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OLD LITHUANIAN *pame(d)mi* ‘IMITATE’

A rare Old Lithuanian athematic present *pamėmi*, inf. *pamėdėti* ‘imitate, ape’ is attested in the third edition of Sirvydas’ dictionary¹: SD³ 141 *pamemi* ‘kugluie, gesticulor, ago mimum’, SD³ 312 *pamemi* ‘podrzeźniam komu, sermonem aut mores alicuius per iocum imitor’. In the first edition² the verb appears as *pamėdau*, *pamėdyti*: SD¹ 127 *pamedau* ‘podrzeźniam, subsanno, illudo, irrideo, mores, gestus alicuius imitor’. Both *pamėdėti* and *pamėdyti* are very poorly attested. The simplex *mėdyti* ‘szczebiotać, podrzeźniać (chirp; imitate)’ is found in A. Kassarzewski’s manuscript dictionary (19th Century) (LKŽ VII 989). Nesselmann, *Wörterbuch der littauischen Sprache*, Königsberg, 1850, 391 (s.v. *megzdžioju*) gives *pamėdmi*, *-dėti*, noting that it is also written *pamėmi*, but he has obviously taken these forms from Sirvydas. Finally, LKŽ VII 984 quotes an example of *pamėdėti* from Léipalingis (in the district of Lazdijai, South Aukštaitian dialect): *Kap ima pamėdėt – kap Jasius valgo, kap šneka* ‘He begins to imitate how Jasius eats, how he speaks’³. In Latvian we have an exact cognate of OLith. *(pa)mėdyti* in *mėdīt* ‘ape, mimic; irritate, tease’ (ME II 612 ‘spotten, nachäffen, höhnen’), as well as some other derivatives (*mėdināt* ‘spotten’, *mėdišana* ‘das Spotten, Nachäffen’, *mėdītājs* ‘einer, der spottet, nachäfft’).

I see no reason not to take Sirvydas’ *pamemi* seriously as a real and potentially inherited athematic present *pamėmi* (< **pamėdmi*), *pamėdėti* ‘imitate, ape’⁴. Sirvydas is otherwise quite reliable as a source of Old Lithuanian athematic presents. We do not find in his writings the bewildering expansion of athematic present inflection (actually, only of 1st sg. *-mi* and 3rd person *-ti*) that takes place later in the history of Lithuanian⁵.

¹ K. Pa k a l k a (ed.), *Pirmasis lietuvių kalbos žodynas*. Konstantinas Širvydas, *Dictionarium Trium Linguarum*, Vilnius, 1979.

² K. Pa k a l k a (ed.), *Senasis Konstantino Sirvydo žodynas*, Vilnius, 1997.

³ Nominal derivatives are also rare and clearly dependent on the verb. We have SD¹ 127, SD³ 141, SD³ 312 *pamedetoias* in Sirvydas’ dictionary, as well as the bird names *pamėdulė*, *pamėdulis* ‘blackbird’, *pamėdonis* ‘finch’, mostly known from Lithuania Minor lexicographers (on which see V. U r b u t i s, *Baltų eimologijos etidai*, Vilnius, 1981, 40–41).

⁴ *Pamėdėti* and the other derivatives of this root are sometimes given as *pamedėti*, etc. (e.g. by Ch. S. S t a n g, *Vergleichende Grammatik der Baltischen Sprachen*, Oslo, 1966, 310). Sirvydas and some other sources are ambiguous as to the root vowel, but all the unambiguous evidence points very clearly to *(pa)mėd-*.

⁵ See specially F. S p e c h t, *Širvyds Punktay sakimu (Punkty kazań)*, Göttingen, 1929, 38; i d e m, – KZ LXII 1935, 84f.

Pamémi shows the regular phonetic treatment **pamédmi > pamémi*, just as *émi* ‘I eat’, *dúomi* ‘I give’, *demì* ‘I put’, or *ráumi* ‘I weep’, and the second stem in **-ē-* is of course perfectly in accordance with the general morphology of Old Lithuanian athematic presents. OLith. *(pa)médyti* and Latv. *mēdīt* bear all the appearance of morphological renewals of a type that was dying out. The replacement of an old athematic present *(pa)mémi*, *-dēti* by an iterative *(pa)médyti* is easy to understand from the semantics of the verb⁶. The presence of both *pamedau* and *pamemi* in Sirvydas’ dictionary probably indicates that both variants were in use at that time. The further semantic developments ‘imitate’ > ‘joke, mock, etc.’ hardly require any comment.

As for the etymology of *pamémi*, it has been usually related to other verbs also meaning ‘imitate, mimic’, ‘mock’ (*vel sim.*): Lith. *mégdyti(s)*, *mégzdyti(s)*, *mégdzioti(s)*, *pamėčioti* (e.g. B ū g a RR I 287; ME *loc. cit.*; Fraenkel LEW 426; Urbatis *loc. cit.*). Endzelins and Fraenkel even go on to derive the whole set from an interjection **mē*. The existence of an athematic present *pamémi* suffices to cast serious doubts on such an approach. Phonetic variation of an uncontrollable sort is not very surprising in words belonging to this type of expressive vocabulary, but if we have to take one of the variants as the starting point, OLith. *pamémi*, *-dēti* is by far the best choice. A more rational etymology would certainly be desirable.

