Romani Slavery in Romanian Historiography (1837–2023): Terminology, Perspectives, and External Influences

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Abstract

This article traces how Romani slavery has been written into – and more often written out of – Romanian historiography from the earliest scholarly treatment by Mihail Kogălniceanu (1837) to the most recent documentary syntheses (2022). Working with a deliberately selective corpus of key monographs, archival editions, and journal articles, the study maps four historiographical moments:

1. Foundational (1837–1918) – romantic–philological texts that name the phenomenon yet normalise it through the terms *țigani* and *robie*.
2. Interwar (1919–1944) – the first large-scale empirical syntheses (Potra, Chelcea) and competing Roma-led associations, documented in police files reproduced by Năstasă and Varga.
3. State-socialist (1945–1989) – a period of partial amnesia, in which slavery is marginalised within grand national narratives but resurfaces in micro-studies (Cicanci, Grigoraș).
4. Post-1989 professionalisation – critical re-examinations spearheaded by Achim, Petcuț, and others, accompanied by substantial archival editions that foreground Romani voices.

Across these stages the article analyses (a) terminological slippages that veil slavery (*robie* vs *sclavie*, *țigan* vs *Rom*), (b) the impact of foreign observers – from Pierre Lescallopier to Elias Regnault – in framing Romanian slavery as a late European anomaly, and (c) the interplay between nationalist myth-making and external scholarly pressure.

I argue that Romani slavery functioned as a fiscal-productive regime integral to Wallachian and Moldavian state formation; its later erasure reflects both elite discomfort with an "un-European" past and the enduring power of racialized language. Integrating this history into university curricula and public memory is therefore essential for a more honest, inclusive understanding of Romanian modernity.

Keywords

- Abolition
- Nationalism and collective memory
- Romani slavery
- Romanian historiography
- Wallachia and Moldavia

Introduction

The subject of Romani slavery in Romania's territories remains – despite its historical and social significance – a marginal chapter in Romanian historiography. Over the centuries, this topic has been systematically ignored, superficially addressed, or distorted through ideological, nationalist, or racist lenses. Although Romani slavery endured for over five centuries – and its effects continue to be felt today in the economic and social marginalisation of the Romani community – scholarly literature on the topic remains fragmented and often contradictory.

Debates concerning the origins of Romani slavery are central to understanding its historical framework. Two opposing hypotheses have been advanced regarding both the geographical origin of the institution (Tatar territories – supported by historians such as Iorga and Giurescu – or the Byzantine Empire – as argued by Panaitescu, Achim, and also considered by Petcuț) and the initial juridical status of Roma (as either slaves or free people). Viorel Achim (1998) argues that Roma were already slaves in the Byzantine Empire and, upon migrating north of the Danube, merely changed masters while retaining their enslaved status. In this view, slavery was a transferred and continued institution. In contrast, Panaitescu and Petcuț (2015) contend that slavery was a locally constructed system, gradually established by Wallachian and Moldavian elites in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to serve purposes of fiscal control and forced labour. The enslaved status was not inherited from Byzantium but rather formulated progressively through legal acts, donations, and princely regulations.

This article does not aim to provide an exhaustive inventory of all scholarship on Romani history. I discuss only those monographs and documentary collections that – by their breadth and methodological influence – have decisively shaped the field (for example, critical editions edited by Năstasă and Varga or syntheses by Achim and Petcuț). Numerous other studies and regional monographs – valuable yet of limited circulation – remain outside the present analysis. This choice reflects both space constraints and the intention to foreground the works that have most visibly re-shaped paradigms on Romani slavery and post-emancipation in Romania's history. It tracks: (1) the evolution of terminology, (2) scholars' stances toward the institution of slavery, (3) external intellectual currents that periodically re-ignited interest in the topic, and (4) the ways in which cultural prejudices have shaped representations of Roma.

To stress the exceptional persistence of this bondage within Christian Europe, the essay also weaves in a series of Western testimonies from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries (Pierre Lescallopier, Paul of Aleppo, William Wilkinson, Félix Colson, Elias Regnault, among others). Read comparatively, these outside voices reveal how Wallachia and Moldavia maintained a slave system after most European states had long abandoned such forms of human exploitation.

Accordingly, the study offers more than a critique of national historiography; it probes the specifically Romanian "anomaly" within the wider European history of slavery.

The article also highlights the disjunction between historical discourse and the social and legal realities of slavery, emphasising how official narratives have contributed to the erasure of slavery from national

memory. This study thus seeks not only to recover a history of facts but also to investigate the history of forgetting and institutionalised silence surrounding a central episode in understanding majority–minority relations within Romanian society.

1. Denying Romani Slavery: Language, Memory, and the Construction of Romanian Historiography

The institution of slavery, as it existed in the Romanian Principalities, has long been subjected to processes of linguistic minimisation and historiographical marginalisation. The persistent use of terms such as *robie* (servitude) instead of *sclavie* (slavery), and *țigani* (Gypsies) instead of *romi* (Roma), reflects not only a reluctance to confront the systemic exploitation of an entire population but also broader dynamics of nation-building and the management of collective memory.

1.1 Denying Slavery through Language: Terminological Ambiguities and the Rejection of an Uncomfortable Memory

Addressing the subject of slavery places the historian in the midst of complex dilemmas regarding the selection of terminology that both reflects the past and holds meaning in the present. The most problematic terms remain *"țigani"*/Roma and *robie*/slavery, along with their respective semantic fields. The use of one term or another today often reflects the author's level of interpretation and theoretical abstraction. Leaving aside recent scholarship, Romanian historiography has been remarkably consistent in employing the terminology inherited from the medieval period: *"țigan(i)"* (Gypsies) and *rob(ie)* (servitude). While this lexical choice has often been championed by nationalist circles, it has not generated sustained academic interest, either historically or today, because it touches upon the sensitive issue of nationhood – particularly in the context of a Romanian national identity constructed in opposition to Hungarians, Jews, and Roma.

Historians following Mihail Kogălniceanu did not write about "țigani" because they were supposed to assimilate; since 1990, Romanian scholars have largely avoided using "Roma" due to the widespread but mistaken belief that the term usurps the ethnonym of the Romanian majority.

"Robia țiganilor" (Gypsies' servitude) remains the preferred conceptual framework used in nearly all historical and literary writings. Alongside the use of the terms *robie* and *țigani* in period documents, one also finds a systematic minimisation of their negative connotations. As a result, the dependent condition of Roma has often been painted in romanticised hues – as a kind of servitude lighter than that of the enserfed peasantry. Among historians, one often encounters remarks such as "servitude protected the Gypsies from the fiscal burdens imposed on peasants", or "relations between the enslaved and the majority population were generally good". Such statements imply that Romani slaves were not truly exploited but rather represented an economic burden for their owners rather than a source of profit.

