

Luciano ROCCHI (Trieste)

ON TWO OLD ITALIAN TURKISMS (1. *cassasso* 2. *pettomagi/pettomanzi*)

Abstract. The paper aims to explain the origin of two old Italian words of Turkish origin, *cassasso* ‘a Turkish police officer’ and *pettomagi/pettomanzi* ‘Turkish officer(s) dealing with the possessions of the dead’. Contrary to a previous etymology of his, the author’s present opinion is that *cassasso* derives from the Ottoman-Turkish *hasas*, a spoken variant of the literary Arabism ‘*ases*’ ‘a guard, night-watchman, policeman’. As to *pettomagi/pettomanzi*, it is possibly a Turkish adaptation of Greek words as *πεθαμός* ‘death’, *πεθαμένος* ‘dead’ + nominal suffix *-ci*.

1. Among the words of oriental origin of the old Italian vocabulary is *cassasso*, attested in the meaning ‘a Turkish police officer’. It is a rare word, as demonstrated by the fact that it was not included in the main Italian historical-lexicographical works such as DEI or S. Battaglia’s *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, 21 voll. (Torino 1961-2002). In fact it has only been found in a couple of 16th-century authors, Theodoro Spandugino and Luigi Bassano, who quoted the word (Bassano in the plural form *cassassi*) with reference to the Ottoman world:

Il simile dico del Cassasso il quale è colui che prende coloro che di notte vanno senza lume, et lo fanno punire al Cadì (*Trattato di Theodoro Spandvgino Cantacvsino Gentil’ hvomo Costantinopolitano de’ costumi de’ Turchi*, in Fr. Sansovino, *Historia vniversale dell’origine et imperio de’ Turchi*, Venezia 1600, 2, 97);

I Turchi Cassassi, cioè, Birri (L. Bassano, *I Costvmi, et i modi particolari de la vita de Turchi*, Roma 1545, 39v);

E questi [bastoni] vsano anchora i cassassi e castaldi, i quali si chiamano *muchtür* [cf. *muchtur* ‘birro; messo’ (Argenti 173) = literary Ottoman *muhzir* ‘an officer of a court of justice who summons persons and produces them in court’ (Redhouse 1890: 1764)] (*id.* 49r-49v).

In a paper published some years ago (Rocchi 2006: 65) I proposed that the Italian word derives from the Ottoman-Turkish *kassas* ‘an executor of the law of *talion*’ (Redhouse 1890: 1456) < Ar. *kaṣṣāṣ* ‘shearer’ (Wehr 1979: 896), from the verb *kaṣṣa* ‘to cut; to shear’. I consider now this etymology as incorrect, both because the aforesaid meaning of the Ottoman word is rare (as far as we know, only the Redhouse’s dictionary records it) and for the strange semantic development shown by the Italian loanword if the supposed etymology were right.

In my present opinion *cassasso* clearly comes from another Ottoman Arabism, namely *hasas*, well recorded by various *Transkriptionstexte*, cf. *hases* (chases) ‘sbirro’, *hasas başı* (chasasbasc=i) ‘capitano di sbirri’ (Molino 1641: 375, 80), *hasas* (chasas) ‘boja; manigoldo; sbirro’ (Pianzola 114), ‘sbire, archer’ (Viguiet 124). It is a popular variant of the literary Ottoman ‘ases’ ‘a guard, night-watchman, policeman’ (Redhouse 1890: 1300) < Ar. ‘*asas* ‘patrol (as a body of men)’ (Wehr 1979: 716). The rendering of the Arabic ‘*ayn* with a glottal, velar or palatal fricative is a feature of certain varieties of the spoken Turkish. As to the popular pronunciation of Istanbul, Bonelli (1899: 308-309) reports several instances: *hünnabi* for ‘*ünnabi* ‘pertaining to the jujube’, *zühüm* for *zü‘üm* ‘mistaken supposition’, *qanaḥat* for *kana‘at* ‘opinion, belief’, *zenahat* for *zena‘at* ‘craft, trade’, *taleḥ* (*taleh*) for *tali* ‘(modern Turkish *talih*) ‘luck, fortune’, *iḥtibar* for *i‘tibar* ‘esteem, consideration’. Some of these were already pointed out by Filippo Argenti for the 16th-century spoken Turkish: *dalḥ* (dalych, daleh) ‘risicho, uentura’, (*e*)*htibar* (echtibar et chtibar) ‘stima et conto che si fa d’una persona o d’una cosa’, *hunnabi* (chunabi) ‘giuggiolino’, *zenaat/zanahat* (xenaat, xanachat) ‘exercitio, arte’ (Argenti 75, 91, 122, 274).

