

The Gypsies

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Introduction

My earliest memory of a Gypsy is also one of the earliest memories of my childhood. I am very hazy now about the details; I remember my impression much more than I remember what actually occurred. I was about six years old, a Jewish boy in Berlin where Hitler had just come to power. On that day, which I now realize was the beginning of my interest in Gypsies, I was in a small branch post office, probably loitering rather than doing anything recognizably purposeful. The Gypsy woman was dressed as Gypsies are often pictured in books, and I must have stared at her curiously. I suppose that I must also have had some feelings of superiority. Having lived in an environment in which peoples were judged as inferior or superior, I am sure that my stare must have contained a certain satisfaction at seeing someone considered to be even lower than the Jews. I do not recall the exact words of that Gypsy woman, but I know she said something to the effect that "dirty little Jewish boys should mind their own



Photo taken at a camp of *Rom* outside Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1969

business." I also know that in addition to my feeling of injury, I was startled by the effectiveness of her thrust, by her self-confidence, by her disregard of the social conventions according to which Gypsies were considered to be the lowest form of human life.

Not everyone in our society has had personal experiences with Gypsies, but virtually everyone is subjected to a certain stereotype that is perpetuated in thousands of articles, popular books, and motion pictures.

There are two distinct images in this stereotype. On the one hand, Gypsies are thought to steal, to lead a shiftless life, to be unreliable, dangerous, dirty. Almost all people who have grown up in southern and eastern Europe were told in their childhood to stay away from Gypsies because Gypsies abduct children. However, there is not a single authenticated case of abduction by Gypsies, though there are cases, such as that of Jan Yoors (Yoors, 1967), in which youngsters have run away from home in order to travel with Gypsies¹ [all notes appear at the conclusion of the text].

The other popular image of Gypsies is more benign but no more realistic. It is said that Gypsies are gay, musical, free-spirited, romantic. John Masefield relied on this notion in his poem Sea-Fever: "I must go down to the seas again to the vagrant gypsy life. . ."

In any case, the stereotype of Gypsy life is fairly firmly established in our language. The verb "to gyp," in the sense of "to swindle, cheat, or steal" is frequently used by people who would not dream of saying "he jewed me down," and the thesaurus lists synonyms of the word "gypsy" as wanderer, roamer, vagabond, knight of the road.



Photo taken at a camp of *Rom* outside Bucarest, Romania, summer 1969

The professional sociological literature is not exempt from unscholarly reliance on this stereotype in the treatment of Gypsies. One of the most prestigious of social scientists, contributing to an anthology of very high professional standards, uses Gypsies as an illustration for his discussion of criminals. The author of a widely quoted recent book on Gypsies, by his own admission, cannot understand the Gypsy language. The text is a mixture of fact and romantic fiction, culled from similarly produced earlier works, and some superficial contacts with French Gypsies. In my professional career, I have never encountered a subject treated as poorly in standard works of reference.

Unfortunately, scholarly work in the field of Gypsy studies is very difficult. One can hardly encourage an interested graduate student to plan fieldwork among people with whom he is unlikely to establish adequate rapport within a reasonable period of time. Learning the Gypsy language is no more difficult than learning most other languages, and much easier than many; however, the problem lies in finding someone able and willing to teach it. Similar difficulties face the professional anthropologist who is eager to get at least some results after a year or two of effort. It is to the lasting credit of Rena Cotten Gropper (Cotten, 1950) that she overcame these difficulties as a young graduate student, and thus established herself as the first scholarly observer of Gypsies in North America.

The following discussion will outline the procedures of my own work and the nature of the data I have gathered.

Methods of Study

Until the academic year of 1966-1967, my research interests centered on the sociology of Jews and of certain small religious groups. (As a graduate student, I had done a thesis on Jehovah's Witnesses.) In general, I was interested in groups that live within our society but which, in one way or another, have become excluded from full participation in it. I believe that a study of these groups helps us to understand our society and culture. In 1966, my family and I went to France for a sabbatical year; my major purpose there was to study small Protestant sects in the Paris region. But while in Paris, I came in contact with the organization Etudes Tsiganes. This is a semiofficial group of social workers, scholars, and others interested in Gypsies. They publish a journal under the same name, organize lectures and discussions, and, in general, make it possible for the public to come into contact with authentic Gypsy studies. It is through this group that I received my first orientation and background in the technical literature

concerning Gypsies.

When I returned to Canada in the fall of 1967, I was determined to begin fieldwork with Gypsies there. My readings and brief contacts in France had convinced me of the importance of learning the Gypsy language (a judgment that all my subsequent experience has confirmed). I thus needed to find Gypsies willing to talk with me and to teach me the language.

My first steps were straightforward. I went to Vancouver's oldest business section, which was then a rather run-down neighborhood of secondhand stores, cheap restaurants, derelicts, and drug addicts. I had been told that a number of Gypsy fortune-telling establishments could be found there. After an hour or two of searching, I finally located what I later learned was an ofisa, a storefront fortune-telling location. The door was locked, and the view of the store was blocked to the outside by a variety of curtains. (Cotten, 1950, contains descriptions and floor plans of similar establishments in New York City.)

I knocked on the door and was met by a young woman who, with something of a smirk, proposed to tell me my fortune. Since I could sense even then the folly of any attempt by a male fieldworker to confer with young Gypsy women, I explained to her that I wanted to meet her husband or father. She told me abruptly that no one was home and shut the door in my face.

I returned several times that day, and the woman got more hostile each time. Once she demanded that I tell her what I wanted to see her husband for. When I told her that I was interested in learning the Gypsy language, her tone of voice switched briefly from one of hostility to one of



Photo taken outside an *ofisa* in Vancouver, British Columbia

giving information; she told me I would not be able to learn the language. I was told also to leave, and not to come back.

I had heard that Gypsies are often involved with the law, and thought that the police might know where to find some others. The detectives of the fraud squad were cooperative and pleasant. They told me many things concerning the method of operation of fortune tellers. (Some of these police reports are very informative; the very good article by Mitchell, 1955, is based on such sources.) The detectives furnished me with the names and addresses of several Gypsies, one of whom I proceeded to visit. I was again and repeatedly put off by the man's wife, and had just about decided, as must have many other would-be fieldworkers with Gypsies, that no rapport was possible. The woman's function as keeper of the gate was well established.

However, before giving up completely, I decided to make a final gesture. I wrote a letter on University stationery to the man whose name had been given to me by the police, explaining that I would like to learn the Gypsy language and was willing to pay for lessons. Several days later I received a telephone call from this man, telling me that his father would be willing to give me these lessons.

Thus started a long relationship with my first principal informant, whom I shall call Stevano, which was unbroken until his death three years later. The regular language lessons with Stevano lasted an average of an hour and a half each, one to three times weekly. Since Stevano's death, I have had similar sessions with his oldest son, whom I shall call Vania. Altogether, I have so far done four and a half years of this kind of fieldwork.

When I first started my work with Stevano, I did not know a single word of the Gypsy language. Moreover, I had had no experience in learning an unwritten language, no linguistic training, and no courses in linguistic fieldwork. A linguist colleague kindly helped me overcome some of these deficiencies by providing concentrated tutoring. I was also aided by the little *vade mecum* which had just appeared, by Sarah C. Gudschinsky (1967).

I taped all my sessions with Stevano, and went over them at home until I slowly began to grasp the skeleton of the language. The wonderful description of the language by Gjerdman and Ljungberg (1963), a work of extraordinary thoroughness and scholarship, is always at my side; I keep one copy at home for study and reference, another one at my office in order to look up matters that come to my mind during the day.

My conversations with Stevano and Vania dealt not only with the Gypsy language but also with whatever other aspect of Gypsy life and culture might occur to one of us. But in addition to such free-ranging discussion, I was involved in a number of more formal projects in these sessions. One was the recording of several folk tales told by Stevano in the Gypsy language and then annotated by the two of us. (See Cohn, 1972a, for one of these tales.) In another project I obtained Vania's responses to the Thematic Apperception Test (a psychological instrument for assessing personality), again in the Gypsy language. This project actually took several months, since I followed the same procedures I had used in taking down Stevano's stories. After the initial recording of Vania's responses (twenty stories created by him to explain the TAT pictures), I played back the tape, and together with him re-

corded in writing each word he had spoken. This project not only gave me a great deal of insight into Vania's personality, but also gave a substantial boost to my competence in the language.

