

LITTLE-KNOWN DOCUMENTS

Three Documents from the Archive of Roma Enslavement

INTRODUCTION BY ADRIAN-NICOLAE FURTUNĂ,
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The word *slave*, Saidiya Hartman reminds us in *Lose Your Mother*, comes from *Slav*. “At the beginning of modernity,” writes Hartman, “slavery declined in Europe as it expanded in Africa . . .” (5). The implication is that, although there were white slaves, slavery was gradually restricted to people of African descent. However, in the European East, the enslavement of a people gradually racialized as nonwhite and non-European persisted until well into the nineteenth century. This introduction returns to the question of enslavement in this region of the world. Studies of the Atlantic world benefit from a world historical, relational account of enslavement, which considers its entanglements with other histories of enslavement. The European East should be enlisted in this endeavor. For more than four hundred years (1385–1856), Roma people were enslaved on the territory of what is now Romania, the historical principalities of Moldova and Wallachia, both under Ottoman domination. Comparative studies of enslavement in the United States have paid little attention to the archive pertaining to the enslavement of the Roma. How does the question of the archive resonate in this space?

In Romania, the interwar period witnessed a brief moment of interest in this history (Potra). It was followed by a long period of silence, dominated by self-congratulatory Cold War accounts of the “integration” of the Roma. After 1989, a few historians approached the subject, setting the tone for a dominant historiography (Achim; Tomi). This period coincided with the development of a Roma civic movement interested in the recovery of a lost history of enslavement and its integration in the process of Roma identity reconstruction. In the last decade, a new generation of scholars have started to assemble a variety of documents toward a more complex archive, which they approach through a range of interpretive practices (Furtună, *Sclavia romilor*; Chiriac; Petcuț; Matache and West; Chang and Rucker-Chang).¹

As in the case of other histories of enslavement, the archive of Roma enslavement is heterogeneous, shaped by the imbrication of coloniality with interimperiality in the European East (Doyle; Parvulescu and Boatcă). The archive of enslavement contains a

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PMLA 139.5 (2024), doi:10.1632/S0030812924000701

variety of documents, including requests for emancipation and arguments for freedom made by the enslaved, like Ioana Rudăreasa (Furtună, “Institutional Forms”); various forms of creative output, such as Roma music and storytelling (Cosma; Meltzl, *Jile Romane* and *Black Wodas*); the legislation of enslavement (Rădulescu, *Codul Calimach* and *Legiuirea Caragea*); property deeds; prison records; and documents recording the sale, donation, exchange, or recapture of enslaved people. Central to Romanian abolitionist literature was the translation and adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Szeman), itself witness to translation’s entanglements with coloniality. Romantic poets wrote poetry addressing enslavement and advocating for abolition (Tomi). Traces of Roma enslavement can also be found in periodicals, which published ads for the sale of enslaved persons, as well as articles debating the institution of slavery (Chiriac).

The documents that follow have been selected to foreground two nodes in this archive. One node involves the 1671 sale of an enslaved child named Crăciun, of unspecified age, who was sold three times over the course of two days. The National Center of Roma Culture has published three sale documents extracted from the National Archives of Romania involving Crăciun, all written in Old Romanian, in Cyrillic script (Furtună, *Sclavia romilor*).² On 3 February 1671, a man named Rafail, affiliated with the Cotroceni Monastery in the Argeș Diocese of Moldova, together with his son Eftimie, sold Crăciun to a man named Oancea for fifteen gold coins. The next day, Oancea sold Crăciun again, to a man named Vlad, son of Neagoe from Domnești, also for fifteen gold coins. That same day, Crăciun was sold again, but in a different kind of transaction. Vlad sold Crăciun to the Argeș Monastery, represented in the transaction by Father Efrem. Vlad, who was a serf (*rumân*), used the enslaved Crăciun to buy his own freedom from the monastery.³ The record of Vlad’s sale of Crăciun (fig. 1), translated below, bears witness to four interrelated dimensions of enslavement: the state-sanctioned sale of a Roma child; the role of religious institutions in

