

THE REPRESENTATION OF ROMA IN MAJOR EUROPEAN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS



Volume I – The Louvre Sarah Carmona

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

THE REPRESENTATION OF ROMA IN MAJOR EUROPEAN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Volume 1: The Louvre
Sarah Carmona

French edition:

*La représentation des roms dans les
grandes collections muséographiques
européennes, Volume 1: Le Louvre*

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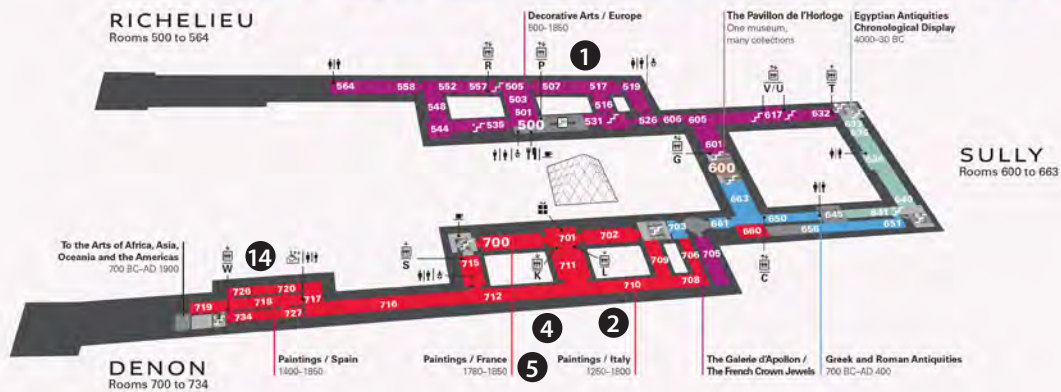
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MUSEUM



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MUSEUM



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Floor plan (ground floor level not shown).

Preface

**“A work of art is not the reflection or image of the world;
but it resembles the world.”**
Ionesco

Did you know that in Raphael’s painting, *The Great Holy Family*, St Elizabeth is represented as a Romani¹ woman? And that the people in *Travellers beneath the Ruins* by Bourdon are Romani soldiers, gathered in the Bohemian companies? Do you wonder why the portrait *The Gypsy (The Bohemian girl)* by Hals is that of a voluptuous young woman? What do these works of art teach us about their time of creation? What do they teach us about interactions between people and social groups? This book will provide many answers, explaining and at the same time questioning the place given to Roma² in the Louvre collections. This work corresponds to the Council of Europe’s strategic objectives, which include the fight against prejudice and discrimination against Roma and Travellers.

In addition to other initiatives – such as the partnership with the [European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture \(ERIAN\)](#) and the contribution to [Roma Genocide remembrance](#), and in particular its teaching – this book highlights the perception of Roma among the general public and gives an idea of the complex mechanisms that construct stereotypes underlying discrimination. In addition, it helps the reader to understand the role and contribution of Roma to European history.

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1. Editor’s note: the term “Romani” is used in a more extensive context than the restriction to language and culture.
 2. The term “Roma” used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies.

Whether you are a teacher of history, art history or philosophy, or a (school) student or simply a visitor to the Louvre, this book is an invitation to openness and discovery through worksheets that present, in depth, 15 selected works of art and provide a contextual framework that will allow you to put into perspective the works, periods and history of ideas. These are essential tools in today's fight against anti-Gypsyism and in recognising the Roma's place in European history.

Enjoy this beautiful experience!

Snežana Samardžić-Marković
Director General of Democracy
Council of Europe



The Glorious Virgin (circa 1485), Anonymous
Tapestry: yarn, silk, gold, silver (205 x 285 cm) – Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 1

The Glorious Virgin (circa 1485)

The work in brief

Period: late Middle Ages, early modern period

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: religious scene

Style: Northern Renaissance (Flemish)

Medium: embroidery

The work in questions

■ What religious scenes are depicted in the triptych's panels?

The central panel depicts the Glorious Virgin, crowned by two angels.

The panel on the left depicts a scene from the Old Testament: Moses making the water spring from the rock during the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt. The scene on the right shows Christ healing a sick man.

■ *What can be seen in the foreground of the left-hand panel?*

There are two women, with children, drinking at the spring.

■ *What can be seen in the middle distance of the left-hand panel?*

Moses and his brother talking, with some other Hebrews.

■ *What can be seen in the background?*

An idealised landscape, people in the distance and a castle on the horizon.

■ *What connects this panel to Romani history?*

The woman in the middle foreground, drinking from a bowl and holding a baby, is dressed in the style of Gypsies of the time. She is wearing a cape (a long piece of material worn over the shoulders), has one of two typically Romani hairstyles, and is wearing a skirt or dress made of a striped fabric.

■ *Is the depiction of the people, scenery and landscape true to the events shown in the left-hand panel of the triptych?*

The scene depicts an event from Ancient Hebrew history. The clothes worn by the people and the architecture of the castle in the background do not correspond with those of either the time or place depicted. They are anachronisms.

■ *Why has the artist incorporated a Hebrew woman dressed in the style of 16th-century Gypsies into this religious work?*

By the end of the 14th century, Roma people had been in some areas of Europe for up to a century. They are mentioned in many archived documents, and were often referred to as “Bohemians” or “Egyptians”.

Like the Hebrews fleeing persecution, the Roma are also a people on the move. Historical sources from the period give us the reason that is supposed to have caused their roaming: atonement for having renounced their faith in Christ under Turkish rule.

Moreover, at that time, everything relating to Egypt was considered to be magical and mysterious, but without any negative connotations. If there had been any such negative connotations, the woman in the panel would not have appeared in this Biblical scene.

Finally, the woman who is dressed in the style of a Romani woman of the time is holding a baby in the crook of her left arm. She appears to be nursing it. These images of loving, nursing mothers are found in many texts of the time that describe the arrival of the “Bohemian” or “Egyptian” companies in towns and villages.

The work in themes

Theme: Allegory

4. *Moses Saved from the Water* (1539) by Nicolò dell'Abbate

Reasons for the connection

The works depict an event from the Old Testament using a Gypsy woman as the central figure.

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Genre: Romani women as allegory
- ▶ Romani dress

Differences

- ▶ Technique: tapestry/etching
- ▶ Period: early Northern Renaissance/Italian Renaissance

Theme: Romani dress

3. *Small Holy Family* (circa 1519) by Giulio Romano

5. *The Fortune Teller* (circa 1595-1598) by Caravaggio

6. *The Fortune Teller* (circa 1626) by Nicolas Régnier

13. *Gypsy Camp* (17th century) by Jan van de Venne

Theme: tapestry

Tournai tapestry entitled *The Story of Carrabara the Egyptian* (1500-1510), Tournai Museum, France

Theme: texts

Municipal archives of Mâcon, BB 12 folio 129 verso.

Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris, 1405-1449 (Diary of a Parisian Burgher, 1405-1449), Anonymous, Collection Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, 1990.

The Great Holy Family (circa 1518)
Raffaello Santi (Raphael)
(1483-1520)
Transferred from wood to canvas
(207 x 140 cm)
Louvre Museum, Paris, France



Fact sheet 2

The Great Holy Family (circa 1518)

The work in brief

Period: 15th-16th century

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: religious scene

Style: Italian Renaissance

Medium: painting

The work in questions

Who are the people depicted in this scene?

The Infant Jesus, His mother Mary and Joseph. These three people make up the Holy Family. They are accompanied by St Elizabeth and her son, St John the Baptist, as well as two angels.

What can be said about the picture's composition?

It is structured on two diagonal lines that cross where the Virgin and Child exchange glances.

The ray of light illuminating the Virgin appears to emanate from the left diagonal, with its source in the figure of the Infant Jesus.

What is the meaning of the bouquet of flowers held by the angel above the Virgin Mary?

In the religious art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, flowers had symbolic meaning. These country flowers (daisies, carnations and violets) assume Marian symbolism, in other words symbolism relating to the Virgin Mary. Here, it symbolises her motherhood.

Why is the Holy Family accompanied by St Elizabeth and St John the Baptist?

This is a common motif in religious paintings of the 15th and 16th centuries. St John the Baptist, Jesus's cousin, and his mother, St Elizabeth, are the people who proclaimed the coming of the Messiah. In the New Testament, they predict his message and his crucifixion.

Why is St Elizabeth depicted with the features of a Romani woman of the time?

It should be noted that St Elizabeth has a serious expression. She knows the sacrifices and suffering that her son and Jesus will endure for their faith. She has the power to see into the future, an ability attributed to Romani women of the time. She is therefore depicted with a dark complexion and more angular features, and her hair is tied up in a striped turban, in the Roma style.

The work in themes

Theme: representational codes

3. *The Small Holy Family* (circa 1519) by Giulio Romano

Reasons for the connection

- ▶ Both of these works have representations of the Holy Family with St Elizabeth given Roma features
- ▶ Both are Renaissance studio works

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Genre: religious scene featuring a Romani figure
- ▶ Romani dress

Differences

- ▶ Setting: symbolic presence of nature/scene in a bucolic setting
- ▶ Light: play of light and shade (*sfumato* of Leonardo da Vinci)/diffuse nature

Theme: Romani dress

3. *The Small Holy Family* (circa 1519) by Giulio Romano

5. *The Fortune Teller* (1595-1598) by Caravaggio

6. *The Fortune Teller* (circa 1626) by Nicolas Régnier

13. *Gypsy Camp* (17th century) by Jan van de Venne



The Small Holy Family, also called The Virgin and Child, Saint Elizabeth and The Infant Saint John in Landscape (circa 1519)

Attributed to Giulio Pippi (Giulio Romano) (1499-1546)
Wood (38 x 32 cm)
Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 3

The Small Holy Family (circa 1519)

The work in brief

Period: 16th century

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: religious scene

Style: Italian Renaissance

Medium: painting on wood (poplar)

The work in questions

Why is the picture called *The Small Holy Family*?

The iconic motif of the Holy Family usually comprises the Virgin Mary, the Infant Jesus and St Joseph. In this composition, St Joseph is missing.

Who are the people with the Virgin and Jesus?

They are St Elizabeth and St John the Baptist. St John the Baptist, Jesus's cousin, proclaims the coming of Jesus and his crucifixion.

What can be seen behind the people?

There is a natural landscape, a line of trees, lush plains and the start of a mountain chain.

Why is the landscape in the background blurred?

In fact, what is farther away is less clear than what is in the foreground. Similarly, the colours fade into the distance. This is a technique created at the time by Leonardo da Vinci, known as *sfumato*. He described this technique as being "without lines or borders, in the manner of smoke".

Why does St Elizabeth have a Roma hairstyle?

As with Raphael's picture of the Great Family, St Elizabeth and her son proclaim the crucifixion of Christ and the redemption of mortal sin. Her hair is in the style of the Gypsies of the time, to symbolise that she is able to see into the future, as the artist's contemporaries believed.

The work in themes

Theme: representational codes

2. *The Great Holy Family* (circa 1518) by Raphael

Reasons for the connection

In both of these representations of the Holy Family, St Elizabeth is given Roma features; both are Renaissance studio works.

