

The History of the Romani Language

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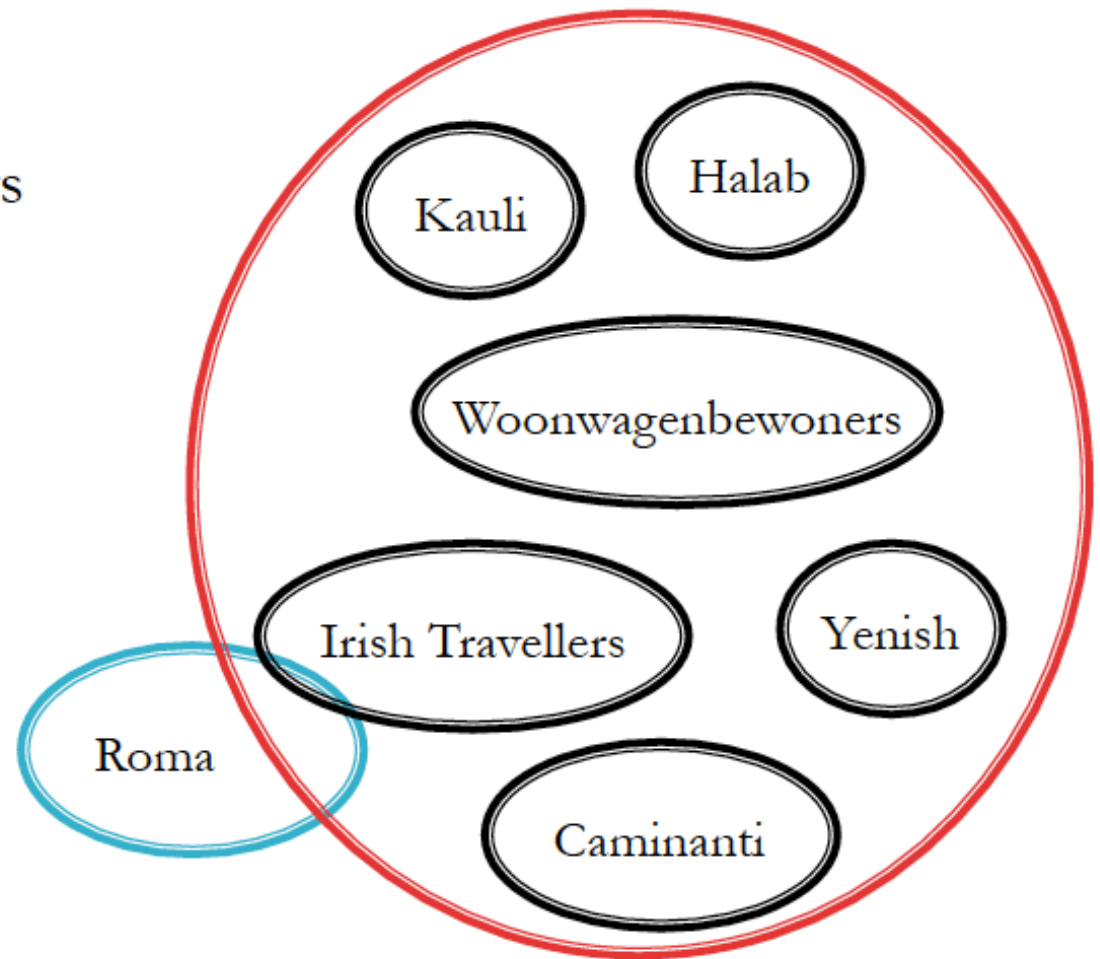


What is Romani ?

