OLD PRUSSIAN \(\langle Stroyſles \rangle\) (E 582) 'FLAT FISH' –
– A VESTIGE OF INDO-EUROPEAN \(*strō-\) 'TO SPREAD'?

1. Already the first investigators of the Elbing Vocabulary (henceforth: EV) noticed that the order of the entries 581 (\(\langle Halpviſchz \rangle : \langle Dubelis \rangle\)) and 582 (\(\langle Tobel \rangle : \langle Stroyſles \rangle\)) as attested by the Holzwescher’s copy (cf. a photocopy of the monument in Mažiulis 1966, 71), must be due to a scribal error in one of the columns, because it is precisely German \(\langle Döbel \rangle\) (here written \(\langle Tobel \rangle\)) that seems to constitute the source of Old Prussian (henceforth: OPr) \(\langle Dubelis \rangle\) (Pierson 1870, 590, Nesselmann 1873, 33, 178, Bezzenberger 1874, 1238). It follows that in the original of the EV the Prussian word \(\langle Stroyſles \rangle\) must have been rendered by German \(\langle Halpviſchz \rangle\), i.e. ‘flat fish’.3

Original Holzwescher’s copy
581 \(\langle Halpviſchz \rangle : \langle Stroyſles \rangle\) 581 \(\langle Halpviſchz \rangle : \langle Dubelis \rangle\)
582 \(\langle Tobel \rangle : \langle Dubelis \rangle\) 582 \(\langle Tobel \rangle : \langle Stroyſles \rangle\)

Similar reversals of entries have been identified elsewhere in the EV as well (cf. Mažiulis 1981, 17, 37, 40, Mažiulis PEŽ IV 250, Smoczyński 2000, 103-105). Hence, the above correction is now commonly recognized in the literature (Trautmann 1910, 324, Endzelņš 1943, 257, Toporov PJ I 386-387 s.v. dubelis, Mažiulis PEŽ IV 161): the meaning of the word has been agreed upon as ‘a flat fish’, probably ‘flounder (\(Platichthys\) or \(Pleuronectes\) \(flesus\))’ – the most common species living in that part of the Baltic Sea.

1. Berneker (1896) rendered both Prussian \(\langle Dubelis \rangle\) (p. 287) and \(\langle Stroyſles \rangle\) (p. 324) by German ’Döbel’.
2. The second letter of this form is usually read as \(\langle ř \rangle\). However, one has to agree with Berneker (1896, 242) that a reading \(\langle c \rangle\) would be equally possible in this case.
3. Nesselmann (1873, 33) writes that \(Halbfisch\) designed a “Brassenart”, i.e. a bream-like fish (\(Abramis brama\)) as well. But the primary meaning of the word is undoubtedly ‘flat fish’ (see below section 5.d). The semantic shift ‘\(Platichthys\) > ‘\(Abramis\)’ is easily understandable in view of the thin and flat body shaping of both species. ‘\(Abramis brama\)’ is in the EV the pair 562 (\(\langle Breſme \rangle : \langle Locutis \rangle\)).
4. Apart from it, plaice (\(Platessa platessa\)) and dab (\(Limanda limanda\)) live in the Baltic Sea.
2. Pierson (cf. Lewy 1913, 164) juxtaposed the noun with the Greek appellative τρίγλα 'Seebarbe'. This explanation is highly improbable. Quite apart from serious formal discrepancies (lack of s-, -g- instead of a fricative, (oy) contrasting with Greek -k-, different inflectional types), one cannot fail to notice that spindle-like mullet crawling on the sea bottom with its fins and flat, broad flounder do not resemble each other at all. Moreover, τρίγλα has been convincingly explained within Greek as derived from the verb τρίζω, "mit Beziehung auf den knurrenden Laut, der beim Aneinanderreiben der Kiemen-deckelknochen entsteht, wenn dieser Fisch aus dem Wasser genommen wird" (Frisk GEW II 932, with references). The verb in its turn is imitative (ib.).

