

# Russian Empire

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Roma in Ukraine | Strategic Aims of the State Policy towards “Gypsies” | The Practical Realisation of the State Policy | Roma in the New Territories | The Crimea and Southern Russia | Bessarabia | Faraonovka and Kair | “Gypsy” Serfs | “Gypsies” after the Reform of 1861

➤ *The Russian Empire has exerted its influence over many peoples. Contrary to other countries in Europe the state policy of the Russian Empire towards the Roma initially and in the long term treated them as equal subjects of the Empire with the respective full civil rights. The administrative efforts of the state aimed to make the Roma meet their obligations as citizens. This policy was above all a “mainstream” policy; “Gypsies” were seen as an inseparable part of society, and in this way were subject to general legislation. In cases where there was a “special” policy directed at them, the aim was to overcome separation from society, without exercising pressure towards their assimilation.*

## THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

*The Russian Empire grew from the so-called Muscovite Russia, which from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (and particularly after proclaiming Ivan IV the Terrible Tzar in 1547) onwards began to develop rapidly and to expand, increasingly adding territories and their populations to the Empire. Although Russia is formally an empire only from 1721 (the reign of Peter I the Great) onwards, this generalising name can be used for earlier periods as well. Roma, who had lived for centuries in the Russian Empire, were considerably influenced by the mainstream social and political conditions, and this is reflected in their contemporary ethnic and cultural characteristics.*

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## THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

III. 1



## INTRODUCTION

A charter dated 1501 may be considered the first evidence of the arrival of Roma in the Russian Empire. In this document Alexander Kazimirovich, Prince of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and King of Poland allowed the “Senior voyt Vassil and his Gypsies” full freedom of travel in the lands of the duchy and gave their leader the right to “judge Gypsies and re-

solve all disputes among them”. Whether these territories, which were added to the Russian Empire only later, could be called a part of the Russian Empire is a subject of dispute.

With certainty “Gypsies” in the Russian Empire are mentioned for the first time in 1733 in a decree issued by Empress Anna Ioanovna, which concerns the settlement of the annuity of three regiments through taxes, gathered from the

population of certain territories, including “Gypsies”. Not much later a new decree was adopted by the Senate of St. Petersburg, in answer to a petition by “Gypsies, born in these lands”, which allowed them to reside and trade with horses in the area around the capital St. Petersburg, with the obligation to register “wherever they wish”. The passus “born in these lands” points to an earlier settlement of Roma in the Russian Empire. [Ills. 1-4]



III. 4

A first period of immigration into the Russian Empire saw "Gypsies" move from the south into Ukraine and from the east into Belarus and the Baltic countries in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today, these early immigrants are known as the "Xaladitka" or "Ruska Roma", the closely related "Polska Roma" (also called "Xaladitka Roma") in Lithuania and nowadays Poland, and "Litovska Roma" in Lithuania and Belarus. The "Lotfika" (Latvian) Roma in the Baltic area are also related to them. The "Servi/Servuria", for instance, settled in Eastern Ukraine and Southern Russia in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century after migrating from Wallachia and Moldavia.

## ROMA IN UKRAINE

The first written sources mentioning "Gypsies" in the present day territories of Ukraine date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, for instance several marginal notes about "Gypsies" in the registers of the towns of Sanok and Lvov for the period 1427/28-1445. During the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century the presence of the Roma has left traces in documents from the Ukrainian "Slobozhanshchina" (territories on the left bank of the Dnieper) and the autonomous "Zaporozhskaya Sech" (of the so-called Zaporozhian Cossacks). In the registers of the whole Zaporozhian Army we find names such as Vasko Tsigan, Stepan Tsiganchuk, Dmitro Tsiganchuk (from "Tsigan", Russian for "Gypsy"). Roma mainly served as smiths and armourers in the army regiments.

After 1654 Ukraine joined the Russian Empire voluntarily, yet kept a certain internal autonomy. "Gypsies" were included in separate tax registers, divided into "regiments", led by their "atamans" (chieftains), who were nominated by the "Gypsies" themselves for these positions prior to their appointment. This should not be understood in the literal sense of the word; the Roma in the Ukraine were not actively serving in the army. In fact what the documents show is that Roma were included in the existing military and administrative organisation of the day. The main obligation of "Gypsy" "atamans" was to gather the annual tax ("obrok") together with appointed tax collectors (who had bought the right to gather taxes at an auction) and to present it to the General army office for the maintenance of the army. The appointment of "Gypsy" "atamans" was determined by the state

by paying a certain sum of money. The "Gypsy" annual tax grew with the years, which is evidence of their growing well being – at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it amounted to 120 "karbovantsi" (Ukraine currency) annually and in 1755 it reached 1,424 "karbovantsi".