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Genre: religious scene featuring a Romani figure
- ▶ Romani dress

Differences

- ▶ Setting: symbolic presence of nature/scene in a bucolic setting
- ▶ Light: play of light and shade (*sfumato* of Leonardo da Vinci)/diffuse nature

Theme: Romani dress

2. *The Great Holy Family* (circa 1518) by Raphael
5. *The Fortune Teller* (1595-1598) by Caravaggio
6. *The Fortune Teller* (circa 1626) by Nicolas Régnier
13. *Gypsy Camp* (17th century) by Jan van de Venne

Moses Saved from the Water
Nicolò dell'Abbate (circa 1509-1571)
Drawing (36 x 26 cm)
Louvre Museum, Paris, France



Fact sheet 4

Moses Saved from the Water (1539)

The work in brief

Period: 16th century

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: Biblical scene

Style: Italian Renaissance

Medium: drawing

The work in questions

■ *What technique has the artist used?*

This work is a drawing. Dell'Abbate has done a preparatory drawing in black chalk, and then used a pen and brown ink, with a brown wash and white highlighting.

■ ***What is a preparatory drawing?***

Since the Renaissance, drawing has been regarded as a preparatory technique for the final work, which could be a painting, a sculpture or an architectural work. A distinction is made between the different stages of a work's production, starting with the initial idea, the outline and the sketch, then general setting up and composition, followed by detailed studies ending with the *modello*, and finally the design, which is the last stage before the work is actually produced.

■ ***What is the subject of this drawing?***

It is an episode from the Old Testament, taken from the Book of Exodus (2:5-10). According to the Bible, at the time of Moses' birth, the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt. Moses' mother wanted to save her son, because the Pharaoh had decided to kill all Hebrew babies. She put him in a wicker basket and placed it on the water of the River Nile. Myriam, Moses' sister, watched the scene unfold and saw how the infant was picked up by the Pharaoh's daughter.

She therefore offered to find a nurse to feed the child, and the nurse is no other than his own mother.

■ ***How many scenes from this Biblical episode are depicted in this drawing?***

Several scenes are depicted. The Pharaoh's daughter can be seen in the foreground, pointing to Moses in his basket. She is accompanied by some other women. A woman can be seen picking up the same basket or entrusting it to the rough waters of the river in the background, and even farther away some people can be seen on the river bank, as well as perhaps someone drowning.

■ ***What sort of hairstyle does the woman on the right have?***

This woman is the Pharaoh's daughter, who picks Moses up. Her hair is coiled in a circular style and tied up with bands, or *bern* in Romani, in a manner characteristic of Romani women in the late Middle Ages and early modern period.

■ ***Why is the Pharaoh's daughter depicted with a Roma hairstyle?***

This voluminous, coiled hairstyle is so typical of the Romani women of the period in which the painter produced the drawing that it became a feature of Egyptian women depicted here. The hairstyle indicates the Egyptian origin of the people depicted.

■ ***For what final work was this preparatory drawing done?***

Dell'Abbate was working on a piece that has now disappeared but which is known from a copy kept at the Church of Our Lady of Melun, in France.

The work in themes

Theme: Biblical scenes

2. *The Great Holy Family* (circa 1518) by Raphael

Reasons for the connection

Both these works have Biblical representations evocative of Egypt.

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Genre: religious scene
- ▶ Model: Romani figures
- ▶ Period: Renaissance

Differences

- ▶ Hair in coils/turban
- ▶ Geographical Egypt/magical Egypt



The Fortune Teller

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (Caravaggio) (1571-1610)

Oil painting (99 x 131 cm) – Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 5

The Fortune Teller (circa 1595-1598)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual arts

Genre: genre painting

Style: baroque

Medium: painting

The work in questions

What is a genre painting?

It is a painting that depicts the artist's contemporaries, often going about their day-to-day lives, in the form of life studies.

■ ***Who are the people depicted?***

They are two young people with strangely similar faces: a young Romani woman on the left, called “Egyptian” at the time, and a young aristocratic man on the right, who can be recognised as such by his clothes, hat, gloves and sword.

■ ***How has Caravaggio set the scene?***

There is only one plane in this picture. The framing is cropped. The figures are shown from the waist up.

■ ***What effect does it have?***

The framing and the background, with no ornamentation or detail, block the composition and bring the scene towards the viewer, who becomes the witness.

■ ***Where does the light in this scene come from?***

The light is lateral, and comes from the top-left part of the canvas. It leaves the young woman in shadow.

Caravaggio produced this picture at the start of his career. He had not yet mastered the technique of *chiaroscuro*.

■ ***What can be said about the looks exchanged by the people in it?***

The people are face to face. The expression and smile on the young woman’s face support those of the man, and are intensified by their matching faces.

■ ***What is the woman doing?***

She is taking the young man’s hand in order to read it. The position of her fingers, with the index finger on the young man’s ring finger, with his ring visible, suggests that she is going to steal his jewellery.

■ ***How do we know this is an “Egyptian”?***

Her hairstyle (long turban) and cape (piece of thick fabric attached to the shoulder) are typical of Romani dress of the period.

■ ***Why is this picture important for the history of depicting Roma people?***

This picture was painted by one of the greatest masters of European painting. The motif of “the fortune teller” is used as a recurring theme by artists influenced by this artist, who are known as Caravagesques, but also by many others.

Caravaggio later became extremely popular. This depiction of the Romani woman established an extremely negative stereotype in the collective imagination. The Romani woman became the symbol of seduction but also of vice, trickery and robbery.

The work in themes

Theme: the fortune teller

6. *The Fortune Teller* (circa 1626) by Nicolas Régnier

Reasons for the connection

Relationship and conflict of styles and themes

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: the fortune teller, a moral theme
- ▶ Treatment of light: birth and development of *chiaroscuro*

Differences

- ▶ Face to face/complex situation

Theme: genre painting

8. *Musicians and Drinkers* (1625) by Le Valentin



The Fortune Teller (circa 1626)
Nicolas Régnier (1588-1667)
Oil on canvas (127 x 150 cm) – Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 6

The Fortune Teller (circa 1626)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: genre painting

Style: baroque

Medium: painting

Movement: French Caravagesque

The work in questions

— *Who are the people depicted?*

This painting depicts a young, beautiful Gypsy woman, a man with a feather in his cap, an old woman, also a Gypsy, and an aristocratic woman.

■ *In what respects is this configuration unusual?*

The motif of the fortune teller generally alternates between a man and a woman. The naive figure is usually a man. In this case, there is a lady from high society. The looks exchanged by the two younger women in the picture, the Gypsy and the aristocrat, reveal tremendous power.

■ *What can be said about the picture's composition?*

It is very complex, and it renews the Caravagesque model. Towards the right of the picture, the woman being robbed finds herself in a position of inferiority. However, she also occupies half of the space on the ascending diagonal, which gives her an imposing presence. The other three people are squeezed into the top-left corner.

■ *What does the viewer's gaze focus on?*

The composition's convergence lines focus the viewer's gaze on the fortune teller's hand. This shifts the focus away from the hidden main subjects, which are the hand of the old Gypsy who is stealing the young lady's purse, and the man who is stealing the rooster from the beautiful Gypsy, which can be seen in his right hand.

■ *What can be said about the depictions of the two Romani women?*

These two people have a dark complexion and typical features. The young Gypsy is wearing a turban and cape, as well as an earring, which was not at all common among European women of the time. The ethnicity of the people here is conveyed not only by their dress, but also by their physical features.

The work in themes

Theme: the fortune teller

5. *The Fortune Teller* (1595-1598) by Caravaggio

Reasons for the connection

Relationship and conflict of styles and theme

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: the fortune teller, a moral theme
- ▶ The Caravagesque school

Differences

- ▶ Composition: complex situation/face to face

Theme: Genre painting

8. *Musicians and Drinkers* (1625) by Le Valentin

13. *Gypsy Camp* (17th century) by Jan van de Venne



The Fortune Teller (circa 1628)
Valentin de Boulogne (Le Valentin) (1591-1632)
Oil on canvas (125 x 175 cm) – Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 7

The Fortune Teller (circa 1628)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: genre painting

Style: baroque

Medium: painting

Movement: French Caravagesque

The work in questions

— *Where could this scene be taking place?*

It is very clearly taking place at a cabaret.

Who are the people depicted?

There are six people: a Gypsy reading a swordsman's hand; a young woman playing the guitar and accompanying a man on the harp; a young man who is dreaming; and a man concealed in the dark, who is stealing what the Gypsy has in the folds of her cape.

How is the motif of the robber being robbed treated here?

In addition to the theme of the female robber, which has been traditional since that time, the painter adds the theme of the robber being robbed, because there is a man in a large coat, who is hiding at the far left of the picture and stealing the chicken that the Gypsy had hidden in her bag.

What does the viewer's gaze focus on?

The composition's convergence lines focus the viewer's gaze on the fortune teller's hand. This shifts the focus away from the main subjects, which are the hand of the man stealing and the fortune teller's chicken, hidden in her bag.

The work in themes

Theme: the fortune teller

5. *The Fortune Teller* (1595-1598) by Caravaggio

Reasons for the connection

Relationship and conflict of styles and theme.

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: the fortune teller, a moral theme
- ▶ The Caravagesque school

Differences

- ▶ Composition: complex situation/face to face

Theme: genre painting

8. *Musicians and Drinkers* (1625) by Le Valentin

13. *Gypsy Camp* (17th century) by Jan van de Venne



Musicians and Drinkers (1625)

Valentin de Boulogne (Le Valentin) (1591-1632)

Oil on canvas (96 x 133 cm) – Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 8

Musicians and Drinkers (1625)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: genre painting

Style: baroque

Medium: painting

Movement: French Caravagesque

The work in questions

■ *In what respects is this theme similar to and different from that of the fortune teller?*

This picture shows us a similar theme to that of the fortune teller: a young man being robbed by a Gypsy in the darkness of a cabaret.

Here, the Gypsy is not predicting the future. The young man is stupefied by the alcohol and food, as well as the music provided to him by two accomplices.

■ *How is the picture's composition organised?*

Horizontally, the four-banded composition is very well balanced: a man, a woman, a man and a woman. Vertically, the young man's inferiority can be seen: he is hanging his head, in the midst of the three people who are watching him.

■ *How do the objects in the work allow the story to be revealed?*

All of the objects in this picture have a hidden meaning. The open pie suggests that the deed is premeditated; the dagger shows where the real manliness lies; the knife on the table points to the designated victim; and the pipe that he plays encapsulates the young man's impotence, in all senses of the word.

The work in themes

Theme: the fortune teller

7. *The Fortune Teller* (circa 1628) by Le Valentin

Reasons for the connection

Variation and shift in the theme of the female Gypsy

Comparison keys

Similarities

Subject: the pictorial motif of the female Gypsy



Gypsy Girl (circa 1630)
Frans Hals (circa 1582-1666)
Oil on canvas (58 x 52 cm)
Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 9

Gypsy Girl (circa 1630)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: genre portrait

Style: baroque

Medium: painting

Movement: Dutch Caravagesque

The work in questions

■ ***Who is the person depicted in this portrait?***

The picture's title tells us that it is a young Gypsy girl. There are no other indications to confirm this.

■ *How could this young girl be described?*

This bust portrait shows a young woman who is jovial, sensual and full of life, with a mischievous grin.

■ *What does the picture's background tell us about the place where this young woman's portrait was painted?*

A rocky background with a section of sky can be perceived. The young woman has therefore been painted outside.

■ *Why is this portrait considered to be of a Gypsy, given the representational codes of the time?*

At the time, it was not at all fashionable to depict a woman in such a natural, dishevelled state, with her hair undone. The painting therefore offers us a character portrait, namely that of a young, voluptuous woman.

■ *What can be said about the painter's brush strokes?*

Franz Hals was capable of very great precision in drawing, and he was committed to not giving his paintings a smooth finish, unlike most of his contemporaries. His technique suggests movement and vitality by applying individual strokes of colour (for example, in the blouse). The general public, already in the 17th century, were struck by the dynamism of his portraits.