- ▶ The language of the Roma
 - Indian origin
 - Many dialects, mutually understandable
 - No standard, no written tradition
- ▶ Rarely spoken about with non-Roma
- ▶ All Roma are multilingual
 - Romani
 - National language(s) of country of origin
 - National language(s) of migration countries
- ▶ Romani has **NO** connection with Romanian
 - Romani is the adjective derived from *Roma* 'people, men'
 - Romanian derives from *Rome*, the capital of the Roman Empire

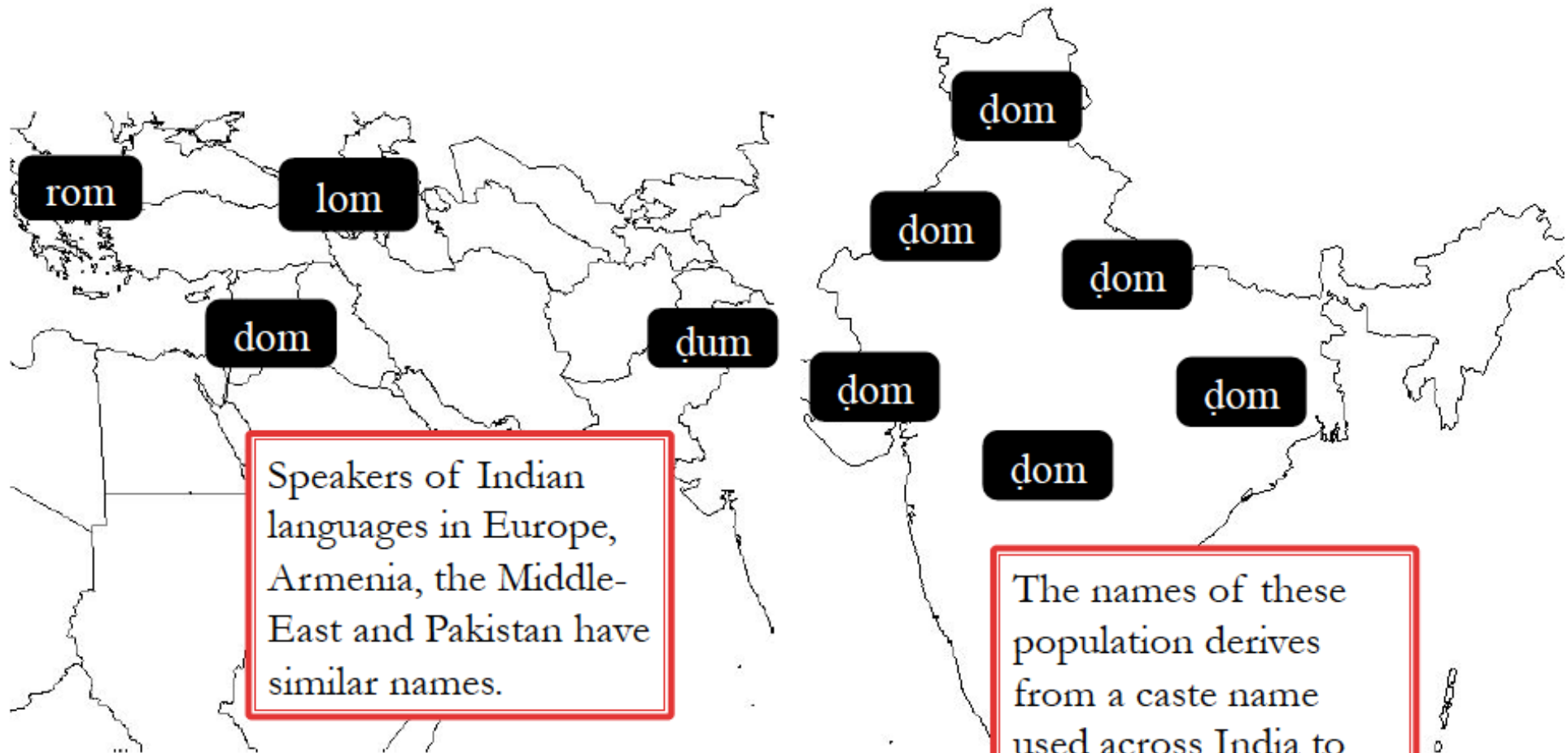
Who are the Roma?

- ▶ Popular perception
 - Roma=Gypsies=Travellers
- ▶ Sociological perspective
 - Peripatetic service providers
- ▶ Other peripatetic populations
- ▶ Some Roma are peripatetic



Roma as an ethnic minority with their own language and culture

Origins of the name



Speakers of Indian languages in Europe, Armenia, the Middle-East and Pakistan have similar names.