I propose relating OLith. *pamémi*, etc. to the root **med-* ‘measure’ (IEW 705f., LIV 380, LIV² 423). The athematic present *pamémi* makes a perfect word equation with Gk. μήδομαι ‘be minded, intend’, μέδομαι ‘provide for, be mindful of’, μέδω ‘rule over’ (Hom. μέδων ‘ruler’), Lat. *medeor*, *-ērī* ‘cure, remedy’, *meditor*, *-ārī* ‘think about, ponder’, OIr. *midithir* ‘judge’, Gmc. **metan* ‘measure’ (Goth. *mitan*, ON *meta*, OE *metan*, OHG *mezzan*). The evidence points to an Indo-European root athematic present. Apart from the Hesychian gloss μῆστο: βουλεύσατο, OLith. *pamémi* would be the only form that continues this formation directly. The lengthened grade of Gk. μήδομαι demands a Narten present **méd-/méd-*⁷. The length of Baltic

⁶ Alternatively, we could see OLith. *pamėdyti*, Latv. *mēdīt* not as replacements of *pamémi*, but as derivatives of it. The final result would have been the same.

⁷ As a possible, by no means secure further example of **mēd-* I would suggest deriving the Old Irish non-reduplicated preterit *·mídair* from the imperfect of the original Narten present (thematized in the present as **med-e-tor*, with the vocalism of the weak stem, and later replaced by **med-je-tor > midithir*, as regularly among Old Irish deponents). See M. Weiss, *Studies in Italic nominal morphology*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1993, 178ff.; *idem*, – *AJPh* CXVII 1996, 674; J. Jasanoff, *Mír Curad. Studies in honor of Calvert Watkins*, Innsbruck, 1998, 305ff., for the theory that some lengthened grade preterits in Latin, Albanian, and some other languages derive from the imperfect of a secondarily thematized Narten present. Cf. for instance Alb. *mola* ‘milked’ < **h₂mēlg-* (pres. *mjel* = Gk. ἀμέλω < **h₂mełg-elo-*, but Ved. *mārṣī* ‘wipes’ assures an original Narten present), OLat. *(sur)rēgit* (Liv. Andr., later *rēxī*; pres. *regō* ‘direct, guide’ = Gk. ὀρέγω, Goth. *rikan*, etc., but Ved. *rāṣī* ‘rules’), Lat. *lēgī*, Alb. *mb-lodhi*, Toch. A imperf. *lyāk* (pres. Lat. *legō*, Alb. *mb-ledh*, Gk. λέγω < **leḡ-elo-* ‘collect’, probably continuing earlier **léḡ-ti/*léḡ-ḡti*).

mēd-* can be explained in two (not necessarily exclusive) ways: either it has generalized the strong stem of the original Narten present, or it is simply due to Winter’s Law. It is interesting to observe that the overall picture seems to point to a middle verb. The reconstruction of a middle Narten present **méd-or*/méd-ror* (*vel sim.*) would contradict the current understanding of Indo-European verbal ablaut (**mēd-*/**med-* in the active, only **med-* in the middle), but such a reconstruction would be the one that fits best the actual facts and lengthened grade in a middle present is not totally unparalleled⁸. It is not necessary to explore this view in detail here. For our present purpose it is sufficient to establish that OLith. *pamémi*, *pamédėti* ‘imitate’ directly continues an Indo-European athematic present that in all probability was inflected in the middle voice⁹.

The root **med-* is well known from the wide range of meanings that it displays in the historical languages¹⁰. For Baltic **mēd-mai* (*vel sim.*) I start from a general meaning ‘measure’, both because it is the one we probably have to reconstruct for the parent language and because it is the one attested in Germanic, the branch closest to Baltic from those in which the verb is attested. For the curious semantic development ‘measure’ > ‘imitate’, cf. Sanskrit *prati-mā-* ‘imitate’ from *mā-* ‘measure’.

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⁸ Cf. above all Hitt. *ēs-a*, HLuv. *isa-* (causat. *i-sa-nu-* ‘seat’), YAv. 3 sg. *āste*, 3 pl. *āṅhāire*, Ved. *āste*, Gk. ἵσταται < **h₁és-or* ‘sits’ (**h₁éh₁s-* in all probability would have given Hitt. †*ēs-*, HLuv. †*as-*, as observed by S. Kimball, Hittite historical phonology, Innsbruck, 1999, 144).

⁹ In *Baltistica* XXXIX (2004) 179–187, I have proposed a similar origin for OLith. *miegmi*, *miegóti* ‘sleep’.

¹⁰ For a classical study on the semantics of **med-* see E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, 2: pouvoir, droit, religion, Paris, 1969, 123–132.