3. Another account, at the first sight quite impressive thanks to its ingenuity, particularly as compared to previous indolence of OPr scholars, is V. Mažiulis' (1981, 303, PEŽ IV 161-162). This author reads (Scroyles) and referring to the Lithuanian phrase žvys skraido 'the fish are flying' (about fish jumping out of water) reconstructs a noun *skrajkšl-, in his opinion a derivative with probably agentive value ('flying, flier'). However, closer scrutiny reveals that this is no more than a shot in the dark, betraying the author's very imperfect knowledge of the referent. The question arises why it was precisely flat fish to be named in this way, despite the fact that nothing is known about an inclination of the Baltic Sea flat fish to jump out of water, inclination that might single them out against all the other fish species. On the contrary, flounders keep to the bottom. To be able to jump out of water, a fish has to overcome quickly and efficiently level differences, to reach quickly the level of water. But swimming up creates serious difficulties to flounders – they move up very slowly, helping themselves by waving motions of their body. This is obviously due to a different orientation of their bodies – moving in the vertical direction, they are directed towards the resisting water with its broadest, upper side, while other species have to overcome merely the resistance of water to their relatively narrow back. It has to be concluded that in its actual form Mažiulis' interpretation is untenable and must be revised, at least in part.  

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5. Seebarbe according to the Grimms (IX 2822) is nothing else than 'barbel, Barbus barbus'. More authoritative sources identify τρίγλα as 'red mullet, Trigla', i.e. a sea fish (see Zalachowski 1992, 536, with a photo).  
6. -g- and (/) have not been traced back to Indo-European (henceforth: IE) palatal *-g- so far, although such a possibility cannot be theoretically ruled out, at least if the current etymology is disregarded (see above). As for a confusion of the letters (g) and (f), it is not encountered at all in the extant copy of the EV.  
7. Cf. no further references in Schmalstieg 1976.  
9. A photo of a plaice swimming up in that way is published e.g. by Frank 1982, 522.  
10. To back up a protoform *skrajdê, one could merely try to link it with a hypothetical fin-name. Terms for 'fin' are often derived from this root in Baltic and Slavic (the
4. What is more, Mažiulis thinks that to translate its singular German counterpart the plural of the flounder-noun was used. His opinion seems motivated by the characteristic ending -(es), unexpected as nom. sg ending, attested (as *-ēs) in East Baltic in the function of nom.pl. ending, and occurring in the EV in denominations of certain established pairs or collectives. Nevertheless, it appears impossible to make probable that the compiler committed errors of that kind when compiling the vocabulary. In all the cases when a Prussian form has univocal plural characteristics, the referent can be interpreted as consisting of two or more parts. In particular, all the remaining fish-names are in the singular. In turn, we know of cases when a form in -(es) is matched by an *-o-masculine of the related languages (Eſketres ‘sturgeon’, plus Medies ‘hunter’

author 2005, 148-150). Nevertheless, we have been unable to identify a word for flounder with such a motivation, which is thus certainly not a typical one.

German plural – or interpretable as plural – forms were used to render Prussian Brunyos ‘armour’ (consisting of its several parts), Dragios ‘yeast’, Krichaytos ‘sweet cherries’, Slwaytos ‘plums’, Wayos ‘meadows’, Winfaytos ‘cherries’ (Mažiulis PEŽ I 160, 217-218, II 272-273, IV 131, 213-214, 255). Knapios E 268 ‘hemp’, Lauynos E 4 ‘sky’ (literally ‘stars’), Perwios E 281 ‘Hintergetreide’ (Mažiulis PEŽ II 230-232, III 53-54, 275-276) are typical pluralia tantum. The only doubtful case would then be the rendition of German Birne E 618 ‘pear’ by the clearly plural Crauſios. But this word occurs within a series of fruit-names, three following items on both sides of the vocabulary being plural forms. We may thus choose between two eventualities: either the compiler departed from his original itemization principle, deciding to use plural forms of fruit-names starting from Prussian ‘pear’, or one of the scribes omitted a nasal suspension (pro *Birnē, cf. Trautmann 1910, 362, Mažiulis PEŽ II 266).

The Prussian terms for ‘eye’ and ‘ear’, which translate German singular forms, but usually are considered as acc. [sic!] pl. forms (Mažiulis PEŽ I 149, 123), are most probably singulativia in *-ins, related to those Slavic in *-im (this interpretation is new). The graphically distorted Dmskins ‘ear-wax’, hitherto interpreted in a similar way (Mažiulis PEŽ I 211-213), may contain an *-in-like suffix as well.

