

Do Romanists Need to Reconstruct Proto-Romance? The Case of the *Dictionnaire Étymologique Roman* (DÉRom) Project.<sup>1</sup>

1 Comparative reconstruction and Romance linguistics

Unlike their counterparts who work in such areas as the history of the Indo-European languages, the indigenous languages of the New World, Austronesian languages, etc., specialists in Romance historical linguistics are blessed (or are they cursed?) by having at their disposal an abundant documentation of various written registers of the source language, namely Latin. Almost all Romanists realize that the relatively uniform written Latin of these texts offers a fuzzy and distorted image of the diverse regional and social linguistic realities of the Spoken Latin of the Roman Empire, the immediate source of the Romance vernaculars, just as written modern standard French or standard English do not faithfully represent the multifaceted realities of the spoken languages. With two important recent exceptions, Romanists have felt no compelling need to apply fully and in a systematic fashion the principles of the comparative method to the available Romance data in order to reconstruct a protolanguage underlying the Romance languages. Romanists have implicitly used comparative data as needed to identify differences between written Latin and spoken Latin or to fill fortuitous gaps in the Latin record. I offer here just two examples. In written Latin the verb *CADERE* is stem-stressed and belongs to the third conjugation. This verb is the source of *cádere*, found in several varieties of Italo-Romance, Occitan *c(h)aire*, Gascon *cade*, Catalan *caure*. However such suffix-stressed reflexes as Rumanian *cădea*, standard Italian *cadere*, Old French *cheoir*, Old Occitan *c(h)azer*, Spanish and Old Portuguese *caer*, and others presuppose a suffix-stressed base \**CADÉRE*. In written Latin the word for ‘egg’ had tonic /o:/. Nevertheless, the Romance evidence (e.g., Old French *uef*, Spanish *huevo*, Italian *uovo*, Portuguese. *ovos* (plural) points to a base with a short tonic vowel (which became an open mid vowel after the loss of vowel quantity). Historical Romance grammars and etymological dictionaries are full of such starred forms that reflect the application to Romance data, as needed, of a non-rigorous form of comparative

reconstruction, labeled not inaccurately by Buchi 2010 as “fiddled-with Classical Latin” (cf. the survey available in Walsh 1980).

There are two schools (one American, one European) of specialists who believed that Romanists should rigorously apply the comparative method to Romance data to reconstruct an entity that they label Proto-Romance. The US group was centered at Cornell University. Its leader was Robert A. Hall, Jr., who published in *Language* a seminal article (oft anthologized and reprinted) “The Reconstruction of Proto-Romance” (Hall 1950). The abundant Latin data can be used only to verify the accuracy of the reconstruction, but should not form part of the data set used to carry out the actual reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> Over the years Hall sought to carry out this reconstruction in his planned 6 volume *Comparative Romance Grammar*, of which only three volumes appeared prior to Hall’s death: Vol 1, *External History of the Romance Languages* (1974), Vol. 2, *Proto-Romance Phonology* (1976) and Vol. 3, *Proto-Romance Morphology* (1983), restricted to inflectional morphology. Hall’s reconstruction work was not taken seriously by most contemporary mainstream Romanists outside Cornell (cf. Craddock 1978 and Walsh 1980). One of Hall’s students, Clifford S. Leonard, Jr. taught at the University of Michigan for many years and directed a number of dissertations (all of which remain unpublished), whose authors attempted to reconstruct various proto-sub branches of Gallo-and Italo-Romance varieties. These young scholars did not continue the work of their teacher in their post-doctoral careers. Saunders (2008) offers a retrospective of the work of her *Doktorvater*, Leonard, and his rather unique and unorthodox view of Proto-Romance, its relation to Latin, and the origin of the Romance languages (cf. Leonard 1978, 1980). To the best of my knowledge, today no American Romanist follows the Hall/Leonard approach to historical Romance linguistics (cf. Klausenburger 1987).

On the other side of the Atlantic, the reconstruction of Proto-Romance has been the goal of the Romanist Robert de Dardel (now long retired from the University of Groningen). He preferred the label “roman commun” for the reconstructed language, and unlike Hall he has concentrated on such morphosyntactic issues as the roots of the strong perfect, grammatical gender, word order, and the syntax of subordinating conjunctions. Recently de Dardel has published two articles on the relation of his

“roman commun” to Latin (Dardel, 2007, 2009). I identify here Hall and de Dardel simply to provide background information on the use of comparative reconstruction in 20<sup>th</sup> century Romance linguistics and the use of this method as the base for the *Dictionnaire Étymologique Roman* (=DÉRom). It is not my intention here to discuss or evaluate critically the output of either scholar and his followers.

