The Charles G. Leland Collection of Romani Books and Manuscripts

Adrian S. Edwards

Introduction

Charles G. Leland (1824-1903) was a man of many interests. To the literary world, he is perhaps best known as the creator of the Hans Breitmann Ballads, comic verses in the German-English dialect of the north-eastern United States that were long popular on both sides of the Atlantic. In the field of American journalism, he is at best a minor figure associated with a broad range of newspapers and magazines, including a brief period as editor of *Vanity Fair*. Ethnographers know him for his work on subjects as diverse as Passamaquoddy folktales, Tuscan legends and witchcraft. Linguists know him for his pioneering work on the languages of the Roma or Gypsy people.¹ It is Leland’s interest in this final category that forms the focus of this article. For the period from 1869 until his death, he repeatedly returned to the subject and earned the honorary title of ‘The Rye’, a Romani term for a Gypsy king.

Leland spent much of his life in Britain, with extensive periods working in the Round Reading Room of the British Museum. Today, fifty-four bound volumes of material with a Leland provenance are held at the British Library. They include printed books by Leland and others (many inscribed, annotated or containing inserts), periodical articles and newspaper clippings, correspondence, publication drafts, vocabulary lists and various kinds of other research notes. Almost everything relates to the Roma people, their languages or their culture. Standard biographical reference sources such as *The American National Biography Online*² and *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*³ record Leland material at Princeton, Harvard, Yale, New York Public Library and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, but none refers to the material held in London. The purpose of this article is therefore to provide a survey of the Leland volumes at the British Library and establish how they relate to his life and research.

Charles G. Leland⁴

Charles Godfrey Leland was born on 15 August 1824 in Philadelphia. His parents Charles and Charlotte were financially comfortable and sent him to a series of well-respected private schools, ending at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) from which he graduated in 1845. Aged twenty-one, Leland then embarked on his first trip to Europe. Over the course of three years, he pursued postgraduate studies at Heidelberg, Munich and the Sorbonne, and travelled around Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Poland and the Netherlands, before returning home.
via Portsmouth. An attempt to establish a legal practice in Philadelphia in 1848 ultimately failed, and Leland turned instead to journalism. He contributed articles and reviews to a succession of magazines, newspapers and reference works in Philadelphia and New York, and took on editorial roles at several others, including *Vanity Fair* during the early part of the American Civil War. In 1855 he published a compendium of travel pieces and light verse called *Meister Karl’s Sketch-Book*, the first of at least fifty monographs and pamphlets to be issued in his lifetime, and early the following year he married Eliza Bella Fisher (generally known as Isabel), who was to become his life-long partner.

1857 saw the publication of the first of his humorous German-English dialect verses centred on the fictional character of Hans Breitmann, ‘a robust, beer-guzzling, giant of a man who matched the American spirit’. The poems initially appeared in a variety of different periodicals, including *Graham’s Magazine*, but such was their popularity that they were soon brought together and republished in pamphlet form on both sides of the Atlantic. Leland enlisted in the Union Army during the American Civil War of 1861-65, although he continued to write throughout and afterwards represented *The Philadelphia Press* on a promotional railway tour across the Great Plains. This is where he encountered Kaw, Apache and Chippewa (Ojibwe) peoples, and when his interest in ethnography appears to have developed. By 1869 he was financially stable following the receipt of a significant inheritance from his father. Prompted in part by concerns over the appearance of Breitmann editions in Britain, Leland travelled to Europe where he and his wife remained for the next ten years.

Following a tour of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy, Charles and Isabel settled in London, but they rarely stayed at any one location for long. Leland developed a particular interest in the Gypsies that he encountered on his frequent travels. The Oatlands Park Hotel near Weybridge (Surrey) and the south-coast town of Brighton (Sussex) were regular destinations, and at the latter he gained the trust of a group of Roma travellers who regularly camped at Devil’s Dyke on the South Downs. Matty Cooper in particular answered his questions about Romani and appears to have given him language lessons. In return, Leland ‘gradually came to be looked upon as a sort of general news agent and letter writer for all the Romanies in the South’.

When in London, Leland was a regular visitor to the library of the British Museum where he undertook research on the Roma and from 1874 compiled miscellaneous entries for Johnson’s *Cyclopedia*. Attempts to correspond with the leading Roma scholar George Borrow initially came to nothing, but they were eventually introduced to one another by a mutual acquaintance in the Round Reading Room, probably in 1872. Borrow was discourteous and unhelpful. Other contacts proved more fruitful, including Museum librarian Richard Garnett who later forwarded material that he thought might be of interest.

---

5 For the period 1849 to c. 1863, these were primarily *Sartain’s Union Magazine* (Philadelphia), *Drawing-Room Journal* (Philadelphia), *Knickerbocker Magazine* (New York), *Appleton’s New American Cyclopædia* (New York), and the *New York Times*.
8 Joel Athey, ‘Leland, Charles Godfrey’ in *American National Biography Online* (op. cit.).
10 Pennell, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 139.
12 George Borrow (1803-1881), author of *The Zincali* (1841), *The Romany Rye* (1857), and *Romano Lavo-Lil* (1874).
13 Pennell op. cit., p. 177: ‘or else it was Dr. Garnett writing from the British Museum to enclose a song in the dialect of the Transylvanian Gypsies’. Richard Garnett (1835-1906), Assistant Keeper, and from 1890 Keeper, in the Department of Printed Books. The corresponding letter can be found in Add. MS. 37174, f. 9.
1872-73 saw the writing and publication of two significant works. The *Egyptian Sketch-Book*14 documents Leland’s river voyage along the Nile, and refers in passing to the ‘gipsies and jugglers’ that he encounters there. This was followed in the autumn of 1873 by his first book of Romani studies, *The English Gipsies and their Language*,15 whose success is indicated by the publication of three further editions soon after. It is at about this time that Leland developed friendships with two established Romani scholars, Francis Hinde Groome16 and E. H. Palmer,17 both of whom were to become travelling companions and regular correspondents. Ever the explorer, Leland was in Russia during the winter of 1875-76, where he stayed with an American diplomat in St Petersburg and made a short excursion to Moscow. He was delighted to come across Roma in both cities, listening to their songs and successfully communicating with them using the Romani dialect he had learned in England. These encounters were later described in a two-part article for *Macmillan’s Magazine*.18 Given his increasing fluency in Romani, Leland would have appreciated the similarities and differences in Romani speech across the Continent, but in the summer of 1876 on a road near Bath he made a significant discovery. Up until that point, the research community had been aware of just one Gypsy language, spoken right across Europe, albeit in a variety of regional forms. This was Romani, a language with its distant origins in north-west India that had been brought via the Middle East to Europe from the fourteenth century onwards. On that road in the West Country, Leland found a traveller who spoke something entirely different: a language that came to be known as Shelta. Over the next three years, Leland collected more evidence and concluded that this second language originated in Ireland and comprised a sub-stratum of Irish Gaelic mixed with English and Romani. Shelta was described in Leland’s 1882 publication *The Gypsies*,19 and this is perhaps his most significant contribution to philology.

