LITHUANIAN tekėti AND RELATED FORMATIONS

Erdvillas Jakulis' thorough, detailed and comprehensive study (2004) is an important contribution to our reconstruction of the Balto-Slavic verbal system. The following remarks are intended to complement his findings from a Slavic perspective.

Jakulis demonstrates that the type of Lith. tekėti, teka 'flow' is largely of East Baltic provenance. He finds it difficult to identify the same type in Old Prussian. This is clearly because preterit forms are very scarce in the sources which have come down to us. There are two instances which I find quite convincing: skellänts 'schuldig' beside skallasnan 'Pflicht', which is identical with Lith. skelėti 'be indebted', and the verb giwūt, giwa 'leben', which Jakulis does not mention. Two more examples are provided by the imperatives kūrdeiti, kirdijti 'hör', Lith. girdėti, and dereis, endirūs 'siehe', Lith. dyréti (cf. Kortlandt 1982, 7; 1987, 106). In Slavic we should expect to find examples partly in the class of simple root verbs, such as tek-, and partly in the class of primary verbs in -ēti. Both of these classes require some discussion.

In a largely forgotten but highly innovative article, Herman Kølln has argued that Slavic root verbs originally had a sigmatic aorist if they were both transitive and non-terminative but a thematic aorist if they were either intransitive or terminative, or both (1961, 269). The only intransitive root verbs with a sigmatic aorist in Old Church Slavic are cvisti 'bloom' and tešti 'flow', which evidently had a different preterit at an earlier stage. Kølln identifies these verbs with the type of Lith. tekėti, adducing three additional pieces of evidence: Russian bežát', lsg. bezú, 3pl. bezú 'run', which is semantically close to Lith. tekėti, tekū, further Upper Sorbian kččč, kću 'bloom', which is identical with Latvian kvītēt, kvitu, and Čakavian (Novi) žīvūt, žīvēn 'live'. The last example is also found elsewhere (e.g. Vrgada, Mostar, Posavian, cf. Ėurišić 1973, 247) and can now be identified with Old Prussian giwūt, giwa.

Slavic primary verbs in -ēti represent different formations (cf. Kortlandt 1989, 109; 1992, 374). Since all of these have an i-present, some of them may have had a thematic present at an earlier stage, e.g. Russ. bežit 'runs', Scr. živī 'lives' (cf. already Meillet 1906, 365). Jakulis lists twenty Slavic verbs in -ēti which have Baltic cognates of the type of Lith. tekėti (2004, 117–124). Almost all of these denote events which strongly affect the senses (sound, light, smell, stress). The largest subgroup
are verbs with an original *ski-present, e.g. OChSl. pištati < *-skë- (with an i-present), pište- < *-ske- (inf. piskati), Lith. pyškėti, pūška ‘squeak’, which apparently gave rise to presents in -ke- and -ze- as well (cf. M e i l l e t 1906, 369; V a i l l a n t 1966, 395–398). This was evidently a Balto-Slavic development already. Other verbs belonging here are grumėti ‘thunder’, svijėti sę ‘shine’, *smurdėti ‘stink’, *pysdėti ‘fart’, Lith. grumėti, svijėti, smurdėti, bezdėti.

Thus, it appears that the type of Lith. tekėti, teka goes back to Balto-Slavic times in the case of intransitive verbs denoting non-terminative dynamic processes such as flowing, running, living, blooming, shining, thundering, smelling. Here we may add Lith. sravėti ‘flow’ (cf. V a i l l a n t 1966, 198) and Slavic *půzēti, *půže- ‘crawl’ (cf. V a i l l a n t 1966, 386) and letekėti, *lekte- < *lekste- ‘fly’, which is to be compared with Lith. lakstytė (cf. V a i l l a n t 1966, 393). The ė-preterit was evidently taken from the Indo-European type of stative verbs with an i-present denoting a state of being, e.g. Lith. budėti ‘be awake’, judėti ‘be in movement’, Slavic mënēti ‘be in thought’, dyrzati ‘be in control’, Vedic būdhyā-, yūdhyā-, mānya-, dēhya-, which were semantically close enough to supply a new imperfect to present stems of non-terminative intransitive verbs when the earlier imperfect developed into an aorist. Slavic kypēti ‘bubble, be seething’, Lith. kūpēti, kupēti, Vedic kūpya- seems to belong to both semantic classes. For Slavic vidēti ‘see’, which has an acute root vowel as a result of Winter’s law, we can reconstruct an ė-preterit on the basis of Latin and Germanic, a thematic aorist *vide- on the basis of Greek and Indo-Iranian, and a suppletive present tense represented by Slavic zrēti, Lith. regēti, Prussian impv. dereis. This high frequency verb may have played a major role in the extension of the ė-preterit to verbs with a thematic aorist at an early stage.

