

SANSKRIT SÁRDIGṚDI-

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*Sanskrit sárdigṛdi- 'portio vaginalis' (Das 1998) may be analyzed as a compound *'vagina-penis'. The first member is derived from a PIE verbal root *serd(h)- 'wipe, rub', reflexes of which are used in Germanic to refer to sexual intercourse.*

IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE to offer in honor of my good friend Stanley Insler the following modest contribution towards elucidating the prehistory of an obscure Sanskrit lexeme. The first appearance of *sárdigṛdi-* is in the (in)famous passage of the *Aśvamedha* Ritual where various participants recite verses with very explicit sexual content while the queen has intercourse under a blanket with the just-suffocated stallion.¹ Until recently, all that was known about our word was that it refers to some part of the female sexual organs.

Rahul Peter Das has now shown in a 1998 article that *sárdigṛdi-* (also with later variants *sardagṛdi-* and *sardi-grda-*) surely refers specifically to the portio vaginalis of the uterus.² He does not discuss a possible etymology for the word, but he offers one crucial observation that helps direct the search for a source: he cites evidence (1998: 305) that in both Indian and Western medical tradition the portio vaginalis is often regarded as a penis within the vagina. This fact first of all strongly supports the suggestion of Hoffmann (1975–76: 570²), cited by Das, that the second part of the word is to be identified with Vedic *grdá-* 'penis'.³ It furthermore suggests that *sárdi-grdi-* is an ordinary determinative compound *'vagina-penis', 'penis of/in the vagina'. We are thus led to a preform **sarda/i-* *'vagina'.

To my knowledge, no one has suggested any PIE source for this first element of our compound, but I believe there are comparanda available. First, there is the

West Germanic strong verb **serdan* 'futuere', attested in Old Norse *serða* (with a metathesized variant *streða*) and Middle High German *serten*.⁴ As per Seebold (1970: 396), the Germanic stem points to a PIE **serdh-*. The adduction of Welsh *serth* 'ribald, obscene' (Pokorny 1959: 911; Jóhannesson 1956: 788; de Vries 1961: 470; et al.) is false, and there is thus no basis for supposing a preform **sert-* and generalization of a Verner variant in Germanic.⁵

Two difficulties stand in the way of the comparison of Sanskrit **sarda/i-* *'vagina' with Germanic **serdan*, one phonological and one semantic. The first, the discrepancy between the voiced stop of Sanskrit **sarda/i-* and the voiced aspirate presupposed by Germanic **serda-*, is not a serious obstacle to connecting the two. Such variation in the quality of root-final "enlargements" is not unusual. Even if one eliminates the more questionable material cited by Pokorny (1959: 1011ff.), it is in my

⁴ Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, *Íslensk orðsifjabók* (1989), also cites a noun *sarð* (17th cent.), which he glosses with a modern Icelandic slang word for 'intercourse'. I am indebted to Guðrún Thórhallsdóttir for this and other references to Magnússon's work, which is not directly accessible to me. Old English *seorðan* is a loanword from Old Norse and thus not an independent witness, but its attested usage does confirm the evidence of the MHG verb that the particular association of ON *serða* with sodomy is a secondary specialization.

⁵ The Welsh adjective *serth* 'discourteous, insulting, vulgar, coarse, obscene' is in all likelihood merely a specialized use of the homophonous adjective *serth* 'steep, sloping' (see the alternative derivation by Pokorny 1959: 1023). From a base meaning *'slanted' one can easily obtain both attested meanings (cf. German *schief*). In any case, the oldest attested example of *serth* in the 14th-century *Ystoria Bown de Hamtwn* has no sexual connotations and hardly means 'obscene'. There is thus no reason to suppose any direct connection between *serth* and sexuality. My thanks go to Stefan Schumacher for his help on this point. On OIrish *serc* 'love' see below.

¹ For the context of this occurrence see Jamison (1996: 65ff., esp. 68–69).

² I was unable to hear the original presentation of this paper at the American Oriental Society meeting in New Orleans in April, 1998. I am grateful to Professor Das for generously sharing with me a draft of his article in advance of its publication.