Nevertheless, archival documents – both official and private – as well as the accounts of foreign travellers, provide concrete evidence that *robie* and *sclavie* were functionally synonymous in the Wallachian and Moldavian social systems.

1.2 What Does 'Slave Society' Mean in a Romanian Context?

The concept of a "slave society" is central to global slavery historiography, yet its application to the Romanian context remains controversial and insufficiently explored. Although the institution of slavery existed in the Romanian Principalities for over five centuries, Romanian historians have generally avoided categorising it as such. Instead, they have favoured the terms *rob* and *robie*, which evoke a milder or intermediate form of servitude, thereby sidestepping the harsh, universally acknowledged connotations of *slavery* and *slave*.

This terminological choice is far from neutral; it reveals a deliberate avoidance of both theoretical positioning and moral accountability. To speak explicitly of slavery would entail drawing direct comparisons with other historical contexts – such as the Greco-Roman world, the Islamic East, or the Atlantic slave systems – where human exploitation was a structural cornerstone of social and economic organisation. Instead, Romanian historical writings have emphasised the "particularities" of local *robie*, often with a justificatory tone: that slaves were not conscripted into the army, that their masters were obligated to feed and clothe them, or that, in certain legal contexts, they could be manumitted or even adopted.

Another argument often invoked to deny the slave character of Romanian society is the relatively low percentage of slaves in the total population – around seven per cent in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, this quantitative perspective is misleading.

Even if Roma represented a numerical minority, the social and economic scale of slavery was far broader. Hundreds of thousands of individuals – boyars, clerics, officials, merchants – interacted directly or indirectly with the institution of slavery: from slave owners and administrators to ordinary participants in auctions or market transactions. Slavery was omnipresent in economic life, in religion (monasteries being major slaveholders), and in the social imaginary.

Moreover, the existence of a clear and continuous legislative framework confirming the exclusive slave status of the Romani population attests to the institutionalised and systemic character of slavery. This was not an occasional or marginal practice but a juridical and social norm, transmitted from generation to generation and validated by the state, the Church, and the boyar elite.

Therefore, even in the absence of a plantation-style slave economy, as in the Americas, the Romanian Principalities meet several fundamental criteria to be considered slave societies – and, in some respects, even slave-based societies. The lack of acknowledgment in traditional historiography reflects not historical reality but the difficulty of accepting an uncomfortable and persistently ignored past.

1.3 European Testimonies about Roma and Slavery between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Foreign travellers perceived and understood the social and legal realities of the Romanian lands differently. Their travel notes and reports penetrate more deeply into the everyday life of Roma, allowing us today to reconstruct events, relationships, and mentalities from different periods and regions. Deconstructing biased ideas and assumptions is just as important in historical restitution and becomes possible by integrating Western historiography into the corpus of sources used when discussing Roma in Romanian territories.

In this sense, the notes of Walerand de Wavrin, commander of a Burgundian fleet fighting the Turks on the Danube in the spring of 1445, raise at least two points about Roma in the Balkans: Christianity and legal status (Holban 1968, 112–113). The Burgundian knight acknowledges that he "heard" what he writes and was not an eyewitness. He reports the transfer of some Christian Bulgarians who resembled, according to observers, "Gypsies". It is not specified whether this resemblance was based on Roma from the Balkans or those in Western Europe. Most likely, the author was unable to distinguish between Bulgarians and Roma, as he was unfamiliar with either group. He had first encountered the ethnic melting pot of the Balkans in the fall of 1444, and Roma had only arrived in Western Europe around 1419.

The text is notable for its reference to the south–north migration of a demographically significant group in the fifteenth century, their Christian faith, and the resemblance or confusion between Bulgarians and Roma. Christianity appears as a deeply rooted identity marker, strong enough to generate a definitive displacement, with the central element in the text being a flight from Islamic pressure into a new, Christian homeland. The term "Christian" is used five times in reference to this group of 12,000 individuals, emphasising the main feature that spiritually connects them with the Wallachians and justifies their request to settle in Wallachia. The Christianity of the Bulgarians stands at the heart of an explicit contrast with Ottoman Turkish Islam.

Period sources are diverse and visibly reflect the societies in which their authors were formed and active. The main distinction between foreign and local observers lies in the novelty or familiarity of their gaze upon Romani slavery. Depending on this, they are either struck by previously unseen realities or express considerations shaped by centuries of interaction between masters and slaves. What was unimaginable for a foreigner was mere normality for a local.

The earliest European testimonies on the slavery of Roma in the Romanian space date from the sixteenth century, when travellers and diplomats documented the existence of a subordinated population, often labelled as "țigani". In 1574, the Frenchman Pierre Lescalopier noted that "țiganii sunt robi ai domnului și ai boierilor" (Gypsies are the slaves of the ruler and of the boyars) in Moldova, thus providing one of the earliest explicit Western references to Romani slavery (Lescalopier 1888, 42).

In the seventeenth century, Paul of Aleppo, a Syrian traveller accompanying Patriarch Macarios of Antioch, documented in his travel journal the harsh living conditions of Roma in the Romanian Principalities, referring to them as a clearly marginalised social category deprived of freedom (Paul de Alep 1900, 168–169).

Dimitrie Cantemir, although a Romanian author, wrote *Descriptio Moldaviae* in Latin for a Western European audience, and the work had a significant impact on shaping the external perception of the Romanian space. He clearly acknowledged the existence of "țigani" slaves and described their economic and social roles (Cantemir 1957, 178–179).

The eighteenth century brings a series of German and Central European works investigating the origin and social status of Roma. Samuel Augustini ab Hortis published in Vienna one of the first ethnographic monographs on Roma (Hortis 1775), and Heinrich Grellmann affirmed their Indian origin while also referring to their servile status in Eastern Europe (Grellmann 1787, xvii).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British consul in the Romanian Principalities, William Wilkinson, provided a detailed account of Romani slavery, noting that Roma could be sold, inherited, or exchanged as private property. He was the first English author to extensively address the subject (Wilkinson 1820).

During the same period, the Austrian historian Johann Christian von Engel published in Vienna a historical synthesis of Romanian lands, in which he acknowledged the existence of a well-established system of slavery for the Romani population (Engel 1804, chapters 4–6).

Félix Colson, the French consul in Bucharest during the period preceding emancipation, authored a critical work on Romanian society in which he analysed the slavery of Roma and condemned it as a barbaric remnant incompatible with modern European values (Colson 1839, X).

In the mid-nineteenth century, historian Élias Regnault published a political and social history of the Danubian Principalities, which also addressed the issue of Romani emancipation and emphasised the ruling class's lack of genuine will to redress the historical injustice (Regnault 1855, 329–346, 341–342).

In Victorian England, Mary Adelaide Walker travelled through the Balkans and published a work in which she denounced the conditions under which Roma had been held in slavery and the psychological trauma that this experience inflicted on the community (Walker 1880, 136–139).

