

## The Mu particle in "Communism"

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So you want us to send a contribution about Communism. Not about any group of people calling themselves communists. Not about any one of the countless currents of "Communism". Not about operetta nation-states like Laos and North Korea. No, you're talking about the core concept of Communism. You want us to dig and touch the roots. Thanks to commies and anti-commies, Communism seems to be today's most unpopular, outdated, crestfallen issue. The very term was bad-mouthed, adulterated, clumsified, claw-hammered out of public discourse. Time to deal with it again.

The word *Kommunismus/Communismus* was coined as a neologism (both in German and late Latin), and sporadically employed in a derogatory way during and after the religious wars that set Europe on fire from the Late Middle Ages to Early Modernity. The doctrines of 16th century radical currents such as the Hutterites, the Hussites and the Taborites were described as *communisticae* by some of their coeval enemies and later detractors. Then the word was engulfed, until it

sensationally re-emerged in 19th century.

All those 16th century heresies proclaimed sharing of goods and communal living, and some of them advocated forced expropriation of the nobility and the clergy. During the German Peasants' War (1524-1525), a chain of riotous events that sent waves of rebellion across Central Europe, one of preacher Thomas Müntzer's battle cries was *Omnia sunt communia*, all things are common. It should go without saying that such an emphasis on sharing was deeply rooted in Christian history and doctrine. "*Erant illis omnia communia*" (Act 4,32): "Things were in common among them". And the *Rule of St. Augustine* (ca. 400 AC) says: "*Et non dicatis aliquid proprium, sed sint vobis omnia communia*": "Call nothing your own, but let everything be yours in common".

*Commūnis*. Let's take a close look at this Latin adjective. *Commūnis* means "common", "universal", "generally shared". *Mūnīa* means "duties", "public offices", "tolls", "excises", and any kind of civil services and obligations to the community. Therefore, *Cum mūnis* means "with duties", "with dues", "with engagements", i.e. obliged to take part in the life of a regulated community. Curiously enough, the antonym of *Commūnis* is *Immūnis*, which means "with no duties", "free from engagements", "free of tax".<sup>1</sup>

This is just the beginning of the journey back, for the word *Mūnīa* itself has a very long history.

The ancient root "*Mai*" / "*Mau*" / "*Mu*" has to do with calculating,

<sup>1</sup> If the antonym of "Common" is "Immune", then Communism is the ideology of "non-immunity", and it's true that "Communism is a disease of the mind", as American journalist and moral crusader George Putnam said on 23 October 1966. It was one of the punch lines in his commemorative speech on the 1956 Hungarian uprising.

weighing, measuring things - presumably in order to exchange them equitably or distribute them between your fellow persons.

That's what supposed to happen with duties in a fairly regulated community.

We can find this correspondence in several ancient languages. In Vedic Sanskrit, the 4000-year-old sacred language of India, *Mâti* means "to measure".

In Latin, *Mensio* means "measure" (French: *Mesure*; Italian: *Misura*).

In Old Slavonic (the first literary Slavic language, developed in the 9th century) *Mena* means "exchange", "barter".

In Old Lithuanian (15th century), *Mainas* has the same meaning.

In Germanic languages, there was a distinct but parallel terminological evolution: the German adjective *Gemeinas* perfectly reflects *Commūnis*. *Ge-meinas* = *Cum-mūnis*.<sup>2</sup>

That's also where the English words *Moon* (Greek: *Mhnh*;

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<sup>2</sup> By the way, *Gemeinwesen* ("community", "common essence", "communal being") was one of Karl Marx's favourite words, as well as one of the key concepts in his early texts, e.g. the "Critical Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian.'" (1844): "But do not all rebellions without exception have their roots in the disastrous isolation of man from the *gemeinwesen*? Does not every rebellion necessarily presuppose isolation? Would the revolution of 1789 have taken place if French citizens had not felt disastrously isolated from the *gemeinwesen*? The abolition of this isolation was its very purpose. But the *gemeinwesen* from which the workers is isolated is a *gemeinwesen* of quite different reality and scope than the political *gemeinwesen*. The *gemeinwesen* from which his own labor separates him is life itself, physical and spiritual life, human morality, human activity, human enjoyment, human nature.". As regards the development of this concept in 20th century critical post-Marxism, see the works of French thinker Jacques Camatte.

