

**GYPSY CORRESPONDENCE, OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE.
“ROMA VOICES” IN HISTORICAL SOURCES
FROM THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY UNTIL
THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

Tamás Attila Hajnáczy*

Abstract: *The prevailing view in the academic community to date is that there are no historical sources from the period before the Second World War that come from Gypsies. However, thanks to the Roma Interbellum project, a number of sources have emerged from the end of the 19th century until the outbreak of the Second World War, in which so-called „Roma voices” are heard, i.e. they originate from or are associated with Gypsies. One such group of sources are letters penned or dictated by Gypsies. They include both official and private letters, as well as open letters. The study attempts to present, organize, and analyse this letter group of sources in detail. I also attempt to create a typology from Gypsy correspondence.*

Keywords Hungary, „Roma voices”, Gypsy correspondence, official letters, private letters.

Introduction

From the early historical works of Herodotus and Thucydides to the present day, historians have used and continue to use a wide range of source material to construct their narratives. As time passed, historiography has increasingly incorporated more and more types of sources, creating schools of thought and discourse, often motivated by theoretical and sometimes ideological considerations¹. Historical sources can be distinguished according to the form in which they convey knowledge: material, written, intellectual and mixed². For the purposes of this study, the written sources are the most important. One of the main types used is letters, which are the subject of

* PhD, Ethnic and Minority Expert at Archbishopal College of Veszprém, Veszprém, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Budapest, e-mail: hajnaczyt@gmail.com
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5024-3789>

¹ Szijjártó M. István, *A történelem diskurzusa. Bevezetés a 20. századi történetírás történetébe és elméletébe*, Budapest, Ráció Kiadó, 2021; Gyáni Gábor, *A történeti tudás*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2020; *Bevezetés a társadalomtörténetbe. Hagyományok, irányzatok, módszerek*, Bódy Zsombor, Ö. Kovács József (eds.), Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2003.

² Kapi Péter, *A források csoportosítása*, in vol. *Bevezetés a történettudományba és a történelemkutatás módszereibe*, Kerepeszki Róbert, Schrek Katalin (eds.) Pécs, Kronosz Kiadó, 2023, p. 123–127.

research by historians specialising in the ancient or the contemporary period³. Traditionally, letters can be divided into two broad groups; official letters, often linked to state bureaucracy⁴ and private letters, these latter belonging to the group of personal sources – ego documents⁵. Official and private letters are sometimes not strictly distinct, an official letter can be a personal source⁶ just as a private letter can be an official letter⁷ or a tool of political propaganda⁸.

It is the so-called lower segments of society that have been at the forefront of historiography, since the Annales school, the beginnings of Marxist historiography or emergence of historical anthropology. This is true at both at national and international level. The terms „history viewed from below”, „history from below”, „history of little people” have permeated historical discourse, research and publications⁹. In spite of the theoretical foundations just mentioned, historical research on Gypsies¹⁰ in Hungary has only rarely entered the discourse of social historians. Even less so in the case of historians who follow the Ranke tradition and who are often labelled „positivists”. The methodological issues of historiography have regularly omitted sources on Gypsies and the methodological dilemmas they raise. The history of Gypsies in Hungary or the history of Gypsy policy is as much a part of the „common history” as the established, „canonised” topics¹¹.

From the settlement of the Gypsies in Hungary in the 15th century to the twilight of feudalism, many historical sources about the Gypsies have been preserved for

³ *A levél mint történeti forrás*, Kincses Katalin Mária (ed.), Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2022.

⁴ Borsodi Csaba, *Irtattan*, in vol. *A történelem segédtudományai*, Bertényi Iván (ed.), Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2006, p. 169–186.

⁵ Kövér György, *Biográfia és társadalomtörténet*, Budapest, Osiris, 2014, p. 99–123; Sipos Balázs, *Személyes források és a történelmi tapasztalat elbeszélése. Egyének és közösségeik Magyarországon, 1848–1948*, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 2022, p. 15–42.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 172.

⁷ Hermann Róbert, *Hivatalos magánlevelek. Kossuth Lajos és Szemere Bertalan levelezése 1848–49-ben*, in vol. *A levél mint történeti forrás*, Kincses Katalin Mária (ed.), Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2022, p. 179–216 [infra: *A levél mint történeti forrás*].

⁸ Farkas Dániel: *A levél mint propagandaeszköz. Che Guevara búcsúlevele*, in vol. *A levél mint történeti forrás*, p. 263–273.

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *A történelemről, a történetírásról*, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 2006, p. 227–242; Sziijártó M. István, *op. cit.*, p. 131–183, 215–233; Apor Péter, *Történeti antropológia*, in vol. *Bevezetés a társadalomtörténetbe. Hagyományok, irányzatok, módszerek*, Bódy Zsombor, Ö. Kovács József (eds.), Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2003, p. 443–466.

¹⁰ In this study, I have used the term „Gypsy” [in Hungarian *cigány*], as it is the word that appears in the sources examined, which originate from Roma themselves. Most of the letters were written by Hungarian Gypsies [in Hungarian *magyar cigány*]. In the case of Hungarian Gypsies and Gypsy musicians [in Hungarian *cigányzenészek*], the term „Gypsy” has become an endonym over the centuries. Furthermore, in the case of Gypsy music [in Hungarian *cigányzene*], I also use the term „Gypsy” for the sake of clear distinction, as Gypsy musicians played Hungarian folk music, known as *magyar népdal*, which was very much distinct from the folk music of the Vlach Roma.

¹¹ Eric R. Wolf, *Európa és a történelem nélküli népek*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, Osiris-Századvég, 1995, p. 15–37.

posterity. The surviving documents from this period can be divided into three groups. This division is based on the extent to which Gypsies were „involved” in the creation of the sources – often against their will – and the extent to which they were involved by local and national authorities:

1) The Gypsies did not participate in any way in the creation of the source: decrees, statutes, district judges’ reports, letters of inquiry.

2) Certain Gypsies or Gypsy communities were indirectly involved in the creation of the source: Gypsy censuses, court documents, inventories, investigations by district judges, manorial documents.

3) Gypsy persons or communities were directly involved in the creation of the source, since it was on their behalf that the letters of complaint, letters of request and letters of appeal were written¹².

The third group of documents, which belong to the category of official letters, is a fraction of the known sources, but there are no private letters or even other types of ego documents¹³. For this reason, historians have very limited access to „Roma voices” from the period between the 15th and 19th centuries, and can only touch upon letters of asylum, letters of complaint and letters of request.

Today, in Hungarian historical research, finding „Roma voices” in the period from the second half of the 19th century until the outbreak of the Second World War also faces several methodological difficulties. We can no longer gain insights from the Gypsies who lived through the period in question through the varied interview techniques, so we can only rely on historical sources from them. Listening to and hearing the „Roma voices” depends not only on the willingness of historians, but also, naturally, on the existence or absence of historical sources. The sources available from the period covered by this study, both in terms of number and type, offer more opportunities to explore the subject than those from previous periods. Even so, in terms of the sources known so far, there is an incomparable preponderance of bureaucratic sources compared to those from the mostly illiterate Roma. There were social, economic and structural reasons behind this phenomenon. Prior to the *Roma Interbellum – Roma Civic Emancipation Between the two World Wars* project, the documents from the period under study, in source publications and source notes, were rarely published by Gypsies. Nonetheless the official and personal sources found range widely: letters of request, private letters, open letters, diaries, interviews in the contemporary press, philological works¹⁴. The international research, which covers

¹² Binder Mátyás, „A cigányok” vagy a „cigánykérdés” története? Áttekintés a magyarországi cigányok történeti kutatásairól, „Regio”, vol. XX, 2009, no. 4, p. 43–49; Nagy Pál, *A magyarországi cigányok története a rendi társadalom korában*, Kaposvár, Csokonai Vitéz Mihály Tanítóképző Főiskola, 1998, p. 11–20; Idem, *Beás cigányok a Kárpát-medencében. Historikus metszetek a 18–19. századból*, Pécs, Pécsi Tudományegyetem BTK NTI Romológia és Nevelésszociológia Tanszék, 2019, p. 29–37.