From 1879 to 1884 Leland and his wife were back in the United States. They discovered that there were now Romani travellers in Pennsylvania and even one Irish tinker who spoke some Shelta. Two other interests developed at this time: returning to Native American ethnography, Leland collected and published legends from the Passamaquoddy people of north-eastern Maine;20 and in the field of education, ‘He pioneered the teaching of industrial arts by developing practical classroom methods’,21 writing pamphlets on the subject and helping to establish the Public School of Industrial Art in Philadelphia.

But by the summer of 1884 Charles and Isabel were in England again, never to return to North America. They were followed to Europe few weeks later by their niece, Elizabeth Pennell,23 who was to become a close companion. Despite the onset of gout, Leland continued to travel widely around Britain and across the Continent, meeting with Gypsies whenever he could. His correspondence shows that Brighton was again a frequent destination, alongside Florence and the German spa town of Bad Homburg vor der Höhe.

Leland’s academic profile was on the rise. A paper on Shelta delivered at the 1886 Oriental Congress in Vienna ‘roused more interest than the chapter in *The Gypsies*’,24 probably because he was now reaching out to a wider international academic community. In 1887-88, he helped

---

16 Francis Hinde Groome (1851-1902), founder member of the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*.
21 Sloane, op. cit., p. 258.
23 Elizabeth Robins Pennell (1855-1936), cited as Mrs Joseph Pennell in British Museum documentation.
found the Gypsy Lore Society, becoming its first president (1888-92) and an early contributor to their Journal. He wrote a long piece in German for the Ethnologische Mitteilungen and, at the invitation of Professor Anton Herrmann, was guest of honour at a meeting of the Ethnological Society of Budapest (although he did not understand much of what was said as the proceedings were held in Hungarian). Further conferences took him to Paris, Stockholm and Christiania (Oslo), and trips to London and Brighton continued for a while. A book entitled Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling appeared in 1891 and was the last of his major works on Romani, although his niece’s biography indicates that there may have been plans to write a book on Shelta with John Sampson and Dr Meyer. Generally, however, the period marked a shift in focus towards other ethnographical interests such as English slang, sea shanties, witchcraft and Tuscan folklore (particularly stories featuring the reappearance in the Middle Ages of the Roman poet Virgil as a magician).

For the last decade of his life, Leland was repeatedly weakened by gout and influenza. Travel beyond Tuscany became less frequent, and even the annual trips to the spa at Bad Homburg ceased after 1900. Despite ill health, he continued to write and negotiate with publishers in London and New York. Both Leland and his wife were, however, becoming seriously unwell. Isabel died in the summer of 1902; she had rarely been separated from her husband in forty years of marriage. Charles Leland lived for a further seven and a half months, but died among friends and family in Florence on 20 March 1903. His ashes were sent to Philadelphia, where they are kept in Laurel Hill Cemetery with those of his wife.

Leland materials at the British Library

Researchers at the British Library today have access to fifty-four bound volumes of material formerly owned by Charles G. Leland. They include published books, various kinds of printed ephemera, manuscript research notes and original correspondence. The collection is physically divided in two, reflecting its earlier custodianship at the British Museum where it was split between two independently managed departments, Printed Books and Manuscripts, each of which had its own binding, cataloguing, shelfmarking and storage arrangements. As a result, it can today be difficult to gain an impression of the collection as a whole.

Survey of the printed books

The part of the collection now in the printed books area of the British Library comprises thirty-eight bound volumes, representing forty-one works. Thirty-seven are individually published books and pamphlets (some now bound together), three are extracts from periodicals (ranging from one article to five consecutive issues), and one comprises an album of miscellaneous ephemera. All the volumes were initially kept in the shelfmark range 886.k.-m, where they were in part interfiled with Basque and Occitan books acquired from other sources. The album of miscellanea was subsequently relocated to shelfmark 1855.b.18, owing to its larger size. Several of the volumes, including the album, were rebound during the course of the twentieth century. A list of the materials in this part of the collection is given as Appendix I.

25 Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (Edinburgh), i (July 1888) – iii (April 1892). It was repeatedly refounded in the twentieth century and continues today as Romani Studies.
26 Leland’s personal copy is at 886.l.36.
27 Anton (in German sources) or Antal (in Hungarian ones) Herrmann (1851-1926), Roma researcher and Hungarian academic.
31 886.l.19 and 886.l.26 are two copies of the same work, counted separately here.
Several observations can be made by examining the list. One item was printed in 1702 (886.k.12), and would have been acquired by Leland as an antiquarian book. This volume has undergone extensive conservation treatment which has resulted in the removal of any evidence of earlier ownership that it may once have had. It even lacks the ‘Leland Gift’ label that the Department of Printed Books would have inserted at the time of acquisition, and which survives in all but one of the other volumes in this part of the collection. The other books, pamphlets, periodical parts and newspaper clippings were published in the period from 1810 to 1891. Leland’s interest in the Roma developed after his move to Europe in 1869. It is probable therefore that the works published before 1869 were all acquired by him second-hand, whereas those issued later probably comprise a few second-hand items alongside rather more titles acquired new at time of publication. The matter is not, however, an easy one to resolve. Even the copy of his own 1873 work *The English Gypsies and their Language* at 886.k.3 contains an inscription from Leland to a Mary R. Stan (?), which suggests that the book only became part of Leland’s collection at a later date (although the inscription could have been written but the book never presented). It is notable that there are no items published after 1891. This is the last year that he and Isabel spent any time in England; from this point onwards they travelled principally around Tuscany, with only occasional trips as far as Bad Homburg in Germany. It is tempting to hypothesize that this set of books was left in England in the care of his niece Elizabeth Pennell, who continued to be based primarily in London until the middle of the First World War. Books collected by Leland during the final twelve years of his life must have been destined for either a different home or for dispersal.

