"Narten" Roots from the Avestan Point of View

Michiel de Vaan

Leiden University

1. At the 1993 Copenhagen meeting of the Indo-European society, Jochem Schindler presented a new theory about the origin of the so-called (acro)static root present. In his own words (Schindler 1994: 398): "Verbalen Nartenformationen entsprechen systematisch Nominalbildungen mit analogen Ablautverhältnissen. Das läßt auf zwei ursprüngliche Wurzeltypen schließen, Standard- und Nartenwurzeln." His theory implies the existence in PIE of a separate category of roots which inherently show 'upgraded' ablaut with respect to other roots: lengthened grade where other roots have full grade, and full grade where others have zero grade.

Schindler illustrates his theory by means of twelve very short notes. The first three of them intend to show that the 'upgraded' ablaut occurs with all three tenses, viz. present, perfect and aorist. Subsequently, Schindler offers reconstructed forms from nine different PIE roots which seem to show 'upgraded' ablaut. He distinguishes between verbal (A) and nominal (B) forms. He illustrates most of the reconstructions with one or two attested forms. In numbers, these are divided as follows: Vedic Sanskrit 12 forms (to 7 roots), Avestan 13 (5), Greek 9 (5), Latin 3, Old Irish 2, Old Church Slavonic 1, Lithuanian 1, Old High German 1, English 1. Whereas it is not unusual to find a numerical preponderance of Indo-Iranian and Greek in a list of examples, the fact that Avestan outnumbers Sanskrit is striking.

Schindler himself admits: "Für das Material bestehen natürlich z.T. Alternativeverklärungen". The key word here is 'partly': how much of the evidence can be explained only by means of PIE 'upgraded' ablaut? If an alternative solution is proposed for a limited number of the adduced forms, this does not affect the general picture: the usefulness of the concept of PIE 'Narten' roots remains intact. Yet if credible alternative solutions exist for many of the forms which Schindler adduces, his theory will lose much of its attraction. It is the aim of this paper to test the validity of the Avestan evidence adduced by Schindler.

*vafrica- appears in the OAv. pres.ptc.med. *vazjama - 'getting married' (of girls).

The meaning matches the Rigvedic use of sub- 'to carry; to marry (of a man)', the passive of which is attested in pasyuhayamāna 'who is being carried around' = 'who gets married'. This suggests that Ilr. *ny>a-ja- 'to be conveyed' had already acquired the meaning 'to get married'.

Usually, the Avestan passive in *-iH- < PIE *-iH> - takes the zero grade of the root. Exceptions occur in Avestan when the root vocalism shows no synchronous alternation, viz. in the case of *dhisa- 'to be reached' (Skt. *dhis-), and of YAv. *dhta- 'to be put, to be given' < *dha-ja-, with YAv. analogical shortening of *ā (cf. de Vaan 2003: 147). Another root which does not display zero-grade formations in Avestan is *suz- 'to worship', and accordingly we find the pres.pass. *suzia-ja- < *suzja-ja- 'to be worshipped'.

The two remaining passives with full grade of the root are *vaza-ja- 'to marry' (Skt. suhade) and *baria-ja- 'to be carried' (Skt. bhadrade). Schindler regards *vaza-ja- and *baria-ja- as archaisms with PIE 'upgraded' root vocalism in front of the suffix *-iH- < *-iH> - which they would have escaped the introduction of a zero grade. However, it is perfectly possible that *vaza-ja- and *baria-ja- are due to an innovation on the Avestan side, introducing the full grade in order to make the passive more similar to other verbal formations (Kellens 1984: 128).

I thus assume that *vaza-ja- and *baria-ja- continue regular Ilr. passive presents *ay>a-ja- and *ay>a-ja- , which analogically introduced the root forms *ay> and *bar> in the model of the full grade in the present stems *ay>- 'to convey' and *bar>- 'to carry'. In the case of *baria-ja- this assumption can be supported by the following observation: Wherever we find a zero-grade passive present of roots in -ar(H), the corresponding active present also has the zero grade, or at least it never has the full grade: *kiriia-ja- 'to be made' < *kiriia-ja- (pres. kurnu-), *piria-ja- 'to be confiscated' < *pria-ja- (pres. pirmu- and pirmu-), *miria-ja- 'to die' < *mirja-ja- (no active present attested), *mai>ia-ja- 'to be covered' < *Hya>ja-ja- (pres. pirmu-), *sria-ja- 'to be thrown down' < *sria-ja- (pres. stormu>ja-). Only the passives *baria-ja- and *xaria-ja- 'to be consumed' (pres. *xara>ja-) occur beside a full-grade thematic present.