## 2 Comparative reconstruction and the DÉRom

Let us now turn to the DÉRom. The most recent and wide-ranging published print etymological dictionary of the Romance language family as a whole (as opposed to etymological dictionaries of individual Romance languages, many of which offer valuable collateral pan-Romance data and analyses) continues to be the third edition of Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke's *Romanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, with its 9721 entries, finished in 1935. The first edition appeared in fascicules starting in 1911. Clearly its methodology and even the scope of its data are now much dated. It is an admirable achievement, considering it is the work of a single individual. An attempt by two German Romanists (Harri Meier and Joseph Piel) in the late '50s to prepare an updated REW got nowhere (one or two sample articles were published). At the XXI<sup>e</sup> Congrès International de Linguistique et de Philologie Romanes held in Palermo in September 1995 two distinguished specialists in Romance etymology, Jean-Pierre Chambon and Marius Sala organized a roundtable whose theme was phrased as a question “È oggi possibile o augurabile un nuovo REW?” In order to prove that such a venture was desirable and feasible, two younger Romanists, both specialists in Romance etymology and diachronic lexicology, Éva Buchi (Nancy) and Wolfgang Schweickard (Saarbrücken) launched in 2008, with the support of French and German funding agencies, their project for an online Romance etymological dictionary, the DÉRom. They have gathered together a team of over fifty Romance scholars (almost all Europeans), each a specialist in the lexical history of at least one Romance language or group of languages (e.g., Gallo-Romance, Italo-Romance),<sup>3</sup> and have created at the CNRS-ATILF in Nancy a magnificent library of Romance lexical resources. Although the individual entries are written by one person or, more often,

a small team of two or three people, each is read by at least one specialist in each Romance variety who corrects errors of fact and suggests revisions to the reconstruction and analysis. The authors of each article are obligated to consult at a very minimum a set list of lexical and etymological resources pertinent to each Romance variety (see the printed and online versions of the *Livre bleu*). To date over one hundred and fifty articles have been published and are accessible at [www.atilf.fr/DERom](http://www.atilf.fr/DERom); a large selection has appeared in print in Buchi/Schweickard (2014: 325-647).

The methodological underpinning for the DÉRom has become a source of very strong debate among some Romanists, who otherwise welcome and actively support this initiative. Two essays by Jean-Pierre Chambon (2007, 2010) constitute the methodological starting point for the DÉRom. In essence, Chambon, former director of the FEW, declares that Romance historical linguistics must return to the strict and consistent application of the comparative method in the same way that specialists in the history of languages that lack documentation of the protolanguage. In this way he seeks to bring historical Romance linguistics into line with the practices of the diachronic study of other language families. Comparative reconstruction should not be used only as a supplement, when necessary, to the traditional Romance practice of starting from the textual evidence of written Latin. Chambon is unstinting in his praise of the efforts of Robert de Dardel. In short, the Romanist should not turn to or be influenced by the available data from written Latin, but rather should apply the principles of comparative reconstruction to the pertinent data in order to arrive at the relevant Proto-Romance base or bases, which can then be compared to the recorded Latin base. A senior member of the DÉRom, Yan Greub, has stated, “[I]l fallait faire un grand effort sur soi pour exclure (provisoirement) notre connaissance du latin de nos raisonnements” (Greub 2014: 275). The application of the comparative method is a return to the older concept of etymology as the search for and identification of word origins rather than etymology as word history, for which the identification of the word origin is but the point of departure for further analysis. Nevertheless, many DÉRom entries contain material and analyses, often relegated to footnotes, relevant to the history of the

reconstructed base at different temporal levels of Proto-Romance and in the individual Romance languages.

