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## MERCURIUS ET PROXIMĪ<sup>1</sup>

*In the present contribution the Roman divine-name Mercurius is analyzed from the point of view of both internal etymology and external parallels. These are not limited to the Italic theonyms, but appear as well in the pantheons of other Indo-European branches, namely in Baltic, Anatolian, and perhaps also in Indo-Aryan. The etymologies of all these forms allow us to accept the traditional idea connecting Mercurius with Latin merx “trade”, but only as the particular output of a more general concept based on ‘distribution’. The main seems to be the role of Mercurius and his colleagues in their infernal engagement.*

1. Divine functions.
2. Attestation in ancient Italy.
3. Internal structure.
4. Internal etymology.
5. External parallels in theonyms.
6. Alternative etymology.

1. The Roman god *Mercurius* had a wide spectrum of functions, as his epithets and other characterizations illustrate:

(1) ‘Patron of merchants’ – *mercator* (*CIL* XIII, 6294); *nundinator* (*CIL* XIII, 7569).

(2) ‘He who brings a gain’ – *negotiator* (*CIL* XIII, 7360); *lucrorum potens et conservator* (*CIL* V, 6594), *Mercurius lucrum promittit* (*CIL* XIII, 2031).

(3) ‘Bearer of felicity’ – *felix* (*CIL* IV, 812, XII, 5687.10).

(4) ‘Conductor of souls of the dead into the infernal regions’ – *Iuppiter iutumuit, quaque est non usa modeste, | eripuit linguam Mercuriumque vocat. | ‘Duc hanc ad manes locus ille silentibus aptus | nympa, sed infernae nympa paludis erit’* (Ovid, *Fasti* II, 607–10).

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2.1. In Rome the foundation of the temple dedicated to Mercurius is dated to 495 B.C. (Livius II, 21), in the southeast from the *vallis Murcia* (Ovid, *Fasti* V, 569).

2.2. The same god *Mercurios*, *Mircurios* was honored in Praeneste, as documented in two inscriptions (see Vetter 1953, 336, 339, #366f, #367b):

*MIRQURIOS ALIXENTROM* ‘Mercurius Alexandrum’

[*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 553]

*IUNO IOUS MERCURIS APOLO LEIBER HERCLE*

*UICTORIA MENERUA DIAMA MARS FORTUNA*

[*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 563]

2.3. In Falerii at the ruins of Mercurius’ Temple the fragments of cups with 11 versions of the same text were discovered (Vetter 1953, 292–93, #264):

*TITOI MERCUI EFILES* ‘Tito Mercuri aediles’

The Faliscan theonym indicates the existence of the parallel form *\*Merkus* or *\*Merkuos* or *\*Merkuu(e)ios* (cf. Radtke 1965, 215)

2.4. Faliscan *\*Merkus* or *\*Merkuos* can be corroborated by the Oscan divine name *MIRIKUI* (dat. sg.) ‘Mercurio’ attested in the one-word-inscription from Marcianise between Capua and Suessula (Vetter 1953, 100, #136), although probably borrowed from Latium (Untermann 2000, 479).

3. The theonyms just mentioned allow us to isolate the root *\*merk-* extended in *-u-*, thus forming a *u*-stem. This *\*merku-* then became a base for the adj. formation *\*Merkuos* (or *\*Merkuu(e)ios* after Altheim), while the Roman and Praeneste forms extended in *\*-urio-* correspond with the suffix forming the family names, cf. *Sancus* < *\*sankuōs* vs. *Sangurius* or Oscan *\*Pakuos* (reconstructed on the basis of the gen. sg. Πᾶκφεις from the inscription from Diano/Tegianum – see Vetter 1953, 123, #185) vs. Roman *Pacurius* (see Radtke 1965, 215). The extension in *-urius* or *-uria* form also other Roman divine-names or their derivatives: *Lemuria* (the fest of *Lemures*, the ‘death-ghosts’), *Mamurius* etc. (cf. Radtke 1965, 174, 195). It is possible to explain *-r-* through rhotacism, cf. the epithet *Matusia* of the goddess *Minerva* from the Umbrian city Sentinum (*CIL* XI, 5740; see Radtke 1965, 206). The formations in *\*-u-s(o)-* appear e.g. in Latin *augur*, *-uris* vs. *augustus* (see Brugmann 1906, 544 with other IE parallels)

