

Gothenburg Romani Festival
Programme, Romano Center i Väst

Romani, histories,
ethnicity and
identity:
contested
narratives around
Romani and
Traveller groups
in Europe



Using a variety of terms, to describe communities, including:

- 'Romani' to refer to the widest communities of people who self-identify as 'Roma', 'Romanichal', 'Romer', 'Romanlar', 'Mitrip', and other terms, who share a common understanding of origins and ancestry related to the Indian lands on the tenth and eleventh centuries Common Era (CE) and a shared notion of 'belonging', a relationship to the Romani language (in its various dialects) and to a series of practices and customs that are connected to cleanliness codes, known as 'mahrimé', that describe or proscribe particular behaviours and relationships between Romani and non-Romani communities and within Romani communities;
- 'Gypsy' used to describe the historical communities or individuals that chroniclers, commentators and historians observed as undifferentiated groups in their recording of encounters between Romani and non-Romani worlds;
- 'Gypsy' (and the translated terms), such as used as a term to describe those communities that self-identify as such, i.e. English and Welsh Gypsies;
- 'Traveller' used as a term to describe those communities that self-identify as such (including Romani Travellers), and Irish, Scottish or other groups of Travellers that are associated with particular national states;
- Other terms will be described in context; it is important to remember that terminology is contextual, many groups in Europe reject the term 'Gypsy' as pejorative in the present day

Histories and times...

“Kaç saat?”

Romani history as ‘entanglement’

- Entangled History is both a historical perspective and a concept in historiography, that adopts a trans-cultural perspective as the main focus, whilst centred on the interconnectedness of communities and social groupings. The underlying argument is that nations, empires, and civilisations cannot be exclusive and exhaustive units and categories of historiography. As entities, they themselves were formed through processes of interaction and global circulation, in which they are related to each other’s development...
- The “Spatial Turn” in history, the idea of the nation as geography, as landscape into which the ‘other’ is placed, grounding national identity in the present landscape, as the past, with projections onto indigenous peoples, nomads and diasporas, with their associated landscapes, i.e. the ‘wandering Gypsy’ in an idealised rural environment...
- The fundamental epistemological challenges of post-colonial studies, as well as their critique of the political, economic, social and cultural order of the colonial and post-colonial world. As a concept that examines historic power structures and their constitution in space, entangled history participates in critically re-assessing modernity...

Time and the 'Other'

- All the historical writing that we might define as comprising Romani historiography has been done so in the framework of western European notions of time, sequence and events, the basis of which, it has been argued, is to be found in the Neolithic impulse, the dramatic metaphysical shift from cyclical measurement to linear progression (Martin, 1993:53 - 74). Defined, classified, measured and documented in notions of sacred (Judeo-Christian, Muslim, Armenian, Byzantine) or secular (post-Darwinian) time, the study of the historical **Gypsies** has been bounded by the underlying conceptions of how they correspond or differ as a group to non-Gypsy structures, including the quantification and management of one sequence of events that has come to predominate over all others. In effect the construction, or reconstruction, of the Romani past, has resulted in a great deal that reflects the present (whichever present the author occupied or occupies; Burton, 1988:420 - 433)...
- The “time of the Gypsies” is in fact *allochronic* time (placing the object of study in another, non-European time), one that does not acknowledge the contemporaneous relationships of power and inequality that exists between researcher and researched, of those who observe and then write about them, and those observed. In this is the distance and separateness that Johannes Fabian describes as a product of European scholarship, marked out in non-Romani terms (Fabian, 1983:144-47). The question here is one of how the imposition of non-Gypsy time has impacted upon Romani peoples and, following that, whether it is important and necessary to both recognise this fundamental organising principle and ask whether there is a particular Romani metaphysic that is being distorted through this process of imposition of western European time and scholarship...

- The 'Road of the Roma' is presented within this *allochronic* time, but within the narrative of nation-states (see the later map), reaffirming the dominant trope of 'other', 'outsider';
- The narrative of journey is also presented in terms of a movement within tropes of 'eastern' and 'western' migration, reinforcing the notion of constant direction towards progress, modernism and particular civilisation...

Maps...

And their inaccuracies

Romani people, modern Europe



Romani migration into Europe

- When did Romani people first arrive in recorded history?
- When did Romani people first arrive in Europe?
- When did Romani people first arrive in Scandinavia?
- When did Romani people first arrive in England?

