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Caravaggio's Gypsy Cheats: Naturalism as a Contemporary "Low-Life" Subject

As has already been noted, any overt artistic application of "naturalism" must be considered to be as much a matter of "content"—that is, its intrinsic narrative meaning—as it is of "style," meaning the actual execution of the artist's (or poet's) given subject matter. Whether a painter or a poet, the artist inevitably entertains a certain "attitude," or point of view, towards his subjects, which he himself has chosen, and in *naturalism* that attitude is typically critical. In this case, the literary genre known as "satire" may be taken to be a close relative of painterly naturalism. According to a standard dictionary definition (Noah Webster's), *satire* is "holding abuses, vice, etc., to reprobation or ridicule." Another understood implication of satire is that one is dealing with *contemporary* "abuses, vice, etc."

Among the most important early statements evaluating the apparently unprecedented Caravaggesque *naturalista* mode is one made by Giovanni Pietro Bellori, himself a champion of classicizing or idealistic art, that is, the contemporary antithesis of unvarnished naturalism. In his *Vite de' Pittori, Scultori et Architetti* (1672), Bellori made lively mention of a painting by Caravaggio depicting a "Gypsy Fortune Teller." This canvas must be the so-called *Diseuse de bonne aventure* (ca. 1598), now in the Louvre (Fig. 5).[1] Bellori's anecdotal reference to a hastily recruited Gypsy trickster was inscribed by him within a broader polemic declaiming Caravaggio's commitment to an emphatic naturalism—what he had elsewhere called his temperament-driven, "dark manner" (Fig. 1)—and his concomitant disdain for approved classical models. Bellori's description of Caravaggio's improvised conception of narrative painting makes it appear functionally similar to contemporary still-life painting: a literal recreation of randomly assembled, but specific, "real" objects. A close reading of Bellori's statement also reveals a "sociological" bias: not only is Caravaggio's distasteful subject matter proletarian, that is, "lower class," but it is additionally criminal.

Fig. 5—Caravaggio, *The Gypsy Fortune Teller*, ca. 1598–9. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

According to the Caravaggio Legend initiated by Bellori, the source of his "dark" painterly naturalism is random "chance," something opportunely seen *now*, even "passing in the street."

> Due to his innate genius [claims Bellori], he was therefore meant to be a colorist, thus he paid no heed [to other accepted options], and so he disparaged the most excellent sculptures made by the ancients and Raphael's famous paintings. As the proper object of his brush, he would [instead] only propose Nature herself [*si propone la sola natura per oggetto*]. When he was shown the most famous [ancient] statues designed by Phidias or Glaukias, with the recommendation that he study these, he only gave this reply: merely extending his hand towards a group of [ordinary] men, he emphasized that Nature herself had already provided a superfluity of models. And, to back up his words, he called out to a Gypsy woman [*una Zingana*], who chanced to be passing by on the street [*che passava à caso per istrada*]. Leading her into the inn, he portrayed her in the very act of [falsely] predicting the future, just as these women of the Egyptian race are accustomed to do. He added a youth, who places his gloved hand upon his sword, then extending his other, uncovered, towards her; taking his hand, she closely regards it. And so in these two figures Michele so purely translated truth itself [*tradusse si puramente il vero*] that he confirmed his own claims. Something very similar can be read about the ancient painter Eupompos.... Many were those who imitated Caravaggio's

manner of painting from nature and for that reason they were called "naturalists" [*Naturalisti*].[2]

It was Bellori's observations that initially set up two paradigms for the meaning of Caravaggio's art, at least as it was actually understood by his contemporaries. First, we have the provocative mention of "*Eupompo [il] antico pittore*," so showing that Caravaggio was indeed recognized at that time as having been an active aspirant to ancient glory, and specifically in the way that the professional achievements of "the ancient painters" had been earlier made generally known by Renaissance humanists following their own intense scrutiny of accounts given by ancient authors. This is a theme that will be developed at great length in what follows. Second, and of more immediate interest, we have the matter of Bellori's explicit denomination of Caravaggio as a rampant *Naturalista*.

Some four centuries later, many people still seem to accept Bellori's claim that "as the proper object of his brush, [Caravaggio] would *only* propose Nature herself." Certainly, "naturalism" is the broadly brushed picture of Caravaggio's "revolutionary" contributions to the development of painting that undergraduate students of art history once routinely got from their college textbooks (and I was one of them). Whatever its sources, *naturalism* is now recognized as an essential feature of much Baroque art (and literature), and Caravaggio gets much of the credit for its historical installation.[3] Unfortunately, often the understood assumption now becomes that "realistic" rendering and "humanistic" content perhaps necessarily represent wholly divergent mentalities. Extending this commonplace perception, "realism"—for being intrinsically so legible, or "obvious"—must have then been mostly designed to be inherently accessible to the unlearned masses, what we today call the proletariat. Supposedly to the contrary, all "humanistic" art stood for antithetical values: upper-class and erudite; hence, humanism's proper stylistic mode becomes distanced and mediated "idealism"—and not immediate, proletarian realism. But these polarized notions are essentially stylistic, hence are all on the surface—and so they are mostly misleading. Among other points to be examined here are the ancient texts actually manipulated by the later sixteenth-century humanists, Caravaggio's patrons, and those made it abundantly clear the factor most prized in classical painting was its realistic rendering, *verisimilitude*, what we might today call its "naturalism."[4]

The literary sanction for artistic verisimilitude is truly ancient. Among other sources, sixteenth-century humanists knew the first extended account, as given in Book 18 of the *Iliad*. It was there recounted how Hephaestos—the Roman Vulcan, the god of fire and patron of all the arts and industries, and described by Homer as a supreme artist, a divine practitioner of deception—had forged the marvelous shield of Achilles, upon which he depicted the entire heavens and the earth, and with every imaginable activity shown in both realms.[5] Centuries later, in the third century A.D., Philostratus the Elder stated flatly in the introduction to his *Imagines*, another ancient text read by Caravaggio's contemporaries, that "Painting is imitation [*mimesis*] achieved by the use of colors."[6] Among many laudable examples of

painterly deception, Philostratus cited the praiseworthy illustration of a "spider weaving in a picture nearby," and the clever artist had made its web "exceedingly fine and scarcely visible [and] he wrought the spider itself in so painstaking a fashion." In sum, "All this [illusionism] is the mark of a good craftsman and one skilled in depicting the truth."[7] Speaking of a different example, he exclaimed, "How I have been deceived! I was deluded by the painting into thinking that the figures were not painting but were [instead] real beings ... and you were as much overcome [by the illusion] as I was, and were unable to free yourself from the deception and the stupefaction induced by it."[8] Addressing the same illusionistic issues raised by his grandfather, Philostratus the Younger commented approvingly that

> The deception inherent in [the painter's work] is pleasurable and involves no reproach. To confront [painted] objects which do not exist, [but which are rendered] as though they did exist, and then to be so influenced by them as to believe that they do [indeed] exist, and since no harm can come by it, it is [therefore] a suitable and irreproachable means of providing entertainment.[9]

Wielding the classically-based art-critical concepts and language current among men of their elevated social station, Caravaggio's Roman patrons would have then classified certain of the painter's aggressively naturalistic works as belonging to ancient, hence approved, genres. For instance, in the case of that "*Eupompo antico pittore*" mentioned by Bellori, the understood reference was to Pliny's *Natural History* (XXXIV, 61), where one reads that when Eupompos, a fourth-century B.C. Greek master painter, "was asked which of his predecessors he followed, he only pointed to a crowd of men, and said that one ought to imitate nature itself, and not another artist."[10] In fact, throughout his biography Bellori constantly makes understood references to certain passages in Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23–79), and he needed not explicitly cite his source, since by that time all the Roman cognoscenti were thoroughly familiar with the *Natural History*. Since Caravaggio was quoted as stating his preferred models were also a "*moltitudine di huomini*"—"a crowd of men"—apparently the painter also knew this passage from Pliny's often-cited encyclopedia. As recent scholarship acknowledges, no text fascinated the humanists more, from the fifteenth century onwards, than did Pliny's *Natural History* and it remained for them the richest source of information about the arts in antiquity.[11] As we shall see, particularly this was the case with Pliny's references to the ancient prestige enjoyed by still-life, and even so-called "low-life" painting.

