

***HOMINUM GENUS IN PEREGRINATIONE NATUM:
GYPSIES IN RENAISSANCE
AND COUNTER-REFORMATION SOURCES****

Abstract: The appearance of Gypsies in Western Europe prompted chroniclers and other writers of the Renaissance to represent them and thus construct the stereotypes associated with this ethnic group. After a brief examination of some Renaissance sources concerning Gypsies, three texts, are examined: a play by the Portuguese author, Gil Vicente, *Auto de hūas Ciganas*; an excerpt from *Disquisitiones Magicae*, a doctrinal treatise of the Flemish-Spanish Jesuit, Martin Delrio; and an excerpt from *Miscelanea*, a dialogue of the Portuguese Leitão de Andrada (sixteenth/seventeenth cents.). The texts were chosen on the basis of their differences: they span across almost one century (1521–1617), from Renaissance (Vicente) to Counter-Reformation (Delrio and Andrada) and, moreover, they are quite different as to their literary genre. Analysis shall concentrate not only on the identification of stereotypes about Gypsies but also on the uses of those stereotypes as well as ascertain the evolution from attitudes towards Gypsies from Renaissance to Counter-Reformation.¹

Keywords: Gypsies, Renaissance, Counter-Reformation, Gil Vicente, Martin Delrio, Leitão de Andrada, ethnicity, migration, alterity.

As early as the fifteenth century Western European authors seem to perceive in Gypsies² the very condition of a migrant people – a perception clearly expressed in the words of the German chronicler, Albert Krantz: *hominum genus in peregrinatione natum* (a race of people wanderers from birth). We shall analyse in this paper three different sources on Gypsies ranging from Renaissance to Counter-Reformation: a play from the Portuguese playwright Gil Vicente; a section of a treatise on magic from Martin Delrio; and finally a dialogue from the Portuguese writer Leitão de Andrada. Before entering into the discussion of the aforementioned sources a comparative analysis of previous notices concerning Gypsies from the fifteenth century will show us the roots of later ideas about Gypsies.

* I would like to thank Professor Ifigenija Radulović for kindly having provided me a copy of an item of the bibliography from the Library Matica Srpska of Novi Sad.

¹ A well-documented overview of the topic is the book by Dietz 2005.

² Although the recommended name for Gypsies today is Roma, we keep the old term, notwithstanding its potential confusion, the reason being that it is the name used in the historical period concerned here.

Five sources covering both 15th and 16th centuries from different geographical areas will be used here as a sample: the *Chronica novella* of Hermann Korner (ca. 1423); the *Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris* (1427); the Spanish chronicle *Hechos del Condestable Don Miguel Lucas de Iranzo* (after 1471);³ the chronicle of Saxony by Albert Krantz (published 1520); and an extensive text on Gypsies from the *Cosmographia* of the German geographer Sebastian Muenster (1550). For the sake of brevity, we present a table (Appendix 1) which schematizes the different pieces of information and attitudes of these early sources.

Repetitions and similarities in these Renaissance sources led some scholars to level all of them as a cliché.⁴ Certainly some of these texts form a line of transmission, as authors seem to prefer to stick to the judgment of their predecessors rather than risk a new approach: so Albert Krantz draws on Hermann Korner, and Sebastian Muenster, in turn, borrows entire sentences from Krantz.⁵ Despite such interdependence, there are differences in terms of information given by each author as well as differences of attitudes from each author regarding Gypsies.

As it is evident from the table, differences between these sources are considerable and though some may be attributed to disparity of literary genres or to the erudition of each author, there are interesting points to be made, namely: 1. the outright distaste for the physical appearance of Gypsies from the citizen of Paris does not prevent him from denying, based on his own experience, the popular image of pickpocketing; 2. knowledge about Gypsies expands beyond issues of customs or their physical appearance in earlier sources to matters of language in later sources; 3. starting with Krantz and more plainly in Muenster, there is a deconstruction of the purported self-narratives of Gypsies (mainly those concerning their geographical origin); 4. the prejudice and the hostility against Gypsies increases, so that from the curiosity of earlier sources a more articulated stance against Gypsies emerges (as in Krantz and Muenster); 5. the Spanish chronicle seems a bit of an outsider in this list as the author seems to have the most friendly view of Gypsies.⁶