¹³ Nagy Pál, *Roma in semi-ego documents in 18th century Hungary*, „Frühneuzeit-Info”, vol. XXX, 2019, no. 30, p. 166–184.

¹⁴ Hajnáczy Tamás, „Hatalmi hangorkán” és „cigány szólamok” a történelmi forrásokban, „Romológia”, vol. VII, 2023, no. 18, p. ...; Idem, *Gypsy/Roma Identities, Voices and Agency, from the*

more than ten countries, has sought to find the „Roma voices” from the end of the 19th century until the outbreak of the Second World War. Moving away from a historical picture painted by the documentary record of Gypsy policies, it has drawn attention to new research directions and new groups of sources. Research in Hungary has uncovered the associations and newspapers founded by Gypsy musicians, bringing to the fore a range of sources from Gypsy people or conveying their perspectives¹⁵. In the present study, I examine the „Roma voices” in official and private letters written or penned by Gypsies that have come to light, as well as in open letters, which are often not clearly distinguishable from the aforementioned types.

For this study, I used archival and printed media sources that have been published in primary source publications and other sources. I also relied on my own source research. In my research, I strove for completeness and used all published sources. In analyzing the sources, I sought to analyze their content and explore their contexts. Following the introduction, the study is divided into three main chapters: official letters, private letters, and open letters. In the summary, I attempted to compile a systematic and in-depth typology.

Official letters

A well-documented example of official letters is the in-depth research of historian József Bana on the Lakatos wandering Gypsy family in Transdanubia. In several studies, sources and chronologies, the historian has explored the migration of this family and the authorities’ actions against them, as well as the press coverage of the family from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century. This gives an insight into the context of the letters of request quoted below, which is a rarity for the period¹⁶.

end of the 19th Century until the Second World War, in vol. *Between the Worlds: Contesting (Im)Possible Identities*, Magdalena Slavkova, Yelis Erolova, Vanya Ivanova, Julia Popcheva (eds.), vol. 6, Sofia, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Paradigma, 2024. (soon to be published).

¹⁵ Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, *Gypsy Policy and Roma Activism: From the Interwar Period to Current Policies and Challenges*, „Social Inclusion”, vol. VIII, 2020, no. 2; Idem, *Roma Portraits in History. Roma Civic Emancipation Elite in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until WW II.*, Paderborn, Brill, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2022; Idem, *Roma Voices in History. A Sourcebook. Roma Civic Emancipation in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II.*, Paderborn, Brill, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2021; Raluca Bianca Roman, Sofiya Zahova, Aleksandar G. Marinov, Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, Tamás Hajnáczy, Viktor Shapoval, Risto Blomster, *Roma Writings. Romani Literature and Press in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II.*, Paderborn, Brill, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2021.

¹⁶ Bana József, *A vándorcigányok letelepítése, építkezése a 18. század közepétől a 20. század közepéig*, in vol. *A Kisalföld népi építészete*, Cseri Miklós (ed.), Szentendre, Győr, Szentendrei Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum, Győri Xantus János Múzeum, 1993, p. 309–328; Idem, *Győr cigánypolitikája a második világháborúig*, in vol. *Pillanatképek a romák múltjából. Romológiai Kutatóintézet Közleményei 1.*, Gémes Balázs (ed.), Szekszárd, Romológiai Kutatóintézet, 1998,

In 1902, voivode (in Hungarian *vajda*)¹⁷ Mihály Lakatos addressed the following letter of request the magistrates of Győr:

„Respected Assembly !

I humbly beseech you to take my following petition into your gracious favour. For as a model among stray Gypsies, who has carried out many important investigations for the police and gendarmerie in my country and brought many crimes to light, I want to break with the wandering life and become a useful member of society. To achieve this wish I would like to build a small house for myself, but I have no money. With deep humility I ask the Assembly to grant me a small plot of land and to be so kind as to build a small house, after which I do so promise to undertake to pay for it in instalments

Your humble servant Mihály Lakatos
born in Győr and resident in Győr”¹⁸.

The letter was presumably not written by Mihály Lakatos the *vajda*, but through someone acting as his scribe, which is clearly evident in the language of the letter. Furthermore, the official jargon of the time, the term „stray Gypsy”, is unlikely to have been used by the *vajda* to refer to himself. Furthermore, these few lines have been passed down through the pages of the „Győri Hírlap” newspaper, so they may very well bear the imprint of the hand of a journalist. This said, the letter of request is in many ways tinged with a „Roma voice”. On the one hand, the *vajda* was cooperating with the authorities, presumably in the apprehension of other „stray gypsies”, and on the other hand, he was asking for the help of the Assembly to settle down and to end his nomadic lifestyle. In other words, as a Gypsy, he cooperated with the armed authorities, even against other Gypsies, and identified – or so it seems – with the objectives of the Gypsy policy of the time. He wished to settle down, which also removing himself from the crosshairs of the armed authorities, which can be seen as a particular form of resilience¹⁹.

p. 123–135; Idem, *Cigányellenes szabályrendeletek a 19. század végén és a 20. század elején*, in vol. *Cigánysors. A cigányság történeti múltja és jelene I.*, Márfi Attila (ed.), Pécs, Emberháza Alapítvány, Erdős Kamill Cigánymúzeum, Cigány kulturális és Közművelődési Egyesület, 2005, p. 107–110; Idem, *A vajda halála. Lakatos Mihály balladája*, in vol. *Cigánysors. A cigányság történeti múltja és jelene II.*, Márfi Attila (ed.), Pécs, Emberháza Alapítvány, Erdős Kamill Cigánymúzeum, Cigány kulturális és Közművelődési Egyesület, Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2009, p. 55–60.

¹⁷ The leader of a nomadic Gypsy caravan or a settled Gypsy community (e.g., Gypsy settlement, Gypsy row, Gypsy town). The *vajda* often acted as a judge in the Gypsy community and maintained relations with the authorities.

¹⁸ Bana József, *A vándorcigányok letelepítése, építkezése a 18. század közepétől a 20. század közepéig*, in vol. *A Kisalföld népi építésze*, Cseri Miklós (ed.), Szentendre, Győr, Szentendrei Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum, Győri Xantus János Múzeum, 1993, p. 315.

¹⁹ Székely Iván, *Reziliencia: a rendszerelméletől a társadalomtudományokig*, „Replika”, vol. XXIV, 2015, no. 94, p. 7–23.

The background to the petition is that the Lakatos caravan had been under the watchful eyes of the authorities since the mid-19th century and had been accused of violent begging and theft. In 1876, the caravan was arrested and imprisoned by the authorities and eventually deported by the city authorities. In 1893, the Lakatos family was halted by a gendarmerie patrol, which resulted in a brawl in which one of the gendarmes shot and killed Mihály Lakatos, the *vajda*, and after this incident some of his family members were imprisoned. It is assumed that the aforementioned reprisals and the series of imprisonments also encouraged Mihály Lakatos, the son of the shot *vajda*, and then the new *vajda* of the caravan, to want to give up the life of a „stray Gypsy”²⁰. The settlement of the Lakatos family dragged on for many years, and the friction with the authorities continued, leading Lakatos to write another letter of petition to the city of Győr in 1907, with the help of a lawyer:

„Respected City Council !

