

Greek μάρπτω and Tocharian A *märk*-*

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Abstract. This paper examines the etymologically isolated Ancient Greek verb μάρπτω ‘to seize’ and argues that it is related to Tocharian A *märk* ‘take away’ and possibly to Latin *merx* ‘commodity’ (with a semantic shift from ‘taking’ to ‘buying’). On the basis of these forms a new PIE root **merkʷ-* is reconstructed.

Keywords: etymology, Ancient Greek, Tocharian, Italic, Latin, Indo-European reconstruction.

[es] Griego μάρπτω y tocario A *märk*-

Resumen. El artículo examina el verbo griego antiguo, etimológicamente aislado, μάρπτω ‘agarrar’ y argumenta a favor de su relación con el tocario A *märk*- ‘llevarse’ y posiblemente con el latín *merx* ‘mercancía’ (con un cambio semántico de ‘coger’ a ‘comprar’). A partir de esas formas se reconstruye una nueva raíz protoindoeuropea **merkʷ-*.

Palabras clave: Etimología; griego antiguo; tocario; itálico; latín; reconstrucción en indoeuropeo.

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Ancient Greek verb μάρπτω ‘seize, take hold of, overtake, strike’ (fut. μάρψω, aor. ἔμαρψα², perf. μέμαρπα³) is well attested in early epic, lyric, and tragic poetry⁴. Its nominal derivatives include μάρπις ‘kidnapper’ (A. *Supp.* 826), Μάρφοτος, a

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² One expects the *s*-aorist to have a full grade of the root (**ἔμερψα*), but it appears that root-allomorph μαρπ- was generalized throughout the entire *Averbo* in Greek.

³ μεμαρπώς Hes. *Op.* 204; μέμαρπεν [Hes.] *Sc.* 245 is textually and grammatically (perf. or aor.?) uncertain.

⁴ Reduplicated aor. μεμάρποιεν is offered by several manuscripts as a *varia lectio* at *Sc.* 252 (see Russo’s *apparatus criticus* and F. A. Wolff *apud* Ranke 1840: 225); even though the form would not scan properly, this reading has been accepted by some authorities, notably by Wackernagel (1914: 113 [= 1955: 1170] n. 1) who viewed it as another instance of “ἀνδροτήτα-scansion” (viz. *mempp-* ~ ~). But a sixth-century poem is an unlikely place to look for a precious archaism of prosody, and the irregular scansion is better explained with Hackstein 2002: 4 n. 7 as “*ad-hoc-Flexion*” of verse-final μέμαρπεν used a few lines earlier. This said, the reading of the paradosis μεμάρποιεν (from a different verbal root, see n. 8) usually printed by the editors of the *Shield* is entirely in order: verse-final μεμαπέ/ό- can be unproblematically taken as a *metri causa* formation created from aor. μαπέ/ό- on the model of λαχέ/ό- ‘to obtain (by lot)’ : λαλαχέ/ό- ‘to grant’, cf. e.g. λελαβέ/ό- (*Od.* 4.388) with the same meaning as λαβέ/ό-; see Tichy 1976: 76 with n. 11.

speaking name of a Centaur on a Chalcidian vase⁵, and κάμμαρψις· μέτρον σιτικόν, τὸ ἡμιμέδιμνον. Αἰολεῖς (Hsch. κ 596 Cunningham), where the apocope in the preposition is in line with the stated Aeolic provenance of the gloss⁶. The usually reliable γλῶσσαι κατὰ πόλεις attribute μάρπτω to the Cypriot dialect (Κυπρίων· ἔμαρψεν· ἔλαβεν)⁷ and Ruijgh (1957: 166) assigned this poetic word to the “Achaean” lexical stock⁸.

The verb μάρπτω has no etymology: ancient connection with (non-existent) μάρη ‘hand’ can be safely discarded⁹, while the comparison with μάρναμαι (PIE **merh₂-*) hesitantly proposed by Egetmeyer (2010: 488) is a counsel of despair¹⁰. As Beekes (2010: 907-908) put it, echoing Frisk, we are dealing with a “system without outer-Greek cognates”¹¹.

Greek μάρπ- can be straightforwardly back-reconstructed as either **merk^w-*¹² or **merp⁻*¹³. Since the root is not attested in Mycenaean¹⁴, the choice between root-final **k^w* and **p* cannot be made on Greek-internal grounds¹⁵. Under the former theory, a plausible *comparandum* for Proto-Greek **merk^w-* / **mr̥k^w-* may be discovered in Tocharian the importance of which for the study of Greek etymology has become abundantly clear in the past few decades¹⁶.

⁵ CHA 23 in Wachter 2001: 188.

