



GYPSY II. GYPSY DIALECTS

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The languages and dialects popularly called “Gypsy” (< *Egipcien* < *qebṭi* “Coptic, Egyptian”) constitute three major groups: Asiatic or Middle Eastern Domari, Armenian Lomavren, and European Romani, technical terms now used to reflect the speakers’ self-designations: *Dom*, *Lom*, and *Roma*, respectively. For Gypsy in Iranian-speaking areas the most common terms are Kowli (presumably < Kāboli, lit. from Kabul) and GŪorbati (stranger); mostly western groups such as the Karaṣi of Azarbaijan have retained the term *dom* “man” (see listing of names and groups below). While traditionally oral, there are now written forms for some European varieties.

The three groups as a whole originate in Indo-Aryan (Indic) languages, most likely the central and northwestern branches. Individually, they reflect three distinct historical layers of Indo-Aryan innovations, which suggests three successive westward migrations, rather than a single one (Turner, 1926, 1927; Sampson, 1923, 1926; overview in Hancock, 1988, also idem, 1995, pp. 25-32). With Iranian-speaking territories as their first staging area and linguistic contact, the earliest layer is reflected in the diverse Middle Eastern group which most likely dates from the second half of the first millennium C.E. It includes most dialects from Central Asia to Anatolia and to North Africa, and is distinct by the absence of later Indo-Aryan changes found in the other two groups. The subsequent layer is represented by the European group, first



reported in the southeastern Balkans by 1100 C.E. It is here, in the Greek language context of the Byzantine Empire, where the constituent varieties evolved into a relatively unified language from which all European varieties derive. The latest layer appears to be the Armenian group, which may have established itself in Armenian-speaking northeastern Anatolia separately. The examples in [Table 1](#) illustrate major historical sound changes which serve to define the three groups, but also exemplify the blurring of the distinctions due to dialect mixture and admixture (Near Eastern examples are Domari from Syria and Fiuĵ-Ĝorbati from central western Persia; for “brother,” cf. English *pal* “friend”).

The phonological diversity is partially reflected also in the Indo-Aryan core vocabulary, including some common terms such as *juklo* “dog” (< Sk. *jukṣa*-) in European vs. reflexes of Sk. *śunaka* in Middle Eastern Gypsy dialects (e.g., Fiuĵ-Ĝorbati *sonoftā*).

The Gypsy dialects in Iranian speaking areas by and large constitute a continuum from Central Asia and Afghanistan through Persia to parts of Transcaucasia, Mesopotamia, and eastern Anatolia. The exception are two: (a) Two related European Romani dialects, one spoken in two villages near Qazvin (Windfuhr, 1970), the other near Qučān in northern Khorasan (Djonedī), of which Zargari has fully retained the highly inflectional morphology of European Gypsy. Both probably originate in southern Bulgaria and were deported a century or more ago. (b) The dialect of the Seb-Seliyer, literally “tin-workers,” which is spoken in a cluster of mountain villages near Firuzkuh (Sotuda). While largely adapted to local Māzandarāni, its small but distinct core vocabulary has remained a linguistic isolate, except for a few terms such as *kūr* “horse.” Often, the distinction between Gypsy as a dialect and the use of Gypsy terms and features in the argot and jargon of other marginalized groups is blurred (see below).

LEXICON

Extra-Iranian Gypsy. The loan component in European Gypsy has been an important factor in the attempts to trace the course and time of migrations. While the largest loan component is Greek, the Persian component in European Gypsy as a whole amounts to some 100 items, of which about 60 are found throughout. It clearly reflects Early New Persian, evidenced by the long mid-vowels *ē* and *ō*, e.g., Romani *amrol* “pear” (< *amrōd*), *zōr* “power,” *zēn* “saddle”; but also *bi-* “without” (rather than *bē*, cf. Indic *vi-*), which in Romani



is a highly productive prefix. Very few loans are from other Iranian languages. The absence of any Arabic loans later adapted by (spoken) Persian, as well as the absence of Turkish loans, reflects the pre-Ottoman and pre-classical Persian date of this migration. Most Middle Eastern Gypsy dialects outside Iranian territories have rather few Persian loans, varying from sub-group to sub-group, and by distance from Iran (Hancock, 1995).

Gypsy in Iranian-speaking areas. The lexicon of all dialects has at least three basic components: Indic, Persian, and loans from various later contact sources. While there is heavy borrowing from local languages, most dialects have retained a substantial Indic core, though varying with the dialect, including everyday words such *kām* “work,” *nāk* “nose,” *lō* “iron,” *rāt* “night,” and *gorā* “horse,” all with local variants. The latter term, from Sk. *ghōṭā-*, is most widely retained and serves as a ready initial clue to identifying a dialect as Gypsy.

