

Archaisms and innovations in the Old Prussian sources: verbs in -ā / -ai and -ē / -ei

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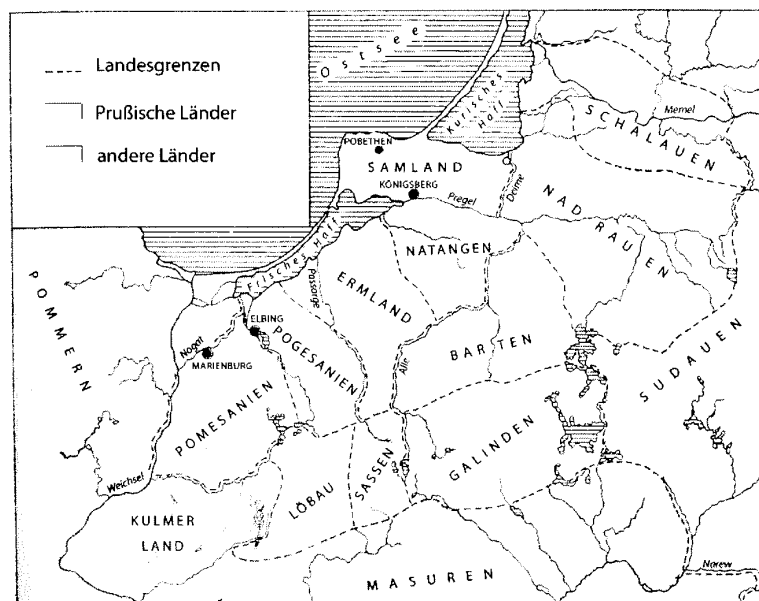
Outline of the talk:

1. Old Prussian: introduction
2. A problem of Old Prussian verbal morphology
3. Old Prussian historical phonology
4. Distribution and analysis of the data
5. Cautious proposal and concluding remarks

1 Old Prussian: introduction

- 1.1 Old Prussian, or the Prussian language, was the language of a Baltic tribe with the same ethnonym,¹ the earliest reports of which stem from the late 1st millennium AD and the latest from the 16/17th century. At their peak of their expansion, the West Balts inhabited the region of Prussia in Northern Central Europe, comprising part of modern-day Poland, Kaliningrad Oblast, and part of Lithuania, as shown in (1). By 1700 the language had probably already died out due to increasing German influence, which started in the

(1) Map of West Baltic tribes (Rinkevičius 2017: 21)



¹ E.g., as *Pruzzi* in the 11th century German chronicles and in Old Russian as Проусы [*Prusy*] in the 11th/12th century Nestor Chronicle.

13th century with the missionary work of the Teutonic Order and involved the eventual annexation of the region in 1525 under the name of the Duchy of Prussia ('Herzogtum Preußen').²

1.2 The language is classified as **West Baltic**, making it closely related to, yet also distinct from, its East Baltic sister languages Lithuanian and Latvian. In the absence of modern languages or premodern sources in other languages, Old Prussian is our only direct witness of the West Baltic clade. Convergences between West and East Baltic are profound, to the point that some scholars assume an early break-up of Proto-Baltic (PB) or refrain from reconstructing a common ancestor at all.³ The examples under (2), based on Petit (2010: 11–21), aim to give an impression of these convergences:

- (2) a. Reflex of the PB diphthong **ei*, e.g. OP *deywis* (E) vs. Lith. *diēvas*, Latv. *dīevs* 'god.'
- b. The *o*-stem GEN.SG ending, i.e. OP *-as* vs. Lith. *-o*, Latv. *-a* (= PSl. **-ā* [CS **-a*]).
- c. Retention of neuter gender, e.g. OP *meddo* n. (E) (~ Ved. *mádhu-* n. 'id.', Gk. μέθυ n. 'wine') vs. Lith. *medūs* m., Latv. *medus* m. 'honey.'
- d. The word for 'milk,' i.e. OP *dadān* (E) 'milk' (~ Ved. *dādhi*, *dādhan* 'id. '; maybe also Alb. *djathë* 'cheese') vs. Lith. *pīenas*, Latv. *piēns* 'id.'.

1.3 The Old Prussian that has come down to us in the documents presents a rather distorted version of the language. The documents, dating from the 14th to the 16th century, are not numerous and are rife with spelling mistakes and orthographic variation, which while to be expected in language in written form, render it difficult to understand what features actually reflect the language itself and not its orthography.

