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STUDIES IN OLD PRUSSIAN

A Critical Review of the Relevant Literature
in the Field from 1975 until 2005

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This book inaugurates a new collection devoted to the Old Prussian language and culture, *Billēmai bhe ersinnimai* ('we talk and we learn'). According to the editors, the aim of this new collection is to 'talk about our culture' and to 'know the contribution of the global culture towards the exploration of our own culture', which is an ambitious goal, opening new horizons to the understanding of the Old Prussian language and its Eastern European cultural environment. The collection starts with a new book by the well-known American linguist, baltist and slavist William R. Schmalstieg (hereafter WS) on the Old Prussian language. I hardly need to introduce WS to the readers of this review. His works on the Baltic languages, particularly on Old Prussian and Lithuanian, have become reference works to all those working in this field: *An Old Prussian Grammar* (1974), *Studies in Old Prussian* (1976), *A Lithuanian Historical Syntax* (1988), *The Historical Morphology of the Baltic Verb* (2000). Each of these works is characterised by a first-hand knowledge of Baltic philology and an impressive depth of analysis, which make WS one of the most outstanding living experts in the field.

In 1976, WS published *Studies in Old Prussian, A Critical Review of the Relevant Literature in the field from 1945* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 420 pages). According to the foreword, the purpose of the book was 'to examine critically the literature published about the Old Prussian language since the end of World War II in 1945' (p. ix); the book was divided into ten general sections: The Old Prussian people; The Sudovians or Jatvingians; The Old Prussian language; Texts in Old Prussian; Phonology; Old Prussian nominal morphology;

Pronouns, adverbs and prepositions; Old Prussian verb morphology; Miscellanea; Old Prussian etymologies. The present book, published almost forty years after its 'older brother', shares the same objective and intends 'to review and at times comment on some of the major contributions to the study of the Old Prussian language since the publication of the volume *Studies in Old Prussian* in 1976', as WS puts it in the introduction. Taken together, the two books offer an overview of the research on Old Prussian for the last seventy years by one of the leading contributors to this field. However, the publication of this new book takes place against a completely new background in comparison to 1976. Not only that the Baltic States have regained their independence, which boosted scientific contacts within the scholarly community, but significant progress has also been made in recent years in Baltic and Old Prussian philology. One could even go so far as to speak of a total revolution in our approach to the Old Prussian language. This complete overturning is due to the emergence of new generations of scholars who have profoundly renewed our knowledge of Old Prussian (Vladimir N. Toporov, Wojciech Smoczyński, Vytautas Mažiulis, Frederik Kortlandt, Pietro Umberto Dini) and to the publication of epoch making books such as *Prusskij Jazyk* (V. N. Toporov, 1975–1990), *Prūsų kalbos etimologijos žodynas* (V. Mažiulis, 1988–1997) and *Lexicon der altpreussischen Verben* (W. Smoczyński, 2007). These *Studies in Old Prussian* are the outcome of this time of tremendous upheaval and intend to look back to its historical achievements.

Writing a critical review of the literature implies the possession of two qualities. First, it is necessary to maintain sufficient distance from one's own theories in order to be able to assess the divergent views of others objectively; nothing would be worse than judging the contribution of other scholars through the narrow prism of one's options, which could result in a devastating soliloquy. A first glance on WS's new book shows that this is not the case: in the discussion about the literature, WS always brings a balanced judgement and refers to the works of his colleagues with elegance and honesty. Even when he disagrees with the views endorsed by other scholars, he does not misrepresent or dismiss them outright. This is the right way to do science, as a respectful dialogue between people working on the same issues with different backgrounds. The second quality is completeness and accuracy. Considering the huge number of studies on Old Prussian, this is a particularly critical challenge and one cannot expect any reviewer to know everything that was written on Old Prussian. But WS has made a praiseworthy effort to capture the full diversity of thought and opinion about the Old Prussian language, and the picture that emerges from his book gives a true and fair view of the studies in Old Prussian during the period considered.

