvan KEMENY, *Linguistic Groups and Usage among the Hungarian Gypsies/Roma*, in: Ernő Kallai (ed.), *The Gypsies/The Roma in Hungarian Society*, Budapest 2002, p. 39.

many books published on Gypsies in early 19th century.⁵ Grellmann reflected on the multitude of Gypsies in Europe, places they inhabited, on their language and customs. He also academically acknowledged the popular beliefs concerning Gypsies, such as attributed to them cannibalism and the depravity, as well as frivolous sexual behaviour on the side of women. Although untrue, they perpetuated in the society and found their way into scholarly works strengthening the dislike towards Gypsies. However, Grellmann strongly argued that Gypsies should not be banished from a social life as they were perfectly capable of being rehabilitated. What is more, this view was shared by a majority of other authors claiming that such a big population as that of Gypsies might be useful for any country hosting them, providing their capabilities were exploited appropriately. Also in the literary field Gypsies were gaining more and more attention, and were perceived in a distorted, yet rather positive light. In 1749 Henry Fielding wrote *Tom Jones* quite favourably depicting Gypsies. Among other trail – blazers in the field of literary who referred to the Gypsy was the German poet Wolfgang Goethe who set an example in 1773 in his *Goetz von Berlichingen*.

2. Political edicts issued against Gypsies in the 18th century tended to revolve around three main approaches applied towards Gypsy people: prosecution, expulsion and assimilation.

Prosecution

Political edicts aimed against Gypsies started to be issued already in the 16th century, the intensification of such legal documents across the whole Europe came, however, in the 18th century. In Bohemia it was regulated that the Gypsies' left ear was to be cut off while in Moravia it was the right one. Lodging or aiding Gypsies in a different way was subject of punishment up to six months of forced labour. In 1719 Frederic Hohenzollern decided that Gypsies should not be tolerated. The same year prince Adolph Frederic of Mecklenburg-Sterlitz ordered Gypsies aged over 25 to be flogged and banned, save more serious criminal charges could be presented.⁶ The politics was different towards children, who were to be taken from the Gypsies and handed over to Christian families responsible from now on for bringing them up as law abiding citizens. In the early 18th century beating up Gypsies was a popular form of punishing them simply for being Gypsies. Consequently, Gypsies in Frankfurt am Main and other places were flogged with rods and expelled from the premises even without any prior legal actions. Special banners informing about the beatings were mounted advertising *Zigeuner Straf* and were thought to serve as deterrents. In France according to Louis XV all

⁵ For example see Polish books on Gypsies: Ignacy DANIŁOWICZ P.P.Z., *O Cyganach wiadomość historyczna czytana na posiedzeniu publicznem cesarskiego Uniwersytetu Wileńskiego dnia 30 czerwca 1824 roku*, Wilno 1824 and Teodor NARBUTT, *Rys historyczny ludu cygańskiego*, Wilno 1830.

⁶ A. FRASER, o. c. in note 3, p. 150.

vagabonds and vagrants (meaning Gypsies) were prohibited from residence – nomadism was forbidden as well as gatherings of more than four adults in a house. Gypsy men were usually sentenced to the galleys for five years and others were either flogged or sent away. Worse days were about to come. In 1721 Emperor Karl VI ordered total genocide of Gypsies. “Heidenjachten” – so called “Gypsy Hunts” were organized to track down and exterminate Gypsies. One of such actions took place in 1728 in Gelderland. In the 1720s Prussian kings and governors of other German lands allowed even to shoot down Gypsies without legal trails, alternatively Gypsies (providing they were already adults) could be hung up. Sometimes legal edicts encouraged hunts for Gypsies, promising rewards for providing live or killed Gypsies. The old laws of cutting off ears were still in use, however, they were sharpened: in 1727 in Berne the decree no.13 stated that *“Gypsy men and women of more than fifteen years of age shall have one ear cut off the first time they are caught ... but if they are caught a second time they shall be sentenced to death.”*⁷ In 1728 the town council of Aachen passed an ordinance condemning all Gypsies to death: *“Captured Gypsies, whether they resist or not, shall be put to death immediately. However, those seized who do not resort to counter-attack shall be granted no more than a half an hour to kneel, if they so wish, beg God almighty to forgive them their sins and to prepare themselves for death.”*⁸ Throughout the 18th century torturing, beating up, banishing and other forms of persecution were not only accepted but willingly used towards Gypsies in all Europe.

