ROMANI | LANGUAGE

Factsheets on Romani Language: ROMANI – An Indo-Aryan Language of Europe
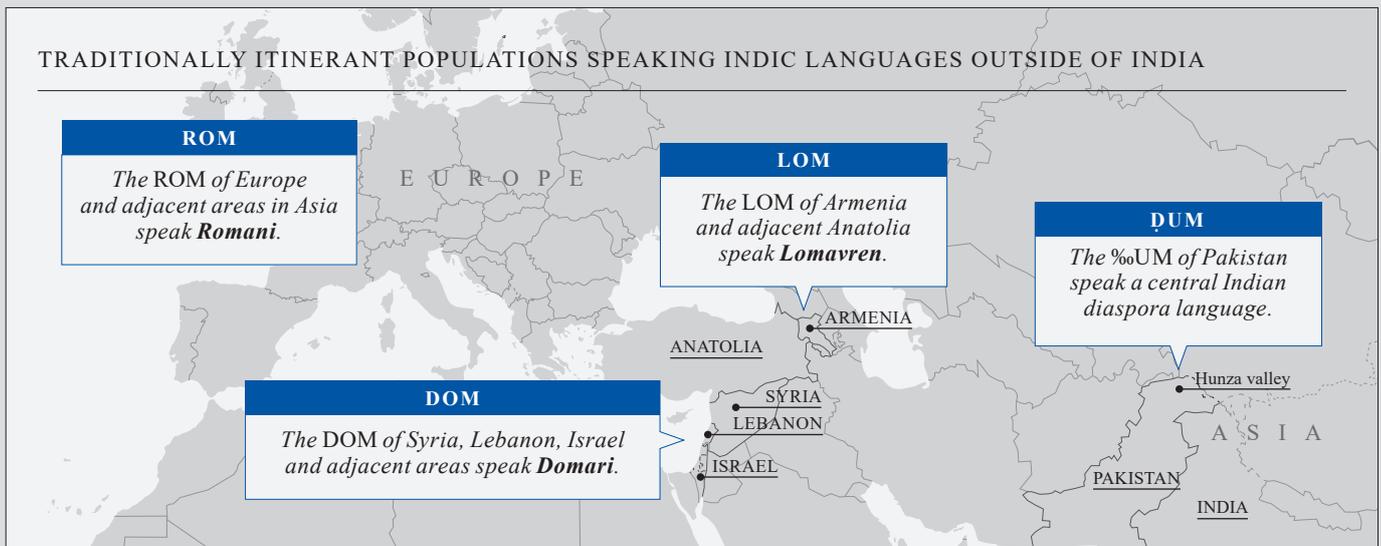
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Romani-Project Graz / Dieter W. Halwachs

Romani and **Romanes** are the general names for the language of the Roma, Sinti, Kale and all other ethnic groups in Europe who speak or spoke an Indic, or respectively Indo-Aryan language. These population groups are collectively called "Gypsies", a term mostly used in a derogative sense.

– **Romanes** is derived from an adverb: *Džanes romanes?* 'Do you know/speak "Romani"?' Romanes is used almost exclusively in German speaking areas.

– **Romani** is derived from an adjective: *Romani čhib* 'Romani tongue, Romani language'. Romani – often spelled Romany in English texts– is used internationally. Moreover, most names in New-Indo-Aryan languages, to whom Romani is genetically affiliated, end in -i: Assami, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Maharathi, Panjabi, etc. The international name thus simultaneously implies its kinship to the language group.

– **Roman** is used by the Roma of Burgenland for their variety, while the Sinti refer to their varieties as **Rómanes** (with a stress on the o) or **Sintitikes**.