Gothic<sup>3</sup>: *Mēna*; Old English<sup>4</sup>: *Mōna*) and *Month* (Greek: *Mhn*, Latin: *Mensis*) come from. The moon was used in order to count days and measure longer periods of time.

That's also where *Mind* (Latin: *Mens*) comes from. The mind is the organ that counts/measures/weights and then sets the value and the *meaning* of things. Of course, the word *Meaning* has the same origins.

Most important, the Akkadian word *Manû* means "to count on the fingers".<sup>5</sup>

Akkadian is an ancient Semitic language. It was already widely spoken (and written in cuneiform) in Mesopotamia 4,500 years ago. It was the language of that era's "international" commerce. Plenty of inscriptions and tablets have been found all over Asia Minor.

The most prestigious and controversial Italian linguist and philologist, the late Giovanni Semerano (1913-2005), devoted his entire life to tracing the origins of all European languages back to Akkadian and a common Semitic base. He filled almost all the gaps in the etymology of Greek and Latin terms. We're drawing heavily from his works and discoveries.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gothic was the Germanic language spoken by the Goths (2nd-5th Century). They later split into two different tribes, Ostrogoths and Visigoths, and practically took over the dying Roman Empire in Southern Europe.

<sup>4</sup> By "Old English" (also called "Anglo-Saxon") linguists mean the Germanic language spoken in England before the 1066 Norman invasion.

<sup>5</sup> It's the only reasonable etymological explanation of the Latin word *Manus*, "hand". Italian and Spanish: *Mano*; Portuguese: *Mão*; French: *Main*; Catalan: *Mà*.

<sup>6</sup> Semerano's findings were systematized in his immense work *Le origini della cultura europea* [The Origins of European Culture] which was published in two 2-volume instalments whose subtitles are *Rivelazioni della linguistica storica* [Revelations from Historical Linguistics] (Olschki,

Let's go further back now.

What is the reason the root "Mai"/ "Mau"/"Mu" has to do with measuring and sharing?

The Akkadian term for "water" is *Mû*. Ugaritic <sup>7</sup>: *Mj*. Aramaic <sup>8</sup>: *Majjā*.

Water is the most valuable resource, you can barter anything for it if you're thirsty. Water is the mainstay of any community, the first thing that must be shared equally. The necessity of distributing and sharing water is the pre-condition and basis of all economy and social regulation.

We're sinking deep into the past, speculating on the very birth of human language.

There's a strict correspondence between the consonant "M" and water. The sound "M" is roughly onomatopoeic of drinking. If you're thirsty and get to drink avidly, you emit a deep, low

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Florence 1984, ISBN 8822232542) and *Basi semitiche delle lingue indo-europee* [The Semitic Foundations of Indo-European Languages] (Olschki, Florence 1994, ISBN 8822242335). In the following decade, he "popularized" his theories in shorter books, and published further groundbreaking studies on the Etruscan language. His latest works include *La favola dell'indoeuropeo* [The Myth of the Indo-European Language] (B. Mondadori, Milan 2005, ISBN 8842492744) and *Il popolo che sconfisse la morte: Gli Etruschi e la loro lingua* [The People that Defeated Death: The Etruscans and their Language] (B. Mondadori, Milan 2006, ISBN 8842490709). As far as we know, there is no English translation of his books.

<sup>7</sup> Ugaritic was a Semitic language spoken in Syria from the 14th through the 12th century BC.

<sup>8</sup> Aramaic is another Semitic language, very close to Hebrew, and Jesus of Nazareth's mother tongue, as it was the everyday language spoken by Jews in Palestina at the times the region was part of the Roman empire. Aramaic and its dialects are still spoken in some parts of the Middle East (especially Syria). Some books of the Bible were originally written in Aramaic (e.g. the book of Daniel).

sound that can be rendered as "Oom... Oom... Oom..."

In Italian baby-speak, the word for "water" is *Bumba* (pronounced "Boom-bah").

Finally, we can say that the "-mu(n)" particle contained in the word "Com-mun-ism" has to do with water. Which has now become the scarcest of resources.

If the word were refreshed, recharged, revamped, its return to use couldn't be better timed.

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