In this particular case, however, Caravaggio's subject-matter—Gypsies (Fig. 5)—was one that very much belonged to the present moment, the end of the sixteenth century. According to three apparently reliable, more or less contemporary sources—Giulio Mancini, Giovanni Baglione, and Pietro Bellori (as just quoted)—Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio had specifically painted Gypsies, an outsider people now calling themselves *Rom*. Oddly enough, modern art historians have not vigorously pursued the possible implications of this kind of pseudo-ethnic subject matter.[12] The purpose of what follows is two-fold. First, I wish to substantiate the "ethnic"

conditions provoking these statements, mainly through the internal evidence of Caravaggio's paintings, and also by other kinds of external and corroborating, contemporary evidence. A principal motivation is the historical observation made in 1983 by Howard Hibbard: "No artist before Caravaggio had painted a Gypsy fortune-teller as an exclusive subject."[13] But, as one may now query, why did it suddenly seem, around 1595, worthwhile to deal with such apparently unprecedented ethnic subject matter?[14] By addressing that question, which is very much one of now-forgotten contemporary "realities," I wish to convey some idea of the intrinsic cultural significance of Gypsies as the subject of genre paintings executed toward the beginning of the seventeenth century by artists all over Europe, many of whom are, in fact, now commonly called "Caravaggisti."

Caravaggio was certainly an artist responsive to the world around him, and the larger context pertaining to his novel kind of "urban-underworld" iconography was described by Fernand Braudel in his massive historical study of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean world:

> Italy was completely overrun with delinquents, vagabonds and beggars, all characters designed for literary fame [and, for instance, just as they were portrayed in Giacinto Nobili's *Il vagabundo* (Venice, 1627)].... Energetic measures were taken against the vagabonds [:] this lazy, good-for-nothing fraternity which spend workdays gambling, wallowing in all the vices, "destroying their goods and what is more their souls." Gamble they certainly did—but then so did everyone else. Anything served as a pretext for a wager.... This game of cops and robbers, of respectable township versus vagrant, had no beginning and no end: it was a continuous spectacle, a structure of the times.... In March 1590 [for instance], there were expelled from Rome in a week, "le vagabondi, *zingari*, sgherri e bravazzi": the vagabonds, *Gypsies*, cut-throats and bravos.[15]

A larger intention here is to recreate the likely immediate reactions of a typical contemporary viewer around 1600 towards *any* depiction of Gypsies as such, no matter whether conceived (initially) by Caravaggio—or by any of the later *caravaggisti*. As was recently shown by Paul Holberton, artistic renderings of Gypsies had actually become fairly frequent since the late fifteenth century. Besides Giorgione's *Tempesta* (ca. 1510, Venice, Accademia), a painting actually described then by Marcantonio Michiel to have included a "*zingana*" (a Gypsy woman), there were many prints of these foreign peoples; the iconographic innovation begins around 1480 with the *Gypsy Family* print series designed by the "Housebook Master," and later including engravings by the likes of Albrecht Dürer, Nicoletto da Modena, Jacopo de' Barbari, Hans Burgkmair, and so forth.[16] Nevertheless, the significant point is that *then*, as Holberton points out, Gypsies were identified in a rather positive way, that is as exemplars of a pseudo–Edenic life-style identified with what modern scholarship calls "Soft Primitivism."[17]

As I will now demonstrate, the situation was rather different over a century later, in Caravaggio's time; by then, and as is demonstrated by the textual evidence which will be presented here, the overriding interpretation of the Gypsy life-style had become largely negative, *in malo*. Much later, however, the Gypsies came to

acquire wholly different connotations, as they then became the prototypes for a distinctly modern lifestyle, "Bohemianism," a new, post–Romantic variation put on to the legendary Soft Primitivist lifestyle. And, long after Caravaggio's demise, that is the kind of *Bohemianism* now exclusively accorded to the mostly mythologized Modern Artist.

First we may attend to the documentary evidence, brief as it is, attesting to clear knowledge by his contemporaries of Caravaggio's conscious choice of *this* distinctive kind of "racial" subject matter, Gypsies, in short. Regarding the single painting mutually described by our three seventeenth-century authors, scholarly opinion presently identifies it as a canvas in the Louvre, variously dated between 1590 and 1595, and now called *The Fortune Teller* (*La diseuse de bonne fortune*: Fig. 5).[18] First, we have the citation by Bellori, as just quoted, which grounded Caravaggio's ethnic appropriation within the prestigious context of ancient "realism." Next, we have a very brief notice inserted into Giovanni Baglione's *Le Vite de' Pittori, Scultori, et Architetti* (1642), with this clearly stating that Caravaggio depicted a Gypsy woman while she tells a youth's fortune: "*effigiò una Zinghera, che dava la ventura ad un giovane con bel colorito.*"[19] A similarly concise remark is found in Giulio Mancini's unfinished manuscript draft for a "*Trattato della Pittura*" (ca. 1620); among various pictures Caravaggio made in Rome during his early twenties, says Mancini, particularly there was "a Gypsy girl who tells a kid his fortune"—"*in particolare una Zingara, che dà la Bonaventura ad un giovanetto.*"[20] Clearly, since the duped *giovanetto* is not a Gypsy, the clueless mark is what Gypsies now call a *gadjo* (plural, *gadjé*).

According to a marginal note following in Mancini's manuscript, "*la zingaretta mostra la sua furbaria con un riso finto nel levar l'anello al giovanotto, et questo la sua semplicità et affetto di libidine verso la vaghezza della zingaretta che le dà la ventura et le leva l'anello.*"[21] Hence, the object of Caravaggio's satire is duplex, including both "the Gypsy girl [*zingaretta*]," specifically the kind who "demonstrates her cunning by faking a smile just as she is stealing a ring," as well as the young *gadjo* dolt, the kind "who demonstrates his simple-mindedness and his sexual desire [*affetto di libidine*]." It may also be observed that the poet Gaspare Murtola included in his *Rime* (1603) a madrigal about Caravaggio's painting, "*Per una cingara del medesimo [Caravaggio].*" Here Murtola mentions the "feigning" and "rapacious" Gypsy woman, so making a comparison between her "magic" and that of the painter, who magically makes her seem "alive and breathing." As the poem stated:

> *Non so qual sia più maga*
> *o la donna [cingara], che fingi,*
> *o tu [Caravaggio] che la dipingi.*
> *Di rapir quella è vaga*
> *coi dolci incanti suoi*
> *il core e 'l sangue a noi.*
> *Tu dipinta, che appare*
> *fai, che viva si veda,*
> *fai, che viva, e spirante altri la creda.*[22]

(I know not which is the greater magician: Either the [Gypsy] woman, whom you are imitating, or you [Caravaggio], who are painting her. She is eager to steal from us, our heart and our blood, with her sweet enchantments. You made her so, painted, so that it seems as though she is seen alive. You make the others believe that she lives and that she breathes.)