The sturgeon-word is an ancient *-o- or *-io-stem (cf. SP VI 63-64), so that it could hardly be taken for nom.pl. of the *-ē-stems. After all, nobody is trying to do that.
and (Tifis) E 184 ‘father-in-law’, two latter perhaps formations in *(i)i-ja-, maybe changed into *(i)-i-, cf. Mažiulis PEŻ I 288-289, III 120-121, IV 195). These spellings most probably reflect an OPr reduced vowel – the most common ending of the ancient *-o-stems is *(i)-i-, very often a vowel letter is lacking (which would reflect full apocopeation of the vowel in this ending), the spellings *(i)-us, -as and precisely *(i)-es are sporadic. This is matched by the varied marking of the German reduced vowel on the German side of the vocabulary. We might also hypothesize that unexpected spellings *(i)-es (2-3 examples), *(i)-us are but occasional scribal errors in reproducing *(i)-is of the original manuscript.14

Another important detail to be mentioned here is the spelling *(i)y. As is known, the etymological diphthong *(i)-ai- is usually written as *(i)-ay, *(i)-ai in the EV. An analysis of all graphical diphthongs of the OPr side carried out recently has shown that in merely two cases *(Coyſnis) E 557 ‘comb’ and *(Caryawoytis) ‘leader’ E 416 we may be dealing with the spelling *(i)y reflecting etymological *-ai- (the present author, forthcoming). In most cases the diacritic *(i)y was probably used to mark the length of the preceding vowel *(Smoy) ‘man’, *(Emnoys) ‘chill, fever’, *(Yccroy) ‘calf (of a leg)’, *(Clattoy) ‘burdock, hardlock’, perhaps also *(Girnoywis) ‘quern’. All this taken into account, we have to reckon with a reading *Strōsl- and possibly as *(i)-i-ja- as.

5. The etymologically clear denominations of the three Baltic species we have been able to check up refer:

a) usually to the flat shape and horizontal orientation of their bodies (Vulgar Latin platessa,15 Greek πλαστήθος, Polish płastuga,16 Proto-Germanic *flunfrōn-,17 English flat fish, German Plattfisch, Lithuanian plekšnė, plekštė, Latvian plekste18). It has to be reckoned here with calques from language to language, ultimately going back to the Latin noun.

b) to their similarity to various things, usually flattened, short, nearly rounded (German Scholle,19 Butt(e)20. Greek πούθος, Latin rhombus21). Here belongs also the idea of similarity to a thin and broad blade, whence French lima >

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14. Cf. e.g. (Takes) E 328 ‘a kind of dam’ as against Lithuanian takišas, thus most probably coming from *takiss < *takis *-i- (Mažiulis PEŻ IV 181).
16. According to Bankowski (ESJP II 617-618) this is an euphonic distortion of a primary *plaskusa, a calque of English flat fish.
18. Fraenkel LEW 613, Karulis II 64.
limande", or English fluke come (the latter word refers also to ‘kidney’ and ‘spear-head’, both slightly heart-shaped or rhomboidal).

c) to their swimming on one side (Greek πλευρονηκτες, German Seitenschwimmer, on which Polish (old) bokopław was calqued), perhaps also Cashubian stórnia (SEK IV 354-355) as well as Finnish kampela (with correspondences in other Ugro-Fennic languages, cf. SSA I 295).

d) to the asymmetry of both sides, the upper side being pigmented, the lower white and eyeless (German Halbfisch, in our opinion also Cashubian stórnia, borrowed into literary Polish as stornia).

e) to the lack of easily recognizable scales, causing the impression of smoothness when touched (Polish [taxonomic] gladzica ‘Platessa platessa’).

f) perhaps also to its cold body (Polish [taxonomic] zimnica ‘Limanda limanda’?).

6. When supposing that the OPr noun too derives from an adjective ‘flat’ (\*Strās-\*), we have to make probable the previous existence of such a word, not attested in any known language. Now, we are of the opinion that such an adjective can be derived from an IE root meaning ‘to spread, to scatter’, attested by Greek (adjective στρῶτος ‘spread’, secondary (indicative) present στρῶννυ, passive perfect στρόωμαι, future στρῶ, s-aorist εστρῶµαι plus certain nominal forms like στρῶ, στρῶµα ‘layer; bed cover’). The root itself is sometimes seen as a transformation of more ancient *sterō-, being its so-called “thème II” (with reduction of the vowel of the first syllable, unstressed in some morphological categories), cf. Boisacq 1950, 916, Lindeman 1987, 29-30, 62-63, Björvand & Lindeman 2000, 866-867. The “thème II” was taken into the Greek participle, middle perfect and -nū-present (which all required double zero grade) from a personal form, perhaps from an aorist *es\*trō\*(\*t) ‘spread’ or from a future tense form. We may suppose on the basis of the above facts that also Balto-Slavic and Baltic (perhaps even particularly Prussian) inherited a verb *strō\*(\*t)\* meaning ‘to spread, to scatter’. It can be inferred from meanings
and usages in the historical languages that the verb was mainly referred to activities like spreading, strewing materials like hewed grass, hew, straw,25 over vast spaces, scattering heaps of soil or stones,26 or spreading out sheepskins (later: issues) used as coats or bedding.27