³ I have nothing new to offer on the prehistory of *grdá-*. Cf. Mayrhofer (1990: 494). Alexander Lubotsky (pers. comm.) points out that the succession of two plain voiced stops suggests a non-Indo-European loanword.

view difficult to disassociate Germanic *step- < PIE *steb- seen in English 'stop (up)' from the *stebh- that appears in Sanskrit *stabhnāti* 'block, prop up', or to separate *werg- and *wergh- 'turn' (Pokorny 1959: 1154). Compare further the doublets *dheub- ~ *dheubh- and *streb- ~ *strebh- cited in Watkins (2000), among others.

As for the semantic development, I cannot cite a direct parallel for derivation of a noun for 'vagina' from a verbal root referring to sexual intercourse. I do not regard this absence as particularly grave, given the relative dearth of reference works that offer full access to this extensive area of the lexicon. Such a derivation is in any case typologically unremarkable. While concretization of action nouns often leads to result nouns, it is also common enough for such nouns to refer to the patient (person or thing) upon which the action is performed, not the product of the action. From Sanskrit *a*-stem action nouns one may cite *kṣāya-* 'dwelling-place' or *vāra-* 'choice' (in the sense of the person or thing chosen). Such a development is normal with what one may term "experiential" verbs: Grk. βρώσις 'food', πόσις 'drink', ὄψις 'sight (thing seen)' (likewise the last two English glosses). The English noun 'lay' in the sexual sense refers not only to the act of intercourse, but also to the person who is 'laid'. Sanskrit *sarda/i- 'vagina' may thus also be etymologically the recipient of the act of intercourse.

A notoriously wide range of verbs may be used for the sex act in colloquial speech or slang, and a similar origin seems likely for *serd(h)-. Besides Old Norse *serða* and *sarð* cited above, there is also *sarða*, attested since the eighteenth century with the meanings 'polish, finish; touch, handle' (Jóhannesson 1956: 788). This stem is in all likelihood an Old Norse innovation based on the productive pattern seen in sets like ON *hverfa* 'turn (intr.); disappear' beside *hvarfa* 'wander' and *hvarf* 'disappearance'.⁶ Nevertheless, Jóhannesson's connection of *sarða* with *serða* is quite plausible, and the attested meaning 'polish' of the former suggests that the meaning 'have sexual intercourse' of the latter is derived from an original sense '*rub, scrape'.⁷

⁶ I thank Guðrún Thorhallsdóttir for valuable advice on this and other aspects of the Old Norse evidence for the verbs discussed here. While there seems to be some evidence for a weak verb *serian* 'future' in Old High German (notably in the "Pariser Gespräche"), this most likely represents a secondary weak inflection of the strong verb (thus Riecke 1996: 156), not a genuine *sard(i)ja- matching ON *sarða*. See most recently on the forms in the "Gespräche," Gusmani (1999: 169) with references.

⁷ Magnússon (1989) (see n. 4) also suggests a connection between *serða* and *sarða*, as well as with Old Norse *sarga* and other more distant cognates discussed below.

Parallels for such a semantic development are easy to find. German uses (*aus*)*raspeln*, *rubbeln*, and (*ein*)*reiben* for sexual intercourse (see Borneman 1971). Compare also Italian *fregare* (see Battaglia 1970: 328, also on *fregagnolo*) and French (*se*)*frotter* (see Robert 1985: 744f.). While the supposed shift in meaning is trivial, one would admittedly like to have rather better evidence for a *serd(h)- '*rub, scrape' than the very late-attested ON *sarða*.