Other Western sources from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, such as those by Antonio Possevino or Michel Quiclet, made tangential references to the servile status of Roma in Romanian Principalities, offering a comparative background for interpreting the European understanding of slavery (Possevino 1586, 133; Quiclet 1676, 219–221).

1.4 Cantemir's Discourse on Roma: Between Documentation and Stereotype

In *Descriptio Moldaviae*, Dimitrie Cantemir notes that:

> […] țiganii are scattered here and there throughout all of Moldavia, and there is no boyar who does not have under his control a few of their encampments. From where and when

> this people came to Moldavia – they themselves do not know, and nothing is found about them in our chronicles. All the țigani, from all counties, speak the same language, which is mixed with many Greek and, it seems, Persian words. They have no occupation other than blacksmithing and goldsmithing. They share the same appearance and habits as țigani from other countries; their most notable traits and what sets them apart from others are idleness and thievery (Cantemir 1957, 178–179).

Although brief, this passage is significant as one of the first written descriptions of the Romani population in Moldavia, composed by an elite intellectual of the time. Cantemir poses essential questions regarding the origin, language, occupations, and geographical distribution of this population, offering valuable factual observations. He notes the dominance exercised over the Roma, without questioning it, and also comments on their language, crafts, and spatial distribution – all useful information for an overview, even if filtered through the lenses of his era.

However, the neutrality of tone disappears in the final part of the fragment, where the prince resorts to value judgments: Roma are "lazy" and "thieving" – labels that reflect the social prejudices of the time more than any objective analysis. It is precisely at this point that the text loses its documentary value and becomes an expression of a dominant mentality that, directly or indirectly, justified the maintenance of slavery.

If we take this assertion seriously – that Roma are inherently "lazy and thieving" – then we must ask how such a supposed moral incapacity could have served as the foundation of a complex economic system, one that enabled the accumulation of hundreds or thousands of slaves by great boyars, monasteries, and even the state. Paradoxically, the "ideal thief" and "ideal idler" were sold "like hotcakes", according to Cantemir, regardless of era or region – a fact that ultimately undermines the logic of such clichés.

Negative labels were not reserved exclusively for Roma. Peasants too were often described by the elites as "lazy", "irresponsible", or "uncivilised" – characterisations meant to justify their exploitation and lack of rights. In reality, in a preindustrial society where survival depended on physical labour, it was not possible to sustain large inactive social classes. Communities could not afford to tolerate a significant share of non-working members, apart from the clergy and the ruling elite.

When theft did occur, it was more often a form of symbolic resistance to the condition of slavery and to the structural poverty imposed on Roma. In the case of sedentary Roma living on a boyar's estate or court, the notion of "theft" is distorted – these individuals lived in a state of absolute dependency, and small acts of appropriation cannot be considered criminality in the proper sense. For nomadic Roma, who interacted with communities beyond the control of their masters, theft can be interpreted as a survival strategy under conditions of extreme material insecurity.

Even the legislation of the time recognised and sought to mitigate this reality: "If a Gypsy man, woman, or child steals once, or twice, or even three times – a chicken, a goose, or some other small thing – they shall be forgiven" (Hamagiu 1932, 254). The legal system was thus not completely blind to the social context, and such judicial clemency can be read as an implicit acknowledgment of the profoundly unequal nature of society.

2. Premises and Silences: Classical Historiography (Nineteenth Century to Early Twentieth Century)

In the Romanian intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century, the abolition of slavery was generally viewed positively, seen as both a moral and national imperative. Unlike the contemporary period – when the slave-owning past is often ignored or minimised – the topic at that time generated a wide array of documentary and literary productions. The first significant contribution by a Romanian intellectual to the study of the Romani population belongs to Mihail Kogălniceanu, through his *Esquisse sur l'histoire, les mœurs et la langue des Cigains*, published in Berlin in 1837 and translated into Romanian in 1900. This study combines historical, linguistic, and ethnographic data, including a Romani–Romanian glossary of 806 words and personal observations made in the Romanian Principalities. Its value lies in the relevant insights into the life and customs of Roma in Moldavia, in the context of the impending abolition of slavery.

In 1857, Jean-Alexandre Vaillant, a professor at Bucharest's Sfântul Sava College, published *Les Romes. Histoire vraie des vrais Bohémiens*, one of the earliest extended monographs on Roma. Blending his firsthand observations from the Romanian Principalities with the scholarship of the day, Vaillant reaffirmed the then-dominant theory of an Indian origin – drawing on linguistic parallels – and offered detailed portraits of Romani traditions, nomadic life, and crafts. Groundbreaking and widely cited, the study nonetheless bears the romanticism and stereotypes typical of nineteenth-century ethnography.

An essential source for understanding the emancipation process is the documentary corpus related to Prince Gheorghe Bibescu (1804–1873), one of the supporters of the liberation of monastic and state-owned slaves in Wallachia. His work, *Règne de Bibesco*, published in two volumes (*Correspondance et documents 1843–1856*, 1893; and *Lois et décrets 1843–1848*, 1894), offers a detailed perspective on the legislative process and the social implications of emancipation.

Alongside these studies, memoir literature, short fiction, and drama reflected – to a limited extent – the presence and condition of Roma in Romanian society. Some of these writings were compiled by Vasile Ionescu in the *Restituiri* collection, a broader initiative aimed at recovering and valuing literary heritage regarding Roma.

By the end of the nineteenth century, academic concern in Romania with the Romani population manifested in a small number of studies. The works of Michail T. Stătescu (*Încercări asupra originei Ţiganilor*, 1884) and Dimitrie Dan (*Ţiganii din Bucovina*, 1892), although modest in length (each under 12 pages), nevertheless provide notable contributions. Stătescu's study attests to the use of the ethnonym *rom* within Romani communities themselves, at a time when official documents continued to use terms such as *emancipat*, *român emancipat*, or *țigan*.

3. The Interwar Period: Selective Syntheses and New Beginnings

Starting in 1920, Ion Peretz, professor of history of Romanian legal traditions at the University of Bucharest, addressed the issue of slavery in Romanian legislation in a course that would form the basis for two doctoral dissertations.

One of these works belongs to Boris Th. Scurtulescu who, in his study *Situația juridico-economică a țiganilor în Principatele Române*, examines the legal status of Romani slaves, while also offering a brief historical overview. The author argues that "fortresses, churches, monasteries, boyar courts, and other public works were built by the hands of these slaves" (Iași 1937, 2), thus underlining the contribution of Roma labour to the premodern infrastructure of the Romanian Principalities.

Another important contribution is a doctoral thesis by Adalbert Gebora, *Situația juridică a țiganilor din Ardeal* (1932). It adopts a chronological approach, analysing the evolution of the legal status of Roma in Transylvania over several centuries. The study addresses the colonisation policies of the eighteenth century, the relationships between Roma and the state or urban authorities, and the ways in which Roma were represented in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature.

