

# Jewish and Gypsy: A Genetic Study of 76 Spanish Gypsies (Gitanos, Calé)

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The Spanish Gypsies (also known as *Gitanos*, part of the Romani people) have long been thought to originate from a single migration out of northwest India (Rajasthan) into Europe around the 12<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, new genetic evidence from a comprehensive DNA study of 76 Spanish Gypsies (from 15 provinces across Spain) paints a far more complex picture. This relatively large sample – 76 individuals – provides an unprecedented window into their ancestry. The findings reveal striking signals of Jewish heritage that cannot be explained by the conventional migration narrative. In particular, multiple lines of genetic evidence (autosomal DNA, forensic STR markers, Haplogroup analysis, and ancient DNA comparisons) point to deep connections with diverse Jewish populations. This finding suggests the Spanish Gypsies may descend from an itinerant international Jewish trading community rather than from a late-medieval Indian migrant group.

## Autosomal DNA Evidence of Diverse Jewish Ancestry

All 76 tested individuals have ancestry rooted in South Asia, consistent with an Indian genetic ties, but specifically *Southern* India rather than Rajasthan (Northern India). Intriguingly, this South Indian component shows close links to Indian-Jewish communities: the Jews of Cochin (Kerala), the Bene Israel of Maharashtra, and the Bnei Menashe of Northeast India.

Beyond their Indian Jewish ancestry, every single individual also carried significant Jewish ancestry from across nearly the entire Jewish world. In fact, the group's autosomal DNA includes detectable contributions from European Jews (both Ashkenazi and Sephardi lineages), North-African Jews (e.g. Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian, Libyan), Middle-Eastern Jews (e.g. Yemenite), Caucasus-region Jews (Georgian, Azerbaijani), Western-Asian Jews (Iraqi, Iranian), Central-Asian Jews (e.g. Bukharan/Uzbeki), and South-Asian Jews (Indian communities like Cochin and Bene Israel). In other words, the Spanish Gypsies' genomes carry traces of almost every major Jewish population from Europe to South Asia.

Notably, while 100% of the individuals have Jewish genetic signals, fewer than half (only 32 of 76) showed any Sephardic (Iberian-Jewish) component. The remaining 44 individuals inherited Jewish ancestry from outside the Iberian Peninsula – spanning Eastern Europe, North Africa, Asia and even India. Such a widespread Jewish genetic legacy cannot be explained by simple mixing with local Sephardic Jews in Spain. It suggests that the ancestors of Spanish Gypsies already possessed diverse Jewish lineages before settling in Iberia. Only after they arrived, did they then mix with local Jews.

Consistent with this, this study found that the Spanish Gypsies share genetic links with ancient Levantine populations. They exhibit DNA segments matching those of ancient Near Eastern peoples (biblical Canaanite/Levantine ancestry), reflecting an old Middle Eastern heritage within their genome. Even more striking, they have identifiable DNA matches to medieval Jewish individuals from 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Specifically, genetic commonalities were noted with DNA recovered from Jewish remains in medieval Norwich (England) and Erfurt (Germany).

It would be implausible for the Gypsies to have *direct ancestors* in Jewish cemeteries of 12<sup>th</sup>-century England and Germany if their forefathers had only arrived in Europe in the 1400s from India. Moreover, their genetic connection to ancient Israelites connects them to every Jewish community in the world. Indeed, the autosomal DNA profile of this group is a mosaic of globally distributed Jewish ancestry, indicating a deep historical intertwining of different Jewish peoples.

## Forensic STR Markers Linking to Jewish Populations

Additional evidence comes from forensic DNA analysis of Short Tandem Repeat (STR) markers in a subset of the Spanish Gypsy sample. STR profiles (the kind used in forensic identification) were examined for nine individuals, and the results reinforced their Jewish connections. All nine showed the presence of four key “Jewish markers” (a set of allele patterns at certain STR loci) in their genomes. These particular markers are known indicators of Jewish ancestry, and having all four suggests contributions from multiple Jewish branches (Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Middle Eastern/Mizrahi) in the family tree.

Moreover, when compared against published STR databases, each Gypsy individual’s profile matched or clustered with reference profiles from known Jewish populations. For example, their genetic fingerprints showed significant similarity to those of Hungarian Ashkenazi Jews, Chuetas of Mallorca (a Sephardic-descended Crypto-Jewish community), as well as datasets of mixed European and Israeli Jews. In practical terms, these Spanish Gypsies share numerous STR alleles with contemporary Jews, constituting direct forensic evidence of relatedness to the Jewish people.