‘New Romani History’: Hancock, Marsh and Acton

- As a result of Ghaznavid invasion and the conquest of north western and north central Indian lands (997-1030 CE), large numbers of Hindu warriors, servitors and auxiliaries were taken as captives, to become the core of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna’s *ghulâm* slave-soldiers, his personal retinue and standing army, which balanced the tribal levy of the traditional Turkish *ghazi* warriors that made up the forces that raided the Multan, Panjab and Ganges regions, for enormous booty and slaves.
- Arab chroniclers and historians at the court of Mahmud, describe Ghazna as an Indian city, with even the mosque built by captured Hindu artisans and craftspeople decorated with motifs and sculpture that reflected this influence. It was known as the ‘Mosque of the Bride of Heaven’, a name unique in Islam and was criticised by orthodox *Sunni* clerics as idolatrous, because of the Hindu influences.
- The Hindu *ghulams* were used by Mahmud in circumstances where he was unwilling to send Muslim troops against Muslim, Jewish and Christian populations in revolt, such as the rebellion at Nishapur (c. 1027 CE)
- The Saldjûk defeat of the Ghaznavids at Dandanquan (1040 CE) forced the remaining units of the Ghaznavid army, severely decapitated by the slaughter of the warriors themselves, across the Iranian plateau (Khorasan) and into the eastern *thematika* of the Byzantine Empire, to make a stand at Ani, the Baghratid capital of the Armenian kingdom and then through Anatolia to Constantinople (1045 CE). Michael the Armenian, writes in his *Chronicle of Edessa* (Urfa), that eastern Anatolia was reduced by the Saldjûk attacks to ‘a vagabond nation’, with hundreds of refugees on the roads heading west from war-torn territories...

Byzantine Empire 1050 AD



Romani identity and origins: what are they?

The presence of Romani people, called *Atsinganoi* and *Aiguptoi* (*Egyptians*) by the Byzantines, is well documented from the 12th to 15th centuries, as they worked as soothsayers, fortune-tellers, snake-charmers, acrobats and entertainers in Constantinople. They called themselves *Romitoi* or ‘sons of the Romans’ (the modern Turkish ‘Romanlar’). They were also present as acrobats, tumblers, puppeteers, shoe-makers, basket-makers, knife-makers and metal-workers in the lands of what are now Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia. On the Ionian Islands of Lefkada and Zakynthos they were organised into war-bands (1440’s) under license from the Venetian Republic and granted a measure of autonomy and tax privileges, though they do not seem to have been part of the Byzantine Emperor’s armies (unlike the later Ottoman period), nor are there any records of ‘Gypsies’ as popular musicians in Byzantium, suggesting that economically this was not an opportunity. There is one intriguing possibility that they may have been dancers at the court of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055 CE), depicted upon the so-called ‘Crown of Monomachos’ in the Hungarian National Museum.



