

SAMUEL AUGUSTINI AB HORTIS: *Gypsies in Hungary (1775)*. Štúdio dd, Bratislava 1994. 203 pp.

An unjustly forgotten Slovak – Samuel Augustini ab Hortis – started to publish his historical and ethnographic monograph “On the present status, special customs and way of life as well as on other properties and gifts of the Gypsies in Hungary” as early as 1775 in the Viennese journal *Privilegierte Anzeigen*. Thirty-nine parts appeared in two years. It was probably the way of publishing of Augustini’s work that made of it just a collection of articles although its structure and conception were those of a scientific monograph. Augustini’s contemporaries perceived it like that. And that might have been the reason why such a significant scientific contribution to better understanding of the Gypsy way of life and culture in Hungary, which had appeared almost half a century before the great ethnographic project of J. Čaplovic to organize work on monographs about individual nations in Hungary, was forgotten.

V. Urbancová, a scientific worker of the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences engaged in the history of ethnography in Slovakia, has become acquainted with the work of S. Augustini, subrector of the Evangelical Lyceum in Kežmarok, later, from 1761 onwards, the Evangelical priest in Spišská Sobota and has decided to translate his work from German into Slovak. She added to Augustini’s text an introductory study “Samuel Augustini ab Hortis and his Forgotten Monograph on the Gypsies in Hungary”. The epilogue to the book was written by E. Horváthová, an outstanding representative of Romany studies in Slovakia.

By placing S. Augustini’s work into broader historical and scientific context she also emphasizes its importance for the present time.

The work of V. Urbancová attracted the attention of those interested in Romany culture and history, and, fortunately, also of some people working at the Slovak Ministry of Culture, who sponsored the publication of the book. Simultaneous publication of both German original and Slovak translation was an asset.

Historical and geopolitical development made of Slovakia, similarly to the neighbouring Central European countries, a country with a multiethnic society. What causes chaos in the politicians’ heads, is for an ethnologist a live laboratory for studying cultural interaction of various ethnic communities in the particular natural, historical, social, and cultural conditions of their way of life. It is interesting to observe the enlightening efforts of Maria Theresia and Joseph II through the prism of Augustini’s work to solve “the Gypsy question” in the second half of the 18th century and compare them with our efforts to build up an emancipated ethnic society. In this context, even today can we agree with the opinion of S. Augustini: “If we want to answer the question whether the people are useful for the state or not, we have to look at their habits and their way of life in the first place. Only then will we be able to determine whether any improvements are necessary and possible and how damages which might occur throughout the country can be avoided.”

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