The first confirmed historian to mention Roma is Nicolae Iorga. He approaches the subject incidentally, as part of his broader studies on the formation of medieval Romanian states. In his monumental *Istoria Românilor*, Iorga suggests that the arrival of Roma in the Romanian Principalities was linked to Mongol domination in the region. According to his hypothesis, adopted by few contemporary historians, the Mongols brought Roma as craftsmen and musicians, and the term *țigan* has etymological connections to the black-coated *țigaie* sheep. Iorga also claims that Roma adopted this ethnonym in a Greek cultural environment and arrived in Romanian lands either from Russia or the Balkans – "always, however, through Tatar mediation". In this context, he interprets the actions of Voivode Bogdan and his son Lațcu as part of an effort to expel the Tatars, during which Roma were captured and turned into slaves (Iorga 1993, 179).

Eugène Pittard was among the first to initiate systematic anthropological studies on Romani populations, conducting extensive research on the diversity of Romani groups in Dobruja and the Old Kingdom during seven field expeditions across the Balkan Peninsula. Throughout these investigations, Pittard collaborated with local figures interested in Romani issues. These included Prince Gheorghe Bibescu, with whom he carried out research in Comarnic and Sinaia, as well as Professor Istrati, then Minister of Public Instruction, with whom he documented Romani communities in Câmpina (1899). In Dobruja, Pittard also met Lieutenant Gheorghe-Ioan Cantacuzino, commander of the Second Hunters Battalion, a unit that included numerous soldiers of Romani origin. The results of these investigations were published in his seminal work *Les Tziganes ou Bohémiens. Recherches anthropologiques dans la Péninsule des Balkans*, released in Geneva in 1932 under the auspices of the Société Générale d'Imprimerie.

Among the significant contributions from the interwar period is also *Les Tsiganes. Histoire, ethnographie, linguistique, grammaire, dictionnaire* (1930), authored by C. J. Popp-Serboianu – a prominent leader of the Romani associative movement in Romania and a vocal opponent of Gheorghe Niculescu, president of the General Union of Roma in Romania. The volume presents a comprehensive synthesis of Roma in both Romanian and European contexts, blending historical, ethnographic, and linguistic dimensions.

The first major historical synthesis concerning Roma in the Romanian space appeared in the late 1930s and was authored by Dr George Potra. His work *Contribuțiuni la istoricul țiganilor din România* (1939), published under the aegis of the King Carol I Foundation, remains a foundational reference in Romani studies. Its 378 pages offer a valuable contribution to the understanding of Romani history, including 82 document abstracts and 156 full documents pertaining to the lives of Romani slaves in the Romanian Principalities. Particularly noteworthy for researchers is Potra's analysis of Romani toponyms and the reconstruction of a Romani–Romanian vocabulary based on the sources available at the time. The volume stands out for its wealth of information on the customs, occupations, and traditions of Romani communities, while also offering a glimpse into their situation during the interwar period.

In his sole study on Roma, published in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (1941), Petre N. Panaitescu advances an explicitly economic explanation for the rise of bondage, rejecting the long-standing thesis that Romani slaves were "imported" alongside Tatar incursions. Starting from the premise that Roma first arrived as autonomous craft-workers, he argues that their conversion from tributary subjects to "moveable property" was driven by acute fiscal crises and local demand for specialised labour.

Within this framework, monasteries emerge as full-fledged estates: they purchased large numbers of Roma to expand agricultural output, hence the predominance of monastic slavery in Wallachia, whereas in Moldavia royal ("domnească") dependency remained pre-eminent until the seventeenth century. As viticulture and the salt trade expanded, slave prices rose and were calibrated by age, gender, and skill (blacksmiths, *rudari* woodworkers, carters). Nomadic *lăieși* were tolerated only as long as they generated transit taxes; once mobility undercut fiscal returns, princely authorities issued travel restrictions.

Pre-1855 manumissions, Panaitescu contends, were strictly cost-benefit decisions: owners freed enslaved Roma when upkeep exceeded profit or when state tax incentives made emancipation advantageous. Ultimately, Romani slavery is portrayed as an incremental fiscal-productive mechanism woven into the formation of regional labour markets and the consolidation of princely power – not as an isolated legal anomaly. This interpretation offers a critical counterpoint to narratives that foreground external causation, embedding the institution within the broader economic evolution of medieval Romanian principalities.

Ion Chelcea's *Țiganii din România. Monografie etnografică* (1944) occupies an ambivalent but indispensable place in the scholarship on Roma. Written under a wartime nationalist regime, the text openly reproduces contemporary hierarchies – asserting, for instance, that "the tolerance of the Romanian people toward ethnically foreign elements… even the Gypsies have taken advantage of our kindness" (Chelcea 1944, 20). Yet, precisely because Chelcea combined this normative stance with meticulous fieldwork, the monograph remains one of the richest ethnographic portraits of interwar Romani life. Drawing on surveys conducted in the 1930s, he catalogues settlement patterns, kinship structures, craft specialisations, and regional

dialects, and proposes a controversial tripartite typology ("village Roma", *băieşi/rudari*, and nomads). Subsequent researchers have mined his tables, maps, and photographs for comparative data, while simultaneously critiquing the racialized framework and assimilationist prescriptions woven through the narrative. In short, Chelcea's study exemplifies the double-edged character of much interwar social science: an empirically indispensable record that simultaneously naturalises the very power relations it purports to describe.

4. Communism: Between Censorship and Exceptions

In the historical syntheses produced under communist ideological influence, the issue of Romani slavery is addressed sporadically, often with visible reticence and in a marginal fashion. A telling example is the monumental *Istoria Românilor* (in three volumes) authored by Constantin C. Giurescu. While remarkable in its scope concerning the development of Romanian institutions and society, the work distances itself from a thorough examination of Romani slavery, limiting itself to brief mentions and fragmented treatments, without critically engaging with the social and historical implications of the phenomenon.

In the second volume, Giurescu correctly identifies the earliest documentary attestations of Romani presence in Romanian territories. However, in line with earlier interpretations advanced by Nicolae Iorga, the author reiterates the hypothesis that the Roma were "brought by the Tatars" during invasions and subsequently enslaved by local rulers, being distributed to boyars and monasteries as servile labour. This narrative, common in traditional historiography, avoids an internal analysis of the mechanisms that generated and perpetuated slavery, transferring the original responsibility to an external factor and thereby reinforcing an exonerating vision of local elites.

In the third volume of *Istoria Românilor*, Giurescu addresses the issue of slavery explicitly, but exclusively in relation to the Romani population – earlier references to the Tatars as initiators of bondage disappear entirely. In this section, the author inventories several key legal acts that marked the evolution of the enslaved status of Roma in the Romanian space.

