

## Latin *dormiō*\*

Eric P. Hamp

There are some aspects of formation of the Latin verb 'to sleep' which have been insufficiently noticed. Certain facts of the historical phonology of the Latin base *dormi-* lead us immediately to recognize morphological implications.

Ernout and Meillet have claimed that this stem is a derived present from the athematic extended base *\*drēm-* to be seen in OCS *drēmijq*, with *m-* marking the durative state, or indeterminate aspect. At the same time they fail to motivate the use of a different extension to mark what is claimed to be the same aspect in Greek *'έδραθον 'εδαρθον*.

Let us first note that a simple athematic in final laryngeal is to be seen in Vedic *drāti* 'sleeps' < *\*dreH-*. Now it is immediately clear that *dormi-* cannot reflect a zero-grade vocalism, for we should then not expect to find a Latin *d-*. I have shown<sup>1</sup> that IE *\*dr* regularly yields Latin *tr*. Therefore *dorm-* must be derived from *\*dorm-*.

If we wonder why the Greek verb 'to sleep' did not choose an *-m-* extension parallel, say, to *\*g<sup>w</sup>em-* 'go' the probable answer is not far to seek: This had already been selected by *δραμείν* 'run', beside Indic *drā-*. So we find *δαρθ-* *δραθ-* formed in the same fashion as *πλή-θω*. It is now clear that our original base was *\*der-*, as others have seen, and that this occurred as a set base *\*dreH-*

---

\* I dedicate this essay as a token of my abiding esteem, respect, and inspiration—to the restless mind of Yuen Ren Chao, who now must sleep peacefully in the sure knowledge that he has enriched us as only the first of many generations to come.

1. "Sound Change and the Etymological Lexicon". *Papers from the Parasession on the Lexicon*, Chicago Linguistic Society 1978, 184-95; to which see the refinement on Indo-European 'thrush' KZ 95, 1981, 81.

and suffixed as *\*dr-dh-* (at least in pre-Greek).

On these grounds we see that *dormī-* can come only from an *o*-grade form in suffixed *\*-mo-*, i. e. a nomen actionis *\*dor-mo-*.<sup>2</sup> Thus the stem *dormī-* must be a denominal in origin, and cannot contain a verbal enlargement *-m-*.

We may now understand why no derived verbal noun matches *dormiō* and why *somnus* suppletes it. It is also easy to see how preverbs are so little involved with *dormiō*, with its nominal origin.

On the other hand, the Slavic verb represented by Serbo-Croatian *drijèmati* and Czech *drímati* 'slumber, doze' cannot reflect a primary formation. We must have here a derivation, with Balto-Slavic regular vocalic lengthening, of a nominal derivative formed from *\*dor-mó-*; that is to say, a thematic noun formed from *\*dormó-* would be expected to show *e*-vocalism,<sup>3</sup> hence *\*dremo-* → *\*drēm-ā-* > *drēm-a-*.

In Latin this denominal stem in *-ī-* from *\*dor-mó*, a nominalization of the base *\*der-* 'sleep', has supplanted the Indo-European base and stem *\*suep-*.

One may wonder what, apart from providing a purely Latin and Slavic solution, this Indo-European example has to offer the historical study of Chinese and Sino-Tibetan. My purpose is to illustrate the community of problems which we encounter, despite the radical differences in structure and typical situations in Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan. In the latter, as in other East Asian language families, we find that the problem of reconstruction is normally approached from a purely phonological-semantic aspect, since overt morphological criteria are typically absent from the starting data. Then from the phonological reconstructions, as e. g. in Karlgren's work, extinct morphology is recovered. In Indo-European, with its rich preserved morphologies, the approach is typically different. But in some instances, as in the present case, IE scholarship may well take a leaf from the Chinese book.

---

2. See my analysis of this formation, *KZ* in press.

3. See my formulation *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 40, 1981, 38 note 4, and earlier references. See also footnote 1 to the article cited in note 2 above.