Despite differences, these texts coalesced the representation of the Gypsy as the strange par excellence. No wonder that European chroniclers, travellers and geographers describing peoples of the New World, resorted to Gypsies as a term of comparison. That is the case of João de Barros, a chronicler of Portuguese conquest and discoveries who compared the Qalandar of India to the Gypsies,⁷ or, even more significantly, the case of a biography of the principal missionary of Brazil, the Jesuit José de Anchieta, written by the Italian Sebastian Berettari and published in early seventeenth century, which makes an extensive comparison between Brazilian Indians and European Gypsies.⁸

Gil Vicente, a Portuguese dramatist, fits (partly) into this exotic view of this

³ Relevant texts quoted in Ramos 2003.

⁴ E.g. Sánchez Ortega 1993: 13.

⁵ See Bartlett, 1952: 88.

⁶ This even acknowledged by Sánchez Ortega 1993: 19.

⁷ Barros, *Década* IV, quoted by Ramos 2003: 76.

⁸ The author admits an affinity between Brazilians and Gypsies on grounds of similarity of skin colour (cf. Berettari 1617: 39).

community. His play *Auto de hūas ciganas*, staged in 1521 or 1525, on Maundy Thursday, in the court during its stay at Évora, a city in the south of Portugal where Gypsies were more common, features Gypsies as the main characters.⁹ The play is rather a divertissement with almost no plot. In the first scene of the play enter Gypsy women who address the noblemen and the ladies of the audience; in the second scene, enter the Gypsy men who address the male audience; in the last scene, Gypsy women turn to individual ladies in the audience and tell each one her fortune. The comic of the play depends essentially from the contrast between Gypsies and courtiers, with the inherent contrasting features: outcast vs. powerful; foreigner vs. national.

In the first scene, Martina and Cassandra, two Gypsies, address the noblemen asking for alms:

Mantenga, fidalguz ceñurez hermusuz
Dadnuz limuzna pur lamur de Diuz.
*Cristianuz çumuz, veiz aquí la cruz.*¹⁰
 God preserve, handsome noblemen,
 Give us alms for the love of God.
 We are christians, here you can see the cross.

Gypsies are made strangers by means of an orthographic rendering of their accent that has two features: a peculiar ceceo and an elevation of the vowel *o* to *u* (*ceñurez hermusuz* instead of *señores hermosos*).¹¹ At the same time these first words point to other characteristics associated to Gypsies: a suspicious stance in terms of religion indicated by display of the cross in an attempt to avert the mistrust of the non-Gypsy audience; the mendicancy indicated by the act of begging alms, and by the flattering compliments to the noblemen.¹²

In this first scene the Gypsies apply to the court audience attributes which should be construed as referring to themselves, as it is the case when Lucrecia calls her addressee „lily of Greece,” and Giralda speaking to a lady calls her „rose born, bank of the Nile” – both references are intended to be reminiscent of the (purported) country of origin of Gypsies (Greece and/or Egypt).

The second scene starts with a Gypsy man, Cláudio, asking for someone willing to exchange his nag. Then his mate Aurício promises to exchange his colt for another one plus a good sum of money. Carmélio, the third Gypsy male of this group, offers another bargain: two donkeys which he would have already sold but now pretends to exchange. Claudio, again, extolls another bargain: a crooked horse, with a marking in the rump (*calzado nel*

⁹ The title with its feminine – the definite article *hūas* plus the noun *ciganas* – points to women as the principal characters. In fact, though there are male characters as well, it is the feminine world that constitutes the focus of the play.

¹⁰ Vicente 1984: 488.

¹¹ For a discussion of the dialect of Gypsies in Gil Vicente see Ramos 2003: 73 ff.

¹² The mendicancy is satirized eventually when one of the women begs the ladies for a coif and skirt, garments of courtly style.

rabo) and cow hocked (*zambro de los piez trazeroz*).¹³ So, in all, the three Gypsies appear to the audience as swindlers and, comically, they do not hide their tricks, on the contrary.