1.4 The few documents we have can be categorized according to their relative age.⁴ The Elbing vocabulary (E) represents not only an older stage of the language, but also a different dialect, namely Pomesanian, as opposed to the Samlandic dialect of the Catechisms. Due to its nature as a word list, however, this text does not contain any verbs and will thus not feature in this paper. The Catechisms stand in order not just of publication, but also of relative age, as the first shows certain archaic features absent from the others (cf. e.g. Rinkevičius 2017: 29, 102–3). Finally, Kortlandt (2000, 2001) divides the 3. Catechism, also referred to as the Enchiridion, into two parts, with the part before 61.30 (in Trautmann's 1910 edition) regarded as older than the following. The table in (3) presents an overview of the aforementioned documents and their relative age.

² Endzelin (1944: 8–12), Rinkevičius (2017: 19–22). Beside references to the Prussians and West Balts in written sources, there is also archaeological evidence for what area was inhabited by West Baltic tribes, for instance in the form of former settlements such as Sassenpils in Northern Poland (Marciniak-Kajzer 1998: 171–188).

³ Cf. the overviews on Balt(o-Slavic) inner dialectology in Pronk (2022: 274–9) and Villanueva Svensson *frthc*.

⁴ Other documents, including Simon Grunau's Vocabulary and the Basel Epigram, are not included in the overview since their relevance for this study was negligible and since they do not represent unique forms of the language.

(3) Old Prussian documents and their relative chronology

Text	Dialect	Publication date	Relative chronology
Elbing Vocabulary	Pomesanian	late 13 th / early 14 th c.	Oldest text
1. Catechism	Samlandic	1545	Oldest Catechism
2. Catechism	Samlandic	1545	Middle stage
3. Catechism	Samlandic	1561	Youngest stage

2 A problem of Old Prussian verbal morphology: verbs in *-a* / *-ai* and *-e* / *-ei*

2.1 The current paper takes up the problem of orthographic variation discussed in 1.3. A consequence of the writing variation found in these documents is that there is **no *communis opinio*** on the structure of the Old Prussian verbal system. In fact, opinions vary about even the most basic classification of verbal forms and even categories.

2.2 To illustrate this point, the table in (4) gives some sample transcriptions or underlying representations of randomly picked verb forms from various modern reference works and studies.⁵ For the selection have deliberately been chosen two ‘classical’ notation systems, which rely heavily on the comparison with the East Baltic languages, i.e. Schmalstieg (1974, 2000) and Mažiulis (2004, 2013); and two innovative ones, which aim to rely only on the Old Prussian data, i.e. Kortlandt (1987, 1999a; following van Wijk 1918) and Smoczyński (2005; cf. also Ostrowski 1994). As can be gleaned from the table, differences of opinion exist even within classical and innovative approaches.

2.3 This paper deals with one problem of Old Prussian verbal morphology, namely writing variation in the verbal endings *-a* / *-ai* and *-e* / *-ei*. Third person (singular/plural) verb forms—as well as 1SG and 2SG forms, as these are often identical to the third person—may show any of these four endings. Still, the orthography is **consistent** in that individual lexemes generally show only either a monophthongal or diphthongal ending, i.e. either *-a* / *-e* or *-ai* / *-ei*, not both.⁶ The question then is why certain lexemes take one ending and others another.

⁵ The table is inspired after Table 1 of Majer (2020) on different notation systems for Proto-Slavic.

⁶ (Apparent) exceptions to this trend are dealt with below in 4.1.

(4) Simplified overview of Old Prussian verb transcriptions in a small selection of modern reference works

Attested form	<i>turri</i>	[<i>per</i>]weddā	<i>ymmi</i> [<i>ts</i>]	[<i>po</i>]prestemmai
Gloss	have.3	lead.3	take.3.PRT	feel.1PL
Kortlandt (1987, 1999a)	[tur-ei / tur-i] ⁷	[-wedd-a]	[im-ī] ⁸	-prest-a-mai]
Schmalstieg (1974, 2000)	[tur-ī]	[-wedd-a]	[im-ē- / ēm-ē-]	[-pre[t]-sta-mai]
Smoczyński (2005), Ostrowski (1994)	[túr-ija]	[-ved-āja]	[im-ī- < *im-ē-]	[-prat-sta-mai]
Mažiulis (2004, 2013)	[tur-ī]?	[-ved-ā]?	[im-i- < *im-ē-]	[-pret-sta-mai]

2.4 An extreme approach to the problem is that of Smoczyński (2005 and earlier sources; followed by Ostrowski 1994), who assumes that this writing variation points to a general apocope of final syllables, so that a sequence like **-āja* would yield either *-āi*, *-ā* or *-a*. The assumption of a wholesale apocope forces him to reject such categories as thematic and “semi-thematic” (i.e., **i-*) stems. A form like 1SG *imma* would thus continue, following this line of reasoning, a protoform **imāja*, a view not followed by most other scholars (cf. also the criticism in Petit’s 2007 review of the book).