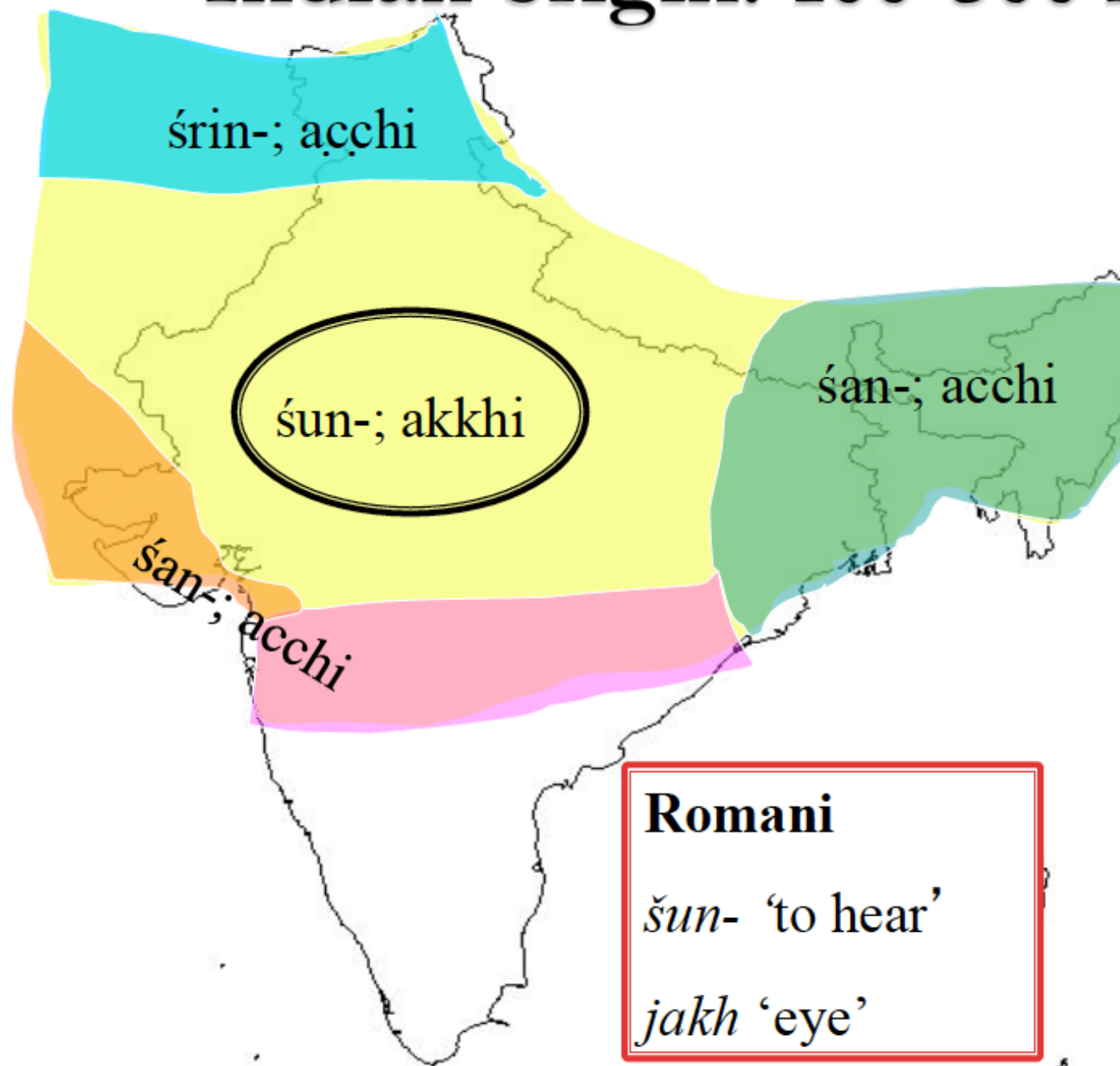
The names of these population derives from a caste name used across India to refer to a group of itinerant service providers.

