

Wallachia and Moldavia

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➤ *Unlike in any other European region, the Roma in former Wallachia and Moldavia (today's Romania), have lived in slavery for five hundred years. In the mid-19th century, when slavery was officially abolished, a large number of Roma left the country and migrated to Central and Western Europe as well as to America.*

INTRODUCTION

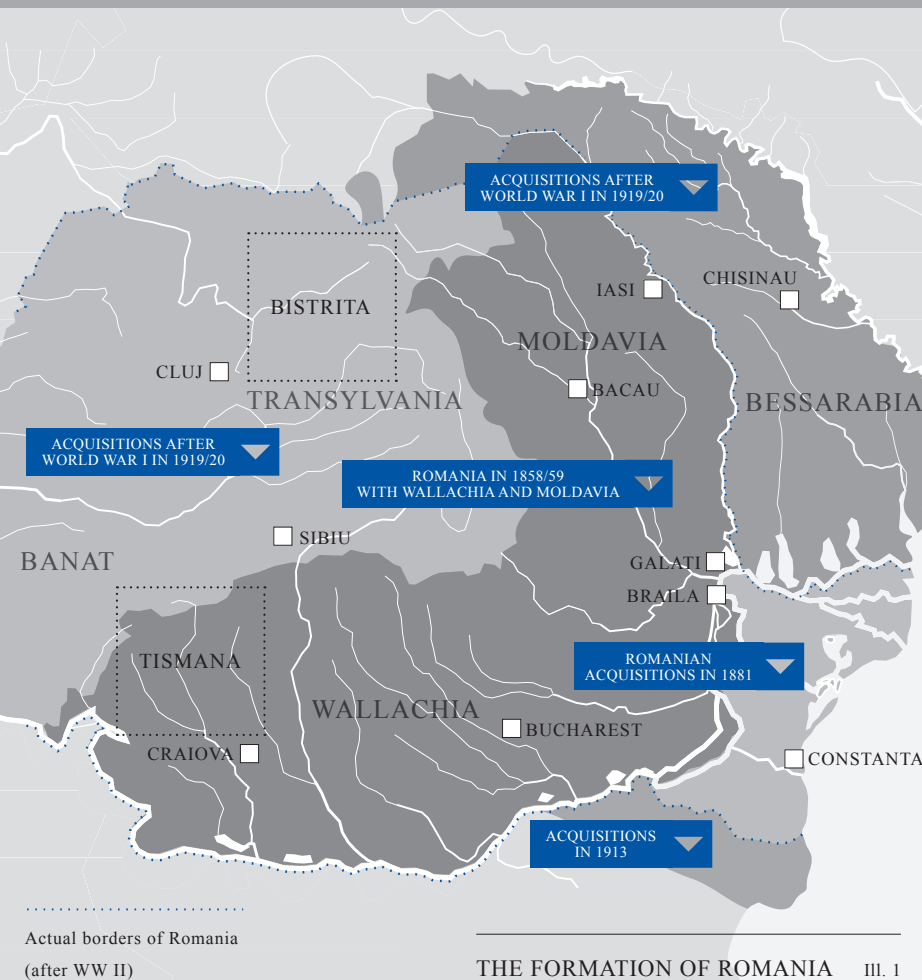
The history of Roma migration into Europe was abruptly brought to a halt for those Roma who arrived in the Romanian territories of the Southern and Eastern Carpathian Mountains. Roma who arrived in Wallachia and Moldavia in the second half of the 14th century were forced into bondage and slavery for five centuries, and their history was marked by a turning point comparable only to the enslavement of the Afro-American population in the United States.

“Gypsies shall be born only slaves; anyone born of a slave mother shall also become a slave ...” stated the code of Wallachia at the beginning of the 19th century. Roma were owned by the Prince (as “slaves of the State” – “tigania domneasca”), monasteries and private individuals. Selling, buying and giving away whole families of slaves was common practice among the owners, who had unlimited rights over their slaves. In fact, slave-owners could do whatever they liked to their slaves, short of killing them.