According to a modern art historian, Luigi Salerno, one's overall conclusion about works like this should recognize that "*i quadri [giovanili] del Caravaggio furon concepiti come dipinti emblematici e morali*," and that means that these youthful "paintings were conceived by Caravaggio as emblematic and moralizing paintings," and definitely not as genre scenes simply conveying a "*pura imitazione del vero.*"[23] Hence, the sophisticated audience for Murtola's madrigal would have been amused that the devious Gypsy and the emblematic artist shared similarly seductive and magical aims.[24]

As we saw, Bellori was careful to cite Eupompos, a fourth-century B.C. Greek master-painter, who "was asked which of his predecessors he followed, he only pointed to a crowd of men, and said that one ought to imitate nature itself, and [certainly] not another artist." And to prove his Plinian point about the advantage of unpolished naturalism, according to Bellori, Caravaggio chose specifically to render an evidently polemicized "*Zingana ... questa donna di razza Egittiana.*" The "Egyptian" denomination—whence their modern names: *gitanos, tsiganes et gitanes, Ziguener*, and so forth—was part of the migrating Gypsies' self-serving strategy for ingratiating themselves with the *gadzé*. As a Bavarian priest noted in his diary for 1424, "They said that they had been exiled as a sign or remembrance of the flight of Our Lord into Egypt when He was fleeing from Herod, who sought to slay Him. But the common people [in Bavaria] said that they were spies put into the country."[25]

Another fact, notice of which has been completely omitted by art historians, is the evident accuracy of Caravaggio's depiction of his tricky *Zingana-Egittiana*, for a particular detail belonging to her costume reveals to us today two telling insights about her station in life: namely, that, besides being none other than a Gypsy, she is unmarried, but nonetheless sexually experienced, and so she would have been understood to be "available" to the "libidinous" young dupe. According to Jean-Paul Clébert, a leading gypsiologist, "a girl who has 'fallen into sin' [i.e., lost her virginity], even though she may not be pregnant, must wear the traditional [turban-like] head-scarf of the married woman. The scarf [just as shown in Caravaggio's painting: Fig. 5] is then knotted under the chin; to the contrary, *married* women wear it on the nape of the neck."[26] Also a specifically Gypsy fashion accessory is the gaudy turban, the kind belonging (according to an English account of 1514) to an "Egypcyan" woman, who could tell marvelous things simply by looking into a person's hand, and another Englishman tells us (in 1548) how these exotic fortune-tellers typically had "their heades rouled in pleasauntes [linen] and typpets [ribbons] like the Egipcians, embroudered with golde."[27]

This identification of specifically Gypsy kinds of occupations and sexuality, and just as these traits were depicted in Caravaggio's painting (Fig. 5), can be further complemented with roughly contemporaneous verbal documentation. In this

case, we may observe another detail relating to the distinctive manner in which Caravaggio's pretty *Zingana* is clothed. In a costume book (*Habiti antichi e moderni*) published by Cesare Vecellio in 1590, it is noted that Gypsy women uniquely "bind a cloak of woollen cloth over the shoulder, passing it under the other arm, and it is long enough to reach down to their feet." In Italy, that cloak was often specifically called a *schiavina*, defined as "a long garment of coarse wool, worn by wanderers and hermits." Gypsy women had, in fact, long since been noted for their distinctive, poncho-like garments; around 1430, a Parisian diarist observed that "their entire costume consists of an old, very coarse, blanket which is attached to their shoulder by a strip of cloth or a string; all they have to wear beneath is a poor bodice or shirt."[28] A typically Gypsy cloak, also the same kind of Gypsy turban as is shown in Caravaggio's painting (Fig. 5), appears in a drawing (datable around 1536) portraying an "Egyptian healer" (or quack) which bears this credulous caption: "*L'Égyptienne quy rendist santé par l'art de médicine au roy d'Escoce abandonné des médicins*"—"The Egyptian woman who made the King of Scotland healthy with her medicinal arts after he had been abandoned by his own physicians" (and that Scottish king was most likely James V, who was in France for eight months, in 1536–7).[29]

Because of his attentive portrayal of these particular iconographic details—obviously an essential feature by which to convey a very particularized characterization of a Gypsy trickster, that is, as one whose intentions are as much libidinous as larcenous—it appears that Caravaggio was paying close attention to then-significant ethnographic details. If so, then he was thinking a bit like a kind of scientist that would not be invented for centuries, the modern anthropologist.

Even though none of the contemporary sources so identify it, I would similarly assign a specifically Gypsy content to Caravaggio's well-known rendering (ca. 1595) of a pair of exclusively *male*, so-called "Card Sharps" ("*I bari*," now exhibited in Fort Worth, Texas, at the Kimbell Art Museum: Fig. 6).[30] Howard Hibbard has recognized the essential novelty of Caravaggio's presentation: "There had been scenes of card playing in art before Caravaggio, especially in the North, but there are no models for his large and focused treatment of a scene of cheating." He also suspected (in 1983) that the "bearded, bug-eyed conspirator behind [the dupe is] possibly a Gypsy, who signals to the young cardsharp in the foreground."[31] Later (in 1989), Barry Wind provided an interesting symbolic reading of the playing cards in Caravaggio's genre scene, according to which "the cards held by the cheating *bravo* promise victory, but the unhappy combination of the ace and the four on the table adumbrates the unhappy upshot of gambling."[32]

In short, we may now go much further, now specifically identifying this painting (Fig. 6) as representing another depiction of—or mute polemic about—Gypsies because, just as in the other scene showing a "*zingaretta furba*" (Fig. 5), the underlying thematic is (again) *cheating*.[33] In this case, the treatment seems satirical, one even bordering on caricature, and the underlying message becomes something like "Innocents beware!" For this conclusion, we have the testimony of a sixteenth-century authority, Girolamo Cardano, who called all such card games "ambush":

Fig. 6—Caravaggio, *Card Sharps*, ca. 1595. Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum.

"There is a difference from play with dice, because the latter is open, whereas play with cards takes place from *ambush*, for they are hidden." Cardano then goes on to enumerate several species of card cheating, including the use of marked decks, mirrors, and also kibitzers, such as the decidedly swarthy, cheating spy shown in Caravaggio's painting (Fig. 6).[34]

Bellori, although making no reference whatsoever to the presence of any "Zingani" within Caravaggio's composition, gives the fullest description of the painting, also noting that this was originally "in the apartment of Cardinal Antonio Barberini." According to Bellori, the picture

> represents three half-length figures of men playing cards [*trè mezze figure ad un giuoco di carte*]. Here Caravaggio portrayed a simple-minded teenager [*un giovinetto semplice*] holding the playing cards in his hands and dressed in a dark suit; his head is well drawn from life [*ben ritratta dal vivo*]. Shown opposite him in profile, a fraudulent youth [*un giovine fraudolente*] leans with one hand upon the gaming table and, with the other hand, which is held behind him, he draws a fake card [*una carta falsa*] from his belt. A third figure near the [duped] boy looks at the markings on the cards and, extending three fingers, he reveals them to his crony. The [swarthy] accomplice leans on the table, so exposing his [left] shoulder to the light; he wears a yellow doublet striped with black bands [*giubbone giallo listato di fascie nere*].