Expulsion

Additionally, Gypsies in the 18th century were often expelled and transported to the far away lands, preferably territories of colonies, e.g. in 1714 British merchants and planters asked the Privy Council for the permission to ship Gypsies to the Caribbean, avowedly to be used as slaves and one year later ten Gypsies from Scotland were deported to Virginia in America. Also in France, starting from 1719 onward, sentencing for being a Gypsy altered from sending to the galleys to the deportation to French colonies. The situation was similar in eastern parts of Europe: in 1759 Gypsies were banned from Saint Petersburg in Russia. Also the northern Europe similar actions were undertaken. In Scandinavia all Swedish laws concerning Gypsies were integrated in 1748 into one law, intending to prevent further immigration and to force Gypsies to settle.

Assimilation

Throughout the 18th century two countries with the largest number of Gypsies inhabiting their territories – Hapsburg Empire and Spain, exercised similar, and yet profoundly different in effects politics towards Gypsy people. In Hapsburg

⁷ See <http://www.geocities.com/~Patrin/timeline.htm>. Accessed on 29. 8. 2008.

⁸ Ibidem.

Empire under the lead of Maria Theresa (1740-1780), a series of decrees tried to force Gypsies to assimilate by the means of imposed sedentarism. Especially during the period between 1758 and 1773 the empress tried to apply the measures aimed at mobilizing Gypsies in Hungary (which by that time included the large parts of the area today known as Slovakia). In 1758 Maria Theresa demanded that Gypsies should settle down and thus could become the subjects to taxes. Local people were, however, rather unwilling to let Gypsies to build up houses in their neighbourhood and tried to prevent them from choosing the regions in the vicinity. It was then almost impossible for Gypsies to buy for example building materials, and this in consequence prevented them from settling down at all. In 1761 Maria Theresa came up with a new proposal – a kind of psychological tool trying to assimilate Gypsies by changing the way they were viewed among citizens. Gypsies were now supposed to be called by the name *Ujmagyar* which meant New Hungarian or were alternatively described as New Settlers.⁹ The decree also ordered Gypsies to learn some craft and to serve military service. The last order was in fact desperately needed by the state which was involved in many conflicts, including the one with Turks. However, this time army officers were again unwilling to accept Gypsies in their ranks and craftsmen usually refused to accept Gypsies as their apprentices. In 1767 Gypsies were made subjects of official jurisdiction system rather than – as it previously used to have been – their own one. They were made to register with the local authorities who were obliged to carry out a census on Gypsies. Gypsies were also prohibited to use their traditional clothes and language. Maria Theresa's last decree in the series trying to assimilate Gypsies with the rest of population aimed at erasing their ethnic identification by forbidding Gypsies to marry between themselves. Similarly in 1776 Constantin, prince of Moldavia, prohibited marriages to any Gypsy. Denying the possibility of marriages between Gypsies was thought as a means of bringing the racial identity to an end. Also Gypsy children under five were supposed to be taken to non-Gypsy families to be brought up by them. Maria Theresa's son – Joseph II continued the same line of politics extending the power of decrees to Transylvania. Not only did he sustain all the previous regulations, but he also vigorously added some new ones prohibiting in 1783 the change of names among Gypsies, restricting their freedom in trading and smithery, as well as prohibiting begging, etc.

