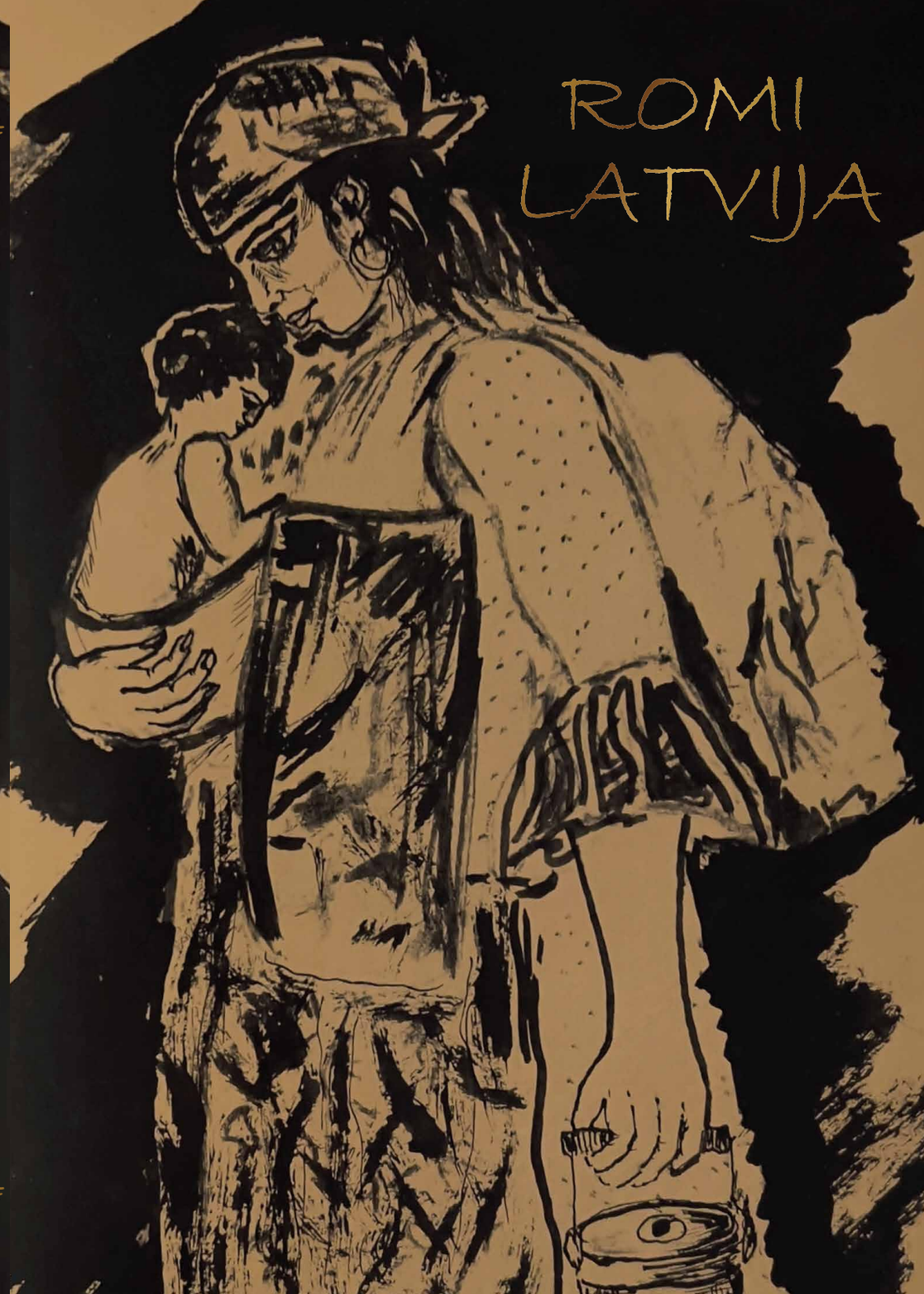
ROMU KULTURAS CENTRS

ROMI LATVIJA

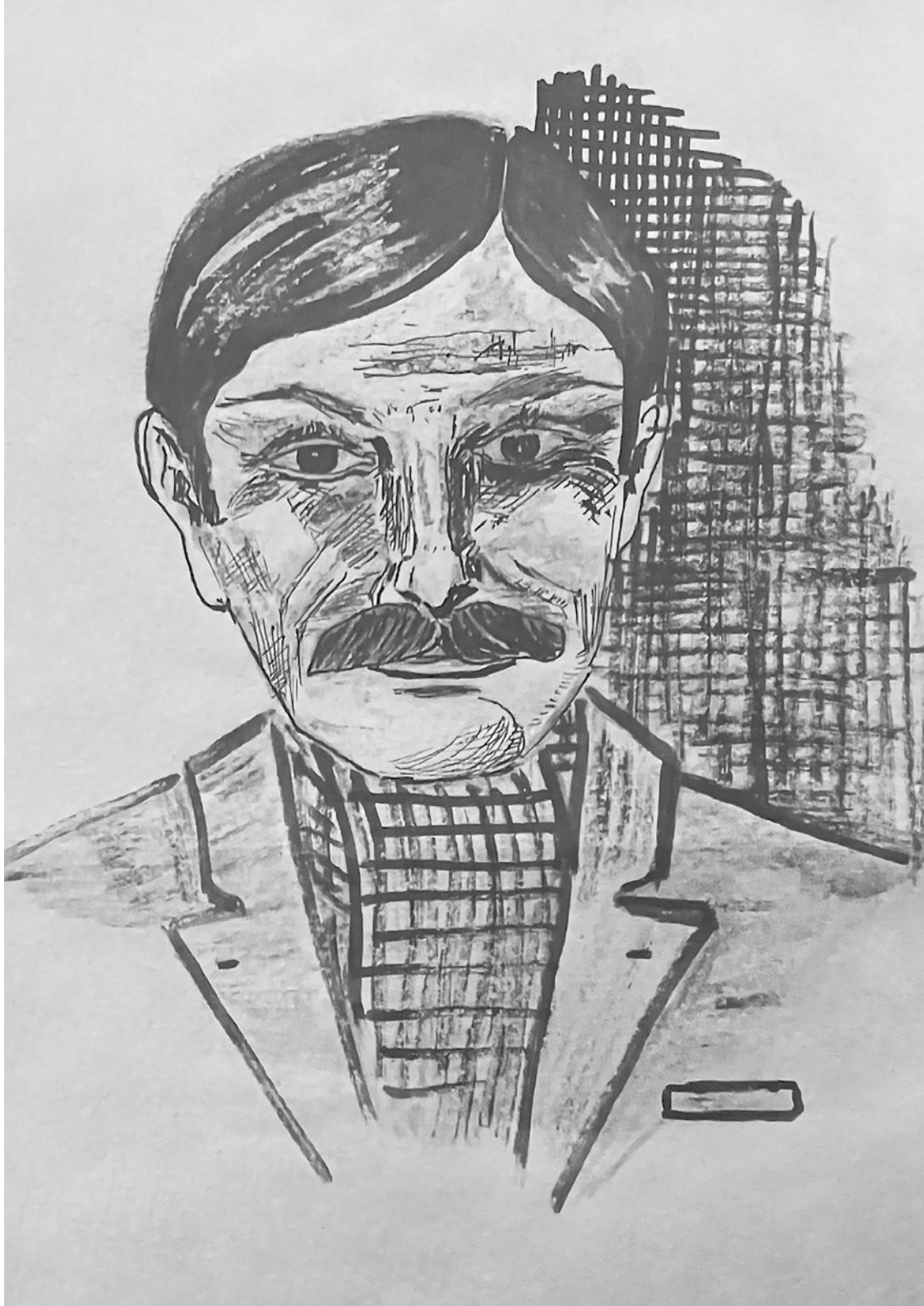
ROMI LATVIJA



Līdzfinansē
Eiropas Savienība

*„Līdzfinansē Eiropas Savienība. Par materiāla saturu un izteiktajiem viedokļiem atbild tā autori, un tie ne vienmēr atspoguļo Eiropas Savienības vai Eiropas Komisijas viedokli. Ne Eiropas Savienība, ne Eiropas Komisija nevar būt atbildīgas par tiem.”*

# Roma in Latvia



# PREFACE

As you will see in this book, the Roma in Latvia are represented in various aspects of life.

Since time immemorial, states—including Latvia—have sought to integrate, transform, attract, and make the Roma loyal, even though the Roma soul's calling is to explore the world and carry the culture of love for life across borders. Naturally, the order of things in a globalized world has suppressed and, over time, assimilated the Roma way of life, worldview, and historical heritage, which has accompanied them since leaving the territory of India a thousand years ago.

Unfortunately, the Roma have remained silent in times when they should have stood up for themselves. Others have written about us, others have left scientific records about us, and others have shaped the image of the Roma. It is only in the last 50 years that the Roma have begun to recognize themselves as a unified people, working to build their own history, culture, language, and identity.

While memorials are openly erected and confiscated properties reclaimed for the suffering of the Jewish people during World War II, few know about the genocide against the Roma people—known as Samudaripen—which resulted in the extermination of more than 2 million Roma in their prime across Europe.

Roma stories about the Roma genocide are not found in textbooks. Only a small number of books have been written about us, and among their authors, you will not find a single Roma representative. No one builds memorials for us, and even the Roma gold discovered in Swiss banks remains stuck in complex legal proceedings. The time for change has come!

According to the information available to the "Roma Culture Center" association, approximately twenty thousand Roma currently identify themselves as belonging to Latvia. This book has been created, in part, to prove to society that the time for integration has ended, and we must all work together toward a mutually beneficial era of cooperation.

We must embrace a new era—one in which we abandon prejudices, open our doors and hearts, and give the Roma the opportunity to showcase and prove themselves.

The Roma in Latvia are a unique asset in culture, sports, politics, and entrepreneurship. The Roma in Latvia create and add value. The Roma in Latvia want and are capable of proving themselves. The Roma in Latvia are open—if only they are met with the same openness.

We extend our hand in friendship.

Respectfully,
PhD Normunds Rudevičs

# Roma in Latvia

One of the oldest minority groups in Latvia – the Roma, traditionally called gypsies ("čigāni" in Latvian), is the only minority in Latvia whose history has not yet been thoroughly studied. The Roma have a rich cultural tradition, a written language and literature that developed later than those of other European peoples, but their historical memory usually does not extend beyond two or three generations. Previous research has rarely utilized written sources on Roma history, which are scattered across various archival collections. History is an important factor in shaping a nation's self-awareness and fostering a sense of belonging to a particular place, and this element is largely absent in Roma culture.

This study provides a general overview of the history of the Roma in Latvia, which could encourage further interest in the detailed exploration of specific historical figures, events, and phenomena. Particular attention is given to the early history of the Latvian Roma in the 18th and 19th centuries and the available records on specific individuals, as well as the Roma's economic and cultural achievements in the 20th and 21st centuries. The research is based on unpublished historical sources from the Latvian State Historical Archives, literature, and periodicals, without claiming to present a complete picture of Latvian Roma history. At this stage, only fragments of Latvia's Roma history can be reconstructed, which may serve as reference points for new, broader, and more comprehensive studies.

The ethnonym *"čigāns"* (gypsy) used in this work carries no negative connotation, as it has long been employed in both spoken and literary Latvian without derogatory intent and has appeared in historical sources and literature.

**1.**

# Roma in the World from Origins to the Present



The Roma ethnic groups are distinguished by the wide variety of names assigned to them by other peoples. Their self-designation is "Roma," which translates directly as *"people who follow the sun,"* in contrast to *"gadžo,"* meaning all non-Roma. The Latvian ethnonym "čigāni" originates from the Greek word *τσιγγάνοι* (tsyganoi), which directly translates as "untouchables." In different languages, Roma are referred to as *tsiganes* or *bohemiens* in French (meaning "Bohemians"), *Zigeuner* in German, *zigeuners* or *heidens* (pagans) in Flemish, *zingari* in Italian, *gypsies* in English (derived from "Egyptians"), *gitanos* in Spanish, *cigáni* or Pharao *népek* (Pharaoh's people) in Hungarian, and *mustalainen* (black ones) in Finnish. One theory suggests that the name *"Romani"* originates from "Romei," referring to the Byzantines, in whose empire the Roma lived for several centuries.

As of 2015, around 30 million Roma lived worldwide, with approximately 15 million residing in Europe. They speak Romani and the languages of the surrounding populations. Religiously, most Roma in Central and Western Europe, as well as in the Americas and Australia, are Catholics or Protestants, while those in the Balkans, Asia, and Africa are predominantly Sunni Muslims, and in Eastern Europe and Romania, they are mostly Orthodox Christians.

Since there were no definitive records of the Roma's place of origin, in the 18th and 19th centuries, various regions were considered their homeland, including Persia, Assyria, North Africa, Egypt, the Caucasus, Ukraine, and Bohemia. These diverse theories are reflected in the names for Roma in different languages. Linguistic research, however, indicates that the Roma are descendants of migrants from India, most likely from nomadic castes such as the Dom, Chamar, Lohar, Kanjari, and Banjara, who practiced craftsmanship, music, and circus arts while traveling. The Romani language dialects belong to the Indo-European language family.[1]

The results of linguistic research, especially with the emergence of historical comparative linguistics, as well as studies in other scientific fields such as anthropology and ethnography, have led to the conclu-

sion that the Roma originated from northwestern and central India. For many years, the reasons for their migration remained unknown. These reasons were studied by Jānis Kohanovskis, a Latvian Romani living in Paris, a Doctor of Philology, author of numerous works and articles on the Romani language, and a polyglot. He lived in India for five years, and as a result of his research on Indian dialects and the everyday life of Indian peoples, he concluded that the Roma are descendants of the Rajputs (which translates as "princes' sons"), meaning that before migrating from India, they could not have been nomads.

The prominent Rajput leader Prithviraj Chauhan united 150 Rajput clans to fight against the Muslim conqueror Shihab al-Din Muhammad Ghori. In 1192, at the Battle of Tarain, the Rajputs achieved a brilliant victory, and the noble Prithviraj forgave his enemy and set him free. The following year, Muhammad Ghori returned with an army of 300,000 cavalry and treacherously attacked the Rajputs.

The defeated army of Prithviraj split into three parts. The first retreated to the mountains, organized a resistance movement, and fought against the invaders until the arrival of the British. The descendants of this group, who mixed with the local population, are the ancestors of modern Indian Roma. The second part of Prithviraj's army also continued to fight against the Muslim oppressors. The third group, who called themselves the sons of the god Rama *(Romane Chave),* considered it better to leave their homeland rather than live in slavery and traveled through Afghanistan to Europe.

The first European country the Roma reached was Greece. All Romani dialects, including the Spanish Romani dialect, indicate that they arrived in Europe via Greece, not through North Africa, as some researchers claim. The first recorded mention of the Roma was made by a monk from a monastery on Mount Athos (Byzantium) in his writings in the year 1100.

From Greece, the Roma spread across Central Europe in the 15th century, reaching Western and Northwestern European lands. The Roma's arrival in Central Europe is dated to 1417, when they first appeared



near German cities in southeastern Europe. They appeared in the Balkans and along the Danube even earlier.

Some Romani tribal groups apparently began migrating from India long before Prithviraj's army was defeated. Some researchers believe that the migration took place between the 5th and 10th centuries. At times, Roma are mistaken for other nomadic peoples.[2]

Another theory suggests that the Roma's departure from their original homeland was linked to the conquests of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (who ruled from 998 to 1030) during the Ghaznavid Empire. This theory is presented in the book Children of the Wind: From Kannauj to the World, written at the initiative of linguist Marcel Courthiade, a professor at the Sorbonne University.

Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India 17 times, justifying his campaigns as spreading Islam, and plundered the lands his army passed through. Hundreds of thousands of captives were sold into slavery in the markets of Khorasan and Baghdad. Indians were recruited into armies and taken as artisans, as they were famous for their metalworking and soldering skills. Merchants, fortune tellers, Brahmins, astrologers, basket weavers, sculptors, musicians, tightrope walkers, and fire-eaters were spared to be used as servants. They formed a distinct community, preserved their culture, and retained the Romani language, which contains many Sanskrit elements.

Modern India acknowledges its connection with the Roma. In the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, in the city of Kannauj, where most proto-Roma once lived, a monument has been erected to commemorate the Roma as India's first diaspora.

Mahmud of Ghazni, born in 971, was known for his brute strength, cruelty, and unattractive appearance, yet he had a deep appreciation for beauty and practicality. His military campaigns brought him hundreds of war elephants and horses, which required skilled trainers. A campaign was unimaginable without expert blacksmiths, and entertainment was best provided by musicians, acrobats, and performers.

The 10th-century Persian encyclopedist Muhammad al-Biruni wro-

te about Kannauj, stating that it was located in the heart of Hindu lands. Its capital was home to flowers used to produce valuable perfumes and incense. The city housed poets, astronomers, philosophers, soothsayers, and clergy, as well as skilled craftsmen, including perfume makers and temple builders. Kannauj was already mentioned in the Indian epics Mahabharata and Ramayana.

Kannauj was ruled by Raja Rajyapala, with Rajputs forming the elite and courtiers of the city, while mahauts served as warriors. The city had perfume factories where fragrances were distilled from flowers and aromatic plants. Nearby were metal workshops producing various iron and non-ferrous metal items. Close to the capital was a breeding ground for working and war elephants, where caretakers and handlers began their training from the age of ten.

On December 20, 1018, Mahmud of Ghazni arrived with his army at Kannauj. After a siege and conquest of the city, the sultan ordered all artists and craftsmen to prepare within ten days for relocation to the capital of the Ghaznavid Empire, Great Ghazni, bringing their families and tools. During these ten days, Ghaznavid soldiers were permitted to plunder homes and temples.

In Great Ghazni, the residents of Kannauj and other artisans from Hindu lands were forced to continue their trades in service to the sultan. After Mahmud of Ghazni's death in 1030, the new sultan, Masud, sent several hundred Indian craftsmen to Baghdad and other cities.

By 1040, the Ghaznavid Empire had disintegrated. In 1055, the Seljuk Turks conquered Baghdad. Kannauj's craftsmen sought refuge in a safer place—Constantinople—where they continued their trades. After the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, some Indians moved to Jerusalem to work under Sultan Saladin, while others went to Cairo.[3]

There is also a theory that the ancestors of the Roma left India in the first or second half of the first millennium AD in several waves. Traveling through Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Armenia, some groups turned toward Palestine, Egypt, and Algeria, falling under Muslim influence. Others reached the Byzantine Empire in the 10th–11th centuries, where they converted to Christianity and developed a shared identity. By the 12th–13th centuries, Roma began settling in the Balkans.



At the beginning of the 15th century, due to the pressure of the Islamic Ottoman conquerors or possibly climate changes, Roma dispersed across Central and Western Europe. They were mentioned in Bohemia in 1411, in Basel and Hesse in 1414, in Transylvania and Moldavia in 1417. Some moved to southern Germany (recorded in Regensburg and Augsburg in 1418), others traveled through Prague and Dresden (1418) to Hamburg, Lübeck, and Rostock, reaching Paris in 1427. Later, they settled in England (1430) and Scotland (1500). Another group moved through northern Italy to Rome (1422), while others traveled through Savoy and southern France to Spain (1425). In the early 16th century, Roma appeared in Sweden.

In European countries, Roma initially claimed to be pilgrims—Christian refugees from "Little Egypt" (probably referring to southern Greece)—with a supposed travel permit from the Pope. They engaged in music, circus performances, and metalworking in public places.

At first, local populations were welcoming, but within a few generations, Roma faced persecution as vagrants accused of fortune-telling and begging. They were believed to spread plagues, act as Turkish spies, kidnap children, and practice black magic. Many countries enacted laws to expel them under threat of slavery, severe corporal punishment, or execution: Spain (1482), Germany (1498), France (1504), England (1530), Denmark (1536), Scotland (1541), Bohemia (1549), and Sweden (1637).

In 1453, a law issued in France against the Roma allowed corporal punishment, the death penalty, and the expulsion of Roma. In 1467, King Francis I issued a decree in Orléans demanding the extermination of the Roma and organizing their persecution. In 1492, in Spain, King Ferdinand I initiated a bloody crackdown on the Roma. For many centuries, monarchs of various countries issued orders for the forced

sterilization of Roma, their consignment to hard labor in galleys and mines, the removal of their children to be given to "good Christians," the prohibition of the Romani language, and the banning of marriages between Roma.[4]

In the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, from the late 15th century, Roma began to be enslaved, a practice that continued until the mid-19th century. Slaves had no human rights; they could be bought, sold, gifted, and exchanged like objects.[5] In 1545, the Reichstag of Augsburg declared that anyone who killed a Roma within the Holy Roman Empire would not be guilty of murder. In 1554, England issued the "Gypsy Act," which ordered the Roma to abandon their idle and dishonest way of life and settle permanently. Otherwise, vagrants would be hanged as a warning to others. In 1710, Holy Roman Emperor Joseph I issued an order to hang all adult Roma men without trial, while women and youths were to be whipped and expelled from the country.[6]

From 1700, in the Dutch provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel, government-sanctioned "pagan hunts" targeted Roma, allowing them to be beaten, robbed, and killed with impunity. By 1730, there were no Roma left in these provinces, as all had either been killed or had fled.[7]

During World War II, Nazi Germany and its occupied territories exterminated between 0.5 and 1.5 million Roma. The Roma were not eliminated as an inferior race but as parasitic and antisocial elements. Nazi doctors sought to prove that parasitism and criminal tendencies were inherent in the Roma and could not be changed.

In the Soviet Union, during the 1920s and 1930s, several decrees were issued aiming to settle the Roma permanently. Roma collective farms were established, Romani schools were opened in cities, and a Romani pedagogical institute was founded. In 1933, a mass deportation of nomadic Roma from the Moscow region took place, justified by the claim that nomadic Roma were an undesirable antisocial and declassed element.

From 1956, the USSR and later other socialist countries passed laws prohibiting the nomadic way of life. Sedentarization contributed



to Roma integration into modern society, access to education, and an improvement in living standards.

Since the 1970s, international Roma organizations have been established. In 1971, the International Romani Union (IRU) was founded, followed in 1996 by a Council of Europe expert group on Roma and Travellers. In November 2004, the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) was created.[8]

**2.**

# Roma Occupations and Way of Life



Traditional Roma occupations include craftsmanship and trade. Their crafts involve metalworking, jewelry making, soldering, and the production of metal utensils. Since the Middle Ages, written sources have mentioned bear and snake taming among Roma men, fortune-telling among women, as well as music and dance. This is why the origins of circus arts and musical performances in European countries are often associated with the Roma.

Since their time in Byzantium, performances with trained animals were an important source of income for the Roma. The most captivating of these performances featured bears. Roma bear trainers performed across Germany, Poland, the Balkans, and the Russian Empire. A trainer typically had one or several animals, which, to the sound of a tambourine, would dance on their hind legs in market squares or streets. Bears also performed various tricks through gestures and poses, mimicking actions such as a boy stealing peas, young men drinking schnapps, a shy bride, or a hunter shooting a rifle. In cities, spectators paid with money, while in rural areas, they offered food products in exchange for the show. By the 19th century, German Roma had also mastered acrobatics, including tightrope walking and jumps, as well as puppet theater performances.

Between the 15th and 18th centuries, a widespread legend in Europe claimed that Roma women had learned fortune-telling in Egypt, though this is untrue. A more plausible theory suggests that the Roma acquired their fortune-telling skills in medieval Greece, where a strong belief in magic persisted and numerous occult sects existed.

