

In memoriam

Antonio Gómez Alfaro, a Gypsy of breast milk



Born in Córdoba (December 28th, 1931), and belonging to the Royal Academy of Sciences, Beautiful Letters and Noble Arts of that same city since 1958, as a corresponding member, Antonio Gómez Alfaro was part of *Alfoz Group*, publisher of the magazine of the same name in Córdoba, between 1952 and 53, which contributed to the poetic renewal movements of the fifties, by publishing in 1953 "*Siete canciones escritas en primavera*". That year he graduated in Law from the University of Seville. Dedicated professionally to journalism since 1956, he collaborated in *El Español*, *La Estafeta Literaria*, *Dígame*, *Domingo*, *Arriba*, *Gaceta Ilustrada*, *Juventud*, *Time*, *La Hora*, *Mundo Hispánico*, until his entry, in 1959, in the group of the company *Eugenio Suárez*, the year he graduated from the Official School of Journalism of Madrid. In 1965 he debuted as Section Head of the evening newspaper *Pueblo*, where he would successively be Editor in Chief (since 1971) and Deputy Director (since 1975), being attached at the closure of the newspaper, in 1984, and until his retirement, to the Information Services of the Office of the Government Spokesperson.

He held a Higher Diploma in Criminology from the Complutense University of Madrid (1971), a Bachelor of Communication Sciences (1985) and Doctor of Law from that same university (1988). Interested in the history and problems of the Roma community, his legal training provoked, while studying in Seville, a special researching and compiling attention to the historical, bibliographical and hemerographic archives, national and international, concerning the legal texts kept in the historical archives that supported, from the Catholic Monarchs to the death of Franco, a policy to dilute, coercively and repressively, the cultural otherness of the group.

The result of this work on the history of the Roma people and their relations with society and public authorities, the formation of prejudice in the collective conscious and unconscious, and the role of media in shaping behavior, was his minor thesis for the Faculty of Communication Sciences on "*Definición académica y uso popular y periodístico de la voz 'gitano' y otras voces derivadas y afines*", which received the highest rating of the court in May 1985. By then, he had already spent thirty-two years to the development of the doctoral thesis "*El expediente general de gitanos*", which would published by the Complutense University of Madrid in 1992. A monumental and comprehensive documentation gave an account of the support that the legislation granted to the harassment and marginalization of a community that refused, for centuries already, to lose its identity signs. Research rebuilds and rescues from the shameful oblivion into which this true contribution to the universal history of infamy and scorn has remained: the most painful episodes suffered by the Roma of Spain in this Spanish Holocaust, the most dramatic moment that was held when the royal and religious power, by mutual agreement, launched in 1749, in the reign of Ferdinand VI, a police operation of extermination that the government of Charles III, sixteen years later, was obliged to bring back, on the path of enlightened despotism.

Belonging since its creation to the Study Group for a European History of Gypsies, coordinated through the Centre de Recherches Tsiganes of the Université René Descartes, Paris-V, Gómez Alfaro published in 1993, in the community collection "Interface", a monographic analysis of his thesis, under the title of *La Gran Redada de Gitanos. España: la prisión general de Gitanos en 1749* (Editorial Presencia Gitana), which has editions in Spanish, French, English (*The Great Gipsy Round-up. Spain: the general prison of Gypsies in 1749*. Presencia Gitana Publishing House), Italian, German, Czech and Romanian. In that same collection he has collaborated on other books on the deportation of Gypsies to the American colonies and the treatment given by the Catholic Church (*La Chiesa spagnola e gli Zingari*, Rome, 2000). La Junta de Andalucía published in 2009 its *Legislación histórica Española dedicada a los Gitanos*. He also published numerous papers in journals and newspapers, and the Asociación de Enseñantes con Gitanos published in 2010 a wide selection of them in the book compendium entitled *Escritos sobre Gitanos*.

Awarded by the Asociación Nacional Presencia Gitana with its Premio Hidalgo in 1980, he held, since September 27, 1994, the Chair of its Advisory Council. He also received the Gaz Kaló Award (2006) of the Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Navarra, the Andaluz Gitano Award that same year, awarded by the Junta de Andalucía, the Ocho de Abril Award of research (2008), from the Instituto de Cultura Gitana, and the Concordia Award (2009), from the Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Cataluña.

Los Gitanos de Córdoba constitutes, among others, the penultimate of his unpublished research works. His death in Benalmádena-Arroyo de la Miel, the last 22 of June, has stopped his last research, very advanced: *Felipe II y los Gitanos*.

The great poet Luis Rosales said that "life is something that we see turning off in our face", and he added that "perhaps we are not only what we were, but also what we should be, what we wanted to be". Nothing more complete and true for Antonio Gómez Alfaro, a Gypsy of breast milk (he was nursed by a Cordovan Gypsy), from heart and passion, that with determination assumed the responsibility, crown of his liberty, to devote most of his time and his life to be what he was, what he should and what he wanted to be, in consistency and in dignity: the most important Spanish historian of the Roma Community of all times. His moral and intellectual honesty, as well as the magisterium of reason in a continuous exercise of analysis and unveiling of the bitter historical episodes suffered, here and in all the states of the old continent, by Roma People (Europeans born before Europe became Europe), will remain and grow, substantial and lasting, among the Roma community and among those, *gadjé* of all colors, who loved and admired him, legatees of his huge and indispensable work, which helps us to be better people and to deserve ourselves.

Blessed be the milk that he breast-fed!

22nd June, 2016

Manuel Martín Ramírez

President of Asociación Nacional Presencia Gitana

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