The book is divided into 11 chapters, covering all areas of the Old Prussian language, from its documentation to the analysis of its grammar. Chapter 1 (p. 31–32) is a very brief introduction summarising the scope of the book. Chapter 2 (p. 33–45) deals with the Old Prussian editions, two of them having been published during the period covered by the book, V. Mažiulis' reference edition of the Old Prussian corpus in two volumes (1966 and 1981) and the facsimile of the First Catechism published in 1995 by Bonifacas Stundžia and Mikelis Klusis (*Pirmoji Prūsų knyga*). A philological edition seeks to reproduce as faithfully as possible the text as it is given in the original publication, ideally through a facsimile; it cannot go beyond the written word. A phonetic interpretation is another matter, which was undertaken by different scholars, especially M. Klusis (*Ponto-Baltica*, 6, 1995) for the First Catechism, Toshikazu Inoue (*Normalizacija prusskogo jazyka Enxiridiona*, Kobe, 1992) for the Third Catechism or Kortlandt's electronic edition (1996) for the entire corpus.

Chapter 3 (p. 43–122) is devoted to Old Prussian orthography and phonology. This is an area about which much has been written between 1975 and 2005. As is well known, WS's position on Old Prussian orthography is that it would be surprising to find a high degree of accuracy 'in phonetic rendition from a German pastor' (p. 48). He therefore invites to be suspicious of 'what seems to me to be an excessive reliance on the orthography'. At the other end of the chain, W. Smoczyński has attempted to propose a global system of Old Prussian orthography, relying on writing habits and script errors. The use of the macron, for example (p. 53–57), is assessed differently depending on one's philosophy about Old Prussian orthography: erratic diacritic for the ones with different values, regular notation of length and toneme, or sometimes abbreviation of nasal diphthongs, for the others. In any case, as shown by Inoue (cf. p. 65), a majority of words encountered in the Enchiridion displays 'allographically alternating forms', which suggests caution with respect to the accuracy of the Old Prussian orthography. In my opinion, WS's views on this matter, recognising that 'there were numerous deviations' (p. 67), are fully justifiable, even if I think that a typology of Old Prussian orthography is a task that can be achieved, albeit imperfectly. Needless to say, 'OPr. texts offer too limited a corpus for meaningful statistical interpretation' (p. 72). On some issues WS has personal views, which are not shared by the majority of scholars, for example on the PIE word-final monophthongisation of **-on* to **-ō* in some sandhi positions (cf. p. 84–85), but he presents these views with the necessary critical perspective. There is also a good discussion on F. Kortlandt's claim that 'double consonants in OPr. may be an indication of stress on the following vowel' (p. 95), relying on examples such as *sem̄ē* 'earth', *weddē* 'brought, led', *billit* 'to say'; WS rejects this view and adheres to the traditional analysis of double writing as indicative of the brevity

of the preceding vowel. There follows an excellent discussion on scribal mistakes and the extent to which the text should be emended (p. 109sq.).

Chapter 4 (p. 123–203) is on morphology and describes both nominal and verbal morphology. Practically all the difficult questions of Old Prussian morphology are discussed, and the picture is sufficiently detailed to provide a good overview of the problematics currently discussed in Old Prussian philology: the hapax legomenon *poklausīmanas* ‘heard’, often overexploited in Indo-European reconstruction as a vestige of a participial formation **-menos* (p. 125 and 176); the unexplained declension of the definite article, for example in the genitive *steison* (p. 130–133); the structure of the personal pronouns (p. 153–154); the preterite ending *-ts* (p. 165); the preterite of the verb ‘to be’, *be* ‘was’ (p. 169); the fate of the neuter gender (p. 182–184 and 200–201); stem ablaut (p. 196–198), etc.

The next chapter (ch. 5, p. 206–290) is devoted to vocabulary. It consists essentially in a discussion of the origin of individual Old Prussian lexemes and can be seen as a bibliographical addendum to an Old Prussian etymological dictionary. Many of them are compounds, such as *paustocaica* ‘wild horse’ (p. 205), *medenixtaurw* ‘pheasant’ (p. 207), etc. Many new etymologies have been proposed especially by W. Smoczyński in his numerous works on Old Prussian. Sometimes, WS adds his own opinion, for example on OPr. *accodis* ‘hole in the wall for the elimination of smoke’ (p. 245). A list of lexical isoglosses shared by Old Prussian and Lithuanian, based on a paper by Ademollo Gagliano, is also discussed at length (p. 281–286). The data are presented in a rather fragmented way, each lexeme being discussed separately; the Old Prussian words are not classified in alphabetic order, but according to their treatment in the literature. This is not really an obstacle to reading, but it is true that a word index would have been very useful for guiding the readers.