Almost all Roma in Russia were engaged in horse trading. During the Soviet collectivization period, keeping horses in private households was banned, effectively putting an end to independent horse trading. Roma were forced to shift to dealing in textiles, cosmetics, clothing, and scarce goods. They bought and resold furs and gold, and later, even automobiles.[9]

Since the Middle Ages, Roma have lived in kinship-based communities. Upon arriving in European lands in the 15th century, they already

had their own leaders, who bore grand titles such as counts, dukes, or voivodes. Most likely, these were *baro rom*—"great men"—figures of authority, the eldest and wisest in the Roma community, who settled disputes among members, provided guidance, and handled dealings with the outside world on behalf of the entire community. This title had no connection to the European aristocratic rank of *"baron"*.

Among Russian Roma, patrilineal clans existed, sometimes numbering up to 800 people. Their nomadic communities, known as tabors, typically consisted of up to 25 kulbas or tents. A leader stood at the head of the group, while disputes were settled by a council of elder men *(sendo, kris).* Earnings were shared among all members of the tabor, including those unable to work. In some places, extended families still exist, but Roma families, in general, remain strictly patriarchal, with the absolute authority of the family head. Hospitality and mutual assistance are highly valued within Roma communities, as are arranged marriages, bride prices, and elaborate wedding and funeral ceremonies.[10]

**3.**

# Friendly Eastern European Lands



As the persecution of Roma and Jews spread across Central and Western Europe, the persecuted could seek refuge in more tolerant countries. The most tolerant of all was the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where many ethnic groups coexisted—Slavs, Germans, Tatars, Balts—and various religious communities, including Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

In 1501, the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, Alexander Jagiellon, issued a privilege for the Roma, allowing them to roam freely across the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.[11] By the 17th century, Roma had appeared in the territory of Ukraine.

Tolerance towards Roma and Jews paid off—their activities contributed to the development of trade and crafts, as well as supplemented the state and noble treasuries through taxation. The Roma in Poland-Lithuania were free people, not tied to a specific place or person, and could move and choose their occupations freely. In various parts of the country, taxes were collected, and communication with authorities was handled by "Gypsy kings"—three or four men usually appointed by the authorities. These leaders aimed to dress lavishly and behave accordingly.

In 1778, one of the wealthiest and most politically influential figures in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the largest landowner, and the Voivode of Vilnius, Prince Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł (1734–1790), commonly referred to by his frequently used phrase *Panie Kochanku* ("My Dear Sir"), appointed Jan Marcinkiewicz as a "king." From then on, Marcinkiewicz dressed in Polish attire, rode on horseback, while his "queen"—his wife—traveled behind him in a carriage. Marcinkiewicz was granted the authority to resolve internal Roma disputes and administer justice.

Another "Gypsy king" of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Matyáš Kwik, lived in the town of Mir, which belonged to the Radziwiłł family and is now part of Belarus. In 1787, Karol Radziwiłł granted him the privilege of judging Roma. As a result, Mir soon gained a reputation as the Roma capital.[12]

As early as the 17th century, the Radziwiłł princes allowed Roma to settle in their town of Smorgon, in present-day Belarus. Prince Karol Radziwiłł showed particular favor to the Roma. In Smorgon, the Roma engaged in various crafts: some worked as blacksmiths, making chains and locks; others carved wooden spoons, goblets, and spindles; while others wove bast shoes and baskets.

Smorgon was governed by "Gypsy kings" appointed by the Radziwiłłs. One of them oversaw the famous "Bear Academy," where he recruited Roma men capable of taming and caring for bear cubs caught in nearby forests. At the academy, 20 trainers simultaneously worked with 10 or more bears, as well as several monkeys. The training lasted six years. In summer, the trainers and their animals roamed the lands, entertaining crowds and earning money for both their own and the bears' sustenance, while also contributing a portion of their earnings to the communal fund of Smorgon.[13] The bear handlers from Smorgon performed at fairs in Prussia, Silesia, Bavaria, and Alsace. The masks of a Gypsy and a bear were among the most common in Latvian ķekatas processions, suggesting that Roma bear handlers were well-known in the territory of Latvia as well.

In the second half of the 18th century, Roma settlements on Radziwiłł lands in the towns of Mir and Nesvizh were destroyed. In 1770, the Russian army captured and ravaged the Nesvizh castle and town. Mir was devastated in 1794 during the battles between Russian forces and defenders of Polish independence. During wartime, the services and entertainment provided by Roma were no longer in demand, which may have prompted them to seek safer lands, including the neighboring Duchy of Courland and Semigallia.

In another Roma-friendly country—the Russian Empire—the Roma were first mentioned in Empress Anna Ioannovna's 1733 decree on new taxes for military needs. The decree stated that Roma, who had not yet been included in population registers, were also required to pay taxes for the maintenance of soldiers.

That same year, Roma in Ingermanland (the lands between Narva



and Lake Ladoga) were permitted to trade horses, as they had already proven themselves to the locals, implying that they had lived in Ingermanland for several generations.

On December 21, 1783, Empress Catherine II issued a decree requiring Roma to be registered among the taxable peasantry. However, they were allowed to register as petty townspeople or artisans, with the exception of the nobility. In many provinces, Roma became petty traders and settled permanently, accumulating wealth.

Russian aristocrats increasingly developed an appreciation for Roma music. In 1774, Count Orlov-Chemsensky invited a Roma ensemble to Moscow. This ensemble later evolved into a choir, marking the beginning of professional Roma music in the Russian Empire.[14]

**4.**

# The Arrival of the Roma in the Territory of Latvia



It is often mentioned in literature that the Roma began arriving in the territory of Latvia as early as the 15th century. However, no written historical sources have confirmed this. According to Roma oral traditions, their ancestors had some connection with a branch of the Teutonic Order—the Livonian Order. This possibility cannot be ruled out, as the Order's army constantly required blacksmiths to repair weapons and shoe horses, as well as horse breeders for war and draft horses. These were skills that the Roma mastered exceptionally well.

A challenge in identifying Roma in written sources lies in the fact that historical records rarely specify a person's Roma ethnicity. The Roma followed the dominant religion of their host country, and in European lands, their names and surnames did not differ from those of Catholics. Unlike Jews or Old Believers, they did not have distinct personal documents or specific names.

The first mention of the Roma in the documents of the Teutonic Order dates back to August 29, 1449. On this date, the Order's envoy to the Papal court in Rome, Jodokus Hohenstein, wrote to the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order in Prussia, Konrad von Erlichshausen, about his dire financial situation and the devastation caused by the plague in Rome. He urged the Grand Master not to allow Gypsies *(czyganen* in Middle Low German), Jews, and other pagans into the Order's lands, fearing that they might spread the plague.[15] This reveals an attitude towards the Roma as pagans. In the lands of the Teutonic Order, Jews were forbidden from settling, and it is possible that this prohibition also applied to the Roma.

The earliest confirmed historical records of Roma in the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia date back to the 18th century. From 1562 to 1795, the duchy was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Duke held princely powers. As a result, the duchy's cultural ties were much stronger with Lithuania than with Riga or Vidzeme.

The historian Jan Juškevič, without citing sources, wrote that a 1719 decision by the legislative assembly of the duchy (the Landtag) described the Roma as a harmful and thieving band, while also noting

that some noblemen protected and supported them. As early as the 17th century, Roma allegedly roamed the duchy in small groups as cattle buyers, pot menders, tricksters, fraudsters, and poachers. A report from 1640 states that residents of Valle had already complained about them. According to Juškevič, Roma often survived on gifts, as they feared work, and even scavenged from waste pits. He further claimed that, as cowards, they enjoyed torturing defenseless people and animals, taking pleasure in watching others suffer and participating as executioners and animal skinners.[16] However, no confirmation of these negative accounts has been found. It is likely that these were unfounded fabrications by the author, as Juškevič has been known to include similar fictionalized elements in his works regarding other historical figures and events.

The earliest documented reference to Roma in the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia is a Landtag decree from January 5, 1724, which ordered all Roma to leave the territory within six weeks or face corporal punishment and the confiscation of all their possessions.[17]

For a long time, the presence of Roma in the duchy was illegal. The term *"Tschigans/Zigeuner"*[18] first appeared in a Latvian language grammar book by G. F. Stender in 1753, despite several Latvian grammars and dictionaries being published before that.

In Latvian folklore, particularly in folk tales and anecdotes, Roma are depicted as cheerful, resourceful, and cunning people who solve everyday problems with humor. They are never portrayed as arrogant, violent, or cruel. Two characteristic Latvian folk anecdotes about Roma were recorded in Kandava in 1936.

*The Roma and the Fishing Rod. Once, a Roma man found a fishing rod somewhere and started fishing in a forbidden place— a pond belonging to a nearby manor. He was so engrossed in fishing that he did not notice the nobleman approaching. The nobleman suddenly shouted at him: "What are you doing here, my friend? Don't you know that fishing is forbidden here?! Now you'll be punished for this!" The Roma, frightened like a thread, replied: "Oh, honorable lord, I am merely watching how the worm jumps on the hook."*



*The Roma Boy and His Brothers. Two farmers were returning from the market with their carts full. Suddenly, they saw a small Roma boy fishing in a puddle on the road. They approached him and said: "What are you doing, fool? Nothing will bite here." The Roma boy replied: "If nothing bites for me, it will bite for my brother." The farmers did not understand and returned to their carts—only to find them completely empty. Only then did they realize that while they were talking to the small Roma boy, the older ones had robbed them. They wanted to catch the boy, but he had already disappeared. The farmers, with sour expressions, continued their journey home.*

The most enduring place in Latvian folk traditions has been occupied by the Roma in the mask parades that took place on farmsteads at Christmas time. One of the most common masks were gypsies with bears and on horseback, gypsy women. In several areas, the processions of masks from one home to another were known as the Gypsy Walk.

In the mid-18th century, a plague epidemic spread across Russia, prompting the Governor of Vidzeme, Georg von Braun, to repeatedly request the Land Council of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia to prevent wandering Jews from entering from Prussia and Lithuania to avoid further spreading the disease. On June 6, 1757, the Land Council issued an order stating that no landowner, estate tenant, or their subordinates—especially innkeepers and peasants—were allowed to provide shelter or permit the stay of wandering Jews, Roma, or other undocumented persons. Instead, they were to apprehend them whenever possible and deliver them to the military command in Liepāja.[19]

It is likely that the arrival of Roma in the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia from Poland-Lithuania was influenced by political events that made normal life difficult—battles with the Russian army in the early 1770s, the annexation of part of Poland by Russia in 1772, and the war of Polish freedom fighters (Confederates) against the Russian army in 1792.

A letter from Officer Friedrich Cekelt dated January 2, 1771, to the State Councilor of Courland from Aizvīķi reported that a considerable number of Jews in the Embūte parish had been detained and transported

across the Lithuanian border. However, a significant number of what he called the "useless, thieving nation" – the Roma – were still present, and he had not yet received instructions regarding their expulsion.[20]

The printed version of the decree issued by Duke Peter von Biron of Courland and Semigallia on November 1, 1780, was circulated. It stated that despite multiple Landtag decisions declaring that all Gypsies who had not settled on land *(die nicht auf Land sitzen)* were forbidden to remain in the duchy, a considerable number of them still roamed the land. Therefore, for the sake of general security, the Landtag decision of April 13, 1778, reaffirmed all previous laws against the Gypsies and ordered that none of them, except those who had settled on land, be tolerated in manorial districts, markets, or taverns. Violations of this decree were punishable by a fine of 200 thalers. If the violation occurred on ducal land or in cities, half of the fine would go to the informant and the other half to the ducal treasury; if on noble land, half would go to the nobility's treasury and the other half to the informant. Roma unwilling to work and settle on land were to be expelled beyond the borders. Every landlord was to inform their innkeepers and peasants—under threat of a six-thaler fine for Germans and six lashes for peasants—that they were required to report any wandering Roma observed within their borders. This decision was made by the Landtag on September 11, 1780.[21]

This ducal order indirectly confirms that by then, there were already Roma settlers who had established permanent residence in the duchy. Like previous decrees, this one targeted only nomadic Roma.

In 1795, the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia was annexed by the Russian Empire. In 1797, the first census (soul revision) in Courland Governorate recorded a total of 94 settled Roma, the majority of whom were in the Sēlpils region (43) and the Tukums region (25).[22]

Later documents indicate that many Courland Roma were born on Courland estates during the duchy's era. Their surnames, derived from Catholic male names with the suffix –ičs (Marcinkevičs – son of Marcin, Tumaševičs – son of Tom), suggest that they or their ancestors originated from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Other Roma



surnames found in Courland in later times, such as Gindra, Vidžus, and Didžus, are of Lithuanian origin.

In August 8, 1812, the Sēlpils District Court reported to the Piltene Regional Administration that it was sending, under guard, nine Romani families to the Piltene Regional Administration: Simon Marcinkēvičs with his wife Hanka and sons Jānis, Mārtiņš, and Kazimirs; Juruks Marcinkēvičs with his wife Eva and daughter Elzbete; Marcin Marcinkēvičs with his wife Elzbete, sons Jānis, Geris, and Jozefs, and daughters Anna, Dorota, Liza, and Ilze; Jakob Kozlovskis with his wife Marija; Pāvels Marcinkēvičs with his wife Madi and sons Pēteris and Jānis; Anna Marcinkēviča with her sons Ančuks, Jurks, and Stefans, and daughters Maija and Ilze; Brencis Stefans with his wife Katrīna, mother Ilze, son Jēkabs, and daughter Grieta; Fricis Stefans with his wife Agate, son Pāvils, and daughter Dorota; Edis Jozefs with his sons Mārtiņš and Jēkabs, and daughter Eva, as the roaming Roma claimed to be from the Piltene region.[23]

On August 18, 1812, the Courland Governorate Administration ordered that Roma fit for work be handed over to the city of Jelgava to work for wages.[24]

On August 4, 1812, in Jelgava, it was determined from the Roma that Simon Marcinkēvičs was 56 years old, born in Sērene Manor, and registered in the city of Jaunjelgava, where he had paid crown taxes until 1811. For the year 1812, he had deposited 4 rubles and 30 kopecks with the city magistrate and presented a certificate as proof.

Juris Marcinkēvičs was 90 years old, born in Sece Manor, and had gone with a governorate pass to register in Jēkabpils, but was not registered there due to being blind.

Martins Marcinkēvičs was 80 years old, born in Elkaciems Manor, registered in Jelgava, and had paid taxes until 1811, though the city had not issued him a tax receipt.

Jakob Kozlovskis was 39 years old, born in Īslīce Manor, registered in Bauska, but was unable to provide a tax receipt, which the magistrate had allegedly not issued.

Pāvils Marcinkēvičs, 48 years old, was born in Bērze Manor near Jēkabpils, registered in Jaunjelgava, but had not been able to fully pay his taxes and had received a receipt for the 6 rubles he had paid.

Jozefs Marcinkēvičs, 38 years old, was born in Bērze Manor, registered in Jēkabpils, but had not been recorded in the last census. He had applied for a chamber council pass, but due to the war, he had not yet received it.

Brencis Stepans, 25 years old, born in Ceraukste Manor, had not yet registered anywhere.

Fricis Stepans, 30 years old, born in Vecsērene Manor, had registered in Jaunjelgava but had not paid taxes.

Jozefs Marcinkēvičs, 36 years old, was registered in Jēkabpils but did not pay crown taxes.[25]

There is no historical information about Roma entering Vidzeme and Riga. It is unlikely that this could have happened during Swedish rule, as Vidzeme and Riga were part of Sweden in the 17th century, and since 1630, Roma were not allowed to reside there. In practice, since 1710, but legally since 1721, Vidzeme became part of the Russian Empire. Russian laws were favorable to settled Roma but harsh on vagrant Roma. For example, the Russian Senate decree of August 8, 1736, stipulated that vagrant beggars and Roma fit for service were to be conscripted into military service, while those unfit for service were to be assigned to state labor.[26] On December 23, 1784, the Governor of Vidzeme, Georg Broun, issued a decree stating that Roma registered in manors had to pay the same taxes as crown peasants and obtain passports from Vidzeme district cities.[27] It is possible that at least some of the Roma in Vidzeme had come from the northern parts of the Russian Empire, namely Ingermanland, where in 1733, Roma horse traders were required to pay taxes. Vidzeme Roma typically had Latvian surnames such as Sūnītis, Sīmanis, and so on.

Until the first partition of Poland in 1772, Latgale was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, specifically the Duchy of Inflanty. Shortly after Inflanty was annexed by Russia in 1772, a soul census



was conducted in the Rēzekne district, containing the earliest known records of Roma in Latgale. Judging by their ages, they had lived there during Polish rule.

In the Antonišķi Manor of the Rēzekne district, there lived a Romani innkeeper, Andrejs Bernatovičs, 41 years old, his wife Marjana, 42 years old, and a worker, the Romani widow Anna, 61 years old.[28]

In the Kaunata Manor, Kamnaši village, lived the farmer Antonijs Grohovskis, 40 years old, his wife Dorota, 23 years old, and their daughters Roža, 3 years old, Tekla, 2 years old, and Marjasja, six months old. His brother Juris Grohovskis, 30 years old, his wife Agate, 15 years old, and their son Antonijs, 5 weeks old, also lived there. Other brothers included Staņislavs, 17 years old, Stepans, 15 years old, and Andrejs, 10 years old. Their mother, Katrīna, 60 years old, and her disabled son Jakups, 45 years old, were also part of the household.

Farmer Jezups Marcinkēvičs, 25 years old, his wife Agate, 18 years old, and their son Sīmanis, 1 year old, lived there as well.[29]

In Varakļāni Manor:

Farmer Ādams Tomaševičs, 48 years old, his wife Dorota, 30 years old, and their children: Kazimirs, 19 years old, Stepans, 15 years old, Pēteris, 10 years old, Juris, 8 years old, Jakubs, 4 years old, and their daughter Magda, 15 years old.

Farmer Antonijs Tomaševičs, 32 years old, his wife Aļesja, 15 years old, and their son Tomašs, 1 year old. Anton's brother Jans, 24 years old, his wife Agate, 15 years old, and their son Jakubs, 1 year old, as well as their mother Barbara, 68 years old. A servant, the Romani widow Kača, 60 years old, and her disabled son Kazimirs, 14 years old, also lived there.[30]

Notably, the majority of Roma in the Rēzekne district were registered as farmers. The family structure was also characteristic of farming families: a large extended family with servants. A Romani innkeeper was also a rare phenomenon, as at that time in Latgale, this profession was almost exclusively practiced by Jews.

Ethnographer A. Sementovsky noted in 1872 that the number of

Roma in the Vitebsk Governorate, which included Latgale, was rapidly decreasing. The reasons for this decline were the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to permanent settlement, intermarriage with other ethnic groups, and assimilation into Russian culture.[31]

In the village of Kutki, in the Kalupe parish of the Daugavpils district, there were 48 Roma men and 58 women, totaling 106 people. In Vecenāni, in the Litavnieki parish of the Ludza district, there were 38 men and 31 women, a total of 69 people. In Liuzinieki, there were 25 men and 30 women, totaling 55 people.[32] In Sopri, in the 2nd Tiskādu parish of the Rēzekne district, there were 21 men and 19 women, totaling 40 people. In total, around 1870, there were 201 Roma living in Latgale.

A. Sementovsky observed that, despite being officially registered in specific settlements, Roma tended to roam during the summer and sometimes even in winter, living in makeshift tents. They engaged in horse trading and exchange, blacksmithing, and agriculture. Roma women practiced fortune-telling and begging. In daily life, they spoke their native language but were also fluent in Russian.[33]

**5.**

# Roma in the Courland and Livonia Governorates



The history of Roma in the Courland Governorate during the 18th–20th centuries is relatively well documented. The archives of the Courland Governorate administration, held in the Latvian State Historical Archive, contain numerous records concerning administrative and criminal cases against specific Roma individuals.

During the Russian Empire, with few exceptions, Roma continued to be free people with surnames and the right to move within the governorate. The surnames of Courland Roma and their Catholic faith indicate that they had migrated from Poland-Lithuania. This migration continued even after Lithuania and Courland were incorporated into the Russian Empire.

In the first half of the 19th century, authorities attempted to settle the Roma permanently or at least register them in a town or borough and ensure they paid government taxes. Every free person could choose their taxpayer category (known as oklad) based on their financial means: merchant, citizen, artisan, worker, or farmer. Roma usually chose the worker or farmer category, as these required the lowest taxes.

Traveling without identification documents (passports) was punishable. On August 1, 1796, the district administrator and judge of Jelgava Castle, Karl von Medem, reported to the Jelgava land court that a Roma man named Juris and a girl named Ilze had been arrested the previous night within the borders of the Svēte estate while riding through without passports. They were taken into custody.[34] On August 4, the Courland Governorate administration ordered the Jelgava police to transport both Roma to Kalve and expel them beyond the borders of the Russian Empire.[35]

Courland Roma frequently roamed illegally in neighboring governorates. On October 8, 1800, the Minsk Governorate administration informed the Courland Governorate administration that several Roma had been detained without passports: Tadeusz Beinarovich with his wife Elizabete and their young daughter Zuzanna; Stepan Beinarovich with his mother Anna and sisters Magdalēna and Anna; Jegor Kozlovski with his wife Katrīna, young son Anton, and brother Kazimir;

and Petr Baikovski with his wife Magdalēna and mother-in-law Anna. They stated that they wandered through various governorates without being registered anywhere. Since they had previously resided in Courland, they were being sent back there.[36] The Courland Governorate administration reported that the detained Roma claimed they were born in the Courland Governorate, in the Sēlpils district, but did not know the exact location or remember their parents. They had roamed Courland but had moved to the Belarusian governorates five years earlier. Written attestations from the Minsk Governorate regarding them had been submitted to the Sēlpils district court.[37]

According to the 1801 census, only a small number of Roma lived in the Courland Governorate—14 men and 14 women. They were officially registered in towns but led a nomadic lifestyle, frequently moving from place to place and surviving solely through horse trading. During the summers, they lived in the forests with their livestock, families, and children, sleeping in tents under the open sky.[38]

In 1806, the Courland nobleman, lawyer, and poet Ulrich von Schlippenbach observed a Roma horse deal at the market in Sasmakas (now Valdemārpils). A half-drunken peasant was riding a good horse when a Roma man tried to persuade him to trade it for his own worn-out, pitiful-looking horse, which was decorated with brass buckles and colorful trinkets. For more than half an hour, the Roma man continuously praised his nag's supposed qualities, not allowing the poor peasant to get a word in. He used a hundred different arguments to highlight his old horse's exceptional traits, including its ability to stomp the ground so hard that it would tremble. The unfortunate peasant, unable to resist the Roma's persuasive rhetoric, seemed to waver. Each time he attempted to ride away, the Roma's eloquence drew him back, and in the end, the deal was made—the poor peasant had been tricked.[39]

The trade of horses is mentioned in later documents and narratives as the main occupation of the Roma in Courland. At markets and fairs, Roma would buy, sell, and trade horses both among themselves and with farmers. If a good horse was exchanged for a worse one, the owner of the inferior horse had to provide additional payment in money or food products. Fraud also occurred in such transactions, but Roma often could not afford to engage in deception, as their numbers in Courland were small, and a fraudster's bad reputation would quickly spread among the farmers.



Roma could buy a sick or weak horse, treat it, and later sell it at a significantly higher price. Horse healers were held in particularly high regard among the Roma.