4. Since ancient times (e.g. St. Augustin, *De civitate Dei*, IV, 11; Servius, *Aeneis* IV, 638), the divine-name *Mercurius* with its variants has been explained on the basis of such words as *merx*, *-cis* ‘ware’ (Plaut.), *mercātus* ‘purchase; market’, *mercātor* ‘merchant, trader’, *mercēs*, *-ēdis* ‘earnings, wage, rent’. The same stem, probably with the prefix *\*ad-*, appears in Oscan abl. sg. *amiricatud* ‘handelsmäßig’, acc. sg. *amirikum* ‘commercium’, whose borrowing from Latium is quite probable (Untermann 2000, 85–86). The idea of a relation of the theonym

and the word *merx* is retained in the most recent Latin etymological dictionary of de Vaan (2008, 376). In contrary, Walde & Hofmann (II, 74) rejected this connection and preferred Etruscan origin. To de Vaan such a solution is also acceptable for both the theonym and the word *merx* and its relatives.

5. There are remarkable parallels in theonyms in other Indo-European branches:  
5.1. In the Old Prussian pantheon it is possible to identify the deity *\*Markāpotis* or *\*Markāpolis* ‘god of wealth & nobility’ and / or ‘earth god’ (see Blažek 2001, 351–54).

5.1.1. The richest survey of forms occurs in the document „Der vnglaubigen / Sudauen ihrer bockheiligung mit sambt andern Ceremonien, so sie tzu brauchen gepflegth“, known from several manuscripts from the 16th cent.:

*Markopole* „die Erdleuthe“ = „subterranei“, and alternatively „die Edelleuthe“;

*Merkopele* „die erdtleutchen“;

*Marckoppole*, *Marckopole*, *Markepole*, *Markkopole*, *Merkopete* „Edelleute“ (Mannhardt 1936, 246).

The latinized form *Marcoppolum* „deum magnatum et nobilium“ was used by Johannes Maeletius [Jan Malecki] in his book „De Sacrificiis Et Idolatria Veterum Borvssorum, Liunum, aliarumque uicinarum gentium“ (1551), followed by J. Łasicki in his book „De Diis Samagitarum Caeterorumque Sarmatarum et falsorum Christianorum“ (1615), see Mannhardt 1936, 295, 362.

The form *Markopotis* was used by M. Praetorius in his „Idolatria veterum Prussorum“, Chap. IX, §22, representing the fourth book of his „Deliciae Prussicae“ finished in 1703 (Mannhardt 1936, 544). The same author (Chap. IV, §3) classifies *Markopete* as ‘one of the three fortune-gods’ (Mannhardt 1936, 532). After Praetorius Grienberger (1896, 84) also quoted the form *Marcopullei*.

5.1.2. Concerning the vacillation *t ~ l* in the second member of the compound, Grienberger (1896, 84) recalled the place-name *Wetau* = *Welau* (the former and older after Praetorius; one of these letters must be a scribal error).