Although the system of slavery endured until the nineteenth century and remained deeply repressive, a few legislative initiatives can be identified in the second half of the eighteenth century, suggesting a timid reconfiguration of the relationship between masters and slaves. These measures, far from challenging the legitimacy of slavery itself, may be read as expressions of a shifting social and moral sensitivity toward Roma:

> The *Anafora* of 1766 (Moldavia) forbids the separation of Romani families, invoking moral and religious reasons. For the first time, an official document asserts the shared humanity of Roma and non-Roma: "They too are made by God like all other men, and it is a great sin to be divided like animals." This wording implicitly introduces the value of family unity as a legal principle, in opposition to the absolute logic of slave ownership.

> The *Hrisov* of 1785, issued by Alexandru Mavrocordat, enshrines the prohibition of enslavement through marriage – a practice commonly used to extend the system of slavery to free individuals who married persons of Romani ethnicity. The document clearly delineates the space of freedom from that of bondage and sets a first legal boundary against the expansion of slavery.
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> The *Așezământ domnesc* of 1793, issued by Mihai Șuțu, prohibits the donation of state-owned Roma – especially from itinerant categories such as *ursari* and *lingurari* – to monasteries or boyars. This restriction reflects both the ruling authority's desire to maintain control over a mobile population difficult to integrate into traditional systems of exploitation, and an attempt to limit the arbitrary exercise of power over enslaved persons.

This series of legal regulations did not undermine the system of slavery but rather signalled the beginning of a conceptual transformation: from the perception of Roma as transmissible property toward a gradual recognition of minimal rights, especially in familial and juridical spheres. The idea of freedom, though still diffuse, began to enter normative discourse, even within a legislative framework designed to uphold the slave order.

The only micro-historical study explicitly dedicated to Romani slavery produced under the communist regime remains Olga Cicanci's *Aspecte din viața robilor de la mănăstirea Secul în veacurile XVII–XVIII*, published in volume X of *Studii și articole de istorie* (1967). Based on archival materials from the Secul Monastery – a corpus overwhelmingly centred on Romani slaves – the author rigorously reconstructs several aspects of their legal, economic, and daily lives.

One notable detail analysed is the emergence of the formula "șerbi țigani de-ai mănăstirii" (Gypsy serfs belonging to the monastery), suggesting an attempt to articulate an intermediate legal status between slavery and serfdom. Additionally, the study documents a limited form of legal capacity attributed to enslaved Roma: they could enter into contracts with abbots, committing to labour, non-escape, and obedience. The contracts were signed by fingerprint, signalling – despite the clearly asymmetric relationship – a minimal recognition of will and legal responsibility.

Cicanci also examines forms of resistance enacted by the enslaved: from concealment to avoid forced labour, to escape from estates, to direct confrontations with stewards or abbots. Labour regimes – uncodified by the feudal state, which provided no legal framework for enslaved labour – were entirely dictated by monastic authority. Although certain documents mention a one-week work rotation for every three, the implementation was inconsistent, leaving room for frequent abuse.

Through this approach, Cicanci offers a rare, detailed picture in Romanian historiography of institutional practices and the everyday life of Romani slavery within a monastic context. While her interpretive framework remains influenced by the ideological constraints of the communist era, the study constitutes a crucial contribution to the understanding of slavery's concrete manifestations in premodern Romania. Soon after Cicanci's study, N. Grigoraș published *Robia în Moldova. De la întemeierea statului până la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea* (1968), a broader investigation of slavery in Moldavia. Though not aiming

for a comprehensive analysis up to the moment of abolition, Grigoraș addresses the main dimensions of the institution, drawing on a wide array of documentary and historiographic sources. His work is notable for its attempt to systematise the juridical and institutional evolution of slavery in a coherent chronological framework.

Both Grigoraș's contribution and George Potra's earlier synthesis, *Contribuțiuni la istoricul țiganilor din România*, directly influenced the work of Viorel Achim – particularly the monograph *Țiganii din România* (1998) which critically re-evaluates these earlier sources in reconstructing the history of Romani slavery. As such, Grigoraș's study stands as a foundational reference for defining the postwar historiographic framework concerning Romani enslavement in Romania.

5. After 1989: Professionalisation and Epistemic Pitfalls

The study of Romani slavery in post-communist Romanian historiography reveals a dual trend: a continued reproduction of simplified or ideologically biased narratives inherited from earlier historiographical frameworks, and a gradual maturation of the field, supported by increased access to archives, improved methodological tools, and a growing ethical awareness among researchers. Following the fall of communism, the Romanian publishing landscape opened to a diversity of perspectives – some rigorous and scholarly, others marred by prejudice or epistemic negligence. This section critically assesses key works addressing the history of Romani slavery, grouped by their scientific value and their contribution to deepening the understanding of this phenomenon.

To underscore the heterogeneity of historiographical production, the works are classified into two categories: those that represent substantial scholarly contributions and those that perpetuate methodological or conceptual limitations without advancing the field in meaningful ways.

5.1 Works of Scholarly Value and Significance

Among the most notable post-1989 contributions is an edited volume, *Robia țiganilor în Țările Române. Moldova* (2000), coordinated by Vasile Ionescu. This collection brings together historical articles and period legal texts, providing a crucial documentary foundation for understanding the legal architecture of Romani slavery. Fundamental laws such as *Carte românească de învățătură*, *Pravila de la Govora*, *Îndreptarea legii*, and *Codul Callimachi* are accompanied by scholarly contributions from Ion Radu Mircea, N. Grigoraș, Alexandru I. Gonța, Olga Cicanci, and Mihail Kogălniceanu.

The thematic scope ranges from the legal status of the enslaved and everyday conditions to resistance strategies and power dynamics between enslavers and the enslaved. Through its rich documentary base and accessible discourse, the volume offers a multifaceted perspective on slavery in medieval and early modern Moldavia. Importantly, it supports both the professionalisation of historical research and the democratisation of historical knowledge, facilitating Romani communities' access to their own silenced past.

A similar documentary and historiographic effort is represented by *Robia rromilor în Țara Românească* (2001), which complements classical texts – notably those of George Potra and Boris Th. Scurtulescu – with a comprehensive body of legal and administrative documents from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. These sources are instrumental in understanding the mechanisms of slavery in Wallachia and recovering an often-neglected segment of Romanian historical memory.

Within this compilation, studies by Gheorghe T Ionescu, Aurora Ilieș, Constantin Șerban, Mihail Grigore Poslușnicu, and Nicolae Iorga contribute to a more nuanced mapping of slavery's legal and economic evolution. They bring to light the diversity of exploitation practices, the complex relationship between enslavers and the enslaved, and the legal ambiguities surrounding Romani status. In this regard, the volume stands as a crucial act of historiographical restitution – a necessary intervention in the collective memory of slavery in Romania.

