Frederik Kortlandt – Leiden University – www.kortlandt.nl

THE GERMANIC WEAK PRETERIT

FREDERIK KORTLANDT

The main difficulty with the Germanic weak preterit is that one cannot endeavor an explanation of its origin without taking into account almost every aspect of the historical phonology and morphology of the Germanic languages. In the following I intend to show how a number of problems receive a natural explanation in a unified treatment on the basis of earlier studies. The theory presented here is not revolutionary, but aims at integrating earlier findings into a coherent whole. There is no reason to give a detailed account of the scholarly literature, which is easily accessible (cf. Tops 1974, Bammesberger 1986).

The best starting-point for the discussion is perhaps the following quotation from Ball (1968: 186f.), to which I wholly subscribe:

> "It is surely a remarkable fact that the stem and dental of any and every weak verb are the same in the preterite and past participle. This immediately suggests either a common origin or that one is derived from the other. Now, the *-to-* participle is an IE formation while the weak preterite is Germanic, and, since a common origin seems out of the question, if they are related at all the dental preterite must be derived from the past participle. This hypothesis would avoid all the difficulties produced by Go. *wissa*, *brūhta*, etc., which have been discussed above: it would, in fact, at once solve the problems both of the origin of the dental and of the form of the stem in the preterite-presents and class I preterites without medial vowel. And I have argued above that the class III preterites like OE *hæfde* can only be accounted for on the assumption that the weak preterite was introduced into this class at a far later date in Germanic."

As Ball recognizes, the "really serious problem is, of course, to account for the endings" (187): if the weak preterit "was a Germanic innovation, we might expect it to adopt a ready-made set of endings, such as those of the strong preterite" (183). This is where the verb 'to do' enters the picture: I agree with Ball that it "has always been the main strength of the composition theory that it provided a fairly satisfactory explanation of the endings" (183). The verb 'to do' has three different preterit stems in Germanic: **dud-* in OE. *dyde*, **ded-* in OS. *deda*, OHG. *teta*, and **dēd-* in OS. *dādun*, OHG. *tātun*. While **de-* is evidently the reduplication syllable, the root forms **dē-* and **du-* must be derived from the root aorist, cf. Vedic *ádhāt*, *ádhur* 'he, they put'. The coexistence of a perfect stem **dedō-* and an aorist stem **dē-* is corroborated by the 2nd sg. endings OHG. *-ōs*, OS. *-os* and Go. *-ēs*, OE. OS. *-es*. Thus, I think that OS. *dedos* and *-des* represent the perfect and the aorist of the verb 'to do', respectively.

There is another root aorist which has survived into Germanic, viz. *stōþ, Vedic ásthāt 'he stood', which gave rise to a 3rd pl. form *stōdun(þ), cf. Go. stōþ, OE. stōdon. Similarly, the 3rd sg. form *dēþ gave rise to a plural form *dēdun(þ), OHG. tātun, Go. -dēdun. I thereby arrive at the following reconstruction of the Proto-Germanic root aorist of the verb 'to do':

	PGmc.	Go.	ON.	OE.	OS.
1st sg.	*dēn	-da	-þa	-de	-da
2nd sg.	*dēs	-dēs	-þer	-des	-des
3rd sg.	*dēþ	-da	-þe	-de	-da
1st pl.	*dēdume	-dēdum	-þom		
2nd pl.	*dēdude	-dēduþ	-þoþ		
3rd pl.	*dēdunþ	-dēdun	-þo	-don	-dun

In order to account for OE. dyde we must assume that *dēdunþ replaced earlier *dunþ at a stage which was more recent than the introduction of *du- into the optative (subjunctive).

The perfect (strong preterit) of the verb 'to do' can be reconstructed as follows:

	PGmc.	OS.	OHG.
1st sg.	*dedōa	deda	teta
2nd sg.	*dedōþa	dedos	-tōs
3rd sg.	*dedōe	deda	teta
1st pl.	*dedume		-tum, -tōm
2nd pl.	*dedude		-tut, -tōt
3rd pl.	*dedunþ	dedun	-tun, -tōn

The formation can be compared with Go. saisō, ON. sera 'I sowed'. After the loss of final *-a, *-e, the 2nd sg. ending *-þ was evidently replaced by *-s on the analogy of the aorist (weak preterit), cf. Go. saisōst, with added -t. This *-s spread to the other strong preterits in West Germanic on the analogy of the weak endings *-dæ, *-dǣs, a development which must have occurred at a stage when the Verner alternation of final *-s was still productive. On the form dedun cf. Lühr 1984: 39f. and 49f.

