

A Caucasian Loanword in Romani¹

Victor A. Friedman

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Papers from the Eighth and Ninth Meetings: Gypsy Lore Society, North American Chapter. New York: Gypsy Lore Society. 1988. 18-20.

Russian version: Кавказское заимствование в цыганском. *Этимология.* 1986-1987 (Москва). 229-230.

Linguistic evidence for European Romani's contact with the languages of the Caucasus appears to be limited to borrowings from East Armenian, Ossetian, and to an extremely small number of lexical items from Georgian, e.g., *khilav* 'plum' (Georgian *kliavi*) and *khoni* 'suet' (Georgian *koni*) (v. Pobožaniak 1964:79).² I would propose that Romani *čamčáli* (pl. *čamčálie*) 'eyelash', which was recorded by Paspatis (1870:526-27) and characterized by him as etymologically obscure, is from Georgian *c'amc'ami* 'eyelash' and is thus to be added as one of the very few non-Indo-European Caucasian loanwords in Romani.

The nonfinal stress indicates that *čamčáli* is of non-native origin,³ and there is no Indo-European, Semitic, or Altaic word that seems to explain it both phonologically and semantically. Evidence from other Romani dialects indicates that 'eyelash' was either rendered by *phov* 'brow' (Sanskrit *bhru-*; Ješina 1882:69, 90)⁴ or was unquestionably borrowed, e.g., *žjana* (Romanian *geana*), *klepke* (pl., Macedonian *klepka*), *küprükja* (pl., Turkish *kirpik*).⁵

Phonologically, the adaptation of /c/ to /č/ (glottalization was lost) is a regular one for borrowings into Turkish, which clearly influenced the dialects recorded by Paspatis in this respect, e.g., *fitiča* 'a type of mushroom' (Modern Greek *fytítza*), *pivavíca* 'leech' (Bulgarian *pijavica*; Paspatis 1870:233, 430). The problem of Romani /l/ for Georgian /m/ has two possible explanations. One of these is dissimilation, which occurs inconsistently with /n/ in this dialect (Paspatis 1870:172, 487). The old Georgian plural of *c'amc'ami* is *c'amc'amni* (the modern plural marker *-ebi* can still be replaced by the now archaic *-ni* for stylistic purposes), and the form is usually attested in the plural (Abuladze 1973:532). In Romani, the Old Georgian plural would still look like a feminine nominative singular and so could have been borrowed as such. We thus have a source for /n/, which could have absorbed the post-tonic /m/ and, as will be seen below, could have been dissimilated or denasalized to /l/ later in the dialect described by Paspatis. Another possible source of /l/ could have been a Daghestanian form or process. Dargwa has *č'imič'ali* 'eyelash' from a reduplicated root *č'Vm- (Murkelinskij 1971:48) and Tabassaran has both *c'abc'am* and *c'alc'im* 'eyelash' (Xajdakov 1973:48). The parallel between Daghestanian and Kartvelian, where the word is also of reduplicative origin, is striking (Klimov 1964:242).

Another argument in favor of a Georgian source for Romani *čamčáli* is cultural. In modern Georgia, *c'amc'ami* is used as a type of shibboleth to see whether foreigners can produce glottalized consonants.⁶ It is entirely possible that this practice was already current in Georgia when the Roms arrived there; perhaps even the plural was used. Due to their constant interaction with other peoples, Roms are both polyglot and highly language conscious. If *c'amc'ami/c'amc'amni* was being used as a shibboleth in Old tHYI â, the Roms would have been aware of its meaning as well as of its status. They would have been in a position to use

it, e.g., jocularly, in their own language, and subsequently it could have become the established form, especially if *phov* was already doing double duty for 'eyebrow' and 'eyelash'.

Looking at dialects other than those described by Paspati, we can find several that may have preserved this loanword. In the Romani of the district of Ayia Varvara in Athens, whose speakers probably came from Turkey within the past hundred years, 'eyelash' is *sampsálo*, and Messing equates this with Paspati's *čamčáli* (Messing Forthcoming). The change of /č/ to /s/ (probably via /c/ through Greek bilingualism) is attested elsewhere in Messing's corpus, e.g., *selíko* 'steel' (Turkish *çelik*). The change of gender is likewise not problematic, e.g., Modern Greek *kostóumi* 'suit' is borrowed as *kostúmo* (Messing: Forthcoming). The intrusion of /p/ is not attested elsewhere in the corpus, but it is typical of Modern Greek phonology, which could have served as the source, e.g., *Sampsoun* 'Samsun' (Anatolia).