■ *What image of Romani women is conveyed by the painting?*

The image offered here is that of a woman free from social norms (for example in her pose, hair and clothes), with a spontaneity and brazenness contrary to the social codes of the time. The natural setting reinforces the idea of a woman with no material ties.

■ *What stereotyped ideas does this painting present?*

Once again, the painter's view is no different from that of the society in which he lives. He paints a picture for us of a disembodied, strongly stereotyped female Romani condition. Attraction and repulsion are mingled here.

The young woman seduces us with her sensuality and her natural attitude, but she also embodies vice and immorality.

The work in themes

Theme: portraiture

15. *Zingara with a Basque Tambourine* (circa 1865-1870) by Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot

Reasons for the connection

Portraiture and construction of an image

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: Romani women between attraction and repulsion
- ▶ The place of nature in this construction

Differences

- ▶ Style: Dutch Caravagesque/Camille Corot's transition from Classicism to Impressionism

Theme: Texts

Miguel de Cervantes, *The Little Gypsy Girl* in *The Exemplary Novels*, 1613.

Alexandre Hardy, *The Beautiful Egyptian, a Tragi-Comedy*, 1628.



Travellers beneath the Ruins (1640-1643) – Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671)
Oil on canvas (73 x 88 cm) – Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 10

Travellers beneath the Ruins (1640-1643)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: landscape

Style: classical

Medium: painting

The work in questions

— *What does the picture portray?*

In a landscape of ruins evocative of Antiquity, a group of about 20 people, men, women and children, appears to be resting and going about their business in a day-to-day existence characterised by travelling (caring for animals and

birds of prey, metalworking, etc.). A nobleman is watching them and seems to be waiting for something.

■ ***What activities make us think that this is a group of Romani men and women?***

Horse trading, falconry, military posts and metalworking are activities that were typical of the “Bohemian companies” at that time. The presence of women feeding their children in natural poses also suggests that they are Gypsies.

■ ***What is the person with a feather in his hat in the far left of the picture doing?***

An extremely well-dressed man whose face cannot be seen is standing in a priestly posture. He appears to be waiting.

■ ***In what respects is this scene extremely important for understanding Romani history in Europe?***

The 17th century was a turning point in the history of Roma people in Europe. Military activities were an important factor in the structure of Roma society at that time. For nearly two centuries, Roma people had moved around the territory of nation states, founding “Bohemian companies” that offered their services as soldiers, mercenaries, horse traders and musicians to seigniorial troops. Women were also present in this military world, following their fathers, brothers and husbands as washerwomen, cooks and mess assistants.

Despite the incessant wars taking place in Europe, the 17th century marked the end of these great companies owing to national centralisation policies and the publishing of declarations, edicts and legal texts against Roma populations, resulting in their being sentenced to the galleys or imprisoned for vagrancy or refusal to abandon their dress, language and traditions.

■ ***What role does the landscape play in the picture's composition?***

The landscape plays an important role, occupying half the work. It is dark, craggy, half-natural and half-idealised (with antique ruins, dead trees and rocky mountains), reinforcing the idea of a military scene. This landscape forms part of the tradition of classical landscapes by “itinerant artists” who went to work on this motif in Italy (Nicolas Poussin, Annibale Carracci, Claude Gellée, etc.).

The work in themes

Theme: landscape

11. *Soldiers at Rest, also called Gypsies at Rest* (1640-1643) by Sébastien Bourdon

12. *Military Regiment Resting with a Fortune Teller* (circa 1648-1650) by Jan Miel

Reasons for the connection

Marginal geography

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: landscape and military activities
- ▶ Style: classicism

Theme: texts

Royal Declaration against Gypsies, their women, and others who shelter them, Royal Ordinance, 1682, Gallica – National Library of France – Collection of Old French Laws, Volume III.

Discurso contra los gitanos (Discourse against Gypsies), Juan de Quiñones, 1631, Madrid, MDCXXI (Madrid National Library).



Soldiers at Rest, also called Gypsies at Rest (1640-1643)

Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671)

Oil painting, wood (43 x 58 cm) – Louvre Museum, INV. 2818, Paris, France

Fact sheet 11

Soldiers at Rest (1640-1643)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: landscape

Style: classical

Medium: painting

The work in questions

— *What is the title of this picture?*

Make the students guess.

■ ***Why does it have two titles?***

This picture was originally entitled *Gypsies at Rest*, and then *Soldiers at Rest*. When an artist does not give a work a specific title, it can be named later on.

■ ***Who is portrayed in this picture?***

There are seven people in it. There are some women, one of whom is feeding a baby, as well as children and men resting under an improvised tent. Some of the men are armed, and there are some other weapons placed on the ground. There is an armed man on an exhausted horse, viewed from behind, who appears to be addressing them.

■ ***Where does this scene take place?***

The scene takes place outside. There are ruins visible that are evocative of Antiquity, a cave and a distant landscape.

■ ***How can the colours used by the painter be described?***

Bourdon used a mineral, metallic palette (ochre, silver, brown and blue), highlighted by the red of the cavalryman's cape and the blue of the skirt on the young woman who is feeding a child.

■ ***Why do art historians speak of a "Bohemian setting"?***

In works of this kind and at this time, European painters created a "Bohemian setting". Small groups of Gypsies, often armed, resting or marching, occupy typical places such as caves or forests. Makeshift camps and this marginal yet nurturing geography underline the free nature of Roma populations in the imagination of society and of the artist.

■ ***Why is there often a woman feeding a child in these pictures?***

During this period, the figure of the young Gypsy woman feeding a child became established as the allegory of natural freedom, a freedom that forms part of an idealised natural setting, as opposed to a society bound by strict rules and social codes.

■ ***Why do weapons keep featuring in pictures of this period depicting Romani groups or companies?***

After their arrival in Europe in the 14th century, the main activities of Romani groups – and probably also their movements – were motivated by the military conflicts of the time (the Reconquista and Alpujarras War in Spain, the War of Succession, the French Wars of Religion and the Franco-Flemish wars). The great companies, and later more fragmented groups, went to serve in armies,

the men often as mercenaries, blacksmiths, horse traders and musicians, and the women as washerwomen and cooks.

The work in themes

Theme: Bambocciate

13. *Gypsy Camp* (17th century) by Jan van de Venne

Theme: landscape

10. *Travellers beneath the Ruins* (1640-1643) by Sébastien Bourdon

12. *Military Resting with a Fortune Teller* (circa 1648-1650) by Jan Miel

Reasons for the connection

Marginal geography

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: landscape and military activities
- ▶ Style: classicism

Theme: texts

Royal Archive of Aragon, Reg. 2573, Barcelona, Spain.



Military Regiment Resting with a Fortune Teller (circa 1648-1650)
Jan Miel (1599-1665)
Oil painting on copper (40 x 52 cm) – Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 12

Military Regiment Resting with a Fortune Teller (circa 1648-1650)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: landscape/genre painting

Style: Flemish painting

Medium: painting

The work in questions

■ *What is the scene portrayed in this picture?*

A military regiment has stopped by an immense rock vault. The men of the regiment are resting. They are talking, tending to their mounts and going about their business. The tents have been pitched. In the middle foreground, beneath the rocky vault, two soldiers, probably of a higher rank, stand talking. Behind them, an old Gypsy woman is telling the fortune of two other soldiers.

■ *Jan Miel is a painter of Flemish origin. Did the landscape that he painted remind him of the landscape in his country?*

No, it is rather more like an idealised Mediterranean landscape. Like many painters of his time, Jan Miel was an “itinerant painter” who went to study and work in Italy.

■ *Why can this picture not be considered to be only a landscape?*

Even though natural elements play an important role in the picture’s composition, it is also a genre painting with many people in it. The presence of the Romani woman telling a soldier his fortune could connect this work to the Bambocciate style, of which Miel was one of the main proponents.

■ *What is a Bambocciate?*

It is a scene of folk life that borrows from the day-to-day life of ordinary Italians. The word Bambocciate comes from the epithet Bamboccio, which was given to the Flemish painter Pieter van Laer.

■ *What is this Gypsy woman doing in the middle of a military regiment?*

There are various theories. She could be part of the regiment. The Bohemian companies that offered their services to regiments travelled with women and children. They could be cooks or washerwomen, or do other work for the soldiers; in this way, they could stay close to their husbands, children and brothers.

There were many movements of people at that time. Therefore, it could also be the case that this woman had encountered this regiment and that she was working as a fortune teller.

The work in themes

Theme: Bambocciate

13. *Gypsy Camp* (17th century) by Jan van de Venne

Theme: landscape

10. *Travellers beneath the Ruins* (1640-1643) by Sébastien Bourdon

11. *Soldiers at Rest* (1640-1643) by Sébastien Bourdon

Reasons for the connection

Marginal geography

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: landscape and military activities
- ▶ Style: classicism

Theme: military history

10. *Travellers beneath the Ruins* (1640-1643) by Sébastien Bourdon

11. *Soldiers at Rest* (1640-1643) by Sébastien Bourdon

Theme: movement

2. *The Great Holy Family* (circa 1518) by Raphael

10. *Travellers beneath the Ruins* (1640-1643) by Sébastien Bourdon

13. *Gypsy Camp* (17th century) by Jan van de Venne



Gypsy Camp (17th century)

Jan van de Venne ("The Master of the Gypsies") (circa 1600-1651)

Oil on canvas (24 x 35 cm) – Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 13

Gypsy Camp **(17th century)**

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: genre painting

Style: Flemish Baroque

Medium: painting

The work in questions

— ***What can be said about the size of this picture?***

It is a small picture, slightly larger than a sheet of writing paper.

■ *What is the subject of this work?*

This is a scene of everyday Roma life of the time. By a fire, on which an old woman is preparing a meal, a younger woman is delousing a child, while a third watches her doing it.

■ *Where does the scene take place?*

It takes place outside or possibly in a cave, as could be indicated by the rocky ground and the top-right corner of the picture.

■ *What is this kind of work called?*

This is a Bambocciata, a scene of folk life.

■ *What can be said about the three women?*

Their clothes and hair (flat hats, striped fabric and cape) are in the Roma style of the time.

The characters are representative of the four ages of life (a child, a young woman, a mature woman and an elderly woman).

■ *Why is Jan van de Venne also known as “the Master of the Gypsies”?*

Jan van de Venne painted many gypsy camps. It was a theme that he valued. His treatment of Romani figures is very special. That is why French art historians have given him that title.

■ *How does van de Venne depict this genre scene?*

The artist has depicted the people in this scene in a very lively, quasi-realistic way. The light and the faded brown shades make the scene come alive and create movement.

■ *What image of Romani women is given here?*

Van de Venne gives us a very special view of Romani women at the time. Of course, they are depicted in a natural setting typical of the 17th century.

However, it is a view that contains fewer stereotypes than those of other contemporary artists. Despite the poverty of these women (their crudely stitched clothes and dishevelled hair), they are depicted as dignified, loving and attentive people. It is a scene of motherly love.

The work in themes

Theme: Bambocciate

13. *Gypsy Camp* (17th century) by Jan van de Venne

Theme: composition of an image

2. *The Great Holy Family* (circa 1518) by Raphael

5. *The Fortune Teller* (1595-1598) by Caravaggio

10. *Travellers beneath the Ruins* (1640-1643) by Sébastien Bourdon

11. *Soldiers at Rest* (1640-1643) by Sébastien Bourdon

Reasons for the connection

Creation by artists of depictions of Romani otherness

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: historicised stereotypes

Differences

- ▶ Style: development and uniqueness of these depictions across styles, countries and periods



Gypsy Wedding Feast (circa 1730-1735) – Alessandro Magnasco (1667-1749)
Oil on canvas (86 x 118 cm) – Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Fact sheet 14

Gypsy Wedding Feast (circa 1730-1735)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: genre painting

Style: late baroque

Medium: painting

The work in questions

— *What does this scene depict?*

Some people are gathered for a wedding in tents held up by wooden stakes. The bride can be seen among the characters at the far left of the table, and a clergyman facing her. In the foreground there are two musicians, one playing the mandolin and another the harp; they are livening up the wedding.