5.1.2.1. If we accept the *t*-variant based on Praetorius’ record *Markopotis* and the variant *Markopete* (besides *Merkopete* quoted above), the second component of this transparent compound is etymologizable from Baltic *\*patis* > Old Lithuanian *patis*, later *pàts* „husband“, *patì* „wife“, Latvian *pats* „housekeeper“, *pati* / *pate* / *paša* „(house)wife“, Prussian (Ench. 5.14) *pattiniskun* „marriage“, (Ench. 45.18; 61.6) acc. *waispattin* „lady“, *butas waispattin* „housewife“ = Old Lithuanian *viešpatni* (Fraenkel 1962–65, 551–52). Corresponding compounds occur in Lithuanian:

*Dimstapatis* ~ *Dimstipatis* „deus domesticus“ (Mannhardt 1936, 432–35);

*Laukpatis* „Herr des Feldes“ (Mannhardt 1936, 373);

*Raugupatis* „der Gott, der die Gehr hilft, wenn das Bier volgiert, den Teig wohl säuert“ (Mannhardt 1936, 545);

*Wejopattis* „Herr des Windes“, cf. also *Wejpons* with the second component borrowed from Slavic, and *Wejdiews* „Windgott“ (Mannhardt 1936, 542);

*Zemepattis* ~ *Zemepatys* „Herr der Erden“ (sic, see Mannhardt 1936, 544).

5.1.2.2. If we accept the *l*-records, Grienberger (1896, 84) assumed metathesis of the 2nd and 3rd syllables, reconstructing *\*Mār-pecolis* where the latter component should correspond to the divine name *Pecols* „Pluto“, cf. also *Pocols* „Furiae“ (Georg von Polenz & Paul Speratus, „Sambiensis Constitutiones Synodales“, 1530), *Pocclum* „deum inferni et tenebrarum“ & *Poccollum* „deum aëriorum spirituum“ (Joannes Maeletius, „De Sacrifiis Et Idolatria Vetervm Borvssorvm Liuonum, aliarumque uicinarum gentium“, 1563), etc. This idea can be developed by suggesting haplology *\*Marco-pocol<sup>o</sup>* > *Marcopol<sup>o</sup>*. Alternatively, the vacillation *l* ~ *t* is explainable if for *Pocols* one substitutes his infernal colleague, *Patollus* ~ *Potollos* etc. „god of the dead“ (see Mannhardt 1936, 312).

5.1.2.3. In the final *-e* occurring in most of the quoted forms Grienberger (1896, 84) saw the Latin plural ending *-ae*. But this ending could be identified as the original Prussian vocative (Baltic *\*-ei* > Lithuanian *-iẽ*) or dative (Baltic *\*-ei* > Lithuanian *-ie*, Prussian *-ei*; see Stang 1966, 211, 207). The vacillation *-ei* ~ *-e* in final position is well attested, e.g. *istwei* ~ *istwe* „to eat“ (Ench. 65.31 vs. 65.32) or *assei* ~ *asse* „thou art“ (Ench. 45.2, 51.18, 53.1, 81.3 vs. 7.4, 65.33).

5.1.3. It remains to explain the first member of the compound. There are two alternative starting points, differing only in the vowel of the second syllable: a) *\*marka-* (cf. EV 654 *paustocaican* „wild horse“, < *\*pausta-* & *\*kaika-*, see Mažiulis III, 237, or the place-name *Raystopelk* < *\*raista-* & *\*pelkī* with the components corresponding to Lithuanian *raistas* „swamp“ & Prussian *pelky* „morass“, see Gerullis 1922, 138; Mažiulis IV, 8); b) *\*markā-* (cf. EV 665 *paustocatto* „wild cat“ < *\*paustā* & *\*katā*, see Mažiulis III, 238), depending on the gender of the first member. The semantic definitions „Erdleute“ / „subterranei“, „Edelleute“ / „deus magnatum et nobilium“ and „Glücksgott“, look rather enigmatic. The existing attempts to etymologize the stem *\*markā-* do not solve this semantic dispersion. Let us confront the published comparanda:

5.1.3.1. Lithuanian *markà* „pit for retting flax or hanf“, Latvian *mārks*, *mārka* „flax-retting“ (so G. F. Stender in the chapter „Lettische Mythologie“ of his „Lettische Grammatik“, Mitau 1783; see Mannhardt 1936, 618–20).