Another example of solid empirical research is Corneliu Tamaș's *Istoria țiganilor din Țara Românească 1241–1856* (2001), which offers a detailed, event-based historical reconstruction grounded in archival sources, particularly from the Vâlcea region. The book is notable for its fidelity to primary sources and chronological precision, drawing stylistically and methodologically from the tradition established by George Potra.

Although Tamaș does not adopt a novel conceptual framework or critical theoretical lens, the work is valuable for its documentary density and factual rigor. Its contribution lies more in the exhaustive compilation and dissemination of archival material than in offering new paradigms for interpreting Romani slavery. As such, the volume occupies an intermediary position between positivist historiography and the critical turn – bridging archival recovery and the need for renewed conceptual engagement with the legacy of Romani enslavement.

5.2 Continuities and Ruptures in Post-Communist Historiography: Between Narrative Humanisation and Academic Professionalisation

At the intersection of memoir literature and historical inquiry, Neagu Djuvara's *Între Orient și Occident* (1995) offers a sensitive, albeit analytically limited, portrayal of the experience of Romani slavery, filtered through the lens of the Romanian aristocracy's memories. Episodes such as the "little Gypsy girl in the boudoir" or the servant Grigore who kills his master reconstruct emotionally charged micro-narratives. However, they are presented in a romanticised register, devoid of socio-historical contextualisation. The book's merit lies in its ability to bring a marginalised theme into public discourse, using storytelling strategies that humanise the enslaved yet without challenging the dominant boyar-centric perspective.
In contrast, Viorel Achim provides a rigorous methodological framework in his landmark volume *Țiganii în istoria României* (1998), a foundational synthesis for Romani studies in the Romanian context. Grounded in a wide and diverse documentary base, the author offers a coherent periodisation of the history of Romani slavery and emancipation, situating these phenomena within both domestic socio-political dynamics and European trends. While certain influences of interwar historiography remain visible – in stylistic choices and the continued use of the term "Gypsies" – the work marks a professionalising turn, shifting from mere chronology to structural analysis.

This evolution is evident in Achim's later works, such as *Munca forțată în Transnistria* (2015) and *Despre locurile de deportare din Transnistria: lagărul de țigani din Golta* (2016), where he adopts a more nuanced and ethically attuned language, aligning with new standards of historical ethics and terminological sensitivity.

A similar academic depth is reflected in the research of Venera Achim, synthesised in her doctoral thesis *Țiganii din Principatele Române în epoca dezrobirii (1830–1860): Aspecte economice și statistice* (2005). Her work takes an interdisciplinary perspective, analysing the economic and legal impact of emancipation on the Romani population. It highlights a terminological and conceptual transition from "Gypsy" to "Roma", mirroring the evolution of scholarly language and a growing awareness of the political stakes of vocabulary in historiography.

A first-rate documentary landmark – one that merits particular emphasis – is a volume edited by Lucian Năstasă and Andrea Varga, *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Țiganii din România, 1919–1944* (2001). Although chronologically removed from the period of bondage, this monumental reader tracks the *descendants* of the enslaved into the interwar and wartime decades, revealing how the social grammar of slavery continued to shape majoritarian–minoritarian relations. The editors reproduce **365 archival items** – police dossiers, ministerial circulars, Siguranța surveillance reports, party minutes, census tables, petitions, and the full bureaucratic chain that led to the Transnistrian deportations of 1942–44. Two substantial essays map the institutional ecosystem behind each document cluster, showing, for example, how the same categories once used to register slave caravans (*țigani nomazi*, *lăieși*) are redeployed in 1938 "ethnic files", or how the label "socially dangerous" echoes nineteenth-century slave codes that criminalised mobility. Because every item is presented *in extenso*, dated to the day, and annotated with archival shelf-marks, researchers can reconstruct:

- rival Romani political movements of the 1920s–30s (Lăzărescu-Lăzurică, Popp-Șerboianu, Gheorghe Niculescu);
- an oscillation between integrationist projects (schooling, military service) and punitive sweeps modelled on earlier vagrant-slave ordinances;
- path-dependency by which a "Gypsy question" of public order morphed into a racial-biological problem culminating in mass deportation.

In short, the volume turns the interwar archive into a *laboratory of post-slavery continuities*, documenting how former slaves' descendants negotiated citizenship – and how the state, transposing pre-abolition stereotypes into modern administrative idioms, produced new forms of exclusion.

Documente de arhivă privind robia țiganilor. Epoca dezrobirii is the first critical source-reader devoted entirely to the emancipation cycle of 1831–1864. Edited by Venera Achim and Raluca Tomi (with Florina M. Constantin), the volume opens with a 75-page scholarly introduction, then presents 216 archival items – princely decrees, Divan rulings, parish censuses, tax tables, manumission petitions, and court files – transcribed authentically and framed by provenance notes, a glossary, and comprehensive name/place indexes. Covering both Wallachia and Moldavia, the documents trace every legislative step from the Organic Regulations to the 1856 manumission laws, while also recovering enslaved Roma's own petitions

for freedom. By assembling dispersed materials into an annotated corpus, the book equips historians to reassess how state, church, and landowners negotiated abolition and how Romani actors articulated claims to personhood, thus filling a long-standing gap in Romanian slavery historiography.

By re-aggregating a dispersed paper trail, the volume supplies the *missing middle layer* between medieval slavery and modern racism, demonstrating that abolition was neither instantaneous nor egalitarian, but a staggered bargain struck among state, church, and landowners – in dialogue, and often in conflict, with the enslaved themselves.

An equally essential contribution comes from the author of this article, Petre Petcuț, whose work has been central to consolidating the documentary and analytical foundations of Romani history in the Romanian lands. *Rromii din România. Documente (1370–1580)* fills a crucial gap by bringing together 356 chancery acts concerning Romani slavery in Wallachia. Through chronological organisation and onomastic indices, the corpus allows researchers to reconstruct master-slave networks and the commercial routes of enslaved Roma. The documents demonstrate the institutionalised character of slavery, countering the still-circulating myth of a "mild dependency". The collection supplies invaluable price data for quantitative analyses (values, quantities, transaction types) and lays the groundwork for future digital databases. By highlighting Romani personal names, the volume recovers the subjectivity of the enslaved, moving beyond a solely noble-ecclesiastical perspective. Its Wallachia-only focus leaves parallel challenges open for Moldavia and Transylvania, pointing to the need for a complete series. Overall, the work marks a transition from writing "about" Roma to writing "with" Roma, providing the documentary bedrock for any serious discussion of slavery in the Romanian space.

But why do these three volumes matter together? Read in sequence, the corpora chart the full arc of the Romanian slavery regime:

1. 1370–1580: institutional codification and market circulation of enslaved Roma (Petcuț).
2. 1831–1864: legislative dismantling and self-emancipation, with its contested promises (Achim and Tomi).
3. 1919–1944: after-lives of bondage – how former slaves' descendants were reinscribed in new racial and administrative grids (Năstasă and Varga).