With regard to the Italian adaptation, it is a matter of fact that in loanwords foreign aspirates, having no equivalents in the Italian phonemic system, are mostly replaced with the native velar stops /k/, /g/; as to borrowings from Turkish see f. ex. *caraccio*, *caragio*, *carazzo* ‘tributo pagato dai sudditi cristiani’ (Cardona 1970: 20-21) < *harac/haraç* ‘id.’; *casnà* ‘luogo del tesoro pubblico presso i Turchi, erario’, *casnadàr* ‘custode del tesoro’ (DEI 793) < *hazna*, *haz(i)ne* resp. *haznadar* ‘id.’; *ganzàr* (Venetian dialect) ‘specie di pugnale che usano i Turchi’ (Boerio 1856: 199) < *hancar/hancer* ‘short curved dagger’. The same phenomenon is found in non-adapted quotations of Turkish words in old Italian texts, see f. ex. the *Relazione dell’impero ottomano* of the Venetian bailo Domenico Trevisano (1554), where one can read the phrase *capigiler-chietcudasci* (sic) [= *kapıcılar kethüdasi*] ‘capo delli portieri di sua maestà’ (*Documenti di storia ottomana del secolo XVI* [= *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, a cura di F. Alberi, serie III, vol I], Firenze 1842, p. 134).

2. The term *pettomanzi* appears as headword in Battisti and Alessio’s etymological dictionary, but the short entry offers very little explanation: ‘(XVI sec[olo]; Sansorino [*recte* Sansovino]); certi ufficiali turchi; v[oce] turca’ (DEI 2886). In spite of DEI’s indication I have not managed to find the word in Sansovino; however, it is attested in Bassano’s cited work:

Le facultà de Christiani, che muoiano senza figliuoli, & senza testamento, resta al gran Turcho (...). Ben che i mercanti che vi praticano, vogliono priuilegio di non istar sotto questa legge, e caso ch'alcuno de loro vi muoia di potersi valere della sua robba. Questo con tutto che si prometta, non però viene in tutto osseruato da quelli ch'hanno quest'ufficio (che si domandano Pettomanzi) (L. Bassano, *op. cit.*, 51r).

The variant *pettomagi* is found f. ex. in the *Relazione* of the bailo Lorenzo Bernardo (1590):

L'entrata de beni de morti è importantissima e molto incerta. Questa è riscossa da alcuni ministri che i Turchi chiamano pettomagi, e sono come appresso di noi i cattaveri. Questi, sparsi per tutto l'Impero, hanno cura di confiscar tutti li beni de forastieri che muoiono in quel paese (...). Questi istessi pettomagi prendono anco tutti i beni de Turchi che muoiono senza fratelli o figlioli (Pedani-Fabris 1996: 335).

From the quoted passages it is clear that the word designates certain Ottoman officers who dealt with the possessions of the dead, especially strangers and those without legal heirs. The Italian adaptation undoubtedly reflects a Turkish form like **petama(n)cı/petuma(n)cı*, which, however, is not entered by any dictionary to my knowledge. It is an evident derivative through the usual nominal agentive suffix *-cı* (thanks to the final *-i* the word was easily interpreted as a plural by Italian authors), but the base **petama(n)-* or the like is problematic. In my view, a possible solution could be found by supposing that this base is of Greek origin. In fact both phonetics and semantics strongly suggest a connection with Greek words like *πεθαμός* 'death', *πεθαμένος* 'dead', which would have given **petam* in Turkish mouths. It is well known that loans from the Greek were very numerous in Turkish and many of them, belonging to spoken everyday language, are ignored by standard dictionaries (as proof of this, the *Transkriptionstexte* are rich in Grecisms not included in major Ottoman lexicographical works). At any case, this etymological proposal needs further research, though the likelihood of its being correct is very high.

Luciano Rocchi
 Università degli Studi di Trieste
 Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori
 Via Filzi, 14
 I-34132 Trieste
 [lrochi@units.it]

L i t e r a t u r e

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