5.1.3.2. Polish *mrok* „dusk, twilight“ (G. Ostermeyer, „Kritischer Beytrag zur altpreussischen Religionsgeschichte“, Marienwerder 1775).

5.1.3.3. Lithuanian *iš marios kopa* „to rise from a sea“ (Praetorius; see Grienberger 1896, 84).

5.1.3.4. Lithuanian *Mergu pàts* „lord of virgins“ (Brückner 1922, 170).

5.1.3.5. Finally, Grienberger (1896, 84) reconstructed the starting point *\*mār-pecolis* with metathesis of the 2nd and 3rd syllables, interpreting it as „der grosse *Pecolis*“ (see above). Let us add that *\*mār-* is postulated only on the basis of other IE languages, cf. Welsh *mawr*, Old Icelandic *már* (Pokorny 1959, 704).

5.2. There are interesting parallels in Anatolian.

5.2.1. With regard to the chthonic function of the Prussian and Latino-Faliscan deities, there is a tempting cognate in Hittite <sup>d</sup>*Markuwaya-* ‘deity in depth of the

earth' (Tischler 1990, 139), especially with respect to the hypothetical Italic variant *\*Merkuu(e)io-*. This divine-name is attested as follows:

Dat. pl. <sup>d</sup>*Mar-ku-wa-ya-as* [KUB VII 38 Vs. 6];

Fragments as <sup>d</sup>*Mar-ku-wa-ya[-* [KUB LIX 18 Vs. 23 (ANA), 26 iv 5];

DINGIR<sup>MEŠ</sup> *Mar-ku-wa-ya[-* [KUB LIV 78 Rs. 6];

Maybe also <sup>d</sup>*Mar[-* [IBOT III 50 r.col. 7: LÚNAR <sup>d</sup>*Mar...*].

5.2.2. There are also probable Cuneiform Luvian counterparts:

Nom. pl. DINGIR<sup>MEŠ</sup> *Mar-wa-a-in-z[i]* [KUB LIV 65 ii 11: ŠA <sup>d</sup>*Iyarri* DINGIR<sup>MEŠ</sup> *Marwāinzi... ekuzi* „he drinks to the *Marwai*-gods of *Iyarri*“];

Dat.-loc. pl. <sup>d</sup>*Mar-wa-ya-an<-za>* [KUB XXIV 9 ii 26–27: *nu petesni tapusza* 1 NINDA.SIG ANA DINGIR *Marwayan<za> parsiya*; duplicate in KUB XXIV 11 ii 8: NINDA.SIG ANA DINGIR *Marwayanza parsiya*; „alongside the [chthonian] pit she fries a flatbread to the *M.*-deities“];

(see van Gessel 1998, 299–300; Puhvel 2004, 75–76; CHD 201).

It is necessary to stress that this deity is described in its plurality, as a group of servants of one of the ‘main’ gods *Iyarri* (Haas 1994, 468; Popko 1995, 93).

5.2.3. In the Hieroglyphic Luwian fragmentary inscription from Sultanhan §8 the adjective DEUS *ma-ru-wá/i-ni-sa* is probably derived by the formant *-wan-* from the corresponding theonym (Hawkins 2000, 474).

5.2.4. Remarkable are hypothetical counterparts in Lycian. Lycian B = Milyan acc. pl. *mrKKas* in *mrKKasuwēti* [44c,43]; genitive adj. *mr[KK]assi* [55,4], formed from the divine-name; 3sg. pres. *mrKKdi* „sanctifies, sacralizes“ (Melchert 2004, 121; Neumann 2007, 223–24; Shevoroshkin p.c. [April 2009]). Milyan *-K-* is derivable from the labiovelar *\*k-* in position before *\*a* and consonants (Melchert 1994, 302).

5.2.5. In Palaic it is possible to seek a cognate in the appellative *marha-* „god“, *marh(ina)-* ‘action performed on a god’, where *-h-* is derivable from a (labio)velar, cf. *ahw-* „to drink“ < *\*eg<sup>uh-</sup>* (Melchert 1994, 196, 210–11, 221).

