

**GYPSIES: SOME CURIOUS
INVESTIGATIONS, COLLECTED,
TRANSLATED, OR REPRINTED FROM
VARIOUS SOURCES, CONCERNING
THIS PECULIAR RACE**

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Gypsies: Some Curious Investigations, Collected, Translated, Or Reprinted from Various Sources, Concerning This Peculiar Race by J. Watts de Peyster

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BY

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Gypsies.



"His captain's heart * * * reneges all temper ;
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust."

"O this false son of Egypt ! this grave charm,
Like a right gipsy, hoth, at fast and loose,
Beguiled me to the very heart of loss."

SHAKESPEARE. 1608.

"The companion of his [the Tinker's] travels is some foul, sunburnt quean, that since the TERRIBLE STATUTE [against Gipsies and the like], recanted *gypsime*, and turned pedlarress."

SIR THOMAS OVERBURY'S "Characters." Sig. I. Circa 1614.

"Outlandish persons calling themselves *Egyptians*, or *Gypsies*, are another object of the severity of some of our unrepealed statutes."

BLACKSTONE, "Commentaries." B. IV., c. 13. Circa 1765.



GIPSIES.—[Translated from "*Zedler's Grosses Universal Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste welche, etc.*" Leipzig and Halle, 1749.]

Gypsies—*Ger.* Ziegeuner, Zigeuner, Zinginer, Zigainer, Zügeuner; *Lat.* Cingari or Zingari. A

wandering and trooped-together mob, which has stolen in over almost all Christendom, and are variously designated, for, besides the names given above, they are called Attingani, Cigani, Cingai, Cyani, Cigari, Cyngai, Zigeuni, Zigeneri, all, however, words of the same stem. Even the word Attingani, which is the name given them by the Greeks, appears to be one with the others, if the syllable "At" be thrown off and the "t" changed into C or Z. They are called also Taten or Tattarn, or Heyden, also Saracenen, Saraceni and Agareni, or (corrupted), Zagareni, especially, too, Egyptians (*Ægyptiani*), from which it is supposable that the name Cyani or Zingani comes. Since our forefathers, the Germans, were accustomed to shorten names, they may have thrown away the two first syllables of *Ægyptiani* and left only Ciani remaining. See Jacob Thomasius' "Dissertation on the Cingari," Leipsic, 1652, § 4, and so on. In France they are called "Bohemians." They are also called by some learned men Nubians.

Some derive the name Zigeuner (Gipsy) from the German as meaning "Zieht-einher" (Come-in), because these people had no fixed dwelling-place but wandered about hither and thither (*Zeiler's Sendschreib. Epist. 71*) a derivation which is further confirmed by the circumstance that the common people gave the

name Zihagan to land-tramps before Gypsies were heard of (*Zeiler's Sendschreib: Letter 276.*)

As regards the origin of the Gypsies, no agreement has, as yet, been arrived at. It is, however, certain and proved, that they were first seen in Germany in the fifteenth century, under the Emperor Sigismund.

Zeiler writes, they first appeared in Hesse, in the year 1414, but almost all historians put their first appearance in Germany in 1418. Jacob Thomasius, in his "*Dissert. de Cingaris*," §§ 16, 17, prefers this latter date. Counting from this date they passed through all Germany in two years and afterwards turned into Italy, France and Spain. The first bands that came into Germany consisted of 14,000, including men, women and children, and were split up into various small tribes, of which some wandered hither, some thither.

They had with them horses, mules and asses, and were under the command of a king or colonel (obrist) named Michael. Aventinus, however, says the colonel whom they had in 1639, when they were in Bavaria, was called Zindelo, or Zandadel. Stumpfius tells us, in his "*Kajser-Chronic*," that at their first appearance they paid for the necessaries of life they wanted with hard money and that they possessed much gold and silver, although they wore poor and ragged clothes.

The Emperor Sigismund, it is said, gave them, on account of their good behaviour, a free pass and safe conduct (Thomasius, *loc. cit.*). Otherwise the gypsies were of a dark complexion and not over cleanly in their clothing and general way of life. They said they were Christians and that they were from Lower Egypt (Klein-Egypten). On this account they were called, in the emperor's free pass, Egyptians. This is also corroborated by three gravestone inscriptions over their colonels, which Mart Crusius cites in his "Swabian Annals." The *first* runs thus, "Countess from the birth of Christ our Saviour, in the year 144 on St. Sebastian's Eve, died the noble-born Lo Panuel, Duke of Lower Egypt and Lord of Hirschhorn in the same country." The *second*, "Anno Domini 1453 Obiit nobilis comes Petrus de Minore Ægypti in die Philippi et Jacobi Apostolorum." The *third* "In the year 1498, on Monday after the Festival of St. Urban, died the well-born Lord John, Frey Graf of Lower Egypt. May God be gracious and pitiful to his soul." As to the cause of their wandering, the people gave out that they had denied Christianity and for seven years became heathen, and this sin they desired to atone for by seven years of pilgrimage. They mixed the Pope in with it as having laid on the penance of seven years wandering for having forsaken Christianity ("Zeller's *Sendschreiben*, Epist. 71

Others say that their pretext was that by their wanderings they were doing penance for the sins of their forefathers, who had refused hospitality to the Virgin Mary and the Jesus-child at the time of the flight into Egypt. Others pretended that the gypsies had previously lived in Singara, a city of Mesopotamia, and since they were driven thence by Julian the Apostate had never been able to regain their country, and for this reason they wandered about the world. Others seek their origin in Assyria, others in Cilicia, others in the Caucasus, many in Tartary, others in the province of Zeugitana in Africa, others in Nubia and Abyssinia. So some derive the name from the Zechis, Zichis, Zinchis, who had their dwellings by the Don on the Palus Mæotis and came from Asiatic Sarmatia (Abel's "German and Saxon Antiquities," P. II. p. 329, &c.) Indeed, some would make the gypsies the descendants of Cain, who, like their ancestor, are fugitives and vagabonds, and must wander over the face of the earth (Thomasius, *loc. cit.*, § 54). But these do not know what they are talking about since the whole race of Cain perished [?] in the flood. If some wish to make them out the descendants of Ham this might be, but there is no apparent cause why they should, on this account, be tramps and vagrants, since others of Ham's race have settled habitations.

The gypsies' own account of the cause of their

wandering was only a fiction by means of which they wished to make people willing to tolerate them. This at first succeeded. People pitied them and felt scrupulous about injuring them. It was also supposed that on the ending of their seven years of pilgrimage they would return home. This did not take place, and when called to account for it they replied that the way home was barred to them, that they were not able to return to their country, or that they were obliged to begin another seven years of pilgrimage, and if they did not do so they would be visited with failure of crops and other national visitations. Stumpfius, indeed, says that the *original* gypsies returned to their country on the ending of the seven years. This cannot be so, since as vagrants they had no home and no proper country. They may have wandered into other Christian countries, but there were always many of them remaining in Germany and we have records that since that time there have always been more or less there. Some are disposed to consider the gypsies who were still to be found in Germany as only a crowd of thieves, murderers, knaves and other riff-raff, who, after the departure of the *gypsies* proper, collected together and wished to pass for those people. And it cannot be denied that all sorts of loose characters may have joined them, whom they also willingly received and whom they knew how to stain of a dark color by