Next, Bellori proceeds to put this work into its art-historical context:

> There is nothing imagined in the coloring of this work [*nè finto è il colore nel-l'imitatione*]. These are the first strokes from Caravaggio's brush with tempered shadows [*con oscuri temperati*] that are clearly indebted to the manner of Giorgione. By acclaiming Caravaggio's new style, Prospero Orsi [a fellow painter] augmented the renown of his works among the leading persons of the court—to his own advantage as well as to that of Caravaggio. *The Card Game* was [accordingly] bought by Cardinal del Monte, who was such an enthusiastic lover of paintings that he helped Caravaggio out of his difficulties by giving him am honored place within his own household [and Bellori then lists some paintings later commissioned by the Cardinal from Caravaggio].[35]

But what is the physical evidence allowing us to call these particular male "car sharps" *Zingani* or *Zingheri*, that is, Gypsies? In the first place, the measuremen (99 × 107 cm.) of the *Card Sharps* painting (Fig. 6), as now exhibited in Fort Worth would have originally closely corresponded to those of the *Fortune Teller* (Fig. 5) i Paris (99 × 131 cm., which, besides being wider, now includes a later addition of ca. 12 cm. canvas strip at the top). This suggests that they may have originally bee conceived as pendants, mutually linked by size as well as by shared "Gypsy-ness and with that communal trait being perhaps framed within the standard narrativ context of "The Prodigal Son."[36] Something like actual proof to this effect is th physical situation of the two paintings (Figs. 5, 6) within Cardinal del Monte Palazzo Madama; according to the posthumous inventory of his art collection draw up in 1627, they then had identical measurements and frames—"*palmi cinque co cornice negra*"—and both were exhibited in the same room, evidently on facing walls. Secondly, we have the internal evidence of the two crooks' pigmentation, since pa ticularly the signaling cheat standing in the rear is made to look swarthy in com parison with his pale-faced, *gadjo* dupe; likewise, this dark visaged *baro* is shown t be bearded in the Gypsy manner. In this case, Caravaggio is really mocking th foppish victim, a modern Prodigal Son, one who is too dim-witted to recogniz automatically the inherently fraudulent nature of his "*bari*" companions as "*zi gani*."

Another telling internal detail is that of costume, particularly what Bellor called a caftan-like jacket, that is, the "doublet striped with black bands." Both cheats, the devious youth with the faked cards and the bearded kibitzer, have long even outsize, feathers stuck into their hat-bands (in the Louvre canvas the now-out sized plume in the hat belonging to the tricked *gadjo* youth was originally minus cule).[38] This distinctive kind of large hat with huge plumes appears, for instance in a series of four contemporary prints by Jacques Callot depicting wandering Gyp sies, whom he calls *Les Bohémiens* (Fig. 7).[39] Even more to the point is the fact tha "*les Tsiganes*," here as rendered by Callot—both men and women alike, and just a they were depicted contemporaneously in Caravaggio's two Gypsy paintings (Figs 5, 6)—possess essentially the same appearance as when they were first described b Europeans in the fifteenth century.

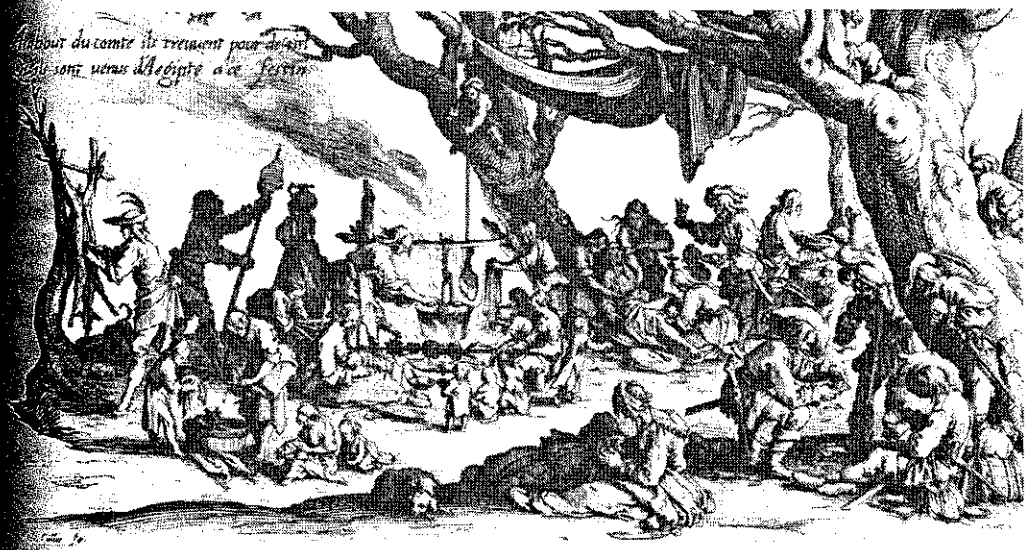

Fig. 7—Jacques Callot, "Gypsies Camping." Plate 4 from *Les Bohémiens*," ca. 1620.

One of the earliest records of their arrival in northern Europe, in Arras, dates from 1421, and according to this eye-witness report: "The men [as, for instance, shown in Fig. 6] are swarthy [*noirs*], with long, black hair, and their beards are so thick that their faces can scarcely be seen. The women [and as shown in Fig. 5] have cloths wrapped around their heads in the manner of turbans, and they wear a chemise made of slit cloth which reveals their neck in front and behind they have a kind of heavy drapery attached to their shoulders" (Fig. 8).[40] A detail from Callot's print (Fig. 7), which overall depicts, according to its inscription, those Gypsies who claimed "*qu'ils sont venus d'Aegipte*," reveals four scruffy "Bohemian cheats" gambling under a tree. The one in the rear has the same kind of feathered headdress, dark visage, scraggly beard and even (apparently) the "jacket striped with black bands" seen worn by the swarthy cheat in Caravaggio's paining (Fig. 6). Regarding all such "*trompeurs bohémiens*," Callot's timely warning is: "*Gardez vos blancs, vos testons, et pistolles*!"—"Watch out for your farthings, your pence and shillings!"

The distinctively Gypsy aspect and attire, male and female, was in marked contrast to normal European appearance and dress. According to an expert on these people, François de Vaux de Foletier, in contrast to the Gypsies, "in western Europe at that time, [non–Gypsy] men were clean shaven and had their hair cut short to the nape; [non–Gypsy] women did not wear hanging dresses, and ear-rings were as yet unknown." The dress of Gypsy *men* did, however, tend increasingly to look like standard European male fashions. Nonetheless, it did still remain somewhat distinctive, and in a way closely resembling the attire of Caravaggio's painting of a devious pair of conniving "Card Sharps" (Fig. 6). Moreover, the same pattern of male clothing can even be seen in some late medieval tapestries, where, according to Vaux de Foletier, one could already observe about Gypsy men that, "unless they were swarthy [*s'ils n'avaient la figure sombre*], had black hair, wore a black beard, or

sometimes white turbans and caftans and striped blankets with braided bord they could not otherwise be distinguished from the [non–Gypsy] populations am whom they lived."[41]

Besides noting how these swarthy-skinned peoples were commonly known France as "the Black Folk, cooked by the sun" (*les gens noirs, cuits au soleil*), this sa scholar also explains the geographical allusion, 'Egypt," contained in one of lori's comments on the painter's tricky female subject, namely that Caravaggio's " *gana, [chi la] ritrasse in atto di predire l'avventure, [era] come sogliono queste donne di ra Egittiana*." According to Vaux de Foletier,

> One of the most commonly told stories about the Gypsies is fortune-telling [*la bonne aventure*], as told by a young fortune-teller [Fig. 5], who is sometimes accompanied by an old woman with a dark and wrinkled face. Then the Gypsies were often called "Egyptians" [*Egyptiens*], and so they are included in Biblical scenes set in Egypt, dressed just as [non–Gypsy] artists could then see them roaming around Europe. According to one legend, since some Egyptians had refused their hospitality to the Holy Family [during the flight into Egypt], their descendents were condemned in perpetuity to a wandering life.[42]

Now that we have made a reasonable case for identifying the ethnography Caravaggio's Gypsy cheats (qua *Zingari*)—meaning either as wily female "Fortu Tellers" (Fig. 5), or as male "Card Sharps" (Fig. 6), and one does so by means their pigmentation and coiffure as much as by their costumes[43]—we may now p ceed to cite the historical texts best conveying a typically *negative* manner in whi nearly any contemporary would have most likely have reacted to these kinds pointedly painted *Zingari*. So doing, we might restore the original audience-reacti to a now-veiled, but once obvious, original artistic intention. We may also rec how this was a fairly common genre; Caravaggio was certainly not the only pain who found patrons eager to purchase his (specifically, as I believe) Gypsy cheats, fact, dozens of such compositions have survived to the present day.[44] A prelimina conclusion is that not only was there a nascent European market in Caravaggi time for artistic depictions of Gypsy cheats (*zingani fraudolenti*), but additionally th there must have already existed an ethnic bias, even a firmly entrenched *racial p udice*, to propel it initially.