*The Roma have a saying: "If I don't have a horse, then I am not a person" (Kedi mange nani grai, te me nason mānuš). A true Romani person simply cannot do without a horse. Even if given the greatest wealth, without a horse, a Rom feels abandoned and poor.*

*From childhood, Roma learn from their fathers how to care for horses, determine their age by examining their teeth, recognize and treat their ailments and diseases.*

*Upon reaching the age of sixteen, a young Rom usually inherits a horse from his father. However, he is not given a fine trotter right away. First, the beginner must prove that he can handle a horse well and trade for a better one.*

*Only when he succeeds in all aspects and conducts himself skillfully do the experienced horse traders consider him their equal, willingly associate with him, and engage in friendly discussions. A father who raises a skilled horse trader gains a good reputation. Other Roma hold such a person in high esteem and honor.*

*It was no coincidence that the old Petaloss had earned respect and fame. He himself was no novice in the trade—he knew how to handle horses and always managed to get a good price at markets. But his greatest pride was his distinguished son, Penta.*

*It is true that in a rye field, every stalk has an ear, and every Rom loves horses, but sometimes, though rarely, a single stalk bears two or three ears. In a way, such a rarity among the Roma was Petaloss's son, Penta—a passionate horse lover and expert. He gained the greatest recognition and fame for his ability to heal sick horses.*

*Even as a boy, he cared for his four-legged friends like no one else. He always ensured they had rich food, studied which grass they liked best, shared his piece of bread and sugar cubes with them, always brought them clean water, constantly groomed them, combed out their tails and manes to prevent tangling, washed their hooves, greased them if they seemed dry, protected them from vicious horseflies, observed and studied their nature and habits, tried to help sick horses, and even learned to understand their language.*

*"And it's not that hard at all," Penta said with a laugh. "Human speech has many words. It takes a long time to learn to understand people from foreign nations and the meaning of each of their words. Horses have few sounds, and they are the same all over the world. You just need to truly love horses and listen carefully to how they snort or neigh each time, and soon enough, you'll understand what they want."*[40]

The majority of criminal offenses for which Roma were punished involved horse theft. Robbery, grievous bodily harm, and murder were not characteristic of the Roma in either the 19th century or later. For example, in the case of the Tukum District Court on June 11, 1827, against the Roma Fricis Ignis, 22 years old, and his brother Jānis, 20 years old, it was determined that on a Sunday night, they had stolen a horse worth 12 rubles from the Dārtuzāles estate, which belonged to Irlava Manor. The following Monday, they stole two more horses worth 16 rubles from the Mālu houses, which belonged to Praviņi Manor. The arrested men initially denied any guilt, but after several witnesses stated that they had seen the brothers at a nearby tavern discussing the horses from these estates, they admitted their guilt. The court ruled that they be sent to a workhouse until they had repaid the value of the stolen horses through labor.[41]

In the first half of the 19th century, Russian authorities repeatedly issued decrees aimed at combating vagrancy in general, and particularly targeting nomadic Roma. These decrees were also in effect in the Vidzeme Governorate. Roma were registered in towns either voluntarily or by force. Punishments for vagrants became increasingly



severe—those caught wandering or traveling without documents could be conscripted into military service, sentenced to hard labor, or even exiled to Siberia.

On June 27, 1803, the Vice-Governor of Courland, Briskorn, sent an order to the Courland Governorate administration instructing them to enforce the Senate's decree of June 17 regarding the eradication of Roma vagrancy and to prepare regulations for both state-owned and private manors.[42] According to this decree, manors where Roma resided were required to issue them certificates allowing them to register in rural areas or cities and engage in productive occupations. Vagrant Roma could be conscripted into military service or sent to fortress labor camps.[43]

On April 1, 1803, the Ventspils castle court reported to the governorate administration that a Gypsy named Juris Badiņš had been detained at the Pope private estate without a passport and had deceived local people. According to him, he had resided at the Ugāle estate for three years without a passport and without paying crown taxes. Consequently, the castle court sent the Gypsy to the Courland governorate administration.[44] On April 16, at the governorate administration, Juris Badiņš stated that he was born at the Lubezere estate and had served there as a coachman. He now resided at the estates of Ugāle, Nurmuiža, and Usma, as well as in Talsi, but was not officially registered anywhere. The governorate administration sent Badiņš back to the Ventspils upper castle court with an order to investigate whether there were any complaints about him at the mentioned estates and, if so, to hold him accountable according to the law.[45]

Registration not only imposed obligations on the Roma but also granted them the right to file complaints with courts and administrative institutions. On October 22, 1806, a Gypsy named Gurģis Stepanevičs, registered in the workers' registry of Jelgava, submitted a petition to the civil governor of Courland, Arsenyev. Some time earlier, his nephew, Juris Stepanevičs, a Gypsy registered in the Tukums city workers' registry, had been arrested by order of the Tukums city magistrate following a complaint by a Gypsy girl named Sapa, who lived at the Apses

tavern in Tume estate. She accused Juris of treating her dishonorably. The magistrate threatened that if Juris did not marry the girl, he would be conscripted into the military, and out of fear, the young man agreed. The pastor of Sēme had already called them to announce the marriage twice. When Juris told his mother, Līze, about the situation, she found out that Sapa was known for her promiscuous lifestyle. Stepanevičs petitioned the civil governor to issue an order for the Tukums magistrate to annul the marriage, as it was being conducted under duress and was not allowed by any religion. The petition was written on Stepanevičs' behalf by the notary Zimmerman.[46] That same day, the Courland governorate administration ordered the Tukums magistrate to suspend the forced marriage and refer the case to the Tukums upper castle court for further investigation.[47]

On October 30, the secretary of the Tukums magistrate, von der Brigen, reported that Gypsies Juris Stepanevičs, his mother Līze, and his uncle Gurģis Stepanevičs had reconciled with the pregnant girl Sapa in his presence. Juris had promised to marry her, and all three declared that they knew nothing about Sapa's promiscuous lifestyle.[48] The Tukums upper castle court determined that Juris had not been forced into marriage; only the mayor, Hofmanis, had privately reminded him of his duty to marry the pregnant Gypsy girl after she tearfully begged him to persuade her fiancé, Juris.[49]

On January 26, 1810, the Piltene district landrat collegium reported that, following an order from the Courland governorate administration issued on August 20, 1809, regarding Gypsies—based on a Senate order from April 30, 1809—the collegium had instructed estates to register all resident Gypsies in a lawful manner within a specified period. By November 4 of the previous year, three Gypsy families living on the Rude estate had registered and requested the issuance of their legally entitled certificates. The owner of the Rude estate, von Koškuls, confirmed on November 17, 1809, that these Gypsy families were his serfs. The landrat collegium ordered the Gypsies to be brought in person, but one of them escaped on the way.[50] The Courland governorate administration explained that these Gypsies had already been recorded in previous censuses and that the order did not apply to them.[51]



On March 14, 1810, the Courland governorate administration interrogated a Gypsy arrested by the Jaunjelgava castle court and learned that his name was Pāvils Marcinkēvičs, aged 48. He had a wife, Made, a seven-year-old son, Pēteris, and a three-year-old daughter, Anna. He was born at the Birži estate, located four miles from Jēkabpils. He had previously been registered in Jaunjelgava, where he had paid taxes for six years and received a certificate. However, four years earlier, the Jaunjelgava castle court had revoked his tax certificate, claiming it was done by Supreme order. He was then escorted by guards to the court's jurisdictional border for allegedly failing to pay taxes. He spent some time in Lithuania before returning to the Jaunjelgava castle court, but no documents had been preserved. He requested that the governorate administration order the city of Jaunjelgava to reinstate his registration.[52] On March 26, the governorate administration issued such an order.[53]

The Courland Chamber Council reported to the Courland Governorate Council on April 21, 1811, that the Aizpute city magistrate had registered the Romani man Jēkabs Spale in the tax roll but had not submitted the necessary documents to the Chamber Council.[54] On July 5, the Piltene Landrat College reported regarding Jēkabs Spale's registration in Aizpute's worker tax roll, stating that on February 3, 1810, Jēkabs had been arrested for living without a passport. He had requested the court to register him in Aizpute, as he lived in the city, albeit without a permanent residence. The Landrat College sent him to the Aizpute magistrate, where he was informed that he had no legal right to register. The Landrat College then sent him, along with his wife and children, to the Courland Governorate Council, and their whereabouts afterward remain unknown.[55] On July 6, the Aizpute magistrate explained that the lack of legal grounds for Jēkabs Spale's registration was the fault of Laža Manor, where Jēkabs had previously lived. The manor had failed to comply with the Piltene Landrat College's order to provide information about the Romani people residing on its estate.[56]

A copy of Jēkabs Spale's certificate indicates that he was about 40 years old, born in the Vormsāte Manor, and had been wandering around the Grobiņa region. His wife, Anna, was 20 years old, and their daughter, Grieta, was four months old.[57] On August 3, 1811, the Courland Chamber Council permitted Jēkabs Spale to register in Aizpute.[58]

Forced labor could be imposed both on those who failed to register and vagrants, as well as on criminals, regardless of their ethnicity. On March 2, 1818, the Vidzeme Governorate Council reported to the Courland Governorate Council that a Romani man named Matīss had been released from labor at the Daugavgrīva Fortress due to health reasons. He had been sentenced to fortress labor by the Courland Governorate Council for vagrancy and failing to obtain a registration within the required timeframe. Matīss was sent back to the Courland Governorate Council with the three rubles he had earned through labor.[59]

On September 10, 1818, the Courland Supreme Court tried Romani men Juris Marcinkevičs, 19 years old, and Fricis Stefans, 30 years old, for stealing a horse in the Sēlpils District Court. It was ruled that Juris Marcinkevičs be deported to Siberia, while Fricis Stefans was handed over to the Courland Governorate Council.[60] Fricis Stefans, 30 years old in 1818, was a Lutheran born on a private estate in Sece. He had lived in Vecsērene Manor for ten years and was registered in the tax roll in Jaunjelgava. Initially, it was decided that he would be conscripted into military service, but he was found unfit due to health reasons. However, he was deemed suitable for fortress labor.[63]

On November 3, 1820, the Jelgava City Magistrate sent a Romani man named Mārtiņš Jēcis to the Courland Governorate Council. It was determined that his real name was Jakobs Gešinskis. His father, Matiass Gešinskis, had already been listed in the revision records under a Courland Chamber Council permit, but Jakobs had not been registered.[64] The Governorate Council forwarded the case for further investigation to the Dobele District Court. The Dobele District Court established that the Romani man Mārtiņš Jēcis, 20 years old, had been born in Skulmaņi Homestead of the Crown Vircava Manor. His father, Matiass Gešinskis,



had previously paid taxes for him in Jelgava. Two years earlier, Mārtiņš was supposed to start paying taxes himself, but considering himself ill and unfit for work, he had failed to register and wandered from place to place.[65]

Harsh punishments were also imposed for failing to pay crown taxes. On June 16, 1821, the Jelgava Police Department sent to the Courland Governorate Council a Romani man named Jānis Ķišķe, who was registered in Jelgava and had accumulated tax debts amounting to 89 rubles.[66] On June 2, the Courland Governorate Council ordered the Jelgava magistrate to determine whether the arrested Jānis Ķišķe was fit for fortress labor. Medical examination confirmed his suitability, and he was sent to the Daugavpils Fortress.[68]

On September 14, 1821, the Vidzeme Governorate Council wrote to the Courland Governorate Council that the Riga District Court had detained the Romani man Simons Marcinkevičs, his daughter Dārta, and her six-month-old daughter Trīne. Marcinkevičs claimed that he and his three sons were registered in Vecsērene Manor near Jaunjelgava but had been forced to beg in Vidzeme due to hardship. The Vidzeme Governorate Council ordered that all the Romani be sent to Jelgava.[69]

In this regard, one of the earliest personal documents of a Latvian Romani individual was issued. A crown tax payment certificate issued to Simons Marcinkevičs by the Jaunjelgava Council on January 12, 1821, stated that he was registered in Jaunjelgava's tax roll as a farmer and paid double the taxes. His age was listed as 65 years, height as 2 arshins and 3 vershoks, thin build, black hair and beard, clean face, brownish complexion, black eyebrows, brown eyes, large nose, medium-sized mouth, white teeth, medium-sized ears, and a bearded chin. He had paid a poll tax of 32 rubles for the second half of 1816, a road and water construction tax of 2 rubles and 80 kopecks for 1817–1820, and a recruitment tax of 17 rubles for himself and his sons Kazimirs, Jānis, and Mārtiņš, totaling 53 rubles and 80 kopecks. His permanent residence was listed as Vecsērene Crown Manor.[70]

On January 15, 1821, a Romani man named Janis, registered as a

farmer in the town of Tukums, was transported from Stūru Manor to Tukums by private transport. Fearing that he would be conscripted into the military, Janis cut off two fingers from his right hand with an axe.[71] As a result, he was sent to the Courland Governorate administration in Jelgava for further investigation.[72] The administration decided to transfer Janis to the Kuldīga district court for trial and punishment for self-mutilation.[73]

A report from the Talsi district court dated December 2, 1822, informed the governorate administration that an arrested Romani man, Jēkabs Graudiņš, had stated that he was 50 years old and did not know where in the Courland Governorate he had been born. He had lost his father, Juris Graudiņš, at the age of three and had never had a permanent residence, living as other Roma did, wandering from place to place. He mostly stayed in the areas of Alsunga and Lutriņi but never remained in one place for more than one or two days. He expressed a desire to register as a resident of Kuldīga but had never paid taxes.[74]

On November 24, the Talsi district court recorded a physical description of Jēkabs Graudiņš: 56 years old, 2 arshins and 4 vershoks tall, thin, with black hair and a beard, a smooth and gaunt face, a pointed nose, an average-sized mouth and ears, missing teeth, and a broad chin.[75] Based on this document, he could request official registration. Jēkabs Graudiņš also testified that he and his wife, Līze, had been baptized in the Alsunga church. They had mostly lived in the estates of Alsunga and Lutriņi, moving from house to house. They had an eight-year-old son, Jānis, who suffered from epilepsy, as well as daughters Trīne and Anna, who had been baptized in the Lutriņi church.[76] On August 5, 1824, the Courland Governorate administration ordered the Kuldīga magistrate to issue Jēkabs Graudiņš a permanent residence permit.[77]

On December 10, 1826, the Dobele district court reported to the Courland Governorate administration about a wandering Romani man named Jurka, also known as Krišjānis Aleksandrovs. His tax certificate had expired on October 1. Although he claimed to be 14 years old, he appeared to be between 17 and 30 years old, which was confirmed by



other arrested Roma. The only locations he could name as places of residence were various fairgrounds where he had stayed for no longer than a day while dealing in horse trading. Another arrested man, Jozefs Aleksandrovs, testified that he had received his tax certificate from a man named Jurka. It was later established that Jurka was the son of the fugitive Romani man Jānis and a woman named Katrīna, who had lived in the Vilcēni tavern five years prior. He had been baptized in the Smilkūni Catholic church.78 The church records mentioned that in 1795, a boy named Juris or Jurka, son of Romani parents Jānis and Katrīna, had been baptized.[79]

A physical description *(Signalement)* of Jurka, also known as Krišjānis Aleksandrovs, stated that he was 30 years old, 2 arshins and 4 vershoks tall, with black hair, a beard, and eyebrows, brown eyes, an average-sized nose and mouth, a round face, and a healthy complexion.[80]

On November 6, 1826, the mayor of Jelgava certified that Krišjānis Aleksandrovs had been issued a legitimization certificate in 1823.[81] A meticulous investigation was conducted, with additional information collected from towns and pastors. However, on January 13, 1827, the Jelgava police requested the Courland Governorate administration to provide the necessary clothing and travel expenses for Krišjānis Aleksandrovs' deportation to Siberia.[82] He was exiled for vagrancy.

A geographical description of the Courland Governorate stated that before 1841, Roma had once been a large group but had since decreased significantly in number. Although they were officially registered in towns, they continued to wander the land, engaging in various trades, begging, horse trading, and sometimes even horse theft.[83] Most Roma in the Courland Governorate traveled across their territory in the summer, spending winters in rented lodgings or houses in towns. With city registration permission, they could also relocate to the governorates of Kaunas, Vilnius, and Livonia.

By the mid-19th century, under the influence of Romantic literature, the Romani nomadic lifestyle began to be seen in a more romanticized light among the Baltic Germans. In 1861, a description of Sabile mentio-

ned that about two versts from the town, there was a small island in the Abava River where, weather permitting, nomadic Roma would camp. The island was therefore called "Gypsy Island." On dark evenings, when the Roma lit campfires and young and old gathered around their pots, the island took on an exceptionally picturesque appearance.[84] Gypsy Island became a popular picnic destination for the residents of Sabile.

Since the Roma ethnicity is not frequently mentioned in documents, Jūris Leimanis' book "Čigāni Latvijas mežos, mājās un tirgos" ("Gypsies in the Forests, Homes, and Markets of Latvia") should be used to identify surnames. The book is based on Roma stories collected by his father, Jānis Leimanis, about their oldest and most notable families in Vidzeme and Kurzeme, as well as the Roma social structure.

*The oldest branches of Latvian Roma tribes, as observed, are in Kurzeme. Among the most prominent are the Blind Miķeli (Gypsy: Karore Miķeli), the Kalēji-Kovaļi (Blacksmiths), the Melnkāji (Kāle pīre), the Šķēpi, and the Tomki.*

*The ancestor of the Blind clan, Miķelis, was a very intelligent and wealthy Roma man who lived in the Kuldīga district. In middle age, he lost his sight and was thereafter called Aklais Miķelis ("Blind Miķelis"), a name that was passed on to his descendants. From this lineage came the famous Latvian Roma leader (šēro rom – the wealthiest and wisest man in the camp), Luttis, as well as Jānis Leimanis, a translator of the Bible into the Roma language.*

*Luttis lived in Saldus, where he owned five houses. His wife, Liene, was a Latvian woman from the Zveju household in Allaži. In their marriage, they had four sons and three daughters, whom they sent to school. Their grandchildren still live in Saldus today, where they own real estate.*

*Luttis was a very just and religious Roma leader. To manage his properties and various economic affairs, he had several subordinates, including four to five dināri and an unspecified number of piskari. Among the Roma, a dinārs was similar to a foreman among German noblemen, while piskars were essentially slaves.*[85]

*The elder sent his dināri to horse markets to observe the actions of*



*Roma traders. Their duties included reporting any misconduct or injustices to the leader. The guilty parties were later sought out and brought before the elder. In serious cases, a Roma court, romano sondos, was convened. In addition to the Roma leader himself, the court consisted of all the dināri present at home, as well as four or five of the wealthiest Roma from the surrounding area.*

*Punishments typically involved corporal punishment, but fines were also sometimes imposed in favor of the victim. If the guilty party could not pay the fine, they were forced to become a piskars under the Roma leader, working until the required amount was paid. The elder then compensated the victim. After serving their sentence, the piskars were expelled from the Roma community and driven out of the camp.*

*Roma leader Luttis also frequently intervened in marriage matters and resolved injustices. Such "trials" were usually settled in taverns. The elder would first carefully listen to complaints and then, on an appointed day, invite the accused young man, the aggrieved girl, and other Roma from the camp. At the young man's expense, Luttis would organize a large drinking feast, and at the end of the celebration, he would announce that the young man's wedding had just been "drunk away." If the young man resisted or protested, Luttis would order his dināri to pin him down, after which he would administer the so-called "little child's beating" with his whip until the young man agreed to accept the elder's decision and vowed to love and respect his abandoned bride.*

*Unhappy lovers whose parents opposed their marriage also sought the elder's help. In such cases, Luttis almost always found a way to turn misfortune into happiness.*

*Roma court matters, marriage disputes, and similar grievances were handled in secrecy, and the outside world was never allowed to know about them. That is why so little is known or heard about the peculiarities of Roma life.*

*Another well-known Roma leader in Kurzeme was Didžus, who lived in Grobiņa. Didžus was a very persistent and proud man, about whom incredible stories are told. He was extremely wealthy and had*

*an immense love for horses. He did not feed his beloved animals from ordinary wooden troughs but instead acquired special silver dishes from which they ate. In cold and rainy weather, he dressed his horses in silk and gold-embroidered fabrics, leaving only their hooves uncovered. How much of this is true is uncertain, but Roma people firmly believe that it really happened.*[86]

*The Kalēji-Kovaļi clan, unlike other Roma, did not engage in horse trading but earned their living as blacksmiths, which is how they got their name. They usually did not live in forest camps. Landowners gladly welcomed them into their estates, where they worked as skilled craftsmen.*

*The Kalēji always carried small bellows and fine tools with them. They were known for making melodious mouth harmonicas, exquisite metal crayfish, and various trinkets for the nobility. The crayfish were crafted from copper, and with a special mechanism, they could move independently, crawling like real ones. Such items were a rarity at the time. Barons paid well for them, and within the Roma community, the Kalēji-Kovaļi were known as peaceful people.*

*The largest tribe in Kurzeme is considered to be the Melnkāji-Kāle pīre. The origin of this strange name is unknown. This tribe also had a well-known elder, the šēro roms Cunnis, who was very wealthy, wise, and, as the people of Kurzeme used to say, a "courageous" Gypsy. His usual place of residence was in the forests of the Šķēde manor lord. The lord himself was friends with Cunnis and often visited him in the forest.*

*The Melnkāji are proud and take great pride in their tribe. They are very dignified, pay attention to their appearance, and can be recognized from afar. In the past, the Melnkāji always wore wide, red knitted belts around their waists, with colorful tassels hanging down to their knees. Their shirts were embroidered with bright patterns, and they wore lacquered boots with zigzag-shaped leather appliqués. Others wore long, colorful knee-high socks decorated with beautifully knitted ribbons, to which they attached distinctive tassels. This tribe is one of the oldest, and its people are known as skilled horse dealers and great singers, lovers of music. They do not tolerate insults, whether from their own people or*



*outsiders. For even the smallest offense, the Melnkāji are ready to fight and defend themselves to the very end.*

*One of the smallest Romani tribes in Latvia is the Šķēpi. They are strong, tall, and very brave. The šēro roms Luttis from this tribe selected his young men for special tasks.*

*The men of the Tomku tribe are also strong and sturdy. Other Roma respect their calm and peaceful nature. The Tomki live in the Kuldīga district, and their legal surname is Kleinis. From this tribe comes the Romani strongman Pautelis, a mighty figure whose strength is still spoken of among the Roma today.*[87]

*Once, Pautelis encountered several Romani wagons on the road and immediately started a discussion about horse trading. One of the unfamiliar Roma began to boast excessively about his horse, claiming it was strong, an excellent draft horse, and had a good gait. Pautelis disliked this bragging and replied that he had seen better and stronger horses. The Roma man stubbornly insisted that no other horse like his existed in the world.*

*The argument heated up. Finally, Pautelis claimed that with one blow, he could knock the Roma's horse into the ditch. The Roma, unaware of Pautelis's strength, replied, "Fine! If you do that, the horse will be yours!"*

*They made a bet. Other Roma tried to calm them down and stop the risky wager, but no one could dissuade Pautelis. He pulled back his arm and delivered a powerful slap to the horse's neck. The horse, standing right at the roadside, fell into the ditch along with the entire wagon.*

*The unfamiliar Roma were left speechless in shock, and a dispute began. The horse's owner lamented that his horse was ruined and refused to give it up. But the other Roma defended Pautelis, saying he had won the bet and the horse rightfully belonged to him. Everyone tried to pull the horse out, but they couldn't. Then Pautelis stepped in and lifted the horse and the entire wagon out of the ditch by himself. It is also said that Pautelis could easily bend straight horseshoes with his bare hands and carry massive stones as if they were nothing.*

*In Vidzeme, there are two Romani tribes: the Buzgi and the Marčuki. The people of the Buzgi tribe bear the surname Marcinkēvičs. Their ancestor was the šēro roms Sīlis, who once owned a tavern in Madona. According to old Roma stories, he had seven wives and 36 children. The Roma of Kurzeme do not get along well with the Buzgi-Marcinkēvičs and are wary of them. The Buzgi are very assertive, intolerant, and always ready to stand up for themselves by any means necessary.*

*The Marčuki-Burkēviči of Vidzeme are small in stature but very resilient, agile, and, when necessary, extraordinarily skilled in using the well-known Romani weapon—the club.*[88]

The Roma of Latvia in the second half of the 19th century were described in autobiographical works by Latvian literary classics about their childhood: Doku Atis in Mans dzīves rīts, Anna Brigadere in Dievs, daba, darbs, Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš in Baltā grāmata, and Ernests Birznieks-Upītis in Pastariņa dienasgrāmata. When a Romani tabor settled near a farmhouse, the men remained in the camp, engaging in horse trading, while the women, with the youngest children, went from house to house begging for food and clothing for themselves and their children. Due to their unusual clothing, language, and behavior, Roma seemed strange and frightening to children.

