

← The Holy Month of RAMADAN (Aug. 10/11 – Sept. 8/9, 2010)

### Master of Photography AYDIN CETINBOSTANOGLU and his Exhibition “GYPSIES and WEDDING” (Turkey)

Posted on August 16, 2010 by Angela Nilsson



*“The most significant characteristic of the photographers is, they are the witnesses of the era that they belong to. The projects are like the memory of the past for the people in the future. We consider and perceive the past with these projects.” – Aydin Çetinbostanoğlu -*

Today, I would like to introduce a Master of Photography and friend of mine from Turkey whose photographs have highly attracted and fascinated me from the very beginning. Aydin Çetinbostanoğlu’s photographic topics reflect cultural and traditional life in Turkey and other countries in a stunningly beautiful and natural way and his range of inspiration and

themes just seems to be boundless: From traditional images from Turkey, political themes, music, dancing, sports, to societies and cultures (Alevi’s, Syriac’s, Turkish Armenians, Christian Arabs) and much more. Aydin’s photo exhibition “Gypsies and Wedding” is one of his fascinating works about cultures and I am very pleased to present some of these fantastic and beautiful photos here, complemented by some additonal historic background information about Gypsies in Turkey and around the world as well as some photos by Aydin which show daily life scenes of the Gypsies. Aydin Çetinbostanoğlu has taken all photos in Tekirdag, a province in the northwestern part of Turkey, in Kırklareli, a province in northwestern Turkey on the west coast of the Black Sea and in the cities Izmir and Istanbul.

#### Aydin Çetinbostanoğlu:

*“The main theme of the project called “Gypsies” began in 1999 and continued till 2008. The photographs of a wedding I had been invited to by a friend were few but forwarded new works in this field. I think this culture can teach us many things, now when our life style is becoming more and more complex. The Gypsies hold on to their life of freedom; they know how to be content with simple things and the beauty that nature provides. Their closely-knit family and community structure provides them with a sense of security. It is a good thing for the rest of us to become acquainted with such a culture.”*



*“Gypsies believe that stars are the reflections of the mortals on earth. When a baby is born, a star would appear in the sky and when the baby dies, the star would fade away. Aydin Çetinbostanoğlu has captured the light of stars reflected on earth. And has shared them with us through his photographs...to ensure that the Gypsies’ star in heavens keeps on shining.” (Füsün Çiçekoğlu)*

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„Gypsies believe that after death the spirit settles firstly in a bird’s and then in a gypsy’s body. Gypsies do not touch a cuckoo because according to their belief it is nothing but a soul of a Gypsy who strives for resurrection “

“In his exhibition, *Aydın Çetinbostanoğlu* is chasing the same voice, a cuckoo bird. And then he becomes the voice of the Gypsies that are the homeland of spirits looking for resurrection. Seeing Gypsies from his perspective, joining them – they who do not render anyone “the other” – in their wedding ceremonies, putting “henna” along with them, is like bathing with them in the same waters at Kakava festivities. Being a guest to the richness of these nomadic people for only one day... a guest of these people, who have been exiled to themselves... and seeing these photographs: it is like being their guest in their land of hunter boots, chained watches, a land of reds and pinks and greens...”



### GYPSIES – HISTORY

The Gypsies, also called Roma, have been living in Europe since the fifteenth century, they share a common language, culture, and until the twentieth century, a wandering way of life. In modern times, and especially since the beginning of the 20th century, various nations have attempted to end the nomadic lifestyle of the Gypsies by requiring them to register and to go to school and learn trades. Gypsies were one of the groups persecuted by the Nazis. Some 500,000 perished in gas chambers and concentration camps during World War II.

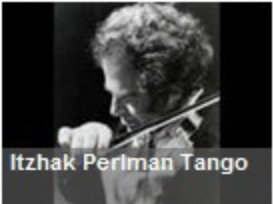


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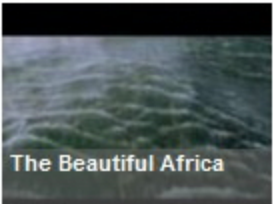
The generic term “Gypsy” usually refers to *Romani people* but may also encompass other nomadic groups, including: “*Lom people*” in East Anatolia and Armenia, “*Lyuli*” in Central Asia, “*Dom people*” in South West Asia, “*Irish Travellers*”, also known as “*Pavee*”, mostly in Ireland, Great Britain, and the United States, “*Sea Gypsies*”, a number of different peoples of Southeast Asia, “*Yeniche (people)*”, mostly in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Belgium, and “*Banjara*” in several states of India.



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**Origin**

The name Gypsy, an abbreviation of “*Egyptian*,” has been used for centuries by English-speaking people to denote a member of a group of wanderers who traveled Europe during the Middle Ages, and whose descendants are still found in most European countries. Many other names, such as “*Saracen*” and “*Zigeuner*,” or “*Cigan*,” have been applied to these people, but “*Egyptian*” resp. “*Gypsy*” is the most widespread. It does not, however, relate to Egypt, but to the country of “*Little Egypt*” or “*Lesser Egypt*,” whose identity has never been clearly established. Two Transylvanian references from the years 1417 and 1418 suggested that Palestine is the country in question, but there is some reason to believe that “*Little Egypt*” included other regions in the East.

