

Romanis (Gypsies) in Medieval Cyprus

Orta Çağ Kıbrıs'ında Romanlar (Çingeneler)

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İnceleme / Review

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Öz

Ticaret yollarındaki konumu ve Anadolu, Bizans ve Mısır gibi önemli coğrafyalara yakınlığı nedeniyle Kıbrıs, her zaman önemli bir ada olmuştur. Hindistan'dan başlayan ve tüm dünyaya yayılan yolculuklarında Romanların, Bizans topraklarında varlığı IX. yüzyılın başında tescil edildi. Anadolu topraklarına ise VII. yüzyılda Çukurova bölgesinden, XI. yüzyılda Doğu Anadolu bölgesinden girmişlerdir. Kıbrıs'taki en eski kayıt da 1332'de Simeon Simeonis'e aittir. Kıbrıs'ta çeşitli ulusların varlığı, doğal kaynakların zenginliği ve ticaret limanı olması her zaman olduğu gibi Orta Çağ'da da ilgi çekiciydi. Kıbrıs'taki Romanlar üzerine çok az çalışma bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Romanların Kıbrıs'a ilk kez gelmiş olabilecekleri tarih konusu tüm yönleriyle değerlendirilecektir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Çingeneler, Kıbrıs, Orta Çağ, Romanlar.

Abstract

Cyprus has always been an important island because of its location on trade routes and its proximity to important lands such as Anatolia, Byzantine and Egypt. Romanis were registered in the Byzantine lands at the beginning of the IX century, on their journey that started from India and spread all over the world. They entered the Anatolian lands from the Çukurova region in the VII century, and from the Eastern Anatolia region in the XI century. The oldest record in Cyprus belongs to Simeon Simeonis in 1332. The presence of various nations in Cyprus, the richness of its natural resources, and the fact that it was a trading port has been interesting in the Middle Ages as it has always been. There are very few studies on Romanis in Cyprus. In this study, the issue of the date when Romanis might have come to Cyprus for the first time will be evaluated in all aspects.

Keywords: Romanis, Gypsies, Cyprus, Medieval.

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Introduction

Romanis live scattered around the world. They differ from other people by their lifestyles. They are people who live in communities, nomadic or semi-nomadic, with their own language. Romanis, around the world are known by names such as Roms, Tsiganes, Bohémiens, Gitanes, Gitanos. They are also named with different names such as *calé* in Spain and southern France, *kale* in Finland, *çingene* in Turkey, *sinti* in Germany and *manuş* in France (Fraser, 2005, p.17). When the origins of these words are examined, it is accepted that the words used for Romanis, come from the word Egypt; in Latin *Egyptianus*, in Greek *Gyftos*, *Gitan*, *Aigyptios*, in French *Égypt*, in English *Egypt* (Radenez, 2016, p.151; Gökbilgin, 1977, p.421). When analyzed which names are given to the Romanis in today's Cyprus geography, we see the names *Kurbet*, *Ole*, *Felah*, *Kouloufos*, *Kilinghros Yieftos* (from the root of Aigiptos) and *Tsignos* (from the root of Atsinganoi). These words mean expatriate, nomadic, not settled, scattered (Kenrick, 2007, p.54).

Until the beginning of the XIX century, the Romanis were thought to be of Egyptian origin. For this reason, words derived from Egyptian roots are used (Altınöz, 2016, p.294). Later research determined the fact that their language and genetic characteristics were from India. The Romanis consider that the word *Gypsy* is humiliating. Inasmuch as their homeland isn't Egypt, today the word Romanis is used instead of the word Gypsy. Due to the use of the word *Gypsy* in previous studies, the word *Gypsy* is also included in the title of this article beside the word *Romani*.

The opinion that the Romanis, who left India, have followed three paths through two main branches. First group, the Doms, speaking *Ben* dialect went southward to Syria and Palestine region or went to Egypt and North Africa. It is believed that the Romanis who came to Cyprus followed this road (Dingeç, 2017, p.91). Second group, the Loms, who speak the *Phen* dialect, went to the northern route and went to Armenia, Georgia, the Balkans and Europe. And the last group is Roms, who speak the *Phen* dialect, went to the western route and reached Europe through Anatolia and the Balkans (Altınöz, 2016, p.295; Marushiakova and Popov, 2006, p.14-15; Topuz, 2010, p.65). The first movements were between V - VII centuries, the second movements between VII - X centuries and the last movements between X - XIII centuries (Yaprak, 2015, p.16).