According to the 1897 All-Russian Census, there were 394 Roma living in Vidzeme, 1202 in Kurzeme, and 346 in Latgale, making a total of 1,942 people. Most Roma were involved in horse trading—53.2% in Kurzeme and 62.4% in Latgale. Only 96 Roma (8%) in Kurzeme were engaged in agriculture.[89]

Interest among Roma in agriculture and real estate ownership gradually increased. In the spring of 1911, in Vidzeme, in Lejasciems, a group of Roma jointly purchased two houses, where several Romani families settled permanently. Before this, Roma in Lejasciems only stayed with some farmers during the winter and wandered around in the summer.[90]

**6.**

# Roma in the First Latvian Republic



The period of the First Latvian Republic was marked by an increase in the Roma population, the emergence of Roma intellectuals, the beginnings of a written language, and the introduction of Roma culture to the wider public through stage performances. In 1920, Latvia had a Roma population of 1,023, which was 919 fewer than in 1897, likely due to people fleeing to Inner Russia as refugees during World War I. In the following years, the Roma population continued to grow. By 1925, there were 2,870 Roma in Latvia, increasing to 3,217 in 1930 and 3,839 in 1935.[91]

The Roma continued to settle in cities, forming compact Roma neighborhoods. The Smiltene suburb of Cērtene was called the "Gypsy city" because it was the only place in Latvia where Roma lived in such a concentrated manner. This was also the home of Krišs Marcinkēvičs, an organizer and leader of Latvia's Roma community, who was even said to have translated the Bible into the Romani language.[92]

People continued to admire Roma "barons" and "kings," who organized lavish weddings and funerals for their family members. On June 9, 1935, in the Valmiera cemetery, the wife of Latvia's "Gypsy king," Valmiera resident M. Sīmanis, was buried. His "subjects" came from all regions of Latvia, and even representatives from Estonia attended, arriving on foot, by horse, and by automobile. The burial ceremony was conducted by the Evangelical Lutheran pastor E. Pavasaris, and a military band also participated.

Several thousand Valmiera residents watched the funeral procession as it passed through the streets. After the burial ceremony at the cemetery, the "Gypsy king" hosted a grand wake at his residence on Limbažu Street, attended by approximately 150 "subjects" and many acquaintances. The wake lasted for three days. On the night of June 8, before the burial, Roma had set up a tent in the garden of their "king's" residence, placing the deceased in an open coffin in the center. Around it, at a table laden with food and drink, Roma feasted in accordance with their traditions to honor the deceased.[93]

More and more Roma took up permanent or seasonal work in facto-

ries, agriculture, and the fishing industry. In the mid-1930s, writer Vilis Veldre, observing motorboats returning from fishing at the Ventspils port, was surprised to see that most of the fish crate carriers were Roma, who were often known for their idleness or even reluctance to work. However, the Ventspils Roma were eager to work, and fishermen claimed that Roma were better suited for carrying fish crates than Latvians. Unlike Latvians, who always wanted to load a full cart to maximize earnings, Roma were willing to transport even a single crate.[94]

The first known Latvian theater play about Roma themes was K. Dziļleja's *Bravo Čabu!* (Feisty Boy), staged in 1932 at the Riga Workers' Theatre. The play was set in the outskirts of Riga, featuring working-class apartments, streets, markets, and the front of a Roma hut. Director J. Jurovskis incorporated various live elements into the production, including a piglet, a cat, a pigeon, and a Roma baby. The role of the Roma girl Unka was played by a Roma actress, Marta Senkovska.

A review of the play noted: "Overall, the actors have successfully transformed into Roma." This was attributed to a rehearsal trip to Čiekurkalns, where the cast visited local Roma, who even entrusted them with a real Roma baby and a piglet for the performances.[95]

Roma musical ensembles were mostly small bands playing in restaurants in Riga and other major cities, but they never reached a professional level. In slightly more prestigious venues, such as open-air stages in Jūrmala and Liepāja, a Roma boys' orchestra performed. However, their music relied more on entertainment and improvisation than on professional skill.

*In the summer of 1937, this orchestra performed at the Liepāja Philharmonic, also known as Kūrmājas Garden. All seat tickets were sold out, as audiences considered the orchestra a sensation. A review stated that such an ensemble would be enjoyable in a restaurant or a lively social gathering, but its concert program lacked the quality to make the music truly captivating.*

*"The orchestra's repertoire consists of Hungarian and Roma folk songs and medleys. At these moments, the young Roma, including some already grown men, truly ignite with their southern passion, and the music builds in dynamic intensity with abrupt, contrasting transitions. The strength of the Roma orchestra lies in its temperament and fiery tempo, but much of it feels artificial, insincere, and showy, as if trying to prove that Roma are purely 'children of nature' who do not know musical notes and play only by ear. However, this artificiality prevents the audience from truly being carried away by the music. We are too Northern to be moved by such staged effects. Many did not appreciate the choir leader's jokes and explanations before almost every piece.*

*The program was long, but many of the announced pieces were not played. As a result, the concert took on the character of casual background music, which was likely the orchestra leader's intention. Among the more serious pieces, a selection from Countess Maritza was well received, and Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody was decent, though played in a rather free interpretation. The main part of the program consisted of medleys and csárdás dances."*[96]

During the First Latvian Republic, crime chronicles were frequently published in the press, and Roma people were the only detained and convicted individuals whose ethnicity was mentioned in these reports, even though people of other nationalities committed the same and even more serious crimes. As a result, crimes committed by Roma always stood out the most in the public eye. Even minor fraud cases were mentioned. In 1938, taking advantage of a law requiring farmers to pay a tax on sold produce into the farmworkers' housing fund, Roma and cattle traders also began collecting these "deductions" that were supposed to be handled by official institutions. A Roma man, Kaspars Mircenkevičs, who frequently attended major rural markets, convinced farmers that they had to pay not only for sold horses but also for purchased ones—a fee of five lats to the "farmworkers' fund." He collected this "tax" from several farmers in addition to the transaction sum.[97]

According to press crime chronicles, Roma mostly engaged in petty theft and fraud. Serious bodily harm and murders were rare and usually occurred within the Roma community as acts of revenge or jealousy. For

example, on November 27, 1925, the Latgale Regional Court sentenced a Roma man from Rēzekne, Kārlis Kovaļskis, to three years of forced labor for fatally stabbing his common-law wife, Paulīne Marcinkeviča, after she left him for another Roma man.[98]

The Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church's internal mission provided both spiritual care and practical assistance to impoverished Roma. It organized worship services in Roma homes in Riga, one of which was located on Kazaku Street (later Abrenes Street). Every week, mission workers visited seven different Roma dwellings in Riga's outskirts, where Roma from neighboring homes would also gather.

At a service on Kazaku Street, about ten Roma with their children had gathered, conversing loudly among themselves. Initially, the mission workers' conversations with the Roma focused on everyday practical matters that were unfamiliar to them due to their lack of education and social isolation.

"The same scene unfolds as when encountering members of this nation in the mission office. These people still have little understanding of society's and the church's institutions and their necessity. Their disregard and indifference toward all legal requirements remain too great. The mission often has to write to justices of the peace, requesting permission to register 17-year-old 'children' in birth records—children who were born and raised in the forest and have never been officially registered anywhere. The mission then ensures that the necessary formalities are completed for the Roma."

During the service, the Roma sang hymns confidently and listened attentively to the gospel passage explanation, though much of it remained unclear to them.

During the solemn period of Lent, a group of Roma also gathered, wishing to receive Holy Communion. On a Thursday evening, at a Lenten service held weekly at the New St. Gertrude Church, the Roma congregation attended as well. During this service, a young Roma man was confirmed. Standing alone, with a strong and confident voice, he professed his faith before the congregation.[99]



The First Latvian Republic era saw the emergence of the first Roma intellectuals and educators. Among them was German language teacher Berta Rudeviča (née Sīmane), who worked at Sigulda and Vangaži primary schools. She was the mother of Roma cultural and social activist Kārlis Rudevičs and the grandmother of Normunds Rudevičs.

## Jānis and Juris Leimans

In the 1930s, Jānis Leimanis actively worked as the first Latvian Roma public, cultural, and religious figure, translator, and collector of Roma folklore. He was also the founder of the written Roma language in Latvia. Born on March 6, 1886, in Skrunda's Kalna Ģiezēni, he spent his childhood as a nomadic Roma until 1898. He completed his education at Kuldīga's Orthodox parish school and later attended Aizpute County School, which he had to leave due to financial difficulties. From 1915 onward, Leimanis organized and led aid efforts for Roma refugees in Inner Russia, beginning to care for their cultural needs as well. Between 1921 and 1924, he delved into the Bible, and from 1926 to 1931, he translated the Gospel of John into the Roma language (though some sources mistakenly claim he translated the entire Bible). This translation was printed. From 1929 to 1930, Leimanis worked as a temporary employee in the postal service. Between 1931 and 1932, he served as an Orthodox church assistant in Riga's Jūrmala. In 1931, he founded the association "Čigānu draugs" (Friend of the Roma) and led its choir. In the spring of 1933, he was employed at the Folklore Repository, where he collected Latvian Roma cultural heritage. The folklore materials he gathered—fairy tales, legends, songs, proverbs, idioms, descriptions of traditional clothing, beliefs, and curses—total more than 500 entries and are preserved in the Latvian Folklore Repository at the National Library.

Leimanis was the first Latvian Roma to record folklore texts in the Roma language. His writings included parallel translations into Latvian and represent the earliest known documented Latvian Roma folklore. Most of these materials remain unpublished.

## *Pal do rekica, pal do sados*

*Pal do rekica, pal do sados*
*Hana reskire trin hentti.*
*Jek sis sivico bielāja griva,*
*Menori bāri te huči.*
*Ked Jov dtala, pīrore marla,*
*Sāre tugici nasadtona.*
*Mc kārei Dēvel so kemela,*
*Chebini mange les te zadav,*
*Kedi nattuva radica tedav,*
*Otdava mani tmerčake.*

## *Beyond The River, Beyond The Field*

*Beyond the river, beyond the field,*
*Three fine horses stand revealed.*
*One, a silver mane so bright,*
*Proud and tall in morning light.*
*When he moves, his hooves take flight,*
*Chasing sorrow into night.*
*Let the heavens will their way,*
*Yet I must harness him today.*
*And if no joy remains for me,*
*Then let the earth take hold of me.*



## *Mi jakhorja po vet dikhana*

*Mi jakhorja po vet dikhana,*
*Mi pirvrenge dūr drom tedžan.*
*Te gilom dromesa vavresa*
*Te viitakirdtom do bāredēr čhār.*
*Te gijom me ko cudza roma,*
*Te den teotkhiņen mi pirurenge.*
*Te den otbarjdn mi balorenge.*
*Vai dova deva mi sivone gress.*
*Te sivo, sivo tephabengēro,*
*Jov vilidtijs mo iēroro.*

## *My Eyes Gaze Far Beyond The Land*

*My eyes gaze far beyond the land,*
*My feet seek paths where none have planned.*
*I sang my song to guide my way,*
*Through tangled thorns, through skies of gray.*
*I walked among the stranger's kin,*
*Who gave my soul to winds so thin.*
*They brushed the dust from weary hands,*
*And whispered fate in silver strands.*
*Oh, let the silver dawn arise,*
*For he who calls now shuts his eyes.*

*Gypsy Market*

*"… Preparing for the market, a Roma first secured a safe campsite, gathered food for his family, and arranged his household so that, upon entering the market, everything would shine and gleam.*

*On the evening before the market, the Roma would arrive either in the market square itself or in a nearby forest. If a Roma had good horses, they would arrive during the day, but if his horse was flawed—lame, stubborn, ill-tempered, etc.—he would come in the evening.*

*As night fell, a Roma would always enter the market with his head held high, full of hope. The moment he caught sight of the market, he would lift his hat and say, 'May God grant this market to be prosperous.'*

*For the Roma, the happiest market was the one bustling with traders and situated near a forest where they were allowed to set up camp. In such a market, the Roma felt truly at home, no matter their material hardships.*

*Arriving in the forest near the market, the Roma felt at ease, walking with his head held high but always observant of his surroundings. The moment he noticed a new Roma arriving, he would quickly assess his horses—what kind they were—so he could prepare for the inevitable horse trading that always took place among them.*

*In Roma traditions, one must never refuse a horse trade, whether it is day or night. There is even a saying: 'Kom parubnastir otphenelapes, dova gres menarikire' ('Whoever refuses a deal should not keep horses'). And if one is thoroughly tricked in a trade, another saying follows: 'Pšal pšales natulini, dād čhāves' ('A brother does not betray a brother, a father does not betray a son'). If someone, out of embarrassment, begs to reverse the trade, they say: 'Nalava me, lela vār' ('I would not take it, someone else will').*

*Another proverb goes: 'Keil dūral dava grelli: "Avri parudo", togi lai visparudo' ('If from afar you hear, "It's exchanged," then it is indeed exchanged'). And one more: 'Ja palcenge konci (vai grengo paruben), zapene khetare, togi uže nīso nakaresa' ('If fingertips (i.e., the horse deal) have already touched, then nothing can be undone').*

*These proverbs are used exclusively in horse trading. No matter the trickery in the deals, a Roma never shows sorrow afterward. Instead, the traders part ways, each continuing their pursuit of the next trade."*



## *How a Gypsy Wanted to Steal the Moon from the Sky*

*A Gypsy Folk Tale*

*Once upon a time, there lived a poor Gypsy with his wife and many children. It was hard for him to support twelve little children in the poverty they endured. They rarely had a horse and cart in their lifetime, and if they ever had a horse, it was barely worth the price of a horse's hide because they couldn't afford a good one. Their cart was entirely made of wood and barely held together due to age. The wooden wheels didn't last long, breaking quickly, but they always managed to get new ones. They would go to local farmers and beg for another wooden wheel.*

*One day, while traveling through a dense forest, their front wheel broke. So, the man went to a large farm. On his way there, he saw that the farmer's servant was hoisting a half-new wheel high into a tree. The Gypsy quickly rushed to the tree, looked up, and spoke to the servant:*

*"My dear brother, please be kind and take pity on my little children. Give me that wheel! They are sitting hungry in the great forest, waiting for me. My wheel broke, and I couldn't get them out of the woods. Please, give me the wheel you are lifting into the tree. Someday, I will repay you, and my little children will dance for you."*

*The servant replied, "I can't give you this wheel because the master ordered me to place it in the tree for a stork to build its nest. But I tell you this—go to the master and ask him for another wheel. He will give you one."*

*The Gypsy went to the master and asked for a wheel to replace his broken one. The master said, "I don't have a spare wheel for you. I need all of mine. Come another time, and I might give you one, but today I have nothing to spare."*

*The Gypsy went from one farm to another, but he couldn't get a wheel for his cart anywhere. On his way back, he looked again at the wheel the servant had placed in the tree for the stork. He watched it for a long time and then said to himself: "If the servant had put this wheel up for some other bird, I would knock it down, take it to my fire, put it on my cart, and*

*leave the forest tonight. By morning, my wife and children would have reached a farm, and they would have gotten something to eat—even just a crust of bread. But now, my little ones have gone all day without food. Will those tiny lives endure this? They will fall ill and die of hunger. No, I will not allow that. Better the noble bird be left without a nest than my children starve to death. Tonight, I will get them out of the forest."*

*The Gypsy waited for nightfall and went to the noble bird's nest. He found a long pole and began climbing the tree to reach the wheel. He got halfway up, stopped, and said: "My dear noble bird, do not be angry with me. You have flown far and wide, and you understand my misfortune with the wheel and my little children. You have no such troubles. You have not even built your home yet, and the master will place another wheel for you. But I cannot do without this one." With these words, the Gypsy knocked the wheel down from the tall tree with the long pole. Then he climbed down himself, returned the pole, and went home to his fire. He placed the wheel by the fire, woke his wife and children, and boasted about how he had taken the stork's nest. His wife, hearing this, was frightened and said, "What have you done, dear husband! You have taken away a sacred bird's home. We will not fare well because of this. You will see—we will be cursed." The Gypsy didn't want to hear it. He grabbed the wheel, fitted it to his cart, harnessed the horse, and told his wife to pack their clothes and children onto the cart.*

*When everything was ready, the Gypsy left the great forest and stopped at its edge. His children cried and begged for food. The Gypsy then said to his wife, "Gypsy girl, gather firewood and water. I will go find something for the children to eat." His wife understood that he planned to go to a farm and take something. She pleaded with him, "My husband, do not go tonight. Look how bright the moon is. It will not go well for you tonight, trust me." The Gypsy replied, "Fine, then I will get a long pole and knock down that bright moon from the sky, and then it will be dark." His wife asked, "Do you really think you can do that?" He answered, "Did I not just knock down the sacred bird's nest tonight? Why shouldn't I knock down that little moon? Just wait, I'll get a long pole." The Gypsy went and found a long stick near a farmer's fence.*



*When he brought it back, he told his wife, "Dear wife, now come with me to that tall tree. But take my big cudgel (a reed wrapped in lead and covered with leather), and as soon as you see something fall from the tree, strike it with all your might. Strike until it is dead. Then I will go and get myself a horse, and the moon will shine no more."*

*His wife fetched the heavy cudgel—it was so strong that it could fight an ox. The Gypsy took the cudgel, swung it left and right, laughed, and handed it to his wife, saying, "With this, you could even kill the devil himself." Then he climbed the tree with the long pole. When he reached the top, he began waving the pole in the air, looking at the moon, trying to knock it down. His wife stood below, holding the cudgel, waiting for the moon to fall.*

*But as the Gypsy waved the pole and twisted it in various ways, he lost his balance, failed to hold onto the tree, and fell to the ground at his wife's feet. The Gypsy woman was terrified—had the moon really fallen from the sky? Remembering her husband's words, she immediately began striking with the cudgel as hard as she could. The Gypsy, having fallen from the tree, was so injured that he couldn't get up quickly. His wife had the chance to beat him senseless until he lost consciousness. When she saw that the thing that had fallen was now motionless, she called her husband down from the tree. Only then did she panic—where had her husband gone? She checked the thing she had been hitting over and over again but couldn't believe her own eyes. She called her children, and together they realized—it was not the moon that had fallen from the sky, nor anything else, but her own husband. Then she and the children buried him, and she remained a widow.*[100]

Jānis Leimanis' son (according to some sources, his foster son) Juris Leimanis was born in 1917 in Yaroslavl, Russia, where his parents stayed as refugees. In 1921, the family returned to their homeland. After finishing Bulduri Primary School, Juris continued his education at the Riga Teacher's Institute and Rainis Gymnasium. In 1939, he served in the Latvian army, in the cavalry regiment.[101] After his service, J. Leimanis enrolled in the vocal class at the Latvian Conservatory.

Already in 1935, the spiritual leader of Latvian Roma, Jānis Leimanis, announced that he was currently writing the play Čigāni (Gypsies) together with his son. If they succeeded in realizing their plan, it would be the first play for the Roma of our land.[102] However, the play was never published, and it is unknown whether it was ever completed.

In 1939, the publishing house of Atis Freināts released Juris Leimanis' book Čigāni Latvijas mežos, mājās un tirgos (Gypsies in Latvia's Forests, Homes, and Markets). The book consists of several sketches about horse trading at markets, the Roma church—a sauna made of branches and fabrics—weddings, funerals, fairy tales, rented winter homes in cities. The sketches include Latvian Roma folk songs, fairy tales, beliefs, legends, and curses collected by Jānis Leimanis.

The war interrupted J. Leimanis' studies. After the war, he enrolled in the Liepāja Maritime School and, upon graduation, moved with his family to Ventspils, where he started working on a ship. In the 1960s, wishing to cultivate Roma national traditions, J. Leimanis founded a Roma ensemble in Ventspils, which soon became famous beyond Latvia's borders. During the Soviet era, he wrote another book about Roma life, traditions, and history, but it mysteriously "disappeared" in the publishing house. In 1998, his book Čigāni (Gypsies) was republished.[103]

Juris' father, Jānis Leimanis, began his cultural work by translating religious texts into the Roma language. At the initiative of the internal mission inspector, Pastor Detlavs, J. Leimanis translated the catechism, prayers, and hymns into the Roma language, which were published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church's internal mission in 1936. In Riga, at the St. Paul's Parish House, a solemn event took place where Pastor Kundziņš, in the presence of the Church's senior council secretary Briedis and many guests, presented the first catechism in their language to the Roma. The Roma sang hymns and their folk songs.[104]

In 1937, *the active Roma leader* J. Leimanis traveled across all regions of Latvia, organizing Roma meetings. At these meetings, Leimanis urged his fellow Roma to fulfill their duties to the state more conscientiously and not to evade military service. Enlisting in military



service would benefit the Roma themselves, as they would become more resilient there. He argued that Roma had no reason to avoid fulfilling their duties since Latvia's laws were the same for everyone, but Roma did not take advantage of their rights. There were about 6,000 Roma living in Latvia at the time. Leimanis sent out survey forms asking each Roma person what they wanted to do in the future to build a better life. The majority expressed a desire to work the land, pointing out that this would provide them with a place to settle, a livelihood, and the opportunity to raise the younger generation in a different spirit. To achieve this goal, the Roma submitted petitions to the relevant authorities requesting land leases in Riga and other nearby cities. J. Leimanis' meetings were well attended by Roma everywhere.[105]

On July 31, 1937, J. Leimanis held a Roma gathering in Valkā, attended by several Roma from Estonia. Leimanis gave his people numerous instructions, urging them to be honest workers and strive for education. The Roma listened to his heartfelt speech with great interest. He also held a Roma gathering in Valmiera and later traveled to Alūksne and other cities. Leimanis distributed the Gospel translated into the Roma language.[106]

On August 2, in Alūksne, J. Leimanis invited his fellow Roma to a gathering at Kanceles Hill. In his speech, he emphasized that Roma must learn to work in any available job, be honest, and become citizens equal to others.[107]

From the spring of 1939, Leimanis expanded his activities in Ventspils as part of Methodist Bishop Church evangelization efforts for the Roma. Many Roma attended these events, quickly learning spiritual songs and other performances in their language, which enriched the services.[108]

Leimanis was no longer satisfied with theoretical discussions; he took practical steps to help Roma interested in agriculture obtain leased or owned land. In the autumn of 1939, while in Ventspils, he proposed allocating land to Roma willing to cultivate it. His request was sent to the district surveyor with instructions to consider Roma land allocations

when dividing Kamārce meadows into small farms. To provide Roma with stable employment, Leimanis planned to organize Roma work groups for construction and agriculture through the labor central office. Roma, particularly those who had participated in Latvia's independence struggles and demonstrated skill and dedication in farm work, would be given the opportunity to acquire their own land. In early November, Leimanis arrived in Ventspils to organize the first Roma work groups. After preparing for their establishment, he moved on to Kuldīga.[109]

A newspaper article mentioned that in early November 1939, Leimanis arrived in Ventspils after a horrific crime in Zaķi village, where an elderly couple, Jānis Rozenbahs and his wife Orte, were murdered in a robbery committed by a Roma named Jānis Paučis. Leimanis held evangelization meetings at the Methodist Bishop Church, reaffirming the Gospel of Christ to his people.