Following another operational principle laid down by Chambon, the Proto-Romance bases appear in phonemic transcription, since what is being reconstructed is a linguistic form of the spoken language, of which the written Latin form is often a very imperfect representation. Nevertheless, in the data section the Romance material is presented in standard orthography. In some cases where there is no standard orthography and a large number of formal variants are on record in the modern dialect dictionaries and linguistic atlases (e.g., Francoprovençal, Gascon, etc.), a compromise or blended form (known in French as a *forme typisée*) is presented in half brackets. This difference is a practice criticized sharply by three leading specialists in Romance etymology, the late Alberto Varvaro, Johannes Kramer from Trier, a specialist equally at home in Classical and Romance linguistics and author of the 8 volume *EWD*, and Germán Colón, a leading figure in the historical study of the Catalan and Spanish lexicons.<sup>4</sup> Greub (2014: 275-277) summarizes the stance of these three specialists, supplies the appropriate bibliographic references, and offers the DÉRom response to this critique. It should be noted that readers can choose to consult the online DÉRom entries by the written Latin form or even by the form of the entry in the REW<sup>3</sup>. This option is not available for the entries reproduced in Buchi/Schweickard (2014: 325-647). Although each DÉRom article obligatorily contains toward the end a reference (with dating of first attestations) to the appropriate “corrélat du latin écrit”), non-specialist users of this work might benefit from the placing of the written Latin form alongside the reconstructed base at the beginning of the entry (a suggestion already made by Colón 2013: 150).

The role of documented Latin in the reconstruction process needs reconsideration. Latin and Proto-Romance (in essence, spoken Latin as reconstructed through the comparative method) are in reality two different registers of the same linguistic system. The written registers of a language preserve grammatical and lexical features that once flourished in the spoken language, but ended up by falling into disuse for various reasons (e.g., synthetic futures and passives, deponent verbs).

Although written Latin forms may mask the phonetic realities of the spoken language with regard to such features as vowel quality, the early syncope of unstressed vowels, early voicing of intervocalic stops, early fricativization (and loss) of voiced stops, etc., they may shed light on earlier realities of the shape and morphemic structure of spoken Latin/Proto-Romance lexical items. The comparative method does not allow for the reconstruction of features of the spoken language that have failed to survive into the earliest recorded stages of the descendant languages. Perhaps the written Latin material should not be included in the Romance data set used in the first round of reconstruction. However, the written Latin forms can then be used to modify and nuance as needed the results of the purely Romance-based reconstruction. In other words, Chambon's hard-line stance on the role of written Latin evidence needs to be softened. A more conciliatory tone toward the role of Latin now appears in Maggiore/Buchi 2014:00, where the authors declare that written Latin has an important analytic role, "à condition de ne pas l'utiliser en lieu et en place de la méthode comparative, mais de façon complémentaire". Buchi (2014: 271) is even more explicit: "[U]ne fois que les étymons protoromans ont été proprement reconstruits, selon la méthode comparative, il devient possible de les confronter – dans leurs propriétés phonologiques, sémantiques et morphosyntaxiques, mais aussi dans leur position diasystémique – avec leurs corrélats du latin écrit de l'Antiquité".

I shall offer here one example. Such forms as Lombard *ʿèži* 'adj. « dont la saveur est piquante, acide », Ladin *àje*, Romontsch *asch*, Perigord *asse*, Galician *acio* (recorded in Valladares 1884, but apparently obsolete today<sup>5</sup>) lead to the reconstruction of a Proto-Romance \*/aki-u/. The corresponding form in written Latin is ACIDUS, which clearly reflects an earlier oral stage in the history of the form reconstructed on the basis of limited Romance data as \*/aki-u/. Should one reconstruct \*/aki(d)u/? Would the reconstruction have been different if other Romance varieties had retained cognates of the Romance forms employed in this reconstruction? In reconstruction, the outcome is only as good as the input. The comparative method is not an absolute formula set in stone with immutable procedures, and was not originally designed for languages that had the good fortune to have a well-documented register of the source language.

Romance linguists should take advantage of all the data at their disposal. In my view, Romance linguists are blessed rather than cursed by having available written Latin. Although linguists cannot deny the value and importance of comparative reconstruction, it is but one analytic tool among many and should not become a methodological straitjacket.

