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“Narten formations” versus “Narten roots”

Abstract: Since the existence of a PIE “acrostatic” present formation with descriptive **é̄/é* ablaut was first established by Narten (1968), there has been an ongoing debate regarding the status of this type of inflection in the overall PIE morphological system. Is it a lexically determined feature, by which certain roots consistently (at least typically) display ablaut one degree higher than “standard” roots in a given morphological category? Or do “Narten presents” represent merely another means of deriving present (imperfective) stems (originally with a specific Aktionsart), alongside well-known suffixes like **-s_ke/o-*? I will present further evidence for the latter viewpoint, thus supporting the independent conclusions in Kümmel 1998.

Keywords: acrostatic, akrodynamic, internal derivation, Narten present, Narten root, root present

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In a ground-breaking article of 1968 Johanna Narten established the existence of a PIE present active type with **é̄/é* inflection (now widely labeled in English “acrostatic”), such as **stéu-ti*, **stéw-nti* ‘praise’ (attested in Ved. *astāut*, Av. ptc. *stauuat*).¹ Schindler (1994: 398f.) argued that the appearance of “Narten formations” in both verbal and nominal formations is systematic and lexically determined: certain roots show a lengthened-grade/full-grade alternation where “standard” roots show full grade alternating with zero grade, or full grade in a category usually showing zero grade. Weiss (2009: 47 with note 16) also defines “Narten roots” in similar terms, but acknowledges the possibility that non-verbal forms showing “upgraded” ablaut are simply analogical to the verbal paradigm. The stance of Villanueva Svensson (2012: 334) is likewise ambivalent: he concedes that some “Narten presents” stand beside root aorists, citing the case of the root **de_k-* ‘receive’ (for which see already Kümmel 1998: 198–200), but also contends that others “... stand at the center of an archaic derivational system of their own

¹ Just as in acrostatic nominal formations, the full grade of the root in the weak stem was subject to early replacement by zero grade, hence Ved. *stuvānti* for **stāvati* (cf. Jasanoff 2003: 42 and *passim* and Melchert 2013: 143f. after Schindler 1972: 32).

(Schindler’s “Narten roots”). Villanueva Svensson thus treats the latter as a subtype of (unmarked) athematic presents.²

Schindler himself (1994: 398) already conceded that “Für das Material bestehen natürlich z. T. Alternativerklärungen”, and in fact subsequent scholarship has brought into question a number of the examples he cited. For a refutation of most of the Avestan evidence see de Vaan 2004. On the *e*-grade in substantivized verbal adjectives like OHG *kind* see Schaffner 2001: 334f. The paradigm of ‘blow’ in PIE may have been an ordinary root present **h₂wéh₁-ti*, **h₂uh₁-énti*: see LIV²: 287 with references to opposing views. As suggested by Harðarson (1993: 72–76) Grk. ἐγήρᾱ ‘grew old’ may reflect an *s*-aorist (followed by LIV²: 165). On TochB *śem* ‘I came’ and ‘s/he came’ see Malzahn 2010: 226 with references and on Gathic Avestan *cikōitərəš* Jasanoff 1997.

It is not, however, my aim here to review or critique each of Schindler’s proposed examples of “Narten roots”. There is no question that some PIE roots show “clusters” of lengthened-grade reflexes in verbal and nominal categories where one generally expects full grade (see e. g. the examples cited in Jasanoff 2012: 129). The issue is whether this evidence establishes the existence of “Narten roots” that *systematically* show different behavior in terms of quantitative ablaut from “ordinary” roots. Before turning to the main purpose of this paper, I wish only to make two general observations.

First, contra Narten 1968: 1–12; Schindler 1994, et al., the mere fact that a root middle shows accented *e*-grade of the root against the “usual” zero grade is *not* sufficient evidence to show that a given root is a “Narten root”. Hittite mediopassive *nē(y)a(ri)* ‘turns’ reflects **néiH-o(r)* (Oettinger 1979: 515; Jasanoff 2003: 197; Villanueva Svensson 2012: 339) and Hittite mediopassive *tarratta* ‘is able’ continues **térh₂-to(r)* (thus with Oettinger 1979: 299 and Harðarson 1993: 107 with note 56 contra Villanueva Svensson 2010–2011: 19 and 2012: 339), but the roots **neiH-* ‘lead, turn’ and **terh₂-* ‘overcome’ show *no* evidence for lengthened **ē*-grade in active verbal formations or in nominal derivatives. It is a descriptive fact that PIE root middles come in two types: with full grade of the root and barytone accent or zero grade of the root and oxytone accent. One may interpret this evidence in more than one fashion (see for one recent extensive review of the problem Villanueva Svensson 2007–2008; 2010–2011; 2012), but there is no justification for inferring “Narten root” status for a given PIE root based *solely* on the appearance of a barytone full-grade root middle.

