

## Latin *merē* and Hittite *marri*

By JAAN PUHVEL, Encino

*Summary:* Latin *merus* ‘whole, pure’ and *merē* ‘wholly, fully’ had a slippery, often pejorative secondary sense of ‘sheer, sole(ly), nothing but’, both bequeathed to the borrowed English *mere(ly)*. The same semantic, and perhaps likewise etymological features characterize the Hittite adverb *marri* ‘very much, wholly’, which also shows a clear tinge of ‘lightly, gratuitously, just like that’ in well-attested contexts. In this light, perhaps *marri* : *merē* can be added to the growing store of Anatolian : Italic lexical pairs, like (in the same semantic sphere) Hittite *pittalwa-* ‘thin, slight’ : Latin *petilus* ‘plain, mere’.

The history of Latin *merus* ‘whole, pure’ is still somewhat opaque. The adverb *merē* meant ‘entirely, fully’ (e.g. Plautus, *Truculentus* 1.1.22: *amoris poculum accepit mere*, said of someone who empties a love-cup to the lees; thence also *merum* for unstinted, undiluted, full-strength wine). But *merus* also had another, slippery meaning ‘sheer, sole, nothing but, just so’, which was likewise bequeathed to its English offshoot (cf. ‘sheer, unadulterated nonsense’). While Hamlet’s unweeded garden was alarmingly overgrown (“things rank and gross in nature possess it merely”), modern usage tends to see in *mere(ly)* something randomly trifling, despite W.B. Yeats’s warnings of “mere anarchy” engulfing the world.

A close semantic and seemingly also etymological parallel to *merē* is found in Hittite *mar-ri*. Neither *CHD* nor *HEG* had a clue to its precise meaning, trying out ‘in the heat of passion’, ‘rashly’, ‘impetuously’, and ‘exceedingly’ in the irreversible binomial *mekki marri* ‘very much, wholly’. The latter (cf. Greek μάλα πάγχυ), attested especially with the verbs *nahh-* ‘be concerned’ and *pahs-* ‘be watchful’ (beside the simple *mekki* ‘much’), occurs also in *KUB XXIV 7 II 52 nu GUD-us m[ekki]i marr[i] SIG<sub>5</sub>-t[at]* ‘the cow was doing very well’.

In other instances, however, *marri* has a sense which is rather 'at random, just like that, lightly'. Albrecht Götze (*Hattušiliš* 47 [1925]) suggested 'aufs Geratewohl', more 'happy-go-luckily' than 'willfully', although 'impetuosity' might creep into a common denomination such as 'haphazardly, rashly' (cf. Latin *temere* 'at random, boldly', literally 'in the dark, blindly' [= Sanskrit *tamasi*]). But let the few contextually meaningful examples speak for themselves:

*KBo* VI 29 I 18-21: *nu-za apūnn-a AŠŠUM DAM-UTTİM marri ŪL dahhun IŠTU INIM DINGIR-LIM-z-an dahhun* 'I did not take her as my wife at random, I took her at the behest of the goddess' (thus, rather than marital roulette, it was an encounter engineered by a divine matchmaker).

*KUB* XXVI 92, 4: *marri-ma-wa-ta-kkan ŪL kunanzi* 'they won't kill you just like that!' (small comfort, as in line 6 'they are indeed going to kill me').

*KUB* XL 1 "Vs." 1-4: The letter-writer has qualms about seeming to address the august recipient frivolously: *ANA] DUTU-ŠI EN-YA ŪL marri arkuwa[r] [iyanun nu kūn] INIM-an ANA DUTU-ŠI EN-YA UL marri AŠ[PUR-un] [UL marri mema]hh[i] ŪL marri hatreskimi* 'I have not lightly made appeal to your majesty my lord, I have not lightly referred this matter to your majesty my lord, I do not speak lightly, I am not writing lightly'.

In all these cases the meaning of *marri* approximates 'just so, gratuitously', in close parallelism to the second sense 'sole(ly), like that' of Latin *merus*, *merē* (and English *mere[ly]*), beside 'fully, entirely'. Formally *marri* has the looks of a case petrifact (locative?) of an adjective resembling Latin *merus*. A semantically similar binary isogloss is Hittite *pittalwa-* 'plain, mere' : Latin *petilus* 'thin, slight'. Thus *marri* : *merē* can be added to the growing store of lexical matches between Anatolian and Italic.

Further tie-ins are mere speculation and of lesser interest. If the base-meaning of Latin *merus* was 'pure' (on the shaky basis of Old English *ā-mērian* 'cleanse, clarify, probe'), one slippery

path leads from there to ‘shiny’ and hence to Latin *marmor* ‘marble’, Greek μαρμαίρω ‘glitter’, Vedic *mārīci-* ‘ray’, as well as a hapax Hittite *marri-* matched by the akkadogram *ṢETI* (*KBo XV 2 IV 7 marri IGI-anda* = duplicate *KUB XVII 31 I 8 ANA ṢETI menahhanda* ‘facing *marri*’). Akkadian *ṣētu* is itself homophonally ambiguous, either ‘(day)light’ or ‘exit, (sun)rise’. Thus, if this second Hittite *mar-ri* seemingly meant ‘eastward’, an etymological integration of its homophone would have to travel the circuitous route of extra-Hittite root etymology.

The semantic bifurcation of *merē* : *marri* into a “positive” ‘purely, fully, wholly, entirely’ and a “negative” ‘solely, nothing but, just so, lightly’ is paralleled by other sets of lexemes. For example, a proto-meaning ‘forget’ is vouchsafed by Sanskrit *mṛṣyate*, Lithuanian *miṣti*, Tocharian AB *mārs-*. But forgetting has a good as well as a bad side: in a meliorative sense ‘forget’ leads to ‘forbear, forgive, condone’, whereas negatively willful forgetfulness amounts to neglect. Both side-meanings or sub-senses are discernible in Vedic *mṛṣ-*, and in addition the adverb *mṛṣā* ‘idly, falsely’ has veered fully *in malam partem* (forget > fail), as have Hittite *marsant-* ‘flawed, false’ and Gothic *af-marzeins* ‘fraud’. Conversely, the antonym of mindlessness, which normally denoted straight thinking (Sanskrit *mānyate*, Latin *meminī*, etc.), could also be prone to pejoration, as when Latin *mentior*, literally ‘be mindful’, slid into ‘think up, fictionalize’ and hence ‘feign, lie’ (e.g. *nomen mentiri* ‘use a pseudonym’; cf. Greek *ψεῦδος* ‘fiction’ > ‘lie’), perhaps abetted by the near-homonymy of *mendāx* ‘lying’ < ‘flawed’ (cf. *menda* ‘flaw’, *ēmendō* ‘correct’, Vedic *mindā* ‘defect’, Hittite *mant-*, Lycian *mētē* ‘harm’).