It is now almost unanimously agreed that the Gypsies came into Europe from *India* by the fourteenth century. They reached *Hungary*, *Serbia*, and other *Balkan countries* by 1438. Next, they spread into *Poland*, *Russia*, *Sweden*, *Spain*, and *Great Britain*. From England they started emigrating to *America* in 1850.



**Romani People**

The Romani people recognize divisions among themselves based in part on territorial, cultural and dialectal differences and self-designation. The main branches are:

*Roma*, crystallized in Eastern Europe and Central Italy, emigrated also (mostly from the 19th century onwards), in the rest of Europe, but also on the other continents;  
*Iberian Kale*, mostly in Spain, but also in Portugal, Southern France and Latin America;  
*Finnish Kale*, in Finland, emigrated also in Sweden: *Welsh Kale*, in Wales; *Romanichal*, in the United Kingdom, emigrated also to the United States and Australia; *Sinti*, in German-speaking areas of Central Europe and some neighboring countries; *Manush*, in French-speaking areas of Central Europe; *Romanisæl*, in Sweden and Norway.  
Some groups which are commonly thought of as Romani, either by surrounding populations or by Romani groups, do not consider themselves to be Romani. This applies to the Balkan Egyptians and the Ashkali.





**Roma in Russia**

Gypsies (*tsygane* in Russian, while *Roma* is the name preferred by this group) have been one of the most visible and yet least powerful of ethnic groups in Russia. Many migrated to Russia by way of Germany and Poland during the eighteenth century after suffering persecution there.

Gypsies are widely dispersed across Russia, with communities in *Moscow, St. Petersburg, Samara, Komi Republic, Sverdlovsk, Vologda, Volgograd, Voronezh, Yaroslavl*, and elsewhere.

Although Roma didn’t receive any state support during the Soviet times, the cultural role of gypsies in Soviet society was recognized and in 1931, the **Romen Theatre** opened in **Moscow**. It was the first theater in the world to showcase gypsy culture, and gypsy actors and musicians performed and were trained there. The theater continues to be active in post-Soviet Russia. *Romen Theatre* is the oldest and still the most famous of Romani theatres in the world. The theatre is a key object of Romani culture in Russia, and from the moment of its foundation , it has been a centre of attraction for Romani artists in Russia.

In 2000 the Russian government officially recognized the need for gypsies to have a political voice, and it authorized the creation of a council that would defend gypsy interests. Its leaders have campaigned against frequent stereotyping of gypsies in the media and have condemned police harassment based solely on ethnic identity.



**Religion**

Migrant Romani populations have adopted the dominant religion of their country of residence, while often preserving aspects of older belief systems and forms of worship. Most Eastern European Romanies are Roman Catholic or Orthodox Christian or Muslim. Those in western Europe and the United States are mostly Roman Catholic or Protestant (particularly in southern Spain many are Pentecostal). In Turkey, Egypt, and the Balkans, the Romanies are split into Christian and Muslim populations.



**Language**

Their language, called *Romani*, belongs to the Indo-Iranian family and is closely related to the languages of NW India, whereas it has split into many dialects; only today is it becoming a written language. Besides one of several dialects, most Romanies also often speak the languages of the countries they live in. Typically, they also incorporate loanwords and calques into Romani from the languages of those countries, especially words for terms that the Romani language does not have.





### ***Living***

Because of their nomadic lifestyle, the Gypsies made a living mainly from trading horses and other animals, peddling, silver and gold work, basketry, fortune-telling and music. They were not allowed to own land where they lived, and were often accused of stealing by the locals. Because the Gypsies were deemed different and foreign, they were treated in a hostile manner by their adopted countries.



### ***Population Today***

Many Romanies for a variety of reasons choose not to register their ethnic identity in official censuses. There are an estimated four million Romani people in Europe and Asia Minor (as of 2002), although some high estimates by Romani organizations give numbers as high as 14 million. Significant Romani populations are found in the Balkan peninsula, in some Central European states, in Spain, France, Russia, and Ukraine. Several more million Romanies may live out of Europe, in particular in the Middle East and in the Americas. The Romani people recognize divisions among themselves based in part on territorial, cultural and dialectal differences and self-designation.



### ***Discrimination & Poverty Today***

By the early 21st century most Gypsies faced increased discrimination and lived in poverty.

According to Amnesty International, the Roma community suffers massive discrimination throughout Europe. Denied their rights to housing, employment, healthcare and education, Roma are often victims of forced evictions, racist attacks and police ill-treatment.

Living predominantly on the margins of society, Roma are among the most deprived communities in Europe. In some countries, they are prevented from obtaining citizenship and personal documents required for social insurance, health care and other benefits.

Romani children are frequently unjustifiably placed in “special schools” where curtailed curricula limit their possibilities for fulfilling their potential.

In 2005 eight European countries and the World Bank backed a ten-year program intended to improve the Gypsies’ socioeconomic status.