The special "Gypsy" regiments were abolished in 1765 and Roma then registered in the existing "sotni" (Cossack squadrons) and regiments, thus they were given civil rights like the rest of the population. All "Gypsy" affairs were subject to the Kiev Civil-Military Commission, which directly linked their mandatory registration with the requirements for permanent residence. These measures, however, did not make it impossible for the Roma to lead a semi-nomadic (with a fixed winter residence) or nomadic way of life. Their main occupations were various types of ironwork, horse-trading and music playing.

## STRATEGIC AIMS OF THE STATE POLICY TOWARDS "GYPSIES"

Comparatively soon after the settlement of "Gypsies" in the Russian Empire special measures were taken towards them. In 1759 the Empress Elisabeth issued a decree banning travelling "Gypsies" in the capital St. Petersburg and the vicini-

ty. This did not mean, however, that they were banned from settling in the capital. In 1766 a decree of the senate regulated the payment of taxes by nomadic "Gypsies" in the Russian Empire, who mainly lived in the so-called Slobodska Ukraine and the areas around Moscow and other major cities in the Empire.

Roma were finally included in the social structure of the Russian Empire

and received their respective civil rights through a decree issued by Catharina II The Great in 1783. According to this decree all "Gypsies", who had not yet been entered in the State Registers of Population, together with those listed in the registers as the property of land owners (i.e. serfs) fell into the category of so-called state serfs and were obliged to pay the respective taxes for this category.

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*The wife of Johan Dimitri Taikon, the famous storyteller, as a newly married bride in Russia around 1900. The Taikon family moved from Russia to Sweden by that time.*

(from Lundgren / Taikon 2003, p. 45)



III. 6

*A Russian "Gypsy chief" of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

(from Clébert, Jean Paul (1964)

Das Volk der Zigeuner. Wien: Paul Neff, p. 64b)



Catherine II's decree actually represents a new approach towards "Gypsies" – the end of the "special" state policy towards them and their inclusion in the mainstream legal norms. However, this does not mean that it was an attempt to force Roma to become sedentary. The Decree deals with the status of state peasants as a whole and reflects the aim of the state to gather taxes from them. The decree speaks of settling "Gypsies" in "suitable places", with the clarification "so that they shall not be given to vagrancy", i.e. to have

a regular registration and keep to the requirements of the law. State peasants and serfs were entitled to travel freely, paying a specific annual tax (the "obrok").

The category of "state peasants" included above all the Slavic speaking Orthodox population of the newly acquired territories – Siberia, Left-bank Ukraine, Novorossiya, etc, together with the various types of Cossacks (Cossacks from the Don, Kuban, Ural, etc.). In the complex bureaucratized social and estate structure of the Russian Empire, the sta-

te peasants had a better status than serfs.

Serfdom on the other hand offered the possibility to pay the annual "obrok" to the landed gentry, thus acquiring the right to freedom of movement. Roma, prior to being included in the category "state peasants" availed themselves of this possibility and continued their nomadic way of life, nominally moving from one land owner to another (paying them for freedom of movement). With her decree Catherine the Great actually aimed at ending this practice.

### THE PRACTICAL REALISATION OF THE STATE POLICY

Unlike in many other countries, "Gypsies" in the Russian Empire have not been regarded as a "problem", hence the outcome of the state policy, which encouraged (but did not enforce) their sedentarisation was insignificant. In fact, this policy resulted in an obligation for Roma to register in administrative registers and to regularly pay their taxes, which (at least nominally) required a fixed abode. Furthermore it was desired (but not made obligatory) to cease, (or at least limit) their nomadic way of life.

This is the line of all state measures which followed the decree of 1783. In 1800, a decree of the senate promulgated that the registration of "Gypsies" in

tax registers should be accomplished as soon as possible. The decree notes that in some "guberniyas" (districts) "Gypsies" have settled in the villages and are used in agriculture, and that elsewhere they have settled in towns, have registered as merchants and as "meshchane" (small holders and artisans). The decree further says that this is not considered a breach of the laws, provided they pay their taxes regularly.