In another systematic line of questioning Stevano (and some others), I obtained the kinship terms as used in the American dialect of the Gypsy language and related these findings to what I knew of Gypsy culture (Cohn, 1969). This proved to be extremely rewarding in furthering my understanding; I will draw on these results in the section on "Kinship Terminology and the Bride-Price."

My latest project, and most elaborate so far, consisted of asking Vania and others about genealogies. The work became so complicated that I had to use a computer to help me sort out the results. I had learned from Vania and a number of other Gypsies in various parts of North America something about the meaning of *vitsi* (tribes) among Gypsies. An individual Gypsy holds his own and allied tribes to be more desirable for purposes of social contact and intermarriage than other tribes. This is a matter of attitudes, and I had established these preferences to my own satisfaction (Cohn, n.d.). But while I knew how Gypsies would prefer marriages to take place, I also knew that the actual practice might very well differ. For that reason I decided to research the details of actual marriages. If I could obtain the tribal affiliations of the partners for as many marriages as possible, I would then be able to determine how actual marriage alignments correspond to the expressed preferences of my various informants. (As I soon discovered, family networks, much more than tribal affiliations, determine marriages. See below, "Inbreeding and the Bride-Price.")

But to satisfy certain other curiosities on my part, I wanted to discover more than merely records of marriages. I had started my fieldwork knowing that I would have to learn the Gypsy language. As my work progressed, I began to see one other area of knowledge that I would have to try to assimilate in order to understand anything at all about Gypsies: the various patterns of family relationships among the Gypsy people I met. Much of the conversation and concern among Gypsies deals with marriages, relationships among relatives, and friendships and enmities that arise from these alliances. Without knowing how individuals are related to one another, the fieldworker simply cannot understand the concerns and anxieties that preoccupy the minds of the Gypsies. Moreover, in order to gain acceptance by Gypsies in other cities, I had found that I must demonstrate a more or less intimate knowledge of family networks as well as a knowledge of the language.

To satisfy these various needs, I devised a procedure that now allows me to feed into the computer information on individuals, and their marriages and their respective parents, and to obtain information on how everyone is related to everyone else. The program can also tell me how many individuals of each tribe married individuals from every other tribe, and the extent to which grooms and brides may be related as cousins or other relatives. (The actual program was written by my research assistant, Mr. Lewis James, for use with the IBM 360-67 at the University of British Columbia.) The data base in my computer file grows each time I receive more information from Vania or from another Gypsy. At the moment of this writing, I have information on 484 individuals with birth dates



A Gypsy man and his grandsons, in a west coast U. S. city

ranging from 1830 to 1970, and on 199 marriages contracted between 1848 and 1970.

Although my sessions with Stevano and Vania constitute the most important source of my understanding of Gypsies, it has been necessary to supplement this source in various ways. My wife and I make it a practice to attend Gypsy feasts (weddings, funerals, saint's days) as often as we can. There it is possible to meet a great many other Gypsies, to observe social interaction among them, and to take pictures.

I have made trips to a number of other cities in North America, meeting Gypsies, observing business patterns, attending feasts, taking pictures, discussing family networks, gathering genealogical data. These cities include New York (in the summer, several scores of Gypsies may be found in the Coney Island amusement area), Montreal, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and New Orleans.

In the summer of 1969, and again in 1970, I traveled to Europe to observe Gypsy groups there, to meet most of the experts who are engaged in Gypsy studies, and to take pictures and tape-record samples of the various Gypsy dialects. I have done this work in France, Austria, Sweden, Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Turkey. These trips were made possible through grants from the Canada Council. On a different occasion, I also visited Gypsy camps in England and in Germany.

The pictures I have taken in various parts of the world (this collection amounts to about 1200 slides, a number of which are reproduced here) have been of great help to me in understanding certain aspects of Gypsy life. For instance, I have hundreds of slides which I took at weddings and



English Gypsy children near London, January 1970

other functions. It was possible for me to study, through them, something of the pattern of men-women interactions at these events, as well as the role of children in Gypsy life.

Finally, I must say something about my personal relationship with my informants. More by necessity than by choice, I have always remained an outsider, although I am given credit for knowing more than other outsiders and for not being dangerous, as a detective would be considered. But my informants have never become friends in the sense in which this term ordinarily applies. I pay five dollars for each session with Vania and did the same with his father. We see one another more frequently than I see any of my friends, but no very strong personal relationship has developed. Despite many invitations, Gypsies have visited my home only once--briefly before Stevano's death, he and two of his sons came to look at my slides of Gypsies in Europe. My wife and I get invitations to many Gypsy functions, but so do certain other non-Gypsies with whom the Gypsies do business: car salesmen, social workers, detectives. The sacred separation between Gypsy and gaZo (outsider), which in my view is one of the central features of Gypsy life, is essentially maintained. This aspect of fieldwork with Gypsies often makes the research emotionally taxing, and may well be an important reason which has deterred professional social scientists from serious work with Gypsies.

The Varieties of Gypsies

Despite the existence of certain in-between groups like the Tinkers of Britain and the Jenisch of Germany, fairly clear-cut and generally accepted criteria suggest themselves for the determination of who is and who is not a Gypsy. The situation is particularly clear in North America, which has a well-defined, self-conscious Gypsy cultural group. These people call themselves Rom, speak a highly inflected Indic language which they call Romanes, and have assimilated most other individuals who have come here from Europe and who continue to lead any sort of Gypsy life. It is of course these Rom with whose culture and style of life I am acquainted at first hand.

In Europe, the situation is somewhat more complex. First of all, I found Rom in almost all the countries I visited. I was able to converse in the dialect I had learned in Vancouver in suburbs of Paris, in the center of Moscow, on the roads of Romania; the style of life of these people was also similar to that of the Gypsies in North America.



Photo taken at a camp of *Rom* outside Bucarest, Romania, summer 1969

On the other hand, each European country also has sizable numbers of different types of Gypsies, which, with the possible exception of Romania, probably outnumber the Rom.

France has three major types of Gypsies: the Rom, the Spanish Gypsies, and the manuS. Spanish Gypsies speak a dialect of Spanish with some admixture of vocabulary from Indic sources; these people seem to form the majority of the Gypsies of Spain, but have never been, to my knowledge, satisfactorily studied.

The manuS are known as sinti in Germany. We now have fairly good descriptions of their language (Jean, 1970; Calvet, Delvoye, and Labalette, 1970), which is similar to Romanes but has many Germanic vocabulary items. I have visited with these people in both Germany and France, and have observed many similarities with the Rom, such as fortune-telling, the sale of trinkets to non-Gypsies, a semi-nomadic life. There are, however, also some important differences. Many of these people are musicians, which is not the case with Rom. The manuS are also much more frequently involved with Christian missionary efforts, especially with those of the Pentecostal churches. On the whole, the manuS give a much more acculturated impression; they seem much friendlier to outsiders than do the Rom, and are certainly easier to talk with upon casual contact.

The Balkans and Eastern Europe have a great variety of Gypsies in various stages of assimilation to their surrounding cultures. In Yugoslavia, for instance, I have seen traveling Rom and highly assimilated Gypsy factory workers; there is also a very small group of educated Gypsies in that country. (I have met an army officer, a school-

teacher, a young poet, an engineer, and several well-known entertainers.) The linguistic situation is particularly diversified. Some of the groups I have visited speak Romanes, others a language related to Turkish, still others speak Romanian. (These languages, there as well as everywhere else, are spoken in addition to the national languages of the countries in which the Gypsies live.)

Romanian-speaking Gypsies form a special group found in countries other than the Balkans. The Rom call these people boiaS and sometimes the two groups intermarry. I have met a family of boiaS in Paris, where they work as exhibitors of trained animals in carnivals; in Yugoslavia, they put on sidewalk performances with trained bears. Most of the American boiaS seem to have assimilated with the Rom, but I visited a roadside camp in Louisiana where I met about thirty boiaS families. The term they use to describe their own group is ludar. The physical appearance of these people was very similar to that of the Rom, but they conversed only in English among themselves. Some of the older people still knew Romanian. Among the artifacts they showed me were a thirteen-year old directory of the Romanian Orthodox Church in America, a Romanian-English dictionary, and a bible in Romanian. They explained to me that their work consists of operating independent concessions at carnivals, and they thus travel all the time. The camp I visited was their winter residence. (These Romanian-speaking people are not to be confused with other groups, for instance the Rom, whose Gypsy language shows strong Romanian vocabulary influences.)

Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria all have substantial Gypsy



A *boia*S bear leader, in Niš, Yugoslavia, summer 1969

minorities, but these Gypsies are culturally very heterogeneous. The Hungarian Gypsy musicians, for instance, seem to form a caste-like group of their own, handing their musical occupations down through the generations. The people of this group whom I met no longer spoke any form of the Gypsy language (we conversed in German), but they assured me that their grandparents still spoke Gypsy. They also gave me examples of Gypsy expressions which they still use in their work--terms referring to the tempo and loudness of the music.

The Gypsies of Britain and those of Spain form special cultural islands. Their respective dialects, because of the loss of Indic inflections, must be considered dialects of English and Spanish. As far as I know, no substantial recent anthropological or linguistic work has been done with either group (the language described by Sampson, 1926, is no longer spoken). Students of Gypsy culture all over the world will be much indebted to anyone willing to undertake this task.

The word "Gypsy," finally, is sometimes used to describe certain traveling people in India and other parts of Asia. Since the European environment and European languages have had such profound influence on the people I have mentioned so far, I prefer to use the word "Gypsy" only for those groups who, while showing evidence of Indic origins in language and appearance, have a history of interrelationships with European peoples.

Although the literature is full of various guesses, the total number of Gypsies in the world is difficult to estimate. A report by an agency of the British government (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1967, p. 58) surveys various censuses and estimates, and gives figures that total to about

1,200,000. But this survey does not include all countries in which Gypsies may be found in sizable numbers; Spain, in particular, is not included, and neither is Turkey.

The figures given for the United States are "50-100,000." When I looked up the article cited as authority for this estimate, it turned out to have been written by my friend Rena Cotten Gropper, who I found had cited these figures as examples of mistaken judgments, and had given her own estimate as somewhere between 100,000 and 300,000. In my opinion, the numbers must be much smaller, probably around 20,000, since almost all the Gypsy adults I have met anywhere in North America know of nearly all the other families I have met.

The largest concentration of North American Gypsies is probably in the New York City area. Police sources there have estimated about 1000 fortune-telling establishments, which would seem to indicate a population of about 4000 Gypsies. However, since Gypsies travel a good deal, this figure would fluctuate from time to time.

The British survey lists Bulgaria as reporting about three percent of its 1965 population as Gypsy. The Romanian census figures for 1956, showing only 0.6 percent as Gypsy, are almost certainly an underestimate, as are the other official statistics from Balkan countries. Because of their style of life, Gypsies are more difficult to enumerate than others; moreover, there is almost certainly a tendency for many Gypsies to report themselves to the census takers as belonging to some other ethnic group.

The conventional literature on Gypsies often makes a distinction between "nomadic" and "sedentary" Gypsies. In my opinion, this distinction is

not very meaningful, at least not for the Gypsies whom I have observed. The travelers with whom I spent some time in Romania have homes where they live in the winter, so that they are both nomadic and sedentary, depending on the season. A family of settled Gypsies in Belgrade, whom I visit whenever I am in that city, has members who travel to tourist spots in the summer to sell trinkets. American Rom constantly move around (for feasts, or to establish fortune-telling parlors for a season or two) but are known, at the same time, as regular longtime residents of a particular city. My principal informants have been residents of Vancouver for about thirty years, but this has not prevented them from being "nomadic" at the same time. Of course those Gypsy groups in the Balkans that have become more or less assimilated to non-Gypsy life (the factory workers, in particular) cannot be called travelers. But insofar as Gypsies lead a Gypsy style of life, it is most misleading to speak of a "sedentary" status.

Finally, and in summary of this brief survey of different Gypsy groups, I would like to observe the following:

1. The various Gypsy groups in Europe and America may be classified as either more or less localized in a particular area of Europe, or as being dispersed throughout the European and American culture area.
2. The Rom are probably the most widely dispersed group. The Gypsies of Spain and Britain, and many smaller groups found in the Balkans and in eastern Europe, are rather strictly localized. The boiaS and the manuS (sinti) hold intermediary positions.



Romni (woman *Rom*) singing a traditional Gypsy song into the author's tape recorder, Timișoara, Romania, summer 1970

3. The cultural integrity of the Rom seems more intact than that of the other groups. Gypsy life in North America, where the Rom are on the whole the only Gypsy group, has a vigor and integrity unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. In particular, there do not seem to be the kind of assimilatory pressures here that operate on the much larger Gypsy groups in the Balkans.

Gypsy Origins

The history of the Gypsies is not very clear. Gypsies are not very literate people; to this day, even in the United States, a great many cannot read or write. They have no records of their own. Their language is unwritten (except, of course, when it is reduced to writing by non-Gypsy scholars). Whatever we know of their background comes from two sources: the linguistic evidence, which unambiguously points to India, and scattered references in European documents (decrees, church records, court records) which have been collected and analyzed by Vaux de Foletier (1970).

All dialects spoken by Gypsy groups show Indic influences. The language of the Rom and manuS, as well as that of certain other groups, is particularly close to the Indo-European languages of India in vocabulary, and even more so in grammar and phonology. This evidence leaves no doubt that the first Gypsies came to Europe from India. Beyond that, the language shows lexical traces of Middle Eastern languages, especially of Persian, Kurdish,

and Armenian, and considerable influences of Greek vocabulary. We can conclude that all the Gypsy groups whose languages have been studied have probably spent some time in Middle Eastern and Greek language areas.

Beyond this basic material in all the Gypsy languages and dialects, the groups show variation. The Rom speak a language which some European scholars classify within the vlax group of Gypsy dialects, named after the Romanian province of Wallachia, because of a very strong admixture of Romanian lexical items. Other Gypsy dialects lack this particular influence. We must conclude from this and other evidence that the Rom, but not all the other groups, are descendants of people who lived in Romanian language areas for considerable periods of time.

Vaux de Foletier found the first references to Gypsies in European documents of the fourteenth century; hence we can say that Gypsies have lived among European peoples for at least 600 years. The old documents are worth looking at for the remarkable cultural similarity which they disclose between the earliest known Gypsies in Europe and Their descendants of today. In general, these people were travelers, the women told fortunes to the indigenous population, and there were minor tensions between Gypsies and non-Gypsies throughout the centuries. Such tensions had to do with the Gypsies' begging, petty crime, theft of chickens, and so forth. There were also numerous rumors of kidnapping, to which I have already referred. (For a discussion of this theme in European literature, see Vaux de Foletier, 1970, pp. 66ff.)

The literature speaks of the enslavement of Gypsies in Romania between the fourteenth and

nineteenth centuries (Vaux de Foletier, 1970, pp. 86ff.). I cannot evaluate the nature of the social conditions under which Gypsies lived there during this long period, but it seems clear that the legal emancipation that took place in the Romanian territories in the middle of the nineteenth century, allowing the former slaves to leave, precipitated a wave of migration of these Romanian Gypsies toward Russia, Austria, Serbia, Western Europe, and ultimately America. As I have already remarked, the Rom and similar groups that I found in Russia, France, Sweden, and of course North America, all have a great many Romanian vocabulary items in their language.

While there were small numbers of Gypsies of various types on the North American continent before this migration, the Rom of today can be substantially traced to immigrants who came to this hemisphere around the end of the nineteenth century. The grandfathers of my middle-aged informants were born in Serbia, Austria, or Russia; I have no report of Romania as a birthplace. It would seem that at least two generations separated the Romanian emigrants from the American immigrants. The wandering life of these immediate forebears of the American Rom must have been very similar to that described, for those Gypsies of a much later period, by Yoors (1967). In many cases, a grandmother is reported as having been born in Russia, a grandfather in Serbia, or vice versa, for those who migrated over relatively large areas would often meet and intermarry.

Two of the three major dialects in the language of the American Rom of today derive from particular areas of Europe. One of these is the "Russian" dialect; another is the dialect of Macva, a Serbian-

speaking area of Austria-Hungary before the First World War; the third dialect is simply called "Coppersmith," referring to a very large subgroup of Rom in Europe and America. But all these dialects belong to the particular vlax (Romanian-influenced) language of the Rom; a few rather rare vocabulary items aside, the dialects are mutually intelligible.

In brief, the respective Serbian and Russian accretions, on a more common Romanian base, on top of a still more common basic Indic language with some Middle Eastern and Greek elements, give a fairly good indication of the origins of the North American Rom.