⁶ Cf. also the immediately preceding entry κ 595 καμμάρψαι· καταλαβεῖν with the same apocope. While the verb does not seem to be attested in epichoric inscriptions, its presence in Aeolic is further confirmed by Sapph. 58.11 (West) and Alc. 61.14 (Voigt).

⁷ See Bowra 1970 [1959]: 43. Egetmeyer (2010: 488) very plausibly hypothesized that the verb λαμβάνω is not attested in Cypriot inscriptions precisely because it was replaced by μάρπτω in everyday use as the default verb ‘to take’.

⁸ Despite its phonetic and semantic similarity with μάρπτω, aor. μαπέ/6- ‘catch’ attested in [Hes.] Sc. 231, 304 cannot have been made from the same root since a loss of *r* cannot be plausibly accounted for (cf. Beekes 2010: 903: “[i]n spite of its semantic agreement with μάρπτω, μαπέειν can hardly be connected with it in formal terms”). The root μαπ- (unrelated to μαρπ-) is found in the adverb ἐμμαπέως ‘quickly, readily, hastily’ (Hom. +).
⁹ E.g. Schol. T ad Il. 16.137 (Erbse) τὸ δὲ μάρψει κυρίως τὸ χερσὶ συλλήψεται· μάρη γὰρ αἱ χεῖρες, ἐνθεν καὶ εὐμαρής. But εὐμαρής ‘easy’ can be explained without positing any etymological connection with the word for ‘hand’ (see Blanc 1992; 2018: 516), while alleged Pindaric μάρη ‘hand’ is a *vox nihili* (see Forssman 1966: 135-140), despite its resuscitation by Puhvel (2004) who compared it with Hittite ^(GIS)māri- ‘weapon’.

¹⁰ If I correctly understand his proposal – provided with a question mark – it would require positing two synonymous roots with different root-enlargements: **merh₂-* and **merk^w-* or **merp⁻*.

¹¹ GEW 2.178: “ohne aussergriechische Entsprechung”; DELG 643 is similarly agnostic.

¹² Kösling 1998: 247 gives the reconstruction **merk^w-* but does not cite any comparative material in its support.

¹³ Original **ɣ* in the root is evinced by the variant βραπ- showing a different vocalization of **ɣ*: Hsch. β 1083 βράψαι· συλλαβεῖν, ἀναλῶσαι, κρίψαι, θηρεύσαι; β 1049 βράπτειν· ἐσθίειν, κρίπτειν, ἀφανίζειν (Cunningham); ε 94 ἔβραπτεν· ἔκρυπτεν. ἐλάφουζεν; ε 97 ἔβραψεν· ἔκρυπεν. ἔπιεν. κατέφαγεν (Latte). Transponates **mNrp-* and **mNrk^w-* are impossible for phonotactic reasons, while **mh₂rp/k^w-* (likewise phonotactically suspect) would have given Proto-Greek **mārp/k^w-*.

¹⁴ See DMic. 1.422 and DMic. Supl. 207. The much-discussed theonym *ma-qe* (dat. sg.) attested in KN F 51 v. 2 in the context of grain offerings is unlikely to be related to the root of μάρπτω (the Mycenaean form may have to be read as *ma-ka*, given the possibility of confusion between signs *77 and *78).

¹⁵ Greek βρακ- only found in Hsch. β 1042 βρακεῖν· συνιέναι and β 1048 βράξαν· συλλαβεῖν, δακεῖν, καταπιεῖν is in all likelihood unrelated, although in theory one might entertain a dissimilation of Proto-Greek **mr̥k^w-* > **mr̥k-* along the lines of the proposal made by Schwyzler (1939: 302). Most probably, βρακ- (< **mr̥k-*) is a cognate of Ved. *mr̥ś-* ‘to touch, handle’ as Osthoff (1896: 10) had suggested.

¹⁶ It might be appropriate to cite just a few plausible examples of plausible Greek-Tocharian lexical equations that are absent from Beekes (2010). These items are not to be viewed as exclusive isoglosses, but rather as retentions from PIE. Gk. ἀμείνων ‘better, stronger’ (< **h₂mejnōn-*) and Toch. B *maiyya* ~ *maiyyo* ‘strength, power’, *maiwe* ‘young’ (< **h₂moi-uo-* ‘strong’); Gk. βλωθρός ‘(grown) high’ (< **m̥lh₂d^hro-*) and Toch. A *malto* ‘at first, in first place’, Toch. B *melte* ‘pile’ (< **mol(h₂d^ho-* ‘top’), see Fraenkel 1932: 6; Gk. ἀταλός ‘tender’, ἀ(τι)τάλλω ‘to bring up a child’ and Toch. A *ātāl* ‘man, male’, see Klaus T. Schmidt *apud* Balles 1999: 3 n. 2 (the reconstruction