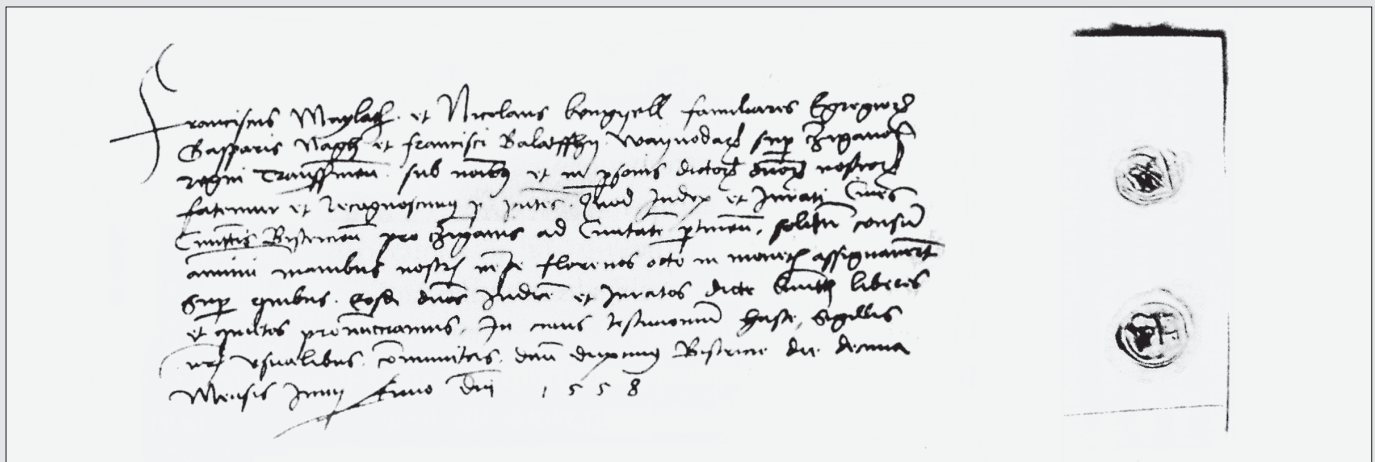
Towards the middle of the 19th century, an abolitionist movement emerged among intellectuals in the Danubian Principalities, and the figure of the “Gypsy” became a frequent subject in newspaper articles, poetry,

literature and plays. Once the emancipation of slaves had been achieved, it raised – and still raises today – the issue of their integration into the social and economic life of Romania.

Traces of slavery persisted in the memories of former masters and their slaves, and the period of slavery has marked relations between the descendants of these two social strata to this day.



THE FORMATION OF ROMANIA III. 1



III. 2

Bill of sale for a group of Roma slaves, 1558

(from Hancock 2002, p. 22)

III. 3

Auguste Raffet, "Famille tsigane en voyage en Moldavie"
(Gypsy family on tour in Moldavia), July 19, 1837.

(from Hancock 2002, p. 28)

STEFAN RAZVAN, ROM AND LORD OF MOLDAVIA

The instances when Roma succeeded in overcoming social barriers and achieving good standing in the public structure in the principalities are more of an exception than the rule. The case of Stefan Razvan who became prince, is well known. Different versions exist about his origins. According to one of them, he was the son of a Romanian, a serf, while his father was a Gypsy slave of Prince Mihai Vitezul of Wallachia. According to another version, popular in literature, he was the son of a Gypsy slave of the Prince of Wallachia, and his father was unknown, probably a

high official representative of some of the dynasties in the principality. As a child, Stefan was a slave of Anastasi, metropolitan of Moldavia in 1572 - 1578, who gave him a good education, and subsequently in his will the metropolitan liberated him. Stefan Razvan's life was quite turbulent. He became a boyar (contrary to Central and Western Europe, in Wallachia and Moldavia, as well as throughout the entire Orthodox world, where the aristocracy was not a closed inherited category, this was possible), he became a government official, was sent on a diplomatic mission to

SETTLEMENT IN ROMANIA

The first undisputed evidence of Roma north of the Danube also constitutes the first evidence of slavery. In 1385, Dan I, Voivode of Wallachia, confirmed property given to the Convent of the Virgin Mary, Tismana, including 40 "salashe" (a term derived from Turkish, denoting families or tent communities) of "Atigani" ("Gypsies").

