

Roma Voices in History: A Sourcebook; Roma Civic Emancipation in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II. Edited by Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov. Leiden: Brill–Ferdinand Schöningh, 2021. 1104 pp. doi: 10.30965/9783657705184

Roma Voices in History is an unprecedented and, therefore, extremely precious publication which will definitely change the paradigms in Romani studies from various points of view by re-writing several stereotypical presumptions, prejudices, historical fake-news, and misunderstandings which have dominated various scientific discourses, including historical, ethnographical, and sociological research. Over the course of the last 30 years, the authors, Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, both of whom work at the School of History at the University of St. Andrews, have written a great number of books and articles about Roma history with a specific focus on Bulgaria, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and the Ottoman Empire. In the relatively small circle of international scholars in Romani studies, Marushiakova and Popov have a rich scientific oeuvre, both as historians and ethnologists. Marushiakova is also the president of the Gypsy Lore Society, the world's oldest organization of Roma studies, founded in Great Britain in 1888 but located in the USA since 1989. The present sourcebook is the result of an ERC-project entitled *RomaInterbellum: Roma Civic Emancipation Between the Two World Wars*, carried out between 2016 and 2021.

Both the *RomaInterbellum* and *Roma Voices in History* offer a new approach to the study of Roma history in which archival documents prove that the various Roma communities in Europe, instead of being only “passive recipients of policy measures, are also active architects of their own lives (XIX).” This new paradigm, which implies taking a *longue durée* view of Roma history and suggests that Roma are active subjects and participants in their history and, more concretely, in their political emancipation, complements the existing paradigms about Roma history. As Mátyás Binder notes, referring to the research of Thomas Acton and Pál Nagy, Roma history has either been viewed as a history of struggle and persecution or as the paradigm of changing modes of coexistence (Mátyás Binder, “*A cigányok, vagy a ‘cigánykérdés’ története? Áttekintés a magyarországi cigányok történeti kutatásairól* [2009]). According to other views, Roma have two histories: one that is written from outside (by non-Roma historians) and one that is mostly written by “self-appointed” representatives of a naïve science (Péter Tóth, *A*

magyarországi cigányság története a feudalizmus korában [2006]). Finally, there is a body of widely acknowledged and frequently cited literature which presents Roma as a “people without history” (Katie Trumpener, *The Time of the Gypsies* [1992]), as people who master the “art of not being governed” (James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed* [2009]), or as a culture based on bricolage and exchange (Judith Okely, *Constructing Culture through Shared Location, Bricolage and Exchange* [2011]). Marushiakova and Popov sharply criticize these approaches and emphasize the existence of historical consciousness among Roma and, therefore, the evidence of Roma history, also accentuating that “how much and what kind of historical sources still remain undiscovered in archives and libraries worldwide and ...have not been put into academic circulation, hardly anyone can determine” (p.XX).

Thus, innovative and pioneering approaches lie both in the collection and presentation of the primary sources (roughly 1,000 pages, with the longest sections devoted to Bulgaria, Romania, and the USSR, while Greece, Latvia, and Finland are covered in the shortest ones) and in the surrounding context sketched in the comments following the primary sources, offering an interpretation which, instead of providing simply a “Roma-centric prism,” reflects on the Roma emancipatory movements in line with the general historical and social context. This integrative view is also expressed in Marushiakova and Popov’s definition of civic emancipation: it is an action for the sake of an equilibrium between the principal dimensions of the Roma presence (community and society), acceptable both for the Roma themselves and for the macro-society. Therefore, according to Marushiakova and Popov, the Roma movement for civic emancipation is a permanent struggle to achieve the equal civic status of the Roma as an ethnic community and as individual citizens with their rights in all fields of social life (political, religious, educational, economic, cultural, etc.). It should be underlined, however, that no other book or previous research on a transnational level has been published about the early stages of Roma emancipation. Normally, research projects and databases deal with the Roma civic movement only after World War II. As Acton observes, for instance, “there were no transnational entities until 1945, only various survival strategies (...) until 1945 Roma politics was based on acceptance of marginalization and submission to the nation-state” (Thomas Acton. *Beginnings and Growth of Transnational Movements of Roma to Achieve Civil Rights after the Holocaust*). Other scholars, such as Vermeersch, van Baar, and Binder, focus on the post-socialist period and compare the different forms of ethnic mobilization and the Romani movement after 1989.

What texts examine the material of the different Roma movements? Until the publication of this sourcebook, the archival documents that had been collected offered insights into the relationship of the majority society to the Roma minorities (laws, ordinances, interrogation protocols, the notes of various assemblies and councils the leading figures of which reflect on the “Gypsy question”). This time, it’s the voice of Roma actors, mostly reported in materials that have been published for the first time, including many documents which have never been used before for academic purposes. In the first chapter, which illustrates the prelude to the emancipatory movements of the interwar period, presenting materials from the nineteenth century, the reader encounters the first requests from 1865 to establish a separate state (Gypsy Voivodina) and the appearance of the first professional association in 1890 (of Gypsy musicians, also in the Austro-Hungarian Empire). These early examples, which prove that the beginnings of Roma emancipation followed the paths of the regional nation-building processes, are followed by materials collected from eleven different countries, presented first in the original language and then in an English translation and then supplements with comments by experts. Although the name of the commenters is mentioned and they also appear in the acknowledgment section, it would have been preferable to have introduced them very briefly or at least to have indicated their affiliations. Nevertheless, the primary sources and the comments are both exceptionally exciting. They include documents concerning the establishment of religious and educational associations, articles published in different Roma newspapers, and publications by Gypsy activists from the USSR.

As also suggested by the authors, this outstanding sourcebook should be used not only by a limited niche of scholars and Roma activists but also in primary and secondary education. From now on, discussions of nationalistic visions and the formation of civil society during the first half of the twentieth century throughout Europe should be complemented by discussion of these sources and stories, and Roma civic emancipation in the central, southeastern, and eastern regions of Europe should be seen and understood as an integral and inseparable part of the general development of modern nationalism and, therefore, of the entire European historical canon.

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