1.The Importance of Cyprus in the Middle Ages and Departure of Romanis from India

Cyprus is a 9251 km² piece of land surrounded by the sea, located at 34 33' and 35 41' north latitude, 32 17 'and 34 35' east longitude. 65 km north of Turkey, about 110 km east Syria, 400 km south of Egypt, 960 km northwest Greece, and is located 170 km southeast of Lebanon. The strategical position of the island depends largely on its location between Athens, Jerusalem, Cairo and Istanbul. The security and integrity of the Mediterranean Region, cannot be complete without Cyprus (Gözlü, 2011, p.21). Cyprus has always been a conflict area, as a base that dominates the Middle East and the east of the Mediterranean Region (Atasoy, 2012, p.265).

In the middle ages, Cyprus and Greece in Europe were perceived as part of Egypt (Topuz, 2010, p.66; Crézé, 2019, p.1). Cyprus was on the sea route from Bari-Italy to the Holy Land (Dingeç, 2017, p.93). The island of Cyprus became the domination area of the Byzantines between 395-1191, the Crusaders between 1191-1192 and the Lusignans between 1192-1489. In 1489, the Venetians dominated the island and in 1571 the Ottoman Empire became the owner of the island.

After the Islamic conquests, when the Mediterranean Region was conquered by Muslims, Europe's commercial ties were affected. It should be kept in mind that in the Middle Ages, maritime trade was more popular than land trade. The direction of this trade was from Central Asia to Baghdad, Syria,

Africa and Spain. Cyprus was at a very critical point for the trade of the Byzantine Empire with the east (Laiou and Morrisson, 2007, p.35).

Although there are many legends about Romanis, they are from the Northern region of India. According to Taberi (1991), Romanis are descendants of the son of Prophet Noah and Sind-Hint basins are their homeland. The Romanis came to work in the region of India during the time of Erdesir I (224-242), the founder and first ruler of the Sassanid Empire, and were musicians in Iran in the time of Sassanid ruler Behram V (420-438). During the Umayyads, those who came from India (Zott) were deported by Muaviye to Antakya and the Mediterranean coasts, which were in the Byzantine border in 669-670 (Demirci, 2016, p.320). In 855, when the Arabs were defeated in the war between the Byzantines and Arabs, the Byzantines captured the Zott soldiers and their families. The Romanis were taken to the Byzantine lands. Evidence that they were taken to the Byzantine territory is the records of the existence of acrobats and veterinarians coming from India in 1050 in İstanbul (Kenrick, 2007, p.xix).

As a result of the expeditions of Mahmud of Ghazni to the Sind provinces, he took 500.000 prisoners and took the Romanis with them while returning to his land (İbnü'l Esir, 1991, p.140). At the beginning of the XI century, Romanis were within the Gaznian community as watchmen and warriors. These groups were transferred to the Seljuks after the wars, and the Romanis thus entered the Anatolian and Byzantine territory through the Armenian lands, and consequently they entered the south-east Europe (Heng, 2018, p.419).

We do not have definitive evidence for the reason why Romanis migration movements from India started. Reasons why Romanis left India may be related to factors such as occupation of their land, wars, deportation and livelihood problems. With the beginning of the spread and adaptation process of the Romanis in Europe after XV century, it became easier for us to follow on the stage of history (Crézé, 2019).

Today, the population of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is estimated to be 350,000. According to official data in 2012, the population consisted of 297,608 people (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Prime Ministry State Planning Organization Economic and Social Indicators 2017). According to the Council of Europe data of Eurostat, the population of Cyprus was around 876,000 in 2019 (EUROSTAT, 2019). In the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Romanis continue their lives in the Güzelyurt and Gazi Magosa regions, where olive cultivation is predominant (Kenrick, 2007, p.55).