The third scene starts with Gypsy women trying to attract the favour of the ladies of the audience:

*Mantenga ciñuras y rozas y ricaz.
De Grecia çumuz hidalgaz por Diuz.
Nuztra ventura que fue contra nuz,
por tierras estrañas nuz tienen perdidad.
Dadnuz ezmula, ezmeraldaz polidaz,
que Diuz vuz defienda del amur de engaño,
que muztra una mueztra y vende otro paño,
y pone en peligro laz almaz y vidaz.*¹⁴

„God preserve, ladies, roses and wealthy you are.
We are noble ladies from Greece, by God.
Our fate turned against us,
by foreign lands it made us go astray.
Give us alms, polished emeralds,
may God defend you from deceitful love
that shows a sample while selling another fabric,
and endangers both souls and lives.”

These words reveal the reason why the title of the play highlights women as principal characters. Indeed, the art fortune-telling is not only practiced by women it is particularly esteemed by women as well, and, what is more, it deals with the most important (and unpredictable) event for a woman in the sixteenth century: love and marriage. Hence the Gypsy foretellers explore the anxiety of women facing the challenges of love and the risk of deception. At the same time the image of deceitful love as a merchant of fabric used by the Gypsy foreteller points to the stereotype associated to the Gypsy way of trading, that is, swindle.

The rest of the play is filled with individual encounters between Gypsy women and the ladies from the audience exploring the aforementioned anxiety of ladies on matters of love, as can be seen in the following quotation:

*Mustra la mano, ceñura,
no hayaz ningún recelo.
Bendígate Diuz del cielo,
tú tienez buena ventura,
muy buena ventura tienez.
Muchuz bienenz, muchuz bienenz,
un hombre te quiere mucho,
otroz te hablan d'amurez,*

¹³ Vicente 1984: 489. A marking in the rump is intended as comic, for a horse is said “*calçado*” when it has markings in the legs (known as ‘stockings,’ ‘socks,’ or ‘boots’).

¹⁴ Vicente 1984: 490.

*tu señura, no te curez de dar a muchoz ezcuto.*¹⁵

„Show your hand, lady,
Have no fear at all,
Bless you God from heaven.
Good fortune you have,
a very good fortune indeed;
much wealth, much wealth,
a man loves you very much,
while others talk to you about love affairs;
you, my lady, do not try
to give attention to many men.”

The manners of the Gypsy foreteller are flattering as we have already seen in the play, but the satire spills over to the ladies insofar as the fortune telling certainly has insinuations (which we can only guess but were clear to the audience) about the vanities of each lady concerning social status, marriage... Despite the criticism of Zimič who sees the „superstitious belief of court ladies in gypsy prophecies,”¹⁶ as the main target of the satire in the play, and, in this scene in particular, as a strategy to expose vanities and trivia about each lady, the play seems rather to focus on Gypsy stereotypes. The tone, however, is not particularly derogatory and cannot be viewed as a fierce invective (unlike the same author does to other social groups). To a certain extent the play is witness to what Sánchez Ortega calls an idyllic period in the relation between Gypsies and non-Gypsies in Iberian societies.¹⁷

From drama of early sixteenth century we move to a doctrinal treatise by the Spanish-Flemish Jesuit Martin del Rio (1551–1608), *Disquisitiones magicarum libri sex* (Investigations into magic in six books) first published in 1599 which contains a long section on Gypsies. The *Disquisitiones*, as Machielsen notes is a book „with a vast range of subjects – not only witchcraft but also popular superstitions, lot-casting and lotteries, and divination.”¹⁸

Gypsies are dealt with in the context of chiromancy about which Delrio gathers a huge amount of information from previous authors, the most important, and deemed the most reliable, being Sebastian Muenster. Besides Muenster, Delrio makes use of a remarkable writer on demonology (a favourite subject of the Jesuit), i.e., the French monk, Pierre Crespet.¹⁹ Whether Delrio got to know Muenster’s text about Gypsies, through Crespet (who cites the geographer) or not, the fact is that this coincidence shows, again, how authors do not risk in these matters to look at things with a fresh approach, rather they look through the lens of their predecessors.