Everything in the printed book collection is in some way relevant to Leland’s study of the Roma. Seventeen (41%) of the forty-one works reflect his interest in their languages, as they comprise descriptive grammars and dictionaries, etymological studies of vocabulary, or attempts to establish the origins of Romani and Shelta. The remainder relate to his interests in Gypsy folktales and ballads, or the history and culture of the Roma across Europe, leaving just a handful of titles on fortune-telling and novels with a Gypsy protagonist. Setting aside Romani, the books themselves are written in six European languages, evidence perhaps of Leland’s linguistic abilities and international outlook. Of the corpus of forty-one items, 41% contain texts in English, 37% in German, 10% in Italian and in 7% French. Just one work is in Spanish, which is unlikely to have presented any difficulty, whereas the two books and numerous cuttings in Hungarian are likely to have presented more of a challenge to him. Together, they represent works published in Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Austria-Hungary and the United States; with the exception of Spain, these are all countries that Leland visited between 1869 and 1891.

The research value of Leland’s printed books is enhanced by the range of inscriptions, inserts and manuscript annotations that seventeen of them contain. Seven volumes are clearly inscribed or annotated in Leland’s own hand. For the most part, the annotations comprise a small number of minor corrections to Romani terms, although in one instance (886.l.23) several new additions have been made to a vocabulary list. Seven volumes, including two of the above, also contain inserts that were probably added by him: mostly newspaper clippings,

---

32 886.l.29 for example contains an inscription to Leland from William Blackmore, but it was published in 1816, eight years before Leland’s birth.
33 886.l.24 and 886.l.30 for example were published in 1873 and 1886, and contain material addressed to Leland by Hubert Smith and Anton Hermann respectively.
34 Material covers most parts of Europe, from Norway to Southern Italy, and from Spain to Russia, with perhaps an emphasis on England and Austria-Hungary. Beyond Europe, there is a study of the Gypsy peoples of India, a single chapter on the Roma who had recently migrated to the north-eastern United States, and passing references to the Gypsies in Egypt.
35 886.k.3; 886.l.23; 886.l.27; 886.l.28.(3.); 886.l.31; 886.m.6; and 886.m.9.
The Charles G. Leland Collection of Romani Books and Manuscripts

but also other material. Another six items contain either inscriptions or inserts placed there by others, including Hubert Smith, William Blackmore, Anton Hermann, W. Marja and J. Sanders. Smith and Hermann were known to Leland, but the others could simply be the former owners of books that Leland acquired on the second-hand market. The inscriptions and inserts are summarized in Appendix I.

In several cases an annotation or insert, or even just the presence of a book in the collection, adds to the narrative of Leland’s life. In Pennell’s biography we read about the unsuccessful nature of Leland’s early attempts to engage with George Borrow, a leading writer on the Roma. Two of Borrow’s works are represented in Leland’s book collection: a copy of the 1874 dictionary Romano Lavo-Lil (886.m.6) and an 1878 Italian adaptation of The Zincali (886.k.2). Both were published after their difficult meeting at the British Museum, indicating perhaps that Leland still acknowledged the value of Borrow’s research even if they did not see eye-to-eye on a personal level. The dictionary even contains a few of Leland’s manuscript additions.

Elizabeth Pennell mentions that a number of Romani scholars, including Hubert Smith and Bath C. Smart, wrote to Leland in 1873 on the publication of The English Gipsies and their Language. The copy of Smith’s Tent Life in Norway (886.l.24) is inscribed from Smith to Leland on 10 November 1873 and contains a photograph of Smith taken just a few weeks earlier. Could this volume have been sent as a gift along with an as yet unfound congratulatory letter? Meanwhile, the inserts pasted into Leland’s copy of the second edition of The Dialect of the English Gypsies (886.l.23) by Bath C. Smart and Henry T. Crofton are more curious. Pennell implies a friendly letter: ‘Bath Smart, from Manchester, the photograph of old Mrs Petulengro sent as a guarantee of his genuineness, and also his collaborator, Crofton’. However, tipped inside this volume are two leaves of Leland’s manuscript notes which begin by saying that Crofton, ‘an entire stranger to me’, wrote ‘under the revision of Dr Smart, the most insolent and coarse letter I ever received in my life’. Perhaps not a congratulatory letter then.

The numerous reviews pasted into the album of miscellanea at 1855.b.18 provide evidence of how Leland’s books were received at their time of publication in Britain and America. Among the reviews are other items that Leland appears to have set aside to keep, perhaps reflecting something of his curious nature and personal connections. They include the business card of a rat killer named Matthias Cooper, almost certainly Old Matty Cooper who in 1870-71 first taught Leland to speak Romani up on the South Downs above Brighton.

Survey of the manuscripts

A list of the twelve bound volumes of Leland manuscripts is given as Appendix 2. The material consists of two elements: ten volumes of the main Leland Gift and two volumes donated by the publishing firm Messrs Whittaker and Co.

36 886.k.2 (watercolour of a young woman); 886.k.13 (drawing of a Celtic knot); 886.l.23 (notes about H. T. Crofton and Bath Smart); 886.l.24 (photograph of Hubert Smith); 886.l.28.(1.) (photograph of Hotel zum Gold, Kreuz in Ischl); 886.m.9 (letter from G. Alick Wilson); and the album at 1855.b.18 (photograph of Emil Ponori Thewrewk and drawing of a ‘Gipsy Girl – Jericho’).

37 886.l.12; 886.l.30; 886.l.35; 886.l.38; and 886.m.5.