The measure by the city’s orphans’ council to declare our children «abandoned» because of their lack of education and refer them to a state shelter is known. As residents of this city, we recognize the necessity for the proper education and upbringing of our children, and, in the light of the serious action of the authorities, we wish to eliminate the causes which might lead to our children being taken from us – being no less warmly loving parents. And as the place assigned to us is very far from the town, and as there is no building there, we can at most camp there, it is our intention to establish ourselves in a proper residence, where we can care for our children and send them to school”²¹.

Even if we did not know the circumstances in which the letter of request was written, the wording of the letter would clearly indicate that it was written by a person with knowledge of official correspondence and administration. However, any connection with the Gypsy community is far from clear. The 1868 law on public education – associated with the name of József Eötvös – stipulated compulsory schooling and applied to both Gypsy and non-Gypsy children²², however, it was not at all uncommon in that era for a non-Gypsy child not to be enrolled in school by his or her parents²³. In order to implement the Law on Public Education, decrees and measures were adopted that applied only to Gypsies²⁴. According to many details in

²⁰ Bana József, *A vándorcigányok letelepítése, építkezése a 18. század közepétől a 20. század közepéig*, in vol. *A Kisalföld népi építésze*, Cseri Miklós (ed.), Szentendre, Győr, Szentendrei Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum, Győri Xantus János Múzeum, 1993, p. 312–314.

²¹ Bana József, *Győr cigánypolitikája ...*, p. 128–129.

²² Kelemen Elemér, *Eötvös népoktatási törvénye*, „Új Pedagógiai Szemle”, vol. LXIX, 2019, no. 5–6, p. 5–21.

²³ Felkai László, *A népsikolai törvény és végrehajtása*, „Magyar Pedagógia”, vol. LXIX, 1969, no. 1–2, p. 151–163.

²⁴ Pomogyi László, *Cigánykérdés és cigányügyi igazgatás a polgári Magyarországon*, Budapest, Osiris–Századvég, 1995, p. 181–188.

the official letter, the applicants identified with the aims of the law, which may have been strongly influenced by the fact that Gypsy children were sometimes taken away by the competent authorities. As in the case of resettlement, the enrolment of Gypsy children may have been motivated by resilience. At the same time, a letter of request from a Gypsy community, indirectly linked to the Gypsies, has survived from the months before the entry into force of the Eötvös Law on Public Education of 1868, in which they asked for the establishment of a lower secondary school (*reáltanoda*) for their children. Though they were not yet threatened with the removal of their children they did invoke Gypsy-Hungarian solidarity. The letter of request, addressed to the Ministry, was somewhat reworded and published in the „Budapest Gazette” in May 1868:

„Gypsy petition

On behalf of the Gypsies of Kolozsvár, the major and minor vajda submitted a petition to the Ministry, claiming that according to Herod, Anonymus, Pray and Matusik etc. the Gypsy nation had been loyal servants of the Hungarians even when they came out of Asia, that they had pitched the tents of the nation camping outdoors, that they had forged the arrows for the nation, the shower of which Zalán had to flee, that they had blown the clarinet to encourage those hurrying to battle; referring to the fact that for centuries the Gypsies have been the living musical notation of the Hungarian, who loved good music but had no notation, and referring to the fact that the Gypsy nation has been granted many privileges by King Sigismund and others for these and other similar merits, – with deep humility they beg that a separate «Gypsy lower secondary school» (*alreáltanoda*) be set up for them in Kolozsvár, where Gypsy sons of the Gypsy nation can be trained at national expense to be honest bootmakers, tailors, hatters, etc. to be directly trained as craftsmen”²⁵.

Although the letter contains many historical distortions and untruths²⁶, it shows that the applicants argued for a harmonious coexistence and claimed a shared history for Hungarians and Gypsies over more than a thousand years. The „Roma voices” were not the only ones to appear in the letter in this respect as there was also a call for the social integration of the Gypsy populace. Notably, they defined themselves as an ethnic grouping, a „Gypsy nation”, including Gypsy musicians and tradesmen. In other words, they did not focus on differentiation between Gypsy groups but defined themselves as one people. Furthermore, they wanted to set up a school specifically for Gypsy children, and not one together with non-Gypsy children. One of the reasons why the Kolozsvár City Council rejected their application was that it did not see any

²⁵ A Kárpát-medencei cigányság és a keresztyén egyházak kapcsolatának forrásai (1567–1953), Landauer Attila (ed.), Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2016, p. 154 [infra: A Kárpát-medencei cigányság ...].

²⁶ Nagy Pál, A magyarországi cigányok története a rendi társadalom korában, Kaposvár, Csokonai Vitéz Mihály Tanítóképző Főiskola, 1998.

justification for setting up a separate „Gypsy School”, as they could enrol in the existing schools²⁷. This is not an isolated case of Gypsies themselves requesting that a school be set up exclusively for Gypsies. After the turn of the century, the Gypsy community of Ószentanna and Pankota, with the help of officials, applied to the education inspector of Arad County to intervene in the establishment of a „Gypsy school”, which was reported in the „Budapest Közlöny” periodical in July 1909. The reason given was not only that they wanted their children to be educated, but also to avoid any possible abuse from non-Gypsy children: „They claimed that their children had not been previously educated, partly because they live on the outskirts of the village, far from schools, and because their poor and scanty clothing prevents them from attending remote schools, especially in winter, and partly because they do not want their children to be subjected to the ridicule of fellow pupils with another mother tongue, which would further reinforce the belief in the minds of both adults and children that they are the scourge of society. The resulting bitterness would have a strong repercussion in their souls and leave a lasting impression until their late old age. But anyway, the schools in their communities are overcrowded and their children are not even admitted to the schools”²⁸.

The interesting thing about the quotes is that the „Roma voices” in the sources are heard through several non-Gypsy intermediaries. First they used officials to draft their application, and then the „Budapest Közlöny” rephrased it.

A further example of an individual request letter is the following minutes, which is related to the Boyash Gypsies, and was conceived in the years of the Great War, in the South Transdanubian region, in the office of the vice lord lieutenant (*alispán*).

„Minutes.

Recorded in Szekszárd, in the office of the *alispán* of Tolna County. The undersigned are present. Ádám Kalányos, a basin carving Gypsy, and György Balog, a basin carving Gypsy, residents, present their request for a permit to keep 1 revolver each, in view of the fact that they live on the edge of the forest on the outskirts of the village and are subject to many attacks by stray Gypsies.

x Ádám Kalányos
x György Balog

[...]

Minute-recorder registrar”²⁹.

In relation to the origin of the archival source, it is clear that the petition itself is from illiterate Gypsies, as their names were accompanied by an X.

²⁷ *A Kárpát-medencei cigányság ...*, p. 154.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 309.

²⁹ *Források a magyarországi cigányság történetéből (1758–1999)*, Nagy Pál (ed.), Gödöllő, Emberi Erőforrások Fejlesztése Alapítvány, 2011, p. 211 [*Források a magyarországi cigányság történetéből ...*].