2.5 Likewise taking recourse to apocope, Palmaitis’ (2013) approach additionally involves prosody. According to him, the apocopated reflexes of **-āja* and **-ēja* were the circumflex diphthongs *-ēi* and *-āi*, alternating with *-ē* and *-ā* in stressed position. At a later point, the alternations were extended to unstressed final vowels too, i.e. *-e* and *-a*. This approach rests upon several idiosyncratic and questionable assumptions, however. Not only is the same intonation system as that of the Elbing Vocabulary ascribed to the Catechisms, but the macron is also assumed to provide information about intonation, as opposed to just vowel length or accent.⁹ In fact, little can be said with certainty about the phonetic character of intonation of the Samlandic dialect (Rinkevičius 2017: 111–7).

⁷ An idiosyncratic paradigm with 3SG *-ei* and 3PL *-i*: “The paradigm of *turīt* appears to reflect an extremely ancient flexion type which underlies the East Baltic and Slavic *i*-flexion” (Kortlandt 1987: 108–9).

⁸ Kortlandt (1998: 145) sees in this verb not an *ē*-preterite, but an “*ī*-preterite.”

⁹ In the preface to the Enchiridion, the author of the text himself, Abel Will, declares his use of the macron as a marker of vowel length. Since in the Samlandic dialect long vowels are restricted to accented syllables, the macron can at the same time inform us about word accent, but this was not its primary function.

- c. \bar{e} -stem NOM.SG ending *-i* (x 9), *-ē* (x 1) (vs. *-ei* x 1) < PB **-ē*, e.g., *semmē* ‘earth.’
- d. ‘you.SG.NOM’ *tu* (passim), *tū* (x 1) (vs. *tou* passim, *toū* x 6, *tau* x 1) < PB **tū*.
- e. ‘me.DAT’ *mennei* (x 9) < PB **men-ei* (cf. also *tebbei* passim and *sebbei* x 3).
- f. \bar{a} -stem DAT.SG ending *-ai* (vel sim.; x 7) (vs. *-u* x 2) < PB **-āi*, e.g. *alkīnisquai* ‘grief.’

3.3 The foregoing analysis does not support an across-the-board apocope as postulated by Smoczyński. At the same time, it also does not preclude that there were environments—of a specific prosodic nature or otherwise—in which apocope could have taken place. Some kinds of **apocope** seems necessary to explain certain verbs forms, such as the preterites *dai* ‘give,’ *postai* ‘become’ < **dājā*, **stājā*. Moreover, long vowels were either not consequently marked as such (with the macron) in word-final position or underwent weakening to their short counterparts.

4 Distribution and analysis of the data

4.1 Let us start by narrowing down the distribution of the variants *-a* / *-ai* and *-e* / *-ei*. As already mentioned in 2.3, generally speaking, this variation is a phenomenon across lexemes, not within. (Apparent) exceptions are the pairs listed in the table in (7), all third person forms, unless specified. Due to their limited attestation, not much can be said about their reliability. Noteworthy is that *enwackēimai*, together with *waidleimai* ‘conjure,’ is the **only 1PL form in -ei-**. The verb *turīt* ‘have’ also belongs here, but will be discussed below in 4.4.

(7) Verbal forms with competition between *-a* / *-a* and *-e* / *-ei*

Lexeme	1. Cat.	2. Cat.	Enchiridion
<i>kaltz-</i> / <i>kels-</i> ‘sound’ (\bar{a} -stem?)			<i>kaltzā</i> x 1 77 ₇
			<i>kelsāi</i> x 1 61 ₆
<i>swint-</i> ‘sanctify’ (<i>in-</i> stem)			<i>swintina</i> x 2 45 ₁₇ , 103 ₃
			<i>swintinai</i> x 1 51 ₁₅
<i>-wack-</i> ‘call, shout’ (\bar{e} -stem)			<i>enwackēmai</i> 1PL x 1 117 ₈₁
			<i>enwackēimai</i> 1PL x 1 29 ₅
<i>-waid-</i> ‘show’ (<i>in-</i> stem)			<i>powaidinne</i> x 1 63 ₁₄
			<i>powaidinnei</i> x 1 63 ₁₂

4.2 Another peculiarity is that the orthographic variation is almost **restricted** to thematic stems and *in*-stems. Of the other relevant verbal stems, *ē*-stems always end in a monophthong save for the abovementioned verbs *enwackē(i)mai* and *turīt*,¹² and *ā*-stems tend to end in a monophthong except for a small number of forms in *-ai* / *-āi*.¹³ In what follows, we will take a look at some features of *in*-stems and of the verb *turīt*.