■ **What in the picture connects this wedding to a Roma wedding?**

Absolutely nothing. There are no indications connecting this work to the reality of Roma life. The presence of a clergyman is rather unusual.

■ **So why is the picture entitled *Gypsy Wedding Feast*?**

This painting uses the motif of the gallant Gypsy. The Gypsies are fantastical. The characters are made up, dressed and characterised in the Roma style, according to the preconceived ideas of the time.

■ **What can be said about the painter's use of light in the composition?**

Alessandro Magnasco paints small, clearly defined people on a dark background, with light, vigorous brush strokes, thus creating a composition that is almost phantasmagorical and unsettling.

The work in themes

Theme: composition of an image

9. *Gypsy Girl* (circa 1630) by Frans Hals

15. *Zingara with a Basque Tambourine* (circa 1865-1870) by Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot

Reasons for the connection

Models dressed in the Roma style

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: the historicised stereotype, between fascination and rejection

Differences

- ▶ Style: development and uniqueness of these depictions across styles, countries and periods

Zingara with a Basque Tambourine
(circa 1865-1870)
Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot
(1796-1875)
Oil on canvas (55 x 38 cm)
Louvre Museum, Paris,
France



Fact sheet 15

Zingara with a Basque Tambourine (circa 1865-1870)

The work in brief

Period: modern

Artistic field: visual art

Genre: portrait

Style: transition from classicism to impressionism

Medium: painting

The work in questions

■ *How can we formally identify the young girl as a Gypsy?*

There are no physical elements or clothing that make this possible. Only the title of the work and the tambourine that she is holding in her left hand allow

us to identify this woman with the world of music, with which various Romani groups are often associated.

■ ***What does Zingara mean?***

Zingara means “Gypsy” in Italian. It is an exonym, like “traveller”. In other words, it is a name given to a group of people by other people external to that group.

Zingara is a recurring artistic motif in operas from Camille Corot’s time.

■ ***Where did the painter have the model pose?***

Camille Corot made his model pose in an idealised natural setting, thus recapturing the image of a Romani figure closely connected to nature.

■ ***How could this young girl’s expression be described?***

Open-ended response.

The Zingara is looking at the viewer. Her expression could be interpreted in various ways. It is often interpreted as being sad or dreamy. However, her indolent pose reveals a certain sensuality. The painter produced this portrait when he was very old, which could explain the Zingara’s melancholy expression.

■ ***What tones were used on the painter’s palette?***

In this portrait, Camille Corot uses an ochre palette, going from pink to green to grey. These tones reinforce the young girl’s dreamy, melancholic expression. The painter’s rapid strokes are sometimes heavy and sometimes light.

■ ***Why is Camille Corot said to be the “last classical” and the “first impressionist” painter?***

Camille Corot is first and foremost a landscape artist in the classical pictorial tradition. He travelled to Italy and all around France. For the young Impressionists, he was a precursor in his treatment of light and in his brush strokes.

The work in themes

Theme: portraiture

9. *Gypsy Girl* (circa 1630) by Frans Hals

Reasons for the connection

Portraiture and composition of an image

Comparison keys

Similarities

- ▶ Subject: Romani women – between attraction and repulsion
- ▶ The place of nature in this composition

Differences

- ▶ Style: Dutch Caravagesque/Camille Corot's transition from classicism to impressionism

Theme: texts

Charles Baudelaire, *Travelling Gypsies*, *The Flowers of Evil*, 1857.

Appendices – Instructions for using the fact sheets

1. **The headline** gives the work's title, production date, dimensions, pictorial technique and location.
2. **The work in brief** supplements the information in the heading and specifies the work's status.
3. **The questions** encourage engagement with the work and stimulate curiosity.
4. **The work in themes** section suggests other works that could be linked to the main work for comparative interpretation according to themes. The themes have been decided upon using comparison criteria such as technique, style, movement or genre.
5. **The reasons for the connection** justify the connection between the works in the given theme.
6. **The comparison keys** guide the comparative analysis of the works in the given theme.
7. **The similarities** reveal the common features shared by the works.
8. **The differences** show what distinguishes the works from each other. By convention, the differences primarily relate to the work illustrated on the front of the fact sheet and then the work associated with it.

Why group the works into themes?

The themes allow the works to be interpreted. Comparative analysis allows spontaneous questions to be asked about criteria such as form, technique,

sense and usage. This kind of theme is constructed with the students through the activities involving the categorisation of the works.

The themes provide guidance for viewing the works. They emphasise some fundamental ideas such as the treatment of space, representational codes, or technique. The comparison keys allow these concepts to be identified and developed.

They also create links between works from different cultures and periods. The aim of the proposed connections is to open up the debate, shed light on the creative process and broaden the students' cultural horizons.

Guide to the visit

Roma at the Louvre: A disembodied otherness

Duration: 2 hours

Age: 9-18

Disciplines: history, art history, French, philosophy

Introduction

Aims

This tour has multiple aims, which can complement each other (and are not differentiated according to the students' levels). The visit may be based on these various concepts:

- ▶ Discovery work and familiarisation with the largest minority in Europe, the Roma people, and the various groups that they comprise: Manouches, Sinti, Roma and Kale, whether travelling or settled (for ages 9-18);
- ▶ A project reflecting on the ways in which stereotyped depictions of otherness are produced (for ages 11-18);
- ▶ A project on real and/or constructed otherness and externality (for ages 15-18).

Bias

The Louvre collection as considered from the Romani perspective could be called "a Disembodied Otherness". In fact, all endeavours to create a national artistic heritage account for a set of intentions that are either deliberately formulated or subconscious and which are deeply entrenched in the body of produced knowledge. With regard to the Louvre collection and the implicit relationship between depictions of Romani otherness and ethnicity, we are

faced with both a presence and an absence. Romani figures, clothes and appurtenances are certainly present, but they are completely disembodied.

The aim is to spark various kinds of reflection on:

- ▶ the artistic treatment of Romani figures throughout history;
- ▶ the development of the place in European societies of the various groups that this people comprises (endonyms: Roma, Manouches, Sinti, Kale, etc; exonyms: Gypsies, Bohemians, tsiganes, Travellers), through the depictions to which they have been subject for over five centuries;
- ▶ what majority societies have projected onto these figures;
- ▶ the necessary links between history, geopolitics and philosophy that are essential for understanding the complex ways in which depictions of these first figures of otherness in Europe have been created;
- ▶ the extent of self-assimilation of certain images of themselves created by others.

The aim is not, however, to undertake a critical analysis of depictions of Romani figures, nor to rectify an omission or absence, but rather to question the ghostly or figurative presence of an otherness that creates a certain structure in modern Europe.

Material

- ▶ Tour framework for teachers and guides, allowing works, periods and the history of ideas to be placed in perspective
- ▶ 15 fact sheets about the works

Roma at the Louvre: A disembodied otherness

Author's analysis

Roma,³ Gypsies, Kale, Sinti, Manouches, Bohemians, Travellers, tziganes... tramps, chicken thieves, spies, poisoners, fortune tellers, child eaters ... Beyond clichés, fantasies, attraction and repulsion, the Roma are a numerous people, numbering over 12 million in Europe.⁴ It is this people, rich in their cultural pluralism, an unusual, transnational people who have been in Europe for over six centuries, that is the idea behind my work.

Ever absent from European national historical tales in which they have nonetheless played a part since the 15th century, the various Romani groups were at the very heart of geopolitical affairs in the periods and countries they traversed. Disseminators of knowledge, outsiders reflected in the mirror, historiography has treated them like free radicals, outside the world and outside history. Only a doleful approach to their history has been able to mobilise historians. Specialists in Romani studies and experts of all kinds have appropriated the "subject" in order to make them their "object", in a type of treatment that ranges from the entomological to the cultural approach via a dignified vision of the 19th century at the high point of colonialism.

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3. The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Kale/Cale, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and d) groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. This text is meant as an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Traveller.
 4. The Council of Europe comprises 47 European states.

Roma, Bohemians, Gypsies, tziganes and Travellers are also creations and motifs. Using the most prestigious and political French art collection as a means of decrypting the connections that create the structure for anti-Gypsyism has without any doubt been a profoundly enriching experience for my own work in historical epistemology. Works have been produced using contradictory projections and artistic motifs par excellence. Ever since the Roma first appeared in the world view of majority societies, these depictions have never ceased to project the mysteries, fantasies and fears of the latter, in the performing arts, in literature and in the collective imagination. At the Louvre, they have been depicted by the greatest masters of European painting. They are seen every day by thousands of people but they remain, in reality, invisible.

On 8 April 2015, for International Roma Day and in collaboration with the Council of Europe, a pilot visit on the subject of Romani figures was organised at the Louvre Museum. The result of several months' research, the title "Roma at the Louvre: a disembodied otherness" was given to this visit.

Fifteen works belonging to the collection and to the museum's permanent exhibition have been listed, thus creating for the first time a complete list of depictions of the people whom we now know as Roma, Manouches and Kale, whether travelling or settled, in the most important museum collection in France. This list shows the way in which pictorial representations of Roma have evolved, each time in response to social, moral, ethical and geopolitical necessity, among majority societies and in dialectics that oscillate between presence and absence.

In fact, there is a shift at the Louvre from the 15th century to the 19th century, from a moral treatment to a political one, and finally a trend to orientalise the Roma. From Raphael to Nicolò dell'Abbate, via Caravaggio, Bourdon, Jan van de Venne, Magnasco and Corot, disembodiment is a common leitmotif. There are only a few works that escape this logic, thus giving us a paradigm to decipher.

Depictions of the Romani body and of Romani attributes, whether real or imagined, serve the majority societies. Their appearance in Europe in the 15th century, as a full epistemological caesura between the waning age of interpretation and the embryonic age of enlightenment, influences a certain relationship with otherness. Whether hermeneutical, allegorical figures of vice, seduction or even embryonic nation states, it is the ontological absence of Roma that is highlighted by the Louvre's pictorial list and this clarifies the relationship that the French power apparatus maintains with this minority.

Multidisciplinary teaching materials at multiple levels have been produced around these 15 works – a teaching tour, a contextualisation tour, fact sheets on the works – and detailed maps all designed to encourage analysis and interpretation on several levels.

It is important to remember that there is a deliberate position behind this approach. As a historian and specialist in the military history of the Roma in the modern period, I also work on questions relating to epistemology and the decolonisation of knowledge.

As a Kale (a Romani group known by the majority societies as Franco-Spanish Gypsies), my narrative has a particular position. It thwarts some of this impossibility of being, this ontological absence, through the words of a historian and with all the methodological rigour that this entails, but also through the words of a historian claiming her own ethnicity and thus offering another relationship with both the historical narrative and the interpretations offered by historiography on this topic.

Beyond the artistic, historical and didactic interest that this list offers, with its contextualisation and its analysis, the publication of this work, which discusses works of art as well as historical and epistemological analysis, explains the mechanisms that have created stereotypes of various Romani groups, their intentions and their conditioning throughout history.