In other words, the draft was written by a non-Gypsy, which is also evident from the official style of the text. The application was finally approved by the *alispán*, and Ádám Kalányos and György Balog were granted a licence to carry weapons³⁰. In my view, „Roma voices” emerged in the few lines of the document. For the relationship between the various Gypsy groups and the relationship between Gypsy and non-Gypsy was also reflected. The Boyash Gypsies who appeared in the source were presumably not sympathetic to the „stray Gypsies” who passed through the area, **who** were probably Vlach Roma. They also identified with the policing approach of the non-Gypsies, i.e. they saw the wandering Gypsies as robbers and highwaymen from whom they had to protect themselves. Finally, they turned to non-Gypsies for help, following bureaucratic procedures. Officials distinguished between settled Boyash Gypsies and wandering Vlach Roma. The former were even granted a permit to carry weapons, which would have been unthinkable for the latter, as and in their case the authorities were constantly putting obstacles in the way of issuing them peddling permits³¹. The antagonisms between different groups, or even marriage taboos, are well known from ethnographic studies³². These have also left their mark on the fabric of many settlements; for example, Hungarian Gypsies and Vlach Roma established separate settlements in the same town³³. It is worth mentioning that in many Eastern European countries and in the Soviet Union in the first half of the 20th century, the settled Gypsies themselves often asked the authorities to put an end to the nomadic lifestyle of **the „stray Gypsies”** and to settle them³⁴. On the whole, it can be concluded that the settled Boyash who applied shared the view of the authorities on the issue of the stray and wandering Gypsies and did not consider their identity as one with the Vlach Roma nor had any concept of a transnational Roma identity.

Another example taken from the First World War period shows that, although the application letter may be linked to a Gypsy, „Roma voices” do not necessarily appear in it:

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 212.

³¹ Hajnáczy Tamás, *Adalékok a „kóbor cigány” kérdés rendezéséhez. A m. kir. belügyminiszternek a 15.000/1916. eln. számú rendelete, a kóbor cigányok tartózkodási helyeinek kijelöléséről*, „Jogtörténeti Szemle”, vol. XVII, 2019, no. 1, p. 46–52; Idem, „The Gypsy issue” in Hungary during the interwar years I., „Revista de Etnologie și Culturologie”, vol. XXX, 2021, no. 2, 60–68; Idem, „The Gypsy issue” in Hungary during the interwar years II., „Revista de Etnologie și Culturologie”, vol. XXXI, 2022, no. 1, 54–62.

³² Erdős Kamill, *A magyarországi cigányság*, in vol. *Erdős Kamill cigánytanulmányai*, Vekerdi József (ed.), Békéscsaba, Békés Megyei Tanács V.B. Cigányügyi Koordinációs Bizottsága, Erkel Ferenc Múzeum, 1989, p. 42–56.

³³ Cserti Csapó Tibor, *A cigány népesség a társadalmi-gazdasági térszerkezetben*. Pécs, PTE BTK Oktatókutatási Központ, Virágmandula Kft., 2011, p. 36–41.

³⁴ Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, „Letter to Stalin”: Roma Activism vs. Gypsy Nomadism in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe before WWII, „Social Inclusion”, vol. VIII, 2020, no. 2, p. 265–276.

„Your Excellency !

I, the undersigned, humbly request Your Excellency to authorize the allocation of a war relief grant for my wife, Kóró Horvát, and my 3 little sons. Your Excellency, I am not legally married to the said Kóró Horvát, and therefore I would like to request a war grant for my three children, even if not for the mother, who is living in an irregular marriage, because the poor children are deprived of the help of their father (for I acknowledge myself as such) and his breadwinning, and the allowance of the war relief grant is therefore justified, because my three children, together with my wife, are living in the greatest poverty and deprivation in my absence. My brother, who is also a soldier, is likewise not married to his wife receives the war relief grant for his family. In support of my humble request, may I have the courage to raise the following: I have been in military service since 26 November 1914, neither I nor my wife have private property, and my family is dependent on the war relief grant, which I have humbly requested several times from the authorities, especially for the sake of the children, and which request has been refused, I am now compelled to appeal to your Excellency Lord *Alispán* with my humble request that he will be so kind as to grant the war-relief for my poor young children. I humbly renew my request to Your Excellency

your humble servant

Samuel Sárközi”³⁵.

The request for wartime aid was sent from a Gypsy resident of Decs, Samuel Sárközi, who was hospitalised in a military hospital for war wounds, and where the letter was written by an unknown person. It was not possible to determine whether the letter was signed by Samuel Sárközi or by the person who typed the request to the *alispán*. It is noteworthy in connection with the above-quoted application for military aid that the applicant's Gypsy origin is not prominently mentioned in the text³⁶. In this respect, we are not dealing with an isolated case, such as the case of Mrs. József Nyári, a widow, who referred to herself as a day labourer in her application for war aid addressed to the Minister of National Welfare³⁷. Despite the fact that the application for military aid came from a Gypsy, the „Roma voices” did not appear in it. The position of the applicant is not determined by his Gypsy status, but by the fact that he served in the army, which means that such applications were also written by non-Gypsies. Consequently, there was no question of discussing issues concerning Gypsies, or any group of them, or for that matter non-Gypsies.

In addition to individual and community application, letters from Gypsies from the period in question can also be linked to Gypsy organisations. Most of these are documents requesting the registration of local groups of the Hungarian Gypsy

³⁵ *Források a magyarországi cigányság történetéből ...*, p. 224.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 225.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 257–258.

Musicians’ National Association (1918–1933), addressed to the competent town or county officials. As regards the origin of the sources, it should be noted that they were often drafted by lawyers or officials based on oral declarations by the Gypsy musicians. The notification required the Gypsy musicians to provide the minutes of the inaugural meeting, the list of members and the statutes. The minutes and the roll of members were drawn up by the secretaries of the local groups. As a constitution, a document issued by the national organisation and approved by the Ministry of the Interior was used³⁸. However, there were also cases where the Gypsy musicians themselves wrote the application letter for the registration of the local group:

„To the Honourable Dr. Sándor Daimel
Alispán of Békés County, Gyula

The local group of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association in Békéscsaba was founded. Pursuant to § 27 of the statutes, 2–2 copies of the minutes of the formation of the association, which were signed by the headquarters in Budapest, and thus the statutes of the association are submitted with the request that this announcement be acknowledged.

With deep respect:

János Kállai
notary

Pepi Purcsi Junior
President

Lajos Tóth
Secretary”³⁹.

The „Roma voices” can be found both directly and indirectly in the applications for registration of local groups. On the one hand, they testify to the self-organisation intentions of a culturally, linguistically and occupationally well-defined group of the Hungarian Gypsies, the Gypsy musicians. On the other hand, the background knowledge that in 1918 the Gypsy musicians split from the Hungarian Musicians’ National Association to form the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association was the basis of their decision to separate themselves from the non-Gypsy musicians. Moreover, in the 1920s, the self-organisation of Gypsy musicians was not limited to the Gypsy musicians of the capital – only Budapest residents were allowed to join the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ Association, which existed from 1908 to 1910⁴⁰ – but self-organisation took on a national scale, with some forty local groups being formed in the countryside⁴¹.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 248–256; *Források a Békés megyei cigányság történetéhez. Dokumentumok a Békés Megyei Levéltárból (1768-1987)*, Kereskényiné Cseh Edit (ed.), Békés, Békés Megyei Levéltár, Békés, 2008, p. 105–112.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

⁴⁰ *Magyar Czigányzenészek Egyesülete. Cigányzenészek mozgalma a boldog békeidők Magyarországon*, Hajnáczy Tamás (ed.), Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 2020, p. 19–28 [*Magyar Czigányzenészek Egyesülete ...*].

⁴¹ Tamás Hajnáczy, *Hungarian Gypsy Musician’s National Association: Battles Faced by Gypsy Musicians in Hungary during the Interwar Years*, „Social Inclusion”, vol. VIII, 2020, no. 2, p. 327–335.