Johann Rüdiger, 1792

schero	waxono	bal.	13.	I	tschib	de
<i>sirku</i>		<i>bala.</i>			<i>Schib</i>	<i>bi</i>
the	head	grows		'The	tongue	and
		hair.'				
o	dant	hi	ander	o	mui.	14.
	<i>dat</i>	<i>hei</i>			<i>mu</i>	I
the	teeth	are	in	the	mouth.'	'The
dschadschi	muschi	hi	soreder	her	serso.	
<i>Sida</i>		<i>hei</i>	<i>zor</i>		<i>subi</i>	<i>dava.</i>
right	arm	is	harder	than	the	left.'

Rüdiger, a German linguist, asked a Romani speaker to translate into her language (top line) a number of phrases from a Hindi grammar (middle line). He was then able to identify conservativisms (green boxes) and innovations, like the definite article (red boxes) and the movement of prepositions before nouns (yellow arrow). He concluded that conservativisms pointed to an Indian origin while innovations indicated the influence of European languages.

Indian origin: 100-500 AD



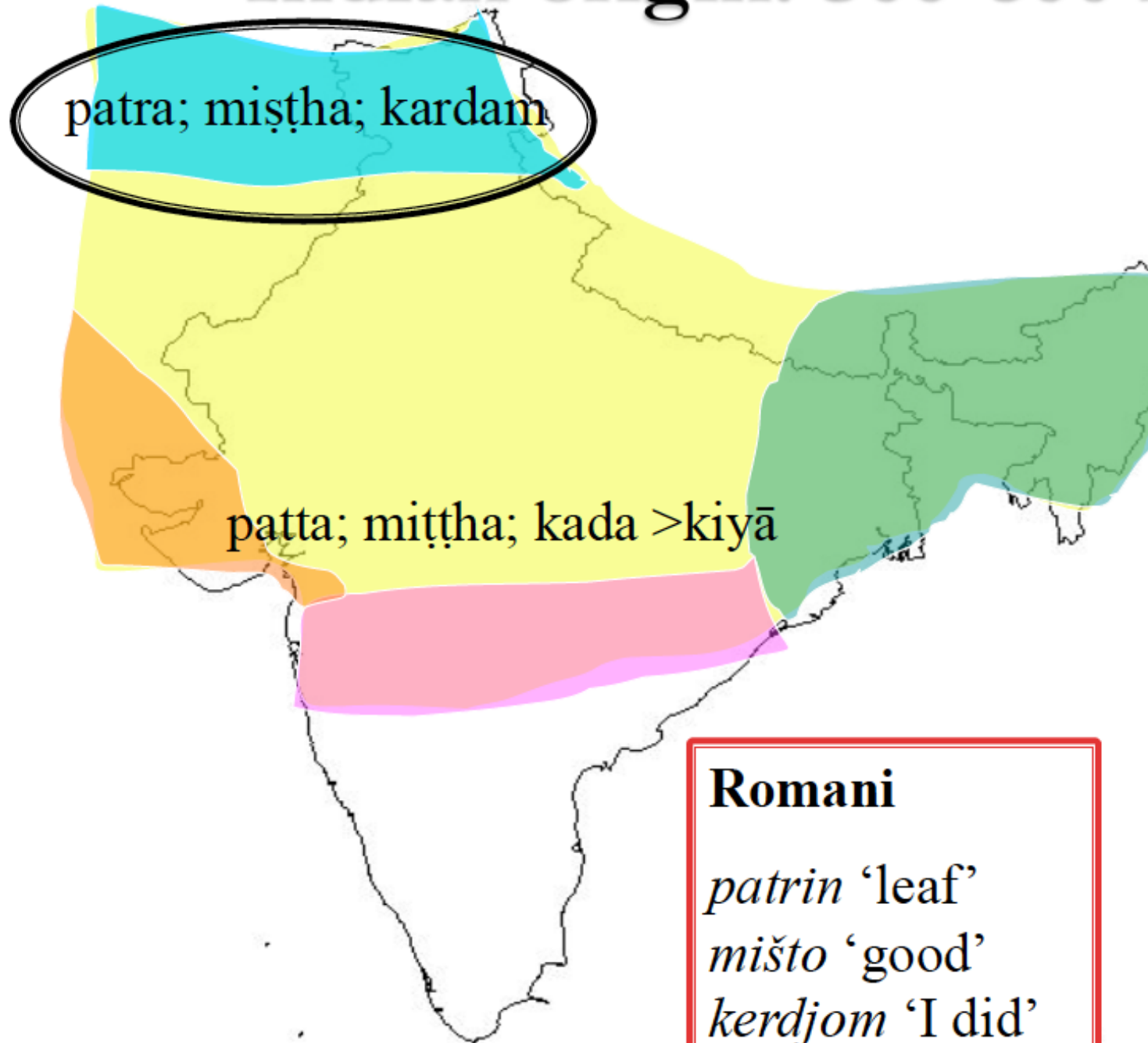
Present-day Romani words and some grammatical structures are very similar to their equivalents found in written texts in the languages of Central India dating to the period between 100 and 500 AD.