A donation of 300 "salashe" of "Gypsies" was made to the Cozia monastery in 1388, by Lord Mircea the Old. Further documentary evidence emerges over the following decades. The Roma slaves of the Tismana monastery are mentioned in all documents confirming its possessions, until the 17th century.

A deed of August 2, 1414, issued in Suceava, Moldavia, mentions Alexander the Good, who gives Toader the Dwarf, in return for "his faithful

service", a village on the banks of the Jeravat where it flows into the Bârlad, or more precisely where "Lie" and "Tiganestii" were "cnezi" (local masters). Historians consider this deed as the first indirect documentary evidence of Roma in Moldavia, and a document from July 8, 1428 as the first direct evidence. In the latter, Voivode Alexander the Good endowed the Bistrita monastery with 31 "chelyadi" (a term derived from Slavic languages, equal in meaning to "salash") of "Gypsies".

FREEDOM AND SLAVERY

Some historians believe that the Romanians took over the institution of

slavery from their eastern neighbours, the Tartars. The latter commonly turned prisoners of war into slaves, a fate suffered by many Romanians, and vice versa: in 1402, Alexander the Good gave the Moldovita monastery four

Tartar families as slaves. However, slavery was known in the region well before the Roma arrived.

Historians believe that, in their migration from Greece and Bulgaria towards Central and Western Europe,



III. 3



III. 4
Gold-panner Roma ("Rudari"/"Aurari"/"Bayash") at work.
Drawing, about 1850

(from Gronemeyer / Rakelmann 1988, p. 125)

III. 5 (provided by Elena Marushiakova / Veselin Popov)

Istanbul, then went to the "Zaporozhskaia Sech" (an independent formation of the Cossacks on the territory of present-day Ukraine), reaching the position of "Hetman" (commander in chief of the Cossack forces), served in the Polish army under King Sigismund III Batory with the rank of colonel and with a noble title, and returned to Moldavia to become the commander of the personal guards of Prince Aron Tiranul. In the internal strife in Wallachia and Moldavia in 1595, Stefan Razvan succeeded in overthrowing Prince Aron Tiranul and ascended to the

prince's throne for five months (from April to August 1595) with the support of Poland. While he was successfully fighting with the Ottoman armies in Wallachia, he captured Bucharest, Giurgiu, Braila, and besieged Targovishte and Ismail. At this time the boyar Ieremia Movila was proclaimed Prince of Moldavia, also with Polish support. Stefan Razvan returned to Moldavia, however on December 14, 1595 he was defeated at the battle of Areni by the united army of King Sigismund III and Prince Ieremia Movila, and executed on March 6, 1596.

a significant number of Roma passed through Wallachia and then Moldavia. Thus there must have been an initial period during which Roma in this area were free. In Wallachia, the 1385 document by Voivode Dan I tells us nothing about their legal status prior to that donation. In Moldavia, the ear-

ly documents refer to Roma as "cnezi" (master of the village, minor nobility; therefore free men); in the case of Transylvania, Roma were always free (their legal status was identical to that of serf peasants).

The hypothesis of an initial period of freedom for Roma is confirmed

by a whole series of liberties granted to slaves by their owners. The most valuable of these were the freedom of moving about within the country (with nomads simply paying an annual tax to their masters), and the internal judicial autonomy mainly for nomadic communities.

HOW WAS SLAVERY POSSIBLE?