Is the Romani figure a constituent element or component of national artistic imagery? Quite simply, is it possible to speak of a Romani presence at the Louvre (understanding “presence” in the Lévinassian sense of another whose otherness is a dazzling expression)? It is certainly present to a lesser extent than in other places of high culture in France, such as the National Archives, or in the rest of Europe, such as the collections in the Hermitage, the Prado or the Vatican. In terms of numbers, therefore, the Louvre houses 15 works, most of which are on display and which are spread out over a time line running from the 15th to the 19th centuries. Bohemians, Gypsies, fortune tellers, Travellers and musicians can be found in them, but who could say that they can see Roma, Sinti, Kalderash, Kale, Manouches or Lovari in them?

Now, when Roma others are regarded as radical outsiders, when Roma and Gypsies, whether travelling or settled, are treated as the lowest of the low, there is no choice but to accept that this people will only be emancipated, whether socially or intellectually, if the philosophical injunctions of Paul Ricœur become a foregone conclusion.

In fact, Roma people in their intrinsic pluralism, yet greatly hampered by the “three fundamental ethical powers of being”, namely the power of speech, the power of action and the power of organising one’s own life into an intelligible, acceptable narrative, are actually excluded from their “payment obligations”, from their responsibility to the world, and also to a great extent from their power to act.

Ghostly, fantastical, allegorical figures; an archaeological methodological approach must therefore be applied in order to find within these ontological absences, these absences of being, something of the Roma, Sinti and Kale, of those whom majority society loves to evoke using exonyms, chanting “Egyptians”, “Gypsies”, “Bohemians” or “tramps”.

We have no choice but to accept that it is very difficult to see oneself as an individual belonging to a Romani group in the depictions presented to us in the works at the Louvre. In my view, and by virtue of the “je ne sais quoi” so dear to Jankélévitch, there is one picture that escapes this presentation. It is a work by Sébastien Bourdon, which unfortunately is not on display and may be found in the museum’s inventory. It dates from 1643 and has been given two successive titles, namely *Gypsies and Soldiers at Rest* and then *Travellers beneath the Ruins* (Fact sheet 10). We will return to it later.

Throughout the visit, the words used to describe Romani otherness will be flexible. You will hear the names that we use ourselves, which take capital letters: Rom, Sinto, Kalo, Kalderash, Lovari and Xoraxane, but also other names, which are exogenic and generally do not: Gypsy, boho, tramp and traveller. This flexibility is difficult to probe and, to the detriment of anthropologists, it is characterised by the relationship that the various Romani groups have with their multiple identities.

This visit, therefore, aims to offer a path through nearly four centuries, a period in which the pictorial representation of various Romani groups in Europe has evolved in a way that has been dictated by the fears and fantasies and the social, moral and political necessities of the relationships that majority societies have with their own identity/identities.

Introduction to the subject

Before this internal otherness that comprises the Rom, the Sinto and the Kalo became fixed in the imagination as a negative stereotype, culminating in their deterioration into Egyptians, Bohemians, Gypsies and Travellers, these strangers from “little Egypt”, as they were often called in the chronicles of the late Middle Ages and who are a recurring presence in western Europe from the 15th century onwards, are first and foremost assimilated positively into four of the archetypal figures of medieval western culture:

- ▶ Biblical Egypt;
- ▶ the figure of the exile (mobility), strongly linked to the world of the Old Testament;

- ▶ the devoted, nursing mother;
- ▶ nature and the figure of the savage.

These four figures are present in the corpus of works from the Louvre.

In *The Glorious Virgin* (Fact sheet 1), an anonymous Flemish tapestry dating from the end of the 15th century, the female Romani figure is one of the most highly incarnated figures in the works under discussion.

The central panel depicts the Glorious Virgin, crowned by two angels. The panel on the right shows Christ healing a sick man, while the panel on the left, the one in which we are interested here, shows a scene from the Old Testament, namely that of Moses making the water spring from the rock during the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt. I would ask you to consider the woman, who is accompanied by a child, who is dressed, and has her hair styled, in the manner of Gypsies of the time, and who has a baby at her breast.

We will see how some of these figures have persisted and others have disappeared completely or ended up deteriorating in a way contrary to their primary motives.

Before anything else, however, as a form of anchorage or mooring in this marvellous tapestry, it is the image of the nursing, devoted mother that I would like to linger on. This figure of the ontologically loving mother is the only connotation-free common theme in the development of Romani femininity from the chronicles of the late Middle Ages through to the poetry of the 19th century. The visible nakedness of the breast or its mere evocation, unthinkable in the Middle Ages and in the modern period, is established as a paradigm of beneficent nature by virtue of the celebration of life in the very essence of motherhood. I cannot help but think of the verse by Charles Baudelaire in *Travelling Gypsies* that evokes this same figure, "the ever-ready treasure of her drooping breasts". I also think about the pain experienced by my people when, in these dark days of ours, this vital, soft, eternal image of a mother nursing naturally is transposed to a street corner or the entrance of an underground railway station, in the archetypal image of our misfortune.

At this point however, by way of introduction, we must go back a little. The oldest documents that attest to the presence of Roma in western Europe date from the first half of the 15th century (France 1419;⁵ Germany 1417; Switzerland 1418; Italy 1422; Spain 1425⁶).

5. Ain department archives CC 9 (Syndic accounts from 1418 to 1419), dated 22 August 1419. www.archives-numerisees.ain.fr/archives/visu/50855/1/daogrp/0.
6. Royal Aragon Archives. Royal Chancellery, leg. 2483 fol. 136r.

Councillors and secretaries of the Kingdom of France, Navarre or other parts of Europe nearly always paint a similar picture for us. Their chronicles and reports mention groups of individuals: men, women and children of all ages, with dark complexions, long hair and jewellery, both men and women, dressed in very specific ways, heavily armed and led by heads of company who are called dukes, counts and captains.⁷

Medieval society is thus undergoing a transformation. It is preparing to go through what Michel Foucault has called an epistemological caesura: a fundamental, structuring transition between a human being in a world conceived of through the prism of hermeneutics and thus of interpretation (in which the ontological Romani figure could be the paradigm) and a modern society modelled on reason and cogito.⁸

It is in this caesura that the presence of the Roma appears and throws a spanner in the works. Between two worlds, one Oriental and the other western, between two historical milestones, the Middle Ages and the modern period, the figure of the Rom, known by the majority societies of the time with exonyms such as "Egyptian", "Saracen", "Bohemian" or even "Tatar", shifts over the course of a few generations from otherness (from a mirrored relationship with the other) to exteriority, imposed by the advent of normativity.

Over a few decades (as expressed so well in the words of the Spanish Gypsy poet Pepe Maya, "a los cortejos suntuosos suceden los harapos"/"opulent corteges are followed by rags"), there has been a radical shift in the symbolic and artistic representation of Romani individuality.

In fact, in around 1500, less than a hundred years after their arrival in Europe, the great Egyptian companies were chased out of the towns and cities, and derogatory clichés took deep root in the pictorial treatment of Roma populations.

Those who had quite rightly been considered as hermeneutists, interpreters and disseminators of knowledge were turned into necromancers, sorcerers, cowards, child eaters, poisoners and thieves. Through these works, we can see how magic ceases to be prophetic and sibylline, and comes to embody dupery, ugliness, vice and theft.

The advent of reason demands the domestication of the other. When this domestication cannot be fully attained, the other must be banished outside

7. *Le journal d'un bourgeois de Paris de 1405 à 1449* (Diary of a Parisian Burgher, 1405-1449), Anonymous, pp. 234-8, Collection Lettres Gothiques, Poche, 1990.

8. Foucault M. (1966), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Gallimard, Paris.

the boundaries of the self, the structuring norms. The other must be made into an outsider, and sometimes one that is so distressing that it must be exposed in an instructing way in order to be controlled. The allegory of vice and deception, the embodiment of the deceiver deceived, these are the images projected onto Roma people, and especially Romani women.

As if it were a receptacle for the fear and fascination of the majority, the manufactured idea of the “Romani creature” mutates repeatedly and forever.

Later, we will see how this exteriority undergoes a different sort of treatment from the 18th century onwards. It will be idealised and serve a particular aim. Once again it will become an allegory, but this time embodying telluric power through a politicised representation of nature owing to the advent of nationalism. Romani exteriority will be depicted and expressed in marginal natural landscapes and used by artists as a symbolic way of furthering the advent of nation states.

In the 19th century, completely disembodied and after having been gallant, the Romani figure becomes no more than an Orientalist reflection of the artist’s projection, of the artist’s inner world, and of the bad creature that the artist tests in the face of a society that no longer suits him, and in which the Bohemian, the traveller, the Gypsy is the antonymic paradigm.

Romani figures appear in western painting from the end of the 15th century

There are some constants in the first descriptions of Romani groups arriving in western Europe: on the one hand, as explained above, there are the names given in the archives for these populations, their mobility and the military or noble nature of the titles under which the heads of these companies presented themselves to the local authorities (and adapting in so doing to the politico-strategic realities of the regions of Europe that they passed through). On the other hand, ultimately, these descriptions rapidly shift towards the creation of a contemptible body, the phenomenology of a hideous body that transforms itself over time into a morbid body.

Archives very often teach us as much about their editors’ state of mind as they do about the subject that they supposedly describe. They are full of descriptive information relating to these companies: the number of members, a description of the weapons, women, children and Romani clothing.⁹ Princes, dukes, kings, counts, voivodes, commanders and privileged interlocutors with

9. Arras, Municipal archives, BB 6, folio 54 verso.

the authorities are sometimes mentioned at the head of these troops. They go by names such as Thomas, Andrew, Paulo or Jacobo of Little Egypt. There is very little information about the sociological structure of these companies, which could number from several dozen to several hundred people. We know that they were heavily armed and that they were mounted. They presented themselves to the authorities under the aegis of a referent, someone who was legally responsible for the actions of his company's members.

If there is a description, it is left to historians to research the impact of these populations on the relationship that the rural and urban societies of the late Middle Ages had with the other in the 15th century. These mass population movements were nothing unique or new; movements of troops and pilgrims were in fact common.

Throughout Europe, from the Kingdom of Hungary to that of France, from Germany to the Netherlands, from the Crown of Aragon or of Castile to Messina and Forli, the Roma who arrived are presented with military and seigniorial titles in the writings of the late 15th-century authorities. They were thus fairly well received at the very beginning by western European nobility, who sometimes even considered them as equals. As nobles coming from an idealised East, having lost their fiefs for the Christian cause, high-ranking penitents for having renounced the Christian faith under Muslim rule, the nobility was obliged to help them. They were treated as knights (basic members of the nobility's corps for military purposes), but also sometimes as "illustrious" (*inclito*), as was the case in Aragon and Andalusia. This was particularly so at Jaén, where, on 22 November 1462, Counts Martin and Tomas of Little Egypt were received as lords by the constable and chancellor of Castile, Count Miguel Lucas of Iranzo.¹⁰

These companies were initially granted Imperial safe passage signed by Sigismund of Hungary (hence the name "Bohemian" which they were given in France), and a little later they were granted universal protection by Papal Bulls of dubious authenticity.¹¹ The archives tell us that these companies were heading for Santiago de la Compostela in penitence, and were quite logically taking the routes still being used for pilgrimages, especially at that time the French Way. Because of this, they received the financial and logistical aid to which all pilgrims were entitled.

10. An account of the deeds of the most magnificent and most virtuous gentleman, Don Miguel Lucas, most dignified Constable of Castile, edition and study, Juan Cuevas Mata, Juan del Arco Moya, José del Arco Moya, University of Jaén, 2001.