It is telling that, despite hailing from different provinces of Spain, the Gypsy individuals had very homogeneous STR profiles, often carrying the same alleles at many loci. This indicates they stem

from a small, tightly intermarried founder community – one that likely had a distinct ethnic identity. Notably, *all* of these individuals carry the Jewish-specific STR markers, pointing to that founder community being of Jewish origin. The forensic analysis concluded that the Spanish Gypsies tested are genetically interrelated and descend from “the same group of Jews who made their way to Spain at some unspecified period” in history. In sum, the STR evidence independently corroborates the autosomal DNA findings: it solidifies the case that the Spanish Gypsies are closely linked to Jewish populations, not only in theory but in measurable genetic markers used in modern population forensics.

## Ancient Trade Routes and the Radhanite Merchant Hypothesis

How could Spanish Romani have acquired such a far-flung tapestry of Jewish ancestry? The Radhanite merchant hypothesis offers a compelling explanation. Historical records, though fragmentary, describe the *Radhanites* as medieval Jewish merchants (active roughly 8<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) who conducted long-distance trade across the known world. Based in Persia/Mesopotamia, these traders were famed for “knowing the way” – traveling from Western Europe and North Africa through the Middle East to India and even China. They connected far-flung Jewish communities along the Silk Road and maritime routes, serving as neutral intermediaries between Christian and Muslim realms.

As they journeyed, the Radhanites would have naturally intermixed with local Jewish populations in each region, through marriage and community ties, accumulating a diverse Jewish genetic heritage in their descendants. Their basic lineage was Middle Eastern (Western Asian Jewish), but over generations they would have picked up European, Mediterranean, and Asian-Jewish ancestries while maintaining a cohesive trading network. (Notably, the 76 Spanish Gypsies carry ~10–18% Western Asian/Middle Eastern DNA on average – consistent with their West Asian Jewish core ancestry. Greater than their Indian core ancestry.)

Historical evidence shows that Jewish merchants were exchanging goods between Levant and India as early as antiquity (for instance, Indian cinnamon and sugar in biblical-era Israel, and British tin in 13<sup>th</sup>-century BCE Israel). By the early Middle Ages, the Radhanites systematized this trade. A Radhanite caravan might begin in Spain, traverse the Mediterranean and North Africa, then go overland through Arabia and Persia, across the Indus to India, and onward to China, leveraging Jewish community outposts at every stage. In fact, the establishment of permanent Jewish colonies at the route endpoints is documented – for example, the medieval Jewish community of Kaifeng, China was founded by merchants from Persia during the Song Dynasty. (Rhadanites).

This mirrors what could have happened at the western terminus: *Sepharad* (Spain) was a natural endpoint of these trade circuits. We hypothesize that a group of ethnically mixed Jewish traders

– those who had amassed Indian-Jewish ancestry and other Diaspora lineages during their Silk Road travels – eventually settled in Spain and became the progenitors of the Spanish Gypsies. In essence, the Spanish Gypsies may represent the descendants of a medieval itinerant Jewish merchant clan that transacted between India and China, and Spain and Germany, in a circular pattern, when they arrived in Spain, rather than descendants of a later 15<sup>th</sup>-century migration from Northern India.

This scenario elegantly accounts for the genetic data found in this group of Spanish Gypsies. Such traders would have arrived in Spain with an “international” Jewish genetic profile already in place. Indeed, the study found traces of East Asian ancestry in the Spanish Gypsies (about 30% of them carried a small component of “Yellow River” East Asian Neolithic DNA), which is consistent with a journey that extended to East Asia. This is the same DNA heritage as the Jews of Kaifeng.

Over the centuries in Iberia, this population likely absorbed additional local Jewish blood (explaining why some Sephardic admixture is present) and also may have incorporated genetic input from Ashkenazi lines (perhaps via earlier branches that went through Central Europe). Yet the core of their lineage remained the conglomerate of Jewish Diasporas gathered along the old trade routes. By the time they were recognized in historical records as “Gypsies” (mistaken as Egyptian or Indian wanderers), they were already a hybrid Jewish community – a living relic of the trans-Eurasian Jewish trading networks.

## Conclusion

The converging evidence from modern autosomal DNA, forensic STR comparisons, Haplogroup analysis, and ancient and medieval DNA evidence, points toward an extraordinary origin for the Spanish Gypsies. Rather than being merely late-arriving immigrants from India who mixed a bit with Spanish Jews, they appear to be the living legacy of Jewish merchants who traversed continents from the beginning of recorded time.

The unique genetic signature of 76 Spanish Gypsies – carrying Jewish ancestry from almost every branch of the Jewish family tree – is possibly explained by a Jewish travelling merchant hypothesis. These people preserved their unique Jewish ancestry through endogamous marriage, possibly tracing back to a single group of medieval Jewish traders who made Spain their home. This new perspective challenges the conventional Rajasthani-origin model for Romani.

Such findings underscore the value of comprehensive genetic testing in unraveling the hidden threads of history and invite further interdisciplinary research into the journeys that shaped this remarkable community.