The Indo-Persian/Iranian core has been supplemented to various degrees by a distinct component of Arabic terms other than those found in the Persian varieties, together with a few terms of Hebrew or Syriac and of obscure origin. This has led to doublets, or the loss of the Indic term; e.g., inherited Indic *jewed* “woman” vs. *dena/neda*; Indic *āg* “fire” vs. *nārak*; Indic *pānī* “water” vs. *miō(w)*; Indic *āk* “eye” vs. *nuhur* < *nūr* “light.” Most of these terms entered Gypsy via marginal groups, such as mendicant darvishes, Sufis, *qalandars*, also artisans and musicians, as shown in pioneering studies of their probable origin, the social mechanisms, and their typical linguistic manipulation, not unlike anagrammatic play, *ta’mīya*, often with semantic shift, by Wladimir Ivanow (1922, 1927); Alexandr Romaskevich (1945); and foremost Anna L. Troitskaya (1948); and, in a larger context, Clifford E. Bosworth (1976).

In fact, in addition to vocabulary as such, a typical feature of most recorded Gypsy dialects is the distortion of words, which may also serve to distinguish related sub-groups. This aspect was systematically discussed by Moḥammad Moqaddam in the context of Fiuj-Ġorbatī, and includes metathesis, phonemic substitution, extensions (e.g., *kāle* > *lāk* “maternal aunt, *sib* > *lib* “apple,” *amu* > *lāmu* “paternal uncle,”), and combinations thereof and other concealing means.

GRAMMAR

All Gypsy languages are typologically hybrids, and reflect the results of contact with successive host languages through centuries. This includes major



restructurings in morphology and syntax. The final stage of this process is the loss of the inherited grammar, while retaining a significant part of the hybrid lexicon, a type called Para-Romani in studies of European Romani. Romani in Europe, and to some extent in Anatolia, has increasingly been the subject of systematic linguistic research during the last quarter century, in particular with regard to the dynamics of language contact, interference, and linguistic typology (cf. Hancock 1988; Matras 1995; Matras et. al.; for Gypsy in Iran, cf. the typological study of Zargari by Windfuhr, based on data collected with the assistance of Stilo, who recognized the dialect as Romani).

In the Middle East, those Gypsy dialects which were or are in contact with inflectional languages such as Turkic, Arabic, Armenian, and Iranian Kurdish and Pashto have tended to retain the inherited morphological distinctions to various degrees, including masculine and feminine gender, two-level case marking with direct and oblique cases, and secondary cases mostly marked by inherited Indic postpositions, as well as a basic system of tense, mood, and aspect (similar to European Romani). Such is the case, e.g., in the language of the Nawar of the Levante, which significantly shows not only lexical, but also morphological loans from Kurdish, most prominently the indefinite enclitic *-ek* (Macalister, 1909-10, p. 299); the language of the Karači of Azarbaijan (Patkanoff, 1909); and probably the language of the Pashto-based Kuṭaṇa of Afghanistan (Rao, 1995). Most other dialects and variants of Gypsy in these regions are based on local variants of Persian, having adopted both morphology and syntax.

The following examples illustrate the hybrid features of Iranian Gypsy (cf. similar features in the hybrid language of the Jewish communities of Persia, discussed by Yarshater; upper case = Gypsy); a Zargar-Romani example is added for comparison:

Example 1. Iranian Gypsy (Fiuḡ-Ġorbati, Moqaddam, 1960, p. 131, with Persian translation).

Example 2. Ġorbati of Afghanistan (Rao, 1995, with Afghan Persian translation).

Example 3. Jugi, Tajikistan (Oranskii, 1964, 1968, with Tajik translation).

Example 4. Rōmāni of Zargar near Qazvin (Stilo in Windfuhr, 1970, p. 279, here with literal Persian translation).



The particle *TE* introducing subjunctive phrases is typical for European Romani and Levantine Nawar Gypsy, and may be a conflation of the functions of the Persian preposition-conjunction *tā* and the general present-future particle *te* found in the Iranian Pamir languages, which would further evidence the diverse course of the Gypsy varieties.

DIALECTOLOGY

It has been difficult to establish the internal dialectology of Middle Eastern Gypsy. This is partially due to the inadequate data, some of which date to the early 19th century. Donald Kenrick (1976), who included a number of Iranian dialects, did the first systematic comparative study, but did not aim at a dialectology. Aparna Rao (1995) presented an overview of Gypsy in Afghanistan, with careful attention to exonymic and endonymic terminology, coupled with some linguistic samples. The following suggests a tentative dialectology of Iranian Gypsy. It is based on the original possessive/oblique forms of the personal pronouns, which were a crucial part of the former inflectional morphology, and as last vestiges provide clues for the dialectal interrelationships. The data suggest two major distinct morphological markers: (a) the suffix *-ri/-ra* (inherited pronominal possessive forms, probably merged with the dative-accusative function of the Persian enclitic *rā*); and (b) the suffix *-ki* (inherited pronominal dative forms). Their presence or absence define six major dialect groups (Table 2) from northwest to northeast (NOM = nominative, or direct case; POS = distinct possessive, or oblique case, which became the general pronominal form in most dialects).

It is evident that there is no direct correlation between name and dialect. The Jugi of northeastern Persia is clearly distinct from that of Tajikistan, just as Western Persian Ġorbati is distinct from Afghan Ġorbati, which in turn is closest to its neighbor, eastern Persian Qereš-māl (speakers of Afghan Ġorbati claim “western” origin; Rao 1995, p. 74). However, there is a close correlation between the distribution of morphological features and geographic distribution. The notable exception is Persian Ġorbati, which morphologically is located between the two varieties of Jugi in northeastern Persia and Central Asia. (Already Moḥammad Moqaddam detailed the closeness of the Ġorbati of the Arāk area he described and Astarābād Jugi, based on de Morgan, 1904).