Apart from *vazjama- there is one other, alleged occurrence of *vazja- which is reported to have the passive meaning 'to be conveyed'. We find it in Yast 14.43-44 together with the (alleged) form *vulta- 'conveyed', which would also show a full grade as opposed to Skt. *sidha-. The passage tells that when two armies clash, the army which is the first to invoke Varṣātrya will prevail. I give the text according to Geldner's edition, with my own translation of the less controversial parts:

14.43 aaj moeast akuri marqtd
gut spuda haqiajast
"rajam rasa katarasit
vahdyok> ahmiia nijy vazjast
jatidhi ahmiia nijy jaista*

14.44 catqeriy porand vibharaist
ausi paqam katarasit
jatiir "pausunnuf fraqiajast

(...)
atari wartha "hacilti.

Thus spoke Ahura Mazda: When the armies come together, oh Špitama Zarathustra, each of them an orderly battle-rank;

You must spread out four feathers towards each of the roads; the one of them both which is the first to worship [Varṣātrya],

that one will acquire the victory.

The problem lies in the last two lines of 14.43. Firstly, their meaning in the context is unclear. The loc.sg. ahmiia 'in it' can only refer to rasa 'battle-rank'; the subjunctive forms vazjaiste and jaista may or may not depend on yat, like haqiajast. A literal translation runs: 'when the v. in it will not be v., (when) the slain ones in it will not be slain.' Bartholomae assumes that this refers to an undecided outcome of the battle, which is possible; but it might also be a description of rāsim rasma, i.e. refer to the situation before the battle. Secondly, and this is most relevant to the present problem, the reading of the penultimate line is disputed. In his edition, Geldner (1886-96) gives this line as vaftajast ahmiia nij vazjaiste, under the assumption (expressed in Geldner 1882: 80) that the double use of the verb jan- in the second line presupposes the double use

\[3\] Vll. Pt1 syntb2h0, M12 syntb2h0 - J10 syntb2h0 - E1 syntb2h0, K16 syntb2h0, s.m. syntb2h0 - Pt1 Pt13 O3 syntb2h0 L18 syntb2h0 L11 syntb2h0 M4 syntb2h0 Jm1 syntb2h0 K38 36 syntb2h0

\[4\] Vll. Pt1 E1 syntb2h0 - J10 M4 syntb2h0 - Pt14, L11 O3 syntb2h0 Jm4 jaista - K38 36 syntb2h0

5. Bartholomae 1904: 894 translates "vier Federn sollt du verteilen auf den Weg nach beiden Seiten hin". This implies two anomalies, viz. the use of the gen.pl. paqam for the acc.sg. (originally paqam, letzte paqam), and the use of the nom.sg. katarasit as an accusative of goal. My translation implies only one anomaly, viz. the nom.sg. katarasit being governed by the preposition ausi, which normally governs the acc.
of a single verb in the first line too. However, neither varta- nor vajita- are securely philologically. The reading varta- appears in F1, but most other mss. have varita-; since there is no word in the context from which -rt- could have been adopted, it seems that F1 varta- has lost -rt- (maybe due to *rītim, spelled rātim in all mss. including F1). The mss. K36 and K38 spell nīthāhi, but since we expect *nīth- to yield nīth-, in the archetype (cf. de Vaan 2003: 232f.), it is likely that they too go back to varitāhō. The verb form is given as vanita- in most mss., and vajita- can be due to a simple scribal mistake of  for n, both letters being very similar in the Avestan alphabet (if one assumes that vanītađh originally contained the letter i, the similarity is even greater). Thus, the original version seems to have been varitāhō akhiia nīt nītītādi. A passive vanita- ‘to be conquered’ would admittedly be a hapax, but it would nicely match the meaning of janta- ‘to be slain’. The juxtaposition of YAv. uahā-, uahāhā (Y 35.3) of YAv. 'leader' represents an IIr. agent noun with the suffix *-tar-, a formation type which usually contains the full grade of the root. Since the expected reflex of *bār-tar- would be *bātar-, Schindler reconstructs IIr. *a in *bāt-ar-. However, bātar- can be counted among a small number of words with an unexpected sequence -zf- < *-zar-, cf. Hoffmann 1986: 847. In all cases, the consonant preceding -a is a labial: *xāta- ‘food’ < *xāta-, xātar ‘drinker’ < *xāt-ar- and vāta- ‘vehicle’ < *vāt-ar-. We may posit phonetic lengthening of IIr. *a in stressed initial syllable in front of -zf- conditioned by a preceding labial (cf. de Vaan 2003: 54-56).