The Caló form *sosimbres* 'eyelashes' cited by Borrow (1901:410) which Pott (1845:250) attempts to derive by conflating Hungarian *szem* 'eye' with Romani *phov*, may in fact derive from the abovementioned Georgian plural form *c'amc'amni*. There is no /c/ in Caló, and /s/ can also be a reflex of /c/ in Spanish. The cluster /mn/ would have given /mbr/ under Spanish phonotactics (e.g., *hombre* from *hom[i]nes*). The plural in *-es* is a regular Caló borrowing from Spanish, and the loss of the first /m/ before /s/ is similarly attributable to Spanish phonological rules (cf. *mesa* from *mensa*). The vocalism is problematic, but labialization and either metathesis or dissimilation could account for the /o/ and the /i/. If Caló *sosimbres* is also of Georgian origin, then the ancestors of the Gitanos must have separated from the Roms of the Ottoman empire before the latter developed /l/ in *čamčáli*.

Finally, Romani dialects from Yugoslavia show both types of development. The Mečkar dialect of Kosovo has *camcale* (pluralia tantum; Marcel Cortiade: personal communication) which may well preserve the original Georgian dental. The Bosnian Gurbet form *cîncána* (Uhlik 1983:90) might also derive from original *c'amc'amni* with the assimilation of /m/ to /n/ and the raising and backing of /a/ to /î/ either under stress before the nasal or unstressed via schwa, both of which processes are known in Romanian, which significantly influenced this Romani dialect.

NOTES

¹A Russian version of this article appears under the title "Kavkazskoe zaimstvovanie v ciganskom" in the journal *Etimologija* 1986-1987 (Moscow: Akademija Nauk SSSR). I am very grateful to Prof. Eric Hamp of the University of Chicago, who read earlier versions of this article and provided me with helpful comments and information.

²I am indebted to Prof. Ian Hancock of the University of Texas for bringing *khilav* and *khoni* to my attention.

³Georgian stress rules are much debated, but stress is never final.

⁴Cf. also Hamp E. Indo-European *(H_e)op-.— Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft 40, 1981, 35-38, also v. Ériu, 35, 1984, 202.

⁵The Romanian word is used in Kalderas[∞] (Ian Hancock: personal communication) as well as in other dialects (Uhlik 1983:90). Marcel Cortiade of the French Embassy in Albania informs me that the Macedonian word is used in the C[∞]ergar dialect and that the Turkish (also cf. Albanian *qerpik*) occurs in the Kabudz[∞]é dialect.

⁶I am indebted to Prof. Dee Ann Holisky of George Mason University for this information.

REFERENCES

- Abuladze I. 1973. *Dzveli kartuli enis leksik[∞]oni*. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
- Borrow, G. 1901. *The Zincali* (9th edition). London: John Murray.
- Jes[∞]ina J. 1882. *Román[∞]i c[∞]ib*. Prague: Urbánek.
- Klimov, G. A. 1964. *E[∞]timologic[∞]eski[∞] slovar' kartvel'skix jazykov*. Moscow: Akademija nauk SSSR.
- Messing, G. Forthcoming. *A Greek Romany Glossary*. Columbus, OH: Slavica.
- Murkelinski[∞] G. B. 1971. *Sravnitel'sno-istoric[∞]eskaja leksika dagestanskix jazykov*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Paspati A. 1870. *Études sur les Tchinghianés ou Bohémiens de l'Empire Ottoman*. Constantinople: A. Kormela.
- Poboz[∞]niak T. 1964. *Grammar of the Lovari Dialect*. Kraków: Polska akademia nauk.
- Pott, A.F. 1845. *Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien*, II. Halle.
- Uhlik, R. 1983. *Srpskohrvatsko-Romsko-Engleski rjec[∞]nik*. Sarajevo: Svjetlost.
- Xaj[∞]adakov, S. M. 1973. *Sravnitel'no-sopostavitel'ny[∞] slovar' dagestanskix jazykov*. Moscow: Nauka.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Victor A. Friedman is Professor of Slavic and Balkan Linguistics at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He received his Ph.D. in both General Linguistics and in Slavic Languages and Literatures from the University of Chicago in 1975 and has worked with Roms in Skopje, Yugoslavia since 1973. His dissertation was entitled The Grammatical Categories of the Macedonian Indicative. He has published numerous articles in Slavic, Caucasian, and Balkan linguistics, including articles on problems of Romani language standardization and on Romani verbal categories in the context of the Balkan linguistic league. He served as President of the Gypsy Lore Society, North American Chapter 1984-86.