11. Papal Bull by Pope Martin V concerning safe passage for Andreu, Duke of Little Egypt, 15 December 1423, National Library, New French acquisitions 6729, No. 7, Paris.

At this point, I would like to underline the fact that, despite this leitmotif of Romani historiography, which consists of justifying the mobility of the companies with a religious motif of atonement, the archives do not mention any particularly significant presence of Bohemians and/or other Egyptians on the routes to Santiago de la Compostela.

This construction of origin narratives, which the British researcher Angus Fraser quite rightly calls “The Great Trick”, is a very important logical articulation that needs to be re-examined, in my view.¹²

In fact, there are numerous questions surrounding the production of this first decline in migratory origins and causes. Romani historiography, in other words the study of historical writings about Roma, has always been very tightly bound to the cognitive engagement of their authors, whether in the actual writing of historical stories or in the researcher’s choice of sources. On the other hand, the field of historical Romani studies is, sadly, very poorly developed and unfashionable. Since it is a field that could be described from the perspective of many disciplines (microhistory, global/connected history, margin studies and ethnic studies, for example), the subject is a godsend for understanding the societies of the late Middle Ages and modern history through a minority prism. The panorama of western universities, it must unfortunately be observed, is incapable of abandoning its ethnocentrism in order to attain peripheral knowledge.

The most striking aspect of this lack of methodological rigour is the fact that no consideration has been given to problematising Romani mobility. In fact, historians have assumed pilgrimage to be the reason for their movement, even though no documentary evidence has been found establishing Santiago de la Compostela as the reason for the movement of these companies through Europe. No archives describe the arrival of these “Egyptians” in the area of Santiago de la Compostela, even though they would have been perfectly visible owing to their conduct and customs. In order to gain a better understanding of the processes underpinning the artistic creation of the first Romani figures and/or the use of Romani imagery in western art from the 15th century onwards, it is necessary to consider this absence of interpretative hindsight on the part of the authorities that produced the archives and of subsequent historians, with regard to the reasons given for the mobility of these first companies. Was this a strategy created by the Romani companies at the time of their arrival, or was it a fantastical creation by the majority societies? Perhaps it was a bit of both.

12. Fraser A. M. (1992), *The Gypsies*, Blackwell, Oxford.

We should ask ourselves why research into understanding the mobility of these groups has never been expressed in relation to two of the main flows of people in Europe, namely pilgrims and military mobility. Its expression is sometimes outlined by historiography, but never historicised. Since archives are obvious, some works by historians discuss the military relationships and ancient lineages that existed between rural French nobles and the “Egyptian households” and thus between the seigniorial troops and Bohemian companies. Nonetheless, many of the connections that would allow us to historicise these relationships are absent from the historical narrative. This is the primary explanation for the power relationships that these alliances assumed, as well as the peripheral resistance to the centrality of the state. It is also the importance of the role played by these alliances and Romani markers in the construction of the future nation states of Europe. Above all, however, it is the denied evidence of mobility of a people that at that time was essentially based on subsistence activities relating to the military and mercenary world.

If, therefore, the written sources adopt a religious cause to justify this mobility, the art in turn also rejects it by invoking two foundational figures.

On the one hand, there is the figure of the Biblical exile (the Hebrews of Egypt fleeing the Pharaoh, and the Holy Family fleeing Herod), the very provenance of which, known as “Little Egypt” (which is nothing other than a region of the Peloponnese where archives attest to the presence of Gypsy military garrisons from the 14th century onwards), establishes and maintains this treatment.

On the other hand, there is the status of hermeneutist, of proclaimer, of diviner, which allows a second iconographic model to be constructed. Chiromancy and necromancy are immediately associated with Romani knowledge. This association was not originally perceived in a negative way. It is part of being in a mystical, esoteric world typical of a turning point in time, before the epistemological caesura mentioned earlier started to operate.

We are therefore faced with two iconographic Romani archetypes that impose themselves and fluctuate between the sacred and the profane. The first is that of the Egyptian figure in exile, of mobility, of the injustice of persecution by the Pharaoh or by Herod. At the Louvre, these figures are found in the Flemish *The Glorious Virgin* (Fact sheet 1) and in the preparatory drawing for *Moses Saved from the Water* by Nicolò dell’Abbate (Fact sheet 4). The second is that of the hermeneutic figure of the interpreter and proclaimer as developed by Raphael in his *Great Holy Family* (Fact sheet 2) and its corollary by Giulio Romano, *The Small Holy Family* (Fact sheet 3) in the figure of St Elizabeth, mother of St John the Baptist and proclaimer of the birth and death of Jesus Christ; she is dressed and has her hair styled in the manner of the Gypsies of the time.

In fact, in the *Great Holy Family* by Raphael, St Elizabeth, mother of St John the Baptist and the Virgin's cousin, announces Jesus' sacrifice. She is therefore depicted in the dress of a Romani woman, wearing a cape¹³ and turban. Other women are found in numerous scenes from the 15th and 16th centuries, such as St Anne and the Virgins with Child, dressed in a similar way or with the flat hat also typical of Gypsy women. This is the case with Boccaccio, dell'Abbate, Correggio, Ansaldo, Mantegna and Titian.

During our tour, we will see how the features of Romani dress disappear from pictorial representations a century later as pragmatics and edicts prohibit any visible, assumed otherness: language, occupations, mobility and Romani dress.

From hermeneutist to fortune tellers: the shift from otherness to exteriority

Even though this epistemological caesura takes place between two completely different interpretations of the world, the iconographic image of the Roma oscillates between the sacred and the profane.

If Raphael's St Catherine, who is depicted as a Roma/Egyptian, is a sacred evocation of the proclamation of Christ's future sacrifice, a profane image, it becomes a recurring theme for Caravaggio (*The Fortune Teller*, Fact sheet 5) and European Caravaggesques. Fortune tellers, as negative allegories of vice and of moral marginality, crystallise the artistic and social representation of Romani women.

Caravaggesque fortune tellers and also others before them tell us about the ancient nature of depictions of Romani women as predictors of the future and mistresses of the "black arts". We have seen how, a little earlier, these women and their qualities as hermeneutists and interpreters of signs that were inaccessible to lesser mortals fascinated other people so much that they were chosen to represent key female figures from the Old and New Testaments.

At the dawn of the 17th century, the theme of the fortune teller took centre stage. The Gypsy and the naive customer, accompanied in some cases by drinkers, musicians and people of ill virtue, are recurring themes in all the studios of Europe (*The Fortune Teller* by Le Valentin, circa 1628, Fact sheet 7; *Musicians and Drinkers*, 1625, Fact sheets 8; *The Fortune Teller* by Nicolas Régnier, circa 1626, Fact sheet 6).

This iconographic archetype was not created by Caravaggio. It can already be found some decades earlier, around 1500, in the *Haywain Triptych* by

13. A garment of thick material, a sort of stole attached to one shoulder.

Hieronymus Bosch.¹⁴ The presence of a Romani palmreader assumes a symbolic, moralising significance that must be decrypted by linking it to the rest of the scene in which it is found. It is the same with the magnificent tapestry called *The Story of Carrabara*,¹⁵ which is exceptionally rich in images and information relating to the day-to-day life of Roma people in the early 16th century. These two works include female hermeneutists reading the palms of nobles.

However, as the Caravagesque movement became a school and spread internationally, it removed the motif of the fortune teller from her complexity and the richness of her world, to isolate her and develop her into an allegorical representation of immorality.

Caravaggio and the Caravagesques crystallised and disseminated an artistic and moral motif on an international scale. Some of them projected the same moral vices, namely theft, dupery and lechery, with each of them incorporating particular features. In the case of *The Fortune Teller* by Nicolas Régnier (Fact sheet 6), the motif is strongly eroticised. It embodies the beginnings of the Orientalist view of Gypsy women, forged by fascination, fear and fantasy. It is the picture in which there is a sexual shift in the figure of Romani women from a glorious body to a hideous body with animal sensuality.

Let us pause here for a moment.

The Fortune Teller by Nicolas Régnier (Fact sheet 6) shows a naive woman attracted by a young, beautiful Gypsy and being swindled by the old Gypsy woman. In *Musicians and Drinkers* by Le Valentin (Fact sheet 8), the naive man is attracted by a courtesan and is swindled by her assistant. The difference here is that the theft is committed by the Gypsy accomplice. With Régnier, the naive man has disappeared, but two contradictory figures replace him: two women, a courtesan and a Gypsy, both victims and accomplices.

The consequence of this fusion is that the attraction of the victim by the accomplice, which was strengthened in the underlying themes by an implicit sexual attraction, here becomes an attraction between women by necessity, hence perhaps the impression of disquiet that the composition stimulates from the outset. Although balanced out by the presence of other characters, the viewer, the accomplice and the onlooker have an intense feeling of strangeness in the seductive relationship between these two stunning beauties who are equal in the splendour of their appearance yet rivals by

14. Hieronymus Bosch, *Haywain Triptych*, circa 1516, oil on panel, 147 x 212 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.

15. Volckaery A. (1985), "The collection of Flemish tapestries from Gaasbeek Castle. A historical, iconographical and stylistic study", Master's dissertation, Catholic University of Louvain, Louvain.

virtue of their skin colour and the weapons of their profession (a robber's dress opposed to that of a courtesan).

It is therefore historical modernity and thus the age of cogito that pushes a key figure of hermeneutics, the proclaimer or Pythia, to the outside by means of the figure of the female Gypsy. It is this exteriority that will be developed using the motif of the fortune teller.

However, as a pictorial response to this epistemological caesura, about halfway through the 17th century, the racialised figure of the Bohemian is eclipsed. Even though Bohemians, Gypsies and fortune tellers were depicted with very negative connotations, they could only be recognised by their physical attributes and clothing. Little by little, and with few exceptions, Romani figures, and especially female Romani figures, lost their ethnicity, as is the case with *Gypsy Girl* by Frans Hals (Fact sheet 9), where only the title suggests the model's ethnic origin.

The Europe of nation states – Nationalisation of the pictorial treatment of Roma people in marginal nature

Majority societies tend to forget that the concepts of nation and of national identity are in no respect components of "human nature" and that such components are nothing but constructs, "simple" products. The nation that the majority accepts could be defined as an "imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"¹⁶ is a modern creation. The concept was consolidated progressively from the 16th to the 18th century. At the end of the 18th century, all European countries tested an identical process for defining the nation, with some gaining self-belief and thus their colonial enterprises.

These western national identities were constructed to the detriment of numerous minorities, who are seen to have been denied, destroyed or irrevocably transformed by monolithic national constructs. If the 18th century saw the arrival of nationalism, it was also partly a result of the establishing of a new geopolitical reality and the changes in cultural legitimacy based on this new concept of normativity, which was already latent from the end of the 15th century onwards.

The emergence of market capitalism, the invention of printing and the birth of vernacular languages as instruments of administrative centralisation are the

16. Anderson B. (1983), *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London.

three key elements in the construction of majority national identities. In other words, the identification of common ancestors, the choice and adoption of designed folklore and the development of mass culture subsequently allowed a national idea to be propagated in the spirits and minds of modern societies on the one hand, and justified colonial enterprises on the other.

An exhaustive study mirroring these three elements (protocapitalism, printing, and vernacular language) – completely contrary to the premodern and modern economic practices of the Roma, those being linked to knowledge transmission (orality) and the multilingual nature of various European Romani groups – would be of decisive importance for understanding the construction of a Romani abnormality by majority societies. Furthermore, it is these three aspects, means of subsistence, multilingualism and agraphia, on which modern and contemporary racist discourses have been based in relation to various Roma and Gypsy groups in Europe.