The process of mandatory civil and (above all) tax registration of the Roma was obviously proceeding slowly which is illustrated by a number of Government papers from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example decrees by Alexander I from 1803 and 1809. In 1811, Alexander I issued a decree to complete the allocation of "Gypsies" into separate estates, and to confirm their rights to register in an estate of their choice, inclu-

ding towns, provided they can carry out the respective civil obligations by 1812.

In 1839 a new decree was issued obliging all nomadic "Gypsies" without fixed abode to register as state peasants by January 1, 1841. With this step Roma fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of State Affairs, which was entrusted with the reform of the situation of state peasants.

The new approach towards "Gypsies", which aimed at the total abolition of the differences in their social status compared with the remaining population, is also found in the decree of 1856 (the time of the Crimean war), when "Gypsies" were obliged to serve in the ranks "together with the remaining members of the estates they belong to". In fact this meant that until that point "Gypsies" had been privileged in that they had been freed from military service.



## CRAFTS AND TRADES

III. 7

*The trades and the way of life of “Gypsy”-serfs are quite varied. Many who were nominally “dvorovie” (i.e. domestic serfs) were effectively nomadic artisans. They paid their annual “obrok” and freely travelled not only in Bessarabia, but also beyond the borders of the region, selling their goods and offering their services. This way of could explain the fact that*

*the rather high number of 100 smiths, 185 chobotari (makers of a kind of peasant’s shoes), 46 cauldron-makers, 7 silver-smiths, 1 tailor, 1 barber, and 185 musicians and their families lived in the estate of Prince Kantakusin near the village of Markoutsy, near the town of Khotin.*

## COLONISING THE STEPPE: THE CASE OF FARAONOVKA AND KAIR

III. 8

*Frequently an analogy is drawn between the creation of the two Roma villages Faraonovka and Kair and the state policy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Spain towards the Roma during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless there are essential differences, which make this analogy groundless. The main difference at Faraonovka and Kair was the fact that “Gypsies” were not subject to any special policy, rather they were seen in the context of the Russian Empire’s policy in the region. The establishment of Roma villages was no act of enforcement, rather*

*it was the direct consequence of the main principle of the state policy to colonise the steppe regions, with many new settlements being founded according to the ethnic principle. The transition towards a settled way of life was voluntary. No restrictive measures were taken against the Roma, as was the case in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Spain. In contemporary terminology, at Faraonovka and Kair there was no enforced sedentarisation and segregation, but rather positive discrimination.*

## ROMA IN THE NEW TERRITORIES

The overall resolution of the civil status of the Roma in the Russian Empire during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was complicated by the fact that this was also a period of active expansion of the empire through the accession of new territories. Some of these, for

instance the steppes of Southern Russia and Southern Ukraine, were sparsely inhabited, but others (the Crimea and Bessarabia) had their local Roma, whose status also had to be legally regulated according to the legislation of the Russian Empire.

In a series of wars against the Ottoman Empire, from 1774 to 1812 the Russian Empire added several territories, such as the Crimean Khaganate (annexed as a Russian territory

known as Taurida Guberniya), the territories between the Bug and Dniester rivers, and the territories between the Dniester and the Prut, then known as Bessarabia (including the present day region of Bessarabia in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova). The new territories became the basis of new provinces (Novorussiya, Taurida, later on Bessarabia), and quickly a new population started to settle on these lands.

## THE CRIMEA AND SOUTHERN RUSSIA

Roma in the comparatively dense populated Crimea peninsula were quickly incorporated in the new social and civil structure of the Russian Empire. In 1812 an annual tax of 2 roubles per capita was fixed for the “Gypsies” of the province of Taurida (the Crimea) as state peasants. Alongside this, they were allowed to register in the tax register in the Cossack regiments of the Black Sea Cossack Army. In 1852 all “Gypsies” of the guberniya of Taurida, who had not yet registered in the

military register, were obliged to pay military taxation “along with the remaining estates”.