GYPSIES IN TURKEY

In general, Gypsies in Turkey are called “*Cingene*” or “*Roman*”. Besides that, there are also region specific names like “*Mutrip*” throughout the region between Van and Ardahan, “*Elekci*” in Central Anatolia, “*Posa*” in and around Erzurum and “*Cano*” in Eastern Anatolia, “*Kraci*”, “*Kurbat*” or “*Dom*” for Gypsies who come from Pakistan or Syria and “*Yunan cingeneleri*” for those who come from Greece.



According to the official figures, the number of the Gypsy population in Turkey is around 500 thousand (according to unofficial figures, it is around 2 million). 95 % of this population is not pursuing a settled life. It is known that a great majority of them works as musicians, florists, whitesmiths, blacksmiths or some get involved in basketry or collection of junk.



Gypsies in Istanbul live in specific “*mahalles*” (neighborhoods), as “*Kasimpasha*” – “*Curukluk*”, “*Kucukbakkalkoy*”, “*Sulukule*”, “*Uskudar Selamsiz*”, etc. Besides the sedentary Roma, there are the nomads who leave the places they lived in towns, and they start following a pre-established itinerary, from spring to autumn, due to occupational reasons.



*Romani* is spoken in the local communities from Rumeli, Uskudar and the Pashalar area of Van town. From the linguistic point of view, there are also some dialectal differences from one area to another. In the language spoken by the Roma people in Turkey, you can encounter words from some Turkish dialects spoken in Anatolia, from Kurdish or Greek. The language of the traveler groups in Anatolia is obviously assimilated, so *Romani* language is mixed with Kurdish, Turkish or Persian and, in this case, the linguistic switching-code is usually used.





In the past, most Gypsies in Turkey were living in outlying districts, outside of the cities, but today a major part of them lead their life in the cities.

In general, Gypsies wish to live in their small, often coloured, single-storey houses. They often have some animals like horses, chickens, pigeons etc., which makes it very difficult to “resettle” them into multi-storey apartments. It remains to be seen how the plans of the Turkish government to find new places for the Gypsies can be put into practice.



*“Despite the fact that Gypsies have always been traveling communities, it is difficult for them to preserve their own customs and traditions forever. In the light of studies and research about Gypsies so far, conclusions could be formed that the first and foremost maintaining factor is marriage that can be idealized and practiced differently among Gypsies around the world.*

*Endogamy is especially very common among the Gypsies of Turkey since it is considered to be the only way of protecting their communal life.”* (“Marriage among the Gypsies of Turkey”, Ali Rafet Ozkan, Department of Philosophy and Religion Studies, Faculty of Divinity, Ataturk University, Erzurum, Turkey).







## Aydın Çetinbostanoğlu

*I was born 1954 in Izmir, Turkey.  
In 1970, I pressed the shutter without thinking  
about my limit, what I can fit on my screen.  
In 1973, my art teacher asked me why I am not  
opening my own photography exhibition*

*and so I opened my first exhibition.  
I travelled around Turkey by hitchhiking in 1973. I realized that I have got many things  
to do after seeing the wideness of my country and the varieties of people living in it.  
Thousands of film rolls weren't enough to picture all those prosperities.  
I started to study in Political Science Faculty of Ankara University in 1974.  
In 1977, while I was taking photography in Taksim on the 1st of May, my life passed in  
front of my eyes. Those scenes from that time became the scenes that Turkey cannot  
forget.  
The happiness of the people in a feast was followed by the fear of death on the same day.  
In 1979 I married with my wife, Zerrin.  
In 1981, my daughter Nergis took her place in our album.  
In 1987, my daughter Yasemin was in my screen.  
I loved humans and pictured them.  
I entered their lives, like sponge hunters in Kas and Gypsy weddings in Tekirdag.  
I shared both their happiness and sadness...  
They looked at me laughing, smiling, worried and crying...  
I made many friends.  
How lucky I am, am I not??  
We have got many things to add to the World's prosperity as we do to people and  
humanity also.  
I opened many exhibitions up to today and I also participated in mixed exhibitions.  
I won awards.  
Photography is a lifestyle for many anyhow.*

Me. Aydın Cetinbostanoglu



## “GYPSIES” and Wedding EXHIBITION:

28 March 2008: Chamber of Certified Public Accountants of Istanbul  
07 April 2008: Maltepe University, The Faculty of Art in Istanbul  
27 May 2008: Diyarbakir Festival in Diyarbakir

02 June 2008: Mitanni Cultural Center in Nusaybin / Mardin City  
08 August 2008: Karaburun Festival in Izmir  
17 October 2008: Cultural Center of Adana Governorship  
28 September 2009: Izmir State Painting and Sculpture Museum  
15 December 2009: Old Municipality Building Antakya (Antioch)  
13 March 2010: Samsun, Atakum Municipality



## Gypsies and Wedding

Exhibition book

March 2008

Turkish & English

Download PDF (16.741 KB):

<http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/files/roman.pdf>

To view the entire photo exhibition of “Gypsies and Wedding”, please visit  
Aydın Çetinbostanoğlu’s official website: <http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/>



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