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***The Image-Anthropological Approach to Historiography:
Gypsies in 19th-Century Hungary***

The aim of this presentation is to experiment with applying the approach of an anthropology of the image to the history of the Hungarian gypsies, profiting from the achievements of the so called “iconic turn”. As respected scientists argue, the picture is an emerging key element in communication, step by step winning back the role it enjoyed before the emergence of writing. However, many historians seem to make a stand against the attack of the “barbarian hordes” of pictures, defending the strongholds of the text.

In reality the picture is an eminent source of the historian's evidence as well, especially in the cases when not the protagonists of history, but different minorities (children, women, ethnic minorities, etc.) are concerned. The latter are rarely covered by the contemporary texts (i.e. chronics, diaries, letters, orders, etc.), but frequently depicted as accessory, or even main, figures of the contemporary pictures.

Although there are many publications on the greatest minority of Europe, analysing the etchings depicting Hungarian gypsies in the 19th century, we can obtain several new pieces of information, from small details to general conclusions. The research allowed to identify for example the costume of the gypsies in the examined period, an authentic tool set of a 19th century wandering gypsy blacksmith or a wood-craftsman, the main types of the tents, carriages, and many other tools and instruments of the daily life. The analysis of the pictures showed well the main money-making activities of the gypsies (wood-work, metal-work, music-making, horse-trading, etc.), and offered an evidence of the importance of those professions in the life of the gypsies and the others as well.

Through the analysis of the pictures we can demonstrate the changing attitude of the majority towards the gypsies. They clearly show the visual – and conceptual – stereotypes of the majorities, from the habit of sitting in the field, and not wearing head-gear and shoes, to the sexual attractiveness of the imaginary “beautiful gypsy girl”. Following the path of the pictures, it became clear how the general attitude of the prevailing majority changed from the 19th century acceptance to the 20th century rejection. At the same time the pictures testify to a great break in the life of the Middle-European gypsy society (in reality different societies of Hungarian-speaking romungro, Romanian-speaking beash, Romani-speaking roma tribes) – how they lost their ability to take part in the general production of the surrounding societies, how they lost their capacity to cooperate – basically because the elimination of the need for their products by industrialisation.