38 Hubert Smith, later Smith-Stanier (1823-1911), author of Tent Life with Gipsies in Norway (London, 1873).

39 Bath Charles Smart (1838-1887), author of The Dialect of the English Gypsies (London, 1854); 2nd edn (London, 1875).


41 Henry Thomas Crofton (1848-1928), Manchester lawyer and antiquarian, collaborator with Bath C. Smart.
Leland’s notes relating to the Roma and their languages

Aside from the correspondence, Leland’s autograph research notes on the Roma and their languages represent the largest category of manuscript material. Vol. 1 of the Leland Gift and the two Whittaker items comprise Romani vocabularies with English glosses. None is organized alphabetically, and no other organizational arrangement is discernible. Nor are there any clues concerning when or where the words were collected, although the Whittaker volumes expressly state that they relate to the English dialect of Romani. A linguistic examination of the content might clarify this and establish whether there is any relationship between these two vocabularies. Further, shorter word lists can be found elsewhere, particularly in vol. 2 where they are bound alongside longer texts in Romani and some accounts of meetings with individual Roma travellers. This volume is dated 1871-75, which is the period when Leland was based in England (London, Brighton, Weybridge, etc.), hinting at a potential connection with his 1873 publication *The English Gipsies and their Language*. Leland and E. H. Palmer travelled to Wales together in the summer of 1878, and the two short lists of Shelta words that they compiled near Aberystwyth are among the papers now in vol. 5.

Some of the manuscripts appear to be drafts prepared for publication. Vol. 4 is entitled ‘Romani Wit and Wisdom’. It has a title page and other introductory material, and the main body of text is peppered with pen and ink drawings. Although undated, it must have been compiled after 1891 as it refers to the International Congress of Orientalists held in London that year; it also mentions *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling*, which appeared in 1890. Pennell alludes to this manuscript in her biography: ‘He now promptly undertook a “Gypsy Decameron,”’ and finished it too, with the name changed to “Romany Wit and Wisdom,” but he never got so far as to publish it.’ Elsewhere, vols 8 and 9 comprise the draft of a work called ‘Gypsy Stories’.

---

42 Subsequently incorporated into the chapter ‘Shelta, the Tinkers’ Talk’ in Charles G. Leland, *The Gypsies* (1882).
43 Pennell, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 211.
Fig. 3. Romani Wit and Wisdom’. Add. MS. 37171, f. 1.
The introduction is complete, as are the first few dozen fables which comprise the body of the text. Many of those at the beginning of vol. 8 have Romani and English titles (‘Muketar ko djel ish-kole = The Fly who went to School’, etc.), but later ones have just an English one, and by vol. 9 there are just spaces left blank for a heading to be added later. In a few places, Leland has appended one or two paragraphs of analysis at the end of a story. The manuscript as a whole has the feel of a work in progress. It may in fact be the ‘stories and sketches’ that Pennell says her uncle began to assemble in the winter of 1898-99, while he was weak with influenza and gout. Elsewhere, midway through vol. 5, there is a curious twenty-six page manuscript booklet of Romani text (‘Akovo Lil see o tatcho …’) and striking geometric symbols in red, grey and black. It has not been possible to establish how this draft relates to Leland’s research. The two volumes of Whittaker vocabularies described above may also fall into this category of publication drafts. Even though they lack introductory matter and structure, it must be significant that they had been in the hands of a London publisher. In addition, Pennell transcribes a letter from E. H. Palmer to Leland in which he states: ‘I notice with much pleasure that you propose to publish a Gipsy-English dictionary’. A handful of texts bound elsewhere in the Leland Gift could either be drafts for publication or notes for oral presentations. Vol. 5, for example, contains two such items: the first relates in some way to his paper ‘On the English Rommany or Gipsy Language’, read before the 1878 Oriental Congress held in Florence, and the second is simply entitled ‘Shelta’. Despite being bound as part of the manuscript collection, some of the research materials are in fact published pamphlets or journal articles that one might reasonably have expected to find among the printed books. Vol. 5 contains three such items: the Denham Tracts (a mid-nineteenth century tract from Yorkshire on fairies, witches and Gypsies); David MacRitchie’s article ‘Shelta: the Cairns’ Language’, as published in the Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness; and Janet Tuckey’s inscribed copy of her 1874 publication Told near Windsor (a Romani ballad with English translation). Some of the material reflects Leland’s personal interest in the work of others in the field. A typescript dated 1888 bound at the front of vol. 5 transcribes a bibliography of English Gypsies as compiled by Henry T. Crofton. Later in the same volume, a piece by Crofton and Bath C. Smart entitled ‘The Dialect of the English Gypsies’ appears to be an extract from their publication of the same name, here copied out by hand and bearing the signature of Francis Hinde Groome. Nearby, three pages of notes on Shelta accompany a letter from John Sampson. The volume ends with five early photographs, all portraits. Three are those reproduced in the second volume of Pennell’s biography with the captions ‘Old Matty Cooper’, ‘Sylvester Boswell’, and ‘An Old Dye’. The subjects of the other portraits remain to be identified.

Leland’s notes relating to other topics

While most of the manuscripts reflect Leland’s interest in the Roma, two volumes have a different focus. Vol. 10 contains six short vocabularies of Yiddish (here called Schmussen, Judisch Deutsch and German Hebrew), and one each relating to ‘Circus Slang’, the ‘Cattle Range Idiom’, and the English Pidgin or trade language of China. None explicitly states where, when or how the material was gathered. The Chinese material, however, became the subject of Pidgin-English Sing-Song, an 1876 compendium of humorous verse and stories. The appendix to the published work comprises several pages of Pidgin English vocabulary which appear to incorporate many

44 Ibid., vol. ii, p. 404.
46 Comparison shows that the text is quite different from that of the Shelta chapter in The Gypsies.
47 David MacRitchie (1851-1925), Scottish folklorist and Roma researcher, author of Accounts of the Gypsies in India (London, 1886). The article on Shelta was published in Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, xxiv (1899-1901), pp. 429-68.
48 Charles G. Leland, Pidgin-English Sing-Song, or Songs and Stories in the China-English Dialect (London, 1876).
of the terms found in the handwritten list now in vol. 10, albeit supplemented with material from other sources. With respect to the Jewish vocabularies, Leland reports that he was ‘becoming quite proficient in Schmussen, or the low-German Hebrew dialect. One does not, as with Gypsies, have to go far and wide to find the talkers of it.’

