



Sinti

Romani-Project

Sinti is the proper name of the group which has been residing longest of all, that is ever since the 15th century, in the German-speaking areas of central Europe. From the turn of the century up until the time right before World War I, the *Sinti* emigrated from southern Germany, Bohemia and Moravia to what is today Austrian national territory. Today, while ties of various intensity still exist with Germany, there is no more contact whatsoever with → Bohemia.

History

The Austrian *Sinti* held various mobile niche jobs, working as travelling salesmen, makers of umbrellas, sieves, and musical instruments, as → acrobats, actors, and musicians. Up until the 1930's, they managed to carry out these professions in spite of attempts by the police to have them registered under various discriminating orders by the authorities of the First Republic. Since as early as 1928 the → Roma of Burgenland had been registered in a so-called → gypsy index file, it was intended to do the same with the *Sinti* by way of the "Central for the fighting of gypsies", which was set up in Vienna in 1936. With the annexation to Nazi-Germany, systematic persecution began: after bureaucratic registration and the prohibition of nomadism, there were already first internments in the summer of 1939. As of 1940, the majority of Austrian *Sinti* and Roma were deported to assembly- and concentration camps.

After the war, survivors took up their former professions. Greatly affected by the Nazi genocide, it has been a major effort on the part of the Austrian *Sinti* to re-establish their destroyed social structure. The success of this reconstruction varies, however, among the different extended families. Over a long period of time, the *Sinti* were denied the support by official institutions and compensation granted to other victims of concentration camps. Contrary to the Roma of Burgenland, however, these negative experiences did not lead them into a kind of self-imposed assimilation. Rather, the *Sinti* developed a deep mistrust toward the majority population, which withdraw them from the society they were living in. This withdrawal still shows, among other things, in the fact that if they do so at all, the *Sinti* are extremely reluctant to give up their chosen anonymity in order to publicly participate in the fight for their recognition as an ethnic group.

Current Situation

Often hardly noticed by the majority population, the great majority of the *Sinti* today live in the larger cities of all Austrian federal states except for Burgenland. Especially during the summer months, mobile niche jobs such as → second-hand dealing, etc, are partly still practiced. Due to this seasonal mobility, contacts to groups from bordering countries are maintained, ensuring that specific cultural traits are passed on. This process in turn improves the social stability within the Austrian clans.

From a social point of view and in contrast, partially, to the Roma of Burgenland, the Austrian *Sinti* are not a marginalised group. Most likely due to their long stays in German speaking areas and the fact that they settled in larger cities, they came to benefit from the economic rise after the war. As far as their economic situation goes, they hardly differ from the average Austrian citizen.

Text based on:



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