A local custom required free peasants who had worked on a feudal estate for twelve years to become serfs ("rumani") of the boyar. There is reason to believe that the Roma were treated similarly. Another, equally important aspect is the weakness of the state in the

face of the authority of the nobility. The sovereign could not exercise effective authority throughout the country in order to keep his own slaves under his direct influence. The Roma were forced into slavery by local masters.

The existence of Roma slaves in Wallachia and Moldavia underwent the most spectacular reversals with changes in the masters' financial situation. Selling slaves was the most

convenient way of repaying debts or redeeming oneself from Turk or Tatar slavery. Slaves were good for anything, equivalent to any value, sold, given as wedding presents or dowries, gifted to the monastery so that the master's name was mentioned during mass, and exchanged for animals or cloth trousers; should they fail to submit, "they should be beaten very hard". [Iills. 2, 10]

SPOONMAKERS	GOLD PANNERS	“URSARI GYPSIES”
<i>Their trade was woodwork; they made bins of various sizes, spindles, spoons and other domestic utensils.</i>	<i>Some of them lived off the proceeds of the gold they discovered. Others did woodwork.</i>	<i>They owned bears and earned a living by making them dance in towns and villages.</i>

III. 6

The report by the four members of the investigative committee divided Roma into six “categories”, according to their occupations and customs (1831).

(provided by the author; abbreviated and translated from Analele parlamentare ale României, Bucuresti, Imprimeria Statului, 1890, I/I)

MASTERS AND SLAVES: THREE CATEGORIES, TWO SITUATIONS

III. 7 (provided by Elena Marushiakova / Veselin Popov)

Roma were owned by the prince (“slaves of the Crown”, later also called “state Gypsies”), monasteries and private individuals. Those who belonged to monasteries or private individuals, the boyars, were always in a more difficult position than those belonging to the prince. The complexity of economic, religious and family relations among the Romanian ruling class resulted in numerous changes of masters and slaves (slaves were subject to purchases, sales, donations to monasteries, inheritances and dowries)

The “slaves of the Crown” were mainly nomads with various professions. Monastery slaves had various occupations, only some of them being nomads, the majority worked the land of the monasteries, and others performed crafts. Boyar “Gypsies” were mainly servants and domestic aids or worked the land.

An alternative classification of “Gypsy” slaves divided them into sedentary and nomadic groups and in terms of their main occupations. The “state Gypsies” were divided in “Rudari”, “Aurarii” or “Bayashi”, washing gold; “Ursari”, being bear leaders and ironmongers; “Lingurari”, who produced wooden household utensils; and “Layashi”, being blacksmiths, ironmongers, combmakers, etc. They led a nomadic life and had to pay annual tax to the state. The monastery and boyar “Gypsies”, according to whether they were nomadic or settled, were divided in “Layashi”, whose way of life was similar to that of the prince’s “Layashi”, and “Vatrashi”, who were settled. The “Vatrashi” in turn fell in two categories, the “Tigani casasi” (“Gypsies” working in houses) or “tigani de curte” (domestic “Gypsies”) who were domestic servants, and the “Tigani de ogor” or “Tigani de câmp” (working their master’s land).

THE LEGAL STATUS OF ROMA IN SLAVERY

From the 14th to the 16th century, the legal status of Roma was not subject to any written regulations providing for the various conflicts that might arise between them and other people. However, the “long-standing” attitude towards the Roma was gradually enshrined in laws passed between the 17th and the 19th cen-

tury. The Moldavian regulations supplement those of Wallachia, with no major differences between the two Romanian countries as regards the legal status of slaves. [III. 7]

Throughout the period in which Roma were enslaved in the two Romanian countries, they did not enjoy a legal status securing them minimum rights or protecting them during trials. The slave was not considered a legal person, but classed as the master’s property. A con-

flict between a slave and a free person who was not part of the slave-owner’s family became a conflict between the slave’s master and the person in question. Slaves were not responsible for their actions, which were their master’s concern. In more serious cases (horse theft, murder), however, the master could abandon the slave and thus no longer had to pay compensation or fines (“desegubina”); the slave had to undergo the punishment, which could be capital punishment.

