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## INTRODUCTION:

### THE ROMANIES COME TO EUROPE

North India was the cradle of the Romany Gypsies and their language. There are no contemporary accounts of the first families from India to reach Persia on their long road westward to Europe, but the Persian poet Firdausi, writing in the tenth century, dates their arrival to some five centuries before his own time. He tells of 10,000 musicians sent from India to Shah Bahram Gur (who reigned AD 430–443) to entertain his people with their music.



FIGURE 1. Map showing route from India to Europe

Linguistic and other evidence shows that the Romanies of Europe belong to groups which left India between the fifth and eleventh centuries. Some crossed the Bosphorus into the Balkans, while others followed the route of returning pilgrims across the Mediterranean islands to southern Greece and Italy. Nomads are recorded 'stopping only 30 days in one place' in Crete as early as 1322 and settled shoemakers were already in the Balkans by 1483. Many Romanies had already moved west as the Turks advanced into Europe.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century there were several hundred Romanies in Europe, belonging to different clans and practising various trades. In the first chapter we look at their treatment as a small and vulnerable minority, a treatment which was to culminate in the horrors of the Nazi period.