Superficially at least, vol. 3 of the Leland Gift appears to be quite different from all the others. It comprises Leland’s travel journal from his voyage along the Nile in 1872-73, which was later to feature in his publication The Egyptian Sketch-Book. The Roma presence is still felt, however, as most of his notes are written in Romani.

Correspondence

Although a small number of letters can be found scattered throughout the Leland collection, the correspondence is for the most part concentrated in vols 6 and 7 of the Leland Gift, where several hundred letters are arranged in two broad chronological sequences (1867 to 1876 and 1878 to 1899). Roma, Romani and Shelta are again the recurring themes throughout. Many, if not all, of the letters reproduced or cited in Pennell’s biography can be found here. There is both correspondence to and from Leland, allowing researchers to follow discussions with collaborators and fellow authors such as Francis Hinde Groome, Henry T. Crofton, E. H. Palmer, Hubert Smith, David MacRitchie, Anton Herrmann, John Sampson, and William Ibbetson. Letters of note elsewhere in the wider collection include two that supply Leland with further information about Shelta: one is from the Edinburgh University undergraduate George Alick Wilson; the other is from Frederick Sherman Arnold, a student at Harvard University.

Provenance

All the Leland material described in this article previously formed part of the British Museum collection until 1973, at which point custodianship transferred to the newly established British Library. Archival evidence shows that it initially arrived at the Museum in three batches over the course of thirteen years.

Receipt at the British Museum

The first batch, comprising all the printed books and most of the manuscripts, was received as a donation from Leland’s niece, Elizabeth Pennell, in 1905. The gift is recorded in the Keepers’ Reports:

Report by Dr Warner 11 October stating that Mrs Jos[eph] Pennell offers to present a collection of MSS. and printed books relating to the Romany language and people formed by the late Charles Godfrey Leland (author of works on gypsies), together with his correspondence on the subject.

50 Principally in Vol. 2 at Add. MS. 37169 and the printed books at 886.l.30 and 886.m.9.
51 William John Ibbetson (1861-1892), a founder of the Gypsy Lore Society.
52 George Alick Wilson (b. 1869?), of Inverness. The letter, dated 3 February 1890, is bound into the printed book at 886.m.9.
The minutes record that conditions were attached to the manuscripts: they were to be ‘entirely reserved from the public for 25 years’ and ‘preserved bound and kept together, as the Leland Collection’. The printed books, however, could be made available straight away. On receipt, the material was shared between the Department of Printed Books (principally the published monographs, extracts and clippings) and the Department of Manuscripts (mainly research notes, draft texts, and correspondence). The division, however, was not a clear-cut one and personal correspondence, sketches, newspaper clippings and the occasional photograph are found across both areas. As stated earlier, the printed books were initially sent to shelfmarks beginning 886, whereas the manuscripts became numbers 37168-74 in the Additional Manuscripts sequence.

The second batch consists of the two volumes of Romani to English vocabulary now at Add. MSS. 38059-60. These came from Messrs Whittaker and Co., a publishing firm based in the City of London close to St Paul’s Cathedral. The letter of offer, dated 7 July 1910, is held in the correspondence files of the former Department of Manuscripts. It asks for the material to be kept from public access and reserves the right to publish it at a later date. However, a subsequent letter received a few days later rescinds this request and states that it can be made freely available. Whittaker and Co. had in fact published a handful of Leland’s works, including most recently *Elementary Leatherwork* in 1894. It seems probable that these manuscript volumes represent an unsuccessful attempt on Leland’s part to convince the firm to publish a Romani vocabulary or dictionary. That the volumes were neither returned to Leland during his lifetime nor sent to his niece after his death may suggest a serious intention to publish at some point.

The third and final consignment was again presented by Elizabeth Pennell. The batch that was to become Add. MSS. 39559-61 was offered ‘as an addition to 37168-37174’. Her letter dated 25 March 1917 in the departmental correspondence file states: ‘Recently another of his mss. has come into my possession’, but there is no indication where these short stories and miscellaneous vocabulary lists had been during the intervening years. As before, a twenty-five year embargo on public access was requested.

**Pennell and the main sequence of Leland materials**

At some point after publishing his *Memoirs*, Leland entrusted the writing of his biography to Elizabeth Pennell. Besides being his niece and close companion, she was already an established biographer having written a significant work on Mary Wollstonecraft. In the preface to her uncle’s biography, she states: ‘My chief authorities in writing the Life of Charles Godfrey Leland have been the “Memoirs” he published during his lifetime and the papers he left to me after his death.’ Given that the sources for so many of Pennell’s quotations can be found among the letters and documents now at the British Library, it seems reasonable to conclude that these are the papers that Leland left to Pennell, and that – once the draft biography had been accepted by her publisher – she then passed them to the British Museum. Although it is not known where the manuscripts were at the time of Leland’s death, it seems reasonable to conclude that the main batch was with her from at least 1903 until 1905 (the date of donation to the British Museum), a period when she and her husband were living in London. The preface to the biography is dated ‘London, 14 Buckingham Street, Strand, July 10, 1906’; this suggests that the preface was in fact written after the donation of the manuscripts to the museum and after the draft text had been accepted by her co-publishers in Britain and the United States.

---

56 British Library Western Manuscripts. Departmental Correspondence (1910).
57 British Library Western Manuscripts. Register of Additional Manuscripts (1913-22).
58 British Library Western Manuscripts. Departmental Correspondence (1917).
59 ‘It had for long been understood between us that I was to finish the “Memoirs” of my uncle, Charles Godfrey Leland, if he did not live to finish them himself’. Pennell. op. cit., vol. i, p. 1.
60 Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Boston, Mass., 1884).
The Charles G. Leland Collection of Romani Books and Manuscripts

The printed books may have followed exactly the same path, but unfortunately concrete evidence is lacking. As noted above, the most recent book in the collection was published in 1891, which was the last year that Leland came to London. His personal letters demonstrate how he and Isabel frequently moved from one city to another, staying as long-term guests at larger hotels or occasionally lodging with friends. This would have hampered his ability to maintain a personal library. His books and papers today are dispersed across several locations, and it is likely that this was the situation during his lifetime too. Given that Elizabeth Pennell and her husband were already settled in London by 1891, it is possible that this segment of Leland’s printed book collection was entrusted to Elizabeth at an earlier date than the letters and research notes.