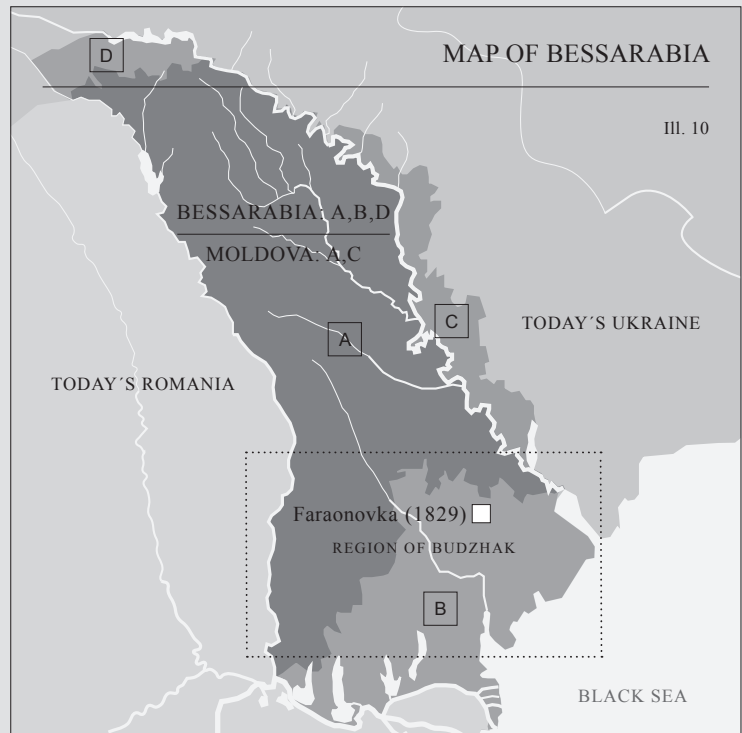
Specific to the Crimea was the fact that an enormous part of the Roma having the status of state peasants, were actually urban inhabitants. This is due to the fact that the northern – steppe – part of the peninsula was sparsely inhabited and only gradually being settled by colonists of various ethnic origins. Part of the Roma had settled in towns, but even travelling Roma spent the winter in towns, and only spent shorter or longer periods travelling in the warm season.

Another peculiarity of the Crimean Roma was the fact that most of them were Muslims, and that many of them had lost their language and became Tatar-speaking. In fact they could be ascribed two civic statuses – both as “Gypsies” and as Tartars. This is why in 1855, at the height of the Crimean war, when there was a strong anti-Russian feeling among the Tatar population, Crimean Roma who had the status of state peasants, but were also members of the Tatar community (i.e. were Tatar speaking and Muslims), were relieved of that status and were obliged to execute the same obligations as Tatars.

### SETTLEMENT AND PRIVILEGES

*During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Roma were granted the right to settle in the steppe regions around the Kuban River and the Northern Caucasus. This was accompanied by giving the Roma additional privileges. In 1832 54 Roma from Pyatigorsk in the Northern Caucasus were freed from military service and from taxes for 5 years. The taxes they had already paid were refunded, as they had been attacked by “brigands from beyond the Kuban” (meaning by that various peoples of the Caucasus – Circasians, Chechens, etc.), and were robbed and suffered damages to the sum of 13,659 rubbles and 50 kopeeks, a substantial sum for the times; 6 people were killed and 22 kidnapped. In 1838 another 27 Roma families, living in the Stavropol guberniya were freed from military service for another 5 years (they were already freed from the service in 1832, when they were included in the local Cossack regiments).*

III. 9



### BESSARABIA

The situation of the Roma in Bessarabia (the lands between the Dniester and the Prut) was quite different from that in the remaining parts of the Russian Empire. Most of them originally fell under the Principality of Moldavia, where Roma lived under the status of slaves. The Budzhak region, inhabited by the Nogay Tatars is situated between the Danube estuary and the Dniester. After 1812, the Nogay Tatars from Budzhak were moved to the Crimea and began to reclaim the steppes. The Roma of Bessarabia had the opportunity to be integrated into the social structure of the Russian Empire in various ways and to a large extent they were free to choose how to integrate themselves. [III. 10]

In 1818, a Provisional Statute for Bessarabia was adopted, dealing with the particular situation of “Gypsies” in the region. Roma were divided into two main categories, one directly under the rule of the state (the former “slaves of the prince”, or “slaves of the Crown”), while the others belonged to monasteries and private persons (the former “slaves of monasteries” and “slaves of the nobility”).