LEGISLATION

In 1646, the first legislative code, entitled “Carte romneasca de invatatura” (the Romanian book of education), set a number of benchmarks with regard to the rights and obligations of Roma sla-

ves in Moldavia. For instance, a bought slave was required to help his master, and a slave who was admitted to being guilty of anything had to undergo “reasonable” punishment administered with the “cane or the whip”, and could object only if the master used “bare” weapons, in which case the slave was in danger of being killed. In fact, slave-owners could

do whatever they liked to their slaves, short of killing them.

As regards marriage, the legal instruments provided that two slaves could marry, but only if the master agreed. If two slaves belonging to two different owners wanted to marry, the agreement of both masters was necessary. In most cases, the two masters reached a settle-

“GYPSIES” KNOWN AS “ZAVRAGI”

There were about 300 of these families, who were included in the category of the bear leaders.

“LAIESHI/LAYASHI GYPSIES”

Normally settled on the outskirts of villages, these Roma worked iron and made boilers.

“NETOTSI”

There were about fifty families of “Netot-si” (Romanian for “Hottentots”), who had come from Germany.



DEEDS OF EMANCIPATION

III. 8 (translated from Sion 2000, p. 130)

Freeing slaves through deeds of emancipation was an opportunity for the master to express gratitude for a life spent in their service. In the mid-19th century, one such deed of emancipation, given to a washerwoman, read as follows:

“I hereby announce that the Gypsy Mary, daughter of Dumitru Cracau and a descendant of the slaves I inherited from my parents, widowed by the death of her husband, because she has served with devotion and ardour since she was a child growing up in my court, putting her heart into the task, such that she has always attracted my gratitude and that of my wife; through this deed which I place in her hands I absolve her from slavery and allow her to go whenever and wherever she likes; for as long as she wishes to remain in my court, she shall, without any hindrance, be entitled to the room she inhabits and her rations, just like all the other slaves living in the court. This will set an example for her son Dinca too, who, if he behaves as well as his mother, will be freed in due course. Dated the 8th day of June, 1849, Dimitrie Canta, logothete.”

III. 9

Portrait of a Roma woman, Bucharest, 2nd half of the 19th century.

(from Gronemeyer / Rakelmann 1988, p. 171)

ment prior to the marriage: either one master bought the slave who was to come onto his property by marriage from the other master, or there was a swap, the master offering a slave of equal value in exchange for the slave obtained. In such situations, most of the documents specify “Gypsy for Gypsy, according to the law”.

In the early 19th century, the Moldavian Civil Code was designed primarily to guarantee the master’s rights over the slave. Chapter II of the Code provided that “there can be no legitimate union between free men and slaves”, and

the slaves’ masters decided on the “most suitable” time and person for their slaves. Slaves were usually married very young, so as to have many children and increase the master’s wealth.

If slaves fled a bad situation, the “slaves’ masters and their legitimate heirs, according to the custom of the country, always have the right to claim runaway slaves, from anyone, for there is no period of limitation for slaves in Moldavia”.

The Code of Wallachia, although more concise, contains the same principles: “Gypsies shall be born only slaves;

anyone born of a slave mother shall also become a slave; the master shall have no rights over his slave’s life; the master’s rights over the slave shall be confined to selling him or giving him away; Gypsies without a master shall be slaves of the prince; marriage shall be recognised among slaves; a separation shall be declared when a marriage takes place between a slave and a free man without the master’s knowledge”.

These were the main conditions set down by the law until the abolition of slavery in the two Romanian principalities.

ASPECTS OF SLAVE LIFE

Traces of slavery persisted in the memories of former masters and their slaves,

and the period of slavery has marked the relations between the descendants of these two social strata to this day.