In addition to letters concerning the establishment of local groups, the National Association repeatedly wrote official letters to the authorities and organisations to defend the interests of Gypsy musicians. In the 1920s, Gypsy musicians sought to curtail the activities of peasant musicians, schrammel bands, and especially foreign and domestic jazz bands, who were blamed for their increasingly deteriorating financial situation⁴² and the narrowing of their job opportunities. For example, the National Association wrote a letter to the Hungarian Musicians' National Association to stop the so-called amateur musicians „contárzenészek”, or peasant musicians, from being granted a licence to operate. In a petition to the Minister of the Interior, the Gypsy musicians called for foreign jazz musicians to be restricted and expelled from the country. The petition of the Gypsy musicians did not go unheeded, and the Ministry of the Interior soon issued Circular No. 137.000/1926 VII, which essentially meant the ban on foreign musicians in Hungary⁴³. The National Association, in an attempt to curb the presence of Hungarian jazz bands, petitioned the Budapest Theatre Committee, which was told that the contracts of jazz bands would not be renewed in the restaurants rented from or maintained by the capital⁴⁴. The Gypsy musicians also made a request to the Ministry of the Interior at one of their general meetings in order to curb the presence of domestic jazz bands, but ultimately failed to win the support of the Ministry:

„Your Excellency, Minister.
Gracious Sir !

The Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association, with the participation and involvement of the undersigned civil organisations, held a meeting on 26 September, 1927, and in accordance with the resolution of the meeting we respectfully submit the following to Your Excellency.

As a result of the unfortunate outcome of the world war, almost everything of value in Greater Hungary was taken away, or at least mutilated, by the victors and our enemies. A large part of the territory of our country, its economic industry and almost all its wealth has fallen into foreign hands. Little, very little of our wealth remains. You could say that everything but our language and our music has been lost. [...] and today, the sickly wail of jazz and the rattle of drums infect cafés, the very air, the streets and souls.

⁴² Idem, *Cigányzenész egyesületek önszervező tevékenysége a boldog békeidők végnapjaitól a második világháború kitöréséig*, in vol. *A cigányzene és a zenész cigány alakváltozásai. Történelmi, társadalmi és kulturális metszetek a 19–20. századból*, Hajnáczy Tamás (ed.), Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 2023, p. 73–111.

⁴³ *Magyar Cigányzenészek Országos Egyesülete. Cigányzenészek harca a két világháború közötti Magyarországon*, Hajnáczy Tamás (ed.), Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 2019, p. 24–31 [*Magyar Cigányzenészek Országos Egyesülete ...*].

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 34–35.

Your Excellency, Minister! We are aware that there are many difficulties in resolving this issue, because it is difficult, as they say, to go against the tide of the world, especially when this opposition might also infringe individual rights. However, we ask whether we should care when the world current, be it communism or jazz music, seeks to destroy, and whether it is not just to deprive an individual of his or her rights when that individual right seeks to promote that destruction.

We therefore respectfully request Your Excellency to put an end to the activities of interpreters of jazz bands and jazz music, or, if a complete cessation is impossible, to restrict them within strict boundaries. [...]”⁴⁵.

In the official letter just quoted, which is in the interests of Gypsy musicians, the „Roma voices” were clearly present. The authors of the letter, on behalf of the association, represented a well-defined group of Gypsies, the Gypsy musicians, and the genre they represented, Gypsy music. At the same time, this letter also provides an opportunity to examine the agency, because it showed that the Gypsy musicians were taking decisive steps to achieve their goals. It also gives an insight into the identity of the Gypsy musicians.

Private letters

One type of Gypsy ego documents are private letters such as like diaries. Very few of such sources from the period have survived. This type of source is predominantly associated with Archduke Joseph Karl (1933–1905) of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine, the branch of the House of Habsburg that held the office of Palatine of Hungary. The Archduke’s correspondence on Gypsies was carefully edited by historian István Soós more than two decades ago;⁴⁶ and includes his correspondence with non-Gypsy scholars, writers and persons of Gypsy origin. From the point of view of our topic, the latter are the most interesting, as it is from them that we can follow or directly encounter the „Roma voices”. Before moving on to a description and analysis of the types of letters, it is worth briefly introducing Archduke Joseph’s work on the Gypsies, knowledge of which is essential for interpreting the letters.

The imperial and royal Archduke, who was appointed commander-in-chief of the Royal Hungarian Defence Forces for many decades, carried out extensive academic-organising and patronage work as a member of the board of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and later as an honorary member. One of his main areas of interest was the study and exploration of the linguistic and cultural relations of the

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 229–232.

⁴⁶ *József főherceg cigány levelezése. Romológiai Kutatóintézet Közleményei 3.*, Soós István (ed.), Szekszárd, Romológiai Kutatóintézet, 2000 [*József főherceg cigány levelezése ...*].

Gypsy population of the monarchy. He supported the publication of journal „Ethnologische Mitteilungen aus Ungarn” and its special issues „Mitteilungen zur Zigeunerkunde”, published between 1887 and 1907. He tried to settle migrant Gypsies on his Alcsút estate and set up a school for their children. This initiative ultimately failed. He corresponded regularly with the leaders of the Gypsy Lore Society, and not only supported their journal financially, but also wrote articles for it. The following Hungarian-Gypsy dictionaries also received the financial backing of the archduke: In 1885-ben Endre Györffy’s *Magyar és cigány szótár – Czigányúl mondva vakeriben*, and in 1886 a work by the Gypsy academic Ferenc Sztojka of Nagyida *Ő császári és magyar királyi fensége József főherceg magyar- és cigány-nyelv gyök-szótára – Románé áláva. Iskolai és utazási használatra*. In 1888, his highness Joseph Karl also published his *Czigán grammar – Románo csibákero sziklaribe*, in which he attempted to cover the Romany dialects of Hungary. The imperial and royal Archduke maintained close professional relations with Hungarian Gypsy researchers of the period, of whom Antal Herrmann and Henrik Wlislöcki were the most prolific. The three of them wrote the appendix to the „Gypsy” entry in the Pallas Encyclopaedia. The scion of the monarchy wrote the section entitled *The grammar of the Gypsy language*, Antal Herrmann the section entitled *The folk poetry and music of the Gypsies*, and Henrik Wlislöcki the section entitled *The way of life, customs and beliefs of the Gypsies*⁴⁷. A few years after his death, Gypsy musicians in Hungary organised a concert, the proceeds of which were to be used to erect a statue of him⁴⁸.

Most of the letters from Gypsies were written in Carpathian Gypsy, while a smaller number were written in Balkan or Vlach Roma dialects. Archduke Joseph responded to these letters in the Carpathian Gypsy dialect, which he knew and used well. The above-mentioned indirectly provide important information in several respects; firstly, the Archduke corresponded mainly with Hungarian Gypsy (Romungro) Gypsy musicians. On the other hand, linguistic assimilation among Gypsy musicians was not yet considered complete. Some of the letters were written by educated Gypsy people, while others were dictated, mostly to people who were not proficient in any Gypsy dialect⁴⁹. On the whole, Archduke Joseph Karl came into contact with the most integrated group of Gypsies in Hungary. However, it was among the Gypsy musicians that linguistic and cultural assimilation was most pronounced. The letters can be grouped into the following types according to their subject matter:

1) Letters of greetings: some of these letters were written on a name day, wedding anniversary or New Year’s Eve, and were addressed to the Archduke and/or his family. Sometimes the letter-writers also sent gifts to the Archduke, such as a musical instrument made by the author’s own hands or a carved wooden memento.

⁴⁷ Raluca Bianca Roman, Sofiya Zahova, Aleksandar G. Marinov, Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, Tamás Hajnáczy, Viktor Shapoval, Risto Blomster, *op. cit.*, p. 129–133.

⁴⁸ *Magyar Czigányzenészek Egyesülete* ..., p. 35–40.

⁴⁹ *József főherceg cigány levelezése* ..., 91–93.