Romani

śun- 'to hear'

jakh 'eye'

Indian origin: 500-800 AD



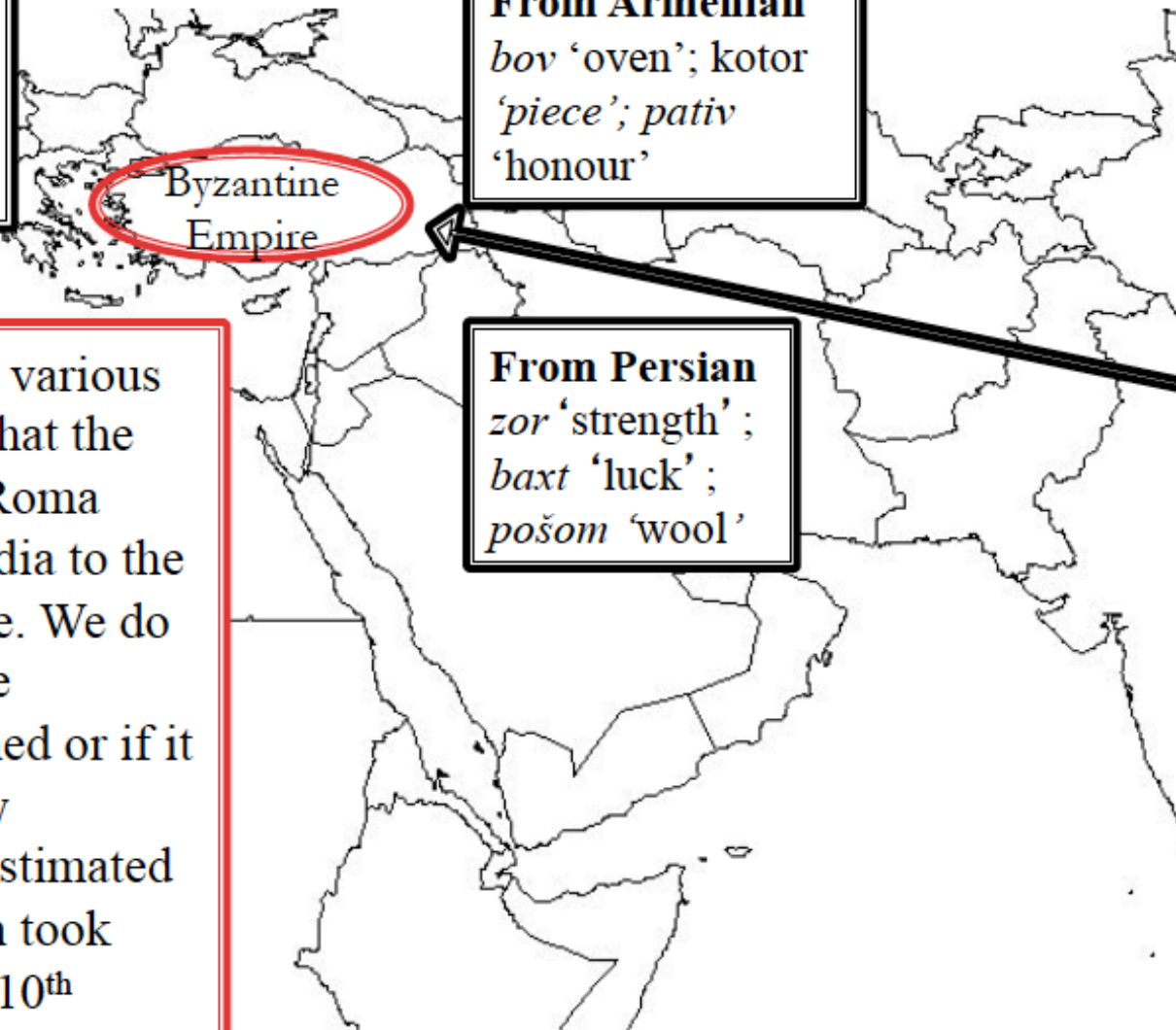
Other words and grammatical structures are very similar to forms found in written texts in the languages of North-west India dating to the period between 500 and 800 AD. This suggests that the ancestors of the Roma moved from Central to North-west India.

