

## Roma and Their History in the Shadow of the Iron Curtain

### *Call for Articles*

One of the areas of historical research in the countries east of the former Iron Curtain that has achieved remarkable growth is the history of the local Roma population in the twentieth century. The newly awakened interest in their turbulent and often tragic fate has yielded many important findings. Above all, it has been possible to capture the overall contours of their history within individual national frameworks, to portray various aspects of their lives and to record a number of individual stories. At the same time, however, this research still suffers from fragmentation, lacking sufficient interconnectedness and deeper grounding in the mainstream of historical research.

It is with this deficit in mind that we have decided to conceive the thematic issue of *Soudobé dějiny / Czech Journal of Contemporary History* No. 3/2023 on the history of the Roma in Central & Eastern Europe with a primary focus on the era of communist rule, but with possible and sometimes necessary overlaps with the wartime and interwar period, as well as with the period of post-communist transformation and the present. However, we are also happy to offer space for comparative analyses of the situation of Romani men and women in Western Europe, covering more general development trends or, conversely, mutual differences in countries with competing socio-economic systems. We also welcome texts emphasizing the specific methodological and ethical challenges associated with research and the formulation of research results focused on Roma history.

We see the history of Romani populations as an inseparable part of a more general history. We wish to give space to Romani men and women themselves as historical subjects and actors who have long been marginalized and relegated to the position of passive objects and recipients of external interventions and events. At the same time, however, we are interested in the goals, means, forms and transformations of state policies towards the Roma and the formation of mutual relations at various levels of the functioning of individual European states and regional communities. We are interested in the genesis of mental stereotypes of the “other” and manifestations of xenophobia, as well as the representation of “Gypsy”/Roma men and women in discursive frameworks that define their position and perception as players in public space, filtering the ways of perceiving them and establishing models of action towards them. We are also interested in Romani perspectives on the experience of a shared past, the formation and development of relations with non-Romani society and the state, and in exploring the ways in which the Roma have managed to promote their own visions of the future, equality and participation in local development or in addressing national issues related to the status and situation of Romani people as a group. We are convinced that the history of the Roma is one of the mirrors that allow us to shed a different light on national or state (Czech/Czechoslovak, Polish, Hungarian, Soviet, etc.) history and to identify its hitherto neglected or overlooked features. At the same time, we perceive the need to respond to contemporary calls to revise ethnocentric assumptions that reproduce historically established hierarchies of meaning and power in the relationship of non-Roma “majorities” to Roma “minorities”.

When we talk about the history of the Roma, we are referring to the Roma as a group, but we are aware of the heterogeneity of Romani society across states and historically established regional groups in terms of social status, socioeconomic status, etc., but also in terms of (self-)identification: not only in relation to Romaniness, but also in relation to the more general categories of race, class, and gender. A more generally formulated label using a generic masculine should not obscure this heterogeneity of attitudes and experiences when examining the history of the Roma as part of European society and its historical development.

For example, we ask ourselves the following questions:

1. To what extent and in what respect were the Roma victims of the communist regimes and their social experiments as a specifically identified group of “g/Gypsies”, but also as people punished for ideological reasons, for example as self-employed persons or free-thinking citizens? To what extent, on the other hand, did the radical change of conditions offer a certain part of Romani society the possibility of escaping from the historical position of socially excluded outsiders, and how did they take advantage of the offered chances? How would a similar balance sheet play out for the subsequent years of democratic capitalist transformation?
2. Which continuities persisted or even prevailed in the situation of Roma society, despite all the systemic transformations from the 1930s or 1940s to the 1990s? What major turning points can be identified when examining Roma history and how do they fit into the established chronologies of the “national” history of individual European states?
3. What role has shared collective memory played in the recent history of the Roma as a group, especially the experience of the Roma Holocaust, and how has this memory been (re)constructed and manifested? How in relation to the communist past? How have dominant (national) historical narratives and/or ideologically motivated interpretations of the past intervened in these processes?
4. What specific contents have the concepts of discrimination, equalization, stigmatization, emancipation, racism, assimilation, integration, solidarity, isolation, social mobility or social exclusion taken on in relation to Roma men and women?
5. How can our understanding and current interpretation of the history of the Roma during the communist period provide new insights into the development of the situation of the Roma in the countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain? What were the state approaches to the Roma communities which formed part of the post-war Western European states? In what ways did Roma men and women in these regions also become actors in the events that determined the state approaches to them?

We welcome articles and essays by historians, as well as by experts in the field of sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and other social science disciplines. **The deadline for submission of manuscripts in English, in the range of 5,000 to 15,000 words, is 1 August 2023.** Manuscripts should be submitted via <https://sd.usd.cas.cz> (“for authors – submit manuscript”).



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