Assimilating Gypsies was also an aim for Spanish kings, facing similar situation as in the Habsburg Empire of a big Gypsy population inhabiting their country. The king Philip IV already in the 17th century attempted to assimilate Gypsies (called in Spain Gitanos) who were sedentarized by force in settlements in specially chosen, supervised places.¹⁰ Furthermore, the use of the Romany lan-

⁹ Koos POSTMA, *Changing Prejudice in Hungary. A study on the Collapse of State Socialism and its Impact on Prejudice against Gypsies and Jews*, Groningen 1996, p. 40.

¹⁰ Bernard LEBLON, *Gypsies and Flamenco. The Emergence of the Art of Flamenco in Andalusia*, Hertfordshire 2003, pp. 22-32.

guage was prohibited, Gitano men and women were sent to separate workhouses and their children to orphanages. This policy towards Gypsies was continued and perfected in the 18th century. The whole century was marked with edicts called in Spain *pragmatics* aimed at assimilating Gypsies. In 1717 the law reinforced the already existing rules towards Gypsies from 1695. The general internment of Gypsies of 1749, the so called “Great Gypsy Round-up” proved the radicalism of the measurements undertaken in Spain. On the 20th of July that year, the day known in Spanish history as “Black Wednesday”, an estimated 9000 to 12000 Gypsies were murdered. Additionally, Gitanos were divided into good and bad ones based on inquiries and witnesses’ reports. For those considered to be bad punishment was organized in the form of public works, relentless were put to already overcrowded prisons. Those attempting an escape from jails were immediately hanged. Orphaned girls were sent to poor houses or became servants in Spanish houses. Teenage girls and wives of sentenced men with children under seven were taken custody of: educated in Christian doctrine usually worked in factories. Gypsy children were often taken by force from their parents at birth and sent to schools. The last law on Gypsies was passed in Spain in 1783 by Charles III. Spanish legislation reiterated previous orders. Gitano dress or way of life, as well as the use of their language, were forbidden. Forced settlement became compulsory within ninety days. Even the name Gitano was forbidden and removed from all official documents. Similarly as in Habsburg Empire where only New Hungarians (not Gypsies) were supposed to live, in Spain only New Castilians appeared. Additionally, restrictions on trade and place of residence of Gypsies were lifted. The punishment for failure to observe the above mentioned restrictions was branding, while repeat offenders were sentenced to death with no chance for appeal. Surprisingly, despite its limitations, the law of 1783 managed to confer some freedoms on Gypsies and was – in fact – the initial spark for further movements, actually favouring Gypsies which took place in the following years. Interestingly enough, the year of issuing the last decree coincided with the time when Grellmann published his influential book on Gypsies and when the overall change of attitude towards Gypsies was observed, partly as a result of pre – French Revolution atmosphere clearly felt in the air.

3. Social attitude towards Gypsies in the 18th century proved that the situation became more complicated than it had used to be earlier. Focusing on Polish example it is easy to notice (following the analysis of preserved documents) that

a) in the beginning of the 18th century the social attitude towards Gypsies was similar to the previous epochs: Gypsies were treated neither as scapegoats nor victims of false accusations more often than others. However, around 1730s the situation changed. As Lech Mróz suggests, it was highly improbable that the criminality among Gypsies escalated in that decade. Rather, it is suggested that because

of the special legal position Gypsy people cherished, they were paid by non-Gypsies to commit crimes.¹¹

b) the intensification of the criminal acts led to the deepening of the stereotypes and prejudices.

Ad a) The abovementioned special legal status meant that Gypsy bands remained under the protectorate of rich Polish magnates granting them considerable freedom and allowing them to sustain their internal system of organization. These meant not only privileges, but also let Gypsies to be tried within their own communities. In the 18th century Polish kings officially recognized following Gypsy leaders:

The Gypsy leader	The year of nomination	Issued by
Jan Dewaltowski	1703	August II
Banawentura Jan Wiera	1705	August II
Kazimierz Wyszomirski	1720	August II
Zulicki	?	August II
Stanisław Godziemba Nizynski	?	August II
Jakub Trzcinski	1729	August II
Franciszek Boguslawski	1731	August II
Marcin Glowacki	?	?
Jozef Gozdawa Boczkowski	1761	August III
Iwaskiewicz	?	Stanisław August Poniatowski
Jakub Znamierowski	1780	Stanisław August Poniatowski

The source: Lech MRÓZ, *Dzieje Cyganów-Romów w Rzeczypospolitej XV-XVIII*, Warszawa 2001.