Romani

patrin 'leaf'
mišto 'good'
kerdjom 'I did'

Migration to Europe: 900-1000 AD

From Greek
drom 'road';
kurko 'week';
Kokalo 'bone'

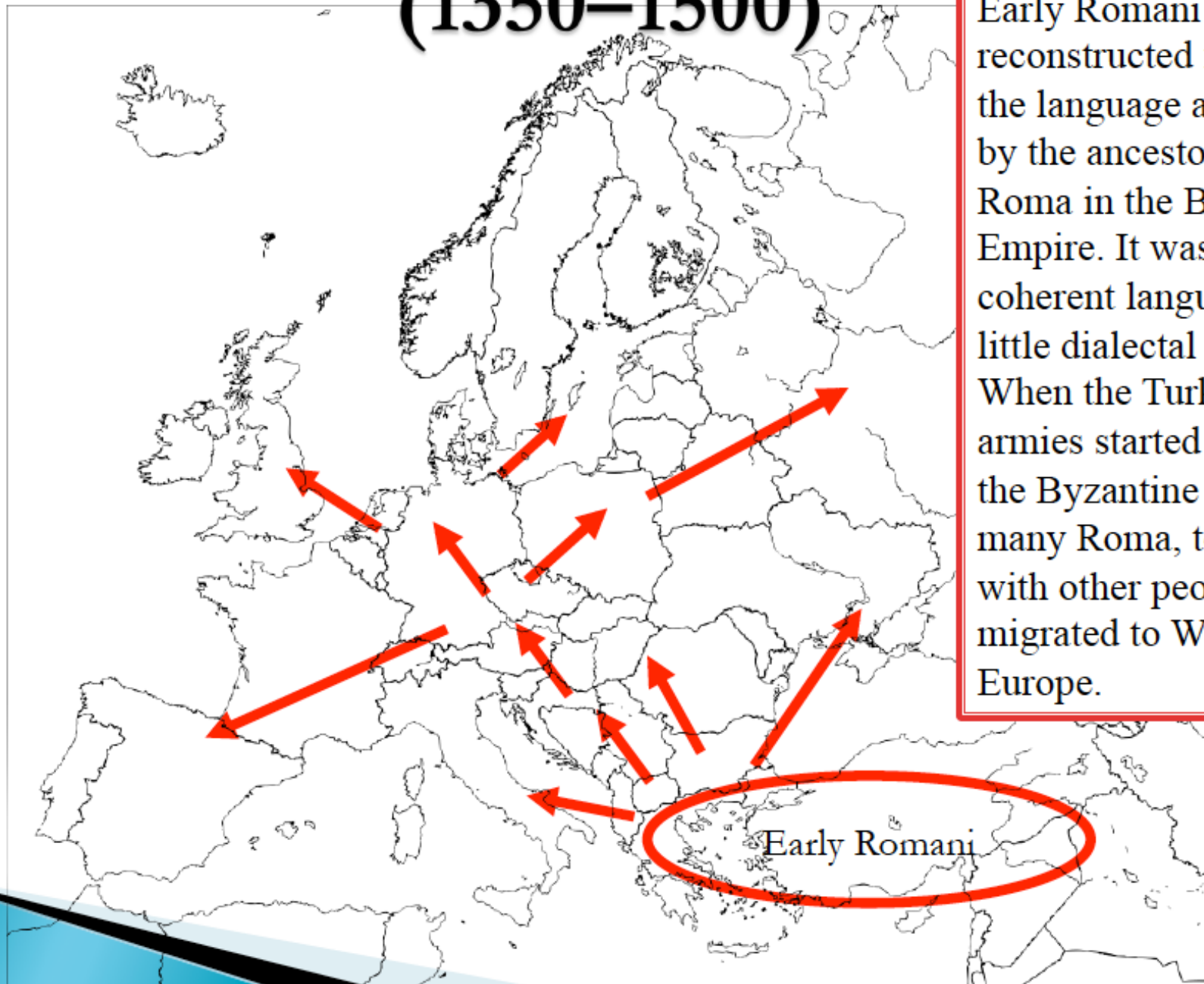


From Armenian
bov 'oven'; *kotor*
'piece'; *pativ*
'honour'

From Persian
zor 'strength';
baxt 'luck';
pošom 'wool'