Life of the *Rom*

Vania, the son of my first Gypsy informant Stevano, is now forty-eight years old. His wife, whom I shall call Duda, is eight years younger. Duda is actually Vania's fourth wife, but this serial monogamy of Vania's is no more typical of the Gypsies than it is of North American non-Gypsies. It is in fact probably much rarer, the bride-price serving to stabilize marriages. Vania is Duda's first husband.

Vania and Duda live with their two young daughters, aged four and thirteen, in a very small apartment in the central business section. The apartment is also used for fortune-telling during the day, with Duda often sitting in the downstairs entrance to the building in order to solicit clients. The thirteen-year-old daughter has not yet started to tell fortunes, despite some urging from her parents to do so.

Vania spends much of his time on the telephone, arranging the sale of used cars or just talking with friends and relatives. Much of the talk and gossip



Gypsy feast in Vancouver, British Columbia, 1970

with other Gypsies concerns affairs of bride-price: how much so-and-so paid, how much is owing, how much can be expected soon.

Another very important topic of conversation concerns the frequent Gypsy feasts. Feasts are given for saint's days using an adaptation of the Serbian Orthodox calendar which has been handed down verbally through the generations. They are also given for weddings and to honor someone who has recently died, or simply one who is visiting town. In all cases rather elaborate arrangements are made to rent a hall, to do the cooking, to arrange for food and liquor supplies. A feast is generally sponsored jointly by two or three brothers who undertake to pay all the expenses. At a marriage, guests contribute to a collection, which helps to reimburse the father of the groom for both the bride-price and the expenses of the feast.

All feasts feature sumptuous but hasty eating, slow drinking, and, except for the memorial feasts, dancing. The men do most of the cooking, the women the serving and cleaning up. Although men and women eat and dance separately, individuals often feel free to chat briefly with their spouses or with other persons of the opposite sex. Sometimes young people have some mixed dancing, but the general rule is for the sexes to remain separated. Rather more frequently than not, the feasts also furnish opportunities to renew animosities with other Gypsies; these grudges most often concern unresolved problems of bride-price. The participation of all age groups is a most striking feature of the feasts. The very youngest roam around the hall with a great deal of freedom, helping themselves to food, playing with the electronic musical equipment, chasing one another.



Roasting lambs for a feast in Vancouver, British Columbia,
1970

People very frequently travel hundreds of miles to attend these feasts, for they form a highlight of Gypsy life.

But I have also seen a great deal of boredom and drabness in the Gypsy lifestyle. Vania's little girls sit in front of the television set all day. Parents do not very strenuously encourage the children to attend school, and in localities in which the number of Gypsies is small, the children do not have much else to do but watch television and accompany their parents on shopping expeditions. Vania's girls do have cousins in the city with whom they play from time to time, but I do not believe that they ever play with non-Gypsy children.

The daily life of elderly Gypsies is sometimes full of sadness and frustration. Before he died, Stevano used to complain bitterly to me that his children had abandoned him, that they did not show enough interest in his welfare. I do know, however, that he either saw his sons or spoke with them on the phone daily. I have met other old people in New Orleans and New York who seemed to me similarly forlorn and unhappy, complaining of insufficient contact with their children. Yet such contacts are actually quite frequent, if not in person, at least by telephone. The amount of long-distance telephoning is astounding; families I visit always seem to be engaged in transcontinental phone calls. Duda talks to her parents, 3000 miles away, several times a week. Yet her father complained to me quite bitterly that he does not hear enough from her.

All the Gypsy women whom I know tell fortunes. The word for fortune-telling is drabarimos; it is most probably related to another Gypsy word, drab, which means medicine. But in the minds of the Gypsies, the activity is not thought of as rendering

a service to the public; it is a means of earning, or more accurately of extracting, money from non-Gypsies. The idea that there could be any validity in what the fortune-teller tells the client is generally ridiculous to the Gypsies. When I press my informants on this point, they will allow that there have been Gypsy women who have been able to help people, but such wise old women no longer seem to be around. It would be considered most shameful for a Gypsy of either sex to have his fortune told by a Gypsy woman, even if one of ability could be found. In this respect I am considered as a Gypsy; it is unlikely, in fact, that any attempt at fortune-telling would be made to any outsider who is at all acquainted with a Gypsy family.

Fortunes are told in special storefront ofisuria, in booths or tents at fairs and amusement parks, and in the homes and apartments where the Gypsies live. Wherever fortune-telling is done, certain props are in evidence: statues of saints, bibles, pictures of Jesus and the saints. But the Gypsies are attached to such artifacts over and above their usefulness in the fortune-telling business; there is, as a result, a certain ambivalence in regard to such religious items. One of my informants once remarked that such objects are there only to impress the outsiders; another, an older man, was offended by this cynicism and insisted on regarding these articles as beneficial to himself and his family.

The religious items are placed primarily where the outsiders would see them. But I have also seen them in bedrooms where no outsider would be permitted. In his bedroom, Stevano had a large picture of the Last Supper, which he would drape at



Gypsy children at an impromptu party in California, 1968

certain times. He was reluctant to explain why the picture was draped, but from what his son told me later, I understand that Stevano would have considered it unseemly to appear without clothes before a picture of Jesus.

Generally, Gypsy men do not tell fortunes. I have seen one do so in a very peremptory manner at Coney Island; he was filling in for his wife in looking after the booth. But this is quite exceptional. Telling fortunes is strictly woman's business, done in a woman's way; the skill is handed down from mother to daughter.

There are several styles of fortune-telling. Gypsies have a keen appreciation of the varieties of attributes of gaZe ("outsiders") which make them suitable as fortune-telling clients: lasciviousness, greed, superstition, loneliness. On the other hand, there are also different types of fortune-tellers: the woman may be young or old or middle-aged; she may work in the central business area or in the suburbs; as a permanent resident of the city, she may have good working relations with the police, or, on the contrary, she may be in town only temporarily. The style of fortune-telling adapts itself to all these variations.

Young women fortune-tellers invariably take advantage of the lasciviousness of male clients. Gypsy women who sit in the windows of the storefront ofisuria, or, as in midtown Manhattan, in open doorways leading to lofts which are used as residences and fortune-telling establishments, beckon to passers-by in the manner of prostitutes. In some localities the establishments are disguised as shoe-shine parlors, with young Gypsy women offering to shine shoes as a prelude to telling fortunes. The implied sexual promises are never



Gypsy fortune tellers in the Moravian Railroad Station,
Moscow, 1970

carried through, but cases are known in which wallets have been lifted in the course of some provocative scuffling. When clients complain, the situation is handled either by the counterthreat of a rape complaint, by restitution of the money, or by a combination of these two methods. But these rough methods are reserved for rough localities (for instance, the Times Square area) and to transient fortune-tellers. Much more usual are methods by which, in return for three or five dollars, the gaZo ("outsider") is given some soothing talk and is sent on his way.

Older women fortune-tellers emphasize the role of the wise advisor. Problems of health, love, and finances are comfortingly discussed with the client, who is often an older woman herself. Cases are known in which the fortune-teller skillfully establishes a relationship of dependence on the part of the client, and is able to extract considerable sums of money. I have in my possession the 4600 pages of transcript of a trial which took place in New York City from January to April of 1962 (People vs. Volga Adams), in which it was alleged, but not proven, that a Gypsy fortune-teller known as Volga Adams had obtained the sum of \$118,000 from a woman in her late forties who had been under stress of loneliness and emotional tension, and who had begun to rely on the fortune-teller as a sympathetic listener and advisor. But it should be emphasized here too that Gypsy confidence cases involving thousands of dollars are extremely rare. Most fortune-tellers make a few dollars on a client, and sometimes have more or less steady customers who bring in a steady trickle of funds, but do not try for any large sum of money. This attitude is also influenced by the fact that



Fortune tellers at Coney Island, New York, 1970

fortune-tellers are almost invariably known to the local police, who simply do not tolerate large and spectacular swindles. (One method that is occasionally used to obtain a large amount of money is called buZo, "small bag," after the implement in which the client is asked to deposit his savings so that these can be "blessed." For descriptions of such methods, see Mitchell, 1955.)