Chapter 6 (p. 291–325) deals with syntax. As is well known, the major problem with the Old Prussian syntax is the extreme dependency on the German original text and the issue of linguistic interference, which, in the case of Old Prussian, takes radical forms. This is probably the reason why Old Prussian syntax was less considerably studied than the other areas of grammar. That there is a massive German influence on Old Prussian is undisputable, but this influence should be distinguished into different levels, ranging from the Germanisation of the Old Prussian language (linguistic contact) to the more or less artificial forms of textual interference due to the word-for-word translation process (philological contact), which is a different thing. To these two levels one could also add the impact of the translation process itself, leading the translator in some cases to construct rules and guiding criteria for his own orientation. The qualification of a given phenomenon as due to linguistic contact, to

philological contact or to the construction of translation rules is a particularly difficult task. For example, the presence of a definite article in Old Prussian (OPr. *stas*, cf. p. 291–297 and 308–312) could either reflect a contact-induced feature of Old Prussian as a strongly Germanised language or it could illustrate the repeated pressure of the German substrate text; it is equally likely that the translator, once having identified the German-Prussian correspondence (*der / stas*), used it consciously as part of his translation grammar. The notion of ‘translation grammar’ is particularly suited to the description of the Old Prussian corpus; it implies the construction and memorisation of rules. A particularly promising line of research has been in the recent decades a comparison of different translations made in the Baltic languages: the Old Prussian translations must be seen in the light of other translations dating from the same time (Old Lithuanian and Old Latvian).

The next chapter (ch. 7, p. 327–375) presents the ‘shorter Old Prussian texts’, some of them having come to light during the period considered. The Basel Epigram (p. 327–335), discovered in the 1970s, is a particularly intriguing text, whose interpretation is still controversial. WS then comes to discuss at length (p. 338–375) the so-called ‘Jatvingian glossary’ (*Pogańskie gwary z Narewu* ‘Pagan dialects from Narew’), discovered (and lost) in 1985 by a certain Vjačeslav Zinov and published in 1985 by Zigmās Zinkevičius. There has been much debate on the language of this glossary; it is obviously Baltic, but cannot be identified with any known Baltic language. The paradox with this text is that it is a unique source and yet gave rise to relatively few studies, as though there was a kind of reluctance to investigate it. This can be due, of course, to the troubled history of the manuscript. An iconoclastic question that is never asked is whether V. Zinov’s glossary could be a fake rather than an authentic document; in order to dispel this suspicion, it would be necessary to have access to V. Zinov’s notebook, to find and interview V. Zinov himself and to collect as much data as possible on the material transmission of the text.

Chapter 8, dealing with the Old Prussian revival (p. 377–381), is very short. It describes the attempts to recreate Modern Prussian as a living language, particularly by Letas Palmaitis. WS’s judgement on this matter is critical, but well-meaning (p. 378): ‘In my view this is a fascinating intellectual exercise, although I doubt that Modern Prussian will ever become a viable language. [...] One can, however, only wish those who wish to recreate a Modern Prussian, success.’

Place names are discussed in Chapter 9 (p. 383–416). Toponymy is one of the most promising fields of research in Old Prussian studies, since it can adduce new material to the limited written corpus and widen our knowledge of the Old Prussian vocabulary. In addition, place names have their own internal

logic and their investigation is a discipline in itself. The same can be said about personal names (ch. 10, p. 417–423).

The final Chapter (ch. 11, p. 425–442) expands the field of vision by presenting the relationships of Old Prussian with other languages. The position of Old Prussian within Baltic is difficult, not only owing to its numerous divergences from East Baltic, but also to our incapacity to reconstruct Common Baltic as the ancestor of both West and East Baltic.

This is a very nice book, both well-written and reader-friendly, giving a good overview of the vitality of Old Prussian studies in the recent decades. W. R. Schmalstieg is to be congratulated for this very useful tool, which crowns his creative career, does justice to the scientific production of his colleagues and paves the way for future research on Old Prussian.

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