To frame the matter within the anachronistic (or "politically correct") ter nology of our own postmodernist age, that is, four centuries later, it may be su gested that *then*, that is, around 1600, Gypsies collectively represented t stereotypical "Alien Other." To frame the argument less anachronistically, Rom contemporaries saw the period around 1600 as one of social deviancy and gene malfeasance; in short, it was an age plagued by *il banditismo*.[45] This is the local co text for Caravaggio's Gypsy iconographic innovation, what Jean-Paul Cuzin ca "*un thème qui était 'dans l'air'*," meaning that of "*le trompeur et le trompé*" (Figs. 5, and, in the larger sense, all those Gypsy tricksters generically stand for "*le canaill* the riffraff rabble, including many deviant *gadjé*.[46] In this case, a standard "Cheati Gypsy" thematic seems particularly significant for intuiting an understood mea

ing once belonging to Caravaggio's "Bohemian" compositions, additionally providing a useful insight into certain prejudices generally infecting the European mind at this time.[47]

Our first piece of supporting evidence is both pictorial and strictly contemporary to Caravaggio's depictions of distinctively garbed, female "Fortunetellers" (and, most likely, also some foppish male "Card Sharps"); this essential document, to which we may again refer (Figs. 7, 8), is the set of four engraved plates constituting Callot's iconographic suite called *Les Bohémiens* (ca. 1620).[48] It turns out that the inscriptions placed upon each of these four prints effectively summarize (*in nuce*) contemporary European attitudes (*in malo*) regarding those Bohemians-Gypsies: "*Ces pauvres gueux pleins de bonadventures / Ne portent rien que des Choses futures*"—"These impoverished beggars are full of fortune-telling / They only carry with them [non-existent] things belonging to the future" (Plate 1); "*Ne voilà pas de braves messagers / Qui vont errants par pays estrangers*"—"These are not honest messengers / Whom you see wandering through foreign lands" (Plate 2); "*Vous que prenez plaisir en leurs parolles / Gardez vos blancs, vos testons, et pistolles*"—"All you who would take pleasure in their words / Watch out for your farthings, your pence and shillings" (Plate 3); "*Au bout du conte ils treuvent pour destin / Qu'ils sont venus d'Aegipte à ce festin*"—"The end of the story has them meeting with their fate / Which is that they have come from Egypt to attend this [squalid] feast" (Plate 4: Figs. 7, 8).

Callot's self-evident prejudices were anything but novel at that time and in that place. In fact, the first official repression of Gypsy bands in France is dated 1539, and in 1560 the States General of Orléans called upon "all those imposters known by the name of Bohemians or Egyptians to leave the Kingdom under the penalty of the galleys." In 1607, Henri IV extended the expulsion orders against the Gypsies and, under Louis XIII, the edict of 1539 was renewed, now specifying that the "Bohemians" must leave France as a whole within two months, but had to exit from Paris itself within only two hours. In 1660, a law promulgated by Louis XIV again ordered that "those who are called Bohemians or Egyptians, or others of their following, shall leave the Kingdom within one month, under the penalty of the galleys or other corporal punishment." Similarly, in 1682, the same monarch observed that "the Kings [of France], our predecessors, have taken great care to purge their estates of vagabonds and the people called 'Gypsy'." Since the "Bohemian" problem obviously still remained, and even after 140 years of persecutions, drastic new measures seemed called for, now broadly directed against "all those who are called Bohemians or Egyptians, likewise their women and children." One solution was immediately "to send [all] the said [male] Gypsies to the galleys without other form of trial," and since the female "Egyptians" themselves were already notorious in their own right (as shown in Fig. 5), "lest the said women continue to roam about, living like Bohemians, we shall have them flogged and banished out of the Kingdom, and all this [likewise] is to be done without any other form of trial."[49]

All the best evidence indicates that Gypsies were wholly unknown to western Europeans before the early fifteenth century, and 1417 seems the year when they first attracted attention west of the Balkans.[50] Nonetheless, practically as soon as

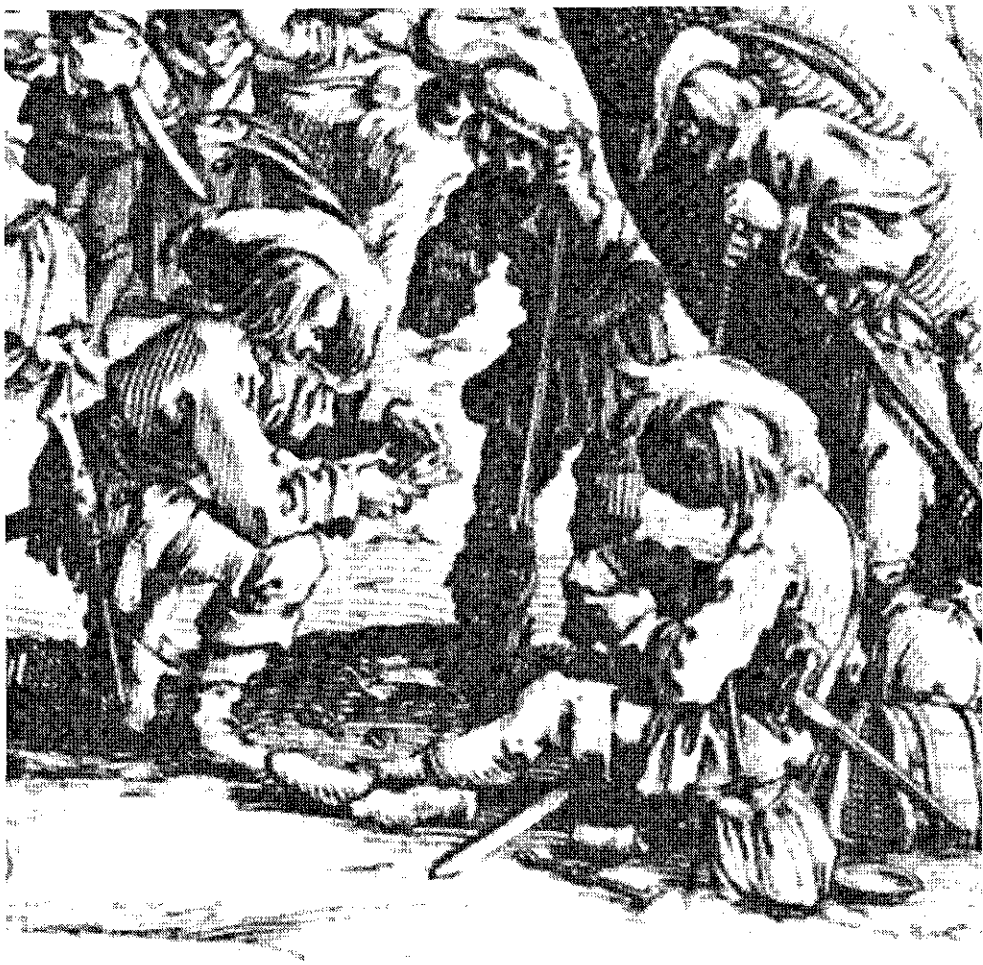

Fig. 8—Callot, *"Trompeurs bohémiens"* (detail of Fig. 7).