Another activity of Gypsy girls and women, very close in spirit and method to fortune-telling, is begging through the sale of artificial flowers in the streets. In areas like Times Square of New York, and North Beach and Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, Gypsy women (and sometimes boys) accost well-dressed young couples who are obviously out on important dates. The method consists of pinning a cheap artificial flower (worth a few cents) on the lady; when the man asks for the price, the Gypsy will calmly name a figure in the neighborhood of two dollars, relying on the gallant's embarrassment for a swift completion of the sale. I have been told that quite a bit of money can be acquired in that way.

Of all Gypsy activities, fortune-telling is at the same time the most traditional and the most widespread; old Gypsy women and young, rich and poor, prominent and unknown, all tell fortunes. It is way of making money, but also the way of being a Gypsy woman. In the Gypsy language there is a word for work, buki, but it is never applied to the activity of telling fortunes--buki is the business of the men.

I have heard it said of many older Gypsy men that they have never worked in their lives. This seems to be true of most, perhaps all, Gypsy males, if "work" is thought of as involving a

continuing and regular responsibility. However, most of the men do arrange many aspects of the fortune-telling business. They will place ads in the classified section of newspapers ("Madam Laura, gifted reader, she will help you with all your problems"), arrange for the printing and distribution of handbills to advertise the fortune-telling, and deal with landlords to arrange for locations.

But the major work of the men consists of a complex of activities that I would call "Gypsy business." It takes several forms but in its fundamental spirit and method it is actually only one. This Gypsy business is as much the way of being a Gypsy man as fortune-telling is the way of being a Gypsy woman. The most important form of Gypsy business, involving almost all the men, is now the purchase and resale of used cars and trailers. Other forms are fender work, obtaining relief payments, and police work.

The used-car business is almost invariably carried on by placing ads in the classified section of newspapers; the Gypsies almost never bother to obtain business licenses. Purchases seem to be done mainly through connections with established non-Gypsy wholesalers. I have had frequent occasion to be present at sales to customers. The atmosphere of these transactions is not very different from that of ordinary used-car lots. Older Gypsies proudly tell stories of how their fathers and grandfathers used to sell horses, using a variety of tricks to make a bad horse look like a good one. The car sales now are carried on in this same tradition.

Most of the Gypsies I know are on relief rolls. Since the irregular cash flow from fortune-telling

Do not judge her until you have spoken to her

Sister ROSE

READER AND ADVISOR ON ALL PROBLEMS OF LIFE

THE LADY FROM THE HOLY LAND

There's no problem so great she can't solve.
WHAT YOUR EYES WILL SEE
YOUR HEART WILL BELIEVE

Tells you how to hold your job, when you've failed, and how to succeed. Will tell you your troubles and what to do about them. Reunites the separated.

Upon reaching womanhood and realizing she had God-given power to help humanity, she has devoted her life-time to this work. Guaranteed to remove evil influences. One visit will convince you she's superior to any reader you have seen.

Appointment NOT NECESSARY

READINGS BY DONATION

Open Daily & Sunday - 8 AM to 10 PM

and selling cars does not leave the traces of a regular income, relief agencies generally find themselves forced to accept the Gypsies' claims of indigence.

In speaking of police work, we reach an area of moral ambiguity. Most Gypsies, perhaps all, have some dealings with the police as a result of the fortune-telling activities of the women. I have very little evidence concerning direct payoffs, but three assertions seem justified: (1) the legality of telling fortunes is in doubt in most North American jurisdictions; (2) Gypsies everywhere engage in fortune-telling, usually with the knowledge of the police; (3) the gap between these two situations is bridged by complicated informal relationships between the Gypsies and the police authorities.

Matters are, however, still further complicated by rivalries among various Gypsy families and "tribes." It is not at all unknown for the police, probably in return for information and possibly other considerations, to become party to intra-Gypsy rivalries. This became particularly conspicuous in certain California localities in which all Gypsy families except one were rigorously excluded from fortune-telling.

Over and above this normal involvement with the police, which is expected of all Gypsies, there are even more ambiguous relationships between the authorities and certain Gypsy individuals. There are a number of Gypsy special investigators, consultants, "Gypsy kings," and other go-betweens whose major activity is shuttling back and forth between governmental authorities and Gypsies. One such man, in California, serves as a consultant to the relief authorities; his cooperation is thought of by the Gypsies as essential for obtaining

relief payments. I have seen similar Gypsy go-betweens in Eastern Europe, where such men often hold minor positions within the Communist Party or the government. In all the cases I have seen, such men, while often praised by them in public, are mistrusted and feared by the Gypsies.

Kinship Terminology and the Bride-Price

In Table 1, I have indicated some differences between the ways in which the Gypsy and the English languages see the world of kinship relationships.

The Gypsy word Rom means husband, Gypsy, or man. But the category of "man" as used in English does not properly exist in the Gypsy language, since in ordinary conversation it is always necessary to specify whether one is talking about a Gypsy or a non-Gypsy. This is a linguistic reflection of the Gypsies' feeling of sacred separation from outsiders. The term gaZo, "outsider," differs from the current Yiddish term goi in that gaZo is not necessarily a pejorative, although such a meaning is often attached to it. Furthermore, gaZo is much more routinely and frequently used than is the word goi.

The other terms in Table 1 all deal with "affines" (the technical term for in-laws). In other domains, the Gypsy language divides the world into categories which are very similar to those provided by the English language--the Gypsies

Table 1
Some Gypsy words and their English equivalents

Gypsy	English	Comments
Rom	husband	
	Gypsy	
	man	Gypsy man
gaZo		non-Gypsy man
bori	sister-in-law	brother's wife
	daughter-in-law	
Zamutro	son-in-law	
	brother-in-law	sister's husband
kumnato		spouse's brother
paSo		wife's sister's husband
xanamik		child's spouse's parent

must have been greatly influenced by centuries of living in the European language area. But the Gypsy affinal terminology shows marked differences from the English system. The semantic space covered by our one word "brother-in-law" has three Gypsy categories, that covered by the single Gypsy word bori has two English categories, while the the Gypsy word xanamik has no English equivalent at all, though many other languages do have such terms (Wayne Suttles, 1960, has suggested "co-parent-in-law" as an English gloss). As it happens, the Gypsy system of affinal terminology is very closely related to a central institution of Gypsy culture, the bride-price.

Marriages among Gypsies normally involve the payment of a considerable sum of money by the father of the groom to the father of the bride. This bride-price may be as high as \$8000, but the average is closer to \$2000. It is paid in recognition of the woman's role as the chief money earner, but also as a material token and guarantee of the seriousness of the marriage bond. Thus the fathers of bride and groom become through the marriage of their children "co-parents-in-law" (xanamikuria), entering into a complex of financial and other reciprocal obligations that is expected to last a lifetime.

The themes of marriage, bride-price, and the formation of a "co-parent-in-law" relationship have a number of variations. The two future xanamikuria may arrange the marriage more or less by themselves, without bothering too much about the views of the young people involved. This is very rare; it does happen this way some of the time in the retelling of events by older men, but I suspect that the prospective groom and bride are always consulted in one way or another.

The ideal method of arranging a marriage, from the point of view of the older people, is for the boy's father to pick a suitable family containing a suitable prospective bori (daughter-in-law), obtain the agreement of the prospective xanamik, then have the young people fall very much in love, and finally have everyone live happily with the resulting arrangement. But whether or not things actually work in the long run is always a problem. The relationship involves not only the groom and bride, but also, and perhaps primarily, their respective families. Should the marriage break up, especially within a year or so of having been contracted, disputes over the return of the bride-price are bound to arise. Very frequently only a portion of the bride-price is paid at the time of the wedding, with the balance due "when the xanamik can get the money." But if the marriage is not a happy one he is less likely to get it.

Another variation on the marriage-through-bride-price arrangement is elopement, naSimos. This happens in a substantial proportion of marriages. The two young people decide to get married, run away from home, and then leave their respective parents to work out the financial details later. There are some hints in the older literature to the effect that this was the favored form of marriage at one time.

We may now turn back to Table 1 with more of an understanding of the peculiarities of Gypsy affinal terminology. Let us take as an example the family relationship of Individual A (a male). From the point of view of the bride-price, which is the responsibility in a sense of A's entire family, his brother's wife and his son's wife occupy a very similar role: a woman for whom Individual A's



Gypsy wedding in Seattle, Washington, October 1969

family had to pay. Hence the Gypsies merge these relationships into a single term. On the other hand, English merges into one term types of "brother-in-law" for which the Gypsies require three. A sister's husband (Zamutro) is someone from whose family money has been received; this is not true of a spouse's brother (kumnato). Moreover, the husband of his wife's sister (paSo) shares with Individual A the same father-in-law, a man to whom the families of both sides to the paSo relationship had to pay money for their respective wives. The term Zamutro includes not only his sister's husband but also his son-in-law, both relationships indicating someone who has obtained a female from Individual A's family.