We may now wonder if the development of the endings is in accordance with the Germanic Auslautgesetze. Elsewhere I have proposed the following rules for the phonetic development of final syllables in Germanic (183: 172, 1986a: 437):

PGmc.	Go.	ON.	OE.	OS.	OHG.
*-ō	-a	zero	-(u)	-(u)	-(u)
*-ōn	-a	zero	-e	-a	-a
*-ōns	-ōs	-ar	-e	-a	-ā
*-ōs	-ōs	-ar	-a	-o	-o
*-ōt	-ō	-a	-a	-o	-o
*-ōa(n)	-ō	-a	-a	-o	-o

Originally stressed *-ōs developed into OE. -as, OS. -os, OHG. -ōs. The unstressed gen.sg. ending *-ōs was replaced by the acc.sg. ending *-ōn in West Germanic in order to eliminate the homophony with the gen.pl. ending *-ōan which resulted from the loss of *-s and *-an. The difference between *-ō and *-ōt is paralleled by the difference between Go. -a < *-ai in the middle and -ai < *-ait in the optative (subjunctive). I do not share the usual view that the ON. acc.sg. ending was replaced by the nom.sg. ending in giǫf 'gift' < *gebō, *gebōn because I fail to see the motivation for such a replacement, the two case forms being distinct in the other flexion classes of this language. The fem. acc.sg. form of the adjective spaka 'wise' has a pronominal ending. Like the introduction of the pronominal ending in the neuter form spakt, this is an innovation of Old Norse. The nonzero nom.sg. ending of ON. hane 'rooster' was taken from the ion-stems (cf. Lid 1952). The reconstructed gen.pl. ending *-ōan was evidently a Proto-Germanic innovation (cf. Kortlandt 1978). I see no evidence for tonal distinctions in Proto-Germanic.

Here I add the expected reflexes of the corresponding front vowel endings:

PGmc.	Go.	ON.	OE.	OS.	OHG.
*-ē	-a	zero	-e	-a	-a
*-ēn	-a	zero	-e	-a	-a
*-ēs	-ēs	-er	-e(s)	-e(s)	-e, -ēs
*-ēt	-ē	-e	-e	-e	-e

Apart from the expected zero endings in Old Norse, the attested singular forms of the weak preterit appear to reflect a Proto-Germanic paradigm *-dēn, *-dēs, *-dē, without final *-þ in the 3rd sg. form. This is strongly reminiscent of the Balto-Slavic ē-preterit, which has a nominal original (cf. Kortlandt 1986b: 256) and therefore suggests a derivation of the Germanic weak preterit from compounds with the PIE. root noun *dhē- (cf. Kortlandt 1985: 120), but it is more probable that the final *-þ was eliminated on the analogy of the strong preterit in view of the Gothic paradigm 3rd sg. -da, 3rd pl. -dēdun, which is otherwise difficult to explain. It appears that OS. deda and OHG. teta adopted the endings

of the weak preterit. The Alemannic plural endings *-tōm, -tōt, -tōn* presuppose an earlier 3rd sg. form **tetō*.

Hollifield has argued that **ē* always yielded **ā* in North and West Germanic (1980). Though I think that this may be correct for **-ē* and **-ēn*, the evidence is unfavorable in the case of **-ēi*, **-ēu*, **-ēr* and **-ēs*, and inconclusive in the case of **-ēt*. Moreover, I maintain that Proto-Germanic **ǣ* was preserved in Ingvaeonic stressed syllables (1986a: 440). Elsewhere I have argued for the following reflexes of long final diphthongs (1990, section 6):

PGmc.	Go.	Runic	ON.	OE.	OS.	OHG.
*-ēi	-ai	-ai, -ē	-e	-i	-i	-i
*-ōi	-ai	-ai, -ē	-e	-e	-e	-e
*-ēu	-au	-ō, -iu	-e	-a	-o	-iu, -e
*-ōu	-au	-ō	-a	-a	-o	-o

It appears that **-ēi* and **-ōi* remained distinct in OS. and OHG., e.g. dat.sg. *ensti* 'favor' vs. *dage, tage* 'day', and that **-ēu* and **-ōu* remained distinct in ON. dat.sg. *syne* 'son' (Runic *magiu*) vs. *átta* 'eight' and OHG. *suniu, sune* vs. *ahto*. The high reflex *-i* of **-ēi* in OS. and OHG. and the fronted reflex *-iu, -e* of **-ēu* in ON. and OHG. suggest that **ē* was a front vowel when the long final diphthong was shortened to **-ei*, **-eu*, while the merger with the corresponding back vowel diphthongs in the other languages suggests that **ē* was a low vowel at the time of the shortening, which was apparently early in OE. and late in OHG. It follows that we must reconstruct **-ǣi* and **-ǣu* for North and West Germanic. There is no reason to assume different apophonic grades in these Germanic endings.