For Roma who had formerly been “slaves of the prince”, in 1818 a separate institution was established at the Bessarabian Regional Government, namely the Office of Gypsies of the Crown, which had to register them as “state peasants”, regardless of their way of life (nomadic or settled). The new office also assumed responsibilities for “Gypsies” who had fled from their masters (noblemen or the monasteries) in Bessarabia or who had migrated from the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. The Office of Gyp-

sies of the Crown attempted to regulate the “Gypsies”’ travelling, differentiating between several categories of nomadic Roma (Laeshi, Lingurari, Ursari). Regardless of whether they were settled or led a nomadic way of life, “the Gypsies of the Crown” had to pay a per capita tax, paid by every Roma family, which was 10 roubles from the early 1830s onwards.

In Bessarabia the forms of autonomy for the Roma communities were also preserved as they were in the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. Directly under the Office of Gypsies of the Crown were the so-called “buluk-bashi” and “judi”, nominated by the “Gypsies” themselves, responsible for the gathering of taxes. They enjoyed certain tax privileges and could act as mediators in disputes between “Gypsies”, i.e. there was a certain judicial autonomy in the community.

### FARAONOVKA AND KAIR

The goal of the administration in Bessarabia to ensure a quicker registration of

Roma in the higher civil status of state peasants was directly connected to the policy of reclaiming of steppe lands in the southern part of the Budzhak region. In the course of the realisation of this policy in 1826 the “Gypsies of the Crown” were

allowed to choose which way of life they desired to lead (nomadic or sedentary), as well as their place of abode (in towns, in settlements of the state colonists, or in new settlements which the Roma could establish by themselves in the south).

## ROMA CHOIRS AND ROMA MUSICAL ARISTOCRACY

*The beginning of the process of settling “Gypsies” in the big towns of the Russian Empire was closely related to the famous “Gypsy choirs”. The first such mixed (men and women) choir was founded by Count Alexei Orlov in 1775, in his estate at Pushkino, near Moscow. The conductor was Ivan Sokolov (succeeded by his nephew Ilya Sokolov), and the members of the choir were serfs. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the choir members were freed from serfdom and moved to live and work in Moscow. In 1812, they made big donations towards the needs of the army during the war against Napoleon, part of them were volunteers and took part in army action (for instance at the battle of Borodino).*

*Count Orlov’s Gypsy choir was very popular among the Russian aristocracy. Other similar choirs were founded, many generations of famous “Gypsy” musicians grew up. “Gypsy” musicians began to move to Moscow, and subsequently to St. Petersburg and other larger towns. In Moscow, from 1807 to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “Gypsy” musicians enjoyed a kind of*

*self-government – they elected their own “burmistr” (mayor), who was responsible to the municipal administration for the gathering of taxes (Roma were registered as “meshchane”), maintained contact with the authorities, resolved petty conflicts within the community etc.*

*After several generations Roma musicians and actors in large towns (chiefly Moscow and St. Petersburg) became special social stratum (separated to a certain extent even from other Roma), comprising famous artist dynasties, such as the Sokolov, Shishkin, Panin, Khlebnikov, Dulkevich, Pankov families, with a high social position. Roma musicians regularly met the highest circles in the Russian Empire – the aristocracy, rich merchants, famous poets, writers, musicians etc. There were even mixed marriages with the high society: Feodor Tolstoy, (a close relative of the writer Lev Tolstoy), the brother of the writer Sergei Tolstoy and his son Lev L. Tolstoy, Prince F. P. Masalskii, Prince Witgenstein, the millionaire from the Ural Nechaev, Anenkov, the rich landowner,*

The first settlements of Roma in the steppes of Budzhak were established in 1829 and in 1831 two new villages, settled by Lingurari Roma – Faraonovka (164 families) and Kair (170 families) – were founded in the Akerman “uyesd” (administrative unit). The names of the villages were chosen by the authorities, based on the then prevailing opinion that “Gypsies” originated from Egypt. The Roma settled there were granted 9,902 “desetini” lands (1 desetina = 1.1 ha). However, about 800 Roma families in Bessarabia continued their nomadic way of life, in spite of more than 11,000 desetini lands they were granted in the south. [III. 8]

At first Roma were settled as state peasants, who however, like the remaining colonists, had additional privileges – freeing them from some military obligations, the granting of free lands, supply of agricultural inventory, state subsidies, tax concessions, the pos-

sibility of registering in a higher estate, the right to run their own markets, the privilege of using certain natural resources etc. The state invested considerable funds to allow new settlers to begin their life at Budzhak, including the Roma in Faraonovka and Kair.