It is not known whether the idea of donating material to the British Museum originated with Leland or Pennell: they both made use of the Museum’s Reading Room and both were acquainted with Richard Garnett in the Department of Printed Books.

The Leland Collection as a research resource

Elizabeth Pennell appears to have made extensive use of the materials now at the British Library during the compilation of her uncle’s biography. For her, the focus was the life and personal networks of Leland himself, and she was therefore drawn primarily towards an examination of the correspondence rather than the printed books, ephemera or research notes. As already identified, some of manuscript material would not in any case have been in her possession at the time of writing (the two-volume Romani vocabulary received from Whittaker and Co., and the Gypsy Stories and the volume of miscellaneous vocabularies that Pennell acquired at some point after the publication of her biography in 1906).

There is undoubtedly further work to be done, both in terms of analysing individual papers or assessing the collection as a whole. The Appendices below describe a range of source materials that may still prove useful to linguists of Roma languages in the nineteenth century or to cultural historians interested in Gypsy folklore and humour. In the field of linguistics, Leland was in essence a gentleman scholar: although he earned the respect of established academics such as professors E. H. Palmer at Cambridge and Anton Herrmann at Budapest, his notes sometimes lack essential contextual information: the vocabularies and samples of Romani speech, for example, rarely state where and when they were collected, and in the case of the short stories and the longer vocabulary lists, he may even have merged data from multiple locations. This adds further uncertainty to an already complex situation of regional dialects spoken by a people that routinely travelled freely across national borders. In some cases, of course, it is possible to deduce where the material was gathered by reference to Leland’s published memoirs, Pennell’s biography or the files of correspondence. Most of the material was clearly collected in England, and reflects a variety of spoken Romani that Leland and others often call ‘Romanichal’ – part of the dialect continuum that linguists today generally call Northern Romani. The dialects that he encountered in Wales, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, Italy and Russia would also have fallen into this broad category, explaining why he was able to make himself understood with Gypsies in St Petersburg and Moscow using the Romani he had learned in England. During his travels in Austria-Hungary and other parts of central and eastern Europe, Leland’s notes are more likely to reflect other dialect groups, such as Central Romani (e.g. Romungro and Vlax Romani) or possibly even Balkan Romani. A closer examination of the manuscripts by linguists may provide clarification and shed light on Leland’s understanding of dialectal variation. Leland’s

---

62 For Leland, there is the letter in Vol. 7, discussed above. For Pennell, her preface to Life of Mary Wollstonecraft, states ‘I must here express my thanks to Mr. Garnett, of the British Museum, and to Mr. C. Kegan Paul [the publisher], for the kind assistance they have given me in my work’.

63 Peter Bakker and Hristo Kyuchukov, *What is the Romani language?* (Hatfield, 2000).
notes on Shelta were gathered primarily in Wales, but as already identified, the paperwork also incorporates material supplied by correspondents further afield, such as George Alick Wilson in Scotland. Separately from the issue of where and when material was collected, there are also uncertainties relating to the way in which the words were set down on paper. Leland was working at approximately the same time that standards in phonetic transcription were in beginning to develop.64 Romani and Shelta appear to have been transcribed according to a system of Leland’s own devising, influenced very much by the spelling and pronunciation of late nineteenth-century British and American English. It is not therefore possible to reproduce with absolute certainty the exact pronunciation of some of the words and phrases he documented. This is not, however, to detract from the research value of the material; Leland was working shortly before the study of language acquired many of the characteristics of a scientific discipline, and his work does in fact provide an interesting insight into the development of linguistic research during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Final words

The British Library holds many of Charles G. Leland’s surviving books, research materials and correspondence relating to the Roma and their languages, particularly from the 1870s to 1890s. These items form a significant part of his personal archive, alongside related collections at a number of repositories in the United States. Usage data and general literature searches both suggest that the British Library material is little known among either Romani scholars or those interested in Leland’s life and literary works. The reasons for this are likely to be several: the collection is physically split between the Library’s printed book and manuscript areas, each with their own catalogues and reading rooms; catalogue records for the printed books do not yet contain any provenance data; catalogue records for the manuscripts are brief and give little indication of the range of documentation held; and the collection is geographically distant from the other significant Leland repositories, all of which are located in the north-east of the United States.

Much of the material, especially the correspondence, was used as source material by Elizabeth Pennell in her Charles Godfrey Leland: A Biography. There is, however, potentially important documentation that still remains to be examined. Opportunities exist to learn more about the Romani and Shelta languages at the end of the nineteenth century, to discover more about Roma culture and folklore (for example through the short stories and the compendium of ‘Wit and Wisdom’), to gain further insights into how the Roma were viewed by academics and the wider population, and – I would argue – to unearth still more about the life and intellectual networks of this truly remarkable man.

64 In Britain, Henry Sweet (1845-1912) proposed his Romic system in the early 1880s; then in France in 1886 Paul Passy (1859-1940) established a group of linguists that would by 1897 become the International Phonetic Association, the organization behind the International Phonetic Alphabet which is today the most widespread system in use for the transcription of oral language.
Appendix 1

List of printed books in the Charles G. Leland Collection at the British Library

Arrangement is by current British Library shelfmark as cited in the main online catalogue. Gaps in the shelfmark sequences are filled at shelf by books acquired from other sources. Unless otherwise stated, all volumes contain a label reading ‘Leland Gift’ pasted on the inside of the upper board.


Leland’s own linguistic and historical survey of the Roma in England. Copy appears to have been intended as a gift from Leland. Inscribed (fly-leaf): ‘Oatlands Park Hotel Weybridge. Surrey Dec 11. 1873. To Mary R. Stan [?]. With kindest regards of Charles G. Leland.’