### 3 The contributions of the DÉRom to Romance etymology

The immediate goal of the DÉRom is the reconstruction of the lexical bases that underlie the inherited pan-Romance vocabulary of the Romance languages; in other words, at the current stage of the project, individual language borrowings from pre-Roman languages, Germanic languages, Arabic, etc. are ignored, as are inherited words found only in scattered areas of the former Roman Empire. The DÉRom is a return to the conception of etymology as the search for and identification of word origins rather than the preparation of full-blown word histories or lexical biographies. Unless one is preparing a multi-volume etymological dictionary that might take decades to complete (the examples of Walther von Wartburg's FEW and Max Pfister's ongoing LEI come to mind), an etymological dictionary is usually a repertory of word origins. Etymological dictionaries are not the ideal place to publish lengthy lexical biographies (although short histories are feasible as can be seen in Joan Corominas's DCECH and his ten volume DECat). To start the project, the directors of the DÉRom chose 500 lexical items that have survived on a pan-Romance scale. They started from a list published by the Rumanian scholar Iancu Fischer (1969). His list presents the bases in their written Latin form, and is not necessarily complete, but 500 items are a reasonable starting point to test out this project and its methodology. Fischer's list excludes the numerous words that have survived everywhere except in Rumanian. Given that Rumanian is not attested in complete texts until the sixteenth century and that the inherited Latin vocabulary has in many instances been overlaid by loanwords resulting from contact with Slavic, Byzantine Greek, Hungarian, Turkish, etc., it is possible that many such words that are unattested in documented varieties of Rumanian originally formed part of

the lexicon of the spoken Latin of Dacia. The DÉRom has been open to the admission of entries dealing with Romance word families not included in the original list, e.g. \*/lɔŋg-e/ (Dworkin/Maggiore in Buchi/Schweickard 2014: 520-521), as this adverb had not left any reflexes in Daco-Romance.

Kramer (2011a, 2011b) criticized this selection criterion, stating that it would not allow for the discovery of new etymologies, but would only confirm what we already know. In his view, the most interesting issues in Romance etymology continue to be the resolution of the origin of words of debated or unknown origin. This is indeed true, but the goal of a new pan-Romance etymological dictionary is an up-to-date synthesis of the current state of knowledge, with the addition of new data and new analytic approaches unavailable to Meyer-Lübke eighty years ago. New solutions to long-standing etymological cruxes should be presented and elaborated in journal articles or monographs. Moreover, the remaining cruxes of Romance etymology are words that exist in only one or two Romance languages and thus fall outside of the current phase of the DÉRom project, e.g., French *aller* 'to go', *trouver* 'to find', Spanish, Portuguese *matar* 'to kill', *tomar* 'to take', Rumanian *băiat* 'boy', to cite but a handful of examples.

In what follows I shall demonstrate how the DÉRom has expanded in certain interesting and crucial ways facets of our already acquired knowledge about the etyma at issue and their Romance progeny. The first is the breadth of Romance material that provide the obligatory linguistic input for the reconstruction; it far exceeds what is available in the REW<sup>3</sup>. The DÉRom is here wisely following Chambon's call that all the romance varieties (including what he labels "les petites langues romanes", the numerous Romance varieties that are not national standard languages) be included in the comparative effort. The reader need only compare the number of Romance forms in a DÉRom entry with the corresponding entry in the REW<sup>3</sup>. There is one issue here. The data provided by such languages as Dolomitic Ladin, Friulian, and Romanian (to name but three) are much further removed in time from Proto-Romance than the material furnished by medieval varieties of

Gallo-, Ibero-, and Italo-Romance. To what extent can the (unavoidable) mixing of modern and medieval data skew the reconstruction?

The second is the requirement that the comparative method be applied to the semantic scope of each Romance form in order to determine the semantic range of each Proto-Romance base. Semantics has been a stepchild in comparative reconstruction (Buchi 2012). Benveniste's seminal article (1954) sets out many of the problems involved in semantic reconstruction. Typical is the stance taken in Orel (2013: xii): "The semantic reconstruction of the Proto-Germanic words was not even attempted: too many complications and arguments would have followed the decision to ascribe meanings to Proto-Germanic words". The authors of DÉRom entries are required to reconstruct on the basis of the Romance evidence both the form and the meaning(s) of the Proto-Romance bases. The meaning is presented as a componential definition, and not merely as a French gloss of the meaning of the Proto-Romance etymon. A commentary explaining and justifying the formal and semantic reconstruction is an obligatory component of each article, as is a descriptive statement on the form and meaning of what is called "le corrélat du latin écrit" (which, in some instances, is attested only very late and, in a handful of cases, not at all).