The relationship between language and culture, always expected by anthropologists, can thus be seen to be particularly close in the correspondence between Gypsy affinal terminology and the institution of the Gypsy bride-price.²

Inbreeding and the Bride-Price

Now and then in the course of discussing marriages among Gypsies, Vania would mention a case in which first cousins married. He would always express his disapproval of such practices. First-cousin marriage, according to Vania and other informants, is *baro laZav* (a big shame). But once I examined every one of my recorded 199 marriages for a possible consanguinity between the partners, I discovered that I had 9 cases of first-cousin marriages and 19 other cases in which the bride and groom were less closely, but still definitely, related by blood. (Such unions, between second cousins, for example, are not considered shameful.) Since my information on the ancestors of the recorded individuals is very incomplete, and since the computer program can establish consanguinity only when it has information on the common ancestors of the partners, the proportion of consanguineous unions is undoubtedly much higher than my present figures would indicate.

If I take my known cases of first-cousin mar-

riages as a proportion only of those marriages on which I have reasonably complete data for the ancestors of both spouses (I have listed 57 marriages for which six or more of the spouses' grandparents are known), I can estimate that first-cousin marriages represent about 16 percent of all Gypsy marriages. A similar estimate of the proportion of all consanguineous marriages--including such relationships as second cousins and cousins once removed--leads to the conclusion that about half of all Gypsy marriages are contracted between blood relatives.

The significance of this finding becomes clear when we compare it with findings in other groups. Cavalli-Sforza and Bodmer (1971, pp. 350-353) show that this high degree of inbreeding (marriage of blood relatives) is most unusual among human groups. The very isolated small groups that are similarly high in inbreeding fall far short of the North American Gypsy population figures. For a group of their size, the Gypsies may well be unique in their degree of inbreeding.³

Figures 1 and 2 sketch some actual alliances in order to illustrate the circumstances under which consanguineous marriages take place. I have followed the conventional practice of indicating marriages by horizontal connecting lines under the symbols of the respective individuals; sibling relationships are indicated by lines above symbols, and parent-child relationships by vertical lines. The numbers in or near the symbols identify individuals in my computer file. Circles indicate females, and triangles indicate males. In Fig. 2, I have also shown the coefficient of consanguinity F (as a percentage) in the cases of the three consanguineous marriages. A figure of 6.25 indicates

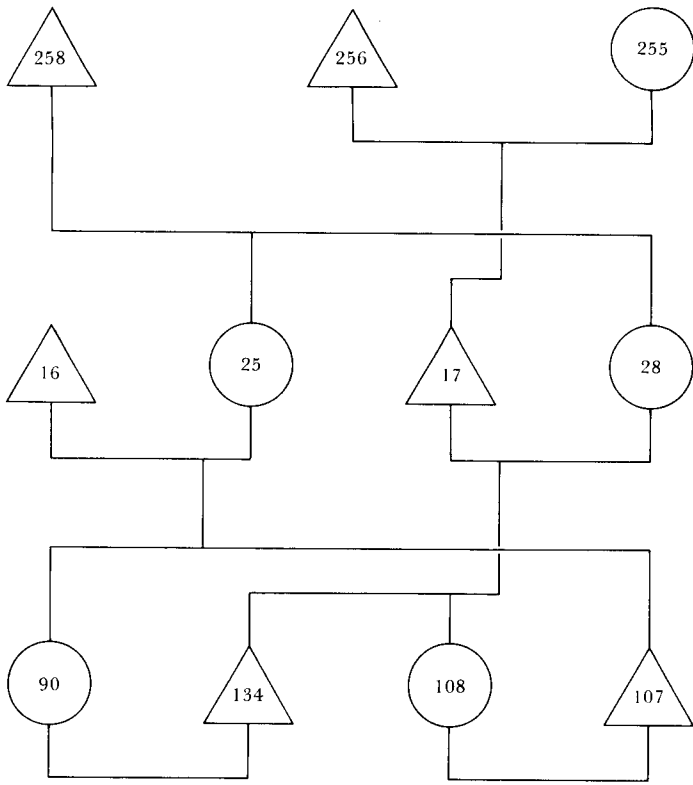


Fig. 1
First-cousin marriage and bride exchange

a full first cousin; lesser figures indicate lesser relationships.

In Fig. 1 we see two marriages of cousins, 90-134 and 108-107. In neither case was a bride-price paid. The girl 108 was considered an exchange for the girl 90; this arrangement is known as paRuimos (trade), and was facilitated by the fact that the mothers of the two pairs were sisters. I do not know of cases of trade except among close relatives; I think it doubtful that unrelated families would have enough confidence in one another to enter into such an arrangement. Becoming co-parents-in-law is difficult enough as it is; if things do not work out with the couple, the financial and emotional difficulties can last a lifetime, without the added burden of having undertaken a trade.

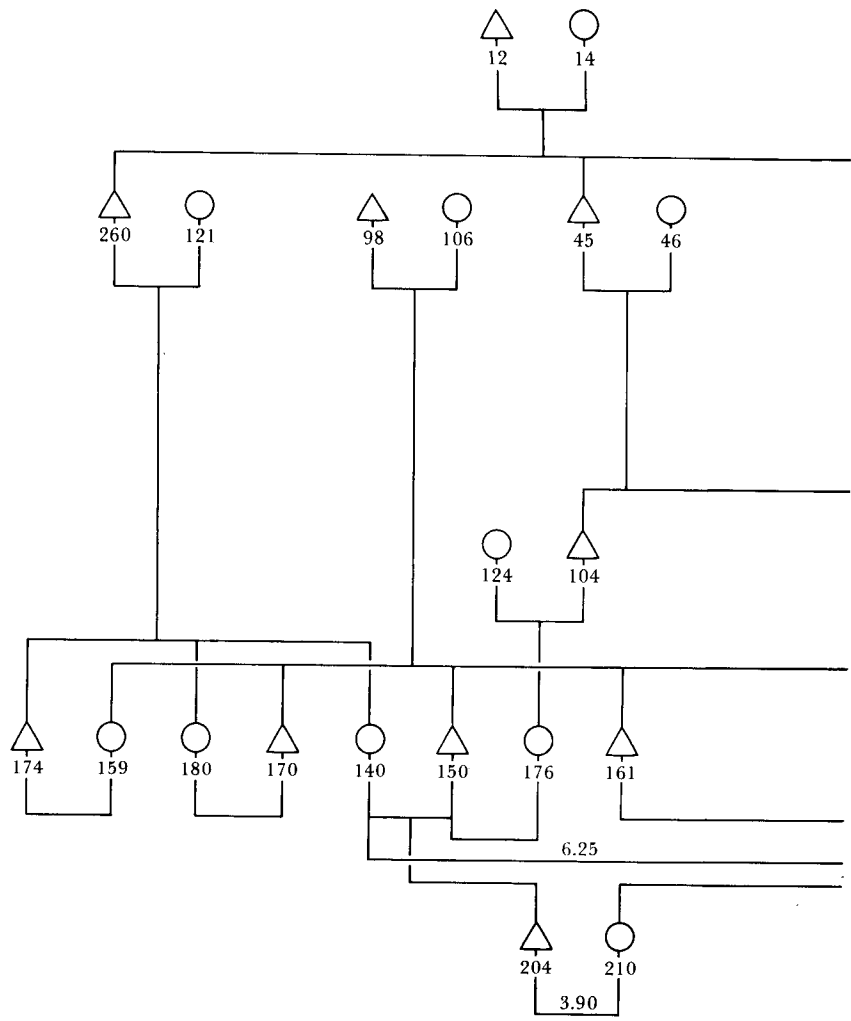
The individuals numbered 16, 17, 256, and 255 in Fig. 1 are not necessary for an understanding of the relationships I have discussed. I have shown them merely to illustrate an important limitation of my data: their incompleteness. I do not have information concerning 16's parents, nor do I know who 258's spouse was. I expect that as my data base grows, some of these gaps will be filled in; as this happens, my estimate of the percentage of inbreeding among Gypsies will probably be raised.