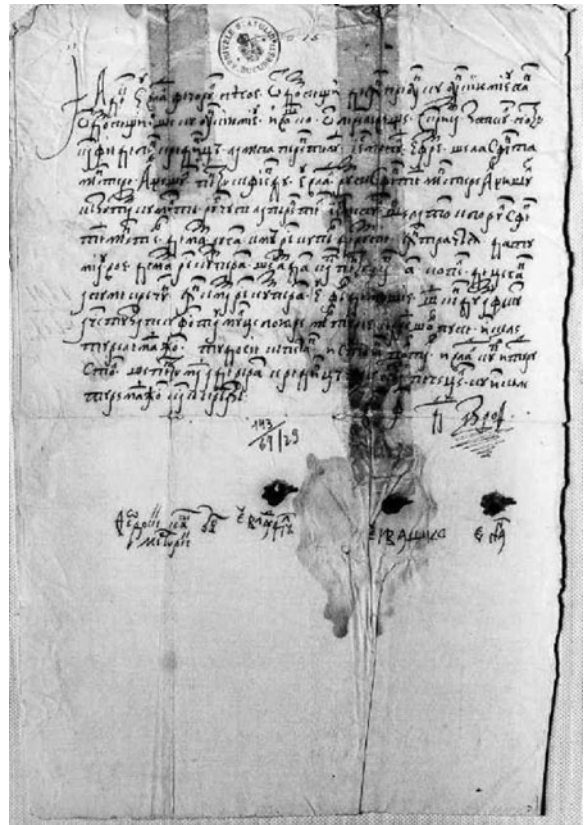


FIG. 1. DANIC, Argeș Diocese LXIX quator/29. Original Romanian document, on paper, torn in two pieces and tied together, with two large spots and three fingerprint marks in black ink next to the signatures of Vlad, Ivașco, and Nan.

enslavement; the centrality of the legal principle of *protimisis* to these transactions;⁴ and the imbrication and hierarchization of the two local regimes of coerced labor, serfdom and enslavement.

The second document features a free non-Roma woman named Dina, who became enslaved in order for her marriage to an enslaved man to be recognized. The document is from 1 February 1674, written in Old Romanian, and housed at the Valea Monastery. Dina had secretly married Fiera, who as an enslaved man could not be officially married in church. The document recorded her consent to her new enslaved legal status as the property of the monastery and her acknowledgment that children born out of this marriage would likewise be enslaved.

A twist in this history is visible in the third document. More than a hundred years after Dina, in 1783, another non-Roma woman, Dobrița, unable to afford marriage to a Romanian man without a dowry, married Mircea, a Roma man enslaved in the service of Sfântul Ioan Monastery. She used this mode of downward mobility—from the point of view of the dominant white majority—as an argument to negotiate freedom for future female children, while consenting to an enslaved status in the service of the monastery for her male children. Both documents provide evidence of anti-amalgamation policies meant to prevent racial mixing and assure the reproduction of a coerced racialized labor force—a condition very much resembling that of enslaved Africans in the Americas.

These are three examples of work Adrian-Nicolae Furtună has done in this complex archive. Scholars are still searching for language and analytic frameworks to describe the specific interimperial archive pertaining to the enslavement of the Roma—an archive developed under Ottoman domination and enmeshed in a complex field of local racial and ethnic dynamics. Juxtaposed and entangled with it was another unfree labor regime, serfdom, to which the non-Roma peasant population was subjected. In his landmark study, *The Slave Ship*, the historian Marcus Rediker drew on thirty years of research in maritime archives to reconstruct silenced stories of resilience and survival of the enslaved. Rediker documented “the creation of something entirely new, something that could only be called African-American” (Cover copy). We are calling for a complementary accounting for the enslavement of the Roma in the European East. This form of enslavement led to its own new creations, the still-unacknowledged Romani Europeans (Boatcă). Attention to the maritime archives that trace Europe’s colonial expansion could be supplemented by a relational account of enslavement, which considers its entanglements and resonances with histories of enslavement in other parts of the world, including in Eastern Europe.