Linguists do not understand the processes of semantic change as well as they do sound change. Whereas specialists in historical linguistics have long operated with the principle of the regularity of sound change (a key underpinning of the comparative method), there is no parallel principle that can be applied systematically to the reconstruction of semantic change. Widespread parallel semantic changes based on metaphor and metonymy in a language family can reflect independent cognitive processes and can be the products of polygenesis rather than an inherited feature of a common proto-language. There may lurk the danger of attributing to the proto-language too many semantic features found in the daughter languages. Should a meaning found in only one or two daughter languages be attributed to the proto-language? Here is a situation where consideration of the data from written Latin, closely related to that entity labeled Proto-Romance by the DÉRom, may play an important analytic role. If the isolated Romance meaning in

question is found in the written Latin record, would it be reasonable to assume that it formed part of the word's semantic range in the spoken language that evolved into the Romance vernaculars, and that that meaning survived in only a handful of the daughter languages? I shall cite here one case, brought to my attention by Victor Celac. Rom *zice* 'to say, tell' also can mean 'to sing'. Romanian seems to be the only Romance language in which the local reflex of DICERE displays this meaning, which is also known in Latin (Petronius, Apuleius; see Heraeus 1899: 34-35). Is this Romanian use of the verb inherited from the local varieties of Spoken Latin, or is it an independent development, parallel to what happened in Latin? On the other hand, if the meaning at issue is absent from the extant Latin documentation, the analyst must decide whether it is a case of independent creation in the daughter languages (what the DÉRom labels "une innovation idioromane") or a feature of the reconstructed protolanguage that fortuitously escaped documentation. I shall mention here briefly two cases. Although the meaning 'charbon (maladie des céréales)' is not attested in written sources for Lat. TITIO, the areal distribution of this meaning in its Romance progeny in Logudorese, Dacoromanian, Aromanian, Calabrese, Sicilian, Friulian, Spanish, and Asturian justifies the reconstruction of this meaning for Proto-Romance \*/ti'tion-e/; see Jactel/Buchi, s.v. \*/ti'tion-e/ in Buchi/Schweickard (2014: 635-638). In like fashion Lat. UNCTUM is not attested with the meaning 'matière grasse élaborée utilisée en cuisine'; nevertheless the widespread distribution of Romance forms with this meaning leads to the reconstruction of that meaning for Proto-Romance \*/'unkt-u/; see Videsott, s.v. \*/'unkt-u/ in Buchi/Schweickard (2014: 643-647). On the other hand, the meaning 'nourriture riche', attested for the written Latin form, seems not to have survived in the daughter languages. Chauveau (2014) discusses and exemplifies many additional examples of this crucial aspect of the DÉRom.

The third important contribution of the DÉRom is the light thrown on formal lexical variation in the spoken language (whether you call it Proto-Romance or spoken Latin). The DÉRom data have shown that certain developments often explained as individual local innovations in language specific historical grammars are actually attested on a wider geographic basis in several Romance varieties, consequently

reflecting regional variation at different chronological stages of the source language. I shall offer here some selected examples. Historical grammars of Spanish often state that Old Spanish *ascuchar* < A(U)SCULTARE became *escuchar* through prefix change. Since this change is found in a number of contiguous Romance languages, e.g., Old French *ascouter* > *écouter*, Old Portuguese *ascoitar* > *escoitar*, as well as in Catalan, Asturian, Gascon, Francoprovençal, the DÉRom has reconstructed at the level of Proto-Romance two bases, \*/as'kult-a/ and \*/es'kolt-a/ (which seems to be a variant originating in the Narbonne; see Schmidt and Schweickard in Buchi/Schweickard 2014: 356-358 and 413-414). One cannot rule out the theoretical possibility of an independent but parallel prefix change. In like fashion, Sp. *encabalgat* and *descabalgat* have been explained as locally created prefixal derivatives of *cabalgat* < CABALLICARE ((a form attested twice in Late Latin sources). Based on the presence of similar forms in widely scattered Romance varieties the DÉRom has chosen to posit Proto-Romance \*/dis-ka'βall-ik-a-/ and \*/in-ka'βall-ik-a-/ (an example discussed now in detail in Buchi/Hütsch/Jactel 2015). The reconstruction permitted by the Romance words for 'hay' demonstrate more clearly than the record of written Latin the complex coexistence in the spoken language of /  
 \*/'ϕɛn-u/ ~ \*/'ϕɛn-u/, corresponding to documented FENUM and FAENUM and (see Reinhardt in Buchi/Schweickard 2014: 433-436).