Each layer speaks to the next: price lists anticipate compensation debates; master–slave networks reappear as patronage chains in petitions; police "Gypsy registers" replicate categories coined in fifteenth-century charters. Together, the three volumes provide a documentary scaffolding on which any nuanced account of Romani slavery – and its stubborn, modern repercussions – must rest.

This documentary dimension is paired again by Petcuț with an interpretive analysis in *Rromii. Sclavie și libertate* (2015), where the author offers a coherent reading of the historical trauma of slavery and the marginalisation mechanisms that persisted after emancipation. He explores the continuities of institutional racism and structural discrimination, weaving the historical dimension into a broader reflection on social inequality and collective memory. Consistently, Petcuț uses the term "Roma". avoiding the pejorative

"țigan", in line with contemporary ethical and linguistic standards in scholarship.[1] This terminological choice signals a critical stance toward stigmatising discourses and aligns with current trends that recognise and respect Romani identity in public and academic spheres. The book arguably provides the most coherent longue-durée narrative of Romani slavery in the Romanian lands and its aftermath up to 1914. Its major achievement is shifting the focus from the mere chronology of emancipation to the post-emancipation social effects – mobility, surveillance, institutional marginalisation – making the volume a touchstone for both Romani-studies researchers and scholars interested in state-building and the genealogy of ethnic inequalities in Romania.

Completing this historiographic landscape, Marius Căldăraru brings an original contribution through *Particularitățile misiunii Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în comunitățile romilor căldărari* (2022), in which he explores the complex relationship between religion, social status, and Romani living conditions. He also addresses the traumatic dimension of the Transnistria deportations, offering an interdisciplinary analysis of how ethnic identity, historical memory, and religious discourse intersect in the identity formation of Romani communities.

By carefully examining the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church in relation to marginalised Romani populations, Căldăraru opens new avenues of reflection on the responsibility of religious institutions in perpetuating – or mitigating – social inequalities, while offering a valuable perspective on the dynamics of trauma, faith, and communal survival.

Rotaru and Gaunt recast the *Rudari* not as a timeless "Gypsy tribe" but as a labour category forged by monastic gold extraction and voivodal taxation. For example, a 1388 grant of "300 Gypsy households" to the Cozia monastery marks the moment free gold panners became hereditary slaves, anchoring a racial-capitalist frontier in Wallachia. Even after the Russian census of 1838, 86 per cent of the 800 enumerated Rudari families remained in state or ecclesiastical bondage, despite nominal reforms. As river deposits dwindled, a third of the group pivoted to woodworking (*lingurari*), showing that occupational change did not end fiscal coercion. Linguistic analysis confirms their speech is archaic Daco-Romanian, exposing earlier claims of "lost Romani" as products of "gitanisation". The study thus demonstrates how Rudari identity crystallised through shifting regimes of extraction, slavery, and state surveillance – offering a model for de-essentialising Romani histories.

5.3 Works of Limited Value and Problematic Approaches

In contrast to the previously mentioned contributions, several post-communist publications stand out due to their simplistic or even tendentious approaches. Lucian Cherata's *Istoria țiganilor* (1994) reiterates

1 An analysis of the usage of the terms "Roma" and "țigani" (Gypsies) in the aforementioned works reflects a significant transition in both academic and public discourse concerning this ethnic group. The shift moves from the traditional and often pejorative term *țigani* toward the more recent and politically correct *Roma*. In most of the historical sources cited, the term *țigani* is employed due to the period in which they were written and the historical context of their production. However, in more recent publications and in contemporary academic language, the term *Roma* has been widely adopted. This transition aligns with international trends toward more respectful and inclusive language regarding ethnic minorities, and with growing awareness of their diversity and rights.

Nicolae Iorga's hypothesis regarding the arrival of Roma via the Tatars and adopts Mihail Kogălniceanu's proposed date of 1417 as the first documentary attestation of Roma in Moldova, without providing direct evidence. The work relies predominantly on outdated sources (such as Dimitrie Dan, George Potra, Nicolae Iorga) and fails to integrate recent research, which diminishes its relevance and prevents a contextualised and critical analysis of the subject. These shortcomings reveal a lack of methodological rigor and an outdated perspective, rendering the work as a rather amateurish synthesis.

Tudor Amza, in his volumes, *Țiganii. O lume a contrastelor* (1994) and *Țiganii, necunoscuții de lângă noi* (1996), advances hypotheses that lack methodological foundation, often relying on questionable sources and employing a journalistic tone rather than a scientific one. The author proposes precise data regarding the migration of Roma from India and suggests a "rewriting of history", without supporting these claims with the necessary critical apparatus.

Even more problematic is Marius Băcanu's *Țiganii – minoritate națională sau majoritate infracțională* (1996), which provides an imbalanced and unscientific approach, rooted in ethnic prejudice and stereotyping. The complete absence of academic references raises serious concerns regarding the scholarly integrity and validity of the interpretations presented.

Niculae Crișan's *Țiganii. Mit și realitate* (1999) continues to reflect similar conceptual and methodological limitations, offering little new insight into the subject. While addressing a relevant topic, the book contributes neither theoretical nor substantial methodological advancements, remaining entrenched in a conventional, descriptive register.

Finally, *Rromii (țiganii) din România* (2011), authored by Costache Silviu and Daniel Dieaconu, presents a general overview with informative potential but remains at a superficial, introductory level. Although useful for orientation, the study does not engage with the historical complexity of the phenomenon, and its promised interdisciplinary perspective remains underdeveloped.

The post-communist historiographic panorama of Romani slavery in the Romanian context reveals a notable evolution: from early works marred by stereotypes and methodological negligence, toward rigorous studies grounded in primary sources and attuned to the social and ethnic realities of Roma. While the 1990s were dominated by simplistic and often biased accounts, the early 2000s saw the consolidation of scholarly research, visible in the efforts of specialised institutions and authors with solid archival and methodological experience. From relevant documentary collections to economic, legal, and social analyses, recent scholarship contributes to the reconstruction of Romani slavery's historical memory and its integration into the broader history of Romanian society.

Nevertheless, a number of contributions continue to perpetuate oversimplified or inadequate perspectives, failing to meet contemporary academic standards. Therefore, the study of Romani slavery must proceed with an ongoing commitment to depth, contextualisation, and ethical responsibility, in order to meaningfully contribute to the recovery of a historical memory too long eluded.

6. Silence as Strategy: An Absence of Romani Slavery in Romanian Historiography

As previously shown, the literature and historiography regarding slavery and the enslaved in Romania are both late-emerging and limited in scope, reflecting the generally low level of interest in Roma as historical subjects – a concern which only gained traction following contact with Central and Western European intellectuals.

