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PANTHERS IN RUSSIAN AND OLD RUSSIAN[1]

Abstract

This paper discusses the etymology of the Russian word *пантера* 'panther' and its other variants in Old Russian and Russian. The Greek word *πάνθηρ* is a direct or indirect source of all of the investigated forms, but several other languages (Old Church Slavonic, German, French) are involved in the borrowing process as media. The solutions proposed in the article are based on extended method inventory, which includes both traditional methods of historical linguistics and some new proposals connected with extralinguistic factors (*Wörter und Sachen* method).

Introduction

This article discusses the etymology of the Russian word *пантера* 'panther' and its other variants, which had been used as the names of this animal before the word *пантера* appeared.

What we deal with is an interesting etymological problem. The word being discussed was borrowed into the Old Russian and then into the Russian language more than once and in different ways including various languages involved as media. The historical phonetics and morphology partially allow us to determine its history. The etymological dictionaries focus on these purely linguistic factors in their attempt to describe the etymology of *пантера*, but they fail to determine its direct source. In this text I would like to propose a solution based on extended method

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inventory, which includes both traditional assumptions of historical linguistics and some new proposals connected with extralinguistic factors.

It is worth mentioning that the problem analyzed in this paper is not a separate case of a word borrowed from the same original Greek etymon more than once via different channels. The same phenomenon can be observed in the case of many other lexemes, borrowed into Russian on one hand via Latin and Western languages and on the other, via Byzantine Greek and Old Church Slavonic.

1. The older borrowings

The oldest Russian names for a panther already appeared in the Old Russian Period. Russian etymological and historical dictionaries present several different forms, attested between the Old Russian Period and the 18th century. They are given in chronological order, with the time of the first attestation:
- ?: панъѳиръ (Fasmer 3: 199)
- 1047, preserved in copies from 15th and 16th centuries: пантирь (*SRY XI–XVII* 14: 146)
- 14th century: панфиръ (*SDY XI–XIV* 6: 348)
- 14th century: панъфиръ (*SDY XI–XIV* 6: 348)[2]
- 1512: пантеръ (*SRY XI–XVII* 14: 146)
- 1728: пантер (*SRY XVIII* 18: 196)
- 18th century: панѳир (*SRY XVIII* 18: 196)

While investigating these forms, one should obviously pay attention to the fact that the earlier attestation may not necessarily mean that the form itself is older than the other one.

Fasmer's dictionary is lacking any information when and where the form was attested. It seems possible, however, that it is not an Old Russian form at all, but the Old Church Slavonic one, cited after Miklosich's OCS dictionary (1865: 554), and Fasmer decided that at the beginning the Old Russian word must have been identical with its OCS etymon.

The forms *панъѳиръ*, *панъфиръ*, *панфиръ* and *панѳир*, despite their visible differences, can be, in my opinion, explained in a coherent way. The more problematic forms *пантирь*, *пантеръ* and *пантер* will be described in the further part of the article.

The forms *панъфиръ*, *панфиръ* are attested in religious texts, *панѳир* is used in a translation of the text written originally in French. It seems plausible that the differences between the forms *панъѳиръ*, *панъфиръ,* *панфиръ* and *панѳир* are purely

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[2]   Interestingly, in Sreznevskiy's (1902: 876) dictionary another form can be found, with a soft yer: *паньѳиръ* with one attestation. Exactly the same attestation in *SRY XI–XVII* (vol. 14) is interpreted differently, as *панфиръ*. Since the emergence of the form *паньѳиръ* does not seem very probable (and it would be a hapax), I interpret this attestation as it is presented in *SRY XI–XVII*. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for interesting remarks on this issue.

graphical and their pronunciation in Old Russian and then Russian was identical. The letter ‹θ› is used only in loanwords from Greek (which were borrowed often through the OCS medium). In Greek, at least from the 3rd century AD onwards, it has denoted a dental fricative θ (Rix 1992: 85). Russian language has never had such a consonant and it has been adapted in loanwords as a labiodental fricative *f*. Therefore, the alternation of the letters ‹θ› and ‹ф› may be easily explained by the fact that they denoted the same consonant.