In the following we exclusively use the term Romani. Single Romani varieties are labelled as Burgenland Romani, Kalderaš Romani, Lovara Romani, Sepečides Romani, Sinti Romani, Ursari Romani etc.
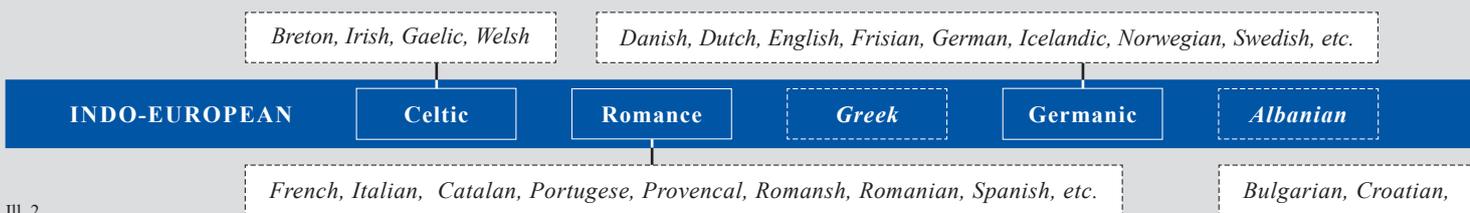
TRADITIONALLY ITINERANT POPULATIONS SPEAKING INDIC LANGUAGES OUTSIDE OF INDIA

ROM
The ROM *of Europe and adjacent areas in Asia speak* **Romani***.*

LOM
The LOM *of Armenia and adjacent Anatolia speak* **Lomavren***.*

ḌUM
The ḌUM *of Pakistan speak a central Indian diaspora language.*

DOM
The DOM *of Syria, Lebanon, Israel and adjacent areas speak* **Domari***.*

EUROPE

ARMENIA

ANATOLIA

SYRIA
LEBANON
ISRAEL

Hunza valley

ASIA

PAKISTAN

INDIA

Ill. 1

ROMANI AS A MEMBER OF THE INDO-EUROPEAN FAMILY OF LANGUAGES

	Breton, Irish, Gaelic, Welsh		*Danish, Dutch, English, Frisian, German, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, etc.*		
INDO-EUROPEAN	**Celtic**	**Romance**	*Greek*	**Germanic**	*Albanian*

French, Italian, Catalan, Portugese, Provencal, Romansh, Romanian, Spanish, etc.

Bulgarian, Croatian,

Ill. 2

ROMA, SINTI, KALE, ETC.[1]

The ethnonym *Roma* or *Řoma* – ř = /ʀ/ – is the plural of *Rom* / *Řom* 'husband, man'. Most groups use *rom* and *romni* as kinship terms to mean 'husband' and 'wife' respectively, but also as general designations for persons who are members of the group – *rom* '(Romani) man', *romni* '(Romani) woman'. As Sinte Romani lacks the latter meanings Sinti do not accept Roma as a name for the collective, 'the Romani people'. To counteract a widespread error it has to be noted that *rom* does not mean 'human being'. Instead the general use of the noun *manuš* has been observed in Romani.

The designation *Romas* is also frequent. It is based on the wrong assumption of *Roma* as a singular. As *Romas* is also used by competent speakers of Romani in statements in English, German, etc. the term has come to be generally understood and accepted and is thus to be interpreted as a neologism.

Some groups have adopted other labels as well: *Romaničal, Kale, Manuš* and *Sinti* are some examples of self-appellations used by Romani-speaking populations. *Sinti* is used by those subgroups who entered the German speaking area at a relatively early point in time. The *Sinti* of France refer to themselves as *Manuš* resp. *Manouche*. *Romanichal* is found primarily among British groups. Some of them also claim *Gypsies* as their self-designation. *Kale* 'blacks' is used by the *Calé* who have been living for a long time on the Iberian Peninsular and by the *Kaale* of Scandinavia residing in Finland and Sweden. *Roma* is used as self-designation among all the groups living in central and eastern Europe or,

respectively, by those who emigrated in the 19th and 20th centuries from central and eastern Europe to western Europe and overseas.

Other group-specific names were adopted from other languages. These are often based on traditional occupations, such as in *Kalderaš* 'tinners' from Romanian *căldărar*, *Čurari* 'sieve-makers' from Romanian *ciurar*, *Ursari* 'bear-leaders' from Romanian *ursar*, *Sepeči* 'basket-weavers' from Turkish *sepetçi*, *Bugurdži* 'drill-makers' from Turkish *bugurcu*, *Arli* or *Erli* 'settled' from Turkish *yerli* and *Lovara* 'horse-dealers' from Hungarian *ló* 'horse'.