In Fig. 2, I have shown a more complete pattern of marriage alliances. Number 98 is my former principal informant, the man I call Stevano in this essay. The diagram shows the many marriage alliances his children have with various offspring of numbers 12 and 14. Number 98's oldest son is number 150, who married a daughter of 260-121. Once the co-parent-in-law relationship was established, two further marriages took place between children of 98-106 and 260-121. While

money changed hands for these alliances, there was *de facto* some trading; it seems probable that outstanding balances on the bride-price facilitated this type of exchange. Several other unions took place between 98's offspring and this family: 150's second wife (176) is a relative of his first wife, as are the spouses of 161 and 192. Number 196 married someone not descended from 12-14, but her husband (207) is related (in ways too complicated to show on this diagram) to 174 through the latter's mother's side. It can also be seen that 207's family has had a previous alliance with the family 12-14 (marriage 68-117). The 12-14 family can thus be seen as the meeting point through which 196 is tied to 207.

I draw the following tentative conclusions from these data: the institution of the bride-price makes it advantageous to marry more or less within the family, since the burden of paying the price can be alleviated through various reciprocal arrangements.⁴ In the case of the exchange shown in Fig. 1, this mechanism operates very directly. But since various family members usually get involved in helping with bride-price payments, the more indirect payment circle suggested in Fig. 2 can also be said to be a reciprocal arrangement. The very youngest marriage of Fig. 2, that between 204 and 210, shows how sooner or later the ties between two families resulted in consanguineous unions.

Previously I suggested that the Gypsy kinship terminology is clarified by a consideration of the bride-price institution. In this section, I have suggested that the very high inbreeding coefficients of the Gypsies are also related to this practice. Furthermore, since it must be assumed that this inbreeding has at least some consequences for the



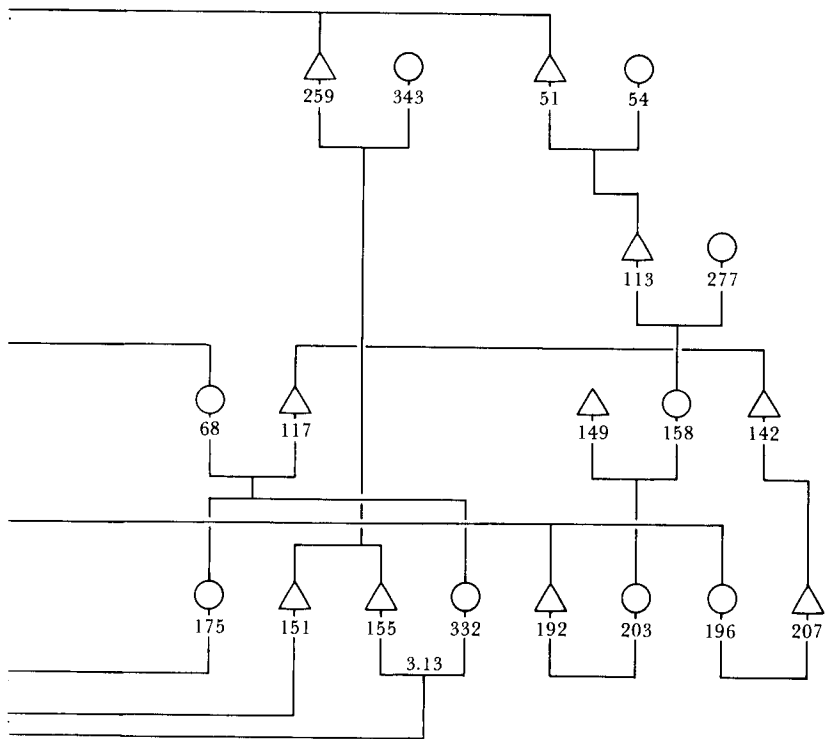


Fig. 2
Pattern of marriage alliances

gene pool of the Gypsies, these considerations suggest a particular relationship between the cultural factor of bride-price and the biological factor of the gene pool.

The Gypsies as an Institution of Western Culture

Why is it that despite the many pressures to assimilate to the world of non-Gypsies, the Gypsies retain so firmly their own culture? My answer is more a point of view than a substantiated fact, since, given the present state of our knowledge, the question does not allow itself to be resolved in a very simple or precise way.

It seems to me that the Gypsies persist because they, or groups like them, are needed in our culture. Their way of life provides solutions to some of our problems, and some individuals from among the non-Gypsies join them in each generation because they are attracted to the basic Gypsy values. Similarly, some Gypsies who find themselves out of sympathy with the Gypsy life leave to join the gaZe (non-Gypsies). The resulting selection of the Gypsy group provides a further strengthening of the distinctive Gypsy culture.

Neither joining nor leaving the Gypsy group could ever have been easy. Occasionally a Gypsy youngster becomes so disenchanted with his family's



Photo taken at a camp of *Rom* outside Bucarest, Romania, summer 1969

style of life that he falls in with non-Gypsy companions and eventually leaves the group. The nature of my data, which deal with Gypsies who have stayed Gypsies, precludes my knowing much about those who leave the Gypsy way of life. I know of a young boy now who has begun seeing non-Gypsy girls and who may very well leave the Gypsy group one day. But such cases are rare and difficult. Gypsy children are not well trained to make their way as *gaZe*.

Becoming a Gypsy is more difficult still. But there are a number of Gypsy men (about six percent of the grooms listed in my file) who married non-Gypsy girls. (These marriages have a certain attractiveness to the Gypsies because no bride-price is paid under such circumstances.) Some of these girls have become skillful fortune-tellers. Most have learned to speak the Gypsy language well, but some have not. I also know two non-Gypsy men who have succeeded in entering the Gypsy life through marriage; in these cases the bride-price was paid by the young couples themselves after elopement.

My data indicate that under present conditions in North America, the rate of inmarriage by non-Gypsies is such that in the next generation of Gypsies about three percent of its immediate parents will consist of newly inmarried non-Gypsies. If we were to extrapolate this figure into the past, assuming that the Gypsies have lived among Europeans for thirty generations, we would arrive at an estimate of European ancestors among them now of approximately 60 percent (0.97 raised to the power of 30 yields a 40 percent proportion of Indic ancestors). I cannot pretend to know anything about the rate of intermarriage before the present



Photo taken at a camp of *Rom* outside Bucarest, Romania, summer 1969

period, but even if this estimate of a three percent average rate of inmarriage over the generations proved to be quite inaccurate, there would be little doubt that a very sizable proportion of the Gypsies' ancestors came from among Europeans.⁵ While many of North America's Gypsies have a vaguely Indic appearance, most can probably pass as white Americans.

Indeed the Gypsies are thoroughly European. Not only does a majority of their ancestors probably come from old European stock, but the group as a whole has also lived within the European culture area for many centuries. I suggest now that in a certain manner of speaking each generation of Gypsies has to make a decision whether or not to remain Gypsy, and those non-Gypsies who become part of the group have had to make a decision to join. Of course these decisions are not made in some ideal sense of "free will"; the choices are made within the network of social conditions and individual preferences. But whatever else this network contains, it is evident that the differences between the central values of Gypsies and non-Gypsies play a role. In other words, I suggest that the distinctively "Gypsy" ways of looking at the world have helped to retain a core of Gypsies and have helped to recruit an ever-renewing group of non-Gypsies into the Gypsy world.

The differences between Gypsy and non-Gypsy values can perhaps best be appreciated by briefly considering attitudes toward business and toward authority, and the Gypsy rejection of the non-Gypsy world.

I have already described Gypsy methods of business. In general, these do not concern themselves at all with performing services to clients;

customers are viewed as resources for obtaining money, and no more. In much of the rest of Western culture, I suggest, there is considerable conflict and ambivalence between the mercenary and the service aspects of business. On the one hand, non-Gypsies are expected to be useful and helpful to their clients, customers, and patients. But on the other hand, the making of money and careers, and the gaining of an advantage over the next man, are powerful motives. I suggest that Gypsy culture simplifies these choices, that it solves a problem of ambivalence in this domain. The result is not only a certain tension between Gypsies and those non-Gypsies who come into contact with them, but also a certain Gypsy spirit of forthrightness and avoidance of hypocrisy.