4.3 An overview of all attestations in the singular of *in*-stems is given in (8). All forms are attested in the Enchiridion and occur only once, unless specified. 9 out of 26 items—or 8 out of 22 items if near-identical derivatives are left out—end in a diphthong. What is more interesting perhaps is that before a diphthongal ending only singleton *-n-* appears, whereas otherwise we find double *-nn-*. The latter is what we would expect if we follow the dominant view that double writing of consonants marks a preceding short vowel. It would seem to me as if the contrastive singleton writing of *-n-* signals a following long vowel (similarly to Kortlandt 1999b, though note the absence of the macron!). The regularity with which this is done does not suggest, in my view, that the underlying form of the suffix is **-ināja*, but rather that *-ai* represents a real diphthong.

- (8) a. *podrūktinai* ‘confirm’ vs. *polaipinna x 2* ‘order,’ *tankinne* ‘promise.’
 b. *sātuinei* ‘satiatie,’ *tūlninai* ‘multiply.’
 c. *dālinai* ‘work,’ *klumstinai* ‘knock,’ *erschwāigstinai* ‘illuminate,’ *poswāigstinai* ‘id.,’ *powaidinei*, *swintinai* ‘sanctify’ vs. *enlaipinne* ‘order,’ *erkīnina* ‘free,’ *gewinna x 2* ‘work,’ *isrankinna* ‘save,’ *kūmpinna* ‘be upset,’ *mukinna x 3* ‘teach,’ *sadinna* / *sedinna* ‘place,’ *spartina* (vel sim.) ‘strengthen,’ *swintina* (*niswintina* ‘desecrate’), *waidinna* (*waidinnasin* ‘seem,’ *powaidinne*), *wartinna sin* ‘turn.’

4.4 The table in (9) gives an overview of all finite forms of the verb *turīt* attested in the Catechisms. The picture that obtains is decidedly chaotic, but it also shows regularities in spelling on two important points: (i) the odd, shortened forms *tur* and *turr* are only found in the first two Catechisms and (ii) the diphthongal forms occur only in the later parts of the Enchiridion. Following the textual chronology set up in (3), we can interpret the ending *-ei* as a later variant. However, it would also entail that *tur* from Catechism I is old, which seems unlikely. How exactly this form is to be interpreted remains obscure.

(9) Paradigm and attestations of *turīt* ‘have’

Lexeme	1. Cat.	2. Cat.	Enchiridion
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¹² On Old Prussian *ē*- and *ī*-verbs in general, cf. Kaukienė (1998).

¹³ Individual forms ending in a diphthong have received different explanations. For instance, Stang (1966: 36) considers the final diphthongs of *ā*-stem *aupallai* ‘find’ and thematic *podingai* ‘like,’ not too convincingly, as relics of the PIE optative marker **-oi-*.

1SG		<i>turri x 1 57</i> ₁₅
2SG	<i>tur x 10 5</i> _{3, 6} , 6 ₉ , etc.	<i>turr x10 5</i> _{3, 6} , 9, etc. <i>turri x14 27</i> _{7, 13, 29} ₈ , etc. <i>turrei x 6 81</i> _{2, 89} _{1, 105} _{9, 11, 13, 17} <i>turri x 28 27</i> _{4, 39} _{15, 47} ₅ , etc.
3		<i>turre x 1 65</i> ₁₅ <i>turei x 10 63</i> _{16, 87} _{1, 7} , etc. <i>turrei x 1 105</i> ₁₂
1PL		<i>turrimai x 19 27</i> _{9, 16, 29} ₁₁ , etc.
2PL		<i>turriti x 3 89</i> _{7-8, 91} _{6, 95} ₂₃

5 (Cautious) proposal and concluding remarks

5.1 The facts from the preceding sections can be summarized as follows: (i) the phonemes /e/, /ē/ and /a/, /ā/, sometimes confused in the documents, merged into a mid / low front / central vowel (**3.1**); (ii) final unaccented long vowels inherited from Proto-Baltic were shortened (**3.3**); (iii) final short mid front vowels underwent diphthongization, i.e. were enlarged with a palatal glide (**4.4**). While these proposed developments are only tentative, they find support in typology since all of them are common developments. They can moreover be put it in the relative chronology as given under (10).

- (10) a. e, ē, a, ā > æ, æ̃ (vel sim.)
 b. V[+LONG][-STRESS] > V[-LONG]
 c. V[-LONG][+MID][+FRONT] _ # > Vi#.

5.2 While the developments proposed here have some explanatory power, there are always counterexamples that have to be explained away as either scribal errors or otherwise. Additionally, it still needs to be explained why certain lexemes end in a diphthong and others not, and still more why a small number of lexemes take both. Perhaps these questions cannot be answered. In the very least, I hope to have shown that, with Levin (1982; contra Schmalstieg 1970: 127; 1974: 305), the orthography of the Old Prussian documents is more consistent than it may seem at first sight.

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