Romani reality has occupied an undeniable place in European nationalist constructs. The abnormality from within that they already embodied had a mirror effect on the normative frameworks on which such nationalism was structured.

There is therefore some unity in the use of the Romani motif for national iconography. European artists of the 17th century mainly used Bambocciate.

Bambocciate are genre paintings that were popularised in Rome in the second quarter of the 17th century by the Dutchman Pieter van Laer, whose small stature and physical appearance gained him the nickname Bamboccio (“little man” or “doll”). Until recently, all paintings that evoked popular life in Rome, the city’s slums and the activities of crooks, buffoons and louts were attributed to Bamboccio. The formula proved to be a great success, and it was practised by numerous painters, including Italians such as Cerquozzi and Frenchmen such as Sébastien Bourdon, whose works are unfortunately not on display in the museum’s exhibition rooms, but are particularly interesting: *Soldiers at Rest*, also called *Gypsies at Rest* (1640-1643, Fact sheet 11) and *Travellers beneath the Ruins* (1640-1643, Fact sheet 10). Another example is the Dutchman Jan Miel and his *Military Regiment Resting with a Fortune Teller* (circa 1648-1650, Fact sheet 12).

The treatment of playlets shows Gypsies in a mannerist way, underlining the stereotypes to which they are subject.

This motif of the Bambocciata must be closely linked to the literary styles of the *commedia dell'arte* or the picaresque Spanish novel, which also had its apogee in the early 17th century.

A Dutch artist from this period, Jan van de Venne, also known as the “Master of the Gypsies”, must also be given due consideration. His pictographic treatment of the Romani figure stands out owing to a deep personal feeling of strong empathy with the status of his models, and a realism articulated by Caravaggio and the Dutch tradition, yet showing a certain respect for the humble, noble characters. In his *Gypsy Camp* (Fact sheet 13), we can see how the motif of the female Romani figure, motherly and loving, recalls the works from the late 15th century that we saw earlier.

The works by Bourdon, which are unfortunately not on display (Fact sheets 10 and 11), can be interpreted, like those by Miel (Fact sheet 12), from an angle different from the Bambocciate or genre painting. These three works show day-to-day Romani life from a military perspective. This is a fundamental point, because since their departure from India at the start of the first millennium, the history of the Roma people and their various subgroups has been very closely linked to geopolitics and military conflicts in the East and in the West. Military and mercenary activity is a constant in Romani protohistory and history. This anchoring of Romani identity in warmongering and European geopolitical history allows Romani movement to be conditioned initially by seigniorial wars and subsequently by national wars.

In Europe, and particularly in France, armed service at the individual or collective level was a factor in the structuring of Romani identity and ethnicity. From the Wars of Religion up to the Wars of Succession, via the Reconquista and the Franco-Flemish Wars, the archives speak of “Roma” soldiers, captains, lieutenants or mere pipers and drummers, the protagonists of national histories, despite the legal directives that were promulgated and executed against them.

Following their arrival on French territory, and for more than a hundred years, the Bohemian companies were able to move around without any difficulty. However, restrictive royal decrees, progressively more and more severe, were issued increasingly, although they were not very effective, and their effects were very often cancelled out by the special privileges that contradicted general ordinances. Egyptian households were protected by the princes and military chiefs with whom they had made deals, thanks to which they obtained certificates, safe passage and passports to guarantee the company’s safe passage. Royal or seigniorial support and patronage ensured the construction of a national identity for Bohemians and Egyptians, thus guaranteeing their collective permanence. Despite the strong legislation punishing the bearing of arms, archive documents describe some companies that were very heavily armed. The seigniorial houses and provincial nobility, who were often rebellious, used these alliances to ensure a loyal, experienced military

contingent. In this context of political instability and in a world that was stabilising itself, these protections were strongly looked down upon by the monarchy, responsible for ensuring the centralisation of power. It is clear that from 1539 onwards the publication of laws and edicts against “Egyptians” and “Bohemians” accounts for an obvious desire to disperse these militarised companies, who could potentially be at the service of a seigniorial rebellion, at the risk of their subsequent formation to better advantage and according to the military and strategic plans of the time.

The year 1682 is a key moment, a turning point in the history of the Roma in France. There is a schism in the way in which the Roma on French territory were subsequently regarded by both the central powers and the majority society. From that point on, their ethnicity is gradually removed from official texts. The terms “Bohemians” and “Egyptians” disappear from 18th-century legislation. They are implicitly encompassed by the body of law that penalises vagrancy. In his “Royal Declaration against Bohemians” and those who shelter them of 11 July 1682, Louis XIV stripped the Bohemian companies of all grounds for military and nobile patronage, which had persisted despite the legislation in force. Punishments included lifetime sentencing to the galleys for men, lashes and exile for women, and workhouses for children. The coercive measures against those who sheltered them were significant: confiscation of land and suppression of privileges, followed by a major punishment if these privileges were insufficient. This royal reprobation by Louis XIV was therefore also an attack on the nobility who counted on the services of the “Bohemian people”. The text very clearly suggests that there was dangerous collusion between certain nobles and the companies, and that it was considered to be scandalous. This occurred in an atmosphere of social unrest resulting in higher taxes and the Fronde crisis, and therefore took place at a very repressive time. By disconnecting the companies from their seigniorial alliances, Louis XIV therefore managed to dissolve the great family companies. It was therefore the “Egyptian moment” at the court of Louis XIV. Court ballets, which were very popular under Louis XIII and Louis XIV, included “Egyptian” entries. For *the Royal Pleasure Ballet* of 1655, Louis XIV himself and other members of the nobility dressed up as “Egyptians”. The Bohemians in the court ballet became purely dramatic abstractions and conventional characters under Louis XIV.

By disconnecting the Bohemian captains from their seigniorial alliances, the great companies were dissolved once and for all. The success of Louis XIV’s centralist policy, which followed and resulted from the Huguenot uprising and the siege of La Rochelle in 1628, completely undid the bonds between the local aristocracy and the Bohemian companies that had been forged over

200 years previously. They had no support and were regarded as obstacles to the policy of consolidating central power.

The “Royal Declaration against the Bohemians” is therefore an instrument of repression, designed to destroy a particular ethnic group, but it is above all a political tool that guarantees the centralisation of the kingdom. These coercive measures doubtless succeeded in dispersing and dismantling the Romani companies, which could include up to 200 people (even if the average company probably counted between 50 and 100 people). The families living close to borders benefited from more favourable situations and were able to move from one side of the border to the other, depending on the political situation at the time. As a general rule, however, the companies broke up into smaller groups so that they could be as discreet as possible.

However, the geopolitical vicissitudes of the first half of the 17th century offered Romani groups in France, Spain and elsewhere a number of opportunities, which enabled them to maintain alliances in order to survive, despite the increasingly repressive measures that were being taken. Whether as a result of Richelieu’s centralist policies in France or the crisis in Spain in 1640, a number of revolts were triggered throughout western Europe, during which most of what remained of the Romani companies retained their military and/or mercenary functions in one way or another, owing equally to their propensity for armed service and to survival reasons.

In Jan Miel’s *Military Regiment Resting with a Fortune Teller* (Fact sheet 12), as in Bourdon’s *Soldiers at Rest*, also called *Gypsies at Rest* (Fact sheet 11), the female figure is present in the military world. This is without a doubt the right moment to mention the richness of the French 17th- and 18th-century archives, which document the place of women in this Romani military history. In fact, the wives, sisters and daughters of Romani soldiers followed the routes taken by the regiments in which their fathers, brothers or husbands served. They settled in the towns and cities where the garrisons stopped, and worked as cooks or washerwomen for the troops. This was the case for Marie, the daughter of a cavalryman in the highly renowned Dauphin regiment and who, in a number of depositions documented by the Indre-et-Loire, Loir-et-Cher, and Rhône and Melun archives, said that, “while her father was alive she always followed him to the towns and cities where his garrison was, and she worked as a washerwoman.”¹⁷ After being withdrawn from armed service, these soldiers very often became masters of arms, serving and instructing the rural nobility, while their

17. Indre and Loire archives, B Maréchaussée, 1728; Loire and Cher archives, B. Maréchaussée, 1748-1749; Rhône archives, B. Maréchaussée, 1739; Seine and Marne archives, B. Maréchaussée of Melun, 1739; Port of Toulon archives, I. O. 98, 100.

wives worked as “dance teachers”, as was the case for François Mauron du Châteauneuf and his wife Claudine Lesperance. They worked for the Marquis of Bellisière and the Marquis of Laxion (François Mauron had also served in a marine company at Rochefort).

The 18th and 19th centuries – Gallant Bohemians, modernity and Orientalism

Two phenomena relating to the treatment of Romani figures developed in the 17th century: on the one hand, there was the use of non-Romani models and fictitious Bohemians in costume, thus affirming the disembodiment of a being in the Romani world and the disembodiment of the individual. On the other hand there was their inclusion in a particular relationship with the idea of nature during the century of the Enlightenment. In France, from the mid-17th century onwards, the dismantling of the social structure of the great Bohemian companies placed the fantastical Bohemian in an artificial relationship with the latter. In the 18th century, it is the model dressed up as a Gypsy that is developed into a constructed nature. This marginal geography where the Bohemian or Gypsy is kept subtends a stance that is moral, ideological and poetic at the same time.

The creation in Europe of a fictitious Bohemian from the archetypal zingaresca of the *Gitanilla*, which was already found in the *commedia dell'arte* and picaresque novels, has been referred to earlier. This fictitious otherness is recuperated by a courteous, gallant world. From the 18th century onwards, the vast majority of these figures were no longer in costume. In the *Gypsy Wedding Feast* by Alessandro Magnasco (circa 1730-1735, Fact sheet 14), a wedding feast has been arranged. This picture participates fully in the idea of the gallant Bohemian and the vacillation between projection and reality. The characters are in tents. The scene comes alive with three musicians: a violinist, a harpist and a chitarrone player, the latter being an Italian instrument in the oud (lute) family. Just as with Miel's *Gypsy Girl*, nothing allows us to identify the characters, or even to confirm that they are actually Roma. They are all simply dressed up, in a formal negation of otherness.

In this entirely disembodied iconographic creation that is the gallant European Bohemian, the model becomes a very typical part of a marginal geography. If nature in the century of Enlightenment is a constituent element of the exteriority in which certain marginal groups are entrenched, the abstract idea of nature is a critical tool for establishing the new order that this exteriority is looking for. It is an object of study. However, it is a nature that is subject to norms, categories, topics, a nature that is tameable and tamed.

As the power of divine right is called into question with increasingly open criticism, the thinkers of the Enlightenment attempt to base the norms of moral and social life on a nature that is assumed to be beneficent. The myth of the good savage and the constant comparison of European customs with the customs of the peoples discovered and opposed by Europe set “natural customs” against the depraved customs of a European society considered to be in crisis, in a contrary manner. The century of Enlightenment turns the idea of nature into a real ideological weapon in the battle fought by its thinkers. Nevertheless, this highlighting of nature and of things like man gradually provides an idealised, normative representation. The Romani exteriority and its relationship to nature cannot be represented there without a filter. Their relationship is a disembodied one there too. It is within this very relationship that the anchoring of embryonic European nationalism, Romanticism and Orientalism are rooted.

Between 1801 and 1883, over 3 000 works showed the phantasmagorical ideas associated with the Roma, in the form of the Bohemian, the Gypsy. This included fortune tellers, and also of course dances, resting and camps, the world of acrobats and street artists. The model dressed in a Gypsy or Bohemian costume is fully established.