2) Letters requesting help: letters requesting help cannot always be clearly separated from the previous category, since some of them asked for financial support or intercession from a member of the Habsburg dynasty on the pretext of a name-day greeting. In several cases, the Archduke was asked for financial assistance on the grounds of permanent illness or old age. There were also cases in which the authorities wanted to seize the house of the letter-writer because he was unable to pay the annual tax and asked the addressee for financial assistance. Not only was financial assistance requested, but his intercession was also expected. For example, a Gypsy first violinist wanted an annual contract with his orchestra on Margaret Island in Budapest, or a Gypsy man was dismissed from the post office because of his origin and wanted to get his job back. There was also the case of a letter-writer who asked for help for his sick child, asking that the Archduke arrange for his child to be admitted to a hospital in Pest.

3) Letters of invitation: some letter-writers asked the Archduke to be godparent or best man or invited him as guest of honour at the 50th birthday party of a prominent Gypsy first violinist.

4) Academic letters: most of them came from the Gypsy poet, translator and dictionary editor Ferenc Sztojka of Nagyida⁵⁰, who wrote several times about the dictionary he was preparing for the Archduke and about its printing.

In the above four types of letters, the „Roma voices” were sometimes indirect and sometimes direct. There are many letters that have survived that, at first reading, without knowing the context, would have little connection with our subject. However, the fact that Archduke Joseph Karl was approached because he was a scholar of Gypsy dialects, spoke the Carpathian Gypsy language himself and was in contact with several people of Gypsy origin and local communities, is clear. Archduke Joseph was far from being the only influential person to whom Gypsies wrote or penned letters during that period. It was customary for prominent Gypsy first violinists of the time to write letters of greeting to rulers and high-ranking statesmen, accompanied by a song, in the hope of receiving honours or handsome rewards⁵¹. However, several letters in which the „Roma voices” appear directly in the source publication have also been published. Notable among these are the lines in which Archduke Joseph Karl was presented from the point of view of Gypsies: „May God preserve you all for having done so much for the Gypsies”⁵². „I heard about you and I was very happy that you love us and are our patron [...]”⁵³. „For we have never had such a great lord, nor will

⁵⁰ Orsós János Róbert, *József főherceg hatása a 19. századi cigány kultúra emancipációjára*, „Romológia”, vol. VII, 2023, no. 18, p. 104–105; Idem, *A cigányok vándorlása. Nagyidai Sztojka Ferenc elbeszélő költeménye*, „Szépirodalmi Figyelő”, vol. XX, 2021, no. 6, 21–29.

⁵¹ *A cigányzenekar múltja az egykorú sajtó tükrében 1904-1944. II. kötet*, Sárosi Bálint (ed.), Budapest, Nap Kiadó, 2012, p. 8–9; Tamás Hajnóczky, *Károly Bura Gypsy First Violinist. Activist, Revisionist, Visionist*, Budapest, Noran Libro, 2021, p. 83–91.

⁵² *József főherceg cigány levelezése ...*, p. 43.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

we ever have / Only you had sweet God left us, we poor / Gypsies [...]”⁵⁴. „You alone are our spokesman, our mouthpiece from God [...]”⁵⁵. „For there is no one on the face of the earth but my Great Lord to help us poor wretches”⁵⁶. From the quoted lines, it is obvious that the letter writers were writing in relation to Archduke Joseph, in general, as Gypsies. They were not writing about a particular Gypsy language or dialect group within the Gypsy community, but generally as a Gypsy nation or Gypsy people. In other words, around the turn of the century, though different Gypsy groups differentiated themselves from each other, the idea of a „Gypsy nation” and a common identity began to take shape in their circles. It should be emphasised that the most integrated, educated members of the Gypsy community were in contact with Archduke Joseph, i.e. the above ideas were formulated in the upper strata of the Gypsy community, in the so-called „elite”. The passage from the letter quoted below is an excellent example of one of the letter-writers clearly expressing the views just mentioned:

„Ipolság, March 10, 1889. Hont county.

I kiss your hands and your feet, Your Highness, I beg a thousand pardons for having the courage to address my words to Your Highness, but since I had the pleasure of that Gypsy grammar’ book from Your Highness and poor dearly departed Sweet brother Jancsi Balogh of Selmec, Highness having mercifully taken the dejected poor Gypsy nation, into his care and favour, for which this poor dejected Gypsy nation cannot repay, if we were a wealthy people, it would be the duty of the entire Gypsy nation in Hungary to unite and join thousands of thousands of people and to fly a triumphal flag to my lord Highness rushing to kneel at his feet to say grateful thanks and to say this in gold letters on the triumphal flag of the Gypsies,

Our Lord Highness and our Patron we shall die with joy and we shall descend to our graves, dead and buried, and we shall be obliged to pray for the great generosity of our Lord Highness, because since the world has existed no man has ever been who has taken this abandoned Gypsy nation into his consideration and patronage as my Lord Highness has, whereupon the Gypsy nation can proudly and emphatically say that we have our Patron and our King, Long may he live and many years in the greatest satisfaction and good fortune in happiness in good strength, the God of the Hungarians preserve our Lord Archduke Joseph with her Highness his wife and his Highness’ family. [...]

Ferko Balogh senior
former musician and former orchestra director”⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 60–61.

The other group of private letters written by Gypsies are those sent to the ethnographer Antal Herrmann (1851–1926), but they are not as *significant* in number or content as those addressed to Archduke Joseph Karl. During the period in question, the ethnographer conducted unique publishing⁵⁸ and academic organizing activity, both in Hungary and internationally, with a significant emphasis on the study of Gypsies. For this reason, he was often referred to in the press or in the academic community as „Gypsy professor”, „Gypsy vajda”, „national chief Gypsy”, „Gypsy scholar”, „Gypsy scholar”, „white Gypsy king”⁵⁹. He taught as a professor at the University of Kolozsvár and later at the University of Szeged, and in 1889 he founded the Hungarian Ethnographic Society. He was the founding editor of *Ethnologische Mitteilungen aus Ungarn*, one of the most important forums for research on Gypsies at the time. Antal Herrmann was actively involved in the work of the Gypsy Lore Society, of which he was appointed Executive Director in 1887, and published regularly in the Society’s „Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society”⁶⁰. He was also responsible for the 1893 „Gypsy Census” of the National Hungarian Royal Statistical Office, the data from which the ethnographer edited and processed⁶¹. In 1890, Antal Herrmann set up an „ethnographic colony” in Jegenyefürdő, Kalotaszeg, for the renowned academics of the time, in the framework of which they carried out research in Kalotaszeg. The ethnographer also requested songs and tales from Albert Eötvös, the leader of the Gypsy orchestra of the Jegenyefürdő resort. In addition to the collection, the Gypsy first violinist and the academic were also linked by a friendship, and their correspondence has survived for posterity, some of which was written in Gypsy and some in Hungarian⁶². The letters can be classified according to their subject matter into the following categories:

1) Letters of greetings: the Gypsy first violinist wrote letters of greetings to Antal Herrmann and his family on the occasion of the New Year or even independently of any major holiday.

2) Letters of request for help: the Gypsy musician asked for the scholar’s help to intervene with Archduke Joseph Karl and to get the Archduke to accept the

⁵⁸ Bódi Zsuzsanna, *Hermann Antal cigány kutatásai. Válogatott bibliográfia*, in vol. *Tanulmányok Hermann Antal emlékére. Cigány néprajzi tanulmányok 8.*, Bódi Zsuzsanna (ed.), Budapest, Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, 1999, p. 87–103.