In the case of Runic *swestar* 'sister' I assume preservation of PIE. **-ōr* and later replacement by the reflex of **-ēr* in ON. *syster* on the analogy of *faþer, móþer, dótter*. If PIE **-ēr* had yielded **-ār*, the rise of ON. *-er* would be incomprehensible. Final **-ēs* is found in the 2nd sg. ending of the weak preterit and in OHG. 1st pl. *-mēs*, which can be compared with the corresponding long vowel ending in Lithuanian.

The ON. nonzero endings 1st sg. *-a* and 3rd sg. *-e* have not yet been explained. The attested older Runic endings are the following (cf. Antonsen 1975):

- 1st sg. *-ō*: Vetteland Stone (Norway, 350 AD), Einang stone (Norway, 350-400 AD), Gallehus gold horn 2 (Jutland, 400 AD), Rö stone (Bohuslän, 400 AD), Tune stone (Norway, 400 AD), Kjølevik stone (Norway, 450 AD), Ellestad stone (Östergötland, 550-600 AD).
- 1st sg. *-aa*: Etelhem clasp (Gotland, 500 AD).
- 3rd sg. *-ai*: Nøvling clasp (Jutland, 200 AD), Vimose chape (Fyn, 250-300 AD), Darum bracteate 3 (Jutland, 450-550 AD).

- 3rd sg. *-ē*: Garbølle wooden box (Sjælland, 400 AD), Halskov bracteate (Sjælland, 450-550 AD), Tjurkö bracteate 1 (Blekinge, 500 AD), By stone (Norway, 500-550 AD), Gummarp stone (Blekinge, 600-650 AD).

These endings appear to reflect 1st sg. *-au* or *-ōu, 3rd sg. *-ai or *-ōi, as if the optative endings had been added to the aorist or perfect endings of the Gothic forms. Here the OE. paradigm of *dyde* comes to mind: it suggests that the aorist indicative adopted the endings of the optative when the perfect became the regular preterit of strong verbs. This leads us to an examination of the optative (subjunctive) endings in Germanic.

The difference between Alemannic *nāmi* 'took' and *suohtī* 'sought' (Notker *nâme* vs. *suohtî*) cannot be explained as a secondary development: it shows that the two paradigms represent different formations. While *nāmi* can be compared with *wili* 'wants' (Notker *wile*) and derived from *-īt, the weak form must be compared with Vedic 1st sg. *dheyām*, 3rd pl. *dheyur*, Gr. θείην, θεῖεν, and derived from *dheīt (cf. Kortlandt 1987: 221). It provides conclusive evidence for the compound origin of the weak preterit. The Old English forms suggest an early substitution of *duī- for *deī- in the simple verb, and later replacement by *dudī-, which yielded *dyde*. This was evidently the subjunctive of the regular preterit *dedō-, *dedu- in Proto-Germanic times. It now appears that North Germanic disambiguated the weak indicative ending *-da by adding 1st sg. *-u, 3rd sg. *-i from the subjunctive *-diu, *-dii, which supplied a convenient model for disambiguation.

Thus, I reconstruct Proto-Norse 1st sg. *-dau, 3rd sg. *-dai for the weak preterit indicative. It is clear that these endings cannot account for the West Germanic material. Following Collitz, Hollifield tries to demonstrate 1st sg. *-a* vs. 3rd sg. *-e* for the Monacensis ms. of the OS. Heliand, but this distribution is not supported by the evidence: the ratio of *-a* to *-e* in the first (I), middle (II-III), and final (IV-VI) part of the ms. is as follows (Hollifield 1980: 157):

-a : -e	I	II-III	IV-VI	total
1st sg.	2:1	2:2	0:5	4:8
3rd sg.	101:46	63:114	18:215	182:375

It follows that we have to start from a single homophonous ending *-æ which was first written *-a* and later *-e* (and twice *-æ* in the final part). The fronted character of this ending, as opposed to the regular endings of the ō-stems (Hollifield 1980: 152f.), may reflect the original timbre of Proto-Germanic *ǣ. It appears to differ from the even more fronted reflex of the dat.sg. ending *-ōi of the *a*-stems (Hollifield 1980: 156):

-a : -e	I	II-III	IV-VI	total
dat.sg.	105:82	52:295	14:324	171:701

It must be investigated whether the differences can be attributed to the preceding consonant (cf. Lühr 1984: 75). In view of the general agreement between OS. and OHG. I assume that the expected strong preterit form *dedo, like *teto, adopted the weak ending.