In Tocharian we find two verbal roots *märk-*: Toch. B *märk-* means ‘to besmirch, to smudge’¹⁷, while Toch. A *märk-* means ‘to take away’. The meaning of the latter verb is beyond doubt, cf. the privative compound *sne-märklune* which translates Sanskrit *ahārya* ‘not to be taken away’ (A 359.15); 3 sg. pret. III *markäs* is found in A 120 b 5: *tām praṣṭ penu sundari nandes pāpṣune markäs* “zu dieser Zeit hatte Sundari das sittliche Verhalten des Nanda weggenommen”¹⁸. The difference in meaning is conspicuous and it is widely agreed that Toch. A *märk-* and Toch. B *märk-* are etymologically unrelated homophones¹⁹.

The semantics of Toch. A *märk-* squares nicely with the Greek verb the oldest meaning of which is ‘to seize’, e.g. *Od.* 10.116 αὐτίχ’ ἔνα μάρψας ἐτάρων ὀπίσσωτο δεῖπνον ‘at once he [*scil.* giant Antiphates] seized one of my comrades and prepared him for dinner’ or *Sapph.* 58.11-12 ἀλλ’ αὐτον ὕμῳς ἔμαρψε / χρόνῳ πόλιον γῆρας ‘yet still grey old age in time did seize him [*scil.* Tithonus]’²⁰. Phonologically, there is no problem with the proposed equation either²¹: PIE **merkʷ-* would give Proto-Tocharian **märkw-* > A *märk* with elimination of labial coarticulation before another consonant: 3 sg. aor. **mērkw-s(t)* > Toch. A pret. III *markäs*, cf. **h₃ókʷ-s* ‘eye’ > Common Tocharian **æk* > Tocharian A *ak*, B *ek*²².

A *tertium comparationis* for PIE **merkʷ-* ‘to seize, to take away’ might be found in Lat. *merx -cis* (f.) ‘commodity, merchandise’ for which there is no universally ac-

**h₂et-l*, **h₂etelo-* is further supported by Proto-Germanic **apala-n* / **apilan* ‘descent, lineage’ and HLuwian *atala-* ‘brother’: **h₂at-* is also possible); Gk. βλέπω ‘to see’ and Toch. AB *pālkā-* ‘to see’ (< **blekʷ-*, further supported by Hitt. *palkuiya-*, *palkuwai-* ‘look to/after’, see Puhvel 2010: 214-215); Gk. θέλω ‘to enchant, beguile’ (< **dʰelg*) and Toch. A *talke*, B *telki* ‘sacrifice’ (< **dʰolgo*), *IEW* 247; Gk. δραμεῖν ‘to run’ and Toch. B *ramer* ‘quickly, suddenly’ (< **drem-*, further supported by Skt. *dram-*); Gk. θραύω ‘to break in pieces’ and Toch. AB *trus-* ‘to tear to pieces’ (< **dʰreh₂us-*, obviously a secondary root); Gk. κηρός ‘wax’ and Toch. B *šeriye* ‘wax, honeycomb’); Gk. λενγᾶλέος ‘wretched, unhappy, sore’, λυγρός ‘mournful’ and Toch. B *lakle* ‘pain, suffering’ (< **luglo-* or **lugro-* with assimilation of *l...r* to *l...l*); Gk. λιμήν ‘harbor, market place’ and Toch. A *lyām*, B *lyam* ‘sea’ (< **limen-*); Gk. μάχομαι ‘fight’ and Toch. B *mākʷol-* ‘to run’ (see Malzahn & Peters 2010); Gk. μέλος ‘member, limb’ and Toch. B *mlyuwe* ‘thigh’ (< **m(e)leuo-*; cf. Proto-Celtic **melsā* ‘knuckle’); Gk. μῶμαι ‘to strive, try’ and Toch. A *māskʷ-* ‘to be difficult’ (< **meh₃-*, further supported by Proto-Germanic **mōjan-* ‘to tire’, Mod. German *sich mühen*, see Peyrot 2011); Gk. νάρκη ‘numbness, paralysis’ and Toch. B *nerke* ‘hesitation’, *närk-* ‘to keep away’ (see Malzahn 2010: 686); Gk. ὀλίγος ‘small, few’ and Toch. A *lykäly*, B *lykaške* ‘small’ (< Proto-Tocharian **lyäk-* < **h₂lig-* ‘little’, further supported by Armenian *alkʷat* ‘poor’); Gk. ὄρχος ‘row of vines or trees’ and Toch. B *waršīye* ‘(grove of) trees’, *warke* ‘garland’ (< **mergʰ-*, possibly supported by Albanian *varg* ‘chain, string of beads’); Gk. τίλος ‘thin stool, diarrhea’ and Toch. B *tin-a* ‘to be dirty, defile oneself’ (< **tiḥ₂-*, further supported by Old English *bīnan* ‘be(come) wet, moist’ and Old Church Slavonic *tina* ‘mud, dirt’); Gk. φλυδάω ‘overflow’ and Toch. AB *plutk-* ‘arise, swell, overflow’ (< **bʰleudh₂-*, further supported by Old Norse *blautr* ‘wet’); Gk. γνάω ‘to gnaw (off), nibble’ and Toch. B *nuk-* ‘swallow’ (< **gʰneh₂u-*). Whenever bibliographical references are not provided above, see Adams 2013. All of these Greek words are labeled as either “unexplained” or “Pre-Greek” in Beekes 2010.