7. In Lithuanian, the suffix -sl- forms substantives with mainly active meaning (nomina agentium, nomina instrumentorum). In some of them a passive shade is evident (for ex. mėšlas ‘dung’ : mėžia ‘to dung’, pėšlas ‘fattened pig’ : pėni ‘nourishes, fattens’, gūšlas ‘rumour’ : gūštas ‘-hears’, spūskai ‘snares, trap’ : spūneda ‘is setting snares < *’is stretching, is straining’, pavėisklas ‘sight, picture’ : veizdėti ‘to look, to look for < *’to see’). It forms adjectives (namely, in -slus) as well.28 Their value is active, not only if derived from intransitive verbs (eislūs ‘who likes to walk’ : eĩti ‘to walk’, sėslūs ‘who is seated’ : sėstas ‘who is seated’) but also from transitive ones (dėslūs ‘laying (about a hen)’ : déti ‘lay (eggs)’), cf. Otrębski 1965, 108-109).29 The major part of these derivatives seem quite recent (Temčin 1993, 99-100, 106), but there are also Common Baltic words, e.g. the word for ‘vein’, attested in all the three historical Baltic languages, including OPr (cf. recently Smoczyński 2003a, 19). The suffix, as well as the corresponding Slavic form atives (Vaillant 1974, 414-415, SP I 103-104), exhibit a clear tendency to attach to roots ending in a dental, so that it seems that these suffixes are due to a transformation of adjectives in *-to-, before which the stem-final dental stop was dissimilated to *-s (eis-tos > *eistas). Since beside *pek-tas there existed a (nearly) synonymous *pek-las, *sēstas could be transformed in *sēstas by simple replacement of the formative *-l- by *-s-. This model does not exclude that among the words to be trans-

25 Cf. the meaning ‘straw’ for the Germanic nominal derivative *strau- (Björvand & Lindeman 2000, 868).
26 Cf. meanings ‘to strew’, ‘to spill’ for Germanic *straujan (Björvand & Lindeman 2000, 866-867).
27 Cf. meanings ‘bed’, ‘bed cover’, ‘carpet’ for Greek στρόμα, στρομη.
28 Contrary to Temčin’s opinion (1993, 100), the origin of this type cannot be explained otherwise than by assuming a passage of ancient participles in *-(s)lo- into the -u-inflection (cf. already Otrębski 1965, 59). Insisting on their secondary character with regard to deverbal -u-adjectives, this author at the same time refrains from explaining in which way a -l- was “infixed” into these structures.
29 Opinions are encountered (Kuryłowicz 1971, Kuryłowicz 1977, 67) according to which active diathesis was originally characteristic only of derivatives of intransitive verbs. It is a well-known fact that in many cases the IE formations in *-lo- (like those in *-n- in Hittite, cf. Szemerényi 1990, 346, with further references) have had (or at least acquired) passive meaning.
formed were participles as well,\(^{30}\) nor that the detachment of the formative \(-sl-\)\(^{31}\) goes back as early as to the period of the Baltic linguistic unity. In conformity with that, we find in OPr even more derivatives with the suffix \(-sk-\)\(^{32}\).