Having distinguished between medical and physiognomic chiromancy, which is admitted by his moral and theological doctrine, and ‘astrological chiromancy,’ which is

¹⁵ Vicente 1984: 492.

¹⁶ Zimič 1983: 7.

¹⁷ Such period, according to Sánchez Ortega, ends in 1499 with the *Pragmática* (law) of the Catholic Kings which tried (unsuccessfully) to settle them (see Martínez Dhier 2007: 120). But in Portugal laws specifically targeting Gypsies are subsequent to the play (see Ramos 2003: 81 ff).

¹⁸ Machielsen 2017: 211.

¹⁹ The author is not mentioned by Machielsen, nevertheless there is a debt of Delrio towards Crespet.

sinful, Delrio turns his attention to Gypsies:

Solent hanc vanitatem profiteri uxores [...] ex illa colluie quae totam peruagantur Europam. Vulgo Zingaros seu Aegyptios nuncupant.

„The people who usually make profession of this vanity are the wives [...] of that pig-swirl which wanders round the whole Europe, and whose members are popularly known as ‘Zingari’ or ‘Egyptians.’²⁰

As can be seen from these words, Delrio’s harshness is not chiefly directed against the practice of chiromancy – indeed a marginal part of Gypsy culture and not more than a means of living, if we believe the words of the already mentioned catholic polemist, Pierre Crespet²¹ – but rather to the Gypsy condition as a migrant and foreign people in Europe.

His comment upon the first quotation from Muenster makes little of the practice of chiromancy and puts the focus elsewhere, v.z., on the inclination to theft attributed to Gypsies:

*Vnde saepe animum subit admiratio, quo iure, uel iniuria in quibusdam prouinciis hoc genus flagitii a Principibus toleretur; non sine maximo scandalo et damno rusticorum. Nam scelerum impunitatem permittit, qui sceleratos tolerat. Si hos fures licet tolerare et maleficia reliqua tolerantur, non id nisi contra diuinae legis, et Ecclesiasticorum canonum auctoritate?*²²

„Hence it causes me wonder: with what right or wrong in some provinces this type of scoundrel is tolerated by Princes, not without the gravest scandal and harm to peasants. For he who tolerates their impunity, tolerates criminals. If it is licit to tolerate these thieves and other evils are tolerated, is that not but against divine law and against the authority of the canons of the Church?“

Clearly the tone has shifted: there seems to be a „Gypsy question,“ where religion plays a lesser role than political, social and moral issues. The attack from Delrio on Gypsies proceeds with the necessity of repressing an idle population – as accomplished scholar, Delrio illustrates his point with a law from Corinth, quoted through Athenaeus, and, moreover, with contemporary laws which obliged magistrates to investigate the means by which lazy people made their living. Then, the Jesuit, again drawing on what Muenster had written, tries to dispel the well-known (self)-narrative of Gypsies as people from Egypt wandering by penance.²³

Another characteristic of Gypsies leads Delrio to a far-fetched argument based on linguistics which in sum predicates Gypsies as foreigners to Western Europe:

*Origine Sclaus esse ex ditione Vvinden, sane quod peculiare ipsis idioma, in Sclauonicum uergere significat Auentinus loquens de natiuo. Scio namque praeterea fictitium quoddam habere ipsis solis notum quod Hispani uocant Ziriquenca Ziriguenca [Ziriguenza: sic instead of Ziriguença], Germani, teste Munstero, Rometsch [Rometsch: sic instead of Rotwelsch], hoc est hoc est ‘rubrum barbarismum.’ Norunt interea cuncta fere Europae idioma et apud Germanos Germanice, apud Gallos Gallice, apud Italos Italice etc.*²⁴

²⁰ Transl. from Delrio 2000: 173 f.

²¹ Crespet 1590: 189.

²² Delrio 1606: 187.

²³ Delrio 1606: 188.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Rometsch is a wrong spelling of *Rotwelsch* (German dialect not strictly related to Gypsies, in reality, but

„As to their origin they are Slavs from the area of the Winden,²⁵ for, indeed, Aventinus, speaking about their native language, points out that their particular language verges on Slavic. For I am aware that they have an artificial language, known of them only which Spaniards call *Ziriguença*, and the Germans, according to Muenster, *Rometsch*, that is, „red barbarism.” Besides that, they know almost every language of Europe: so in Germany they speak German, in France, French; in Italy, Italian and so on.”