Romanis were in three groups in Cyprus. The first is a well-established Orthodox community, the second is the newer Muslim group, and the third is the Kaldereş group. The first group mentioned is thought to be the first settlers on the island. As mentioned above the group traveling from Anatolia to Europe might have come from Lebanon or Israel in the time of the Lusignans.

It is necessary to determine when Romanis came to Cyprus and it is important to describe their professions. It makes sense to look at the neighbors of Cyprus. Historical chronicles of Cyprus are limited, so an investigation can be made through Byzantium and Anatolia.

2. Examining the Dates of the Arrivals of the Romanis to Cyprus

It is generally accepted that the first Romanis immigration to Cyprus took place around 1322. In these years, the island of Cyprus was dominated by the Lusignan family.

In order to find the date when the existence of the Romanis on the island of Cyprus began, the Byzantine Empire trade routes map, the routes of the Crusades and the maps of the Romanis following

the departure from India should be evaluated together. An interview was made with Romani Ali Dumlupznar, who lived in Güzelyurt, in the study of the Romanis in Cyprus, published in 2003 by Adrian Marsh and Elin Strand. Ali Dumlupznar was asked questions about the history of the Romanis of Cyprus. According to Dumlupznar, the Romanis came to Cyprus from Anatolia since the 500s (Marsh and Strand, 2003). In this case, it can be thought that among the first waves of immigration from India, were those who reached Cyprus. Considering that the first wave started in the V century, it may be possible to find Romanis in Cyprus in the 500s. We already know that they were in the Çukurova region in the VII century (Demirci, 2016, p.320).

At the beginning of the XIV century, Romanis were on the island of Cyprus during the Lusignan period. At the same time, they were recorded in Europe. Although Romanis are registered in places such as Anatolia, the Mediterranean islands and the Arabian Peninsula, it is noticeable that there is no clear registration in Cyprus. Due to the strategic location of the Cyprus geography, it is conceivable that Romanis came much more earlier to this region as well. In the Lusignans period, the Romanis population may have increased or entered the records, with the effect of the Crusades.

The first Romanis presence on other islands is important for our investigation. For example, the Romanis were first recorded in Crete in 1322 and in Corfu in 1347 (Altınöz, 2017, p.565). After the plague epidemic called Black Death appeared in Istanbul in 1347, the Romanis were forced to move westward and were recorded in Prizren in 1348. Their spread in Europe continued after this date in the direction of Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Bohemia, Germany, France, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Russia, Denmark, England (Kenrick, 2007, p.xix; Altınöz, 2017, p.566; Gökbilgin, 1977, p.421). It is necessary to separate the immigration waves described above from their integration to the society through other ways. The Romanis came out of India not only by immigration, but also by marriages, under the command of a king (Gila-Kochanowski, 1994, p.47).

Following the Romanis in Byzantine can shed light on our research. It is also noted that Saint Athanasia of Aegina (d.860) in Thrace in 800 gave food to Atsinganoi and in 803 Emperor Nikephoros (802-811) benefited from the magic knowledge of Atsinganoi. The right to free movement in the Byzantine territory has been granted for the Romani group who helped for an uprising in Byzantium (Göncüoğlu and Yavuztürk, 2009, p.112). These records are the first indicative evidence of the presence of Romanis in Byzantine lands.

Around 1050, the existence of the Atsinganoi group was known during the Byzantine Emperor Constatinos Monomakos IX (1042-1055). The Emperor asked for help from this group and asked for the royal hunting park located near Istanbul Sulukule to be cleaned from monsters that killed deer and other game animals. When the Romanis who were obliged to do so demanded money in return for the work they did from the Emperor, St. George The Athonite (1009-1065) claimed that they were sorcerers (Marsh, 2010, p.27). Their professions have always been recorded in the same way since the first registrations in Byzantium in IX century.

In the XIII century, Grégoire II, who was born in Lapta in the north of Cyprus around 1241, (Cypriot II Grégoire, d. 1290) served as the Istanbul Ecumenical Patriarchate between 1283-1289. Gregoire II wrote a letter to Theodore Mouzalon (d.1258), who was responsible for the Byzantine economy. His writings included statements about tax collection from Atsinganoi, who were considered religiously deviant, probably in Peloponnese (Radenez, 2016). This record is important in terms of showing their religious affiliation.