Thus, if we start from the reflexive form of a verb ‘to spread’, we can determine the meaning of its participle as ‘spreading (itself)’ > ‘spread, strewed’, ‘widespread’, which in fact borders on the meanings ‘even’, ‘bread’ and ‘flat’. High degree of likelihood of such a semantic development is borne out by the coexistence of all these meanings in certain adjectives of different origin as well. For example, outcomes of IE \(*pl\text{-}(h)u-\), as known motivated by a verb meaning ‘to spread, to extend, to increase’ (Old Indic \(pr\text{-}\hat{h}ati\), cf. Mayrhofer KEWA II 362-363) mean a.o. ‘bread, wide, large, great’ (like Old Indic \(pr\text{-}h\hat{u}h\), cf. Mayrhofer KEWA II 333), but Old Greek \(\pi\lambda\alpha\tau\alpha\varsigma\) means ‘broad and flat’ (cf. also Pokorny IEW 833-834), whereas Slavic \(*pl\text{-}h-\)\(^{33}\) has already the meanings ‘flat and thin at the same time’ as well as more recent ‘shallow’ (SEK IV 79, s.v. \(pl\text{-}u\), with further references). It should be stressed that in the classical languages certain terms for ‘flat fish’ were derived from the outcomes of precisely this word. Derivatives of the root \(*st\text{-}r(\hat{e})-\) display among other things meanings like ‘to spread’, ‘layer’, ‘flat country, plain’, ‘lowland’.

If the above remarks are correct, the OPr word \(*str\text{-}sl\)\(s\) can be considered a trivial derivative (perhaps in \(*-i\)\(f\)) from a hypothetical (West) Baltic adjective \(*str\text{-}sl\als\) ‘flat’.

**Correction note.** The most recent treatment of the Old Prussian flounder-name that has come to our attention is by V. Blažek, J. Čeladín and M. Běťáková (in Baltistica XXXIX (1) [2004], p. 118-119). The Czech authors, justly criticizing Mažiulis’ above-mentioned interpretation for semantic reasons, compare the word with Lithuanian \(s\text{-}\text{riegas}\) ‘fish scale’ and \(s\text{-}\text{trągė}\) ‘blind-worm, slow-worm; snail’. As they themselves remark, “both comparisons imply the graphic replacement \(g \rightarrow f\)”, which however finds no commonly recognized parallels in the EV (cf. footnote 6 above). Word-internally only \(s\text{-}\text{lunga}\) (\(\langle\text{-}g\rangle\)) is used in the

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\(^{30}\) Baltic and Slavic suffixes in \(*-sl-\) with a determined categorial value would thus have been detached from substantivated adjectiva verbalia.

\(^{31}\) Rendered possible by a coexistence of stem variants with and without \(-d-\) within a single paradigm. The same fact accounts for the detachment of the causative-iterative formative \(-dyti\) (cf. e.g. Smoczyński 1998).

\(^{32}\) \(\langle\text{Dumšle}\rangle\) ‘bladder’ beside Lithuanian \(d\text{-}\text{imškė}\) ‘id.’ and \(d\text{-}\text{imšū\)}}\, Slavic \(*d\text{-}\text{ojít}\) ‘to blow’ (Toporov PJ I 391, Mažiulis PEŽ I 237-239), \(\langle\text{Saninšle}\rangle\) E 485 ‘belt’ (Mažiulis PEŽ IV 61, Smoczyński 2003b, 449), \(\langle\text{Singšle}\rangle\) E 337 ‘dough’ (Mažiulis PEŽ IV 111-112, Smoczyński 2003b). Let us note that in two out of three available examples (plus \(*g\text{-}\text{štā̄}\)) a formative in \(*-d-\) attaches to a stem not ending in a dental.

\(^{33}\) Probably due to a contamination with a member of the word-family of the verb \(*pl\text{-}h\) ‘to float etc.’, cf. Vaillant 1931, 45-46.
copy by P. Holzwescher, whose graphical shape seems to preclude the possibility of its being confused with \( g \). As regards the versions of the vocabulary anterior to that copied by him, cases of confusion between \( f \) and \( b \) (collected recently e.g. by the present author in Rocznyk Slawistyczny LIII [2003], p. 119-121) strongly suggest that the lower part of the letter \( f \) under the line was nearly vertical, straight and relatively short. The confusion often recognized in \( \langle \text{Menig}\rangle \) ‘moon’ E 8 (for \( \langle \text{Menis}\rangle ? \)) is irrelevant to our discussion, because here the final \( \langle s\rangle \) is involved, a grapheme of a completely different shape. Thus, the reconstruction of a \( \langle S\text{troyles}\rangle \) for the protograph of the vocabulary would remain wholly unmotivated from the graphological point of view.

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Sources and other abbreviations

Bańkowski ESJP – A. Bańkowski, Etymologiczny słownik języka polskiego. I-. Warszawa 2000-.
LKŽ – Lietuvių kalbos žodynas. I-. Vilnius 1941-.
References