Regarding the situation, Leimanis stated: *"I have visited many Roma families in Ventspils and found them in a pitiful state, both materially and spiritually. I also visited the family of the man involved in the Rozenbah murders. I give them all good advice on avoiding bad company and living an honest life. Now, all Ventspils Roma suffer because of Jānis Paučis' crime. My request is—do not blame everyone for one man's wrongdoing. There are about 75 Roma families in Ventspils district, according to my information. I intend to help these Roma obtain land and engage in work. In Riga, near Šķirotava station, the city has leased about 100 plots of land to Roma, and there is no shortage of people willing to cultivate it."*[110]

By the spring of 1940, thanks to Leimanis' efforts to encourage serious employment, around 500 Roma were working in the forests of Kurzeme, near Kuldīga, Talsi, and Ventspils. By spring, he aimed to engage most of the previously nomadic Roma in farm work. Observations showed that Roma employed on farms generally fulfilled their duties well. The highest concentration of Roma workers was in the Kuldīga and Ventspils districts, but similar employment could be expanded elsewhere. Authorities estimated that around 9,000 Roma lived in Latvia, with only a small percentage engaged in productive labor.[111]



By the beginning of the 1940 spring work season, J. Leimanis intended to involve the majority of his wandering compatriots in agricultural labor. In Riga and other large cities, Roma worked in sawmills, small industrial enterprises, or survived through trade. In rural areas, only those with their own property worked, and very few were employed as farm laborers. In recent years, however, the situation had slightly improved, and the number of working Roma had increased to several hundred.

J. Leimanis had planned to travel to rural areas in the near future to collaborate with local municipalities and agricultural associations to find jobs for all Roma willing to work. In Riga, he had organized a group of Roma laborers who prepared and transported firewood from forests using their own horses.[112]

After the beginning of the Soviet occupation, Roma illiteracy and poverty were increasingly acknowledged. The newspaper Cīņa, published in August 1940, noted that there were many Roma in Latvia—around 6,000. All of them were poor. Only 20 Roma owned real estate in cities or rural areas. The illiteracy rate among the Roma was very high—around 90%. Although Roma families were large, with an average of five children each, only about one in twenty attended school.

Jānis Leimanis was accused of profiting at the expense of his impoverished compatriots. He had founded the society Čigānu draugs ("Friend of the Roma"). To avoid competition, only illiterate Roma were admitted as members. The society primarily served Leimanis himself and did not gain popularity among the Roma. When a 67-hectare plot of land near Ventspils was allocated for the society's needs, Leimanis soon moved there and attempted to have the land transferred to his name. In Riga, he rented a 6-hectare plot of land from the city. He promised to sell half of it for 100 lats to a poor Roma man, a father of nine children. However, Leimanis had no legal right to sell rented land, a fact that became clear when the buyer demanded the land be officially transferred to his name. Leimanis refused to return the 100 lats, claiming that the man had already "lived off" his land for that amount. If he wanted the money back, he would have to go to court. The central press outlet of Soviet

Latvia, Cīņa, claimed: “All the allowances granted for the needs of the Roma, Leimanis, as a glorifier of the May Night era [i.e., Kārlis Ulmanis’ authoritarian rule], had used for his own purposes and lived the life of a wealthy lord...” [113]

A Roma named Jānis Rudevīts, who had been doing physical labor for 20 years—six of them at the Riga port—told a Cīņa correspondent: *“The Roma do not stand behind Leimanis. All Roma look forward to the future with joy, convinced that they will achieve a better life. Until now, our people were a burden to others. Going forward, we want to live in a way that no one has to point fingers at us.*

*A large portion of the Roma did not have stable jobs. Now, we want to place all Roma in permanent jobs in cities or rural areas. We are organizing a Roma club. We have already secured premises. We hope to soon receive books in the Roma language from the Soviet Union. In the club, we will engage in cultural work. There will be a lot of work, but the Roma want to keep up with the rest of the citizens of Soviet Latvia.”* [114]

J. Leimanis continued organizing Roma meetings and labor groups during the German occupation with the permission of the authorities. In July 1942, the Roma community leader J. Leimanis, with the approval of the General Commissar, began organizing Roma labor groups throughout the General District, calling Roma assemblies. Meetings were held in Nāriņciems, the next day in Talsi and Spāre, and the following Sunday in Sabile.[115]

Later, in September 1942, J. Leimanis not only urged his compatriots to engage in productive work and lead respectable lives at these Roma meetings, but he also collected monetary donations for the German army. The Roma donated more than 500 Reichsmarks to the front-line soldiers.116 No further information about Jānis Leimanis has been found.

## Merchant Andrejs Paučs

One of the most well-known Latvian Roma in the 1930s was the wealthy merchant Andrejs Paučs (also Pauče, Paučis), known as Fraiķis. On December 11, 1934, the Jelgava Regional Court registered the



at the mourning house for the Roma who had grown tired after the extensive feast, while the other orchestra greeted the mourners at the cemetery with funeral music. In the evening, crowds of people gathered at the mourning house, celebrating in a manner reminiscent of a countryside ball. According to an old Roma tradition, the funeral feast lasted several days.[119]

## Opera Singer Lidija Blūmentāle

Lidija Blūmentāle, born Alksne, was an opera soloist (soprano) born in Riga in 1903 but raised and educated in Liepāja. In 1922, she entered the Liepāja Conservatory, though due to family circumstances, her studies were interrupted several times. From her school years, she devoted herself to music, despite her father’s doubts about whether she could earn a living solely through singing. When her father encouraged her to study foreign languages and commercial sciences, Lidija did not object but continued diligently training her voice and learning repertoire—songs and arias from operettas and operas. In 1928, she first performed in the production A Waltz Dream at the Liepāja Opera, even before completing her conservatory studies.

L. Blūmentāle spent five years on the stage of the Liepāja Opera (1928–1933), initially only in operettas, beginning with O. Strauss’s A Waltz Dream. She won the hearts of all Liepāja residents with her roles in the popular operettas of composers P. Abraham and I. Kálmán, which remained in theaters for years in both Riga and Liepāja: Silva, Countess Maritza, Spring Love, The Flower of Hawaii, Ball at the Savoy, The Bajadere, and others. In Liepāja, she also landed her first opera roles—Micaëla in Carmen, the title roles in La Traviata and Madama Butterfly.

After guest performances at the National Opera in 1933, L. Blūmentāle was engaged there and spent the next ten years as a soloist at the National Opera in Riga, except for one year when the Cultural Fund financed her studies in Paris. During these years, she refined her musical and stage abilities. Jānis Kalniņš assigned her the title role in

his opera Lolitas brīnumputns (Lolita's Wonderbird, 1934), and two years later – the role of Ophelia in Hamlet. Mariss Vētra later wrote in his book Mans baltais nams (My White House, 1954): "Blūmentāle's Ophelia was tender and deeply moving in her madness." There were also other roles that remained memorable: E. Eisler's The Golden Mistress, W. Wolf-Ferrari's The Cunning Beauty, Lehár's The Count of Luxembourg, and Dostal's Clivia.[120]

In an interview in 1934, the singer stated that she wished to dedicate her entire life to art. Asked about love, she replied firmly: "I have only one great love—art. Everything else is secondary. In art, I can quench all my longings and my highest spiritual thirst. It never deceives me. I have set aside everything that could hinder me on stage. I give my all to art—family life, comforts. I do not know what I would do if the stage ever betrayed me..."

The feeling of happiness and satisfaction was foreign to the artist, and in its place was a constant drive to achieve new successes in art, without thinking about rest. "I do not feel happiness at all," she replied. "It is a tormenting feeling that I am never satisfied. I feel that this is still not everything. I always strive forward, upward."

"Of course, I would like to rest," she candidly admitted. "I love silence, the sea... I am used to fresh air, but there is still so much work to be done. Without work, there can be no achievements."[121]

L. Blūmentāle often performed in guest appearances in Latvia and abroad. Thus, in April 1935, the Cēsis City Music School organized an evening of melodies and operettas with the participation of Lidija Blūmentāle and Mariss Vētra.

The first part of the evening's program, aside from composers Tchaikovsky, Pérez-Freire, and Tosti, was dedicated to Latvian authors: E. Dārziņš, A. Kalniņš, A. Jurjāns, J. Mediņš, and L. Garūta. The second part of the program consisted mostly of operetta melodies, primarily from Kálmán's Countess Maritza and Silva.[122]

The last recorded news of the outstanding soprano L. Blūmentāle's concert in Latvia dates to January 1944, when she performed at the



university hall, choosing songs composed by H. Berino and J. Ķepītis. These left a great impression on the audience. The artist also sang arias from operas by Donizetti, Thomas, Massenet, and Gounod, accompanied by piano.[123]

In the autumn of 1944, L. Blūmentāle went into exile in Germany. After the war, she performed concerts in Latvian refugee camps. In May 1946, opera singers L. Blūmentāle and Teodors Brilts, accompanied by pianist Rita Schaefer, gave a concert in a refugee camp. L. Blūmentāle sang Jānis Mediņš's popular romances about love and spring, as well as songs by L. Vīgneris, J. Reinholds, and F. Ķepītis, imbued with deep emotional warmth. Music critic Edgars Ramats noted: *"L. Blūmentāle brought the greatest joy with her sensitive performance of operetta songs. Here, the singer's vocal qualities seemed perfectly suited, and her appropriate mimetic play provided a true interpretation of character songs."*[124]

After her years in the German camps, the artist spent 50 years in the United States, in New York, where she eventually managed to put her commercial knowledge to use and became successful and independent.

L. Blūmentāle was found dead in her apartment in New York at the end of 2001. She lived to be 98 years old, and more than 50 years had passed since she had left the stage.[125]

## Ballet dancer Karmena Burkēviča

K. Burkēviča was born on March 11, 1913, in Madona. In 1935, she was a ballet dancer at the Latvian National Opera and Ballet, having previously studied ballet at Feodorova's dance studio. After one performance, the press noted: *"Undeniably good was the gypsy Karmena Burkēviča, she received the greatest acclaim. Good, but without any progress."*[126] The audience was fascinated by the ballet dancer's temperament and expressive dancing.

By 1939, K. Burkēviča had moved to Argentina, from where she seemingly never returned to her homeland. In 1939, the "energetic and gifted compatriot" had established her own ballet troupe, which perfor-

med with great success on the stage of "Avenidas," the second-largest artistic venue in Buenos Aires, a city of three million inhabitants, after the "Colón" theatre.[127]

In 1943, in Lima, the capital of Peru, former National Opera and Ballet dancer Arturs Piķieris founded his own dance troupe, which included the renowned Riga Opera ballet dancer K. Burkēviča. The troupe performed in Peru for two years.[128]

In June 1949, "*Karmena Burkēviča, the only gypsy of the Riga Ballet, whose oriental image once took the breath away from all the guests of the Kurfürstendamm cafés, who abandoned their terrace tables and rushed into the street to admire her when the Riga ballerina arrived in Berlin with her partner Reinis Jēkabsons,*" had arrived in Rome with her husband, an Argentine banker. After great success in Budapest revues, Burkēviča achieved equally remarkable triumphs in South America.[129] No information has been found regarding the later years of her life.

## Clairvoyant and Photographer Eižens Finks

Eižens Finks was born on June 25, 1885, into the family of a Romani craftsman, Johan Finks, and his wife, a Vidzeme native, Līze Brauna. His birth certificate listed his birthplace as a train traveling between Vilnius and Zhytomyr. From childhood, he exhibited various supernatural abilities. He became aware of his power to predict the future and had visions.

"First of all [..] – I am not God and can also be mistaken; secondly, I do not like to talk much about politics, and thirdly, not everything that comes from my mouth remains unaltered later."

E. Finks, Pēdējā Brīdī, 1932, No. 236

## Eižens Finks' Predictions

Around early 1921, Finks predicted to an employee of the Italian embassy that the then-journalist Benito Mussolini would come to power.



company "Andrejs Paučis" in trade register section "A" (No. 181). Its owner, merchant Andrejs Paučis, was born in Piltene on January 27, 1894, and lived at 12 Tērvetes Street, Jelgava. The business, founded in 1924, dealt in horse trading, traveling from place to place.[117]

According to Roma oral history, A. Paučs supplied horses for the Latvian army and donated money for the construction of the Freedom Monument. However, no written confirmation of these claims has been found.

In early 1940, Andrejs Paučes' son Kārlis Pauče met the daughter of a Russian merchant, Ņina Osipova. They developed a close relationship and decided to marry. When Kārlis' father, the wealthy Roma Andrejs Pauče, found out, he threatened to disinherit his son. The couple planned a secret wedding, but when they attempted to register their marriage in Jelgava, Pauče reported to the police that Ņina Osipova had undergone an abortion. As a result, Osipova was arrested, along with a janitor named Sproģe, accused of performing the procedure.[118] The outcome of this case is unknown.

A. Pauče attracted the attention of both local and central press with the grand funeral he organized. In March 1940, an 84-year-old Roma man, Mārtiņš Cīcis, passed away in Jelgava. His son, Andrejs Pauče, a well-known horse trader and property owner, organized a large funeral for his father (in some press articles, for his father-in-law), inviting around 200 Roma. Several calves and pigs were slaughtered for the feast. For a couple of days before the burial, Roma gathered at the mourning house on Tērvete Street 12, feasting at lavishly set tables. Brass bands played continuously. Among the Roma, rumors spread that the wealthy Pauče had invited the Roma king from Poland, Januš Kvik, who had been crowned the previous year. However, the king did not arrive in Jelgava. When the deceased Mārtiņš Cīcis was taken to Baloži Cemetery, many Jelgava residents came to watch the funeral ceremony. The spiritual rites were led by Pastor O. Kraulis. Both at the mourning house and at the cemetery, the Roma attempted to outshout the pastor with exclamations and loud sighs.

Two orchestras participated in the funeral. One orchestra played

After this prediction came true, Finks received a photograph of the new head of state with a note of gratitude. He also foretold multiple assassination attempts on Italy's fascist leader, in which Mussolini would survive. Following these attempts, Mussolini sent his thanks and a reward.

Around early 1925, it was rumored that Finks had predicted the death of then-Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics in a car accident. On August 22 of that year, the minister lost his life when his car overturned on a rural road curve. Finks also predicted a tragic end for Meierovics' wife, who visited him three times. He stated that she would die only after her husband's death, which indeed happened.

In 1932, Finks predicted to the press that race walker Jānis Daliņš would win at the Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Although Daliņš won second place, it was Latvia's first Olympic medal. Regarding decathlete Jānis Dimza, Finks said: "He will achieve much at the Olympics, but in terms of victory, he will stand beside the winner." Dimza did not finish the competition at the Olympic Games, but after eight events, he was in second place.

In 1939, after the outbreak of World War II, Finks stated that he could see, with his spiritual eyes, Russian soldiers in the streets of Berlin.

Finks' prophecy: "You will experience so much more. You will see the world recognize Latvia as a free country again. At first, you will witness this right here in Arkādija. You will walk through the park: there will again be the Latvian flag, people. Those who were exiled and have returned will speak there."

Finks predicted that significant changes for Latvia would occur when the year could be written the same way from both ends. In 1991, Latvia regained its independence; in 2002, it was invited to join the European Union and NATO.

Finks predicted his own death in 1958 a month in advance when lawyer Alksnis offered to take him to a good dentist who would fit him with dentures. Finks said: "That February 6th and 7th seem so dark to me, maybe I won't need those teeth after all..."

7.

# Repressions Against the Roma During the Nazi Occupation



According to various studies, the number of Roma who perished in the Nazi genocide in Europe ranges from 500,000 to 2,000,000 people. The Roma themselves refer to the genocide as *Samudaripen* – a general extermination, with the less commonly used term kali traš – the black horror.

From the perspective of Nazi racial theory, the Roma were a threat to the purity of the Nordic race. Although the Roma, like the ancestors of the Germans, belonged to the Indo-European language group and originated from the Aryan homeland of India, Nazi scientists attempted to prove that through their wanderings, the Roma had mixed with the lowest races, which, in their view, determined their antisocial behavior, inclination toward parasitism and crime, immoral and idle lifestyle, and vagrancy.

Already during the Weimar Republic, Bavaria enacted the "Law on Combating Gypsies, Vagrants, and Idlers" on July 16, 1926, which became a model for laws in other German states. From 1935 to 1938, the police forcibly placed Roma in special guarded camps. Since March 1936, the Nuremberg racial purity laws applied to the Roma just as they did to the Jews. According to these laws, a Roma person was prohibited from marrying or engaging in intimate relations with a German. The Roma were not allowed to participate in elections, and their citizenship of the German Reich was revoked.

On December 8, 1938, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler issued a circular titled "On the Prevention of the Gypsy Threat," which outlined the program for the neutralization of the Roma. It began with the forced sterilization of Roma women. Following Himmler's order on April 27, 1940, the deportation of Roma to labor and concentration camps in Poland began. A large Roma ghetto was established in Łódź, whose inhabitants were exterminated in 1943 at the Chełmno extermination camp. From December 1942, half-Roma individuals in Germany (those with one Roma parent) were equated with full-blooded Roma and, together with Roma from other Western European countries, were sent to the Auschwitz death camp, where almost all were exterminated, except for Sinti Roma, whom the Nazis considered to be more civilized.

After the German invasion of the USSR, special units of the German Security Service (SD) and police *(Einsatzgruppen)* exterminated both nomadic and settled Roma along their path. During World War II, approximately 90% of the Roma population in Croatia, around 70% in Poland, and about 50% in the German-occupied territories of the USSR were exterminated.[130]

The oldest discovered document concerning the Roma issue in Ostland, signed by an illegible German official (presumably the Ostland State Commissioner), is the "Comprehensive Report on the Situation in Ostland – Latvia, September 1941." It states that in Latvia, some Roma were settled while others were nomadic. The latter, as a factor of concern for public security, were to be placed in a single concentration camp.[131]

In a 1946 trial, SS Obergruppenführer and General of Police in Ostland Friedrich Jeckeln testified: "Gestapo and SD chief Ernst Kaltenbrunner ordered all SD and Gestapo agencies both in the territory of Germany and in all occupied lands to deny Roma the freedom of movement, capture them, and exterminate them."[132] It is possible that this was a verbal order since written directives do not explicitly mention the extermination of nomadic Roma, and this order may have been connected to the large-scale Roma extermination actions of 1942.

The first Roma execution documented by the USSR Extraordinary State Commission took place in August 1941 in the Svētupes forest of Baltinava Parish, Jaunlatgale County, where 10 Roma families—43 people in total—were shot along with 23 Jewish families, totaling 105 people.[133]

During the German occupation, Latvian press agitation against the Roma was not as pronounced as against the Jews, but it did exist. The propaganda employed rhetoric that was also used against Jews: that the Roma were immoral parasites and criminals who did not want to work honest jobs. The newspaper Tukuma Ziņas, in its issue of October 21, 1941, following the first major Jewish extermination actions and Roma killings, wrote: *"The Gypsies have always wandered along the roads*



The extermination of Jews and Roma in Rēzekne and Ludza Counties was carried out by the Maltā precinct police unit under the command of Haralds Puntulis and the Rēzekne precinct police unit led by Boļeslavs Maikovskis. These police units were under the authority of the chief of Rēzekne County police, Alberts Eihels. The police units consisted only of local Latvians, Poles, and Russians—there were no Germans among them. The Maltā unit, which was known among the population as the "death battalion," was particularly notorious for its involvement in massacres. In August 1941, they shot 381 Jews in Rēzekne County, exterminated all the Jews of Maltā Parish in September, and on January 4, 1942, executed 30 men from the village of Audriņi in Rēzekne's marketplace before proceeding to exterminate all Roma in Ludza, as the Ludza police had refused to do so.[139]

On January 4, 1942, Roma from Viļāni were shot between the Old Believers' and Brotherhood cemeteries in Rēzekne; in Varakļāni, the Roma were exterminated on-site in January.[140]

During a 1965 trial against former Rēzekne police officers, the prosecutor asked the accused Judovs: "What can you say about the extermination of Roma citizens in Rēzekne?"

Judovs: "There were 40 or 50 Roma in prison. When the cells were needed for the arrested residents of Audriņi, the Roma were ordered to break ice in the prison yard. They were promised that after work they would be released. They did not know that they were clearing their own path to death. As soon as they finished, they were all taken away and shot. The freed cells were then used for the Audriņi prisoners."

Regarding the extermination of Roma in Rēzekne County, surviving Roma Aleksandrs Petrovičs testified in court in 1965: "The Roma were rounded up and driven into a house that had previously belonged to a Jewish family. An order was given not to let them leave the house. My mother, brother, and sister were among those imprisoned. The executioners also surrounded our home and the houses of other Roma, looting our possessions and taking our cows and horses. One policeman struck my elderly father with a revolver."

Prosecutor: “How many Roma in total perished in Rēzekne?”

Petrovičs: “I do not know the exact number. In my family, all my brothers and sisters were killed.”

Prosecutor: “Did anyone survive from the Roma who were confined in the special Roma ghetto?”

Petrovičs: “I was the only one who survived.”[141]

According to A. Petrovičs’ account, more than 100 local Roma lived in the city: the Petrovičs, Tumaševičs, Levickis, Sarbusis, and others. In 1941, those Roma who had no homes were gathered into a house on Ludzas Street. On the first Sunday of January 1942, in the evening after the execution of the men from Audriņi village, the Roma who had property and a permanent residence were also gathered into the house on Ludzas Street, taken to prison the next day, and from there transported to the Ančupāni forest and shot—around 200 people.

Additionally, in Rēzekne, 20 Roma from Malta parish, six from Andrupene parish, and 70 from Viļāni parish were executed.

In April 1942, the SS and Latvian police leadership indicated that only nomadic Roma should be arrested; however, all the Roma in the Rēzekne district had already been exterminated by January.[142]

In May 1942, all the Roma from Bauska—approximately 250 adults, children, and elderly—were gathered at the Skaistkalne Jaunmēmele manor, and after 5 or 6 days, they were taken to the forest in Jaunsaules parish and shot. This mass murder was carried out by the Bauska district police officers.[143]

By order of the commissioner of the Zemgale region, Mēdems, on May 27 and 28, 1942, 280 Roma from Jelgava were arrested and shot 13 km from Jelgava, in the Ērmiķu forest. The shooters were the police officers from the Bauska district, who had already previously exterminated the Roma from Bauska. Before being executed, the Roma from Jelgava were gathered in the Sērmuiža camp. The camp guard, Soboļevskis, recalled that even in 1943, Roma were still in the camp and were executed.[144]

On December 24, 1941, the head of the Valmiera district issued an



order to three police districts to collect information on how many Roma lived permanently and how many were nomadic. Outside Valmiera city, there were a total of 65 Roma in the district.145

In the criminal case against former police officer Jānis Šteinbergs, he testified that he had been a guard at the Valmiera concentration camp and had participated in the execution of 45 Roma. This took place in the winter of 1942.[146]

Not all Roma in the Valmiera district were exterminated, as evidenced by the fact that in November 1943, the price supervisor of the Ainaži district, Kārkliņš, arrested the Roma Markins Mitrovskis in the Pāle parish Skujciems, who had escaped from prison multiple times.[147] In June 1944, it was discovered that the previous autumn, Markins Mitrovskis, who had escaped from Valmiera prison, had been hiding for a long time in Pāle parish, Skujas, with his wife. The landlord of the house, Jūlijs Tulveitis, his wife Alma, and their daughter Marta were aware that the Roma man had escaped from prison, as Mitrovskis helped with agricultural work. When the escaped Roma was arrested, the landlord and his family were put on trial for harboring him. Jānis and Alma Tulveitis were given relatively light sentences—one month in prison each, which was converted into a fine of 100 Reichsmarks, while Marta Tulveitis was sentenced to two weeks in prison, converted into a fine of 50 Reichsmarks.[148]

About 500 Roma, Jews, and Soviet activists from the Tukums district were gathered in concentration camps at Tille Manor in Milzkalne parish and Vecmokas Manor. Driver A. Stūrmanis testified that in 1942 he transported Roma to be executed near Lake Valgums. Around 1,500 victims were buried there. Another witness, driver J. Alksnis, stated that in June or July 1942, he transported Roma families to Lake Valgums—making a total of 12 trips with 20 people each. Around 200 Roma were executed at night. A third witness, driver E. Dreija, stated that the total number of Roma executed in June was 300 people.[149]

In the Talsi district, including the towns of Kandava and Sabile, around 200 Roma were saved. In the summer of 1942, the district chief

Kārlis Krūmiņš asked the German district agricultural leader Asborn not to execute the Roma, as there was a labor shortage for the harvest due to many residents being conscripted into the army. Together, they appealed to the commissioner of the Kurzeme region, Redike, who in turn brought the matter to the Ostland General Commissioner, resulting in the cancellation of the execution of the Roma. A signed testimony from several dozen Roma from Talsi and Ventspils has been preserved, stating that K. Krūmiņš saved their lives.[150]

A grave for executed Roma had also been dug near Sabile, and the Roma were already standing by it when the town mayor, Mārtiņš Bērziņš, arrived on a bicycle with an order to postpone the execution.[151] In Sabile, near the care center Kalme, where M. Bērziņš worked during World War II at the town council, a memorial plaque has been installed at the initiative of the local Roma community. A monument purchased by the Roma stands on M. Bērziņš' grave.