However, matters among the colonists of various ethnicities ran into difficulties and fairly soon new changes to their status were required. In 1836 the populations of some villages with state colonists were included in the Danubian Cossack Army. This new status meant new additional civil and above all economic privileges, in exchange for certain military obligations. These changes also affected the Roma and with a special supreme decree issued by Nicolai I on May 29, 1839, 1,538 Roma, men and women from Faraonovka and Kair, along with about 1,600 nomadic Roma from Bessarabia were enlisted in the Danubian Cos-

sack Army and the two Roma villages became the corresponding Cossack “stanitsas” (Cossack’s settlement).

The development of the two Roma villages, Faraonovka and Kair, together with the further settlement of “Gypsies” in the steppe regions, also ran into various problems. Roma from these villages until then had led a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life and had no agricultural skills. In addition, a number of other difficulties emerged: a new system of steppe agriculture, several years of drought, a corrupt administration, which embezzled part of the state subsidies, etc. Frequently there is speculation about the inability of Roma settled at Faraonovka and Kair to support themselves through agriculture; records from 1839 on the possessions of Roma from the two villages, however, show that there is no substantial difference in their property in comparison with other settlers in the region.

### “GYPSY” SERFS

The situation of the Roma in Bessarabia who had been slaves to the nobility and the monasteries in the past in the Principality of Moldavia was quite different. In

the Provisional Regulations for Bessarabia, adopted in 1818, the privileges of the Boyars from the Principality of Moldavia (now referred to as “pomeshchiki” – the class of landowners) and the privileges of monasteries, including the private ownership of “Gypsy” slaves were retained. The situation of Roma, belonging to the

landowners, was settled in 1828 by the decree of Tzar Nicolai I, through which “Gypsy” slaves were freed, received civil rights and the status of serfs of private persons or monasteries.

Gradually the status of “Gypsy” serfs began to change. Some fled from their owners and registered as state peasants

III. 11

*Ledwik, the publisher of "Borsovie vedomosti", and others, all married Roma girls.*

*The first complete "Gypsy" performances by "Gypsy" musicians and actors were staged towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On March 20, 1888, the musical comedy "Chave adro veshi" (Children in the forest) was performed at the Malyi Theater in St. Petersburg. The music, primarily "Gypsy" songs and romances, was an arrangement by Nikolai Shishkin. The play was continuously shown up to 1906. 1892 saw the premiere of N. Shishkin's new operetta "Gypsy Life".*



III. 12

*Pre-revolutionary "Gypsy"-choir.*

(from Lemon, Alaina (2000) *Between two Fires*. Durham / London: Duke University Press, p. 45)

(most often nomadic Roma), which led to a rather complicated situation, requiring radical solutions. In 1847 Emperor Nicolai I signed a decree banning landowners in Bessarabia from regaining the rights of

possession over "Gypsies", who had fled from them. A new decree was issued in the same year, according to which "Gypsies" from Bessarabia and the region of Novorosiisk with an unclear status, could

register as "meshchane". According to the logic of these two decrees, Roma serfs were granted a totally legal opportunity to leave their owners and receive new registration in a higher standing.

### "GYPSIES" AFTER THE REFORM OF 1861

In 1861, alongside with the manifesto of Tzar Alexander II for the liberation of the serfs and the abolishment of serfdom, a commission was set up to work out a draft for activities to regulate and improve the way of life of "Gypsies", who mostly became part of peasantry. The commission did not yield any results and eventually it was disbanded.

The Danubian Cossack Army was disbanded in 1868 and its Roma were given free land. Roma in Faraonovka continued to live in the village, however most of the Roma in Kair sold their lands (about 190 plots) and returned to their old settlements (in the forests north of Kishinev), to their traditional trades (the production of wooden goods) and to a semi-nomadic way of life. In 1877 in Faraonovka there were 1,039 Roma, 150 Moldavians and 103 Ukrainians, while in Kair Roma at that

time were only one third of the population.

Contrary to other provinces in the Russian Empire, in Bessarabia "Gypsy"-serfs, after receiving their freedom from serfdom, did not receive land. Moreover, they were obliged to continue to pay their obligations to their earlier owners for two more years. After that time, Roma serfs as well as Roma state peasants mostly registered as "meshchane" in the towns of Bessarabia. Yet this did not mean a transition towards a sedentary way of life.

