ON THE ORIGIN OF GOTHIC ULBANDUS ‘CAMEL’

Great are the merits of Bojan Čop in Hittite lexicography and etymology. Glancing merely at volume 3 of the *Hittite Etymological Dictionary*, the latest to leave my workshop, his ideas have either provided the etyma or pointed the way to the interpretation of such important items as halkuessar, halluwa-, halzai-, hattalkesna-, hazzila-, huek- (both verbs!), and hu(wa)nhuessar. May the small token of homage that follows be worthy of his endeavors!

The Semitic word for ‘camel’, exemplified by Hebrew gāmāl, makes its Greek debut as κάμηλος in Aeschylus (*Hiketides* 285); via Latin camēlus it has conquered the modern west. In the other direction it appears, with some apparent interference from the verb krāmate ‘stride’, as Sanskrit kramela-, supplementing the old Vedic term ústra-, of Indo-Iranian attestation (cf. Avestan Zarat-uštra-, either ‘Old-camel’ or ‘Camel-driver’). Unlike such relatively neat and short terms, the ungainliness of the beast is more picturesquely expressed by the designations for it in Germanic, Slavic, and Baltic. Starting with Gothic ulbandus, the Germanic attestations are ON ulfalde, OE olfend, OS olbundeo, and OHG olbento. The Slavic forms (OCS velibõdû, Russian verbljûd, Polish wielbląd) appear to have been folk-etymologically twisted in the direction of velii ‘big, great’, whereas the Baltic variants (OPr. weloblundis, misrendered as ‘mule’ by the Elbing Vocabulary [line 437]; Lith. velblûdas) are patent borrowings from Slavic.

Received wisdom¹ presumes for ulbandus and company “same origin” as OE elpend, OHG elfant, i.e. ‘elephant’ borrowed from Latin elephas (elephant-) which in turn comes from Greek ἐλέφας (ἐλέφαντ-). A “transfer of meaning” (‘elephant’ > ‘camel’) is assumed, but the best parallel produced is a dialectal Arabic bil for ‘camel’, allegedly a variant of the old word for ‘elephant’ which ranges from Akk. piru or pilu ‘elephant’ to Old Persian piru- ‘ivory’ to Aramaic and Persian pil, Sanskrit (late) pîlî-, Arabic fil, and Old Norse fill ‘elephant’². Even this is no parallel at all³, for the Ger-

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² Also παρίσσας ‘elephant’ (Hesychius), perhaps ‘elephant cow’ like Akk. pirâti or Skt. pillarā.
³ Weaker still is the alleged derivation of Russian slon ‘elephant’ from Turkic af’slan ‘lion’; Russian Ruslán is well taken as such in origin, but slon is better traced back to Austroasiatic words for ‘elephant’ (cf. T. Gamkrelidze and V.V. Ivanov, *Indoevropejskij jazyk i indoevropejcy* [Tbilisi, 1984], 524–525). Not so, however, Tocharian B oïkolmo (A oïkalâm) ‘elephant’, whose source V.V. Ivanov (*Etimologija* 1980 [Moskva, 1982], 166) also surmised in Austroasiatic. In oïkolmo may lurk rather an Indo-European
manic words for ‘camel’ are no stray dialectal semantic deviates but engrained across early Germanic before the intrusion of the Greco-Latin word for ‘elephant’. One would have to assume instead that some remote proto-designation existed from which evolved semantically ‘elephant’ on the one hand, ‘camel’ on the other. But the earliest attainable meaning of EMPL - is rather ‘ivory’: e-re-pa-(te-) is well attested as an ornamental material in Mycenaean Greek, but the beast itself was unknown in Europe, being mentioned first for Ethiopia and Libya by Herodotus (3.114, 4.191), and described for India by Aristotle (Hist. Anim. 2). Syro-Phoenician sources of Euphratic ivory were accessible to the Greeks earlier than the animal made a mental imprint, even as in Italy Punic mediation produced the ebūr (from a Hamitic term seen in Egypt. 3bw ‘elephant’ and ‘ivory’) way before the Luca bōs or bōs Luca that was militarily introduced to Italy ahead of Hannibal by Pyrrhus in 280 B.C.E. and later described in lumbering detail by Lucretius (5:1301–2). Clearly, therefore, EMPL - entered Greek as a term for ivory, rather than as a zoonym; only later did metonymy include the animal source of the product.

Additionally, the discovery of lahpa- as the Hittite term for ‘ivory’ (matching Akk. šinnu at Ugarit)6 has clarified the sources of EMPL -. It did not stop Gamkrelidze and Ivanov from Indo-European etymologizing (still drawing in ulbandus, etc.), and may have led Laroche8 to overstress similarities to the Semitic terms for ‘ox’ compound ‘snake-handed’ (cf. Lucretius 2:538 anguimanos elephants, 5:1301 bōves Lucas ... anguizmois), made up of cognates of Lat. anguis and palma (OIr. lám ‘hand’), i.e. *anghwi-pfAmōn. This makes more sense than A.J. Van Windekens’ *ang-olmō(n) ‘bent-being’ (i.e. with curved trunk; Le tokharien 1 [Louvain, 1976], 337) or J.E. Rasmussen’s *hzwpbhi-k‘hymah2 (allegedly elephant as ‘servant’, as in it and form meaning to Gk. ἐμφρίσσως. Tocharian and Indo-European Studies 2 [1988] 166–183; Acta Linguistica Hafniensia 21 [1988], 92). Cf. J. Puhvel, HS 106.