The argument seems contradictory: even as Gypsies speak the national language of each European country that does not make them Europeans. Delrio ends by sharing his impressions upon encountering a Gypsy chieftain in Spain, in Leon in 1584:

Cum adhuc in Hispania anno 1584, uersarer Legione, magna tum multitudo istorum per pagos illos inundarat. [...] Huic hordae Comes erat, sic appellant [...]. Comes tam perite Castellanum idioma loquebatur, quam si Toleti natus. Sciebat omnes Hispaniae aditus terrestres (puertos uocant) omnes regionum amfractus et difficultates; quid roboris esset cuique ciuitati, qui praecipui in quaque, et quae cuique opes. Nihil fere ad rempublicam pertinens, tam arcanum, quod eum lateret nec clam hoc, sed gloriabatur. Quo aut cui rei haec curiosa exploratio?²⁶

„Recently, in 1584, in Spain, during a stay in Leon, a huge crowd of these people invaded the villages around. [...] The chieftain of this horde was a Count (so they call him) [...]. The Count spoke so fluently in Castilian language as though he was born in Toledo. He knew all the entrances of Spain by land (they call it *puertos*), all the roundabouts and the disadvantages of regions; what was the strength, who were the principals, what were the riches of each city. There was hardly a matter concerning the state, even the most secret, that was not known to him — this was not said in private, rather he boasted of it. To what purpose or to what matter is this inquisitive spying?”

In times when European monarchies became more absolutist and centralized the argument that Gypsies or whatever minority could pose a threat to national security was all the more compelling. Even if Delrio proceeds and ends the chapter with the refutation of two passages of Scripture that could be (rather deviously) be interpreted in support of chiromancy, the overarching impression we get from this section is that of a shift of the Gypsy question to the terrain of politics and policies.

The last source confirms such a shift. A Portuguese nobleman, Leitão de Andrade, who lived from 1555 to 1630, wrote a *Miscelanea* (Miscellany) in the form of dialogue between three characters. The section about Gypsies is found in the Dialogue XI, which is a description of diverse games, dances, plays, processions on the occasion of feasts in honour of the Virgin of the Light celebrated in a small town in the centre of Portugal, Pedrógão Grande, and sponsored by one of the speakers: Devoto (which means devout).

Devoto expelled Gypsies from the festivities he was sponsoring in the town. The reasons given for his attitude are an extreme repugnance towards them, unworthy, in his own words, even of receiving alms at his door. According to Devoto, Gypsy men side with robbers, killers, with no law and no fear of it; whereas women side with thieves, witches, and

attributed exclusively to them by Muenster). *Ziriguença*, in turn, is a typo (instead of *ziriguença* or *ziriguenza*), today spelled as *jeringonza* which, indeed, is used for any lingo and not specifically for a Gypsies' dialect.

²⁵ For the equivalence of *Sclau* and *Winden* see Muenster 1550, *cccij* (the Latin edition is not as clear).

²⁶ Delrio 1606: 189. The note about the Gypsy count's fluency in Castilian taken together with the previous consideration about an exclusive dialect among German Gypsies amounts to what we could call a double bind: if Gypsies assimilate the national language and culture they are spies; if they don't they are strangers.

disturbers of female probity. Devoto charges Gypsy women with the most nefarious machinations in beguiling other women: maidservants are lured into poisoning their own masters; non married women, in turn, are beguiled into enchanting men with filters.²⁷

For Devoto, the main charge to be made against Gypsies amounts, in its different forms, to witchcraft:

*Todos somos peccadores, estes o são por officio, e por carta, e delle se mantêm. E os que introduzirão em Portugal mil feitiçarias, e males que nelle não se sabião. [...] E o não perderem nunca a sua lingoa, não foi por certo pèra nella se lerem e usarem dos livros catholicos, ou de sciencias e artes que trouxessem boas, se não pèra melhor intelligencia de suas malas-artes, latrocínios, e embelecós, ou enganos, porque usando tudo isto como usão por officio os não possamos entender.*²⁸

„We are all sinners, but these are sinners by profession, and qualified, and out of that they make their living. They are the ones who introduced in Portugal one thousand sorceries and evils hitherto unknown. [...]