Novel; ‘The Author has always taken great interest in the wild people of whom she writes’. Blind stamped (fly-leaf): ‘Jenvey Bookseller and Stationer Barnstaple’.

886.k.5. James Crabb, *The Gipsies’ Advocate; or Observations on the Origin, Character, Manners, and Habits of the English Gipsies: to which are added many interesting anecdotes on the success that has attended the plans of several benevolent individuals who anxiously desire their conversion to God.* 3rd edn. (London: Nisbet et al., 1832). 199p.
General study of the Roma in England and responses to them among the general population.

886.k.6. James Crabb, *The Gipsies’ Advocate; or Observations on the Origin, Character, Manners, and Habits of the English Gipsies: to which are added many interesting anecdotes on the success that has attended the plans of several benevolent individuals who anxiously desire their conversion to God.* (London: Seeley et al., 1831). 167p.
As above, this being the first edition.

Poem, with footnotes, considering the Roma in England and their origins. Inscribed (title page): ‘F. K. Barker [?]’.

Romani ballad from Transylvania translated into German with accompanying essay.

General study of the Roma in Moldavia and Wallachia (pp. 1-68), Bound with an unrelated work on Roman Gaul.
The Charles G. Leland Collection of Romani Books and Manuscripts

886.k.10. Augusto Jiménez, *Vocabulario del dialecto jitano, con cerca de 3000 palabras y una relacion exacta del caracter, procedencia, usos ... de esta jente*. 2nd edn. (Sevilla: Imprenta del Conciliador, 1853). 118p.
Spanish to Romani vocabulary list, with appendices of prayers, saying, stories, toasts, poems, etc.

Verse dialogue between the Virgin Mary and a Gypsy woman.

German translation of Thomasius’s *Dissertatio Philosophica de Cingaris* (Lipsiae, 1677), an early tract on the Roma people in Europe. Conserved and rebound 1997, and now wanting the ‘Leland Gift’ label.


Burlesque-style poem or libretto, in which one of the main characters is a Gypsy woman.


Linguistic study of Romani as spoken in Slovakia.

Linguistic study of Romani as spoken in Bohemia.

Study of vagrants and travellers in Norway.

Linguistic study of Romani as spoken in England. Based on a paper read by Smart at the Ethnological Section of the British Association, Manchester, 1861. Inserted: clipping of a review of the work published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1875); two leaves of manuscript notes about Crofton and Smart. Also, a few manuscript additions to the Vocabulary. Manuscript material appears to be in the hand of Charles G. Leland.

886.l.25. see 1855.b.18.

Social and linguistic survey of Roma in Germany, with a substantial Romani to German and German to Romani dictionary. (One leaf of manuscript notes, seemingly in Leland’s hand and reported as ‘found, in January, 1926, in a printed book R. Liebich, *Die Zigeuner*, 1863’, is bound as f. 127* into the manuscript volume at Add. MS. 37172.)

Another copy of the previous work. Inscribed (upper cover): ‘Charles G. Leland’.

886.l.28. [Bound volume containing four publications:]
Grammar of Romani as spoken in Slovakia. Inserted: photograph of the Hotel zum Gold, Kreuz in Ischl [Bad Ischl, Austria?].

Offprint of Leland’s two-part journal article in which he reports his encounters with Roma in St Petersburg and Moscow in 1876.


Romani to Hungarian dictionary.

886.l.29. John Hoyland, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits, and present State of the Gypsies; designed to develop the Origin of This Singular People, and to promote the Amelioration of their Condition* (York: the Author, 1816). 265p.

Sixty-three tales and legends from the Roma of Transylvania. Inserted: a manuscript letter in German from Anton Herrmann (Budapest, 1887), addressed to Leland at the Hotel di Roma, Venice; also five Hungarian newspaper clippings relating to the Roma.
The Charles G. Leland Collection of Romani Books and Manuscripts

General history of the Roma. This copy is water damaged and is imperfect, wanting all after p. 432. With a very small number of manuscript annotations, seemingly in the hand of Charles G. Leland.


Linguistic study of Romani, using examples from south-eastern Europe, southern Italy and the French Basque Country. Comprises an addendum to August Friedrich Potts, *Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien* (Halle, 1844-5), and begins with a critical examination of Paspatis’s *Memoir* (see 886.l.37.).

Historical and cultural survey of the Roma in Europe.

Single periodical part. Only article 5 has a Roma subject: Moritz Rosenfeld, ‘Lieder der Zigeuner’, pp. 823-32. Inserted (at front): four leaves of manuscript notes which perhaps record personal meetings (e.g. ‘Sr Wohlegeborn, at Fiume, Agram and Budapest, in November 1886’); one refers to ‘Charles G. Lelan’ [sic].

Bound volume containing the 1891 issues (part 1-5) of an ethnographical periodical from Hungary. Printed among the preliminaries (pp. 2-3) is a German-language introductory letter written by Leland which was read at a meeting of the Society for the Ethnography of Hungary on 7 December 1889. Only one article has a Roma subject: Heinrich von Wlisłocki, ‘Wesen und Wirkungskreis der Zauberfrauen bei den siebenbürgischen Zigeunern’, pp. 33-8.

Linguistic study and dictionary (English to Romani only) of Romani as spoken in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire, including Wallachia and Moldavia. Based on a paper presented to the American Oriental Society on 17 May 1860, and originally published in the Society’s *Journal*, vii (1861), pp. 143-270.

Linguistic study of Romani, most probably as spoken in central Germany. Material was originally presented at a meeting of the Royal Academy of Public Sciences at Erfurt. Inscribed (title page verso): ‘WMajra [?]’.
The Charles G. Leland Collection of Romani Books and Manuscripts

Biography of Methodist minister James Crabb (1774-1851), who worked among the Roma in Hampshire and published several works on their history and social conditions. Inscribed (inside upper cover): ‘J Sanders’.

Linguistic survey and vocabulary of Romani as spoken in England, with some related material such as songs. A few pieces relate to other parts of Europe, for example songs from Russia and Spain. With a small number of manuscript additions in pencil, possibly by Leland.

Historical notes on the Gypsies of India, being for the most part a translation of a Dutch work by M. J. De Goeje, followed by an appendix and some miscellaneous remarks by MacRitchie.