² The treatment of such phenomena by Jasanoff (2003: 31 and 2012: 128f.) is also in the spirit of “Narten roots”, but he speaks explicitly only of “Narten behavior” and “Narten profile”.

Second, while certain roots do show “clusters” of lengthened-grade formations in both verbal and nominal categories, this fact per se does not justify the notion of a special class of “Narten roots”, since it is commonplace that the expected ablaut pattern of a nominal formation may be influenced by a related verbal category. Hittite clearly inherited the “*τόμος*-type” of primary action noun, but regular Hittite sound changes obscured the formal relationship to the associated root verb in many instances: e. g. *karša-* ‘shearing’ < **kórs-o-* beside *karš-* ‘cut’ < **kers-*.³ Hittite thus shows for this productive formation also examples like *kuera-* ‘field’ < *‘section’ with *e*-grade after *kuer-* ‘cut’ and *gulšša-* ‘fate’ with zero grade after *gulšš-* ‘draw, sketch’. Therefore the mere appearance of a descriptively “acrostatic” *s*-stem **séd-(o)s*, **séd-(e)s-* ‘seat’ (Lat. *sēdēs* ‘seat’, OIr. *síd* ‘fairy mound’) beside evidence for lengthened-grade verbal formations (Lat. *sēdī* ‘sat’, OIr. *sáid-id* ‘fixes’ < **sōdeye-*) does not necessarily prove that PIE **sed-* ‘sit’ was a “Narten root” as defined above.⁴

Let us now turn specifically to acrostatic (“Narten”) presents. An acrostatic present **stéu-ti*, **stéw-nti* ‘praise’ can in principle be analyzed in one of two ways (see already the excellent formulation of the issue in Kümmel 1998: 192). It may be interpreted as a root present, of the same category as **h₁és-ti*, **h₁s-énti* ‘be’, and its unexpected ablaut regarded as lexically determined (see explicitly Schindler 1994: 398 with a different acrostatic example). We might expect in that case to find equally unexpected lengthened grade in other verbal or in nominal derivatives of the same root, but they could be lacking due to chance or, as just argued above, be due to analogical influence from the acrostatic present itself. More crucially, if the acrostatic present truly is a *root* present, there should not exist a PIE root aorist to the same root, nor a competing characterized present formation.

The alternative is to regard acrostatic presents as *characterized* presents, entirely parallel to suffixed types like those in **-ské/o-* or reduplicated presents, but marked by a special accent and ablaut pattern. In this case, other lengthened grade formations to the same root must be due to analogical influence from the acrostatic present or (in the case of nominal formations) due to independently motivated acrostatic inflection. On the other hand, the presence of acrostatic presents to telic roots with root aorists would by this account be not only normal,

³ My citation of Hitt. *tarma-* ‘peg, nail’ < **tór(h₂)-mo-* in this connection in the oral presentation of this paper was obviously a lapsus, since it manifestly is not an action noun in R(ó)-o-.

⁴ Since influence of a noun on a transparently related verb is also commonplace in language (note the common pronunciation of English ‘err’ not as [ə] but as [er] after ‘error’), one may at least entertain that in some instances the noun was the source of the lengthened grade: e. g. root noun **h₃rég-s* ‘king’ (> Lat. *rēx* etc.) beside acrostatic present **h₃rég-ti* ‘rules’ (> Ved. *rāṣṭi*).

but in fact expected. Furthermore, it is generally acknowledged that the different ways of forming characterized presents (imperfective stems) in PIE originally expressed particular Aktionsarten — even if we cannot always determine the semantics with precision. Thus it would also not be surprising if an atelic root showed a characterized present beside an ordinary root present.⁵

Kümmel (1998) presented at least six, possibly, eight examples where a fundamentally telic root forms a root aorist with momentative or ingressive sense alongside an acrostatic present with durative or iterative sense.⁶ He thus concluded (1998: 205):