Mārtiņš Bērziņš, mayor of Sabile, said, *"If you shoot them, then take me as well..."*—thus saving the lives of 300 Roma.

On November 15, 1943, the Ostland State Minister emphasized in a circular to provincial commissioners that all nomadic Roma and their mixed descendants were to be equated with Jews and placed in concentration camps. The selection of Roma was carried out by the commander of the security police and the SS, in coordination with the general commissioner's offices. On December 16 of the same year, the Reich Commissioner of Ostland expressed the NSDAP's racial policy office's evaluation of the Roma. It did not differ from the Nazi stance from the very beginning: Roma were mixed with the dregs of society and primitive peoples, characterized by an antisocial attitude and criminal tendencies. In Ostland, nomadic Roma were to be equated with Jews, while settled Roma were to be treated as state inhabitants.[152]

These orders came far too late, as many Roma in Latvia, including settled ones (presumably in Rēzekne, as well as in Bauska, Jelgava, and Tukums), had already been exterminated in 1941 and 1942. The Roma extermination actions in district towns followed a unified scheme: first,



*without working, idling, and getting in the way of hard-working people. They are a worthless nation that has never accomplished anything great but has always lived a parasitic life.*

*If in the past one could view them as providers of humor and entertainment and often turn a blind eye to their misdeeds and their immoral lifestyle, that is no longer the case now. Now everyone who wants to eat the bread that this fertile land provides must earn it with the sweat of their brow!"*

*"We have freed ourselves from the Jews. Their lurking, murderous gaze will never again look upon our streets, their filthy, immoral, lowly lives will no longer mix with the clean Aryan everyday life and aspirations of Latvians!*

*But the Roma must also change if they want to live among us! Small punishments, constant scoldings, and warnings will not help.*

*Now once again, it was necessary to place the Roma Kristaps Kraučs from Grenči Parish in Tukums prison because he was idling during the peak of the work season, when people in the fields were laboring from dawn till dusk. This same Kraučs also disobeyed the orders and warnings of supervisory authorities.*

*Almost all Roma are like Kraučs. Just as Kraučs is now in prison, so too will the new era teach all other Roma to work!"*[134]

In December 1941, in Ciecere Parish, 100 Roma from Liepāja County were shot. This was carried out by policemen from the 1st precinct of Aizpute. A list of those murdered has been preserved, including their addresses, professions, and health conditions.[135]

In Ludza, in August 1941 and in January and February 1942, Roma and Jews were shot, though the exact number is not recorded. A ghetto was established in Ludza, where approximately 1,000 Jews and 200 Roma were confined.[136] The Ludza Roma were executed by police officers from the Maltā precinct in Rēzekne County, as the Ludza police themselves refused to carry out the executions.[137]

In Kalvene Parish, between 1941 and 1942, 93 residents of Aizpute were exterminated, 90 of whom were Roma families with children.[138]

the Roma were concentrated in guarded buildings or camps, and after a short time, they were executed in nearby forests. The arrests, guarding, and executions were carried out by local police units, which consisted only of local residents, not Germans. District chiefs could prevent the extermination of Roma if they showed personal initiative and guaranteed that the district's Roma were employed and had a permanent residence.

According to eyewitness reports, approximately 8,000 Roma were exterminated in Latvia. Documentary evidence confirms the murder of around 3,000 Roma.

According to the 1935 census data, Roma lived in all 19 districts of Latvia and in the city of Riga. Their total population was 3,839, but in reality, the number of Roma could have reached 12,000, as many were registered in passports as Latvians, Ukrainians, Poles, or Russians. Some had no identity documents at all.

In the Talsi district, and in the districts of Daugavpils, Ventspils, Valka, Madona, Cēsis, Ilūkste, Jēkabpils, and Riga, as well as in the city of Riga, no documentary evidence of the Romani genocide has been found.[153] In-depth research on the Romani genocide in Latvia continues.

In 1935, there were 3,800 Roma in Latvia, but according to Jewish historian M. Westermanis, nearly half of this number perished in World War II. However, in the post-war years, the Roma population grew rapidly once again.[154]

Since the 1959 population data publication already listed more than 4,300 Roma, indicating the growing demographic dynamics of this minority, historians researching genocide victims did not pay special attention to this group. This can partly be explained by the Roma themselves, who, fearing renewed repression, avoided declaring their ethnicity, remained silent about the horrors they experienced during the war, and rarely worked in public workplaces where registration in employee lists was required.

**8.**

# Roma During the Soviet Era



The Soviet authorities treated the Roma favorably but aimed to settle them in permanent residences and integrate them into regular, productive labor. As early as January 1941, in the Limbaži parish, six of the 146 planned farms were allocated to Roma families: Anton Kozlovski in Slaunes, Kate Mitrauska in Verneri, August Mitrovski in Urbāni, Juris Mitrauski in Kārņi, Fricis Mitrauski in Remškini, and Jegor Kozlovski in Kalna Teteri. The latter declined to manage the assigned farm, but the others seriously considered starting work in the spring.

When asked how he felt about being a new landowner, Anton Kozlovski said: *"Previously, Roma were not given land and were looked down upon if they tried to do honest work. I have already done land labor, working in exchange for rent. I don't have a horse yet, but I hope to acquire one and cultivate my land. I have enough labor power, as our family consists of nine members."*

E. Mitrauski, a father of seven, had already ensured that rye was sown on the allocated farm by autumn. He also planned to build a house, placing great hope in the government's support and his 19-year-old son August. *"I do have a horse, though a weak one,"* said the determined Roma man. *"I lack only a cart and other tools. I have already requested 10 bushels of oats, 3 bushels of wheat, 15 bushels of potatoes, and also pea and clover seeds from the government. I have never worked the land before, but I hope learning won't be too difficult."*[155]

On October 5, 1956, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a decree, "On the Inclusion of Nomadic Roma in Work." The decree acknowledged that due to Soviet state efforts, most Roma had transitioned to a settled life and started working. However, a certain portion of the Roma population continued to wander, living as parasites and often committing crimes.

To involve them in socially beneficial work, it was decided to prohibit Roma from nomadism, invite them to settle permanently and start working, and instruct the Council of Ministers of the Union Republics to arrange their resettlement, employment, and fulfillment of cultural and social needs. Additionally, it was determined that adult Roma who

deliberately avoided socially useful work and continued a vagrant lifestyle would, by court decision, be sentenced to up to five years of corrective labor.[156]

Roma had already been engaged in seasonal agricultural work, such as harvesting fruits and vegetables. In October 1956, the press reported that the Imants Sudmalis collective farm in the Baldone district had produced a rich potato harvest that year. To gather the crops, collective farmers invited volunteers. Twenty-six Roma families volunteered, were provided with cozy accommodations in the second brigade, and chose a leader from among themselves—Roma named Dāvis, who ensured that work proceeded efficiently.

Within a few days, the volunteers harvested about 140 tons of potatoes, receiving 8% of the yield as payment. The most diligent workers were the families of Augusts Sunītis, who harvested about 38 tons, and Jāzeps Dāvis, who harvested about 34 tons.

The collective farmers were satisfied with the Roma workers. Several Roma, such as Sunītis and others, expressed in conversations with collective farmers a desire to trade their nomadic way of life for a settled one and to become members of the agricultural cooperative.[157]

Some Roma, especially in Latgale, became permanent collective farmers with stable residences and employment in the collective farms. Urban Roma engaged in unskilled seasonal work in collective farms, while women collected forest berries and mushrooms in the summers to sell at purchasing stations. With the development of motor transport, the trade of horse dealers became obsolete, leading Roma to shift to speculation with scarce goods. They purchased items in parts of the USSR where they were easily available and then transported them to Latvia, selling them at significantly higher prices.

In 1959, there were 4,301 Roma living in Latvia, and by 1970, their number had increased to 5,427, making up 0.2% of the Latvian SSR population.[158] The majority of Roma already lived in cities: 2,883 in 1959 and 3,864 in 1970.[159]

The Soviet era was marked by significant achievements in Roma



cultural life. Shortly after the war, Roma musical and dance ensembles emerged. These attracted the attention of other ethnic groups to Roma culture but also created a romanticized image of a carefree, joyful life in tents and by campfires, ignoring the reality of lack of education, qualifications, and the resulting poverty.

Latvian Roma cultural figures maintained close contacts with Roma writers, theaters, and musical ensembles in the USSR, receiving valuable information and support from experienced Soviet Roma organizations. Shortly after the establishment of the USSR in 1925, the All-Russian Roma Union was founded, aiming to end Roma nomadism, transition them to a settled lifestyle, and raise their cultural level. Roma collective farms, kindergartens, schools, and a Roma technical school were established to train teachers for Roma schools. The union was led by Roma Andrejs Taranovs, a Communist Party member since 1922, who had fought on the fronts of the Civil War in Budyonny's First Cavalry Army. A Roma writing system was created, laying the foundation for Soviet Roma literature.

In 1920, the first issue of the magazine "Romani Zorja" ("Roma Dawn") was published in the Roma language. Later, it was renamed "Nevo Drom" ("New Path"). One of the pioneers of Roma literature was Aleksandrs Germano (1893–1955), who wrote around 150 works. The first issue of "Romani Zorja" featured A. Germano's short story "The Wolf Cub" ("Ruvoro").

In 1929, a collection of essays, "New Life" ("Nevo džiiben"), was published in the Roma language by the State Fiction Publishing House.[160]

On July 15, 1954, a Roma song and dance ensemble performed at the Cēsis Cultural Center. The ensemble's artistic director was Vasiliy Korzhkov, a laureate of the All-Union Variety Competition. The concert featured laureates of Republican and All-Union variety competitions—Iraida Abaurova, Leonid Dukhov, a choir, and a dance group. The program included a performance titled "Evening at the Roma Camp," featuring Roma folk dances, songs, and romances.[161]

It is possible that this ensemble also performed as a Roma troupe at

the Riga Circus. In 1959, the press reported on the troupe's production "Under the Roma Tents," which featured Indian songs, Spanish dances, and acrobatic elements. A critic wrote: *"What could be the criterion for evaluating this unusual ensemble? It seems the best approach is to look for ethnographic elements rather than professional circus attractions. One must note the fiery dancing of artist Gitana—although not purely national, as it already includes acrobatic tendencies. The youngest dancer in the troupe, J. Moskalyov, with his fiery and choreographically precise performance, would bring honor to any professional dance ensemble. However, other dancers' performances are less valuable. For example, the girls' paired dances show a lack of coordination. The ensemble needs a director's assistance, especially in ensuring that mass scene participants do not passively disengage from the performance. It is unacceptable for some members to curiously observe the audience during their colleagues' performances. An interesting highlight is Roma singer M. Shishkov's rendition of 'Pūt, vējiņi'—although completely devoid of Latvian character, the song captivates with the performer's original, distinctly Roma expression."*[162]

On August 12, 1976, a Roma song and dance ensemble from Russia performed in Riga's Kirov Park (now Vērmanes Garden). The director and ballet master, Vasiliy Korzov, an Honored Stage Artist of the Adjarian ASSR, stated that the ensemble had been active for fifteen years, performing in Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv, Kharkiv, and many other Soviet cities. Their success had been noted by prominent Soviet variety performers, including Mahmud Esambaev, Batyr Zakirov, as well as Mikhail Tsaryov and Ivan Kozlovsky. The "Kaleidoscope" program included Indian and other international songs and dances, as well as traditional Roma music and dance. Korzov admitted that he had lived in Riga for many years.[163]

In 1963, the Riga Circus presented an attraction titled "Roma." The troupe's artistic director was J. Bresler.[164] In 1969, the circus program featured a Roma revue led by circus veteran J. Bresler, combining an ethnographic storyline with Roma melodies, songs, and dances alongside traditional circus acts such as juggling and vaulting. Due to audience demand, the Roma troupe's performances were extended until the end of March.[165]



On November 27, 1968, a guest performance by Russian Romani artists took place at the Riga Circus—Riga residents saw the revue Ame Roma (We, the Roma) for the first time. This Romani troupe had been established almost 30 years earlier. Individual artists had performed in Riga before, but never in such large numbers.

The revue We, the Roma, staged by the Romani artists' troupe under the direction of the RSFSR Honored Artist Ivan Kurilov, was a passionate performance filled with songs and dances that vividly showcased the ancient traditions and customs of the Romani people. The production was further enriched by performances from circus artists. It was difficult for anyone to remain indifferent when soloist Mikhail Ivanov performed Romani songs and romances, and the same could be said for the other singers and dancers.[166]

In November 1968, the Moscow Romani Theater Romen—the world's only professional Romani theater—performed in Riga for the first time.

*Romen Theater* was founded in 1931 by a group of enthusiastic Roma intelligentsia. The People's Commissar of Education, A. Lunacharsky, actively participated in its establishment. The young collective received great support from professional and talented stage artists, including the People's Stage Artist of the Kazakh SSR, Honored Art Worker of the Ukrainian SSR, Honored Stage Artist of the RSFSR, and director M. Goldblat, who became the theater's first artistic director; USSR People's Artist M. Yanshin; RSFSR Honored Stage Artist P. Saratovsky, who led the theater for many years; Honored Art Worker of the Uzbek SSR A. Tishletsky; RSFSR Honored Stage Artist and composer A. Bugachevsky, who had headed the theater's music department since its foundation; and many others. They trained the older generation of actors in the best traditions of Russian realistic art while carefully preserving national uniqueness

and vivid originality, drawing from the ancient sources of Romani folk art.

Although *Romen* was a dramatic theater, music, songs, and folk dances naturally conveyed the thoughts and emotions of its characters. The theater's actors seamlessly transitioned into dance and song where, in another theater, a monologue might have been used. This created a unique and distinctive artistic style that had been refined over many years. The theater stayed in Riga for 13 days, during which it presented 12 performances from its extensive repertoire, which consisted almost entirely of original works. Most of the plays staged at the theater were written specifically for *Romen* and were not performed anywhere else.[167]

Outside of Riga, the only Romani artistic collective in Latvia was established in Ventspils. In the spring of 1959, at a Romani assembly convened by the Ventspils City Committee of the LCP, Secretary A. Ķīlis made it clear that the time had come to end nomadic life. He urged the Romani community to take up socially necessary work and strongly recommended that they establish their own amateur artistic group.

Thus, young Roma in Ventspils began preparing their first ensemble production, Romani Wedding, at the Workers' Club. To ensure the accuracy of the performance, the director of the Leninist Komsomol Youth Theater, I. Krenbergs, familiarized himself with Romani customs by attending their family celebrations. As a result, a beautiful storyline was created, incorporating ancient Romani traditions, enchanting songs, and fiery dances.

Rehearsals began in March. Initially, only six young women participated, but their numbers soon grew. Eventually, 23 Roma took part in the production, although many more young people attended the rehearsals, hesitant about whether to join the ensemble.

For a people accustomed to a nomadic lifestyle for centuries, the younger generation found it difficult to adapt to discipline or conform to the demands of the stage. Their dances never turned out identical—improvisation was an integral part of both their singing and dancing.

The ensemble's leader, Georgs (Juris) Leimanis, son of Jānis Leimanis, had previously studied at the Ventspils Music School. He conducted rehearsals on evenings when the director was occupied with theater performances. He also arranged Romani songs, creating second voices for them. The musical accompaniment for all Romani songs was composed by H. Vicinskis, while L. Gindra became the ensemble's dance instructor.

By November 1959, four well-attended performances of Romani Wedding had taken place in Ventspils, Kuldīga, and Pope, with upcoming performances planned in Talsi, Ugāle, and Kandava.[168]

Around 1960, the activities of the Ventspils Romani ensemble dwindled, and it disbanded. However, in 1962, posters once again appeared on the city's streets announcing a Romani Variety Concert. With the establishment of a new railway workers' club, a Romani variety ensemble found a home there. Rehearsals began, and gradually, the individual numbers of the new variety program took shape.

A correspondent noted that, overall, the new program made a good impression. The various Romani folk dances, which opened a new chapter in the rich folklore of the Romani people, were especially delightful. Particularly striking were the African and Romani dances performed by Vilma Cīče, in which the southern temperament was strongly felt, as well as a dance performed by Ernests Paučs.

Soloists Georgs Leimanis, Leons Gindra, Alīda and Malda Paučes performed several Romani folk songs and songs by various composers with great sensitivity, demonstrating their talent. The concert's musical aspect was successfully handled by a small orchestra led by Vladimir Makajev. The positive impression was further enhanced by the witty humor of the program's host, Jēkabs Ozollapa. [169]

**9.**

# Latvian Roma Awakening



The Latvian Romani national awakening began in the same way as for Latvians, only about 180 years later. The strongest unifying element of a people and a prerequisite for the formation of a nation is a written language, in which literary and popular scientific works are created. This is followed by education, engagement in entrepreneurship, and participation in politics. An awakening is not all-encompassing nor does it happen spontaneously—it is prepared by individual enthusiasts and intellectuals. Time must pass before their words, writings, and actions gain the trust of their fellow people.

What Ernests Dinsberģis, Ansis Leitāns, and Krišjānis Barons were to Latvians, Leksa Manuš, whose real name was Aleksandrs Belugins, was to Latvian Roma. In 1977, the publishing house Liesma released Leksa Manuš's children's poetry book Gribu kumeliņu (I Want a Foal) in both Romani and Latvian.

## Leksa Manuš

Leksa Manuš (Leksa—a Romani abbreviation of Aleksandrs, Manuš—meaning "man" in the Romani language) was the creative pseudonym of Aleksandrs Belugins (1942–1997). The family into which Leksa Manuš was born was multinational. Among his ancestors were Russians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Germans, Prussians, Poles, and Roma, but he felt a special kinship with the latter. He mastered various Romani dialects exceptionally well and dedicated his life to studying Romani culture.

He completed his postgraduate studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. Leksa Manuš was considered a unique linguist. According to his colleagues' estimates, he was proficient in no fewer than 50 languages and knew about ten Romani dialects and variants. In some language groups, Leksa Manuš had developed his own linguistic training system that facilitated accelerated language learning. He engaged in historical, in-depth, and comparative research on the Romani language. Leksa Manuš published his scientific works on the Romani

language, history, folklore, literature, religion, and musical characteristics in numerous Soviet and foreign ethnographic, Romani studies, and other periodicals, often including the original language of his translations. In the 1970s and 1980s, collections of Romani children's poetry by Leksa Manuš were published in Moscow and Riga. In 1980, a collection of Romani poetry from various countries was published in Budapest in both Romani and Hungarian, taking its title from Leksa's poem Čigānu šūpuļdziesma (Gypsy Lullaby), which included ten of his poems. In 1990, the world-famous epic Ramayana was published in India for the first time in both Romani and English, translated by Leksa Manuš.

Leksa Manuš prepared two primers for Romani children in Russian and Latvian Romani dialects. In Riga, a primer illustrated by the talented Romani poet and artist, and Leksa's friend, Kārlis Rudevičs, was published in 1996.

In 1997, Leksa Manuš's final work, The Great Romani–Latvian–English and Latvian–Romani Dictionary, was published in Riga. For the first time in history, it provided a detailed description of the grammar of the Latvian Romani dialect. Leksa edited the manuscript of the Latvian–Romani dictionary, on which Jānis Neilands, a Latvian Romani from Ventspils, had worked for many years, while Kārlis Rudevičs supplemented it and prepared it for publication. The legacy of Leksa Manuš includes dozens of his scientific works, unique and original studies in the fields of Romani history and culture, linguistics, and ethnography, as well as hundreds of poems.[170]

## Rigonds Kleins-Mednis

By 1985, another talented writer of Romani origin, Rigonds Kleins-Mednis, born in 1963, was already noted for writing poetry in Latvian. He excelled particularly in lyrical poetry, often incorporating motifs from Romani folklore. He also composed melodies for songs, such as Rūķija, a children's poem by Imants Auziņš. R. Kleins-Mednis



had graduated from the Romen Romani Theater studio in Moscow under the guidance of USSR Honored Stage Artist Vasilijs Koržovs. At the 4th eight-year school in Jūrmala, he led a children's variety choir, consulted with Liesma publishing house editors A. Groda and V. Rūja, and was active in the Tukums Literary Association.[171]

On April 9, 1989, in the Talsi Cultural Center, the first Romani organization of the Awakening era—the Gypsy Association—was established, with R. Kleins-Mednis elected as its chairman.

The Gypsy Association was the only minority organization that categorically refused to establish national schools, a newspaper in the Romani language, or its own symbols. The call to create national schools emphasized the idea of schooling in general, but in Romani perception, a contrast between formal education and living culture had developed over the centuries. History records numerous cases where educated Roma became estranged from their own people—either belittling or mocking them. Ethnographic materials indicate that, for Roma, education was often associated with losing one's mind.

R. Mednis-Kleins used to say, *"I would be happy if I had a šatra (tent),"* emphasizing the need for a stable, secure home and a source of livelihood.

Earlier Romani migrations essentially took place outside historical time, meaning they did not foresee any development over time. Attempts to tie Roma to the land succeeded only partially. For example, when authorities provided Roma with land, necessary equipment, and seeds, the latter were often secretly sold, and the lack of harvest was explained by claiming that nothing would grow on Romani soil. In the 19th century, Russian writer and ethnographer Vladimir Dal asked a Romani man where he lived, to which he replied: *"I have no home; I am not a master."* "*Where is your homeland, then?"* The Romani man did not understand. "*Your land?"—"Here,"* he replied, covering with his palm the spot where he sat. Then, laughing again and drawing a circle around himself with his hand, he added, *"Tot la mine: everything is mine, the whole earth."*

Journalist I. Leitāne mentioned several cases where Roma culture has influenced other nations' cultures, particularly music, and even preserved cultural traits of other peoples that they themselves had already lost. Composer Franz Liszt acknowledged that the Hungarian Roma had preserved many Hungarian folk music motifs that the Hungarian people themselves had already forgotten. In the 19th century, Russian cultural figures perceived the true Russian spirit of their folk songs in Roma performances. The American jazz king Duke Ellington noted that classical jazz would not have gained such immense popularity and influence without the Roma performer Django Reinhardt. The ancient layer of Spanish musical folklore—*cante jondo* (deep song)—was so shaped by Roma songs that its authorship cannot be attributed to any single nation. During the winter solstice, Latvians go masquerading or "become Roma." And writer Uldis Bērziņš acknowledged: "They are a real people, a real temperament." However, this is not a purely complimentary listing. Everywhere the Roma have arrived in their wanderings, they have found a significant connection with the local culture. Completely fluent in the local population's language, the Roma are now the only minority group in Latvia that freely speaks three languages, having absorbed much from both Latvian and Russian—so much so that, based on linguistic research, it is possible to trace their travel routes and trajectory.