In this period, the state policy towards "Gypsies" in the Russian Empire came to an end and up to the October Revolution in 1917 they were not subject to any special legislation or administrative acts. The only exception to this was the mention of "Gypsies" in the regulations for issuing passports of 1880. According to these regulations "Gypsies", registered in the peasant estate, could be granted passports only with the permission of the local authorities, and only for one member of the family. The idea was to limit

their nomadic way of life. This restriction was not valid for "Gypsies", registered in the merchant and the "meshchane" estate, who could travel freely together with their families. Yet in practice these administrative measures had the same result, as all the previous policies of the Russian Empire in their attempt to limit the nomadic way of life of the "Gypsies": they were a total failure.

Actually the entire state policy of the Russian Empire towards "Gypsies" in the course of more than one century can be seen as a constant repetition of measures, which should lead them (however not by force) to become "normal" subjects of the Empire and taxpayers. Nevertheless these measures were never at the focus of the overall state policy, rather at its periphery. "Gypsies" were an insignificant percentage (less than one percent) of the total population of the Empire, hence they received attention more because of their exotic features, as seen by the local population, than they were considered as an important aim of the state policy.



## DEMOGRAPHY

III. 13

Although demography usually lacks accuracy in the case of the Roma, the proportion of Roma in the overall population of the Russian Empire is best seen in statistics. In 1834 out of 60 million inhabitants of the Russian Empire, “Gypsies” accounted for 48,247, 8,000 of them living in towns and 18,738 in Bessarabia. The figures about a quarter of a century later are similar (1862), when the “Gypsies” in the Russian Empire were thought to have been roughly 50,000, 17,000-18,000 of them in Bessarabia, and 7,500-8,000 in the Crimea. The data from the census of 1897

appear to be comparatively precise, when the population of the Russian Empire was about 125.7 million, and “Gypsies” officially were 44,584, 38,031 of them rural inhabitants and 6,551 living in towns. The geographic distribution was uneven, 8,636 “Gypsies” lived in Bessarabia, 1,056 in Poland, 1,750 in Latvia and Estonia, 3,003 in Lithuania and Belarus, 3,177 in Little Russia, 14,300 in Novorussia, 2,138 in Southern Volga, 1,080 in Northern Volga, 2,021 in Northern Russia, 2,784 in Central Russia, 3,223 in the Central Chernozem region, 1,433 in the Crimea, 2,829 in the Northern Caucasus, 212 in the Transcaucasus, 628 in Central Asia, 6,238 in Siberia and 143 in the steppes to the east of the Volga.

## CONCLUSION

The general picture of Roma in the Russian Empire on the eve of the October Revolution of 1917 is quite varied. Most Roma continued to lead their traditional way of life (semi-nomadic, renting housing for the winter, and most often with a fictitious tax registration in the rural regions). A comparatively small part of them had settled in the villages of North-West Russia, as well as in Ukraine, without totally breaking with their semi-nomadic way of life and traditional crafts. The processes of sedentarisation continued to run actively in Bessarabia as well. A third, comparatively small part of the Roma had established itself in the towns, registered chiefly as merchants

and “meshchane”, some of them quite wealthy, having become traders or owners of establishments. Socially close to them are Roma musicians and actors. [Ills. 11, 12]

There is no doubt that the social integration of Roma in the Russian Empire was much more successful than that of their compatriots in the Balkans, not to mention Central and Western Europe during the same period. In the literature various interpretations have been offered for this particular social position occupied by the Roma in the Russian Empire, yet none of them has drawn attention to the brief and extremely precise explanation given by N. Shchiber at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “Under our legislation Gypsies have never been treated

separately as a specific tribe, neither as a specific social standing, nor are they included into the category of ‘inorodtsi’ (foreign born citizens).”

For that reason, as a whole, the policy of the Russian Empire towards “Gypsies” was subordinated to the aim of making them fully-fledged subjects of the Empire, enjoying full civil rights, but also fulfilling their civil obligations. Above all this was a mainstream policy: “Gypsies” were seen as an inseparable part of society, thus falling under the common laws of the country. In the cases when there was a need for a special policy towards “Gypsies”, the aim was to overcome their separation from society, which did not mean that they were to be assimilated.

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