The problem of the yers appearing in the discussed forms is slightly more complicated. From the end of the 10th century on, the so-called Havlík's law, which led gradually to the loss of the weak variants of the reduced vowels noted by yers, did operate in Old Russian (Stieber 1989: 49). A common result of this process is the absence of many yers where they are expected to be found since they ceased to note the proper sounds and became purely orthographical signs. This is the reason why there are no yers at all in the form *панθир*.

In the light of these arguments I claim that in Old Russian after the loss of the weak variants of the reduced vowels there was one word *panfir*, which was noted in different ways.

The Old Russian word *panfir*, undoubtedly was borrowed from OCS (Fasmer 1987 3: 199; Chernykh 1999 1: 621). The OCS etymon is attested in different sources as *панъθиръ* (Miklosich 1865: 554). In OCS, according to Fasmer and Chernykh, *панъθиръ* is a loanword from Greek, where it had a form *πάνθηρ*. In Classical Greek it was pronounced as *pant^{h}ēr*, but at the time when OCS translation of the Bible was rendered with the strong Greek influence, the pronunciation was already changed into *panθir* (Rix 1992: 50, 85). We cannot expect that the Classical Greek pronunciation was known as early as in the Middle Ages, because it became popular only in the 16th century thanks to the works of Erasmus of Rotterdam (Allen 1968: 127). It explains why the word *панъθиръ* contained the vocal *i*. Also, as a result of borrowing into OCS, some changes linked to the phonetic adaptation were made. The Greek letter ‹θ› was used, but the consonant, to which it corresponded must have been changed from θ (absent in OCS) into *f*. Except for that, two reduced vowels noted by yers were introduced. It was the result of the Slavic law of open syllables.

The Greek word *πάνθηρ* is also an indirect source of the Modern Russian word *пантера*, which will be explained later.

2. History of the form *пантирь*

The problematic form *пантирь* cannot be explained as part of this scenario. It was attested in the copies of the text from 1047, which go back to the 15th and 16th centuries (*SRY XI–XVII* 14: 146). It is an Old Russian translation of the Old Testament book *Twelve Minor Prophets* with the commentary by Theodoret of Cyrus, one of the Church Fathers. The text from 1047 was written by a Novgorod scribe, Upir Likhyj.

It does not seem possible to explain the form *пантирь* as a reflex of *панъθиръ* since the change *f* (noted as ‹θ›) > *t* is unexpected in Russian or OCS.

It is actually a hapax, attested only in the *Book of Hosea* and in the corresponding part of the commentary. Upir Likhyj copied the text in 1047, but the translation itself had been made earlier. It is possible that the translator, unaware of the existence of the word *панъθиръ* or its later variants (because perhaps the translation had been made before they appeared), borrowed the Greek *πάνθηρ* as *пантирь*. It must have been the Medieval Greek pronunciation that he knew, in which the letter ‹θ› denoted a dental fricative *θ*. Such sound, despite being usually adapted as *f* in OCS and Old Russian, could be also borrowed as *t*.

The absence of the yer between *н* and *m* can be explained in two ways:
- for someone with a good knowledge of Greek it was not a problem to pronounce a closed syllable *pan-*, so he did not consider it necessary to open a syllable with a reduced vowel
- a reduced vowel was inserted in the process of adaptation, and then after it disappeared in the pronunciation, an unnecessary yer was eliminated.

The final consonant written ‹pь› is soft. It is a trace of a reduced vowel, which was inserted to open the final syllable. It appears that it was more necessary to open the final syllable than the middle one. A front vowel was inserted probably because the final *-r* had been palatalized by the preceding vowel *i*.

3. The forms *пантеръ, пантер*

The history of the forms *пантеръ* and *пантер* appears to be more complicated. It may seem plausible to explain the second form (attested in the 18th century) as the reflex of the first one (16th century) after the final yer – phonetically insignificant – was dropped. However, if we accept this solution, we must assume that between the attestation of *пантеръ* (1512) and the first attestation of *пантер* (1728) the word continued to be used, so it coexisted with the word *panfir*, the history of which has been described above. The coexistence of these two forms, not much different phonetically and equal semantically, is rather doubtful, especially in the light of the fact that between 1512 and 1728 there was no attestation of either *пантеръ* or *пантер*. Therefore, it appears more advisable to analyze these forms separately.