⁵⁹ Hála József, „Kedves Nagyságos Uram!”. *Eötvös Albert cigányprímás levelei Hermann Antalhoz*, in vol. *Cigány világok a Kárpát-medencében. Cigány néprajzi tanulmányok 17.*, Bali János (ed.), Budapest, Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Néprajzi Intézet, 2017, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Bódi Zsuzsanna, *Hermann Antal és a hazai cigány kutatás*, in vol. *Tanulmányok Hermann Antal emlékére. Cigány néprajzi tanulmányok 8.*, Bódi Zsuzsanna (ed.), Budapest, Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, 1999, p. 72–82.

⁶¹ *A Magyarországon 1893. január 31-én végrehajtott cigányösszeírás eredményei*, „Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények”, vol. Új folyam, 1895, no. 9.

⁶² Bódi Zsuzsanna, *Hermann Antal és a hazai cigány kutatás*, in vol. *Tanulmányok Hermann Antal emlékére. Cigány néprajzi tanulmányok 8.*, Bódi Zsuzsanna (ed.), Budapest, Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, 1999, p. 73; Hála József, *op. cit.*, p. 10–24.

godfatherhood of his child. He also asked for his advice so that he could perform with his Gypsy orchestra at the 1896 millennium celebrations, and for his intercession in helping his son to pursue his studies.

3) Scientific letters: several letters of the Gypsy first violinist were written in connection with the tales and songs collected for Antal Hermann.

The different types of letters are often not clearly distinguishable from each other, and the three main themes listed are sometimes mixed together. The following letter is a good example:

„Dear Excellent Sir !

In my letter of February 19 of this year, I had the courage to inform Your Excellency of my intention to go to Pest with my band, which I would increase to 10 members, on the occasion of the millennium. At the same time I was brave enough to ask for the advice of your Excellency on the above-mentioned matter, and to ask for information on the procedure for getting there. And as I have been without your answer for some time, I am so bold as to ask it again, with my humble respects.

I apologize for not having sent you any of my Gypsy songs and tales for some time, I have a collection of them now, but I would like to give them to your excellency personally.

Apologising for my inconvenience and greeting the excellent gentleman together with his family and kissing his hands, I am with my wife and my band

Your most humble servant

Albert Eötvös
folk orchestra leader
[...]⁶³.

In the private letters sent by the Gypsy first violinist Albert Eötvös, the „Roma voices” were revealed, sometimes indirectly, sometimes directly. Most of the letters were signed by the Gypsy first violinist as „**folk orchestra leader**”, but in several cases he also wrote lines in Romani – mostly as farewell – in his Hungarian letters. It should be emphasised that Albert Eötvös did not write about Gypsies, a particular Gypsy group or Gypsy musicians in general, as we have seen in the private letters of other letter-writers addressed to Archduke Joseph. However, it is clear that the reason why the Gypsy first violinist exchanged letters with Antal Herrmann was because the scholar was engaged in research on the Gypsy community, i.e. the Gypsy origin of the letter writer is the decisive factor.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

Open letters

The open letters in the most popular sense were mainly related to Gypsy musicians. During the First World War, Gypsy first violinists serving at the front sometimes wrote to the editors of Hungarian newspapers to publish a few lines of their writings about their life and the everyday life on the battlefield. In their letters to newspapers, they identified themselves as Gypsy musicians and proudly informed the reading public that they had formed a Gypsy band in the army or were fighting the war with „rifle and violin”. In these short articles, which were also published in the press, the “Roma voices” are both directly and indirectly present, as the identity of the Gypsy musician is also expressed. In the army, they did not usually enlist as simple musicians but as Gypsy musicians and they did not form a military band but a Gypsy band⁶⁴. In the army, they were often sharply separated from the „peasants” or were discriminated against⁶⁵, but their „patriotism” still appeared in letters:

„Honourable Editor Sir !

I apologize for the inconvenience, but I am obliged to inform you with pleasure that I, Csikaló Kis, the Gypsy first violinist of Szeged, am here on the battlefield with a rifle and a violin. As for the situation, it is very good. I’m playing daily on the line. When Warsaw and Ivangorod fell, I played for the battalion, and I’ve been here ever since as a telephone operator, playing every day [...]. I have a good orchestra. It’s a well composed orchestra from Transdanubia. I would like to inform the public of Szeged that, I, the Gypsy first violinist of Szeged, Csikaló Kis, is doing his duty on the battlefield.

With patriotic respect:
Csikaló Kis Gypsy first violinist”⁶⁶.

The other group of open letters discovered were related to the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ Association and the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association. Some of these letters were not originally intended as open letters but were written and posted as private letters and then published in the press by the editorial staff or the letter writer.

In 1908, the Association announced several times a song contest, the developments and results of which were continuously reported to the readers of the „Magyar Czigányzenészek Lapja”⁶⁷. During that period, so-called Hungarian song

⁶⁴ Scholtz Róbert Gergely, *Hegedűvel és puskával. A Nagy Háború elfeledett cigány katonái (1914–1918)*, Zsáka, HANGADÓ Egyesület, 2018, p. 40–43; Tamás Hajnóczky, *Károly Bura Gypsy First Violinist ...*, p. 29–41.

⁶⁵ Ifj. Munczy Béla *I. világháborús frontnapló*, D. Szakács Anita (ed.), Sopron, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Győr-Moson-Sopron Megye Soproni Levéltára, 2020.

⁶⁶ Scholtz Róbert Gergely, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ *Magyar Czigányzenészek Egyesülete ...*, p. 28–30.

(*magyar nóta*) – also known as folk-like music or folk-like songs – were composed by both Gypsies and non-Gypsies. Song composers and musicians used known and unknown composers' songs for folk or popular music, and had different ideas about the concepts of authorship, arrangement and performance. Consequently, during this period there were many disputes about whose work a song was⁶⁸. The letters addressed to the jury were published in the „Magyar Czigányzenészek Lapja” as an example of a controversial letter:

„Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' Journal
to the respected editorial office
Budapest.

I was shocked to read in their valued paper that the 100 crown prize was won by cimbalom player Antal Mezey (doubles) with his song *Only I am unhappy*.

I, the undersigned, hereby inform the editorial staff that the above folk song, which I have also seen in musical notation, is my composition, and that Antal Mezey simply stole it, and appropriated it for himself. I claim the prize of 100 crowns, and I strongly object to this being attributed to Mezey.

That the song is my own composition is confirmed by the witnesses at the bottom.

Budapest, 5 Dec. 1908.

József Csóka

	Witnesses	
<i>Etele Prihoda,</i>	<i>Mihály Sárközi,</i>	<i>Dezső Homoká'</i> ⁶⁹ .
	<i>József Pityó.</i>	

In the reply letter, which was also published in the Gypsy musicians' newspaper, the accused cimbalom player explained that the „**song was indeed half made by Józsi Csóka**”, but he had corrected several parts of it⁷⁰. Finally, Jenő Müller, a conductor from Kassa, who was not of Gypsy origin, and came second place in the contest, joined the debate, arguing that he deserved the prize because the first prize winner had „plagiarised” it and that it the legitimate course of action was to disqualify him from the contest. The conductor's letter was also published in the „Magyar Czigányzenészek Lapja”, with the editorial board's position⁷¹. On the whole, I believe that the „Roma voices” did not appear in the letters from the Gypsies mentioned above, another example, like the war relief application, of how Gypsy authorship is not necessarily related to the presence of „Roma voices” in historical sources. Even if the subject matter itself, in this case the Hungarian song, is clearly linked in many ways to Gypsy musicians in Hungary.

⁶⁸ Sárosi Bálint, *Cigányzene ...*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1971, p. 136–170.

⁶⁹ *Magyar Czigányzenészek Egyesülete ...*, p. 126.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 127–130.