The subject borrowed from Caravaggio is therefore treated by all of these young painters who went to Rome to complete their studies, but they are inspired by contemporary people. Armed bands were in abundance in Italy. They were often selected by painters because for the Romantic spirit they represented the free man facing an immovable society. At that time, everywhere in Europe, but especially in Spain, France and Italy, repressive measures against various Romani groups and their ways of life compelled them to leave the towns and cities and to settle in the mountains and remote places where bandits and bandoleros were active, adopting an equally marginal nature.

Intra-European Orientalism – The epistemicidal power of images and words

One can easily feel sad when faced with *Zingara with a Basque Tambourine* by Camille Corot (Fact sheet 15). A profound melancholy overwhelms anyone who stops to look at this face. Some may feel the nostalgia of youth retranscribed by a painter whose death was near, or the weight of seven centuries of epistemicide, in a total absence of being, which is nonetheless supposed to evoke something of the Roma people and of Romani women. This young model, whose regard strives to appear innocent and yet is hardly innocent at all, this young girl whose tambourine is meant to ethnicise her, has the dignified eroticism of all the stereotypes of Prosper Mérimée relating to Gypsy women.

Within a Romantic setting, Orientalism is powerful for those who are willing to admit it. This young girl appears to be on the brink of whispering something, and it is in this pregnant silence that it is possible to catch a glimpse of the Orientalising relationship that the 19th century had with the Roma, and with Romani language and philology.

The 19th century rethought philology, which for a long time had been confined to text analysis, in the light of the embryonic social sciences. A controversy arose at the very beginning of the century between rational philology, which contented itself with the study of language in the strict sense of the word, and culturalistic philology which nurtured the ontological aspirations of the Romantics and strengthened Orientalist vocations. To this end, the attention paid to the Romani language formed part of a more general quest for primordial languages.

The West was anxious to find links to a mythified elsewhere that existed farther back in time than historical European heritage. It had started to weave this link through its constructed relationship with nature. Archaeological tales concurred with the idea of becoming nations, and exoticism repressed the increasingly sensitive anguish of decadence. "Indo-European research" concealed questions relating to kinship and to the calling of a West that was undergoing a national, political and religious identity crisis, a dream of regeneration through the discovery of its own unadulterated sources.

The ethnophilological frenzy that this century witnessed had no other objective than to use oral languages as a means of safeguarding the values threatened by mass society. The Romani language, which has no alphabet, seemed to them more primitive than Hebrew, with which the Romantics and later the Orientalists thought it shared a nomadic character and energy. It could have been the Adamic language, for which the Romantics were pursuing the age-old search. As modern languages became impoverished and increasingly characterised by slang, their primitive counterparts preserved a freshness that captivated an ageing bourgeoisie. The majority society therefore maintained a paradoxical relationship with the Gypsies, vacillating between fascination and disdain, ignorance and need. Romani civilisation, which had formerly been the repository of anti-values, delineated possible redemption for a broken Europe. Of course, the majority society retained only the positive aspects that were also beneficial to it, while distancing itself once again from that which did not suit it. It perceived, for example, the promise of social reconciliation in Gypsy solidarity. This reconciliation was partly linguistic or, as Mérimée said, "Gypsies – who speak the language from before Babel – crystallise the fantasy of universality so dear to time: Carmen speaks all languages". Once again, Roma people and Romani studies found themselves at the very heart of intellectual

affairs and western ideology. The “discovery” of the Indian origin of the Romani language was made in the late 18th century through studies carried out by Jacob Rüdiger and Heinrich Grellmann in Germany, and Jacob Bryant in Great Britain, among others. It is not, however, until well into the 19th century that the discoveries made by these pioneers were confirmed and that Romani philology achieved recognition. In 1844, August Friedrich Pott, the inventor of phonetics and comparative etymology of Indo-European languages, was the first to offer a rigorous demonstration of the Indian origin of the Romani language. Comparative linguistics dominated the 19th century. Linguists specialising in the Indo-European era undertook to reconstruct the Proto-Indo-European language, that is to say the mother tongue of this language family.

The presuppositions, ulterior motives and ideological and political affairs surrounding the Proto-Indo-European language were numerous and varied. From its identification it was opposed to Hebrew, the language that had been imagined as the original language of humanity prior to the Renaissance. Indo-European studies of the 19th century and up to the mid-20th century were exposed to politicisation and ideological instrumentalisation. The shift from the concept of a common original language to that of a common original people was therefore made in the 19th century within an intellectual framework characterised by nationalism and racism: Proto-Indo-Europeans, called “Aryans”, were thus recognised as a race. These ideas, which spread widely throughout Europe in the early 20th century, found particular favour in Germany, especially following the work of the archaeologist Gustaf Kossinna. Indo-European studies are thus the basis for what Léon Poliakov has called the “Aryan myth”, an ideological springboard to Nazi Germany.

From this point on, the Indian origin of the Roma is indisputable. The traces left on the Romani language by the various languages of the countries passed through by these populations also allowed progress to be made in reconstructing Proto-Romani history (before their arrival in Europe), by studying medieval chronicles and historical texts. However, even if it was established that the Roma did not come from the moon, the bowels of the Earth or the depths of Atlantis, that they were not a conglomerate of anti-social people expelled from Europe and united in a licentious, impoverished and amoral condition, as some scholars have claimed and as others continue to imply to the present day, recognising the Indian origin of the Roma was not the end of alienating the other in the face of its own history. In fact, Romani studies (an intra-European form of Orientalism), Romani philology and physical anthropology would initially assimilate various Roma populations with the lowest Indian castes.

It was not until the late 20th century, with the reappropriation by Romani intellectuals of their own history, that other hypotheses were formulated and then

supported. If the enthusiasm of Jan Kochanowski for the theory of Kshatriya origin of current Roma populations is to be qualified without any doubt (the Kshatriya were the warrior class, second in the four rankings of Hindu society), it has the merits of opening up a breach in the monolithic, subjective vision created by a people who for so long were not the masters of the historical narratives of which they were the subject. The Romas' military connections are nothing new in Romani historiography. De Goeje in 1873, Clarke in 1875 and Leland in 1882 had already related the history of Roma populations to the Ghaznavid invasions of northern India.

Romani professors such as Ian Hancock, Adrian Marsh and others find in the works of De Goeje, Clarke, Leland and Kochanowski the first premise of what is now a basic presupposition for most serious researchers in the field: the fundamental importance of the military context in the crystallisation of Romani ethnicity. Taking a different view of the various Romani groups, it is primarily and above all a matter of decolonising one's relationship with otherness and with knowledge. Decolonising one's view of one's own racialised being is to go through a process of archaeological recovery of one's own *potentia*/power,¹⁸ by developing a genealogical relationship with the ideas of otherness, exteriority and margins. The Romani figure and its various manifestations in the collections of the Louvre Museum allow this critical, contextualised and rigorous approach to the place of minorities in both national and European heritage. Accordingly, the paradigm here is more interesting than a multitude of ontological particularisms in enriching our reflection. In the case of the Roma, it is a transnational, non-territorial minority whose epistemological framework is both singular and plural at the same time.

An epistemological framework is a methodology used to obtain knowledge that is created historically and maintained collectively, and as a result of which a group can understand and evaluate the individual lives of its members and the collective life of the group. Whenever humanly possible, the members of an epistemological community must be able to change their framework voluntarily as a result of their own enlightenment, basing it on the way in which they understand themselves and relying on a number of reasons with which they identify and on which they have worked to some extent. When the epistemological framework of a group changes unbeknownst to its members, through the action of another group and on terms that they do not understand, the group loses its ontological autonomy and becomes the victim of an epistemological injustice.

18. Negri A. (2004), *Subversive Spinoza*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

This visit therefore offers a historical context for the construction of the perception of Roma. For majority societies, Roma, Sinti, Manouches and Kale, whether settled or travelling, must be relegated to the outskirts of the margins. The dynamic has not changed since the end of the 15th century. It comes from the otherness that is useful to majority societies, to art and particularly to music, but also the fantasy of freedom, so the rest of the Romani epistemological framework, which does not equate to the normative frameworks of the majority, is subjugated or annihilated.

Providing a historical context for the construction of the images produced and projected onto various Romani groups throughout their history allows us to gain a better understanding of the contemporary matters surrounding what is a “Romani question” for some and the consequences of structural anti-Gypsyism for others. For those concerned, it is a denial of their existence.

The catalogue and photo credits

1. Anonymous (Flemish)

The Glorious Virgin (circa 1485)

OA3133

Richelieu Wing, 1st floor, Millefleurs, Room 508

Photographer: Daniel Arnaudet



2. Raffaello Santi (Raphael) (1483-1520)

The Great Holy Family, also called The Holy Family with Saint Elizabeth, the Infant Saint John, and Two Angels (circa 1518)

INV604

Denon Wing, 1st floor, Grand Gallery, Room 712

Photographer: Adrien Didierjean



3. Attributed to Giulio Pippi (Giulio Romano) (1492-1546)

The Small Holy Family, also called The Virgin with Child, Saint Elizabeth and the Infant Saint John in a landscape (circa 1519)

INV605

Denon Wing, 1st floor, Grand Gallery, Room 710

Photographer: Michel Urtado



4. Nicolò dell'Abbate (circa 1509-1572)

Preparatory drawing for *Moses Saved from the Water* (1539)

RF569-recto

Denon Wing, 1st floor, Grand Gallery, Room 712

Photographer: Tony Querrec



5. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (Caravaggio) (1571-1610)

The Fortune Teller (1595-1598)

INV55

Denon Wing, 1st floor, Grand Gallery, Room 712

Photographer: Mathieu Rabeau



6. Nicolas Régnier (1588-1667)

The Fortune Teller (circa 1626)

INV366

Not on display

Photographer: Adrien Didierjean



7. Valentin de Boulogne (Le Valentin) (1591-1632)

The Fortune Teller (circa 1628)

INV8254

Richelieu Wing, 2nd floor, The painters of Louis XIII, Room 829

Photographer: Tony Querrec



8. Valentin de Boulogne (Le Valentin) (1591-1632)

Musicians and Drinkers (1625)

INV8255

Richelieu Wing, 2nd floor, The painters of Louis XIII, Room 829

Photographer: Tony Querrec



9. Frans Hals (circa 1582-1666)

Gypsy Girl (circa 1630)

MI926

2nd floor, Richelieu Wing, Dutch 17th century,
Room 802

Photographer: Jean-Gilles Berizzi



10. Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671)

Travellers beneath the Ruins (1640-1643)

INV2819

Richelieu Wing, 2nd floor, Rome-Paris 1600-
1650, Room 831

Photographer: Michel Urtado



11. Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671)

Soldiers at Rest, also called Gypsies at Rest
(1640-1643)

INV2818

Not on display

Photographer: Stéphane Maréchalle



12. Jan Miel (1599-1665)

Military Regiment Resting with a Fortune Teller
(circa 1648-1650)

INV1450

Richelieu Wing, 2nd floor, Flemish landscape,
Room 854

Photographer: Tony Querrec



13. Jan van de Venne (The Master of the Gypsies) (circa 1600-1651)

Gypsy Camp (17th century)

RF2004-13

Richelieu Wing, 2nd floor, Flemish landscape,
Room 854

Photographer: Tony Querrec



14. Alessandro Magnasco (1667-1749)

Gypsy Wedding Feast (circa 1730-1735)

RF2619

Denon Wing, 1st floor, North Italian painting of the 18th century, Room 720

Photographer: Tony Querrec



15. Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875)

Zingara with a Basque Tambourine

(circa 1865-1870)

RF1947-31

Not on display

Photographer: René-Gabriel Ojéda



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