The Crown of Monomachos



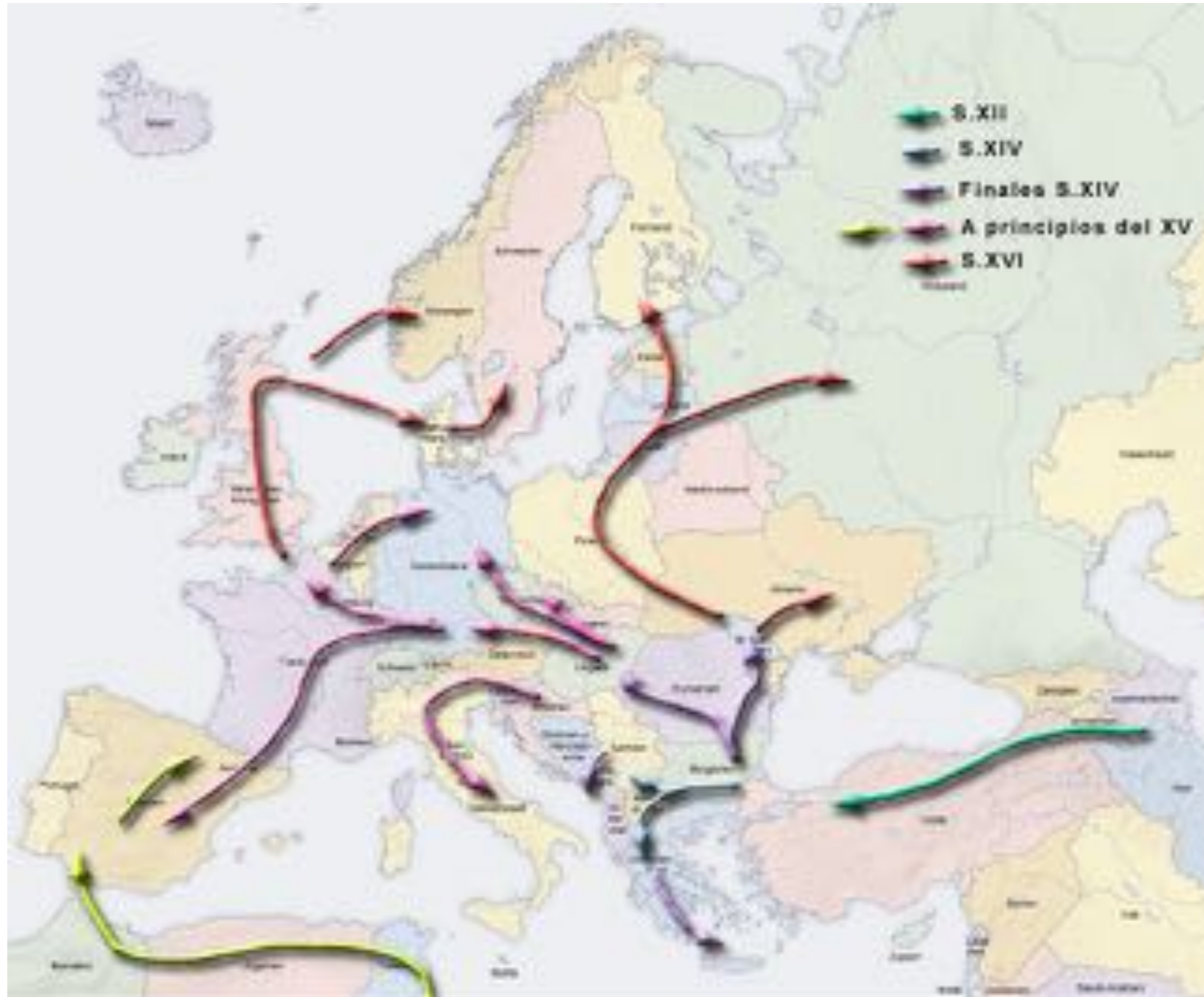
Romanlar, Domlar and Lomlar in mediaeval Anatolia: who were they?



The first documented arrival of ‘Gypsies’ (Romani, Domari, Lom and Gezgin) in Anatolia is from the eleventh century, when a group described as *Atsinganoi*, “a Sarmatian (i.e. from Samaria, in Syria) people” and the descendants of the Gnostic Simon the Magician (associated with the cult of Trojan Helen, in Syria, in the 2nd century CE) came to the court of the Byzantine Basileus (emperor) Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055 CE) c.1050 AD. They were asked by the emperor to help him rid the royal hunting park, the *Philopation*, outside of the Blachernai Palace (Tekfür Sarayi - close to modern-day Sulukule) of wild beasts that were killing the deer and other game animals. The *Atsinganoi* obliged, but when they returned to the emperor to claim payment, the monk (later Saint) George the Athonite of Iviron, denounced them as sorcerers and, making the sign of the cross over a dog they had ‘charmed’ (poisoned), revived the dog and challenged them as false prophets and teachers of ‘devilish things’, associated with the 9th century AD group of heretics from Phrygia (the *Atsinganoi*) and called ‘Egyptians’ in the Greek sources (Balsomon, c.1150; Psellus, c.1050).

Romani language and identity can be traced, therefore to Byzantium c.1100 (Swedish identity and language can be established from 1225 with the ‘Västgötalagen’ distinct from Danish and Old Norse)