Also in the Hebrew hapax šen-ha-bbim ‘tooth of elephants’ (usually simply šen ‘tooth’ or qarnāt šēn ‘horns of tooth’ for ‘ivory’). On the increasingly dubious relevance of Skt. ḫīha- ‘elephant’ see M. Mayrhofer, Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoirischen (Heidelberg, 1988), 194.

In languages closer to elephant habitats the distinction was clearer from the start: Vedic for ‘elephant’ was mṛgāḥ ḥastin- ‘beast with hand’, and ‘ivory’ was Skt. hastidantam. Sumerian had am si ‘elephant’ (am sign seemingly made up of gud + kur ‘mountain ox’, si ‘horn’; thus ‘horned mountain ox’) and ka+ud amis ‘ivory’ (literally ‘tooth of elephant’, like Akk. šinnu [pəɾ]. In modern languages such derivation has reasserted itself (e.g. German elfenbein, Danish ålfsten).

See Chicago Hittite Dictionary 3.1 (1980), 12–13; J. Tischler, Hethitisches etymologisches Glossar 2 (1990), 14–15. J.-C. Billigmeier (A Linguistic Happening in Memory of Ben Schwartz [Louvain, 1988], 321–331) suggested that Lat. Luca bōs is in reality lucabos, a late Asianic (“neo-Hittite”, perhaps Lycian) survival of lahpa- (presumably meaning ‘elephant’ in addition to ‘ivory’), and that bōs Luca was a Roman folk interpretation. This hunch puts a lot of faith in Pyrrhus’ Hellenistic army employing eastern mahouts who instantly taught their exotic term for ‘elephant’ to the Italic natives under battle conditions. More probably bōs Luca is a genuine “nativism”, like Sumerian amis (see fn. 5); cf. R. Arena, Rivista di filologia 116 (1988), 185–197.

Loc. cit. in fn. 3. Lehmann (see fn. 1) erroneously claims that Th. von Grienberger (SÖAW 142/8 [1900], 225) denied an early relationship of ulbandus and elephant-; G. did exactly the opposite, postulating an Indo-European prototype of both.
(Akk. alpu, etc.), but it established a likely term for ‘ivory’ in the Syrian-Anatolian-Helladic orbit of the latter half of the second millennium, one that has no plausible Indo-European origin or connection with ‘camel’ words such as Gothic ulbandus.


This suggestion may have been an inspired one, for it appears that Hitti supplies what may be either a borrowing source or a cognate for ulbandus. There is the word huwalpant- which means ‘humpback’, as in the teratology lists of birth omens (KBo XIII 34 IV 3–4 takku SAL-za hâsi n-as [...] huwalpanza ‘if a woman gives birth and [the baby] [is] a humpback...’). There is further the derived noun hu(wa)lpanzina-, hulpanzana- ‘hump, protuberance, embossment’, both in an anatomical sense (KBo XIII 31 I 6) and referring to metal ornamentation (e.g. KUB XLII 69 Vs. 25–26 GİR \(\text{URU^1}\) Hatta arahan[da]... [...] 30 hulpanzas GUŠ[KIN ‘swords of Hatti, all around thirty embossments of gold’); these were of the type of the Homeric ἐξόρως [or φύογαρ-νόν] ἀργυρόηλον ‘silver-studded sword’). From a denominative verb hulpanzina- ‘emboss’ there exist both Hittite and Luwian-type passive participles, e.g. KBo II 1 I 38 1 \(\text{URUD}^1\) GİR TA GUŠKIN hîwâl<pa>zinan ‘one bronze dagger embossed with gold’; KBo XX 47, 11–12 nu-za LUGAL-us ... [hu]lpanzinanda wasiyazi ‘the king dons embossed regalia’; KUB XII I IV 34 GUŠKIN hulpanzinaimes ‘[shoes] embossed with gold’\(^10\).

The external similarities of hu(wa)lpant- and ulband- require little comment. The Gothic u-stem is unexpected; considering the Luwian elements such as the participle hulpanzinaimai-; one would have looked for an i-stem *hu(wa)lpanti- as perhaps underlying the derivative hulpanzina-. The camel being called ‘humpback’ is self-explanatory. As Indo-European reconstruction can serve *Hwb(h)o- related etymologically to Skt. ulbam, Lat. volba ‘uterus, womb’, and perhaps to Hittite huelpi- ‘newborn’. The question whether ulbandus is a borrowing from Anatolian into early Germanic or cognate Indo-European remains open; perhaps the typically Anatolian -nt- suffix tends to tilt the balance in favor of borrowing, thus giving Schrader’s intuition its full due.

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Slovenska in germanska beseda za kamelo (npr. gotsko ulbandus in starocerkvenoslovansko velibodi) se navadno povezuje z besedo elefant 'slon' (grško ἐλέφαντ-, grško ἐλέφαντ-). Ta povezava je sporna: ἔλεφαντ- spada k hetitskemu lahpa- 'slonova kost', vtem ko je sorodnik besede ulbandus hetitsko huwalpant- 'grbavec' in njegove izpeljanke s pomenom 'grba' ali 'izboklina'.