By stirring the depths of the human soul, the Roma have prevented the fossilization that threatens any culture, as culture cultivates stability: they are a living reminder that a person truly owns only what does not belong to them, that true life is created in the present, and that the True Home is found on the Journey.[172]

After the establishment of the Latvian Roma Association *"Roma"*, its board began very active organizational work. On June 27, 1989, the Roma living in the Latgale region met in Viļaka. The director of the cultural center had allocated a space where everyone gathered and, through open voting, elected the head of their local chapter. The meeting concluded with a concert by the ensemble *"Ame Roma"*, led by Valērijs Činčekovs.



The tasks of the association were explained by the chairman of the Latvian Roma Association, R. Kleins-Mednis. Thanks to his background in education, he recognized the necessity of pedagogy among his people. Therefore, the main directions of the association focused on the development of education, artistic culture, the preservation, research, and documentation of past cultural heritage. The association also considered it crucial to preserve cemeteries and sites of mass terror victims, to erect plaques and monuments, as well as to establish an ethnic and cultural history museum.

In Talsi, the first truly Roma-style market had already taken place, attracting many people—with singing, dancing, horse trading, and other distinctly Roma activities. It was decided to organize such markets elsewhere as well. In the Viļaka area, a different kind of experiment was planned—to manage 37 hectares of land and breed horses. The Roma have always stood out not only as skilled musicians but also as animal experts, for the Roma are children of nature.

At the time, there were only three national schools for Roma: in Ventspils, Riga, and Talsi. However, keeping up with modern times, R. Kleins-Mednis recognized the lack of education among his contemporaries, as well as the loss of many talents due to this lack of knowledge. In this regard, the goal was to persuade the older generation to send their children to Latvian schools.

In the Roma association, everyone paid a membership fee. Valērijs Činčikovs had started leading a Roma national theater, which was scheduled to have its first performance in Rēzekne in August 1989. Six folklore ensembles had been formed, three of which had already gained popularity. The Roma themselves provided and sewed costumes, crafted violins and guitars.[173]

In an interview with journalist E. Līcītis in 1994, Ventspils' leading Roma activist Jānis Neilands revealed that he was a cobbler by profession but had self-taught himself linguistics and literature. He stated that all Roma are people of Christian faith—either Catholic or Lutheran—but they have a strong belief in the power of God. At the

same time, he noted: the lower a nation's level of development, the more religious it is. He himself believed in nothing but education. In his view, only school and education transform a savage into a human being. His work was literature, and his life's work was a Roma-Latvian dictionary. At the time of the interview, he had already compiled a Roma primer.

The Roma faced bureaucratic ignorance or resistance regarding education: *"We wanted easier admission requirements for Roma in universities, perhaps entry without competition if a Roma child had made it that far in schooling, but nothing came of it. Some way must be found to ensure parental responsibility for sending children to school. The lack of education and poverty—those things go hand in hand. Without schooling, a Roma is forever doomed to poverty, but education is the solid foundation for prosperity. In turbulent times, some Roma managed to be smarter than others—they found ways to earn money. Some in Ventspils bought private houses, a few dozen live in apartments in high-rise buildings like me, but the vast majority live in terrible conditions, in poverty, in horrific Harlem-like places."*

*The Roma had a reserved relationship with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and largely supported Latvia's independence: "You know, very, very few Roma were party members. I was a fool—I looked through rose-colored glasses and joined the Komsomol in 1940. A year later, on the morning of June 14th—it was a beautiful morning, fresh air—I went out in Kandava, where we lived at the time, but in the town, one house was empty, another… It was terrifying—people had been taken away. That was the end of communism for me. Later, at work, I was repeatedly invited to join the CPSU, but I always refused. Now, we voted quite organizedly for Lembergs because he is the first city leader who at least fights for Ventspils, even against the government. Back then, all the Roma voted for Latvia, so that Latvia could exist."*

*Roma from other countries did not enter Kurzeme: "Wandering Roma groups no longer come to our region. About ten years ago, a tabor from Moldova did come—men, children, women in blue dresses.*



*The then elder of the Ventspils Roma, Ignāts, became alarmed, had to seek out the militia, and then managed to turn them back."*[174]

On December 27, 1993, the Ventspils municipality signed an agreement with Leksa Manush, acquiring the rights to publish his compiled Roma primer and was prepared to finance its illustration and printing.

Of all Latvian cities, Ventspils had the highest proportion of Roma—approximately two percent of the population. Thanks to this fact and the activism of the brightest Roma minds, in 1986, the first Roma education classes were organized at Ventspils Evening Secondary School. These were the first of their kind in Latvia and throughout the former Soviet Union. The lessons were conducted in Latvian, as there were no teachers or textbooks available in the Roma language. In 1993, four Roma classes operated at the Ventspils Evening Secondary School, with 30 children attending.[175]

## Kārlis Rudevičs

Kārlis Rudevičs (1939–2002) was a prominent and significant figure in both Latvian culture and the history of the Roma people. He was a poet, artist, writer, linguist, and social activist who dedicated his life to the development of Roma culture, education, and identity.

Born on January 19, 1939, in Vangaži, Kārlis was the tenth child in his family. During World War II, in an effort to escape the Roma genocide, his family moved to Riga. From an early age, he displayed exceptional intellectual abilities and creative talent—at the age of nine, he began writing poetry in Latvian, and at twelve, for his published poems in the newspaper Pionieris, he was awarded a trip to the pioneer camp *"Artek"* in Crimea.

Despite enduring great hardships—losing his mother at the age of seven and his father at nineteen—Rudevičs continued to educate and develop himself. A self-taught intellectual, he studied literature, art, philosophy, history, and languages, including Sanskrit.

One of his most significant contributions was the promotion and

preservation of Roma culture. On March 26, 1991, in collaboration with the Latvian Writers' Union, he organized a large Roma cultural evening at the Small Guild in Riga, where his paintings were exhibited, and his poetry was recited. This event was a major step in the revival of Roma culture in Latvia and contributed to the founding of the Latvian Roma National Cultural Society.

He was actively involved in Roma education. In 1991, the first Roma evening school and primary class for Roma children were opened in Ventspils. In 1992, together with Leksa Manush, Rudevičs began work on the first Roma primer, which was completed in 1993 and published in 1996. One of his major achievements was the publication of the Latvian-Roma-English Etymological Dictionary and the Latvian-Roma Dictionary in 1997. He was not only the editor but also a co-author, introducing 6,000 new words.

Rudevičs actively participated in cultural events, art exhibitions, and poetry publications. In 1995, his solo exhibition was opened at the Reiterna House, and in 1997, a large exhibition took place at the Ventspils Regional and Art Museum. He took part in the Latvian Wreath festival for Latvia's ethnic minorities and collaborated with the Association of National Cultural Societies.

In literature, Rudevičs collected Roma folklore, translated complex sections of the Bible, including the Book of Revelation, and published numerous books. In 1998, his first poetry collection in Latvian and Roma, The Gypsy Heart, was released, along with the children's book The Gypsy Baron and Bimbars, based on folk song motifs.176 In 1999, the Latvian Bible Society published his edited Gospel of Luke in the Roma language, and in 2000, his poetry collection In the Sun and in the Shade was published.

He was a member of the World Roma Writers' Union *Romani PEN* and a correspondent for ROM-NEWS, promoting international interest in Latvia's Roma cultural issues. For his contributions to the development of Roma heritage and Latvian culture, Kārlis Rudevičs was awarded the Order of the Three Stars on June 30, 1999.



His creative legacy continues to live on. In 2005, a catalog of his paintings, *"Kārlis Rudevičs. Paintings, Poetry, Thoughts"*, was published, followed by *"Karlis Rudevich. Gipsy Legacy"* in English in 2022. In 2023, his epic *"Romi and Mahmoud Gadjo"* was published in four languages, reflecting the struggle of Roma ancestors against Persian invaders and their forced departure from India.

Kārlis Rudevičs remains an outstanding symbol of Latvian and Roma culture, whose work and ideas continue to inspire new generations.[176]

## Normunds Rudevičs

Normunds Rudevičs is the president of the Latvian Romani National Cultural Association and the first Romani representative in the parliaments of world nations, having been elected as a member of the Latvian Parliament (Saeima) in the 7th convocation (1998–2002). At the World Romani Community Congress held in Prague in 2000, he was elected as the High Commissioner of the International Romani Union (IRU). The congress was attended by approximately 600 delegates from 41 countries, representing about 20 million Roma. In Prague, for the first time, a broad Romani representation was established, including a parliament, a cabinet of ministers, and a court.

N. Rudevičs continues to believe that Latvia can make a significant contribution to solving Romani issues globally. He acknowledges that discrimination in Latvia is not as pronounced as in Western European countries. The Latvian Romani community has successfully integrated into society, with 98% of Latvian Roma holding citizenship. Some Romani families who emigrated to the United Kingdom in search of a better life later returned to their homeland.

The main issues facing the Roma in Latvia were related to education and economic conditions. There were proposals to revive traditional trades such as horse breeding and agriculture, as well as to promote educational opportunities for Romani children.[177]

Speaking about the uniqueness of Romani culture, N. Rudevičs wro-

te: *"Roma have their own path, and in my opinion, the best approach is to allow them to follow it. How do I understand this? Let the Roma cultivate and develop what has been given to them for centuries—to open people's souls through song and dance, to work in traditional Romani crafts: breeding horses, running small family businesses such as artisan workshops, smithies, and shops. This way, Roma will feel in their element and integrate into social and economic life. By the way, I am concerned that Roma are singing less and less because they are preoccupied with how to feed their children. If we consider ourselves a civilized society, let us allow each nation to live in accordance with its traditions and mentality."*[178]

## The International Situation of the Roma and the Legacy of Genocide

During World War II, the Nazis exterminated approximately 65% of the Romani population. Their gold deposits in German banks were confiscated. The issue of genocide is handled by a special fund in New York. Germany allocated 350 million Deutsche Marks for Holocaust compensation, while the U.S. contributed approximately one billion dollars. Latvian Roma were not included in these programs due to a lack of information about victims from World War II. The Latvian Gypsy National Cultural Association (LČNKB) submitted an official request to the responsible U.S. organization, asking for special application forms so that Roma living in Latvia could complete them and be included in the compensation program. The LČNKB invested a lot of effort, preparing five lawyers to interview applicants and fill out forms that were more than ten pages long, containing numerous specific questions that many Roma would have found nearly impossible to answer on their own. Around 800 compensation applications were submitted from Latvia, of which only 384 were approved. The distribution of compensation for the Roma was taken over by the Latvia–UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) representation, led at the time by



Ilmārs Mežs, which claimed to be competent and authorized to handle it in Latvia. However, it later turned out that instead of distributing the $2,000 compensation, this organization provided one-time humanitarian aid packages containing food and firewood to the victims. Only a few dozen Roma who refused this aid managed to secure the financial compensation they were entitled to.

Internationally, the main issues faced by Roma communities have been integration in host countries, cultural preservation, and addressing the consequences of genocide (Samudaripen). Despite financial support from international organizations, the living conditions of Roma in many places have not significantly improved. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Roma communities in various countries lost their main source of livelihood—trade in scarce goods.[179]

In 2006, N. Rudevičs became an official of the largest European Roma organization, the *European Roma Travellers Forum*, and the head of the European Parliament's Roma Assembly. The organization worked on solving issues related to Roma education, employment, and discrimination.

With N. Rudevičs' initiative, the first-ever Roma Museum of Art and History was established in Riga in 2005. In 2009, the Central Roma Passport Department was founded in Riga, but the passportization program did not achieve the expected results.

In 2009, the International Romani Union (IRU) and the Latvian Red Cross signed a cooperation agreement to improve the social conditions of the Roma. Two years later, the IRU signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Latvian Ombudsman, encouraging similar collaborations in other countries.

In 2013, a study was conducted in collaboration with historian Uldis Lasmanis on the Nazi-led genocide of Roma in Latvia, analyzing 45,000 archival documents. On April 8, 2015, the Latvian University Misiņš Library hosted the first-ever exhibition on the Romani genocide, titled Romu Samudaripen Latvijā (The Romani Samudaripen in Latvia).

On August 16, 2015, at the 9th World Romani Congress in Riga,

N. Rudevičs was elected president of the IRU, and in 2022, he was re-elected. During his presidency, several international Roma events have taken place in Riga.

From August 18 to 21, 2016, the first International Roma Seniors Conference was held in Jūrmala, with a focus on the consequences of the genocide experienced by Roma in Europe during World War II. A living archive was initiated at the event to document the testimonies of elderly Roma. During this conference, the IRU Presidium and Cabinet agreed to introduce the international term for the Roma genocide, Samudaripen (Mass Killing), into global usage.

In 2017, a session of the IRU parliament took place in Riga, where it was decided to decentralize the governance of the IRU and elevate the status of local non-governmental organizations in each member state to more effectively implement European projects. In 2018, during an IRU cabinet meeting, the possibility of the IRU's participation in the conference dedicated to the millennium of the Roma's migration from India in New Delhi, India, was discussed. In 2019, a meeting was held where the international Roma community agreed on organizing the *"Roma Expo 2020"* exhibition in Moscow. Unfortunately, this initiative by Rudeviča did not materialize due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2022, the 10th IRU congress was held, marking the 50th anniversary of the organization, and the main task of the presidency was set—to bring the Roma closer to their motherland, India. Normunds was re-elected as IRU president.[180]

*"Many years have passed, much has been accomplished, and much still lies ahead. Integration programs have shifted focus and are now collaboration programs. Roma are still often reluctant to be hired for jobs, but at least a theoretical solution has been proposed. What is needed now are resources and societal involvement. Roma no longer wish to be invisible and unheard. Today, more than ever before, we want to be acknowledged, listened to, and feel a sense of belonging to Latvia!"*



# Sando Rudevičs

Sando Rudevičs (1964–2012) was a notable Latvian Roma cultural figure, poet, composer, and educator. He was the son of Kārlis Rudevičs, known as the author of the world's first Roma alphabet book.

Sando Rudevičs led the Roma ensemble "Šerad" and established a Roma art studio, where he taught singing, history, and culture to Roma children at the Riga State Technical School for many years. He was also the musical director of the ensemble "Ame Roma" and the founder of other significant artistic groups.

Rudevičs actively participated in the board of the Latvian Gypsy National Cultural Association and represented Roma culture at public mass events, including Riga's 800th anniversary celebrations, the festival "United in Diversity", and international Roma music festivals.

His life was cut short on April 8, 2012, after a severe illness, at the age of 47. After his passing, a collection of his poems and songs, "Saules zaķēns" ("Sunbeam Bunny"), was published, compiling his works.

Sando Rudevičs' legacy continues through his students and the Roma community, whom he inspired with his work and passion.

## Roksana Rudeviča

Roksana Rudeviča is a prominent representative of the Latvian Roma community, a lawyer, and a cultural activist. In 2019, she obtained a professional master's degree in private law and a legal qualification. Since 2011, she has been the chairperson of the board of the "Roma Cultural Center" association. Roksana's work is dedicated to raising public awareness of Roma artistic heritage, culture, and traditions, including the Roma genocide. She actively promotes the integration of Roma youth and their civic participation in society's development.

She is actively involved in researching Roma history, culture, and social memory in Latvia, organizing various cultural events, and working on education, employment, and social issues. She also actively participates in the Ministry of Culture's Advisory Council for promoting Roma participation, and has worked as a legal assistant and advisor on Roma issues at the Ombudsman's Office of the Republic of Latvia. Since 2015, Roksana Rudeviča has been organizing the International Roma Culture Festival "Roma World" in Riga. In 2023, she became a laureate of the "Woman Leader of the Year Award", recognizing her significant contributions to the development and integration of the Roma community. On September 25, 2024, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers appointed Roksana Rudeviča as an expert on Roma integration issues in the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.



## Ornella Rudeviča

Ornella Rudeviča is a Latvian Roma artist, musician, and activist who promotes the recognition and preservation of Roma culture in Latvia and worldwide through her creative work.

Ornella comes from a distinguished Roma family—her grandfather, Kārlis Rudevičs (1939–2002), was the first Roma artist and poet in the world, while her father, Normunds Rudevičs, is the president of the International Roma Union.

From an early age, Ornella was immersed in the arts, which became her means of expression and communication with society. She aims to inspire the global Roma community by emphasizing its irreplaceable place in human culture. Regarding her creative process, she says: *"In my works, I want to share my world of imagination, my vision, and illusions, which I transfer onto canvas. And more than that—my works represent my people's history, legends, and life, their extraordinary journey through the centuries."*[181]

On April 4, 2018, Ornella's first solo exhibition, *"Ornella's Reflection"*, was opened at Riga City Council. On June 1, 2022, at the Modern Digital Art Center "Digital Art House", she presented her digital solo exhibition *"Art of Gipsy"*, along with an art catalog of the same name. In 2019, Ornella Rudeviča participated in several exhibitions at the Latvian National Cultural Association House and represented Latvia with her artwork on Roma Resistance Day (May 16) at the opening of the *"Emerging Talents"* exhibition, organized by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) in Berlin, Germany.

For her contributions to the promotion of Roma culture and Latvian cultural heritage, Ornella Rudeviča has received recognition from the Ministry of Culture.

**10.**

# Roma in the Restored Republic of Latvia



The restoration of the Republic of Latvia brought both opportunities and challenges for Latvian Roma. On the one hand, it enabled them to establish public organizations, attract funding, promote cultural and sports life, and recognize the growing importance of education. On the other hand, it created economic difficulties, indirect discrimination in the local labor market, and widespread emigration to the United Kingdom and Ireland—especially after the economic crisis that began in 2008 when people had to repay recklessly taken and spent loans. Roma did not shy away from unskilled labor abroad and successfully settled in their new host countries, breaking the stereotype that Gypsies do not want to work.

In 1989, Latvia registered 7,044 Roma, the majority of whom lived in cities. After 1991, traditional Soviet-era income sources for Roma—speculating on scarce goods, selling forest berries, and harvesting collective farm crops—dried up. Roma had to rely solely on their own household production and child benefits.

Roma communities were concentrated in the Abava River Valley (in Sabile and Kandava) as well as in Tukums, Sloka, and other areas. The Old Town of Riga was once a popular settlement location for Roma. However, as restoration work began in the Old Town and residents were relocated to other parts of the city, Roma disappeared from the historic center.

Journalists Dz. Medenis and S. Metuzāls wrote about the Roma in Latvia in 1993: If not for their external features—dark skin and hair—it would be difficult to distinguish long-term Latvian Roma from the general population. They are well-informed about events in the country, their neighboring parish, and society in general. Roma exhibit the same characteristics as Latvians or any other nationality—friendliness, dishonesty, quarrelsomeness, and nobility, among others. The difference is that these traits manifest much more vividly in Roma. If a Roma wants to give a gift, it can be extravagant; if angered, they will not wait for a better moment to express their resentment but will slam their fist on the table immediately. Even Roma themselves believe there are no

fundamental differences between Latvians and Roma—perhaps only in mentality, as Roma are considered more sociable, warm-hearted, and less frugal than Latvians. For unexplained reasons, Roma also tend to have strong musical abilities and a natural talent for languages.

Marriages between Roma and people from other ethnic groups were rare. Occasionally, a Roma man would marry a Latvian woman, but the reverse was extremely uncommon. Roma believe that no wife is better than a Roma woman, as they are considered the most loyal. Traditions played a significant role in this—parents insisted that a wife should be chosen from within the community rather than from outsiders. In Roma families, the father is the head of the household (although children must also respect the mother), while in society, important matters are decided by the oldest and wisest Roma. Disobedience to their decisions was unthinkable, as non-compliance could lead to complete exclusion from the community.

Unemployed Roma worked in private farms tending livestock, traded clothes and precious metals, and some opened cafés and shops. Most of this activity took place at Riga Central Market, where it was difficult to distinguish between local Roma and those who had arrived from Russia. The dialect of Russian Roma was different, so communication with them often had to be in Russian.[182]

In 1996, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia appointed a national coordinator for Roma and Sinti affairs (self-designations used by the community). The position was given to Ilmārs Geige, a Livonian and head of the National Affairs Division within the Ministry's Public Affairs Department. The first task undertaken by Geige, following a request from the OSCE's instructions, was to provide information on the situation of the Roma community in Latvia across various aspects by completing a special questionnaire containing dozens of questions.

It was determined that 7,785 Roma lived in Latvia, making up 0.3% of the country's population. Nearly 90% of them were Latvian citizens. Among the ten largest ethnic groups in Latvia, Roma had the highest proportion of young people—almost one in three was under 18. The



largest Roma populations were in Riga (1,200), Ventspils (1,039), Jelgava (929), Talsi District (565), Tukums District (534), and Daugavpils (348). The Liepāja region had only 64 Roma, and Ventspils District had the smallest Roma population, with just 22 people.

In reality, these numbers may have been higher. The head of the Ventspils Roma community, Jānis Neilands, noted that during World War II, many Roma, trying to escape genocide, managed to have their documents changed to register as Latvians. In his view, the actual Roma population in Latvia was twice as high as official statistics indicated.

In 90 out of 100 cases, Roma identified the Romani language as their native tongue. At the same time, nearly all locally born Roma were fluent in Latvian and equally proficient in Russian.

The Latvian National Awakening period created numerous new challenges for Roma, which they had not faced before. According to Ilmārs Geige, the main issue was a lack of intellectual capacity to adapt to new living conditions. This problem was unlikely to disappear soon, as the number of Roma university students was extremely low. Their parents had not been particularly diligent in sending them to even free Soviet-era schools, and now financial difficulties made it even harder. The disappearance of scarce goods markets, the decline of berry picking, and the collapse of collective farm work meant that Roma lost their traditional sources of income. In the modern labor market, where highly skilled workers were in demand, it became difficult for Roma to compete. As a result, many left for Russia and other CIS countries, where their traditional sources of income still existed.[183]

From July 27 to 30, 2006, the Roma youth cultural camp "Puda Rača" was held for the second time in the Talsi district, near the Abava waterfall, close to Sabile. The camp provided an opportunity to gain insight into the unique aspects, traditions, and history of Roma culture. The young participants staged a musical performance, which was presented at the Sabile Wine Festival.[184]

In 2002, Dainis Krauklis, a 12th-grade student at Kandava Kārļa Mīlenbaha Secondary School, who later pursued studies at the Jāzeps

Vītols Academy of Music, admitted that after obtaining an education, he no longer felt fully at home among either the Roma or other ethnic groups: *"In the environment where people know me, I feel very good. But sometimes, when I enter a foreign environment... it hurts. I feel rejected, ignored, looked down upon... They say—all Gypsies are swindlers. I used to take it very hard when I was treated unfairly. There are many prejudices against the Roma people. And it's precisely because they lack education, because at some point on the street they did something wrong... I do not deny that the Roma themselves are partly to blame because, in many ways, they are irresponsible. But on the other hand, I understand these people. They have no other opportunities; no one hires them for work. And what can a Gypsy even offer... The number of Gypsies with higher education can be counted on two hands."*

*"The real Gypsies—actually, what does 'real' even mean—Latvian Gypsies themselves no longer consider me a real Gypsy; they say I have assimilated. I don't even know the true Gypsy language. If I met a Gypsy from Germany, I wouldn't be able to communicate with him, even though I know five languages: I am fluent in Latvian Romani, which is my native language, as well as Latvian and Russian, I speak German well, and I have a conversational level of English. We speak the language of the environment in which we live. For us, language is not just a means of communication for exchanging information—it is like a song."*[185]

The historian Ilga Apine, in her 2007 study "Čigāni (romi) Latvijā", provides an overview of the situation of Roma education, employment, and integration into society in Latvia from 2000 to 2007, as well as the measures taken by the Latvian state and municipalities to address Roma issues.