they made their initial appearance on the European scene, they were thereafter be consistently viewed in a prejudicial manner. The kind of prejudices summariz in the captions to Callot's prints (Figs. 7, 8), and evidently in Caravaggio's Gy paintings as well (Figs. 5, 6), were long since become a commonplace. In fact, a G man scholar-occultist, Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, said much t same thing in his skeptical treatise, *De incertitudine et vanitate omnium scientiarum artium* (ca. 1540), namely that Gypsies

> lead a vagabond existence everywhere on earth; they camp outside towns, in the fields and at crossroads, and there they set up their huts and tents. They depend for a living upon highway robbery, stealing, cheating, and barter; they amuse people with fortune-telling, purporting to tell the future by palmistry and other impostures [Figs. 5, 6].... They like to beg from door to door; they get bored with their homes and seek out strangers, and then the local citizens flee.[51]

And much the same was stated in Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia universalis* (1550), including a woodcut of a Gypsy man and woman, the latter wearing a turban and a striped robe.[52] Referring to certain peoples "*quos vulgo Züginer vocant*," Münster states that the "Gypsies, as they are commonly called," had arrived in Germany in 1417, and they were immediately thereafter recognized to be "principally thieves"—"*furtis in primis intenti*," and that means "the women as much as the men"—"*nam viris ex furto foeminarum victus est.*"[53]

Unfortunately, by 1550, such invective had become conventional wisdom. Much earlier, in 1439, Johann Thurmaier, had already referred to the Gypsies as

> that thievish race of men, the dregs and bilge-water of various peoples.... By dint of theft, robbery and fortune-telling, they seek their sustenance with impunity. They relate, falsely, that they are from Egypt, and that they are constrained by their rulers [*superis*] to exile, and they shamelessly feign to be expiating, by a seven-year banishment, the sins of their forefathers, who turned away the Blessed Virgin with the child Jesus [on the flight into Egypt].... They are traitors and spies.... Everywhere they lurk about, to thieve, and to cheat.[54]

A perhaps even more vitriolic opinion was voiced by an English contemporary of Caravaggio; according to Thomas Dekker (in his *Lanthorne and Candle-light*, 1608), the Gypsies:

> were a people more scattered than Jewes and more hated: beggarly in apparell, barbarous in condition, beastly in behaviour, and bloudy if they meete advantage. A man that sees them would sweare they had all the yellow Jawndis, or that they were Tawny Moores bastardes, for no Red oaker man [that is, a Native-American "Indian"] carries a face of more filthy complexion.[55]

As early as 1530, in England the "People callynge themselfes Egyptians" were described as fortune-tellers (as shown in Fig. 5), the bad kind, who

> used greate subtyll and crafty meanes to deceyve the People, berying them in Hande [or persuading them] that they by Palmestre coulde telle Menne and Womens Fortunes and so many tymes by crafte and subtyltie had deceyved the People of theyr Money and also had comytted many and haynous Felonyes and Robberies to the greate Hurte and Deceyte of the People that they had comen amonge.[56]

Viewed in art-historical perspective, the language of this English legislative "Act of 1530" now seems almost like an ekphrasis of the mute libretto propelling Caravaggio's *Diseuse de bonne fortune* (Fig. 5).

We may now pinpoint the fact of anti–Gypsy prejudice in Caravaggio's homeland, Italy. There, the first Gypsies apparently arrived in Bologna by 1422, and as led by their chieftain, "Duke" Michaël of Egypt, and L. A. Muratori later transcribed some records from that time in his *Cronica di Bologna* (1749). As we see from these accounts, already they were infamous—and meaning since the very first

moment of their long European, also Italian, sojourn—as "fortunetellers," "thieves," and "cheats." As one may now read in a transcription of the fifteenth-century *Bolognese Chronicle,*

> Many people went very respectfully to seek Duke Michael's wife in order to have their future told by her. In actual fact, many things happened, with some [Bolognese] learning what would really be their lot. None, in any case, returned [from the fortuneteller: Fig. 5] without having their purse or some item of clothing stolen. The women of those [Gypsy] people went through the town between six and eight o'clock, displayed their [chiromancer] talents in the houses of the burghers, then seizing everything upon which they could lay their hands. Others went into shops as if to make purchases, but, in fact, they only went there to steal. Throughout the whole of Bologna there was petty thievery on a vast scale. As a result of this, it was proclaimed that, as well as excommunication, a fine of fifty livres would be imposed on whomever engaged in any business with those [Gypsy] foreigners....
>
> These vagabonds are the cleverest thieves in the world. When there was nothing more to be stolen [in Bologna], then they left for Rome. It must be again noted that there is no worse brood then these savages. Thin and black, they eat like swine. The women go about in chemises, hardly covering themselves. They wear earrings and much other [vulgar] finery. One of them gave birth to a child in the public square, and only three days later she began once again to travel about with the others.[57]

Gypsies (as *Zingare*) additionally appeared to aghast contemporary Italian observers typically as rootless and whining beggars, arriving without invitation from distant, foreign and strange, regions ("*di paesi lontani, e di stran loco*"); according to, for instance, a carnival song composed in a corrupt Italian regional dialect commonly attributed to the Gypsies:

> *Deh qualche caritate a noi meschine*
> *prive d'ogni conforto e pellegrine.*
> *Zingare siam, come vedete, tutte,*
> *per gran forza di pioggie, e neve, strutte.*
> *Ad habitar con voi siam qui condutte*
> *con questi figli in braccio, sì meschine,*
> *di paesi lontani, e di stran loco.*[58]

("Come, give us, wretched wanderers deprived of every comfort, some charity. We are all, just as you can see, Gypsies, devastated by the great force of rain and snow. We have been guided here to live with you, coming from distant lands and strange places with these, oh so very wretched, children held in our arms.")

A similarly self-dramatizing plaint, and as again given in garbled "Gypsy Italian," was recorded by Bastiani di Francesco Lanaiuolo in his farce, *Contentione d un villano e d'una zingana* (Siena, 1520):

> *Dui vi contenti tutte,*
> *le belle paparutte:*

un puca caritate: tu ventura ti vu dire...
Semu natu nellu Egiptu;
nostru corpu abbiam afflitu
in stenti et in affanni,
consumandu i mesi et anni
a la neve, a l'acque et venti,
giurnu e notte in tanti stenti:
nostra casa è una grutta.[59]

("May God content you all, you pretty geese [*le belle paparutte*: ready for plucking?]: a bit of charity please; I'd like to tell your fortune.... We were born in Egypt; our bodies have been distressed by toil and travail; consumed by months and years of exposure to snows, rains and torments, night and day we have spent under such sufferings: our dwelling place is a cave.")

Such reiterated plaints of "poverty" even became fully absorbed into the mainstream of art-historical literature by Caravaggio's time. As one could then read in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (a standard artist's manual, and most likely owned by Caravaggio), the very figure of "Povertà" is a literally crooked (in both senses) Gypsy woman!