In comparison, the dialects of the Ottoman areas clearly belong to the *ki*-groups, but also show compounding with possessive *-r* (Table 3).



Geographical Listing of Sources, mostly containing linguistic data:

European Romani. Zargari; endonym/language Rōmāni; two villages in Qazvin area (Windfuhr, 1970). Rōmāni, endonym/language; Qučān area (Djonedī).

Isolate. Seb-Seliyer, endonym; isolate Gypsy dialect, local dialect base; in mountains of Firuzkuh area east of Tehran (Sotuda).

Northwest, Transcaucasus, Armenia, Azarbaijan. Boša: endonym Lom, Armenian base, Christian (Patkanoff 1908; Finck, 1907-08, grammar); Mitrib: exonym, Turkish or Persian base, Sunnite (Patkanoff, 1908; Benninghaus). Karačī: endonym Dom, Persian or Tat base, Shi'ite (Patkanoff, 1909); Karačī: endonym Dom, Tabriz area and Kurdestan (Ouseley, III, pp. 400-401; Patkanoff, 1909).

West, Kurdish areas, western Persia. Kaloro: endonym, also *Dom*, Marash, eastern Turkey and Ainteb, Syria, along Euphrates, Sunnite, 'Alawi, and Kelli groups (Paspates, 1862, 1870, in lexicon). Cingāna: in Central Kurdish areas (Turkey), endonym Dom in most Kurdish areas of Persia and Iraq; Sōz(m)ānī: exonym, in southern Kurdish areas (Sanandaj and Kermānšāh; Voskaniān, 1997, no linguistic data); Dūmān (Dom): endonym, extensive Persian loans, Baghdad (Newbold, 1856, pp. 285-312).

Central and Southern Persia. Ġorbati: endonym Il-e Fiuĵ, Arāk area, from Shiraz area (Moqaddam, extensive data and discussion; Wirth); Ġorbati: Jiroft, Sirjān, Ker-mān (Sykes); Lōṛī language Mōkki or Lōṛīčīnī, Ba-luchistan; possibly secret language (Ivanow, 1914, no linguistic data).

Caspian and eastern Persia. Juġi, exonym; Māzandarān and Astarābād (de Morgan, pp. 304-6); Gowdari, exonym; Astarābād; strong Persian component (de Morgan, pp. 306-7); Qerešmāl, exonym; Khorasan (Sykes); Gypsies of Nišāpur, Sabzavār, Qā'en, Birjand (Ivanow, 1920), Qā'enāt (Ivanow, 1914).

Afghanistan. Jat: term for four major Indic Gypsy groups in Eastern Afghanistan, Jalālī, Pikrāj, Šādibāz, Vangāwāli, speaking Inku, related to Hendku in Paki-stan (Rao, 1995; the term Jat is also generally used for Gypsies); Ḥaydarī: endonym, language Magadi Ġorbati, Fāryāb province, North Afghanistan (Pstrusinska, 1986). Jōgi, Juġi: endonym, also Mugat, language Mogati-bey, North Afghanistan; also called Juġi-e Boḡārā'i or Ġorbati in Mazār region; also called Juġi-e Balkġi or Qāzulāgi in Balk region (Rao, 1995). Kuṭaṇa: Pashto base (Rao, 1995); Balōč, endonym (Rao, 1995), related to



Kara-Luli of Tajikistan.

Persian-based Gypsy groups of Afghanistan: Ğorbat, endonym, widely found, language also named Qāzulāgi in Herat, Magadi in Kabul region, claim to come from Persia (Rao, 1995); Šayḡ Moḡammadī: endonym, language Ādurgari, Pashto loans, Afghan Persian base, mostly secret language, Eastern Afghanistan (Rao, 1995; Oleson); related to Kavol of Tajikistan.

Central Asia (Tajikistan/Uzbekistan). Jugi; endonym Mugat, Tajiki base, Hissar Valley (Oranskiĭ, 1961, 1983; Nazarov), related to Jōgī of Afghanistan and to Jugi of Astarābād and Māzandarān; Kavol, *qawm* Afghān: language Porsi, Pashto loans, Afghan-Persian base mother tongue, Kulyāb district (Oranskiĭ, 1961), related to Šayḡ Moḡammadi of Afghanistan; Balōj: endonym, Persian base (Wilkins, 1882; Patkanoff, 1909), related to Balōč of Afghanistan; Luli: endonym Multāni, argot, Tajiki base, Farḡāna area (Wilkins, 1882; Patkanoff, 1909); Kara-Luli (Lit. Black-Luli): endonym Hindustani, *qowm* Beluji, Farḡāna area (Wilkins, 1882; Patkanoff, 1909); related to Balōč of Afghanistan; Afyōn: Indic based dialect group (Oranskiĭ, 1956), related to Inku in Afghanistan.

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