



Arman

Mozes F. Heinschink / Michael Teichmann

Arman (Pl. *armaja*) derives from either the old-Indian term *arma* (waste, ruins) or from the Persian term *arman* (desire) and means curse. As it is an "inherited word", *arman* is used in most *Romani* dialects. In general, a differentiation is made between quite harmless everyday life and ritual curses. Similar to → *solax* (vow) no supernatural relevance is attached to everyday life curses. They rather resemble the eloquence and humour of the speaker. Also the curses addressing the → *Gadže* are considered to be without any effect. Their effect is based on the fact that the non-Roma believe in them. Jan Yoors who grew up within the *Lovara* community reported that the reason for pronouncing curses is to frighten the respective person.

In contrast to a vow – *solax* – that always refers to the speaker, curses address others. Characteristic elements are insinuations regarding group internal traditions, a vivid language and an extremely permissive choice of words. Ribald expressions are characteristic for all *Romani* dialects, which is the reason why they strongly differ from the languages of the majority population. This kind of permissiveness is even more striking if one considers the severe moral codex of traditional Roma communities. The contrast between linguistic openness and a taboo reality is most evident in view of sexuality. Common phrases such as "*Kures mura da!*" ("That you would have sex with my mother!" / *Lovara-Romani*) according to the Roma, are pure affirmative expressions with no unmoral connotations. In view of the non-Roma in the western industrialised societies such expressions, on the other hand, are exclusively vulgar and represent a taboo. It is striking that this verbal openness disappears in traditional Roma communities as soon as the strict moral codex is dissolved.

Everyday life curses

The rich variety of metaphors in *Romani* is vividly expressed in the everyday life curses of the Kalderaš:

Te del o beng ande tute!

"Devil shall take you!"

Te kořarel tu kako manřo!

"This bread shall blind you!"

Te řordol ři goři po drom, te řidav la ando dikhlořo!

"Your brain shall spray, and I will gather it in my handkerchief!"

Te řernol řo mas pa tu!

"The flesh shall rot off you!"

Te xal tu phuv!

"Earth shall devour you!"



Marel či bax o khul!

"Shit shall break you good luck!"

Xas me mulenge kokala!

"You should eat the bones of my dead!"

Further examples of everyday life curses, recorded by Rade Uhlik:

Marel tu o Del!

"God shall punish you!"

Ne xal o beng leski bax!

"Devil shall eat his good luck!"

Xan tu e ruv!

"The wolves shall eat you!"

There are numerous curses that refer to group internal traditions but they are not understandable without having this knowledge. The *Rom* Trifun Dimić born in 1956 in Yugoslavia recorded many examples of these curses and published them in a commented edition.

Mek del o Del, te djilabes sargo čirikljori!

"God grant that you sang like a bird!" (note: *Mulikani čiriklji* was called the "bird of death")

Te del o Del, džučhela te čeren o abjav katar će kokala!

"God grant that the dogs make a feast out of your bones!" (note: refers to the *Romani* proverb, "a dog is to be looked for among dogs, a human among humans")

Ritual curses

Ritual curses are dealt with in a different way. They are pronounced on special occasions and in relation to a financial or emotional dependency. They are expressions of superstitious thought that determine life and the view of life. The belief in the effect of these curses is extremely present in the most traditionally living Roma groups. This belief is based on the presumption that curses → ritually soil the addressee and make the addressee unlucky. The *Sepečides* call this status *armandino* (cursed upon / "under spell"). The closer the relationship with the person affected, the stronger the considered effect.

Amraja sî phare kata kuko, kaj lja tutar sama, vaj avela Řom vaj avela gažo, vaj kaj najardja tu vaj pravardja tu! Te dela tu amraja naj mišto. Katar daras proklecil tu svako zaloga kaj dja tu!
(Kalderaš-Romani)



"Curses expressed by the one who has cared for you (educated you), no matter whether a *Rom* or a *Gadžo*, no matter whether he had washed you or nurtured you, are extremely heavy. If he puts a curse on you, that is not good. What you are afraid of, every little mouthful proves your undoing, every mouthful he has given you." (*Kalderaš-Romani*)

A fundamental function of ritual curses is to exert social control. The relationships of dependency that are created in this context are used in → kris -meetings in order to establish the truth and in order to guarantee a higher justice.

The Austrian *Kalderaš* on the other hand know a ceremony, which among others keeps away the effect of the curses. It is the reconciliation day (*Jertimos*), which takes place in April. [→ Bara]

Sources

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