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)
tuitive forms: they are supplied by the root aorist, e.g. Skt. 23s.opt. sāhāya to s-aorist sāhāya. (sah- 'to conquer'). Narten (1984: 99) observes that the same situation seems to apply to Av. sārā-: most of the active aorist forms are s-aorists, but there is no s-aorist optative. Therefore Avestan, like Sanskrit, may have supplied the aor.opt.act. by means of the root aorist (cf. also Hardarson 1993: 125). In that case, it cannot be excluded that the ablaut grade of the s-aorist *sārā- has influenced that of the root aorist nārmez, which was used as its optative.

As evidence for ‘Narten’ vocalism, Schindler also adduces the root noun *nārmez- ‘working’ which is used as the second member of a compound, e.g. in avyānārmez- ‘who does evil’ and kābliuānārmez- ‘who makes real’. Kellens (1974: 66) ascribes the full grade of *nārmez- to analogical influence of the nom.sg. *nār < *-af-t, which has regular -ar < Plt. *-f- in front of i. This is one possible explanation. Alternatively, one may ascribe *nārmez- to the analogical introduction of (what looked like) the full grade from other derivatives of *nār-, such as the ptc. *nārīta- ‘done’ and the adj. nartīna ‘what must be done’. This scenario seems especially likely because the frequent thematization of the root noun in YAv. is always accompanied by the full grade of the root: nom.sg. nāršānārmez, gen.pl. nārśānānārmez, etc.

Schindler adduces the past participle *nārīta- ‘done, made’ in Old Avestan nārunārta- ‘struck’ and kābliunārta- as evidence for a PIE *-te- formation with full grade in Avestan. In OAv., the vowel -a- is unexpected: Proto-Avestan *-f- regularly yields -ar/f- in Old Avestan, as opposed to -ar/f- in YAv. However, we find a number of OAv forms which do contain -ar/f- < *-f-. As a possible explanation, ‘with a stallion’, dārīta ‘sight’ and pārtīta ‘question’. These are probably dependent on YAv. influence on the OAv. texts: the OAv. sequence *-f- was replaced by YAv. -ar/f- in the speech of the YAv. text transmitters (thus Beekes 1988: 94 and Hoffmann-Forssman 1996: 91). We may regard *nārīta- as another instance of this YAv. influence on OAv.

• PIE *gēn-, noun ni-ziyta- fra-ziyiti-.

Schindler compares Av. nizyta- with German Kind, and Av. frausītī- ‘posterity, offspring’ with Greek γεών. He posits PIE *gēn-, to-, and *gēn-ti-, i.e. full grade in two forms which usually show the zero grade of the root. However, the Avestan forms cannot be simply projected back into PIE. The stem ni-ziyta- is only attested in the hapax nizyntam (sic) occurring in Frāhag-i ōm, nr. 730. The Pahlavi translation glosses it as ‘who is born in the house’. If the connection with γεών ‘to engender’ is correct, this would be the only combination of ni + γεών in Avestan; similarly, RV jaht is not attested in combination with ni. In view of Skt. jātā ‘living being; son’ and Av. zātā ‘born’ < Hr. *gēhtā < PIE *gēh-, it is unlikely that nizyta- preserves archaic ablaut of the root PIE *gēh-.