Note: Hittite *Mark<sup>o</sup>* and Luwian *Marw<sup>o</sup>* are derivable from pre-Anatolian *\*morK<sup>u</sup>/u-* or *\*m<sub>r</sub>K<sup>u</sup>/u-* (cf. Melchert 1994, 126), but also from *\*merK<sup>u</sup>/u-* (see Melchert 1994, 136, 263 on the development *\*érC > \*aCC*).

5.3. The hypothetical Indo-Iranian counterparts are limited to the world of death and destruction: Old Indic *Márka-* „a demon presiding over various sicknesses of childhood; name of the Purohita of the Asuras“ vs. *marká-* „seizure“, i.e. „eclipse (of sun); annihilation, death“ = Avestan (Young) *mahrka-* „death, destruction“, (Old) *marakaē-čā* „and in ruin“ (Mayrhofer II, 323–24; Bartholomae 1904[1961], 1146).

6. The following are primary verbs enabling us to etymologize the above-mentioned divine-names:

6.1. Hittite *mark-* „to divide, separate; distribute, apportion; cut up, butcher“ (CHD 187f; cf. Tischler 1990, 137–38). Puhvel (2004, 74–75) compares this verb directly with Latin *merx* „trade, goods“ and mentions the exclusive parallelism

between Latin *commercārī* „to trade, buy up“ vs. Hittite *-kan mark-*, the term used in the Hittite meat industry, where meat was undoubtedly the object of trade too. And so in his intriguing etymology Puhvel has found a bridge between *Mercurius* and his divine colleagues, the Roman trade tradition and the Hittite butchery. Let us mention that the common Iranian designation of „god“ as Avestan *baya-*, Old Persian *baga-* is related to Old Indic *bhága-* „lord, dispenser“ and all are derivatives of the verb of the type Old Indic *bhájati* „divides, distributes“.

6.2. Avestan *mark-* „to destruct, ruin, kill“, Sogdian *mrync* „to destruct“, *mrc* „death“, Middle Persian *marg* id. (Bartholomae 1904[1961], 1146; Mayrhofer II, 323–24).

Note: The Hittite divine-name *Markuwaya-* has been interpreted as „Dark gods“ (so e.g. Puhvel 2004, 77–78), although there is no proof of this, but only an indirect indication in the Luwian theonym *Marwai-*. Concerning the meaning of *Marwai-* as „dark“, see the careful discussion in CHD 201. On the other hand, if this interpretation is correct, it is also compatible with descriptions of the deities connected with the Nether World. If this is the case it is attractive to add Slavic *\*morkъ* „darkness, cloud, storm“ (cf. already §5.1.3.2.), with such derivatives in *\*-y-* as *\*morky*, *-ъve* id., *\*morkava* id. etc. There are also some extensions in the world of supernatural beings here, e.g. Russian *moróka* „phantom“ or Slovenian *mrakóvi*, *mrákov* „personification of the evening wind which is dangerous to the weak and ill people, especially children“ (Trubačev, ESSJ 19, 230–36; Šarapatková & Erhart, ESJS 500).

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## RESUMÉ

V článku je analyzováno jméno římského boha *Merkura* z hlediska vnitřní etymologie i vnějšího srovnání, a to nejen mezi dobře známými theonymy italickými, ale též v pantheonch dalších indoevropských větví, jmenovitě baltské, anatolské, možná indoíránské. Etymologie všech těchto forem



dovoluje přijmout i tradiční spojení mezi *Merkurem* a latinským slovem *merx* pro „obchod“, ale jen jako dílčí výstup z obecnějšího konceptu založeného na ‘rozdělování’. V souvislosti s vnějšími paralelami je třeba připomenout ještě jinou roli římského Merkura, a to průvodce duší zemřelých do podsvětí.