Fortunately, such is available—in Hittite. There we have a verb *šart-*, whose original inflection is that of an athematic *hi*-verb (pres. 3rd sg. *šartai*, pret. 3rd pl. *šarter*). We find also innovative stems *šartā(i)-* and *šartiya-* (*mi*-conjugation).⁸ The verb is poorly attested, and the few available contexts are not always complete, but the basic sense is reasonably clear. In the Old Hittite ritual text *KBo* 17.43 i 14 (an Old Hittite manuscript), one functionary performs the action of *šart-* on the feet of others: [(^{LÜ}*hartagg*)]-aš ^{LÜ,MEŠ}ALAM.ZÜ-an GİR.ḪI. A=ŠUNU *šerḫit šartai* "The 'bear-man' s.'s the feet of the 'acrobats' with (a) *serḫa*." As per Neu (1981: 161 and 165⁴⁸⁴), an approximate sense 'wipe' is suggested by the parallel with *KBo* 21.98 ii 7–8: ^{LÜ}*šerḫa[laš... -a]n šerḫanna- ḫarzi n=apa pūriuš āna[škezzi]* "The *serḫa*-man holds [] and (a) *serḫa*, and he wipes his lips." The restorations are assured by *KBo* 19.163 i 22–23. Neu, loc. cit., tentatively interprets *šerḫa-* as a purifying substance and assumes a meaning 'besmear' for *šart-*.

However, as noted by Burde (1974: 45), one could equally well take *šerḫa-* as a scraper or similar implement and interpret *šart-* as 'wipe/rub off'. Either meaning would also fit the general context of *katta šartaizzi* 's. down(ward)' in *KBo* 21.20 i 11, which describes a medical treatment (unfortunately the immediate context is lacking). Likewise, pending a convincing restoration of the missing noun in *KBo* 3.8 ii 31–34, our verb there may likewise refer either to wiping the tongue with a substance or wiping it clean with some instrument: *nu-za* ^{MUNUS}*ḫašawaš x-x dāu n=an=kan* EME=ŠU *šartāiddu* EGIR-*da=ma=an IŠTU* Ĭ.NUN *iškeddu namma=an IŠTU* LĀL-*it* EME=ŠU *arḫa ānašdu* "Let the *h*-woman take [] and s. his tongue. Afterwards, let her anoint it with butter. Then let her wipe off his tongue with honey." A

⁸ Oettinger (1979: 476) suggests a *hi*-verb with final *-i-*, but as he himself points out, pret. 3rd pl. *šarter* argues against this, while pres. 3rd sg. *šartai* is ambiguous. The shift to the *mi*-verb type in *-ā(i)-* (*-āizzi*, *-ānzi*) makes far more sense if the original pattern was *šartai*, **šartanzi*. The unusual shift of an athematic *hi*-verb to a stem *šartiya-* may be misleading. The hapax *šartianun* (*VBoT* 120 iii 10) may be a nonce creation based on *tianun* in the immediately preceding sentence.

sense 'wipe/smear on' does seem assured for the occurrence in *VBoT* 120 iii 9–10: *nu=kan ŠA É.GAL^{LIM} Ī. DÜG.GA Šer šartīyanun* "I rubbed thereupon fine oil of the palace." Likewise the name of a festival with verbal noun points to '(be)smear': 1 *EZEN₄ ešhar šartauwar* "one festival of smearing blood" (*KUB* 46.2 Vo 5). A derived noun ^{URUDU}*šartal* '(copper) s.' is attested in *KBo* 22.142 iv 11 9 in a list of tools. This could be either a kind of 'scraper' or a tool used to apply some substance.⁹

A basic sense 'wipe' is also suitable for the rather different context of *KUB* 36.110 Vo 17–21 (an Old Hittite ms.): *appaliyaša É-[er=šet] karaitti pēran w[etan] karaiz lāh[uw . . .] n=at parā šartai n=a[t] aruna []* "But the house of the deluded one is built before the flood. The flood pours out (*or* is poured out) and wipes it away and [carries] it into the sea." The restorations are assured by the contrast with the previously mentioned house of the Hittite king, which is built firmly on a rock. Since the agent removing the house is water, a contextual translation 'wash away' (thus Starke 1977: 143 and 171) is quite in order.¹⁰ The fundamental meaning, however, remains that of removal by a wiping or scraping action, with the preverb *parā* 'forth, out' indicating the direction of movement (out into the sea).