The form with a yer was attested in a work known as *Русский хронограф*, in its first editorial work called *Хронограф 1512 г.* According to the tradition, it was written in 1512, but possibly it is several years older (Tvorogov 1996). The chronicle describes the world history from the biblical times until the fall of Constantinople. The author used many different sources written in various languages and the exact source of the word *пантеръ* is impossible to determine. The direct etymon is certainly neither a Medieval Greek nor an Ancient Greek word since the only pronunciation of Greek texts used in Europe at that time was the Medieval Greek pronunciation, according to which the word for a panther was pronounced *panθir* (Rix 1992: 50, 85). A pronunciation closer to the Ancient Greek (*pantʰēr*) became popular only after 1528, i.e. after the publication of *De recta Latini Graecique sermonis pronuntiatione* by

Erasmus of Rotterdam (Allen 1968: 127). Since convincing hypotheses are lacking, I shall leave this question unsolved.

As for the form without yer, two attestations are known from 1728 and 1788. Since the word appears twice in scientific texts, it seems plausible that they did not continue any earlier form and they are the result of the 18th century borrowing. It was the period of a very strong Western influence on the Russian language, especially the German impact. Furthermore, a possible etymon can be easily found in German, i.e. *Panther*. Its phonetics perfectly corresponds to the Russian word *пантер*.

Another possible etymon can be found in French *panthère*. The final *e* in French is mute, so theoretically the result of the borrowing of the French *panthère* could have been the Russian *пантер*. However, the grammatical gender (feminine, against *пантер*, which is masculine) of the French word contradicts this hypothesis. It is worth mentioning that among the Russian upper class of this period French was well-known. Therefore, if we are to accept the French *panthère* as an etymon of the Russian *пантер*, we must include an additional adaptation change, i.e. the change of the grammatical gender. In the case of the German etymon, it is not necessary. Italian *pantera* appears even less plausible as a borrowing source since the result would rather be a feminine noun **пантера*.

In the light of these arguments it seems plausible to accept that the Russian word *пантер*, attested twice in the 18th century, is a German borrowing. Possibly it has never left scientific texts and has not made its way into the common language.

As for the etymology of the German *Panther*, it is without doubt a Latin borrowing. There were two variants of this word in Latin: *panthēra* (feminine) and *panthēr* (masculine). The source of the borrowing is the second form.

4. Problem of the etymology of Modern Russian word *пантера* and its solutions

In this part of the article some proposals concerning the etymology of the Russian *пантера* will be discussed. Then I will present a new plausible solution of this problem.

The Greek word *πάνθηρ* was borrowed into Latin as *panthēra* (Frisk 1970: 471). The morphological and phonetical forms of the word were changed. Possibly, it is a result of the reinterpretation of the Greek 3rd declension accusative *πανθήρα* as a 1st declension nominative. The Latin form was the source of the names for a panther in Romance languages, including French *panthère* and Italian *pantera*.

Latin *panthēra* could have been an etymon of the Romance words in two different ways: in the process of genetic continuation or borrowing, if it had been forgotten earlier. For the French word the etymological dictionary by Walther von Wartburg (1955: 569–570) states that it is a Latin borrowing. Also, for the Italian form etymological dictionaries have no doubts that it was borrowed (Battisti, Alessio 1954: 2752; Cortelazzo, Zolli 1985: 872). In both languages it was likely for this word to be forgotten due to the fact that there are no panthers in France or Italy.