I have reached similar conclusions about the domain of authority. The Gypsies have no leaders, no executive committees, no nationalist movement, no Gypsy kings. Whenever the newspapers allege such phenomena among the Gypsies, they have been misled by certain individuals who engage in a more or less elaborate play of deception. Gypsy attitudes toward the politics and religion of non-Gypsies are similarly cynical. They will often feign Christian commitment and patriotism, but I know of no authenticated case of genuine Gypsy allegiance to political or religious causes.⁶ (This is not to deny the possibility of cases involving isolated individuals; furthermore the situation may be different in the more acculturated groups of Europe. For a discussion of these points, see Cohn, 1970. For a description of the relationship between the Rom and the anti-Nazi resistance during the Second World War, see Yoors, 1971.)

If we look at the non-Gypsy world for attitudes



Photo taken at a camp of *Rom* in Timișoara, Romania, summer 1970

toward authority, the situation is surely much more complex. On the one hand, there is much mobilization behind governments, parties, and churches. But on the other, there is also much evidence of a dislike of all power and authority. Together with a need to submit, there seems to be a need to resist (Cohn, 1958). By their rather unambiguous rejection of the vanities of power and the slavishness of submission, the Gypsies, in comparison to the non-Gypsies surrounding them, again show forthrightness and honesty.

Finally, the Gypsies have a strongly developed sense of the integrity of their own culture and they maintain a sacred separation from outsiders. The Gypsies will not associate with outsiders socially; the women avoid sexual contact with outsiders rigorously and effectively; Gypsies do not enter a non-Gypsy's home except on business. This sacred separation is bolstered and made possible by all the other attributes of Gypsy culture. The joy of Gypsy feasts engenders pride and happiness that one is not *gaZo*. The bride-price sets a tremendous economic penalty for cases of desertion by Gypsy women (I know of only one such case). The Gypsy language, in which each Gypsy child I have ever met in North America is absolutely fluent, makes it possible to have a medium of communication that is impenetrable by outsiders. The categories of this language do not admit of unspecified "man" but insist on "Gypsy" versus "non-Gypsy."

In short, the Gypsies reject our everyday world and the values of our culture. This rejection, given a certain discontent of Western man, has appeal to many people, and not only to Gypsies. In conclusion, and if my suppositions are right,

these are the determinants of the Gypsies' persistence in the non-Gypsy world: the Gypsy values of business, Gypsy attitudes toward authority, the Gypsy rejection of the Western world. These are all responses to Western dilemmas, given by Western men.

Postscript

I have come a long way since I met my first Gypsy in Berlin. My Gypsy studies have opened new fields to me: the Gypsy language has introduced me to the world of Indo-European scholarship; tangling with the complicated Gypsy genealogies has led me to use the computer; the interesting genetic questions raised by Gypsy inbreeding have caused me to look into aspects of physical anthropology.

There have been non-intellectual benefits as well. I have learned much from the Gypsy world view. Perhaps alone among the peoples of Europe, the Gypsies have been able to resist the temptations and vanities of power, the pretensions of patriotism, religion, and ideology. Gypsies are known to steal chickens and to cheat when selling cars, but they have never organized a war, never persecuted others, never manufactured bombs, never perpetrated industrial pollution.

Notes

1. There is an analogous belief concerning "feral children," human infants supposed to have been abducted and reared by wolves. There are no authenticated cases on record, yet the stories persist. Bettelheim (1959) speculates that the myth is kept alive by the practice of some parents of abandoning children, for instance those with autistic symptoms, whose behavior is unacceptable to them. North America now has institutions in which such unfortunate children can be cared for, but these facilities were probably not so easily available in Europe one or two generations ago.

2. All the Gypsy terms for affinal relationships can be shown to have been borrowed from non-Gypsy languages. My original article on kinship terms (Cohn, 1969) indicates most of these sources; further relationships with non-Gypsy languages were shown by Markotic (1970). It is obvious that the items of the Gypsy kinship terminology are not completely different from other languages, either in the form the actual words take, or in the terri-

tories of meaning they respectively encompass. But it is striking that the Gypsies have borrowed selectively, taking a term here, a meaning there, so that the whole fits into their system of social organization.

One further point: the connection between language and social organization is always problematical in at least two different ways. (1) Since we do not have very good standards for judging what would constitute a perfect fit between language and culture, we cannot say just how good such a fit is in a given case. Surely the Gypsies could get along with a terminology less--or more--explicitly related to their bride-price custom. All that we can say definitely is that the Gypsy terminology makes quite a bit more sense in Gypsy society than it would in American society. (2) There is also, in general, a problem of the direction of influence between language and social organization. We cannot always be sure which has been more important in influencing the other. In the present case, it may well be that the existence of this particular terminology tends to strengthen the bride-price custom, just as the custom itself favors the retention of the terminology.

3. On the basis of my very incomplete data, which must be considered as biased toward revealing less inbreeding than there actually is, I estimate the Gypsies' average coefficient of inbreeding \bar{F} to be at least 0.0118 but probably closer to 0.016. In the general population, the coefficient is well below 0.001. Among U. S. Catholics, for whom there are published data, the figure is 0.00009. For these figures, and an explanation of their significance, see Cavalli-Sforza and Bodmer (1971).

The amount of inbreeding found among Gypsies may have deleterious consequences for general health; it may also depress measured intelligence. For discussion of these points, see Cavalli-Sforza and Bodmer, 1971; Schull and Neel, 1965; Roberts, 1967; Morris, 1971; Symposium on "Methodology of Isolates," 1964; and Goldschmidt, 1963. The discussion by Morris is particularly cogent and readable, and has the additional virtue of providing the student with a critical discussion of some of the other interpretations (pp. 413-415).

4. As Figs. 1 and 2 illustrate, almost all Gypsy marriages take place between members of the same kindred, if we define kindred as comprising all those individuals with whom a given individual is related either through blood or through marriage. The relatively high frequency of consanguineous marriages, in my view, is only incidental to the fact that marriage between members of the same kindred is favored (practically to the exclusion of any other). I have presented more evidence and more discussion for this interpretation elsewhere (Cohn, 1972b), where I also suggest that the kindred is much more important than the vitsa (tribe) in Gypsy life.

5. The evidence from physical anthropology does not allow us, at this time, to estimate the proportion of genes which may have entered the Gypsy gene pool from European sources. Boyd (1963) thought that the "genetical method," by which he meant ABO blood grouping, furnished "confirmation of the Indian origin of the Gypsies." But his opinion depended on a radical disregard of evidence that had been carefully assembled by Mourant (1954). Now there are new data from Sweden, as well as

a review of all the available evidence that is based on blood grouping (Beckman and Takman, 1965; Beckman, Takman, and Arfors, 1965). The result is that we now know that the Gypsies form a gene pool rather separate and distinct from that of non-Gypsies; moreover, this gene pool seems well differentiated with respect to separate Gypsy groups. But the extent of the Indic origin of this pool or pools is a moot point.

6. While Gypsies in America never participate in any religious activities involving non-Gypsies, they do look upon catholic priests, in particular those of the Eastern Orthodox church, as having certain supernatural powers. They always have their infants baptized by a catholic priest, when possible by an Orthodox one. On the other hand, they show very little respect for the priests, regarding them more or less as necessary evils. This point is elaborated upon elsewhere (Cohn, 1970).

Suggestions for Further Reading

The book by Yoors (1967) is required reading for anyone who wishes insight into the nature of Gypsy culture. Yoors knows Gypsies as no other outsider who has ever written on the subject does. In addition, Mitchell (1955) is instructive about Gypsy business methods in New York. The unpublished thesis by Cotten (1950) makes rewarding reading, as does the work on Philadelphia Rom by Çoker (1966).

The Gypsy language is authoritatively treated by Gjerdman and Ljungberg (1963), but this important book is of more use to the expert than to the student. The same can be said of the monumental piece of scholarship by Sampson (1926), which deals with a different dialect. The latter work should be of special interest to students of the other Indic languages.

Those who can read French should read the book by Vaux de Foletier (1970), which is an inventory of what the European documents tell us of the arrival of Gypsies and of their life in Europe

up to the nineteenth century. For readers of German, there is the detailed account of the Nazi persecution of Gypsies in Döring (1964).

There are two specialized journals in the field of Gypsy studies: Etudes Tsiganes, published in Paris in French, and the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, published in Liverpool. The articles published in these journals are not of uniform quality. The student is advised to constantly ask himself, "How does the author know?" Unless a satisfactory answer suggests itself, it is best to maintain a certain skepticism. But if approached with a critical attitude, the back issues of these two journals can be a great source of knowledge.

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