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The Origin of the Gitanos in Spain - Linguistic Evidence

This paper will bring linguistic evidence to bear on the origin of Spain's Gitano (Gypsy) population. While there are historical records that place the arrival of Gitanos in Spain from the North and via the Mediterranean during the 15th century, there is also a hypothesis that proposes an earlier entry to Spain via Northern Africa. This paper argues that linguistic evidence fails to support the Northern African Hypothesis. In particular, the Northern African Hypothesis predicts that some of the ancestors of the Gitanos would have been Dom and not Roma. This, in turn, predicts a Domari substratum in Calû, the language of the Gitanos. This paper examines evidence from cognate, loan words, and sound correspondences and concludes that there is no evidence for a Domari substratum, but significant evidence that the vocabulary of Calû is largely based on Romani.