A map of Romani migration 1100 to 1600



From Fundación Secretariado Gitano's online resources

Romer och Romanifolket (Resande) i Sverige

- Romani people arrive, in recorded history, in Sweden, 1512, from Finland according to the Stockholm Chronicle (c.1525) and have been in Scandinavia, from Scotland to Denmark in the early fifteenth century, since c.1417. For many centuries, the Romani people in Sweden were known as 'Tattere', no longer an acceptable term as it contains connotations of 'vagabond', 'thief' and 'liar' (this is not the case in Norway, where the term is often used as a ethnonym, or the UK, where we use 'Gypsy' as a reclaimed term). In modern Swedish, there are many words of Romani origin (Carling, 2018), usually used as slang or stylized speech amongst certain groups. Scandoromani (sometimes called 'Tavringar Romanës) is the modern descendant of the language spoken by Romani people in Sweden five hundred years ago
 - *Tjej*, meaning "girl" in Swedish (originally slang, but now a popular alternative to the older *flicka*)
 - *Puffra*, meaning "gun" in Swedish (used to be common slang)
 - *Hak*, meaning "place" (as in "joint" or "establishment") in Swedish (common slang)
 - *Vischan*, meaning "the countryside" (as in boondocks or rural areas) in Swedish (common slang)

Scandoromani (Tavringar Romanës)

Romani words in Swedish slang		
Suffix -is (English -ish) (From Romani and/or Latin)	Ball 'good'	ludder 'talk, fight'
Suffix -o (English -o) Millo 'tweak'	Beng 'stupid'	lycke 'dog'
Fylo 'drunkard'	Beddo 'well dressed person'	Kamma 'have'
	Bomma 'smoke'	Kinesa 'sleep over'
	Bänster 'money'	Klämma 'eat'
	Dabb 'fight, hit'	Kocka 'be'
	Ding 'stupid'	Kova 'money'
	Facka 'work'	Lättjo 'fun'
	Ful 'crap, bad quality'	Lex '1000-kronor bill'
	Gaja 'woman'	Macka 'sandwich'
	Gulla 'money'	Mängra 'work'
	Haja 'understand'	Paj 'broken'
	Jacka 'look'	Pucko 'stupid'
		Rappa 'talk nonsense'

Gerd Carling 2018

A screenshot from Dr. Gerd Carling's website, <https://gerdcarling.se>; see also Carling, Gerd, Lenny Lindell & Gilbert Ambrazaitis (2014) *Scandoromani. Remnants of a Mixed Language*, Boston, USA: Brill

