

## GRK. κέρτομος 'MOCKING' \*

The author proposes to derive Grk. κέρτομος 'mocking' from the IE root *\*ker-t-* 'to cut'.

One of the sources of the words for 'bitter, caustic, sarcastic, mocking' in the Indo-European languages is the figurative use of the words for 'cutting', 'breaking' or 'splitting':

1. Skt. *kaṣu* 'pungent, acrid, sharp, bitter, caustic (as words)' = Lith. *kartus* 'bitter' < IE *\*(s)ker-t-* 'to cut' <sup>1</sup>.
2. ON *bitr* 'sharp, cutting, daring, keen' (*bita* 'to bite, sting (of a speech)'), OHG *bittar* '(auf die Rede) bissig, verletzend, scharf', NHG *bitter* 'bitter, sharp, sarcastic, biting', NE *bitter* 'sharp, acrid, reproachful, cutting, sarcastic' < IE *\*bhid-* 'to cleave, split' <sup>2</sup>.
3. Arm. *ergic-anan* 'satiric, pungent' *ergic-anem* 'to bite, tear, jeer, cavil', OArm. *ergic-uc<sup>c</sup> anam* 'ρήγνυμι' <sup>3</sup>.
4. Russ. *kolkij* 'cleavable, caustic, biting': *kolótv, koljú* 'to break, chop' <sup>4</sup>
5. NE *cutting* 'sarcastic'.
6. NHG *schneidend* 'cutting, caustic'.  
Etc.

\* Paper written in March 1984 during a fellowship at the University of Heidelberg granted by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

<sup>1</sup> *Pañcatantra* I 191 (p. 36 Kosegarten), Böhtlingk/Roth, *Sanskrit Wb.* II, p. 24 s. v., Pokorny, pp. 941-2: Skt. *kṛntāti, kartati* 'to cut', Av. *kər̥ntāti* 'to cut, strip', Arm. *kertem* 'to strip, peel', Lith. *keriù* 'to hew, hack, batter', Hitt. *kartāi-* 'to cut off, put aside', etc., all from IE *\*(s)ker-t-*, an extension of *\*(s)ker-* 'to cut'.

<sup>2</sup> Cleasby/Vigfusson, *Icelandic-English Dict.*, p. 64, H. Gering, *Vollst. Wb. z. d. Lied. d. Edda*, p. 106, Pokorny, pp. 116-7, Karg-Gasterstädt/Frings, *Ahd. Wb.* I, p. 1137

<sup>3</sup> Pokorny, p. 1181.

<sup>4</sup> Vasmer, *Rus. etym. Wb.* I, pp. 600, 603-4.

It is then natural to consider Grk. κέρτ-ομος 'mocking'<sup>5</sup>, now mostly labeled 'debatable' or 'of unknown origin'<sup>6</sup> as meaning originally \*'cutting, piercing' and derived from the above root IE \*ker-t- 'to cut'<sup>7</sup> with the nominal suffix -mo-. But from \*kert- + -mo- one should have expected in Greek \*κερτ-μος or \*κερτ-ι-μος, not κέρτ-ο-μος, because a suffix such as -ο-μο- is unattested in Greek<sup>8</sup>.

The absence of a form \*κερτ-μος is due to a phonological fact: the inexistence in Greek of the cluster -ρτμ-<sup>9</sup>. An anaptyxis was evidently needed, as in ξβδ-ο-μος 'seventh' < \*ξβδμος<sup>10</sup>. It is likely that -ι- (\*κερτ-

<sup>5</sup> Hes. *Op.* 788, *H. Merc.* 338, φιλο-κέρτομος 'fond of jeering' *Od.* XXII 287, κερτόμιος 'mocking, taunting' *Od.* XXIV 240, *Il.* V 419, κερτομια 'mockery' *Il.* XX 202, *Od.* XX 263, κερτομέω 'to taunt, sneer' *Od.* XVI 87, κερτόμησις *Soph. Philoct.* 1236.

<sup>6</sup> Frisk, *GEW* I, p. 833 'Expressives Wort strittiger Herkunft', Chantraine, *Dict. étym.*, p. 521 'mot expressif sans étymologie établie', E. Risch, *Wortb. d. hom. Spr.*, p. 114 'etymologisch unklar'.