Ad b) In the 18th century Poland Gypsies were accused mostly of stealing horses. In 1755 there was a case of a child kidnapping in a village Obryte. Because coincidentally the Gypsy camp stationed there at the same time it was the Gypsy women who were accused of stealing a child. Pogroms began, ending in burnings and deaths of Gypsies, despite the fact that a missing girl was soon found drowned in the river. The social anger directed towards the Gypsies soon was balanced by the literary imagination of them. In 1786 a Polish poet Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin produced a popular work entitled *Gypsies* in which Gypsies were presented in a rather positive light, especially an old Gypsy woman called Jawnuta. The effects of “discovering” Gypsies by academics and poets alike in the Western Europe affected the eastern portrayal of them as well, soon followed by the very first publi-

¹¹ Lech MRÓZ, *Dzieje Cyganów-Romów w Rzeczypospolitej XV-XVIII*, Warszawa 2001, p. 255.

cations on that topic (early 19th century in Vilnius). The overall perception of Gypsies in the society was, however, set and remained unchanged in the course of the 19th century. The only exception in the rule were the Gypsy musicians treated with respect or – at least – without hostility. This positive tradition stemmed – in my opinion – directly from the 18th century.

4. The Gypsy ensembles dominated especially the 18th century Hungarian musical life. Gypsy bands were part and parcel of Hungarian gentry lifestyle. They provided music for a number of social occasions, especially gatherings, meetings and balls. Sometimes pompously called orchestras they consisted of a few players, up to ten – eleven, not necessarily all of them being Gypsy. The most popular disposition comprised string instruments – violins, double bass and cimbalon, later also clarinet was added (so called Gypsy clarinet). In 1714 Gypsy music bands were recorded travelling to the court of Esterháza. They accompanied the dancing of soldiers playing *verbunkos* helping recruiting efforts undertaken by Nicolas the Magnificent for his military operations. By playing music that was required from them, Gypsy musicians served their protectors who often acted at the same time as generous sponsors paying for Gypsies' musical education. The common English proverb saying that "*he who pays the piper calls the tune*" was understood almost literally in the Hungarian circumstances.¹² Gypsy musicians performed music composed by well educated, but amateurish aristocratic composers. This type of music bore traits of Austrian influence but was considered at the same time truly ... Hungarian because it was composed by noblemen living in Hungary. So called Gypsy motifs became so popular with other 18th century composers (mainly Austrian) that they called some of their pieces alternatively "Hungarian" or "Gypsy" using these words interchangeably according to the politics of Maria Theresa and later her son. One of the most prominent 18th century composer – Joseph Haydn produced a few so called Gypsy/ Hungarian pieces.

The tradition of Gypsy musicians in Hungary had a long history. Accounts on Gypsy musicians were preserved documenting their presence near Buda in 1489.¹³ When studying the Gypsy in general became popular in the end of the 18th century, although authors focused on their origins, customs, policies etc., they would mention the unusual musicality of Gypsies giving as examples Hungarian Gypsies. In 1787 Grellmann wrote about Barna Mihaly who was known as *Magyar Orpheus*.¹⁴ Perhaps one of the most renowned Gypsy violinist and the leader of his own orchestra was Janos Bihari (1764-1825 or 1827). The legend said that he was the son of the most famous 18th century Hungarian female Gypsy violinist –Panna Czinka or Cinka (1711?-1772). It was just a legend, however, Panna Czinka under

¹² Instead the pipes Gypsies usually played violins.