Aus dem Vorliegen zweier verschieden ablautender Wurzelbildungen mit unterschiedlicher Funktion bei derselben Wurzel kann nur geschlossen werden, daß der akrodynamische Ablauf nicht auf einer inhärenten Eigenschaft bestimmter Wurzeln basiert, sondern vielmehr eine bestimmte morphologische Funktion erfüllt. Im Bereich der Wurzelverben besteht diese Funktion darin, durative Präsentien zu Wurzelaoristen zu bilden, die entweder ein auf die Aoristhandlung folgendes duratives Geschehen oder aber die Fortführung der Aoristhandlung durch fortwährende Wiederholung derselben bezeichnen. Hauptfunktion des akrodynamischen Wurzelpräsens scheint also die Durativierung gewesen zu sein.

The modest aim of what follows is to show that there are at least two counterexamples to “Narten roots” of the other kind cited above: i. e., cases where an atelic root forms an acrostatic present beside an ordinary root present with a clear contrast in sense. The first example is PIE **h₁es-* ‘be’.⁷ It forms an ordinary root present **h₁és-ti*, **h₁s-énti* in the sense ‘be, exist’, but also an active acrostatic present **h₁és-ti*, **h₁és-nti* in the durative sense ‘abide, sit, be sitting’, whose Pres3Sg is directly attested in Old Hittite active *ēšzi* ‘sits, is sitting’ (as in other acrostatic presents elsewhere the expected Pres3Pl **ešanzi* has been replaced by *ašanzi*). Against the standard derivation (e. g. Harðarson 1993: 70f. and LIV²: 232) the long **ē* of the PIE verb ‘sit’ cannot reflect reduplicated **h₁é-h₁s-*. Only lengthened-grade **h₁és-* can explain HLuvian /i:snu(wa)-/ ‘seat’ and /i:stara-/ ‘throne’, since **eh₁C* > Luvian *āC*, as in **yéh₁ro-* > *āra/i-* ‘time’ (Melchert 1994: 245 with further examples). Both Luvian derivatives are new creations based on **/i:s-/* ‘sit, be sitting’ (compare Luvian /h^winu-/ ‘cause to run’ to /h^wi(ya)-/ ‘run’), and the noun says nothing about pos-

5 For example, LIV²: 68f. reasonably reconstructs a PIE nasal infix present alongside a root present for **bheh₂-* ‘shine’.

6 Harðarson (1993: 59–71) had already drawn similar conclusions regarding the status and function of acrostatic presents, also citing the roots **dek-* and **k^(w)remH-* (cf. Kümmel 1998: 198).

7 The following analysis owes much to the analyses of Oettinger (2004; 2011), but he himself (2004: 493) leaves open the question of whether PIE **h₁es-* ‘be’ and **h₁es-* ‘sit’ are the same root and in a footnote explicitly denies the notion that acrostatic presents are characterized presents.

sible PIE lengthened grade in **-t/dhro-* stems. To the Narten active present ‘sit, be sitting’ was formed an oppositional middle (or Stativ) **h₁és-o(r)* with the eventive sense ‘sit down’, continued by Old Hittite *eša* and CLuvian *aša[r]* ‘sits down’ (thus with Oettinger 2004: 491 and especially 2011: 168). One should acknowledge that by “Čop’s Law” (Čop 1970) **h₁és-o(r)* would regularly lead to Luvian **aššar*, but adjustment to *ašar* is unsurprising given the single */s-/* in all other allomorphs of the root for ‘sit’ (*/i:s-/* as cited and */as-/* in HLuvian (THRONUS.SOLIUM)*á-sa-* ‘seat’ < virtual **h₁ós-o-*). In “Core Indo-European” **h₁és-o(i)* renewed as **h₁és-to(i)* took over the stative sense ‘sit, be sitting’, eliminating **h₁és-ti*, but it adopted the long *ē* of the latter (with Oettinger 2011: 168). Hittite independently made a similar renewal: active *ēšzi* ‘sits, is sitting’ was eliminated in New Hittite, while simple middle *eša(ri)* took over the meaning ‘sits, is sitting’ and eventive ‘sits down’ was now expressed by *-za eša(ri)* (with obligatory reflexive particle).