Among the “Gypsies”, the distinction between “Layashi” and “Vatrashi”, nomadic and settled Roma, proves to be crucial

in many ways. “Vatrashi”, regardless of to whom they belonged, the prince, monasteries or private persons, on the whole suffered from very bad conditions, whereas the life of the nomadic Roma, even compared to some categories of the majority population,

III. 11

A “shatra” (slave settlement) in Wallachia, 1862.

(from Hancock 2002, p. 18)

De la fii și moștenitorii
de răposatului
SERDAR NICOLAE NICA
de București
sunt

200

de familie de țigani
de vânzare.

Bărbații sunt sclavi excelenți de curte, adică țigani de moșie și aurari, cismari, muzicanți, și muncitori agricultori. Vânzarea nu oșă conțina de mai puțin de cinci sclavi pã rînd. Prețul pe persoană atunci oșă fie doua ducate. Oșă fie preparați ca de obicei și bazat pe primirea banilor, cumpărătorul. Va fi asigurat de un serviciu adecvat.



III. 10

The emancipation of the Roma was the result of several laws: the Organic Regulations of 1831, the laws of 1843 and 1844 for state-owned Roma, the law of 1847 for church-owned Roma, and the laws of 1855 and 1856 for those owned by private individuals. However trade with Roma slaves continued well until 1845, as this advertisement for a slave auction shows, which appeared in the Bucharest newspaper Luna in 1845. It reads:

“From the sons and heirs of Serdar Nicolae Nica of Bucharest, there are 200 Gypsy families for sale. The men are excellent slaves of the court, which is to say estate slaves: goldwashers, cobblers, musicians and field hands. The sale will consist of not fewer than five slaves at a time; the price therefore will be two ducats. They will be made ready in the usual way, and with payment the buyer may be assured of the most attentive service”.

(from Hancock 2002, p. 24)

had significant advantages. The “Vatrashi” were seen by their masters mostly as lazy thieves and liars, who did whatever was necessary to avoid their duties. Punishment was administered at the master’s whim. The most common punishment was strokes on the back with a hazel rod. The number of strokes ranged from a few dozen to two or three hundred, administered in several goes. Even the hardest skins gave out after forty or fifty strokes, and bled profusely.

Roma huts had clay and thatched roofs with chimneys. A dormer window could be seen in the back wall. A “salash” of “Gypsies” was squeezed into each hut, comprising the father, the mother, sometimes the grandfather or grandmother and all the children not wiped out by the very frequent illnesses resulting from the squalor and poverty in which they lived. [III. 11]

A number of women, all of them Roma, were responsible for looking after the master’s bedroom, cleaning it,

heating it, making his bed, doing the laundry, preparing the boyar’s bath and, in many cases, looking after all aspects of his personal hygiene. The most beautiful Roma women were often sent to massage the feet of important visitors. The boyar’s interest in them propelled them into the court, in his direct personal service. These young women live on in the works of painters and writers of the time. [III. 9]

The obligations of “claca” (work) for the master placed many Roma slaves in a situation of extreme poverty, which shaped their very difficult economic and social position in the subsequent period. The question that arose for the majority of the sedentary Roma was simple: How can one work half the year for the master and have time to earn enough for one’s family to live on? They were farmers, and the days spent in the master’s service took up all the good weather just to work his field. It is impossible to plough, sow cereal, hoe crops and harvest at the end of the season

if one owes the master up to 150 days of work a year. So, one could either work for the master and go hungry, or work one’s own field and run into debt.

Nomadic Roma, “Rudari”, “Aurari”, “Bayashi”, “Ursari”, “Lingurari”, and “Layashi”, which accounted for a considerable part (more than a half in earlier times, roughly one third by 1850) of the Roma population, enjoyed a specific kind of autonomy. They had a leader – “jude” or “juge” – recognised by the authorities in Wallachia and Moldavia, who served justice in his “salash” on the basis of Roma tradition. Their tax obligations in most cases were lighter than those of the rest of the population. They were free to move and, probably most significant, did not have the various other obligations like, for instance, “claca”. Their nomadic way of life, it has to be noted, was seasonal, in that they spent some time of the year – usually winter – in the respective estates of their owners.