Regarding the professions of the Romanis in the Byzantine Empire, between XI-XIV century, they are known as fortune-teller, snake player, magician and animal keeper. The Patriarch of Istanbul Athanasius I (1289-1293, 1301-1309) wrote a letter to all the clergymen. He stated that they should

not allow to enter their homes who are fortuneteller, lion keeper, snake player and especially Romanis. Romanis were accused of teaching satanic things (Heng, 2018, p. 421; Soulis, 1961, p.147).

In the XIV century, we know that there was a slave named Nikolas Aigyptios in Halkidiki in 1300. It can be said that he was Romanis by looking at his surname. Around 1325, it is registered that a Romani slave married a woman named Anna from here (Radenez, 2016). In addition, Byzantine historian Gregoras wrote that in 1322, Egyptian gypsy acrobats came to Istanbul (Gregorae, 1829, p.379).

Leonardo di Niccolo Frescobaldi, who belonged to a noble family, made a trip to Egypt and the Holy Land and shared his observations. In 1384, Leonardo di Niccolo Frescobaldi noted that he saw many Romanis outside the walls of the city of Methoni (Frescobaldi, 1818, p.73). In the Middle Ages, the city of Methoni was an important naval base for the Venetians. In 1422, Muratori noted that he saw the spooky looking Chingani or Chingari community in Bologna, Italy and that they had a great-talented chef named Duke Andrea (Muratorii, 1731, p.611). Lodovico Antonio Muratori, a historian and librarian, has written twenty-eight volumes on Italian medieval history. The works of Frescobaldi and Muratori, are reliable sources. So, in the late XIV century and early XV century, Romanis were recorded in Greece and Italy.

Towards the end of XV century, there were Romanis in Ottoman Empire. When the income items of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans are examined in 1475, it is seen that Romanis (Gypsies) are mentioned here. They are included in the table of *Cizye and Major Muka'tas* in 1475 by Halil İnalçık with the gold pen of 9000 duka. As it is determined, the Romanis came to the Balkans long before this date (Oprisan, 2002, p.3; İnalçık, 2017, p.64). In these years, Romanis had entered into Europe. A comprehensive dictionary writer Louis Moréri, noted that the Romanis (Bohémiens) were first seen in Paris in 1427. The Romanis, who he described as poor-looking, free, beautiful dancing people, entered the city exactly on Sunday, August 17, 1427, with a duke, 10 horses. 12 days later 120 men and their families came to Paris (Moréri, 1759, p.534).

With all this collected information, we defined the existence of Romanis around Cyprus geography. It is also possible to predict the professions of Romanis in Cyprus.

3.Records Regarding Romanis in Cyprus

It is the accepted opinion that the Romanis were first seen in Cyprus in the XV century, whose places they live in, are likened to the beehives and to the grasshopper herd (Panayi, 2009, p.17). The first record about the Romanis in Cyprus goes back to 1468. However, Cyprus was probably the target of Romanis who came from the east, due to its location (Liégois, 2007, p.18). Already Romanis existed in Anatolian and Byzantine lands before this date. In other islands like Crete and Corfu, Romanis have registered in XIV century. For these reasons, the Romanis must have entered Cyprus before the record in 1468.

It is one of the alleged opinions that the Romanis, who came to Cyprus during the Lusignans, passed thanks to the Crusades from Lebanon (Panayi, 2009, p.17). In the process of leaving India, it is possible that the groups passing to North Africa through Syria also came to Cyprus.

Following the 1071 Manzikert Victory of the Seljuks, the Cilician Armenians fled to Cyprus in 1078 with some Turkmen groups with them (Öztürk, 2017, p.625). Based on this information, it may be thought that some of the Romanis in Çukurova may have immigrated to Cyprus in XI century.