On the contrary, I would argue that nizyta- represents a more recent derivation of the root Av. γεών.

The word frausītī- < *projukhīti- is regarded as a possible old formation by Hoffmann 1986: 846, who connects it with Gr. γεών and Latin gen. For these forms, Beekes 1969: 228 has suggested the possibility of a PIE ablaut paradigm nom.sg. *gēnhtīti, gen.sg. *gēkhtēti. The zero grade in the root and suffixal accent might then be continued in Skt. prajāti, although this does not occur in the oldest Skt. texts, and has a slightly different meaning ‘generating or generative power, generation, production, bringing forth, delivery’ (Be): Śrīs; BhP. It is therefore possible that prajāti- is an inner-Sanskrit formation on the basis of Skt. prajā- (RV +) ‘offspring’ and prajā- (RV +) ‘born, produced’. This would leave Av. frausītī- as the only Ir. descendant of *gēnhtīti, which renders the explanation from an ablaut paradigm unnecessary (though not impossible). Instead, frausītī- may be due to the introduction of the full grade of the root γεών ‘to give birth to’.

3. So far the Avestan evidence which was used by Schindler. There is one other form which has often been regarded as evidence for ‘Narten’ ablaut in Avestan:

• OAv. stāumi (Y 43.8), 1s. pres.ind.act. of stū ‘praise’.

This form was discussed by Narten 1968: 17, who concluded that it might represent the Avestan counterpart of the lengthened grade in Skt. stāumi. However, instead of stāumi we must in all probability read Y 43.8 staumi, with the same full grade as in YAv. stāumi. This is borne out by the variant readings: all ms. have stāumi except for the Iranian Videvdād sāde ms. Jp1, Mf2 and K4, which have stāumi. Although it is true that these mss. sometimes preserve an older reading than the other ms. classes, the sequences -am- and -am- tend to be mixed up by Jp1, Mf2 and K4, cf. De Vaan 2000; in particular, they tend to replace -am- by -ām-. Thus, we must read Y 43.8 staumi.

4. It has become clear that the Avestan evidence does not support Schindler’s theory; but there is more. A cornerstone of his system is formed by lengthened grades in acrostic presents such as Skt. śāstī and rāṣṭī, but an alternative explanation for these lengthened grades has been found in the simplification of original reduplication in roots of the type *TeK. This idea has been developed by Kortlandt 1999, who builds on a suggestion by Lubotsky (p.c.): ‘When lengthened grade superseded reduplication in the active singular of the static present, first in *TeK-roots such as śāstī ‘fashions’, rāṣṭī ‘makes offering’, then analogically in mānīti ‘wipes’, sāstī ‘praises’, the long vowel became characteristic of this type of derived present’ (Kortlandt 1999: 6). This explanation combines a simple observation on the phonological structure of roots
showing 'Narten' presents with the fact that the lengthened grade has spread especially in Indo-Iranian (and within Ikr, especially in Indo-Aryan). Since it does not introduce an otherwise unknown phonological parameter for PIE, and since it is tailored to the languages which contain most or all of the disputed lengthened grade presents, Kortlandt's explanation carries more conviction than the theory of PIE 'upgrading' roots. The proposed origin of lengthened grade presents in reduplication also removes the apparent anomaly that some PIE roots would have formed both a root present and a root aorist (cf. Kümmel 1998). Finally, it has been argued by Hardarson 1993: 89 and by Kümmel 1998: 204 that lengthened grade root presents are characterized by an intensive or iterative (Kümmel also speaks of durative) meaning. Since one of the main functions of reduplication in PIE is to express repetition, this observation neatly fits Kortlandt's explanation.

5. We have seen in section 2 that none of the added Avestan forms remains as trustworthy evidence for PIE 'upgraded' ablaut; all of them can be explained as the result of phonetic development within Avestan or from morphological rearrangement. The conclusion seems to be justified that the Avestan pillar under the theory of 'Narten' roots has collapsed. Added to the attractive alternative explanation which exists for the acrostatic root presents in Skt., the concept of 'Narten' roots can be abandoned altogether.

Bibliography