III. 12
Romanian students publicly burn the slavery statutes in Bucharest on September 25, 1848.

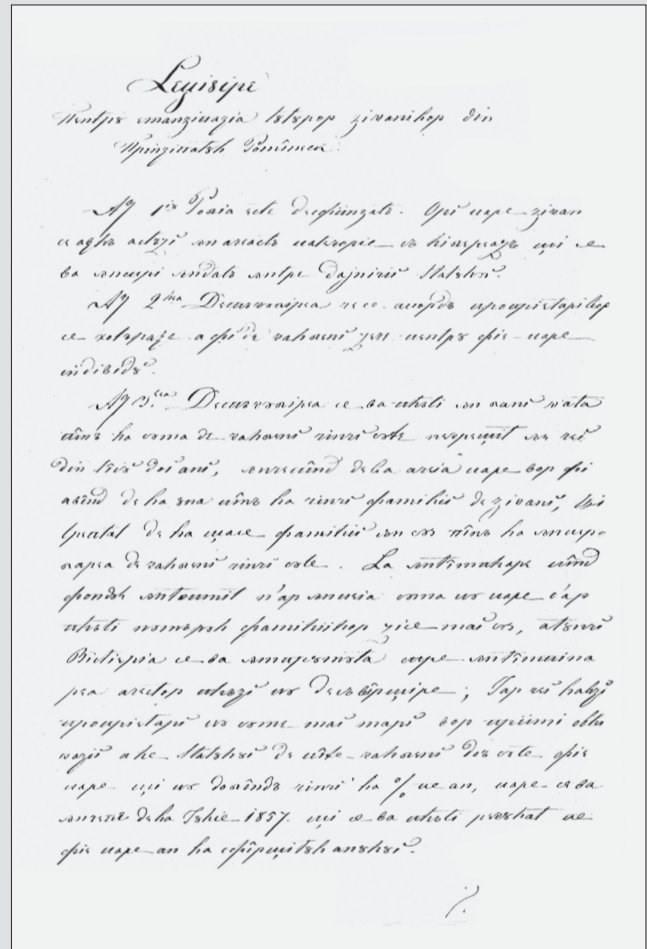
(from Hancock 2002, p. 27)

A Proclamation of June 11th 1848 reads:

“The Romanian people ceases the inhumane and dishonourable practice of slavery and proclaims the freedom of Gypsies owned by private individuals. Those who have suffered the shame of having slaves are pardoned by the Romanian people, and the motherland will compensate from its treasury anyone who suffers loss as a result of this Christian act.”

Settled Roma were later estimated at 8 and nomads at 4 pieces of gold.

III. 13 (from Arhivele Nationale Istorice Centrale (ANIC), the Romanian National Historic Archives)



III. 14

The “Act for the Emancipation of all Gypsies in the Romanian Principality” issued by the Prince of Stirbei of February 8, 1856. With this decree finally all Roma in Moldavia and Wallachia were free men.

(from ANIC)

THE BEGINNINGS OF EMANCIPATION

The idea of emancipation of the slaves slowly arose in Romanian society in the context of an overall development towards the introduction of European elements in socio-political conditions. Among the first steps, an extraordinary National Assembly was called to revise the Organic Regulations (basic acts of legislation) for Wallachia and Moldavia. In 1831 it proposed, that an investigative committee be set up to identify the slaves’ living conditions and then to find ways of

improving them by encouraging the slaves to settle appropriately and to take up agriculture. [III. 6]