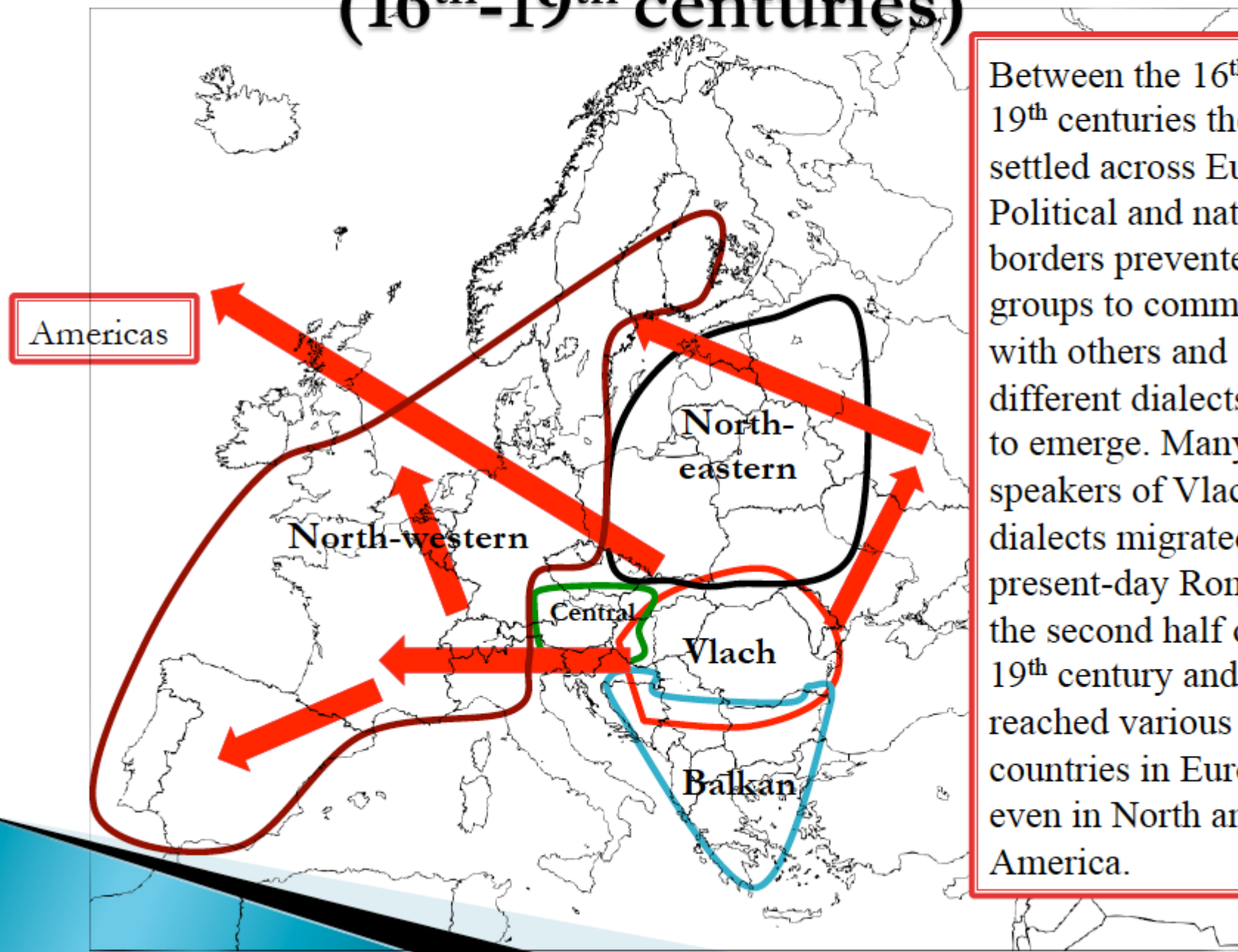
Borrowings from various languages show that the ancestors of the Roma migrated from India to the Byzantine Empire. We do not know why the migration happened or if it was a fast or slow movement. It is estimated that the migration took place around the 10th century AD.