Lecture about the migration of the Roma across Europe.

Leland’s own wide-ranging survey of the Roma, with chapters on the Roma and related peoples in Russia, England, Wales, America and Egypt, as well as family names, stories (in Romani with English translations) and magic spells. The Irish-based language Shelta is also introduced. Inserted (at end): manuscript letter from G. Alick Wilson (Edinburgh, 1890), with observations on the ‘Tinker Argot’ (Shelta). Inscribed (title page): Charles G. Leland.

Miscellanea collected by Leland, assembled into an album by the British Museum. Comprises extracts and clippings from books, newspapers, and periodicals, together with a few single sheet ephemeral items, one photograph, and one pen and ink sketch. Formerly shelved at 886.1.25.
Contents:
Labels (inside upper cover and affixed to f. 1): ‘Leland Gift’ and ‘Clippings from Books, Magazines and Papers’.
Photograph of the Hungarian philologist Dr Emil Ponori Thewrewk (Budapest, 1886), sent to Leland by Ponori.
Extracts from Hungarian- and German-language periodicals (1882-88), including issue 17 (1887) of *Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde*.
Handbill of the song *Gipsy's Warning* (Philadelphia, no date).
Printed title page and preface to Leland's *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling* (London, 1890).
Call for subscribers (undated) for *English Gipsy Ballads*, by E. H. Palmer, Charles G. Leland and Janet Tuckey, to be published by Trübner & Co.
Pen and ink drawing entitled ‘Gipsy Girl – Jericho’.
Matthias Cooper’s business card: ‘Destroying Rats and Mice’.
Entry on ‘Gipsies’, extracted from an unnamed encyclopedia.
Offprint of a story entitled ‘Dowse, the Gipsy’.
Offprint of the article ‘Bivouacking with Hungarian Gipsies’, *Temple Bar*, 75 (1885).
Appendix 2

List of manuscript volumes in the Charles G. Leland Collection at the British Library

A. Leland Gift of Elizabeth Pennell
The bound volumes have the following lettering on their spines: ‘C. G. Leland Collection’, a title as cited in the entries below, ‘Brit. Mus. Presented by Mrs J. Pennell’, and their Add. MS. (Additional Manuscripts) number. These items are listed in the library’s ‘Explore Archives and Manuscripts’ online catalogue, where further descriptions of each volume are provided.


Add. MS. 37171. Charles G. Leland, Vol. IV, Romany Wit and Wisdom (no date). 192 leaves. Draft for an unpublished work. References to the 1891 International Oriental Congress in London and the publishing of Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling in 1891 suggest that this must date from 1891 or later. With a pen and ink title page and several drawings. All material appears to be in the hand of Charles G. Leland.

Add. MS. 37172. Charles G. Leland, Vol. V, Miscellanea on Romany and Shelta (no date). 261 leaves. Selection of texts relating to the Romani and Shelta languages. The manuscript material includes short vocabularies, notes towards papers and articles, transcriptions from printed works, and a few pieces of correspondence. Printed material includes a pamphlet on fairies, witches and Gypsies, a ballad, and an offprint of an article by David MacRitchie. Also five photographs. Contents:
- Denham Tracts: or A Few Pictures of the Olden Time, in connexion with North of England (Richmond, Yorks., c. 1852). 8p.
- Charles G. Leland’s notes for the paper ‘On the English Rommany or Gipsy Language’, read at the Oriental Congress, Florence, 1878.
- Emblem book in Romani beginning ‘Akovo Lil see o tatcho’ (manuscript).
- ‘Tinkers Slang, Taken down by C. G. Leland’ (manuscript).
The Charles G. Leland Collection of Romani Books and Manuscripts

Correspondence from John Sampson and Frederick S. Arnold on Shelta.
Charles G. Leland, ‘Shelta’ (manuscript). 59 leaves.
Five early photographs, including Old Matty Cooper, Syvester Boswell, and An Old Dye (all as reproduced in Pennell’s Biography).

Manuscript letters to and from Leland. Although labelled 1867-76, the content ranges from 1867 to 1883, with the majority dated 1871-76. Correspondents include: Henry T. Crofton, E. H. Palmer, Hubert Smith and Janet Tuckey. Most of the letters refer to Roma topics.

Manuscript letters to and from Leland. Although labelled 1878-99, the content ranges from 1875 to 1899. Correspondents include: William John Ibbetson, David MacRitchie, Anton Herrmann, Francis Hinde Groome and E. H. Palmer. Also one letter from Richard Garnett at the British Museum (22 March 1879). Most of the letters refer to Roma topics.

A collection of Roma folk tales, written out as if being prepared for publication.
With a general introduction and a few pen and ink illustrations. Stories at the beginning of the volume have titles in both English and Romani. A few stories conclude with some contextual analysis. Begins: ‘Muketar ko djel ish-kole = The Fly who went to School’. All material appears to be in the hand of Charles G. Leland.

A continuation. Most of the stories are untitled, and none has a Romani title. The volume begins: ‘The Charcoal Burner’s Son and the Nine Ravens’.

Manuscript vocabularies relating to a range of languages and dialects. All items appear to be in the hand of Charles G. Leland and are for the most part undated (although a few give dates from 1875 to 1889). Contents:
‘A Vocabulary of Schmussen, or the Jewish-German Dialect’. 29 leaves.
‘Judisch Deutsch’. 1 leaf.
‘German Hebrew. = Schmussen or Mauscheln’. 13 leaves.
‘Romany – English’. 1 leaf.
‘Pidgin-English’. 29 leaves. The subject is the Chinese-English trade language.
‘Circus Slang’. 1 leaf.
B. Material presented by Whittaker and Co.
The bound volumes have the following lettering on their spines: ‘C. G. Leland, Romany Vocabulary. Vol. 1 [or 2], Presented by Messrs. Whittaker and Co. Brit. Mus. Additional Ms. 38059 [or 38060].’ These items are listed in the library’s ‘Explore Archives and Manuscripts’ online catalogue.


Fig. 4. First leaf of Leland’s Romani to English two-volume vocabulary. Add. MS. 38059, f. 1.