NOTES

Our work was supported by a Global Incubator Seed Grant from the McDonnell International Scholars Academy at Washington University in St. Louis.

1. Recent collections of archival documents from the legal archives include Achim and Tomi; Petcuț; Mateescu; Furtună, *Scavia romilor*; Furtună and Turcitu.

2. The documents have been translated into Romanian by Ștefan Berechet and into English by Gabriela Murgescu; we modified some translations.

3. In the early modern period, the word *rumân* was used in Wallachia to mean *serf*, a rural laborer tied to the land; starting in the seventeenth century, serfs could become free and the term reacquired the sense of *Romanian*.

4. The principle of *protimisis* stipulated that estates, which claimed the enslaved who labored on them as property, could not be estranged; when they were put up for sale, preference was given to family members and local boyars (Rădulescu, *Sobornicescul Hristov* 19).

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Three Documents from the Archive of Roma Enslavement

Document 1

This is to say that I, Vlad, son of Neagoe from Domnești, together with my uncles Nan from Domnești and Ivașco from Biriliviști, have written this deed to be a truthful proof for father hegumen Efreem and for the Holy Argeș Monastery that I, serf Vlad, had piously prayed to father hegumen and to the Holy Synod of Argeș Monastery to redeem me from serfdom. Thus, they allowed me to redeem myself and I gave them, head-for-a-head, a Gypsy child named Crăciun; however, I have redeemed myself with no property. And when we made this deed, many boyars were witnesses and testified with their signatures bellow: captain Tudose, gatekeeper Stoian, trader Vlad, and *stolnic* Tudor. And to strengthen the authenticity of this deed, we put our seals and signatures below to be trusted.

4 February year 7179 [1671]

I, Vlad, I, Ivașco, I, Nan, I, captain Teodosie, witness

Document 2

This is to say that I, Dina, gave my deed to Holy Cross, to be known that by taking Fiera, a Gypsy of the Vale Monastery, into marriage by my free will, I willingly and without any constraint became a slave of the monastery. The holy monastery should not worry, I will obey and do any work they ask, like the other women slaves. Because I ran away with the Gypsy man in Sărata, where we got married, and when I came back to the holy monastery father confessor questioned me and I willingly gave myself into slavery. And I agreed, with my good will and without any constraint, that all the children I would have shall belong as slaves to the monastery and be in the power of its abbot, father hegumen Partenie. There were priests who have witnessed and signed below accordingly.

1 February 1674

I, hieromonk Filoteiu, wrote this with her own words.

I, Dina, slave.

Hieromonk confessor A(n)tonie, witness.

Document 3

This is to say that I, Dobrița, give this deed to father *kir* Dositei, archimandrite of Sfântul Ioan, to be known that, as I became a young orphan among strangers, having no one next to me and being poor, I couldn't afford to marry a Romanian. When the time came, I fell in love with a Gypsy belonging to the monastery, named Mircea, who took me in marriage with my approval. It was decided that our male offspring shall belong to the monastery and the female offspring shall be mine, meaning free. So, among my children, I had a girl named Mărica, who is of eligible age and indeed the monastery allows her to marry a Romanian, but seeing my poverty and that I cannot

afford to marry her to a Romanian, and as I fear I would die and she would become an orphan like me, sad and oppressed in the hands of strangers, I asked his holiness, and I had others ask him too, to allow me to marry her to a Gypsy, the fiddler of the monastery, named Petrea. My daughter desires him with all her heart, and she has my approval, my husband's and her brothers', with the same bargain remaining valid that her male offspring shall belong to the monastery and the female offspring shall be free. Therefore, as the father agreed, we gave him this deed, and to be trusted we signed it.

15 May 1783

I, Dobrița, Mircea, Vasile.