Romani migrations (1350–1500)



Early Romani is the reconstructed form of the language as spoken by the ancestors of the Roma in the Byzantine Empire. It was a coherent language with little dialectal variation. When the Turkish armies started to invade the Byzantine Empire, many Roma, together with other people, migrated to Western Europe.

Settlement and dialect differentiation (16th-19th centuries)



Between the 16th and 19th centuries the Roma settled across Europe. Political and natural borders prevented some groups to communicate with others and different dialects started to emerge. Many speakers of Vlach dialects migrated out of present-day Romania in the second half of the 19th century and reached various countries in Europe and even in North and South America.

Traditional uses of Romani

- ▶ The nuclear family
- ▶ The extended family
- ▶ Romani neighbourhoods
- ▶ Occasional encounters with Roma from other places
- ▶ Business/work
- ▶ Institutions
- ▶ Media
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Literacy
- ▶ Community services

Used in

Not used in

The emergence of new uses

- ▶ From ca. 1860: Bible translations (1)
- ▶ 1920s: Soviet propaganda (2)
- ▶ 1960s-70s: Intellectual movement in Central and Eastern Europe (3)
- ▶ 1990s: Literacy in Central and Eastern Europe (4-6)
 - Support from
 - NGOs
 - Soros Foundation
 - European institutions
 - Governments



Public uses of Romani

- ▶ Speeches at commemoration events
- ▶ Institutions that deal with Romani policy (1)
- ▶ The Internet
 - Newsletters > activists (2)
 - Romani websites > NGOs (3)
 - Social media > Lay Roma (4)

Institutional support

- ▶ 1978
 - UNESCO recognises Romani as minority language
- ▶ 1992
 - Council of Europe resolution to support Romani
- ▶ 1993-2007
 - Several countries recognise Romani as minority language
- ▶ 2008: Council of Europe
 - European Curriculum Framework for Romani
- ▶ 2010: Qualirom Project
 - Piloting the Framework
 - Development of learning resources
- ▶ 2014: Qualirom Project
 - Publication of resources
 - <http://qualirom.uni-graz.at/home.html>

Standard Romani?

- ▶ All dialects written
- ▶ Many spellings
 - Each based on major national languages
- ▶ Many loan words
 - Different in each dialect
- ▶ Still limited use in official domains
- ▶ Flexibility and creativity
 - Text spelling
 - Emoticons etc.
- ▶ Openness
 - Acceptance of multiple, flexible norms
- ▶ Pride in the language

Facts

Speakers attitudes

If you want to know more

What is Romani?

<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/whatis/whatisromani.shtml>

Romani Virtual Library

<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/virtuallibrary/index.html>

Teach yourself Romani

<http://www.romaninet.com/>