#### 4 The nature of Proto-Romance in the DÉRom

Criticisms of the DÉRom project have revolved around two issues, namely the need to reconstruct Proto-Romance and the nature of the reconstructed linguistic entity to which the DÉRom has attached the label "protoroman". The bulk of the polemic is to be found in the exchange published in volume 75 (2011) of the *Revue de linguistique romane*, pitting Alberto Varvaro (2011a, 2011b) against the two co-directors of the DÉRom, Eva Buchi and Wolfgang Schweickard (2011a, 2011b). Johannes Kramer, has also published telling criticisms of the DÉRom (Kramer 2011a, 2011b), but he is also a supporter of the project and has authored an instructive essay titled "Contrepoint: ce que j'aurais fait différemment dans le DÉRom" (Kramer 2014). Additional explicit criticism of the decision to reconstruct

Proto-Romance has also come from such veteran etymologists as Max Pfister, Frankwalt Möhren, and Germán Colón (for references and discussion, see Greub 2014, and Buchi 2015).

At the outset the *DÉRom* concept of Proto-Romance and the nature of its relationship with Latin was unclear. This lack of clarity seems to underlie some of the initial harsh criticisms voiced by Alberto Varvaro and the use of the word “malentendus” in one of the replies by Buchi and Schweickard. Buchi has stated on several occasions that she follows the definition of a proto-language as given in Campbell 2004:

« *Proto-language* : (1) the once spoken ancestral language from which daughter languages descend ; (2) the language reconstructed by the comparative method which represents the ancestral language from which the compared languages descend. (To the extent that the reconstruction by the comparative method is accurate and complete, (1) and (2) should coincide.) » (Campbell 2004: 125).

In two conference papers that remain unpublished (but for which the handouts are available at the *DÉRom* website), Buchi has clarified what is meant by “protoroman”. For the purposes of this project that label is used to distinguish conceptually the oral linguistic system at issue from the written corpus known as Latin. Both are part of the same larger (dia)system that de Dardel (2009) has labeled “latin global” defined (perhaps too broadly) as : “latin sous toutes les formes qu’il a pu revêtir depuis la fondation de Rome, dans le monde romain occidental antique et par la suite dans les parlers romans, en Europe, ainsi que dans le latin moderne pratiqué par les sciences et le culte”. I quote here from the English abstract attached to Buchi/Schweickard 2013: “Thus the most fruitful aspect of the comparative method applied to the Romance lexicon seems to lie in the fact that this method permits reconstructing *the internal variation of the Latin lexicon* [emphasis mine]”. This is a very explicit linking of Proto-Romance to spoken Latin, and clearly demonstrates that the *DÉRom* does not consider the proto-language to be uniform (an unfair criticism aimed at the *DÉRom* by Varvaro). No human language is uniform; all display regional and social variation at each level of linguistic analysis. Although a proto-language is a reconstructed system, it still must have only the features of documented human languages to retain any sort of analytic value.

This protolanguage in its narrowest sense (“protoroman sensu stricto”, to use Buchi’s terminology) is the language spoken throughout the extensive Roman Empire prior to the beginning of what Romance scholars view as the beginning of the political, with the consequent linguistic fragmentation, of the Empire beginning with the splitting off in the second century AD of the varieties that underlie Sardinian. To quote Vallejo (2012: 454): «En términos reconstructivos, el protorromance correspondería a la situación evolutiva del latín antes de la separación del sardo (primera lengua en segregarse)”. Obviously, Proto-Romance, like any other language spoken over a wide geographical spread, must have had a fair degree of variation over time and space that is not reflected in the relatively uniform orthographic garb of a lexical item in written Latin. In many of the earlier published entries that posit more than one Proto-Romance base, it is unclear which of these bases are ancient and which are later regional or local innovations. In the article for the bases that corresponds to written Latin ROTUNDUS, Hegner (in Buchi/Schweickard 2014: 608-612) posits a base \*/ro’tund-u/, a metathesized \*/to’rũnd-u/ to account for neighboring Old Venetian, Friulian, and Ladin forms, an apherisized \*/’tũnd-u/ to explain a single Italian and a single Sardinian form and a dissimilated \*/re’tund-u/, which underlies such items as Old French *reond*, Spanish *redondo*, Italian *ritondo*. Are these forms considered to have existed in the Empire at the same time as regional variants or do some of the Romance forms used in their reconstruction represent the workings of later local changes? A more nuanced view on the genesis of lexical bases in later chronological and regional varieties of Proto-Romance is offered in the lengthy and complex entry headed by the base \*/’ϕamen/; see Buchi/González Martín/Mertens/Schlienger 2014 in Buchi/Schweickard 2014:422-430.