It has been proposed that the weak preterit represents the imperfect rather than the aorist of the verb 'to do' (e.g., Bech 1963, Lühr 1984). This hypothesis explains neither the absence of reduplication in Gothic -da, nor the long vowel of 3rd pl. -dēdun, OHG. tātun. The derivation of these forms from a root aorist, to be compared with Go. stōþ, OE. stōdon, has the additional advantage of offering an explanation for OE. dyde, as was pointed out above. It is highly improbable that the present stem *dedhē- survived beside aorist *dhē- and perfect *dedhō- when reduplication became characteristic of the strong preterit. It think that the attested present stem represents a thematic derivative *dōje- of the perfect and that the 1st sg. ending -m is secondary in this paradigm, cf. already early OHG. 2nd sg. tōis, 3rd sg. tōit, tuoit, part. tōenti (Braune & Eggers 1975: 304).

Now we turn to the problem of the stem form before the dental suffix. If the weak preterit must be derived from the past participle in the formations without a connecting vowel while the endings represent the root aorist of the verb 'to do', the origin of the weak preterit must be sought in compounds which are reflected as weak verbs with a connecting vowel. The correctness of this hypothesis is nicely corroborated by the existence of a class of verbs where the connecting vowel cannot have been introduced from the present tense. The Germanic first class of weak verbs originated from a merger of earlier je-presents, e.g. *bugje- 'buy', *wurkje- 'work', and eje-presents, e.g. *naseje- 'save', *kauseje- 'probe', as a result of Sievers' law and raising of *e before *j. Elsewhere I have argued that the distinction between these two formations was preserved with short stems in Proto-Germanic (1986c). In Gothic we find seven je-presents with a strong preterit (bidjan, hafjan, hlahjan, fraþjan, skaþjan, gaskapjan, wahsjan), five je-presents with a preterit in -ta (bugjan, waurkjan, brūkjan, þugkjan, kaupatjan), and eight primary je-presents with a preterit in -ida (hazjan, taujan, siujan, sōkjan, hrōpjan, wōpjan, þaursjan, faurhtjan). The connecting vowel was spreading in this language, as is clear from sōkida 'sought' (OE. sōhte, OHG. suohta), faurhtidēdun 'they feared' (OHG. forahtun, cf. Krause 1953: 212), part. kaupatidai beside kaupastēdun 'they buffeted'. It appears that brūhta 'used' and waurhta 'worked' replace earlier strong preterits in view of OE. brēac and warhte beside worhte (cf. Bammesberger 1986: 80), where the apophonic alternation cannot otherwise be explained; similarly Go. brāhta

'brought' and *þāhta* 'thought' beside *þūhta* 'seemed', which gave rise to a secondary present **þankeje-* in Proto-Germanic times. Thus, I think that all strong verbs with a root in *k* or *g* and a *je*-present created a weak preterit on the basis of the past participle, which must have ended in *-htas* at that stage. It follows that the original first class of weak verbs had an alternation between **-eje-* in the present and **-i-* in the preterit, e.g. **nasejeþi*, **nasidē(þ)* 'he saves, saved'. Elsewhere I have identified the stem **nasi-* with the Indo-Iranian passive aorist as a neuter verbal noun 'salvation' (1981: 127f.), of which Go. *naseins* is a derivative **nosi-H₁n-i-* (1986c: 29).

The Germanic third class of weak verbs remains to be discussed. It has convincingly been argued that neither Go. *habaida*, ON. *hafþa, -e*, OHG. *habēta*, nor OE. *hæfde*, OS. *habda*, Alemannic *hapta* 'had' can represent the original preterit of this class. As I have indicated elsewhere (1990, section 8), I think that the inherited preterit was **habē-*, without an intervening dental. This formation was replaced by **habdē-* in West Germanic and by the present stem followed by the dental suffix elsewhere, and later also in Old High German.

The formation of **kunþē-* 'knew', **unþē-* 'granted', **wulþē-* 'ruled' is peculiar because we expect **d* in the past participle. It seems to have originated from a root aorist 3rd pl. **kunþ* (replacing **knunþ* or **kununþ*), cf. **dunþ* above, and 3rd sg. middle **wulþa*, Vedic *ávṛta* 'he chose'. These forms reflect the original relation between nasal presents (**kunn-*, **unn-*, Vedic *vṛṇ-*) and root aorists, as opposed to underived presents with reduplicated perfects. The stem form **wulþ-* cannot be identified with ON. *vald-* 'rule' because the latter is identical with Lith. *valdýti* 'to rule', which has PIE. **dh*. It must rather be compared with Slavic *velěti* 'to command', which is a derivative of PIE. **uel-* 'want'. The absence of a connecting vowel in Go. *wilda* and the zero grade in OE. *wolde*, OHG. *wolta* suggest that these forms replace an earlier preterit **wulþ-*, which apparently survived in ON. *olla* 'I ruled'.

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