Why has this topic been so persistently avoided that it remained almost entirely ignored in both academia and society? Are the *țigani* themselves to blame, due to their long-standing placement on the social margins, a position they allegedly refuse to abandon? One might argue that slavery is merely a segment of economic history, in which slaves had a market value like land, draft animals, and other commodities. Romanian historiography is perhaps not yet sufficiently developed to include in-depth studies on all these topics – even though their absence raises serious questions about the robustness of economic history as a whole in the Romanian context. The same could be said about social history: slavery is seen as marginal and therefore unworthy of sustained attention, despite its increasingly recognised societal relevance in recent decades.

There is also the possibility that Roma were merely collateral victims of a broader, intentional silence around slavery in Romanian lands. It is telling that the study of slavery has been reduced to a form of local dependency, disconnected from other temporal or geographic forms of slavery. This isolation enables a paternalistic approach, limiting itself to a chronology of legal provisions and social realities – much like the historiographical treatment of the peasantry – culminating in the integration of the emancipated into the Romanian nation by the mid-nineteenth century. Such a framework is assimilationist, in that it disregards the memory of slavery and its profound consequences on family relations, society, economy, education, health, and the delayed cultural and political aggregation of Romani communities.

The mid-nineteenth century, marked by widespread abolitionist movements across Europe, brought a surge of interest in the Romani population, primarily driven by external pressures to eliminate the institution of slavery – seen outside the two principalities as a source of shame and backwardness. The abolition of slavery, with its emphasis on dismantling the institution rather than ensuring socio-economic emancipation for the former slaves, left assimilation as the sole available path to integration into the national body. This took place behind the historical stage, in silence: Romanian society absorbed the most "advanced" elements of the Romani minority and rebranded them as Romanians. Thus, the memory of slavery and the contemporary experience of economic and social marginalisation remained with the weak, uneducated, ignorant, those without the esteem of society – citizens without papers, second-class human beings.

With few exceptions, Romanian intellectuals have not considered it important to descend so low as to capture this eternally uncivilised *alterity* in their writings. And when they did, the resulting narratives – expositions or historical descriptions – almost always ended with moral judgments, whether pertinent or not, applied indiscriminately to the entire Romani population.

Assimilation has disfigured the Romani minority by depriving it of vital human resources and cultural values. Under these conditions, reconstructing the historical image of Roma can only be achieved in a fragmented way, primarily through chancellery documents that are sparse in detail and overwhelmingly focused on the legal nature of princely, boyar, or monastic acts. Some documents even omit the names of the individuals they concern, revealing a commercial rather than human value assigned to the enslaved.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the issue of Romani emancipation became a central topic in intellectual and political debates. Slavery was seen as a "shame" that tarnished the image of the Romanian nation. In line with the spirit of the time, the 1848 revolutionaries proclaimed the freedom of the Roma on 11 June 1848, without, however, establishing concrete measures for their social integration. The proclamation emphasised the moral imperative of abolition, stating: "The Romanian people cast off the inhumanity and shame of holding slaves and declare the freedom of privately-owned Gypsies. Those who have until now borne the shame of the sin of owning slaves are forgiven by the Romanian people" (Documente 1960, 80).

Documents of the era offer a more nuanced perspective on the 1848 Revolution, revealing the opposition of most slaveholders to the abolitionist current. Although there exists a considerable documentary basis for the efforts of emancipation and the struggles of the Roma for freedom, these aspects were largely ignored by both communist and post-communist historiography. This deliberate omission – motivated either by ideological concerns or a form of systemic racism – has led to a significant gap in the public understanding of this historical episode.

After the abolition of slavery, interest in the Roma population in both public and academic discourse diminished. Subsequent documents focused more on social issues associated with nomadism and the poor economic conditions of sedentary Roma. Archives include numerous records of Roma migration toward urban areas and of their attempts to cross borders – phenomena that elicited ambivalent responses from authorities, torn between recognising Roma as part of the Romanian nation or regarding them as foreign elements. The press of the time provides additional detail, particularly regarding the activities of Romani musicians abroad. Nonetheless, a systematic scholarly approach to these phenomena has been conspicuously absent, reflecting Romania's lag behind academic developments in Central and Western Europe.

In modern and contemporary Romania, historiography – dominated by the imperatives of national identity-building – has reserved minimal space for Romani-related issues. Where they do appear, the information is often superficial and marginal. Yet interwar studies, articles, and doctoral theses attest to the existence of a significant documentary base on Romani history. The archives contain abundant references to slavery and emancipation, but their exploration remained limited – until the end of the communist period – to a small number of researchers. None of the major historians of the time dedicated themselves systematically to the subject, likely due to the prevailing nationalism, regardless of the political regime.

Under the communist regime, research on Romani slavery was extremely limited, and historical syntheses had no chance of passing censorship, making the publication of such works impossible. After 1989, the post-communist period saw greater editorial output on the topic, but a large number of publications was

not matched by a corresponding increase in scholarly quality. In fact, some of the works that emerged in the 1990s may give the impression of a historiographical revival, but this impression is misleading: many of those texts are, in reality, of questionable academic merit.

Conclusion

Romanian historiography has approached Romani slavery with significant reluctance, oscillating between minimisation, romanticisation, and, in some cases, deliberate erasure. This stance reveals not merely an academic gap but a systematic avoidance of confronting an uncomfortable past – one with profound repercussions on Romania's present social realities.

Romani slavery was not a marginal phenomenon; it was a deeply rooted institution with economic, social, cultural, and psychological consequences, the structural effects of which persist to this day in the form of stigma and exclusion. The fact that historians have preferred softened terms such as "serfdom" (*robie*) and have avoided comparisons with classical or Atlantic slavery signals an unease in the face of historical truth.

The recovery of the memory of Romani slavery must go beyond the mere restitution of documents. It must include a critical reassessment of the national historical narrative. Integrating this theme into the national historiography – with all its painful implications – is a necessary step toward building a society that is more aware, inclusive, and honest about its past. Only through such a reckoning can Romanian historiography become a space for truth and symbolic reparation.

A concrete step in this direction would be the integration of Romani slavery as a topic into university curricula in fields such as history, sociology, journalism, and political science. Higher education programs should include dedicated courses – either mandatory or elective – addressing not only historical facts but also their contemporary socio-political implications: collective memory, post-emancipation marginalisation, reparatory policies, and systemic racism.

Training new generations of historians, journalists, political analysts, and sociologists within a paradigm that recognises Romani slavery as an integral part of Romanian history is essential to overcoming the denial and trivialisation of this past. Moreover, it is imperative to support in-depth academic research on this topic, through funding for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral projects, as well as through partnerships between universities and Romani organisations. Such collaborations would enable a participatory and ethically reflective approach.

Only through these educational and institutional efforts can we build a historiography oriented toward truth, justice, and inclusion.

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