¹³ Iren KERTESZ-WILKINSON, *Gypsy Music*, in: S. Sadie (ed.), *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London 2001, p. 614.

¹⁴ Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb GRELLMANN, *Histoire des Bohémiens, ou Tableau des Moeurs, Usages et Coutumes de ce Peuple Nomade*, Paris 1810, p. 111 (first edition in 1787).

the protectorate of rich Hungarian gentry managed to assure an amazingly high place in the cultural life of the country. When she was only nine years old, she amazed her family and neighbours with her beautiful violin playing and attracted the attention of the aristocratic head of the provincial Gemer region – Ján Lányi, who became her generous patron. She and her band (e.g. her husband and brothers-in-law, later her own sons) played even for Maria Theresa.¹⁵ When Panna Czinka died in the end of the 18th century, a lassus was composed (in Latin) celebrating her excellent skills as a musician but also – surprisingly – claiming that she was a beautiful woman. According to her contemporaries it was just the opposite, her complexion being darker than generally encountered among Gypsies, she was simply considered ugly. Her post – death portrayals, however, seem to elevate her position. Characteristically she is often depicted smoking a pipe. This trait is disputably assigned either to exotic, i.e. Ottoman associations attributed to Gypsy people or alternatively associated with the depictions of women of low morals, alluding to certain sexual activities, oral sex including.¹⁶ Interestingly enough, in the 19th century imagination this link remained and the most famous Gypsy girl of that time – Carmen used to work in the cigarette factory. Still, portraying prominent Gypsy musicians as Hungarians was very popular in the 18th century. The famous primas Janos Bihari was always presented as a Hungarian, a Hungarian musician, or the most outstanding interpreter of Hungarian folk music.

In fact in the 18th century it was only Hungary where Gypsies managed to establish the high position of musicians – Spanish flamenco became popular only in the late 19th century. However, the depictions of Spanish Gypsies dancing, also in churches, were preserved even from the 15th century onwards. In the late 18th century Gypsy musicians became treasured also in Russia, where Count Orlov organised first Gypsy choirs (headed by Ivan Sokolov) whose members were selected from his Gypsy serfs. Again Gypsy people and their music became extremely popular in the end of the 19th century and early 20th century as a part of Viennese operetta blossoming.

*

The situation of the Gypsies in the 18th century still calls for further investigation as a few research questions remain to be answered. These include following issues:

Gypsy musicians, dancers and entertainers were known in Europe long before the 18th century. However, it was in this century when their status was established; this can be better understood in the light of the general situation of musicians in that century and the role of so called *Hauskapellen*. The emancipation of musicians in the late 18th century helped Gypsy musicians to fulfill the gap between independent musicians and *Hauskapellen* ones. It is also highly possible

¹⁵ See Hana ŠEVČÍKOVÁ, *Romani Band Leader Panna Cinkov*, in: Arne Mann (ed.), *Neznámí Rómovia*, Bratislava 1992, pp. 117-126.

¹⁶ For the suggestions I am indebted to dr. Gerhard Baumgartner.

that the reasons for the growth of Gypsy musicians' reputation were different and entail further questions (e.g. concerning the competition between freelance Gypsy and Jewish musicians).

The prejudices against the Gypsies were common in Europe even before the 18th century, never before – however – had there been so many trials and accusations against them. On the other hand it was in that very same century when the academic interest in the Gypsies began. This paradox calls for further investigation. Was the scholarly interest in Gypsies simply an attempt to comprehend and thus tame what seemed dangerous and presented a menace for the society?

Finally, the last question concerns the problem of singling out Gypsy musicians (not smiths, etc.) as “good” Gypsies. Is the simple explanation that “*music hath charms to soothe a savage beast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak*” as William Congreve said in 1697 a sufficient one? Without doubt Gypsies – associated with music – managed to sustain their position in the 19th and deep into the 20th century and the stereotype of a Gypsy musician became one of the most prolific ones in European culture.