Romani people and Anglo-Saxon England



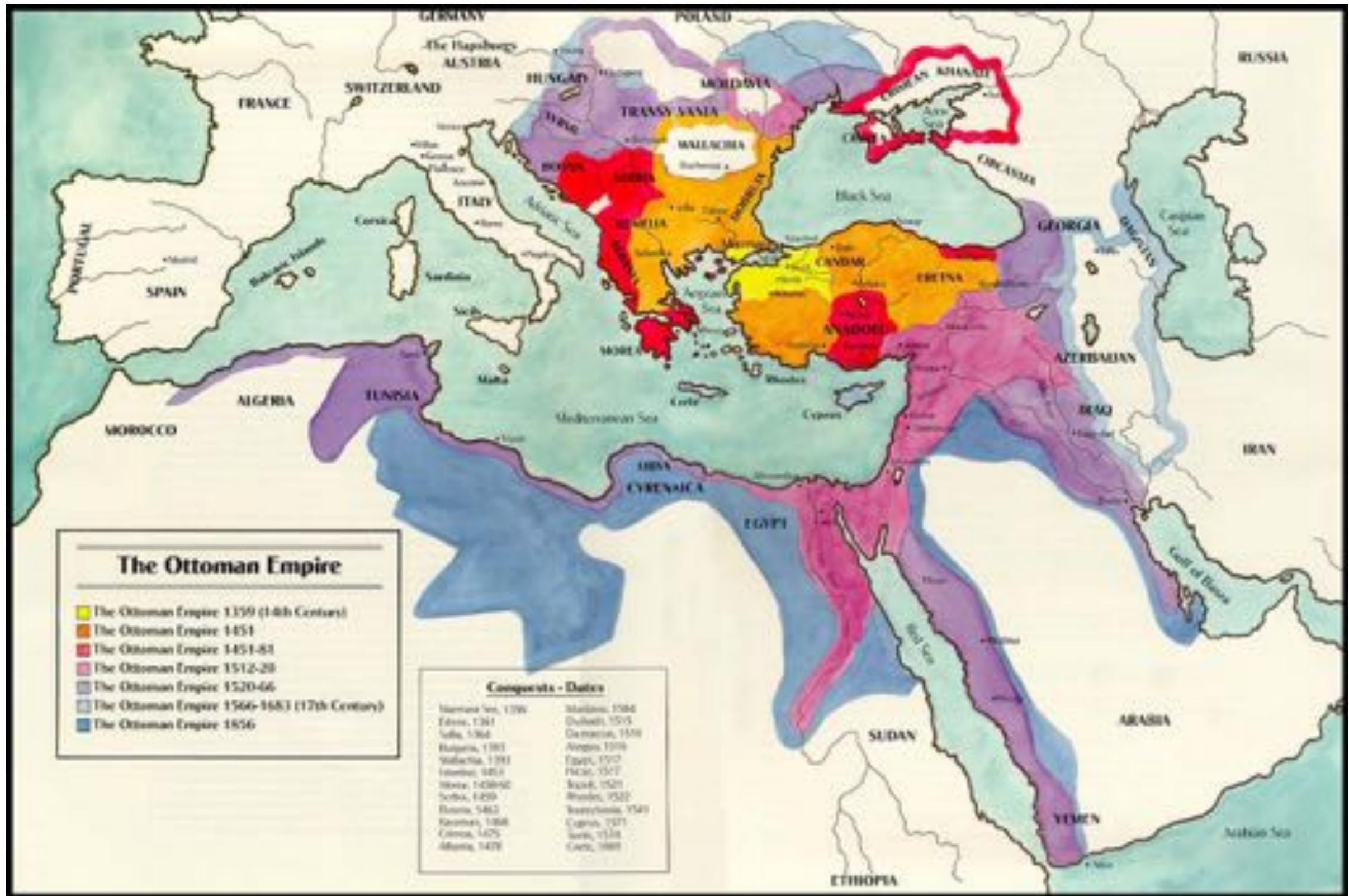
Romani people and DNA studies

- Study of the Romani language indicates that the Romani migration into Europe, followed a path north from the Hindu Kush (Hindu Death, literally), and the southern shores of the Caspian and Black Seas, across Anatolia to Constantinople (Byzantium) by the 11th century, to subsequently spread across Europe from the 13th century CE, reaching as far afield as the British Isles, the Iberian Peninsula, Scandinavia and Russia by the 15th - 16th centuries CE.
- A team from the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (UK) studied Y-chromosome DNA samples from around 10,000 males, including 7,000 samples from India's 214 indigenous groups. They found a high concentration of Y-haplogroup H1a1a-M82 amongst European Romani people. Nearly all modern members of haplogroup H, which was founded 30,000-40,000 years ago, live or originate in the Indian subcontinent, and the Romani population are the main source of haplogroup H in western Europe (outside of recent post-war migration). The team also found that Romani populations share the strongest genetic similarity with the aboriginal 'Dhomba' people of northwestern India, traditionally ostracised by the Indian caste system and regarded as 'untouchables'. This connects with an older linguistic theory that the name 'Roma' derives from the Classical Sanskrit word 'Dhomba', meaning 'married man of low caste'.
- An anomaly to this was revealed in 2005 with the discovery of Romani mitochondrial (female) DNA in a 10th-11th Viking century cemetery in Norwich, suggesting either that a few intrepid Romani people had migrated to England 500 years earlier than thought, or were, more likely brought here from the eastern Mediterranean by Viking traders (as slaves?), following the Russian river system into the Black Sea and the Byzantine Empire. Alternatively, a Saxon member of the Varangian Guard, the Byzantine Emperor's personal army, married a Romani woman and brought her back to Anglo-Saxon or early Norman England when he 'retired'.
- Romani DNA cannot exist before Romani people do – Romani identities are traceable to 11th century CE Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire. What do DNA studies really tell us? How do they connect to 'racial' science and notions of biological determinism?

Romani people and the Ottoman Empire

From 'Çingene' and 'Kipti' to Romanlar

The Ottoman Empire 1300 to 1900



Romanlar, Domlar and Lomlar in modern Anatolia

Romanlar: a group to whom the European Roma (or Rroma) are directly related, sharing much in the common culture, language and economic specialisms. There are many subdivisions amongst the Romanlar, mostly defined by occupation (*sepetçiler* - basket makers; *kalayci* - tin smiths; *bokci* - pedlars; *hammanci* - bath attendants; *hamalci* - porters and carriers; *arabaci* - horse drawn carriage and wagon drivers, etc.) The class system amongst the Romanlar means that the musicians (unlike in other countries such as Sweden or the UK) are frequently the élite. Most are Sunni Muslim in faith, but there are significant numbers of nomadic and settled *Alevi* (Shi'ite) Romanlar, particularly in the eastern part of the country and around the outskirts of Istanbul. They mostly occupy distinct *mahalles* or neighbourhoods, and are socially and economically discriminated against, and spatially segregated from wider Turkish society. They are organised, with some 28 local associations and a national federation of Romanlar organisations. There are, according to current research, about 4 million Romanlar living in Turkey, many of whom speak one or other dialect of *Romanës*...