My second example is the root **wek-* ‘wish, will’. The gist of the correct solution was already seen by Harðarson (1993: 62) and adopted in LIV²: 672f., but his discussion is extremely brief, and for various reasons this analysis has not achieved the acceptance it deserves. The root forms an ordinary root present **wék-ti*, **uk-énti* with the stative sense ‘wish’ (sic!), attested in Vedic *váṣṭi*, *uśmāsi*. It is crucial to insist (with Kümmel in LIV²: 673, note 1, contra Eichner 1973: 81 and Oettinger 1979: 100) that the Vedic verb cannot reflect an acrostatic present, since complete loss of the expected lengthened grade in the strong stem of such a well attested verb is not credible. A further compelling argument is that the true reflex of the matching active acrostatic present **wék-ti*, *wék-nti*, Hittite *wēk-* is entirely distinct in sense, showing only the eventive meaning ‘demand’.⁸ I must underscore this point, since unfortunately Harðarson (1993: 62) and LIV²: 672 confuse the issue by citing “wünschen” as one of the meanings of Hittite *wēk-*, and Jasanoff (2003: 36), while correctly translating the Hittite verb only as ‘demands’, misleadingly characterizes this as a “quasi-stative meaning”. It is nothing of the kind. The Hittite verb is always and only eventive: ‘demands, asks for’. Since the contrast in inflection between the Vedic and Hittite verbs is *matched* by a consistent different in sense, we must with Harðarson and LIV² assume both an ordinary root present and an acrostatic present that expressed a different Aktion-

⁸ Contra Kloekhorst 2008: 996f., the Hittite verb cannot be derived from an ordinary root present. It is true that if we had only the very sparsely attested finite forms with single *-k-* pointing to “lenition” after accented long vowel (Pret1Sg *ú-e-ku-un*, Pret3Pl *ú-e-ke-er*), these could be dismissed as “simplified spellings”, but the marked imperfective stem in *-ške-* is *always ú-e-ki-i/eš-ke-* with single *-k-* (8x). This can only be explained as reflecting the generalized strong stem **wék-* with lengthened grade.

sart.⁹ Per Harðarson (1993: 62), the sense ‘demand’ is from “ein intensives oder wiederholtes “Wünschen””. This is not impossible, but a characterized imperfective stem to a stative verb can express an inceptive (or better “anfangsterminativ”) sense — see e. g. Hittite *iyanni-* ‘begin to walk’ < *iya-* ‘walk, be walking’. I suggest that the acrostatic present came in Hittite to mean rather ‘initiate a wish’ > ‘demand’. One may compare the situational use of English ‘want’ and ‘will’: ‘I want that!’ or ‘I will it!’, both of which express an act, not a state.

I conclude that we may add to the examples cited by Kümmel (1998) for PIE telic roots forming acrostatic presents with broadly iterative-durative sense beside eventive root aorists at least two instances of atelic roots forming acrostatic presents likewise marking a particular Aktionsart beside ordinary root presents with stative meaning. I therefore must reject the notion of special “Narten roots” that formed true root presents (*functionally* equivalent to ordinary root presents) with “upgraded” ablaut. Acrostatic presents rather formed characterized presents in the same manner as various suffixes or reduplication. The origin of the type is a separate question that I will not pursue here.¹⁰

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Abbreviations

LIV² Helmut Rix (2001). *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben. Die Wurzeln und ihre Primärstammbildungen*. Unter Leitung von Helmut Rix bearbeitet von Martin J. Kümmel, Thomas Zehnder, Reiner Lipp, Brigitte Schirmer. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Reichert.

⁹ Since the meaning of the Greek participle ἐκών is stative ‘willing’, I prefer to assign it also to the ordinary root present and regard its full grade as secondary, with Frisk 1960–1972: 1, 479 and Chantraine 1968–1980: 331, contra Harðarson and LIV², loc. cit.

¹⁰ The broadly iterative-durative Aktionsart of Narten presents is quite compatible with the idea that they originated in reduplicated presents where simplification of consonant sequences in the strong stem with compensatory lengthening led to a reanalysis (see Kortlandt 1999: 2 and de Vaan 2004: 597f., following Lubotsky). However, the existence of such a type already in PIE means that such a development would have to have taken place in pre-PIE, and the details remain to be worked out. In any case, the origins of lengthened grade in the verb and the noun need not be the same (witness the debate regarding “Szemerényi’s Law” at this conference).

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