Both Gypsies and non-Gypsies submitted songs to the song contest, and Gypsies and non-Gypsies were involved in the public debate in the columns of the „Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ Journal” [Magyar Czigányzenészek Lapja], in which they did not even mention their ethnic identity or affiliation. Furthermore, the „plagiarism”, that is to say stealing songs and lyrics and the use of Hungarian songs in public or folk music was not necessarily linked to Gypsies or non-Gypsies.

Nearly two decades later, another conflict also led to the publication of open letters in the pages of the „Magyar Czigányzenészek Lapja”. In 1930, a Hungarian song festival organised by the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association was a great success, attracting tens of thousands of people, but a scandal broke out in the association during the accounting of the event. Károly Bura, the organisation’s Gypsy president, and its honorary president, the non-Gypsy, János Ilovsky, a member of the City of Budapest’s municipal committee, accused each other of embezzlement⁷². The open letters were a mixture of accusations and explanations. Károly Bura, a Gypsy musician, regularly wrote open letters in which he spoke up for Gypsy musicians and the Gypsy community as a whole: „We have an official newspaper fighting for the interests of the Gypsy community, and we have friends and well-wishers throughout the Hungarian press who support our efforts for free because of their patriotic attitude. And here, finally, we have the world’s first school for Gypsy musicians, the «Bihari» music school, which has successfully completed its first year and with which we have earned the recognition of the entire educated world and with which we are also serving the precious aspirations of Hungarian national culture”⁷³. „I don’t care about the hand-waving of the inflated and exciting elements among us, I am only addressing the working, serious elements of Hungarian Gypsy musical society who have at heart (not their own interests) but the fate and future of the whole Gypsy community”⁷⁴. It should be stressed that the quoted excerpts not only represent the Gypsy musician or Gypsy identity, but also the Hungarian national aspirations and ambitions framed in a positive way, which was by no means a unique phenomenon in that era.

After the Trianon peace treaty, Gypsy music became part of irredentist ideology and revisionist aspirations. Gypsy musicians became defenders of the Hungarian song against musical movements, especially jazz, labelled as „**anti-national**” and became openly involved in state identity politics⁷⁵. The National Association of Hungarian Gypsy Musicians sought contact and cooperation with newspapers and organisations that spearheaded the struggle against the peace dictate, such as the „Magyarság” paper, the Turul Association, the Werbőczy Comradery Association, the Csaba Comradery Association, the „Fehér Ház” (White House) Comradery Association and the Association of Social Associations. The Treaty of Trianon, the fate of the post-war

⁷² *Magyar Czigányzenészek Országos Egyesülete ...*, p. 39–44.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 299.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 302.

⁷⁵ Tamás Hajnáczy, *Trianon and revisionist Gypsy musicians*, „Central European Political Science Review”, vol. XXI, 2020, no. 3, p. 129–141.

mutilated country and the annexed territories regularly appeared in the minutes of the Gypsy Musicians' Association, in the statements of its members to the press and at the events they organised⁷⁶. The irredentist and revisionist image of the national association was further strengthened when in 1929 the membership elected one of the most famous Gypsy musicians of the time, Károly Bura, as president of the association. The Gypsy first violinist from Nagyvárad was persecuted by the Romanian authorities for his support for Hungarians, and this spread like wildfire in the Hungarian press as an „irredentist” trial⁷⁷. Károly Bura wrote a letter of thanks to Lord Rothermere on behalf of the association and asked for the Gypsy musicians' organisation to be admitted to the Hungarian Revisionist League. The letters, together with the replies, were published in the press:

„To the Esteemed Leadership of the Revisionist League !
Budapest

On the ninth anniversary of the disgraceful peace treaty of Trianon the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association feels compelled to announce its joining, that is to say, to respectfully request its admission to the Revisionist League. We acknowledge with great sincerity the enormous work that the Revisionist League does and feel its ever growing necessity. We would ensure the Leadership that the Revisionist League's meritorious efforts and noble work for us all are received with great understanding by every member of our association. We would once again express our great esteem and in closing respectfully again ask our admission, as we remain with patriotic respect,

Bura Károly, president
Lilin, secretary⁷⁸

Right Honourable Lord,

On behalf of the newly formed Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association and all Hungarian Gypsy musicians, we thank and greet your Lordship with deep admiration for your tireless work to help Hungarian justice towards victory. May Divine Providence give your Lordship unwavering strength of spirit so that your struggle maybe successful and our national hope will become a reality as soon as possible! We have been looted and downtrodden! Since then, the song on our violins has wept more sadly, and all the pain of our nation quivers on our strings. But we also know our duty. We are present in the territories torn from us and we remind our brothers with Hungarian songs that there will once again come another Hungarian

⁷⁶ *Magyar Cigányzenészek Országos Egyesülete* ..., p. ...

⁷⁷ Tamás Hajnáczy, *Károly Bura Gypsy First Violinist* ..., p. ...

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 63–64.

feast day throughout the world! And we announce everywhere Hungarian Gypsy musician goes, that Hungarian justice must conquer, as the Divine justice is with us! Because our banner is held by Lord Rothermere !

In the name of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association:
President Károly Bura⁷⁹.

In the letters just quoted, the „Roma voices” are directly present. On the one hand, it was revealed that the President, on behalf of the National Association, advocated irredentist ideology and revisionist aspirations. Furthermore, the Gypsy-Hungarian dual identity is also clearly evident in the letters, as well as the identification with state identity politics. At the same time, „victimhood” also appeared in the sources, but the writer saw the reason for this not in the Hungarians, but in the countries of the Little Entente.

Typology of Gypsy correspondences

From the end of the 19th century until the outbreak of the Second World War, several types of letters written or penned by Gypsies that have been discovered so far:

- 1) official letters;
- 2.) private letters;
- 3.) open letters.

The official letters addressed to the bureaucracy of the time can be classified into the following groups:

- 1.) from Gypsy persons;
- 2.) from Gypsy communities;
- 3.) from Gypsy organisations.

Four subtypes of private letters could be distinguished by subject:

- 1.) letters of greeting;
- 2.) letters requesting assistance;
- 3.) letters of invitation;
- 4.) academic letters.

In several cases, the latter subtypes are not clearly distinguished. With regard to official and private letters, it should be stressed that, on the basis of the sources discovered, they were not addressed to Gypsies in all cases and both types of letters were permeated by a subordinated relationship. The open letters can be divided into two groups, according to the author’s intention:

- 1.) intended for the public;
- 2.) not intended for the public.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 60–61.

The second category means that in many cases open letters cannot be clearly distinguished from official and private letters.

The letters written or penned by Gypsies are relatively numerous in type and subtype, but the number of those discovered so far is negligible compared to the documentary record of Gypsy politics. They do, however, provide important contributions to the articulation of 'Roma voices'. In the letters examined, the 'Roma voices' were not essentially data for the so-called discourse on the history of suffering, but for research in other fields:

- 1.) Gypsy agency;
- 2.) Gypsy identity;
- 3.) Gypsy resilience.

The „Roma voices” in the letters did not necessarily appear, even though their author was of Gypsy origin, and I have given several such examples in the study. Taking all this into account, the following forms of „Roma voices” in the letters can be distinguished:

- 1.) were not published;
- 2.) indirectly, a background knowledge of history is required to recognise and analyse them;
- 3.) can be read directly and unambiguously from the source.

In conclusion it can be stated that letters as a historical source type allow the „Roma voices” to be heard in the period from the end of the 19th century to the outbreak of World War II. Furthermore, in addition to the historical examination of the persecution and exclusion of the Gypsies, these letters open up new avenues of research. Letters from Gypsies can be divided into three main groups and several subgroups, which highlights the fact that the Gypsies had many ties to non-Gypsies and to the authorities. In other words, they did not live in isolation within society. Finally, a content analysis of the letters also revealed that not all sources originating from Gypsies feature „Roma voices”.