At the same time, transitive verbs denoting non-terminative dynamic actions such as OChSl. bere- ‘gather’, žene- < *gene- ‘hunt’, ište- < *iske- ‘search’, mete- ‘throw’, tōče- < *tōke- ‘weave’, kove- ‘forge’, zove- ‘call’ developed an ā-preterit (cf. K ð l l n 1961, 275), which was probably taken from an Indo-European type of verbs denoting determinate movement (cf. K o r t l a n d t 1984, 184). This was clearly a Balto-Slavic innovation because the East Baltic transitive root verbs with a thematic present and an ā-preterit belong to the same semantic class, e.g. Lith. reinka, riŋko ‘gather’, siūva, siuvo ‘sew’, sūka, sūko ‘twist’ (cf. S t a n g 1966, 385). Later the ā-preterit replaced the thematic aorist in East Baltic, where it was subsequently generalized as the preterit of intransitive verbs par excellence. On the other hand, the sigmatic aorist of transitive root verbs was replaced by an ė-preterit, which then became the characteristic preterit of transitive verbs in East Baltic. Thus, I agree with S t a n g that “sowohl der intransitive Charakter des ā-Prät. als der transitive Charakter des ė-Prät. sekundär
ist" (1966, 388). The motivation for the latter development is far from obvious and requires some discussion.

There are three reasons why the ending of Lith. vėdė ‘led’, which cannot be separated from the Slavic imperfect veděaše, cannot simply be identified with the formative suffix of séděti, Slavic séděti, Latin sedère ‘sit’ (cf. Kortlandt 1986, 256). First, the latter formation designates a situation that is the result of an earlier process, which is denoted by the root *sed-. It thus resembles the perfect. The Balto-Slavic imperfect, on the other hand, expressed a process in the course of its completion. It rather resembles the English progressive form. Second, the stem *sédè-, which has an acute root vowel as a result of Winter’s law, is common to all verb forms except the present tense, whereas the imperfect formation is limited to the preterit. Third, the tonal difference between the Lith. circumflex ending -ė and the acute formative suffix of “Zustandsverba” precludes their identification. To my surprise, I have been unable to find the latter, decisive objection in the existing literature.

It follows from the foregoing that Lith. vėdė can be identified as a nominal formation (cf. already Meillet 1906, 370) which yielded the Slavic imperfect through composition with the original perfect *öse ‘was’ of the root *es- (cf. Stange 1942, 82–84), which must be reconstructed for Indo-European on the basis of the Indo-Iranian and Greek evidence (cf. Kortlandt 1986, 255). Deverbal nouns in -ė- are found in Latin, e.g. caedes ‘slaughter’, sédēs ‘seat’, vātēs ‘seer’. Thus, we can paraphrase Lith. vėdė, Slavic veděaše as ‘was leading’, as opposed to Slavic sédē ‘sat, was sitting’, sēde ‘sat (down)’, Lith. sėdėjo, sêdo with a secondary ā-preterit. The two types of ė-preterit may ultimately both have a nominal origin because they can be compared with the Greek intransitive aorists in -ē- and -thè- (cf. Meillet 1906, 366–368; Chantaine 1961, 166–168), which may go back to deverbal nouns in -ē- and to the root noun which is represented in Lith. -dē, Vedic -dhā, Latin -dēs, respectively.

In Prussian we find the intransitive ė-preterit in ismigē ‘entschlief’, Slavic mëžati < *migē-, and the transitive ė-preterit in weddē ‘brachte’ and pertraūki ‘verschloss’, Lith. vėdė, traukė. The transitive ā-preterit was largely generalized in Prussian, as is clear from bela (I), byla (II), bilā ‘sprach’, prowēla (I, II) ‘verriet’, lima (I), lymu (II) ‘brach’, poglabū ‘herzte’, and especially endeirā ‘sah an’ and teikū ‘schuf’ because these have the e-grade root vowel of the present tense, as distinct from the zero grade root vowel in the infinitives endyrētwē ‘ansehen’ and tickint ‘machen’. The infinitive teickut ‘schaffen’ evidently adopted the vocalism of the present stem, as did the infinitive laikūt ‘halten’, the participle maisotan ‘gemischt’, and the deverbal noun perbandāsnan ‘Versuchung’, Lith. laikyti, maišyti, bandyti. On the analogy of such
verbs as billē < *-ēie ‘spricht’, billā ‘sprach’, the ā-preterits stallā and quoitā were created beside stallē ‘steht’ and quoitē ‘will’ (cf. Kortlandt 1987, 108). It thus appears that the Prussian data support the reconstruction of a transitive ā-preterit and two different types of ē-preterit proposed above for the Balto-Slavic proto-language.

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