



Sepečides

Romani-Project

History

The *Sepečides* of Izmir are a south-balkan group of Greek/Turkish origin. Their ancestors lived in the area of Saloniki in the Osman Empire. After an undefined period of nomadic life this Muslim group of basket-weavers was affected by the Greek/Turkish exchange of ethnic/religious groups as defined by the Lausanne treaty of 1923. Those parts of the group willing to adapt to the religion of the majority stayed in Greece. Those who had a greater inclination for Turkey and the Muslim religion were expelled from the Greek territory and moved to Turkey. Greek/Osman influence of unknown duration then gave way to modern Turkish influences. The families migrated for approx. ten years before they finally settled in the vicinity of Izmir. The group's history of the last 75 years is well documented in biographical recordings and family stories (and legends). Beyond that, former settlements are unknown. The *Sepečides* dialect is clearly non-Vlach and, compared to other Balkan Romani dialects, rather conservative.

Presently, the *Sepečides* of Izmir are a completely sedentary group of Gypsies. Until approx. 1920 their traditional profession was the production and selling of baskets. They all spoke Greek, some of them also Turkish, fluently. Some family names still reflect former Greek settlements of *Sepečides*, such as Tralangere (Trala, a village in the surroundings of Saloniki), Kardičakere (Karditsa, a village in northern Greece). When the group split up in the early 1920s, the knowledge of the Turkish language proved to be an advantage for the ones who left Greece. The migrants avoided the regions engaged in the war and posed as either Greek or Turkish people, according to the situation. Informants report that they even had two flags and used them alternatively. In this manner, they migrated far into the east. After several months they reached the town of Malatya; after a short stay they were expelled by the locals and moved on to Mersin where they stayed for about three years before the group split up. *Sepečides* settled in the area of Mersin in Adapazar, Tarsus and Adana. In Mersin and Adana there are still settlements of at least several hundred speakers. However, no records of their dialect exist so far. From Mersin, one part of the group went to Izmir by ship. They settled in Çırpıköy, Arapçıköy and Çıplaköy, villages in the region of Izmir. Later, many of them moved into Izmir, where they settled in the Gypsy quarter Gültepe and finally in the district of Ballıkuyu. This was approx. 10 years after they had left Greece. In Izmir they became totally sedentary.

Current Situation

The generation of today's 70- to 80-year old people still worked in the old basket weaving profession, especially in rural areas. The next generation, however, has dropped basket weaving. The women work as cooks or cleaning women, mostly for Americans at the NATO-base or rich Turkish families. The men are temporarily employed in service industries, e.g. at filling stations, or trade with food and dry goods in small shops or at the markets. However, they still refer to themselves as *Sepečides*.

Language competence has decreased alarmingly among the younger people. Within the middle generation, only a few informants have full competence. As sedentary Roma the children generally attend school, which favours their second language, Turkish. Especially among the young men, frequent contact with *gadže* leads to an increasing number of exogamic marriages. Because of these tendencies, the young Roma are undergoing an assimilation process that seems irreversible; Turkish is their main



language now; they understand Romani, but do not speak it any more. There is no information about the *Sepečides* groups living in Mersin and Adana, but a similar situation is to be expected.

Those families that stayed in Greece after 1923, moved south and finally settled in Volos. They are Greek-orthodox, and can be identified as direct relatives of the *Sepečides* from Izmir. They left the area of Saloniki approx. at the same time as their relatives. Their only contact language since then has been Greek. Despite many prevailing Turkish words in their dialect, they do not call themselves *Sepečides*, but *sevlengere Roma* ("basket(weaving) Roma"). Their traditional profession, however, has changed. The women work in carpet factories, where they are partly paid in products instead of money. The carpets are then sold independently by the men, who roam as far as Saloniki with their trucks. Both women and men use Romani at work and at home. Their children's first language is Romani, followed by Greek.