An amendment recommended that “these Gypsies shall settle and pay all taxes in the same way as all other taxable peasants on an estate; those who do not have a fixed abode (who live in tents) shall not be free to settle on an estate without the owner’s agreement”. It sought to persuade nomads to settle in order to pay lower taxes, like all the peasants. Probably there were very large numbers of nomads at the time, which was to lead to the emergence of a settlement policy; such policies were more hard-line

following emancipation. The Roma’s situation, which gradually began to be seen as a “dishonour” for the image of the Romanian people, was at the centre of intellectual debate during the middle decades of the 19th century. Things changed, and slavery was abolished for Roma owned by the state under the Act of March 22, 1843; all those who paid taxes to the Vornicia prison authorities (Roma owned by the state) came under the authority of district prefects, a measure that emancipated them from slavery and placed them within the category of Romanians subject to personal taxation. [III. 10]

EMANCIPATION OF ROMA OWNED BY THE CHURCH. ACT OF 1847

The next stage in the emancipation process took place in 1847. Prince Bibesco of Wallachia submitted a bill to the National Assembly for the emancipation of Roma belonging to the Holy Metro-

polis, bishoprics and monasteries, and it was passed unanimously on February 11, 1847. With 2,088 Roma families, the Cozia monastery had the biggest number of slaves, thanks to the earlier charity

of Voivode Alexander the Good. The Prahova district also had 8,870 individual Roma, and was the leader in this respect. In the districts of Wallachia

there lived 47,245 Roma, in 11,446 families, who were former slaves to the monasteries. From further statistics, it has been estimated that in the 1850s

there lived about 250,000 to 300,000 Roma in the two principalities. Thus, they counted for about 7.5 percent of the total population.

THE END OF SLAVERY

The emancipation of the last slaves, those owned by private individuals, took place in Moldavia in 1855 at the instigation of Prince Grigore Ghica. The sovereign sent an "ofis" to the country's Extraordinary Council, calling for a "new bill" to emancipate Roma owned by private individuals in Moldavia. The abolition of slavery was seen as a reform that derived "from the very laws of humanity and was primarily a matter of the country's dignity". Prince Ghica explained this historic moment: "When Europe shows a keen interest in the principalities and intervenes in their future, our people have a duty to take a step forward." Slavery was considered as "a vestige of a barbaric

society", "an anomaly that must disappear", "clashing with the holy Christian dogmas, the principles of humanity and the vital interests of the state".

In accordance with the prince's idea, the draft contained two basic elements: "The immediate abolition of slavery in Moldavia", and "Regulations and conditions governing the distribution of appropriate compensation to owners." November 28 was declared a national holiday. On December 22, 1855, the "Divan" (the national assembly) passed the "Act on the End of Slavery, Regulation of Compensation and the Transformation of Emancipated Slaves into Taxpayers."

As regards compensation for the masters, "Lingurari" and "Vatrashi" Roma (settled in villages) were estimated at 8 pieces of gold and "Layashi" (no-

mads) at 4 pieces of gold, irrespective of gender; only invalids and babies were exempt from payment.

The situation of Roma slaves in Wallachia took much the same direction as in Moldavia. On February 8, 1856, the Prince of Stirbei decreed the "Act for the Emancipation of all Gypsies in the Romanian Principality". It proclaimed the end of slavery and the freeing of all "Gypsies" in this category, who were immediately registered as taxpayers to the state. The sum of 10 pieces of gold was set as compensation for each slave's former owner. February 8 became a national holiday. [Ill. 14]

After their emancipation, the Roma continued to form a group of taxpayers at the mercy of farmers and local authorities. Some of them migrated to towns, and an equal number left Romania.

CONCLUSION

The picture of Roma slavery in Wallachia and Moldavia is not accessible by unidimensional interpretations. If we are to make general observations from a present-day point of view, then probably

the most significant issue is the relative position of nomadic and settled Roma. Whereas the settled Roma ("Vatrashi") lived at the disposal of their owners, enjoyed no personal rights, were often severely punished, and sold as goods, itinerant Roma ("Layashi" and others)

often enjoyed a number of freedoms and even privileges which most social strata of the local inhabitants did not have. These differences can be traced to the present day in the differences between groups of Roma in Romania, and, to a certain extent, all over the world.

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