Non-Roma are usually referred to as *gadže – gadžo* 'non-Romani man', *gadži* 'non-Romani woman'. This is an ancient designation for outsiders which is also found among the Middle Eastern *Dom* as *kaddža*, among the Armenian

EXAMPLES WHICH ILLUSTRATE TURNER'S ASSUMPTION OF AN EARLY MIGRATION OF THE ROMA WITHIN INDIA

Innovations shared by Romani with central Indic languages such as Hindi: these regular sound changes both suggest a relation to Sanskrit and a longer residence of Romani speakers in the central Indian area:

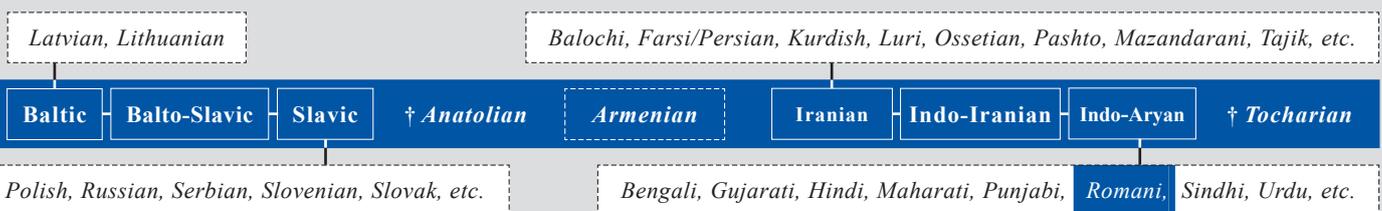|	'tree'	'blood'
Sanskrit:	þ kí a	ra kt a
Romani:	ru kh	ra t
Hindi:	rū kh	rā t ā

Differences between Romani and central Indic languages: these are conservative features of Romani as opposed to central Indian innovations, which support the assumption of an early emigration from central India:

	'grape'	'good'
Sanskrit:	dr ākíā	mi íÝ a
Romani:	dr akh	mi št o
Hindi:	d ākh	mī th ā

Parallels to innovations in northwest Indic languages such as Sindhi, which are not found in the languages of central India, suggest that over a longer period of time the speakers of Romani resided in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent:

	'bent'	'tooth'
Sanskrit:	va &k uë	da nt aë
Romani:	ba ng o	da nd
Sindhi:	wi &g u	ôa nd u
Hindi:	bã k a:	dã t

Ill. 3

Latvian, Lithuanian			Balochi, Farsi/Persian, Kurdish, Luri, Ossetian, Pashto, Mazandarani, Tajik, etc.			
Baltic	**Balto-Slavic**	**Slavic**	† *Anatolian*	*Armenian*	**Iranian**	**Indo-Iranian**	**Indo-Aryan**	† *Tocharian*

Czech, Polish, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, Slovak, etc.		Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Maharati, Punjabi,	Romani,	Sindhi, Urdu, etc.

Lom as *kača*, and among the different groups of *Ḍom* in India as *kājwā*, *kajjā*, or *kājarō*. In some regions, more specific names are found. For example, in the Balkans, Muslims (including Turks and Albanians) are referred to by the Roma as *xoraxane* or *koraxane*. Slavs are referred to as *das*, based on the same original Indic word for 'slave' – a designation inspired by the similarity between Greek *sklavos* 'slave' and *slavos* 'Slav'.

ROM, LOM, DOM[2]

Romani is the only Indo-Aryan language used exclusively in Europe since the Middle Ages. It is part of the phenomenon of the so called Indic diaspora languages spoken by travelling communities of Indian origin outside of India. The name *Rom* or *Řom* has related cognates in the names employed by other travelling (peripatetic) communities that speak Indic languages or use a special vocabulary derived from Indic: the *Lom* of the Caucasus and Anatolia insert Indic vocabulary into *Lomavren*, their variety of Armenian. The *Dom* of the Near East, originally metalworkers and entertainers, speak *Domari*, one of the most conservative modern Indo-Aryan languages. In the Hunza valley in the north of Pakistan, the population called the *Ḍum*, who are also metalworkers and musicians, speak a central Indic (i.e. not a local) language. [Ill. 1]