In 1332, after the traveler and writer Simeon Simeonis (d.?) visited Cyprus, he noted that he encountered a race that was claimed to be of Cham origin. According to his 1785 letter in

Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity, the Romanis, he faced in Cyprus, could not stand for more than thirty days, where they stood, they could gather and go immediately. They lived in small black tents, in the hollows of the mountains, just like the Arabs (Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity, 1785, p.393; Berkovici, 1931, p.19-20). The original text is as follows:

“Ibidem et vidimus gentem extra civitatem ritu Graecorum utentem, et de genere Chaym se esse asserentem, quae raro, vel nunquam, in loco aliquo moratur ultra xxx dies, sed semper, velut a Deo maledicta, vaga et profuga post xxx diem de campo in campum, cum tentoriis parvis, oblongis, nigris et humilibus, ad modum Arabum de caverna in cavernam discurret, quia locus ab his habitatus post dictum terminum efficitur plenus vermibus et immunditiis, cum quibus impossibile est habitare”².

Through this work, Romanis in Cyprus were registered before Florio Bustron’s reference book in 1468.

Another Romani that was recorded is Jani Ciganus. Jani Ciganus was working as a clerk in court at the time of King John II (1432-1458) in Famagusta (Radenez, 2016). The term "Cingani" was used to collect taxes in the time of King II James (1464-1473) in "L'Île de Chypre" by Florio Bustron. The original text is as follows *Nicolo Giafuni: il dretto delli Cingani*. Bustron (1886) writes the right of Romanis in the tax favors of Nicolo Giafuni. This date is a very late date in the light of the evaluations made. But this is the general opinion accepted in literature.

In the XVI century, Pierre Belon (d. 1564), a naturalist who lived around 1550, travelled to the East and conveyed his impressions. He stated that, in Turkey, Greece and Egypt, Romanis worked in iron works and they were successful in this business. To harden iron, they made their own coal from plants and shrub roots. In 1549, the French traveller André Thevet (d.1590) lived in the same periods and reported his observations. He determined that the Romanis, which he recorded as "les Egyptiens ou Bohémiens" in Cyprus, Rhodes and many other Mediterranean islands, lived and their main profession was to make nails. It is stated that by living a simple life, women produced belts and men produced nails and made a living by selling them. It was observed that the Romanis, who lived a nomadic life in the island of Cyprus during the Lusignans, worked in small jobs and produced griddle-like tools to sift wheat. Locksmiths are also registered (Bataillard, 1876, p.10-11; Thévet, 1566, p.196). According to this information, it seems that Romanis in Cyprus worked also outside of ordinary professions.

The population of Cyprus is estimated to be around 100,000 at the beginning of the Venice administration. In the middle of the XVI century, nearly 85% of the Cyprus population lived in rural areas. When Venice dominated the island, there were 981 villages. There were mostly Orthodox Christians in the villages. During this period, there were 33 villages belonging to Maronites, 3 belonging to Armenians and 1 village belonging to Romanis (Şahin, 2011, p.94).

In the Byzantine records between the XII-XV centuries, the Romanis worked in professions such as seer, acrobat, fortune teller in Istanbul. In Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia regions, they produced baskets, knives, shoes and they worked in professions such as metalwork (Marsh, 2010, p.28). In Cyprus, it can be said that they worked mainly in iron works in this period. There were also those who sustained their lives by doing simple jobs.

Conclusion

² The community of Chaya origin, which settled just outside the city, would not stay anywhere for more than thirty days. These people, cursed by God, go from place to place with black and low tents, as the Arabs live. The places they live are becoming uninhabitable from pollution and worms.

The general opinion on the first arrival of the Romanis in Cyprus was in 1468. As identified, the Romanis left India on two separate lines and three roads, and lived on all lands and islands near Cyprus before 1468. Romanis, who were seen in the Byzantine lands from the beginning of the IX century, entered the Çukurova region of Anatolia in the VII century and the Eastern Anatolia region at the beginning of the XI century. In 1332, Simeon Simeonis' record about Romanis in Cyprus, is very important evidence for their existence before Florio Bustron's record.

Today's research is insufficient to explain the presence of Romanis in Cyprus. Small clues can be obtained from the scrupulously studied works. Although our research has attempted to reveal that the Romanis have lived in Cyprus since ancient times, deeper research should be done. It may be appropriate to seek help from other fields, such as archaeology, for new research. Finding new sources can also clarify research.

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