POVERTÀ [è una] donna vestita come una Zingara, co'l collo torto, in atto di domandare elemosina; in cima del capo terrà un'uccello chiamato Codazinzola, overo squassacoda [o gazza]. Racconta il Valeriano, che volendo gli Egittii significar un'huomo di estrema povertà, dispingevano questo'uccello; perche, come dice ancora Eliano, è animale di tanto poco vigore, che non si può far il nido, & per questo va facendo l'ova ne'nidi altrui. Rappresentasi la povertà, in forma di Zingara, per non si trovare la più meschina generatione di questa, la quale non hà ne robba, ne nobiltà, ne gusto, ne speranza di cosa alcuna, che possa dare una particella di quel la felicità, che è fine della vita politica.[60]

("POVERTY is a woman dressed like a Gypsy, with her neck twisted in the act of demanding alms; perched on the top of her head she will have a bird called "Codazinzola," a magpie. Valeriano [an emblematic author] recounts how when the Egyptians wished to symbolize a person in extreme poverty they would picture this bird, and they did so because, as Elian later stated, this is a beast with scant vigor, one who can't even make its own nest; hence it steals the eggs from the nests of the other birds. *Poverty* is represented in the form of a *Gypsy*, for one can not find a more stingy bunch than these, nor any more prone to theft; without any honor nor pleasure, nor hope of anything whatsoever that could provide even a tiny bit of joy, they represent the very end of public life.")

Mostly, the invective against the Gypsies stresses their "alien" nature, especially their "lawlessness." In his *Commentari Urbani* (1506), Raffaele Maffei da Volturno characterizes these perpetual wanderers as Orientals and "beastly" to boot; the Gypsies, he says, "live scattered through the world, especially in Italy, [surviving] in the manner of beasts, without law, without arts, and only by predicting the future."[61] In Francesco D'Ambra's play *Il Furto* (1544, "Theft"), the villain-hero is aptly named "*Zingano*" (Gypsy); styled "*il maggior bravo d'Italia*," he proves that point

by cheating his patrons of all their money. More to the specific point o
ing the cheaters in Caravaggio's paintings (Figs. 5, 6) as Gypsies is Giordan
near-contemporary play, *Candelaio* (1582); in this work, both the characte
of the Gypsy and the equally stereotypical simplicity of the *gadjo* dupe were
As he must, the Gypsy fortune-teller limned in by Bruno, a scamp calle
muré," performs as a complete scoundrel, and his magical utterances are
nonsense only intended to impress, also confuse. His clearly stated goal is
sition of money through trickery; in this he succeeded at the expense of
Bonafacio, the superstitious Bartolomeno, and the pedant Manfurio, ga
Further attesting to the Italians' persistent fascination with the deviou
much popular material, the kind belonging to an informal theatrical n
called "*zingaresche*," was gathered and published in Caravaggio's time, for
in Vicenza (1612), Venice (1619), and Milan (1619); more than fifty *zingar*
are known today, most being written in the seventeenth century.[63]

We can now directly situate this kind of "*zingaresche Commedia dell'Art*
within the milieu of Cardinal del Monte, Caravaggio's patron and the p
sessor of what now appears to have been a complementary pairing of "
garesche": "The Gypsy Fortune-Teller" (Fig. 5), plus Caravaggio's "Card Sh
6). In 1589, at the sumptuous wedding celebrations held for Ferdinando
and Christine of Lorraine, the "Gelosi," a long-established and distingui
pany of actors, had performed *La Zingara* ("The Gypsy Woman"), Gigi
Giancarli's 1545 comedy. Here, the Gypsy plays a central (and stereotype
kidnapper, temptress, and wily thief. The Gelosi were court entertainers
were almost certainly invited to the Medici wedding by Del Monte, who
self present for the performance. The Gypsy was played by Vittoria Pisim
acting was described by spectator with wonder: "Whoever has not hear
perform the 'Gypsy Woman,' that is, to see her imitate the language an
of Gypsies, has not yet seen nor heard something that is truly rare and m
The costumes belonging to Giancarli's play became known through
French engravings, the "*Receuil de Froissard*," and these Caravaggio may
known.[64]

Along with a fascination for everything *zingaresche*, there came
reprisals in Italy, all of which illuminate the conventional, indeed ort
"politically correct"), meanings once attached to contemporary treatme
tricky Gypsies.[65] The first documented series of ordinances against the p
Gypsies on Venetian territory begin in 1540. These were, however, p
Milan—Caravaggio's homeland—in 1493 by edicts ordering the immed
sion of all Gypsies, and non-compliers were threatened with the gallows; t
given were that they had become "too numerous" and that they were a
ruffians": a "*grande multitudine [di] banditi roffiani e cerrotani.*" In 1506, t
decrees declared Gypsies to be a public menace, and their punishment
the "*tratto di corda*" (hoisting the victim by his arms tied behind his ba
proclamations followed in Milan in 1517, 1523, and 1534, when all "*Eg*
mente appellati Cingali," were now threatened with hanging.[66] In 1588,

decade before the execution of Caravaggio's *Fortune Teller* (Fig. 5), and then his *Card Sharps* (Fig. 6), the Gypsies were defined by a Milanese legislator, Carlo d'Aragona, in a wholly negative way as "*gente pessima, infame, data solo alle rapine, a i furti ad ogni sorte di mali.*" The same terminology—"disgraceful folk, the worst, the kind only given to rape, theft and all manner of evil"—was faithfully repeated in 1640 by Cardinal Albornoz.[67]

Beginning in 1535, the Papal States followed suit, banning Gypsies from the towns of Jesi and Senigallia; the ban became general to all the Papal States, meaning Rome also, in 1552. One edict particularly spoke of the general wave of scandal, disorder and theft caused by Gypsies; they were in the habit of coming to Rome and camping in the grottoes, vineyards and surrounding countryside. They were not, however, just viewed as simple poachers, but were also observed to be notorious horse thieves and cattle rustlers; thus they were all labeled "*banditi in perpetuo.*" Throughout the sixteenth century, Roman trial records (*Processi del Tribunale criminale del Governatore*) tediously enumerate instances of thefts and other crimes, including homicide, by Gypsies, also even recording accusations regarding their outlandish mode of costume and egregious life-style.[68] The major conclusion was that they were generally given over to banditry, "*che si sono dati al banditismo,*" and that many were repeated offenders: "*alcuni sono già stati in carcere due o tre volte e anche più.*"[69]

In Italy, the end result was that, according to researcher Maria Zuccon, the mere mention of their name, Gypsies, was sufficient to damn them in the public mind, and none would dare defend them: "*Il loro solo nome [Zingari] era sufficiente a renderli colpevoli di tutti i delitti, e a far si che fossero attaccati e processati senza che nessuno osasse difenderli.*"[70] However, since Caravaggio is himself cited in Roman police records at least thirteen times, between 1600 and 1606, we may assume him to have been at least a bit sympathetic to the similar plight of Gypsy habitual offenders.[71]

Soon after their descent upon Bologna in 1427, the Gypsies made their initial, similarly unwelcome, appearance in Paris—and this epiphany provides the "French connection" specifically enhancing our understanding of the manner of Callot's depiction of the "Bohemian-Egyptians" (Figs. 7, 8). Their physical aspect—and their plentiful misdeeds—were carefully recorded in an anonymous private diary, *Le Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris*, covering the years between 1405 and 1449. According to our aghast bourgeois chronicler,