Buchi (MS A, MS B) operates with the following sequence of splits and regional outgrowths of Proto-Romance (I reproduce here her French labels for these language states). After Sardinia left the Roman Empire, the original “protoroman” split into “protosarde” and “protoroman continental”. Following the Roman abandonment of Dacia, “protorman continental” bifurcated into “protoroumain” and “proto-roman italo-occidental” (a term Buchi chose to reflect Hall’s “Proto-Italo Western Romance”). Over time this last entity gave rise to most varieties of Italo-Romance, as well as to Gallo-

Hispano-and Luso-Romance. However pedagogically useful the genealogical tree model may be as a graphic representation of the splits derived through comparative reconstruction, languages evolve through constant evolution and gradual differentiation, and not through sharp binary splits or fractures. To some extent the tree model distorts the reality and fails to capture the dynamic nature of the linguistic fragmentation of the Roman Empire (cf. Penny 1996).

It is not clear at what point the historian of a Romance language should stop talking about change at the Proto-Romance level and begin to view changes as local independent innovations, what the DÉRom label “changements idioromans”. There also arises the perennial issue of monogenesis versus polygenesis. If a parallel change is found in various Romance languages (especially those that are not geographically contiguous), does it reflect a change going back to some period of common linguistic unity (an analysis dictated by the tenets of the comparative method), or might it represent the instantiation of parallel, but independent changes, perhaps reflecting some type of evolutionary “drift”? There is an inherent danger in attributing too many features to the common proto-language. The DÉRom team is currently rethinking its views on the relative chronological stratification of Proto-Romance and is planning future publications in order to clarify and nuance its views of the linguistic fragmentation of Proto-Romance.

## 5 Some specific problems of Proto-Romance in the DÉRom

Some of the conclusions concerning individual features of Proto-Romance reached through the application of comparative reconstruction to the Romance data are controversial. I offer here some examples. The DÉRom consistently reconstructs a voiceless bilabial fricative / $\phi$ / at the level of Proto-Romance for the sound represented in the orthography of written Latin by <f>. Such a sound may have existed as a basolectal regional variant (it may well be the starting point for the much-discussed Spanish and Gascon sound change /f/- > /h/-), but its generalization as a phoneme of Proto-Romance is questionable (cf. Gouvert 2014: 103, Kramer 2014: 292-293). I quote here Pensado (1993: 148) “que f haya debido tener realizaciones bilabiales en los contextos donde se

pierde no implica en absoluto que el fonema latino haya de definirse como /ϕ/ bilabial”. Is there any evidence to show that the parallel change in Macedo-Romanian cited by Gouvert is ancient? Given the predominance of labiodental /f/ in the Romance languages, reconstructing a bilabial fricative on the basis of two widely separated sound changes seems to me to be a risky application of the comparative method.

The DÉRom has vacillated considerably with regard to the reconstruction of a distinct neuter gender at the Proto-Romance level. A thorough and thoughtful discussion of whether the Romance data allow for the reconstruction of a “neuter” in Proto-Romance would require a separate paper. The DÉRom team has changed its position on this matter several times (cf. Buchi/Greub 2013). This issue exemplifies a situation where, in individual cases, consideration of the data available from written Latin may play a crucial role. Until recently, it has been assumed that only varieties of Rumanian have preserved (with later local accretions and evolutions) a neuter gender inherited from the protolanguage. If a noun that has survived in all Romance regions is preserved as a neuter in Rumanian (preferably in at least two subvarieties) and is documented as a neuter in written Latin, it seems reasonable to reconstruct a neuter starting point in the protolanguage (for concrete examples and discussion taken from DÉRom entries see Délorme/Dworkin 2014: 174-183). However, if a noun is neuter solely in Rumanian and is only recorded as a masculine in written Latin, it may be risky to reconstruct the neuter for the Proto-Romance etymon. Consequently, despite the fact that *nod* ‘knot’ is neuter in Rumanian, Dworkin/Maggiore (in Buchi/Schweickard 2014: 572-574) chose to assign the masculine gender to the reconstructed base (whose written Latin equivalent is the masculine noun *NODUS*), claiming that the assignment of Rumanian *nod* to the neuter gender is a local development. This discussion begs the question as to whether the Rumanian neuter is the functional equivalent and historical continuation of the Latin neuter, since the Rumanian neuter shows masculine morphology in the singular and feminine morphology in the plural, i.e., it is an example of a *genus alternans*. Unlike Latin, there is no set of specific neuter endings. It remains to be seen to what extent the presence of a “neuter” in Old Tuscan some central and southern varieties of Italo-Romance (see Loporcaro/Faraoni/Gardani 2014 for discussion and extensive bibliography) will impact gender assignment in future DÉRom reconstructions. The data

presented by Loporcaro and his collaborators seem to support the existence of a third gender at the Proto-Romance level. Of course, the analyst must distinguish between the presence of a third gender and the assignment to it of a specific noun in the reconstruction of Proto-Romance bases through the comparative method.<sup>6</sup>