The data from the 2000 population census served as the basis for a 2003 study on Roma education by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies. The data shows that, in 2007, more than 40% of Roma had an education level of no more than four grades. It was estimated that the percentage of Roma with this education level could have been as high as 60%. In contrast, only 7.9% of Roma had a secondary



education. It is also worth noting that illiteracy was present among the Roma, with an estimated 2,500 or more people unable to read or write. Compared to other ethnic groups, it can be concluded that the education level of Roma remained very low across all age groups.

The involvement of Roma children in the education process often did not correspond to their actual age. Frequent school absences, after-school work, and other circumstances hindered the learning process. The impact of special schools or classes for Roma children was ambiguous. It should be noted that Roma classes in Ventspils existed since 1987, in Sabile since 1998, and in Talsi, Tukums, Kuldīga, and Jelgava since 2000. In some municipalities, it was common to create special classes for Roma children, providing free meals and learning materials, in cooperation with Roma organizations such as "Ame Roma" in Ventspils, "Gloss" in Tukums, and also in Sabile and Jelgava. The Roma course at the Riga State Technical School, where students could obtain a secondary education, was helped to be established by the Latvian Gypsy National Culture Association (LČNKB), led by Normunds Rudevičs.[186]

In part, the insufficient education level explains the complex material situation of the Roma community, as without formal employment, people could only claim the minimum pension. Unemployment and deprivation led some Roma to engage in drug trafficking. The unfavorable social environment alienated them from the rest of society, reinforcing negative stereotypes about Roma.[187] The number of Roma in official employment is minimal—only 5%. Unemployed individuals are not registered and do not receive unemployment benefits, except for about 10% of actual unemployed people. Roma families primarily lived off social benefits and pensions, as well as informal work.

Following the order of the Prime Minister of Latvia, Aigars Kalvītis, on February 1, 2006, the Secretariat of the Special Task Minister for Social Integration Affairs developed a program for the integration of Latvia's Roma into society: "Gypsies (Roma) in Latvia 2007–2009."[188]

On October 18, 2006, the Cabinet of Ministers approved this program, and it was implemented. The program was developed considering

the requirements of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the goals of the Latvian State Program "Societal Integration in Latvia," as well as recommendations from various other Council of Europe and European Union regulatory acts.

The main objective of the state program was to establish a foundation for the qualitative, effective, and sustainable integration of the Roma community in Latvia. The program outlined actions in three main areas—education, employment, and human rights. Its implementation was only possible with the active participation of the Roma community.

The program emphasized that Roma should be offered opportunities to raise their education levels, including for adults who had not received an education to date. Essentially, the program aimed to implement the inclusive education principle successfully applied in European Union member states. One of the solutions was to include Roma children in the educational process from preschool age, thus avoiding a marginalizing or alienating situation from the rest of society. The need for special adaptation support was highlighted, including from parents and relatives, such as showing interest in the child's academic progress and encouraging family members to attend classes.

The program proposed a model for informing Roma about the labor market situation, with Roma NGOs distributing up-to-date information on the professions and skills in demand in the region or city. Roma NGOs were to cooperate with the Employment Service and other institutions in a permanent format to promote Roma professional training, retraining, or temporary job offers.

Given the Roma community's experience in trade, the program suggested providing support for entrepreneurship, and Roma NGOs were encouraged to take advantage of European Union financial instruments.

While it could be concluded that Latvia had a relatively favorable attitude toward the Roma community in the European context, discrimination remained a significant problem in Latvian society. Survey results showed that 71% of Latvian residents believed that the Roma



community was closed and had integrated less well into Latvian life than Jews, Russians, and Belarusians, and 27% said they would not want to live next door to Roma. Employment was one of the areas where Roma faced the most direct discrimination, as hiring decisions were not based on skill assessments or other professional criteria. In the case of Roma, ethnicity played the largest role.[189]

As survey data shows, the majority of people had no direct or firsthand contact with Roma. It is worth noting that 75% of respondents indicated that communication took place at markets or on the street. Prejudices against Roma stemmed from personal experience and the lack of direct interaction. Historically ingrained stereotypes and prejudices were also frequently adopted.

Sociologists emphasize the correlation between close contact with Roma and greater tolerance and willingness to accept them.

Several measures were planned in the program to reduce societal prejudices. One method was public education about Roma history and life in Latvia, their cultural richness and uniqueness. It was believed that creating a positive image would also support the work of Roma associations in implementing various activities. Media workers were to be informed about the Roma community to create a non-offensive narrative. It was also planned to review school textbooks to remove negative stereotypes and prejudices against Roma. Regular qualification upgrades and training were foreseen for police officers and judges. Active cooperation between Roma organizations and organizations of other nationalities was expected to contribute to reducing prejudices.

However, the implementation of the program was interrupted by the economic crisis of 2008–2010. Due to this crisis, many Roma left Latvia in search of work. Singer Dzintars Čīča predicted that within two or three years, all the Roma from his hometown of Sabile would have left, maybe even himself.[190]

The successful implementation of the program was interrupted by the economic crisis of 2008–2010. As a result, Roma people emigrated from Latvia in large numbers in search of work. Singer Dzintars Čīča

predicted that in two or three years, all the Roma from his hometown of Sabile would have left, possibly including himself.[191]

The leader of the Roma community in Sabile, Ēriks Kleins, along with like-minded individuals, planned to establish a Roma museum with a restaurant, accommodations, and other income-generating opportunities. Another idea was to create something akin to a Roma collective farm to raise pigs, sheep, and horses. They only needed to obtain a plot of land from the municipality, but their request was denied. Other planned initiatives were also not supported one by one.

Kleins left for England. His son, teacher Kaspars Arhipovs, tried to carry on the torch of community spirit and hope. However, the garden with the monument to Mārtiņš Bērziņš, the savior of Roma from genocide, proved to be just as unnecessary to the local government as everything else that mattered to the Roma.[191]

Before moving to the United Kingdom, Ē. Kleins led the Roma association Mēnessgaisma (Moonlight) in Sabile, and in 2023, he remotely managed the social integration association Alternatīvas in Sabile.[192] In 2020, his memoir collection Mēnessgaismas stāsti (Moonlight Stories) was published.

In 2009, Roma claimed that racism in Latvia had reached unprecedented levels—except for very rare cases, having a darker skin tone automatically meant rejection when seeking employment. Even the leader of the Roma national association Nēvo Drom, Anatolijs Berezovskis, remained unemployed despite holding two higher education degrees and extensive experience in public work.

According to rough estimates, by 2009, around 10,000 Roma had emigrated, with an equal number remaining in Latvia, though many planned to follow once they secured the financial means. Of course, not all Roma immediately found work in England, but child benefits there amounted to 84 pounds instead of seven lats, and Roma families tended to have many children. Latvian Roma who left were motivated to obtain British citizenship. In reality, the outflow of Roma was a bad sign—it indicated that people were leaving Latvia altogether.[193]



Since September 19, 2012, the Consultative Council on Roma Integration Policy, established by the Ministry of Culture, has been operating. It includes representatives of active Roma non-governmental organizations and communities, as well as specialists from ministries and agencies. Its goal is to promote the integration of Roma in Latvia, assess its implementation, strengthen cooperation between the Roma community and state institutions, and encourage the personal involvement of the Roma community.

In 2013, the Roma mediator initiative was launched in Latvia by the association "Education Initiative Center." This initiative had already been in place in European countries. Roma mediators, specially trained individuals from within the Roma community, acted as intermediaries between municipal and state institutions and local Roma, providing information and practical assistance. Mediators work in Riga, Jelgava, Ventspils, Jūrmala, Daugavpils, Balvi, Augšdaugava, and Krāslava counties, and for a short period in Talsi and Valmiera.[194]

In 2016, the Ministry of Culture, with support from the European Commission, began developing the Latvian Roma Platform to improve cooperation, communication, experience sharing, and awareness among all parties involved in the Roma integration process. This development was carried out through annual projects that included educational seminars, expert meetings in Latvia's regions, research, practical workshops, and informational events to raise public awareness of Roma culture, history, and social conditions. Other activities included training for representatives of Roma civil society, support initiatives for Roma mediators, and assistance in Roma participation in the development and implementation of Roma integration policies. The project's funding was provided 90% by the EU program "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values" and 10% by national co-financing.[195]

Since 1991, the Latvian Roma National Cultural Association has been operating in Riga under the leadership of Normunds Rudevičs. It was founded by the distinguished Latvian Roma cultural figure, painter, and poet Kārlis Rudevičs.[196]

Over the years, the association has published numerous books, organized exhibitions, and held international conferences and congresses. Among the association's achievements, the successful compensation payments to Latvian Roma who suffered during the genocide should be noted. In 2001, 588 valid applications were submitted from Latvia, of which 384 applicants each received a compensation payment of 3,500 German marks. In 2010, a payment of 2,556 euros per person was secured for 70 Latvian Roma from the German Federal Ministry of Finance.

Since 2015, the "Roma Cultural Center" association in Riga has been organizing the International Roma Cultural Festival *"Roma World."* This festival has provided an opportunity to engage and inform the wider public about Roma cultural heritage and to showcase its creative expressions, thereby challenging prejudices against Roma, breaking stereotypes through the lens of art and culture, and positioning Latvia as a center of Roma culture in Europe.

The festival has featured many well-known Roma musicians and performers from various countries around the world, including the United States, Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Estonia, India, Italy, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Finland, Ukraine, Spain, Hungary, and Sweden.[197]

**11.**

# Roma in Latvian Music and Sports



In recent decades, Latvian Roma have primarily developed their traditional musical and athletic talents. Detailed information on Latvian Roma music in the 20th century, particularly folk music performed by non-professional musicians and storytellers, can be found in the monograph *"Īsta čigānu mūzika. Autentiskums un etniskums Latvijas čigānu (romu) mūzikā"* by ethnomusicologist Ieva Tihovska (married name Vīvere), published in 2017.

The most well-known professional Roma music group in Latvia is the folk ensemble Ame Roma. Since 1985, it operated under the Latvian SSR State Philharmonic. Following the Philharmonic's reorganization in 1990, the ensemble ceased its affiliation and continued independently. It was highly sought after, performing 30 to 40 concerts per month, successfully touring other Soviet republics, appearing on television and radio, and participating in theater performances. The ensemble aimed to present Roma musical traditions in a contemporary form.

Renowned Latvian singer-songwriter and composer Haralds Sīmanis (1951–2022) was born in Cēsis to a mixed Latvian-Roma family—his mother was Latvian, and his father was Roma. It is possible that his Roma heritage contributed to his unique musical style, as he never formally studied music but taught himself to play both the guitar and the organ.

The Riču family gained widespread recognition after participating in the show Dziedošās ģimenes (Singing Families), though they had previously performed Roma songs as part of the ensemble *Džeski gloss* (Heart Voice). Their heartfelt and passionate renditions of rhythmic and soulful Roma and world folk music captivated every listener.

Singer Dzintars Čīča, from Sabile, won the hearts of the Latvian public through his participation in the Junior Eurovision Song Contest, concerts with Raimonds Pauls, appearances on TV shows like Koru kari (Choir Wars) and Izklausies redzēts (Sounds Familiar), as well as multiple victories in Latvia's Schlager Music Poll. At the beginning of his career, Dzintars' cousin, Kaspars Antess, sang with the group. He composed his own songs and later pursued a solo career, primarily performing schlager music.

Tomass Kleins, a Roma-origin Latvian guitarist, vocalist, and songwriter from Liepāja, has been a member of several Latvian music groups, including Neptūns and Līvi. He played in Līvi for over 10 years before forming the duo Fomins & Kleins and later embarking on a solo career. From 2006 to 2008, he was part of the band *Cacao* and later continued his career in Aivars Brīze's band *Leģions*.

Edgars Jass is active as a music producer, composer, pianist, and guitarist.

Among the younger generation of Roma musicians, Ventspils-born Agnese Korvstileva stands out. In 2019, she became the first and only young Latvian Roma to study music abroad with the support of the ERASMUS program. In Latvia, she founded the vocal studio *One Heart* and works as a vocal coach.

The most notable Roma achievements in Latvian sports have been in ice hockey, boxing, and other combat sports disciplines. Roma youth are generally raised to be physically active, although few reach the highest levels due to a frequent lack of self-motivation.

Weightlifter and Roma community activist Tahīrs Sīmanis competed in professional sports from 1976 to 1985. He was a USSR Master of Sports, a Latvian SSR champion and record holder, a USSR vice-champion and medalist, a multiple-time Baltic States champion, and the USSR Armed Forces champion.

Mareks Jass is a Latvian ice hockey player who played as a forward. During his career, he spent three seasons with the Russian Super League club CSKA Moscow and also played in Finland's SM-liiga. However, he spent most of his career with various Latvian teams, including Rīga Pārdaugava, HK Liepājas Metalurgs, and HK Rīga 2000. He represented the Latvian national hockey team in the 1999 World Championship. In 2022, Jass was an assistant coach for the Latvian Championship team Rīga Dinamo.

Māris Jass is a Latvian ice hockey defenseman and former national team player. In 2022, he played for the Latvian Championship team *Dinamo Riga.* During the 2011–2012 season, while playing for Bratislava



*Slovan* in the Slovak Extraliga, Jass won the Slovak championship title. In the summer of 2015, he joined *Dinamo Riga* on a trial basis, but the club initially did not sign him. However, after several defensemen left the team in mid-October, Jass signed a one-year contract and played 26 games. In the following seasons, he played in various European leagues. He has represented the Latvian national team in five World Championships.

Koba Jass is a Latvian ice hockey forward. Since 2021, he has played for the Latvian Championship team Rīga *Olimp.* He represented the Latvian national team at the 2014 Winter Olympics as well as in the 2012, 2013, and 2014 World Championships.

Rolands Mikalausks is the founder of the kickboxing club *Golden Glory Latvia,* established on February 23, 2010. He is an international-category referee (MMA, WKN Kickboxing, Pankration). Under his leadership, the club has won the Latvian team championship title 26 times in various combat sports disciplines and has trained champions at the Latvian, Baltic, European, and world levels.

Ruslans Okurļaks is the founder (2019) and head coach of the sports club *Top Ring Latvia,* specializing in *Muay Thai* (Thai boxing). The club has trained 8 Latvian *WAKO* kickboxing champions, 21 Latvian *IFMA Muay Thai* champions, 13 European *IFMA Muay Thai* champions, 2 world *IFMA Muay Thai* champions, as well as several professional kickboxers and Latvian and European championship winners.[198]

# Conclusion



Documented evidence of Roma presence in the territory of Latvia dates back to the 18th century. Most Roma families who arrived in Latvia, primarily from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, settled here for generations, as they were not subjected to repressive measures solely due to their ethnic background. In the mid-to-late 18th century, Latvia did not experience wars, uprisings, or major epidemics. These relatively stable conditions allowed the Roma to continue their traditional occupations, such as horse trading, metalworking, and small-scale craftsmanship.

The policies of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia and the Russian Empire aimed to encourage Roma settlement. Punishments for vagrancy and mandatory Roma registration in cities led many Roma to settle in fixed locations or limit their nomadic movements to specific regions.

The development of Roma cultural life in Latvia, including musical and theatrical groups, the first Roma publications, and public organizations, began before World War II and continued afterward. The cultural awakening of Latvian Roma started with the emergence of Roma literature and linguistics, led by individual activists such as Leksa Manušs, Kārlis Rudevičs, and Jānis Neilands. This was followed by the establishment of Roma public organizations and educational institutions, also driven by dedicated cultural and social figures. Unlike earlier times, these individuals were not self-taught but had obtained higher education. A small group of cultural figures, activists, and community leaders is characteristic of the early stages of any national awakening. Russian historian and philosopher Nikolai Gumilyov referred to such leaders—who inspire the masses, work selflessly for the good of their people, and, if necessary, sacrifice their freedom and lives—as passionaries. For the majority of Latvian Roma to engage in cultural and social life, time and sustained activist efforts are needed.

Latvian Roma social and cultural activists continue their efforts to implement previously unsupported projects. The European Commission created the special program Roma Strategy 2014–2020, allocating

€26.5 billion to improve Roma living conditions across the EU. Latvia participated in this initiative with its own program. The Latvian Roma National Cultural Association proposed a project to EU structural funds to establish four modern tabors (Roma settlements) in Latvia. These settlements would provide both housing and employment opportunities, as well as essential public services for Roma communities. The vision was to create Roma-inhabited villages where economic activities, such as turkey and poultry farming, fruit and vegetable cultivation, and food processing, would be conducted collectively. Special shock-freezing equipment was selected from Israel. Negotiations were held with several Latvian municipalities, which agreed in principle to allocate land for these settlements. The estimated cost of constructing and equipping a single village was around €40 million. Unfortunately, the proposal was not included in Latvia's official program.

The new EU Roma Strategy for 2021–2027 allocated €88 billion from the EU Social Fund. Under the leadership of Minister of Culture Nauris Puntulis, a special task force was created to develop Latvia's program for improving Roma living conditions. The council included representatives from four additional ministries, the Ombudsman's Office, and Roma non-governmental organizations. The Roma Cultural Center took responsibility for drafting a program covering education, employment, healthcare, cultural heritage preservation, and housing issues, with a total budget of €120 million over seven years. Despite eight months of intensive work, these proposals were ultimately not included in Latvia's national program.

Another ambitious initiative, proposed in 2023, is the establishment of a World Roma Cultural Center in Riga, on Lucavsala Island. The center is envisioned as a complex of buildings, with a memorial dedicated to all Roma who perished during World War II at its heart. The complex would also include a concert hall, conference facilities, a museum, a library, a hotel, a multimedia center, a sports and wellness center, an art gallery, a café, and a restaurant. The project requires approximately €85 million, and the International Roma Union has launched a global fundraising campaign to secure the necessary funding.

While large-scale projects have yet to be realized, efforts to preserve Roma cultural traditions through musical groups and educational initiatives continue. Despite a lack of public funding and widespread societal interest, the development and growth of Latvian Roma culture persist.

# Epilogue

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# Romanipe in the Modern World



To understand how *Romanipe,* the law of the Roma lineage, can help heal the modern world, it is essential to grasp its foundational structure.

Literature about the Roma has created a certain stereotype: a nomadic people viewed with suspicion. They are never truly part of the community but remain outsiders. They live separately, within their own circles, following their own laws, customs, and even their own justice system. Because Roma history and culture were passed down orally within *Romanipe* rather than written by themselves, while others wrote about them, perceptions differed from reality. The Roma and other nations lived—and in some places still live—in parallel realities. This is one reason why, in many parts of the world, integrating Roma into local societies has not been successful. It is precisely the law of the Roma lineage that has helped this people keep the flame of their identity alive and maintain inner strength through the centuries.

*Romanipe* is more than a constitution or a set of laws; it is not merely the Latvian concept of life philosophy and traditions as known from folk songs and festival celebrations. It is an entire system that manifests a sense of being special and chosen. It holds the joy a young boy feels when fishing at dawn with his grandfather. It carries the wisdom a boy gains only from his grandfather while forging a horseshoe together. It embodies both tenderness and strength when a grandfather shares stories of his family's past. Just as well, it is the careful hands of a grandmother teaching her granddaughter embroidery, cooking, relationship-building, and card reading. *Romanipe* encompasses knowledge, a code of relationships, and a large portion of folklore, which speaks of justice, family as a value, community, resilience, and survival skills.

Today, as continents drift apart, societies fragment, nations and states rise and fall, and tectonic plates of values no longer hold together, *Romanipe* stands as a guiding star in the darkness. The law of the Roma lineage, which can undoubtedly be considered one of the most conservative worldviews, can serve as a value compass for societies, governance, international organizations, education systems, business relations, justice, and much more. It is no coincidence that *Romanipe,*

unwritten, has helped its followers survive for a thousand years without a homeland or a unified society.

The saying, "Losses on the outside are a test, but losses within are a fatal mistake," is hardly relevant in today's society. For Roma, however, it remains a significant life principle around which their worldview is built. This is why Roma do not believe their republic requires land; their territory stretches "through the souls of people." Failure to adhere to the law results in exclusion. In modern times, a person can survive being excluded from a particular group—either by joining another group or existing alone. In the past, this was not possible, meaning that "losing oneself," as the saying implies, could also mean losing one's life.

*Romanipen*, or the Roma community court, consists of uninvolved elder members of society—authorities who resolve all community disputes. In the Roma community, elders are respected. Unfortunately, this virtue has been partially lost in Western civilization as we know it today.

As we can see, the rest of the world can learn from the Roma not only joy for life, kindness, and openness, as reflected in their songs, dances, literature, and art. It can gain much more—if it so chooses. Certainly, it is understandable that it would not be convenient to take the simple wisdom of a wandering people and place it on the podiums of the UN or UNESCO, bring it before governments, or market it like a commercial product. No politician would be popular for pointing to *Romanipe* and saying, "This is the right choice if we wish to preserve ourselves as a civilization!"—especially in an era where social media grants everyone the power to be an opinion leader with their own voice.

Much like the Tower of Babel, which people built toward the heavens in the hope that God would hear them and recognize their worth, today human voices have merged into one great chaos, which can no longer untangle itself. In circumstances where people, like moths, rush toward a burning object, *Romanipe* is like a song in which humanity, nature, and God intertwine in a harmonious melody, resonating far beyond the treetops, lakes, and oceans—touching both the sensitive strings of artistic souls and the weathered features of wind-hardened lumberjacks.



It is time to introduce *Romanipe* to the wider world! Therefore, under my leadership, the International Roma Union (IRU) will soon present a special interpretation of Romanipe, focusing on its documentation and establishment in our society. Through the contributions of photographers, artists, musicians, poets, storytellers, and creative minds, works will be created to promote the values and strength of *Romanipe*. With the opening of the World Roma Cultural Center, these values will find a physical home and be presented to the world. Thanks to international Roma radio and online resources, they will reach people across the airwaves. Through cross-border funding, *Romanipe* will be introduced in schools and universities, while a strengthened diplomatic network, supported by our motherland India, will ensure that the law of our lineage reaches decision-makers.

The IRU must become an organization that carries *Romanipe's* values into today's confused and misguided world! This will be a demanding task that may take decades—one that I hope my family and companions will continue. It will not be an easy task, as the elite who have lost their power will continue to fight. They will not surrender. It is already clear that this will likely be an uneven battle—between those still wealthy proponents of false democracy, various pseudo-freedoms, artificial rather than living intelligence, and those who see a strong family, work ethic, a connection to nature, and God as the foundation.

Respectfully,
PhD Normunds Rudevičs

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*Projekta vadītāja Roksana Rudeviča*
*Izdevuma idejas autors un teksta līdzautors Normunds Rudevičs*
*Vēsturiskās izpētes autors – vēsturnieks Agris Dzenis*

*Mākslinieciskā redaktore Ornella Rudeviča*
*Datordizainere Baiba Stelle*
*Redaktors Pēteris Jankavs*

*Angļu valodā tulkojis Arsenijs Poltoraks*