

7. HANDICRAFT, INTANGIBLE CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND TRADITIONS AMONG SEA TRAVELLERS/SEA TINKERS

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The sea travellers in Norway are a certain part of the Romani culture. Traditionally the sea travellers have had seasonal travelling periods by boats along the coast connected to trade, handicraft and seasonal periods of permanent settled living. The latter have often been connected to production of products for trade.

The concentration of the sea travelling Romani culture has been on the stretch from Sandnes close to Stavanger and north to Trondheim, with a few families along the southeastern Norwegian coastline and down along the Swedish western coastline. They have, as the rest of the Romani culture had connection to British Islands and down along the North Sea coastline to Holland and Belgium and into the Baltic Sea. Travelling the inland routes til coastal sea travelling culture has been connected to the eastern Norway and Swedish Romani communities.

Many people without Romani background have been defined and experienced as sea travellers without having a Romani background (Midtbøe 1956 and 1968, Sundt 1850, 1859, 1862, 1863, 1864, 1947, 1967 and www.rhd.uit.no/sundt) For those belonging to the Romani communities that has resulted in them being defined as groups they can not identify with. Partly that has been outlaws and other groups having a lifestyle resulting in conflicts with the rest of the society and partly those groups have not had the strong traditions in trade, handicraft, music and other cultural traditions characteristic of the Romani culture (Bastrup and Sivertsen 1996, Gotaas 2007, Hvinden 2007, Johansen 1991, Rusten 2008 and Schlüter 1990 and 1993).

The sea travelling Romani culture has had and partly still has strong traditions in handicraft both among men and women. Most known are different types of metal work, wood work and production of knives. Less known today is the strong traditions of the past among females for different types of handicraft connected to knitting, textiles and food. The intangible knowledge among travellers has also included fields outside production of different kinds of products. Rich traditions in dance and music have been important for travellers and given them an important role in transferring such cultural traditions. In the same way the story telling traditions of the travellers have played an important role in transferring knowledge and traditions along the travelling routes both those by sea and those by land. Other examples have been in folk medicine and practical medical treatment and care. Knowledge about boats, sailing and different techniques connected to sailing, transportation by sea and about agriculture and most of all training and use of horses has also been communicated by the sea travelling communities.

Nearly in all fields the sea travellers have functioned as a kind of link and information channel between different kind of communities and because they have mastered skills and had knowledge that local communities could use. It is well known that the Norwegian Society, particularly in the period after 1900 have actively tried to eradicate and suppress the culture of the travellers. Many parts of the Norwegian public were involved in the process of suppression and in many different ways. The Justice system, health- and social authorities, the school and the State Church all played their role in the process of suppression together with the organization Norwegian Mission among the Homeless. The latter was a private

organization supported by the Norwegian State Church, funded by the public and often consisting of mix of private employees and public officials of which many also worked in the State Church. All of them actively worked towards making the travellers using the Norwegian language and preventing them from using Roman language, stop the pattern of seasonal travelling and stop their handicraft traditions. The methods were often brutal, many children were taken away from their parents, and several kind of institutionalizing was frequently used. Both the health, social and justice authorities worked together in a united effort to change the Roman culture into a national settled Norwegian (Bastrup and Sivertsen 1996, Gotaas 2007, Hvinden 2007, Johansen 1991, Rusten 2008 and Schlüter 1990 and 1993).

The handicraft traditions of the Roman travellers have to a great extent been connected to the pattern of seasonal travelling. Various kinds of metalwork is one example, during the seasonal travels the travellers have had the possibility to meet the customers and make locally adapted products. The periods of settled living gave the travellers foundation for good high quality craftsmanship, often done in their own workshops and factories.

One of the characteristics of the Roman handicraft culture was their ability to make products and provide services under extremely changing circumstances. They were able to provide maintenance and do minor production during their travels. Those using boats naturally had a production unit and even machinery and tools available to a greater extent than those travelling by horse and cart along the roads. For many local communities such services must have been of great importance in order to maintain and develop their own communities. From the economical point of view such services have been important because those from local communities did not have to travel on their own, had services available necessary for the development of their own communities and was less dependent upon craftsmen and traders in the towns.

The Norwegian Society never succeeded in breaking the traditions of the Roman culture. Even if many travellers lost their contact with their own culture, language and handicraft traditions there were always some who managed live the traditional way and maintain traditional cultural practices and language. In the later years the Roman travellers have had a active work to maintain their own traditions and to strengthen the transfer of knowledge and practices from the elder generations to the younger. However, the reality of today is a totally different one from that of the past when the travelling culture was at its most accepted and active stage. The technological development and the changes in communication patterns and ways have been extensive resulting in a completely different foundation for the culture. The old ways of transportation and travel is no longer possible to maintain in today's world.

Handicraft traditions have changed as technology has developed. Many Roman handicraft traditions have been connected to crafts undergoing rapid and great change. One example is handicraft connected to boats that have been connected to everything from maintenance to use of sailing ships to in recent times different kind of machinery powered vessels. The Roman culture has been important in all stages of the development first in sailing technology and later in machinery technology. However, as the technological development has increased and communication patterns changed small scale vessels have lost much of their importance in trade and transportation. Thus, the very foundation of the travel patterns and technology has lost its very foundation.

The intangible cultural heritage has not only been connected to the vessels, but also to navigation and lifestyle of travelling along the coast. The heritage has included extensive knowledge of natural harbour, depth and currents. Much of the knowledge required for fishing and local use of boats were limited to the local area and certain routes of transportation. The Roman culture has had a different pattern of travel and represented knowledge across traditional local boundaries. The result has been that the Roman culture has been able to both give knowledge and services that has connected the various parts of the coastal culture.

Another advantage of the culture of the Roman travellers has been that it has included whole families with females, men and children. The culture has not only, like many other groups of traders and those travelling along the coast, included only males. The children from the Roman culture have had traditions and ways of playing connected to their travels and culture, the female's traditions of female handicrafts and folk medicine. For males, females and children a rich tradition of folk music, song and dance has been an integrated part of the cultural heritage. Much of the literature and traditions of music, song and dance have been interpreted as local, however it is good reason to claim that those being practitioners and communicators of those traditions often have had some kind of relationship to the Roman culture and in many cases been part of that culture.

At the same time as Roman travellers have made local adaptation they have also had an active relationship to wider Norwegian, European and even other parts of the world traditions, and developed all those traditions in their own way. In that way the Roman culture has represented unique ways both of practice and in communication of those practices and traditions.

Handicraft, ways of living and language has all been part of what can be defined as the Roman identity. This identity has included both men, females and children in a community where the differences and cooperation between the generations, males and females has been different and often closer than in cultures where males and females have lived more separately. Because whole families have travelled together children have been educated by close contact with the activities of the grown ups. Integrated and gaining an understanding of the cultural traditions of the Roman culture has been an integrated part of growing up in the Roman culture. In a way growing up in the culture has been like a child being breastfed by a mother. The intangible knowledge of the culture has been closely attached to the language and an identity attached to the practical tasks and doing rather than the theoretical and abstract (Unesco 2003)

In contact with schools and a society that has emphasized the theoretical and abstract the Roman culture has had a lot of friction. The school system has had problems relating to the intangible knowledge being part of the Roman lifestyle and the in-built knowledge in the Roman language.

Taking care of the intangible cultural heritage and the handicraft culture of the Roman culture will face us with a number of challenges. Maintaining the Roman language will be important both for Roman culture and the communities that has interacted with that culture. Both have depended upon each other, nevertheless they have also functioned as separate cultures.

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