> On Sunday, August 17 [1427], twelve penitents, as they called themselves, came to Paris: included were a "duke," a "count," and ten men, all on horseback, who said that they were Christians and natives of lower Egypt.... They had already been travelling for five years before their arrival in Paris. The common herd, a hundred and or a hundred and twenty [Gypsy] men, women, and children, did not arrive until after the feast day of Saint John the Baptist.... In truth, their children were incredibly shrewd; and the majority, indeed nearly all of them, had their ears pierced, and in each they wore one or two silver rings. They said this was the fashion in their country [Egypt]. The men were very dark and their hair was kinky. The women were the ugliest and swarthiest one could ever see. They had sores [or perhaps tattoos] on their faces and black hair like a horse's tail. They were clad in *flaussaie*, a coarse

material attached to the shoulder by a thick band of cloth or cord; their only linen was an old blouse or shirt. In short, they were the poorest creatures ever seen coming into France within living memory. In spite of their poverty, there were among them witches, who, by looking at people's hands, revealed the past [to them] and foretold the future [Fig. 5]. They sowed discord in many households by telling the husband "your wife has made you a cuckold," and to his wife [they said] "your husband has deceived you." But the worst was that, as their patter went on, either by magic, and with the help of the devil, or by their own [manual] dexterity, they emptied into their own purses those of their [gullible] listeners.[72]

One hundred and twenty years later, that kind of wholly negative perc of Gypsies remained basically unaltered, perhaps had even gotten worse. A eye-witness report, this time from a *gadjo* (non–Gypsy) who actually traveled a with the swarthy "Bohemians," brings us right up to the period of Caravaggi *tune-Teller* (Fig. 5) and his *Card Sharps* (Fig. 6, likely also Gypsies). As was t Jean Jullieron, *dit* "Pechon de Ruby," in his picaresque semi-autobiography, *Généreuse des Gueux, Mercelots et Boesmiens* (1596), he thought himself fortu have been included in a roving band of "*égyptiens ou boesmiens*," a larcenous who had become notorious in their neighborhood for playing "havoc, pillagi picking locks everywhere." As if burglary were not by itself sufficient, "they counterfeit money industriously, and they play all kinds of gambling games 6). Hence, Pechon de Ruby's popular 1596 publication may be now reckon specific inspiration for Callot's engraved suite of *Les Bohémiens* appearing son decades later (Figs. 7, 8).[73]

In his narrative Pechon additionally recalled instances of what were pr typical set-tos with duped *gadjé* townspeople, gullible "villagers who began t ble with our [Gypsy] companions, and [of course!] they lost their money." A ing to quasi-ethnographic conventions fixed throughout Europe by the year while Gypsy men were to be shown as tricky card-players (and just as shown 6), in a similarly stereotypical fashion their women were to rendered dupli tellers of faked fortunes (or practicing that "*predire l'avventure*" illustrated in I As Pechon tartly recalled, "while some of our men played cards, their women stealing, and, in truth, they did find booty." Whether Gypsy men or women they might not "win at gambling, they will earn by fortune-telling."[74]

Whereas many more such reports of this sort, wholly *in malo*, could be cited, the results would by now become merely redundant.[75] In sum, aroun even a slightly sophisticated connoisseur probably would have viewed certai tures composed by Caravaggio and his followers—meaning those depictin tinctively garbed female "Fortune Tellers" and foppish male "Card Sharps" 5, 6)—in a certain way, that is, as a matter of *pre*-judgment, meaning with *pre* Accordingly, he (or she) would have quickly recognized—as we seem not able so today—that those exotic but patently devious types were none other than sies," either male or female. The essential ethnic identification, itself represe a racist stereotype, would have been quickly made on the basis of then-fa details of physiognomy and costume, also including an obligatory reference

quintessential Gypsy activity, "cheating." Once our archetypal contemporary viewer made his own easy identification of such strictly "Caravaggesque" iconography, then he would have automatically reacted to that kind of polemicized imagery with either mockery, or even with an immediate rush of emotion, at times perhaps something actually approaching fear and loathing.

A complementary issue, perhaps demanding a monograph-length study in itself to be fully resolved, would deal with the correlation drawn by contemporaries between the wandering Gypsy "Other" and the *juif errant* "Other." In this case, the "Wandering Jew" motif clearly has historical precedence; thus it serves as a kind of pre-established, typically pejorative, model for the later epiphany of the Gypsy.[76] In this case, sadly we may recall the comment made by Thomas Dekker in 1608: the Gypsies "were a people more scattered than Jewes and more hated." And one also recalls that, centuries later, Hitler's racial-based extermination programs were directed as much against *Gypsies* as *Jews*—and with equally lethal consequences. Presently—that is, after September 11, 2001—a new target for ethnic opprobium and fear has appeared: swarthy folk who appear to be Muslim. Having said that, we now finally appreciate the fact of an *emotional power*, for better or for worse, once inherent to Caravaggio's carefully rendered—also contemporary, hence "naturalistic"—depictions of the "cunning Gypsies" (Figs. 5, 6).

To conclude, a final art-historical observation about the larger cultural impact of the Gypsies may be made, stressing their essential role in the formulation of a distinctive legend of strictly "modernist" creative mentality. We recall their common nomenclature in Callot's time, "*bohémien*,"[77] with this designation erroneously placing their physical origins in Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), meaning far from the Hindu Kush (later to become the lair of Osama bin Laden, another stereotypical, swarthy "Alien Other"). Presently, that term, *bohémien*, is taken to refer both to the modern avant-garde artists' marginalized situation and to their typically prestigious, and defiantly independent, life-style. The first written references to a special, identifiable kind of modernist "avant-garde" modus operandi—"*bohémien*," with its adherents dwelling in a wholly psychic nation known as "*la Bohème*"—only appear during the 1830s in France. As a typical expression of then-reigning Romantic attitudes, the token signs of this quintessential, perhaps enviable, modernist life-style were—and even then—obsessive dedication to art appreciation and individual creativity, the predominance (even worship) of youth, and a quasi-religious commitment to the marginalized, impoverished and rootless, also stridently anti-bourgeois, mode of the *demi-monde*.

The crucial step may be attributed to Goethe; in 1773, his stormy tragedy *Götz von Berlichingen* had cast a Gypsy chieftain in the role of the "noble savage" and, as Angus Fraser observes, "soon it became a cliché for an author to contrast Gypsy life with the shams of ordinary [bourgeois] existence."[78] However, the first writer explicitly to connect contemporary *artistes* to the historical *bohémiens* (and specifically meaning Gypsies) was probably Félix Pyat, in his *Nouveau tableau de Paris au XIXme siècle* (1834). Pyat then noted the obsession of contemporary *artistes bohémiens* with living "with other ideas and other behavior; this isolates them from the world,

makes them alien and bizarre, puts them outside the law, beyond the reaches of society. They are the Bohemians [*les bohémiens*] of the present day." As Jerrold Seigel sums up Pyat's disapproving autopsy, "the designation 'Bohemian' located them [the modern pseudo–Gypsies] in a twilight zone between ingenuity and criminality."[79]

All of this modernist, now standard, "Bohemianism" rhetorically recreated, in short, the anti-bourgeois kind of Gypsy life-style that was long since known from the historical records we have just examined (also proving that "ethnic cleansing" is nothing new in European legislation). And the Gypsy life-style is still with us, from the Beatniks to the Hippies and Punks (and grungy post–Punks), all of whom are (ironically) *gadjé*—and mostly "bourgeois" to boot. Also with us today are the authentic Gypsies; never *gadjé* and rarely bourgeois, they are perhaps even more marginalized now—especially in post–Communist Europe—than they were back in Caravaggio's day (Figs. 5–8).[80]

Having so demonstrated Caravaggio's employment of "painterly naturalism" as a tangible means for representing a specifically *contemporary* application of social "satire," we may now proceed to reveal its complementary aspect: as a contemporary approximation to the humanist canons of "realism" as extolled in writings describing *ancient* works of art.