¹⁷ Note also the noun *-märkär* attested as the second member of the compound *snaimärkär* ‘not turbid, clear’ which is used as the Tocharian B translation of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *anāvila-* ‘not impure’.

¹⁸ Trans. by Carling 2000: 285.

¹⁹ See Malzahn 2010: 755-756; Adams 2013: 487.

²⁰ The text is by West 2005: 5.

²¹ Comparisons with Tocharian always have a degree of uncertainty, since PIE voiced, voiced aspirated and voiceless stops have nearly all fell together in Tocharian. While there is no alternative etymology for Toch. A *märk-* on the books, Michael Weiss points out to me that the underlying PIE root could also be **merǵ-* ‘divide’ reflected in Hittite *märk-ahhi* ‘I divide, I cut up’, as well as in the noun for ‘border’: YAvestan *marəza-* ‘border, district’, Lat. *margō* ‘border’, Old Irish *mruig* ‘territory’ (< **mroǵi-*) and Proto-Germanic **markō-* ‘boundary, region’ (Goth. *marka*, etc.).

²² For the phonology see Pinault 2008: 456-457.

cepted etymology on the books²³. The well-attested lexical family of Lat. *merx* refers to commerce, cf. *mercārī* ‘to buy’, *mercātor* ‘merchant’, *mercēs* ‘payment’ (all Pl.+). The proposed etymological comparison therefore requires an ancillary hypothesis: on the way to Italic, the root **merk^w*- developed the meaning ‘to buy’. This hypothesis does not appear particularly costly, since there are ample parallels for a semantic development from ‘take’ to ‘buy’: for instance, one might compare Lat. *emō* ‘take’ > ‘buy’ or **ad-captō* ‘take’ (REW 63) > Italian *accattare*, French *acheter* ‘to buy’. *Nomen actionis* **merk^w*-s ‘buying, commerce’ would give Proto-Italic nom. sg. **merks* with a concretized meaning ‘commodity being bought (and sold)’ which served as the basis for all further derivatives²⁴.

A new PIE root **merk^w*- ‘to seize, to take away’ can thus be reconstructed on the basis of cognates in three branches: Gk. μάρπτω, Toch. A *märk*- and Lat. *merx*. Further descendants of this root remain to be discovered²⁵.

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²³ See DELL 400; EDLIL 376. Oscan *mirk-* (**amirikum**, *amiricatud*) is usually analyzed as borrowed from Latin, see Untermann 2000: 86. The god’s name *Mercurius* may be a loanword from Etruscan and have nothing to do with the etymology of *merx* (for which there are no indications of Etruscan origin, see Breyer 1993: 92-93 n. 313).

²⁴ From nom.sg. the allomorph *merk-* was generalized throughout the paradigm (at the expense of **merqu-*), just as the stem *voc-* was generalized from nom.sg. *vox* < **uok^w*-s. After nom. **merks* had become *mers* (Plaut.), the velar stop was reintroduced into nom. sg. (so Leumann 1977: 221).

²⁵ Despite its semantic attraction, comparison with Hittite *markištai-* ‘to catch, take someone (unawares / by surprise)’ (used of death from plague, see CHD L–N s.v.) must be prophylactically rejected, since the Hittite form lacks a labiovelar reflex: PIE **me/ork^w*-es- is expected to give Hittite **markuiš-*. Indo-Iranian **marč-* / **mark-* ‘to destroy, damage’ (Vedic *marc-*, YAvestan *marəxš-*, Ved. *marká-* ‘destruction’ = YAvestan *mahrka-*) is usually compared with Gk. βλάπτω (see LIV 434–5), but it is possible that the reflex of **merk^w*- ‘to take, to seize’ reconstructed in this paper merged with the reflex of PIE **melk^w*- in Proto-Indo-Iranian and the two roots became indistinguishable.

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