Based on the systematicity of sound changes attested in these languages, we know with a fair degree of certainty that these names all derive from the Indian term *ḍom*. In various parts of India itself, groups known as *Ḍom* are castes of commercial nomads. References to the *Ḍom* are made already by a number of medieval Indian writers such as Alberuni (~1020 CE), the grammarian Hemachandra (~1120 CE), and the Brahmin historian of Kashmir, Kalhana (~1150 CE). They all describe the *Ḍom* as a low-status caste whose typical trades included sweeping, making music, juggling, metal work and basket weaving, in some areas seasonal farm-work. Similar occupations are still reported for the ‰om in modern India. The self-designation *ḍom > řom* thus appears to have originally been a caste-designation, used in different regions by different populations with similar types of trades.

ROMANI-LINGUISTICS

Up until the end of the 18th century, there was nothing but wildest speculations about the origin and the language of the Roma. In his 1697 paper titled "De civitate Norimbergensis commentario", Johann Christoph Wagenseil characteristically describes Romani as a mixture of German, Jiddish, Hebrew, and phantasmagorical words, claiming that:

The first Gypsies were German-born Jews.

Even in 1781, the weekly journal "Neueste Mannigfaltigkeiten" published in Temeşvar still reads:

Out of the mixing of Ethiopians, Troglodites and Egyptians, there evolved an individual, migrating folk, which has retained something of all three nations and whose descendents can be assumed to be today's Gypsies.

The development of comparative methods in linguistics helped to clarify the origin of the Roma. Serious discussion of this topic started with Johann Christian Christoph Rüdiger, who in his study of 1782, titled "Von der Sprache und Herkunft der Zigeuner aus Indien" he proves the relationship between Romani and Indic languages. [Ill. 2]

Critisizing prevailing discriminatory and romanticising prejudices, he calls the miserable living conditions of the Roma

a political inconsistency, which to tolerate our enlightened century should be ashamed of.

In 1783, one year after Rüdiger's text, Grellmann's book titled "Die Zigeuner" was published. It became the most widely known and read work of its time and had a significant influence on public opinion. Grellmann continues Rüdiger's studies on a broad basis; his linguistic explanations are profound. Other than Rüdiger, however, he uncritically adopts the stereotypical and discriminatory prejudices of his time.

Sixty years later, Pott's study "Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien" marks another milestone in the linguistic discussion of Romani. Pott specifies its origin and thus the origin of the Roma. Accordingly, Romani is to be attributed to the northern Indic languages and

thus holds a blood relation to the proud Sanskrit.

It is worth mentioning the work of the Slavicist Franz Miklosich as another milestone of Romani linguistics. In two series of articles published between 1872 and 1881, Romani is i.a. classified into different dialects. Miklosich organizes the language into thirteen idioms based on linguistic influences of the various host countries, differentiating between Greek, Romanian, Hungarian and other dialects.

In 1926, Ralph L. Turner publishes an article called "The Position of Romani in Indo-Aryan", in which he compares Romani, Sanskrit and various New-Indo-Aryan languages, concluding that there must have been an early relationship of Romani to the central group of Indo-Aryan languages. Thus, the ancestors of the Roma must have lived in the central Indian area, from where they migrated to the northwest of India. There, they must have stayed for a longer period of time, as Romani also shares innovations with New-Indo-Aryan languages of the northwest.

During the second half of the 20th century scientific interest in Romani intensifies, manifesting itself in both quantity and quality of the publications. With Yaron Matras' comprehensive description "Romani: a linguistic introduction", which was published in 2002, Romani linguistics finally establishes itself as an integral part of modern linguistics.

LITERATURE

Two books available in English which offer an overview of Romani language are proposed for further reading:
Peter Bakker et al. (2000) *What is the Romani Language?* Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, which is an easy to read introduction intended for all those who have an interest in the language;
Yaron Matras (2002) *Romani: A linguistic introduction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, which is an scientific introduction dealing with all details of Romani in the best way possible.

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