Romani and other 'Gypsy' communities in Anatolia

They were present in the Ottoman forces (the *Çingene sancak*) that took Constantinople in 1453 and were an important part of Ottoman society, known as *Çingene* or *Kipti* and working as basket-makers, horse-traders, metal-workers, tailors, shoe-makers, puppeteers, dancers, musicians and entertainers, often organised in guilds and sometimes wealthy. 'Gypsies' were even appointed to important offices, such as the head of the water authority in Salonika in the early twentieth century. In the eighteenth century European ideas and opinions began to influence the views of Ottoman officials negatively.

Romani populations in modern Anatolia

the Rom, Dom and Lom

Romanlar, Domlar and Lomlar in modern Anatolia: who are they?

- The Dom arrived even earlier than the Romanlar, founding a brief state in the Mesopotamian region in the ninth century, that was eventually defeated by the Abbasids and Byzantines, and almost certainly appear in Antioch (Antakya) c.1040 in a confrontation with the Antiochenes and their caravan. The earliest arrival of the Lom is unknown...



Romanlar, Domlar and Lomlar in modern Anatolia: who are they?

Lomlar: the Lomlar's origins are extremely obscure and it may be that they represent a 'break away' group from the Rom during the 11th century that did not move westwards but remained in the east of Anatolia during the Saldjūk and Ottoman periods. The current Lom population is largely descended from those that were forced to move to Turkey in the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Russians in their conquest of the Caucasus in the 1870's. They now reside in small communities in the north east and Black Sea region where they are called by the derogatory term '*Posha*' (from 'boş' meaning empty or stupid). They are mostly settled and agricultural, though there are numbers who are professionals (though these, like all such Romani groups in Turkey 'hide' their ethnicity). Some of them maintain their language, *Lomavren* and a tradition of musicianship but many have 'lost' this and few speak the language fluently under 60 years old. There are possibly 150,000 of them but numbers are very hard to estimate...



Romanlar, Domlar and Lomlar in modern Anatolia: who are they?

The *Geygelli*, *Gezginler* and other *Göcebe* groups: there are numbers of 'Travellers' amongst the Romani communities of Turkey that are primarily nomadic for large parts of the year, and who are often identified as 'Yörüks' in ethnographic studies. Most are *Alevi* and some that have settled have 'become' *Alevi* and deny a Romani heritage (though they speak creoles or contact languages using elements of Romanes, such as the Alevis in Kuştepe in Istanbul, or the Geygelli nomads of central Anatolia). There are also some groups that have adopted other identities, who originate in Romani communities from the mediaeval period, but no longer identify with them. The picture of them is hard to discern as they are very much on the margins of Turkish society and no estimates of their numbers can be made. In Thrace they are known by a variety of names including Mangösür and Çalgar and other Romani communities do not, by and large marry with or into these groups...

Lomlar in eastern Anatolia



Modern Romani and Traveller populations as ‘reconnected communities’ after 500 years

- Migration, often as the result of war, persecution and violent xenophobia, has meant that Romani people are once more in motion across the Middle East and Europe, on a scale unseen since the 1500’s;
- Such migration has changed the balance of populations in western and north-western Europe; there are now one million east European Roma in the UK for example (in contrast to 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers);
- In the case of Sweden, there are significant Romani communities from the Balkans, central and eastern Europe and even the Middle East – though the latter ‘pass’ as Turks, Kurds or Syrians;
- Community are being brought together in new ways, with revitalisation of Romani cultures through increasing language competence, especially as a result of the Romani churches, which often act as central nexus’ of information, assistance and support;
- Culturally, the re-encounter, or ‘reconnection’ of Romani populations separated by 500 years or more, has seen new forms of language use, arts, music, dance, intellectual developments and academic research, as Romani scholars from central, southeastern and eastern Europe migrate to north and west Europe, in search of ‘a place of greater safety’ (to quote Hilary Mandel)
- The establishment of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, in Berlin and the launch of the Digital Archive of the Romani People, in January 2019, are just two manifestations of that energy