The Russian word is a borrowing from one of these languages, i.e. according to Fasmer from French, according to Chernykh from French or Italian. Neither of them presents any arguments in favour of one of these languages. In fact, phonetically both sources would give the same borrowing effect in Russian. Since historical phonetics is inconclusive, I will present an extralinguistic argument using a method called *Wörter und Sachen*, according to which history of words cannot be researched separately from history of objects described by them. More information about this method can be found in the classical work by Yorgu Yordan on Romance linguistics (Yordan 1971: 102–117).
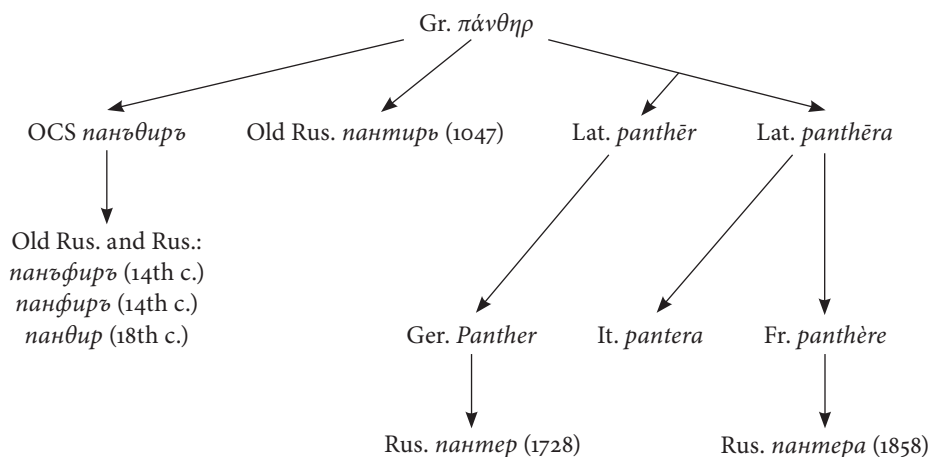
As Fasmer and Chernykh state, the word *пантера* appeared in the Russian language not later than in 1861, when it was for the first time attested in the dictionary. To study *пантера*'s history in a more detailed way, I consulted works on the history of Russian scientific life in the field of biology. As it turned out, in 1858, even before the first zoological gardens were opened in Russia, an article *Черная пантера* (Black panther) was published by Charles Roulier (Карл Францевич Рулье) in the journal *Вестник естественных наук* (Raykov 1955: 425–426). The author described a panther bred in a private garden in Moscow (unfortunately, there is no information about how the owner called his animal in the summary of the article). Roulier was a son of French immigrants, born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1814. After finishing his studies he became an active scholar. His academic activities included very popular public lectures (Raykov 1955: 181). Since 1836 he published many scientific articles dedicated to zoology (for the complete bibliography see Raykov 1955: 392–430) in both French and Russian. He could have possibly used the word *пантера* also in his previous texts. As it was stated above, his academic activity in the field of zoology strongly influenced the development of zoology in Russia and chronologically it fits in the period, in which the word *пантера* was borrowed into Russian. On the basis of these facts a highly probable hypothesis can be stated that it was Roulier himself in his articles and lectures, who borrowed this word from French into Russian.

5. Conclusions

The word *πάνθηρ* was borrowed from Greek into OCS as *панъѳиръ*. The OCS form is a source of Old Russian and Russian forms *панъѳиръ, панѳиръ* and *панѳир*. Greek *πάνθηρ* is also a (probably direct) source of Old Russian *пантирь* attested in a text from 1047, which survived only in the copies from 15th and 16th centuries. All of the mentioned Russian and Old Russian forms went out of use without a trace in Modern Russian.

The German *Panther*, borrowed from Latin, is a probable etymon of Russian *пантер* attested in the 18th century and soon forgotten.

It seems very probable in the light of extralinguistic factors that the Modern Russian word *пантера* is a borrowing from French *panthère*.

Gr. *πάνθηρ*

OCS *панъѳиръ*   Old Rus. *пантиръ* (1047)   Lat. *panthēr*   Lat. *panthēra*

Old Rus. and Rus.:
панъѳиръ (14th c.)
панфиръ (14th c.)
панѳир (18th c.)

Ger. *Panther*   It. *pantera*   Fr. *panthère*

Rus. *пантер* (1728)   Rus. *пантера* (1858)

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