Sardinian data must be treated carefully in the reconstruction process. Although Sardinian may have been the first linguistic branch to split off as a result of the loss of Sardinia from the Empire, that does not mean that the spoken language became frozen in time, or that there was no linguistic contact between Rome and its former colony. The absence from Sardinian of a lexical item widely diffused elsewhere in the Romania does not automatically indicate that the word was coined later; it may well have disappeared without leaving any trace in the rather exiguous written record of Old Sardinian. I have already alluded to the risk of drawing hasty conclusions concerning the possible pan-Romance distribution of a proto-Romance etymon on the basis of its absence from recorded varieties of Daco-Romance.

The aforementioned article on the Proto-Romance bases corresponding to written Latin *FAMES* ‘hunger; famine’ illustrates some of the issues pertaining to the neuter and to the role of Sardinian in the reconstruction process. Except for masculine Sardinian *famen/famine*, all the descendants that continue recategorized and remorphologized evolutions of Proto-Romance \*/ $\phi$ amen/ are feminine. This gender split leads the authors of the entry to posit \*/ $\phi$ amen/ as a neuter noun “en raison du caractère récessif du genre neutre en roman” (426). The written Latin correlate *FAMES* is feminine. The notion of recessive genes is valid in genetics, but is it a principle that works in linguistic reconstruction? A similar distribution of genders is found among the reflexes of Proto-Romance \*/ $\phi$ lumen/ in which the author adds the qualification “s[ubstantif] n[eutre] (> s[ubstantif] m[asculin])” (Georgescu 2014: 527). Unlike the case of *FAMES*, the written Latin correlate *LUMEN* was a neuter noun.

## 6 A final thought

Regardless of the answer that individual scholars give to the question posed in the title of this essay, the importance of the DÉRom in the furtherance of Romance etymology as a

research discipline cannot be undervalued. It is true that the DÉRom is unlikely to come up with new solutions for the long-standing cruxes of Romance etymology. Most of these puzzles concern the origin of words with quite restricted diffusion in the Romance languages and consequently they do not fall into the purview of the DÉRom, conceived as a pan-Romance etymological dictionary. The volume of new Romance lexical material taken into consideration, the importance accorded to the semantic evolution of the Romance forms, and the light shed on the dynamism of linguistic variation in the spoken language (regardless of whether it is called Proto-Romance or spoken Latin), are all major contributions to our knowledge of Romance historical linguistics in particular and to the nature of language change in general. I wish to close by pointing out one further contribution of the DÉRom. The overwhelming majority of the writers of the entries are younger scholars who are at the beginning stages of their careers. These colleagues, our successors, are required to work with the full range of Romance varieties, and, to carry out the reconstructions, they must become familiar with the main points of the relevant historical grammars. Consequently, the DÉRom may play a major role in creating a new generation of *Vollromanisten* and in removing this category of Romance scholar from the academic endangered species list.

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<sup>2</sup> Chambon (2007, 69) explicitly rejects the use of written Latin evidence as a means of validating the reconstructed Proto-Romance.

<sup>3</sup> An up-to-date list of the members of the DÉRom team is available on the project's website ([www.atilf.fr/DERom](http://www.atilf.fr/DERom)).

<sup>4</sup> A similar observation is also made by Robert Martin in the published version (409) of the discussion that followed the presentation of Buchi 2014.

<sup>5</sup> In a discussion with me of this form, María Dolores Sánchez Palomino questioned the existence of the Galician adjective and suggested that Valledares may have recorded a ghost form. Galician also has a noun *acío* 'racimo de uvas'.

<sup>6</sup> In addition, some of the decisions concerning Proto-Romance grammatical gender of nouns that in some Romance varieties are masculine while feminine in other varieties (e.g., masculine Sard. *ponte*, Fr. *pont*, It. *ponte* vs feminine OSp. *la puente* (masculine in the modern language), Rum. *punte*, Romantsch *punt*) are open to discussion (for other specific examples from DÉRom entries, see Délorme/ Dworkin 2014, 167-183).