<sup>7</sup> This connection was already made with regard to the form by L. Meyer, *KZ* 6, 1857, pp. 14-16 (id., *Vergl. Gr. d. griech. u. lat. Spr.*, Berlin 1884, p. 1051 and *Hdb. d. griech. Etym.* II, p. 364, Naegelsbach-Autenrieth, *Anmerkungen zu Ilias*, Nürnberg 1864, p. 271, R. Roediger, *KZ* 17, 1868, p. 314), Vaniček, *Griech. lat. etym. Wb.*, p. 1081, Curtius *Grdz.*, p. 148, and with a semantical explanation (see fn. 11 and 12) by Brugmann, *IF* 15, 1903/4, pp. 97-8 (followed by Walde-Pokorny II, p. 574 'jemanden schneiden, schneidender Hohn', cf. I, p. 353), Pokorny, p. 939, cf. Boisacq, p. 442, and Frisk, *GEW* I, p. 833). A relationship with IE \*karja- 'blame', Lat. *carinō* 'to blame', OIr. *caire* 'blame', etc. was envisaged by Fick II, p. 71, Walde, *LEW*, p. 132, Walde-Pokorny I, p. 353, Walde-Hofmann I, p. 169 (Pisani, *Rend. Accad. Lincei* 77, 1943, p. 553 posited \*kert- and cited Arm. *ker̄t'em* 'scortisco', Alb. *qeth* 'rado', Skt. *kaṣ-u* 'colpisco, batto' (?), as to the meaning he referred to δέρω). Older etymologies (κῆρ + τέμνω — see also recently H. Troxler, *Sprache und Wortschatz Hesiods*, Zurich 1964, pp. 119-120: \*κερ(δ)-τομος 'Herzschneider' — κέρω + τέμνω), all of them untenable, in Ebeling, *Lexicon Homericum* I, p. 770 s. v. Frisk, *GEW* I, p. 833 holds κέρτομος rather for a back-formation from κερτομέω. See also Chantraine, *Dict. étym.*, p. 521. To Beekes, *Laryngeals*, p. 190 κ. seems 'non-IE'. Very attractive phonetically is the comparison of κ. with Hitt. *kartimijā-* 'zürnen, grollen', *kartimijāt-* 'Zorn' and Arm. *ker̄tmjel* 'grollen', also Georg. *kr̄ṭinva* 'sich erbösen', *kr̄ṭimli* 'Streitsüchtig' (E. Furnée, *Die wichtigsten konsonantischen Erscheinungen des Vorgriechischen*, The Hague 1972, p. 349, fn. 46 ref.), but the equation 'anger' < 'to cut' has no analogy. The Hittite word was probably derived from *kard-* 'heart', already suggested by H. Pedersen (*Hittitisch und die anderen indoeuropäischen Sprachen*, København 1938, § 34, see also J. Friedrich, *Heth. Wb.*, p. 103, H. Kronasser, *Etym. d. heth. Spr.* I, p. 103 [who also suggests *karp-* 'heben' (?)]), similarly to Grk. *θυμός* 'soul' > *θυμώω* 'be angry', Alb. *zëmërrë* 'heart' > *zëmëronem* 'be angry', Lith. *širdis* 'heart' > *širsti* 'be angry', etc., cf. J. Tischler, *Heth. etym. Glossar*, Innsbruck 1983, pp. 524-6 ref.

<sup>8</sup> Brugmann-Thumb *Gr. Gr.*, p. 218-9, Schwyzer, *Gr. Gr.* I, pp. 494-5.

<sup>9</sup> Brugmann-Thumb, *op. cit.*, p. 104, Schwyzer, *Gr. Gr.* I, p. 278. On ξβδομος see recently W. Winter, *American Indian and Indoeuropean Studies*, Papers in Honor of M. S. Beeler, The Hague 1980 (*Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs* 16), pp. 487-9.

<sup>10</sup> L. Lupas, *Phonologie du grec attique*, The Hague 1972, p. 138.

-ι-μος) was avoided because of the confusion with the compounds in -τιμος as θεό-τιμος 'honored by gods', φιλό-τιμος 'loving honor', etc., which might have infused to \*κερτιμος an inappropriate semantical similarity.

The -ο- form, κέρτ-ο-μος, is probably the result of the influence of the compounds in -τομος, which already suggest the idea of 'cutting'.

Brugmann's hypothesis of a compound \*κερστομος < \*κερ(σ)- 'mockery' + στόμα 'mouth'<sup>11</sup>, which is to be seen as a *bahuvrīhi* meaning 'having a mocking mouth'<sup>12</sup>, is improbable, for such a compound usually does not have further derivatives, as κέρτομος with κερτομέω, κερτομία, κερτόμιος, etc., because of the lack of the verbal stem which would have helped in building the denominative. Indeed similar formations as ῥοδο-δάκτυλος 'rosy-fingered', οἶν-οψ 'wine colored', ἱππό-μητις 'skilled in horses', etc., have no derivatives either, as well as any of the *bahuvrīhi* compounds in Homer<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> *IF* 15, 1903/4, p. 98, where κερ- is supposed to be a substantive meaning 'Hohn, Schmahung', originally either a root-noun ('ein Wurzelomen') or an -es-stem \*(s)ker(e)s- (see also Benveniste, *Origines*, p. 68).

<sup>12</sup> Brugmann, *ibid.* 'einen Lästermund habend'; see on this type of nominal composition Risch, *Wortb.*<sub>1</sub>, pp. 166-170, *Wortb.*<sub>2</sub>, pp. 182-6.

<sup>13</sup> See the complete list in Risch, *Wortb.*<sub>2</sub>, pp. 182-6.