More problematic is the contextual meaning of the remaining occurrence, in the second paragraph of the so-called Old Hittite "Palace Chronicle" (*KUB* 36.104 Ro 5, with restorations from the duplicates *KUB* 48.77,3 and *KBo* 12.44 i 7, all Neo-Hittite mss.): ^m*Pappan=a^{LÜ}uriannin šarā šar[ter]* "They *s-ed* up Pappa, the *urianni*." The context makes clear that this is an act of punishment or humiliation. Starke (1977: 143) renders literally as "spülen' nach oben" and likewise Dardano (1997: 78 and 145) as 'sciaccquare'⁷ with an indication that the real meaning is unclear. While certainty is not possible, I believe the solution lies in assuming that the core meaning of **serd(h)-* and its Hittite reflex was *'move the surface of one object obliquely against that of another'. The degree of violence and the precise angle of the contact could vary considerably. There are ample parallels for such a wide range of variability in roots of

this meaning: modern German *streichen* generally means 'stroke, touch gently, spread, coat, whet, rub, graze against', but the noun *Streich* can also mean 'blow, lash'. The English cognate 'strike' is now a verb of violence, but it once had a more gentle sense, as still seen in '(to) stroke'. One can also compare Hittite *s(a)lig-* 'graze against' with OIrish *sligid* 'strikes' (but *fo-slig* 'smears!') and German *schleichen* 'crawl, creep'.¹¹ French *frotter* 'rub', also used for sexual intercourse as noted above, was also once used to mean 'beat', a sense preserved in *frotter les oreilles* 'box the ears' > 'upbraid'. I tentatively suggest that Hittite *šarā šart-* likewise refers to slapping someone about the face. The preverb reflects the fact that in such an action the motion of the hands is inevitably upward.

As already proposed by Jóhannesson and Magnússon, a root **serd(h)-* as defined above may be related to other enlarged forms of a root **ser-* whose basic sense was that of bringing one object up against the surface of another with varying degrees of violence. One may compare with them the Icelandic verb *sarga* 'rasp, scrape; try to cut repeatedly with a dull knife; play (a violin)' and *surga* 'make a rasping sound', reflecting a virtual PIE **sergh-* (or possibly **serk-*).¹² As they further suggest, one should also relate Latin *sarriō* 'to hoe, weed' and *serra* 'saw', probably < **sers-* (for this preform see Schrijver 1991: 493). An enlarged form **serp-* furnishes the word for 'sickle' appearing in Greek ἄρπη, OCS *сръпъ*, Latvian *sirpis*, and Latin *sarp(i)ō* 'prune' (cf. also OHG *sarf* 'sharp, rough'). The enlarged root appears in Skt. *srñt-* 'sickle' and *srñt-* 'elephant goad'. The root **serd(h)-* appearing in Hittite *sart(āi)-* 'rub, wipe, scrape' (possibly also 'slap, rough up') is thus not isolated but part of a quite extensive set of words for similar actions. The use of such a verb to refer to sexual intercourse is typologically so trivial that we have no way to determine whether this usage in Germanic **serdan* and (indirectly) in Sanskrit **sarda/i-* **vagina* is an inheritance or the result of independent innovation.

¹¹ There is no justification for deriving the OIrish verbs from different roots, contra Vendryes (1974: S-133).

¹² It is unlikely that one should, with Pokorny (1959: 911) et al., derive OIrish *serc* 'love' from this source. The Irish word refers very broadly to physical and spiritual love, sacred and profane. Contra Vendryes (1974: S-92), the particular meaning of Breton *serch* 'concubine' may easily be due to euphemism and carries no special weight. For a better alternative etymology for *serc* see most recently Janda (2000: 192).

⁹ I owe the last two examples to Harry Hoffner, to whom I am most grateful for generously sharing with me the lexical file on *šart(ai)-* of the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary*.

¹⁰ So also the *CHD*, 1995: 114 (which see for the sense of *appaliyalla-*), but with equal justification the *CHD*, 1980–89: 14 renders 'will dislodge', and Archi (1979: 57) opts for 'sweeps away'.

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