That they have never abandoned their own language, it is not because they intended catholic books, or sound sciences and good arts brought by them to be learned in that language; it was rather for the sake of a better learning of their trickeries, thieveries, deceits, or duperies so they may use all this, as they use by profession, without us being aware of them.”

The attack amounts to scapegoating the Gypsies for all the evil and points to the impossibility of their assimilation. Like Delrio, Andrada upholds the same suspicion: Gypsies are strangers threatening European nations.

In contrast to previous writings on Gypsies, the work of Andrada shows little interest in ethnological or historical issues. Instead his main concern is, on one hand, the neglect by authorities of an ethnic group which was judged as alien to Portuguese society, and, on the other, the recommendation of measures to remedy the problem. Such approach bears a strong resemblance to the works of a typical figure of both Spanish and Portuguese seventeenth century, called the *arbitrista* (social and political thinker). The *arbitrista* is an author who expresses opinions (*alvitres* or *arbitrios*, hence his name) about matters of public concern and, among these, chiefly the health of public finances.

* * *

To conclude, it is clear that there was a period, namely the Renaissance, during which Gypsies were the object of curiosity and enquiry from non-Gypsy Europeans. This is evident in the play of Gil Vicente. But then came Counter-Reformation and with it more and more voices appear less interested in Gypsies (even as a curious ethnic group). Instead they try to turn the outcast status into a public and policy issue – an attitude illustrated in the works of Martin Delrio and Leitão de Andrada. This signals a turning point when Gypsies rather than satirised were put under suspicion, almost scapegoated as the source of all the plagues of society.

²⁷ Cf. Andrada 1867: 240.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 241.

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***HOMINUM GENUS IN PEREGRINATIONE NATUM:*
ЦИГАНИ У ИЗВОРИМА ИЗ ПЕРИОДА РЕНЕСАНСЕ И
КОНТРАРЕФОРМАЦИЈЕ**

Сажетак

С доласком и појавом Цигана у Западној Европи увећао се и број текстова који их представљају и смештају у европско друштво. Први аутори су пре свега били хроничари (као што је анонимна хроника *Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris* или хроника Немца Хермана Кронера) чији је приступ према Циганима одражавао зачуђеност али и знатижељу у односу на њихов физички изглед, обичаје и понашање. Касније су, пак, немачки хроничар Алберт Кранц и географ Себастијан Минстер с предрасудама приказивали Цигане на основу њихових обичаја. Упркос разликама у подацима и оценама, ови аутори су створили стереотипе везане за Цигане. С друге стране, чини се да је португалски драмски писац Жил Винсенте у својој драми *Auto de hūas Ciganas* (1521? 1525?) репродуковао овај клише који се везује за Цигане али без злих намера да их сатирично омаловажи. Уместо уобичајеног приступа он је желео да у комичне сврхе испита њихове необичне обичаје. Прекретницу представља научни трактат *Disquisitiones magicae* из 1599. године фламасно-шпанског језуите Мартина Делрија у духу контрареформације, који пише о Циганима и то о њиховом бављењу хиромантијом. Делрио изражава свој тврдокорни став о Циганима сматрајући да их је немогуће интегрисати у европско друштво: и у том смислу, с историјског и етнографског становишта, Цигани, друштвени изгнаници, постали су политичко питање. Сличан став се може уочити и у дијалогу португалског аутора из седамнаестог века који напада Цигане углавном из подозривости и на основу њихове немогућности интеграције у друштво. Како Делрио тако и Андрада, у оквиру својих размишљања, слично друштвеним и политичким мислицима (*arbitristas*) тог времена окарактерисали су Цигане као оваплоћење сваког зла у друштву (лоповлука, лењости, вештичарења).

Кључне речи: Цигани, ренесанса, контрареформација, Жил Винсенте, Мартин Делрио, Леитау де Андрада, националност, миграције, *gruïosii*.