

# Who is Who in the Old Prussian Epigram?

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Professor Bammesberger has kindly drawn my attention to W.P. Schmid's discussion of the oldest Prussian text (1982), which I had not seen. Schmid thinks that the text is addressed to God and proposes the following translation:

"Salve, o Herr! Du bist wohl nicht mehr unser Vater (Väterchen).

Wenn ich trinken will, wilst du kein Geld geben."

His interpretation gives rise to the following objections.

Firstly, the word *thewis* means 'uncle' in the Elbing Vocabulary, where we find *towis* and *patowelis* for 'father' and 'stepfather', respectively, cf. also *tawe* 'father' in Grunau's vocabulary. It is therefore probable that **thewelyse** means 'Onkelchen' (thus Mažiulis 1975, Schmalstieg 1976), not "Väterchen".

Secondly, Schmid interprets **labonache** as either *labon-asse* 'wohl bist' or *labo(n)na<sup>x</sup>se* 'wohl unser', with *labo(n)* as a labialized variant of the expected form *\*laban*. The problem with *\*asse* 'bist' is that it is too far removed from the preceding negation *ne*. The problem with *\*na<sup>x</sup>se* 'unser' is that the expected form is *nuson*, which is found 5x in the First Catechism, where it is also written *nusun*, *nusan*, *nusen* (once each), never *\*na-* (cf. my electronic text edition, 1996). The long *\*ū* was diphthongized in the 16th century (see my contribution elsewhere in this volume). Both alternatives proposed by Schmid (neither of which explains the attested **-ch-**) must therefore be rejected.

Thirdly, the interpretation of **koyte** as "ich will" is unsatisfactory in view of *quor* 'ich will' (3x) in the Enchiridion. The 3rd pl. form *quortā* in the latter text appears to be a preterit form in the function of a

subjunctive (cf. Kortlandt 1987:108). From a strictly formal point of view, **koyte** could be identified with the attested 3rd sg. form *quoitē* 'er will'. Yet it seems more probable to me that it represents the same form as in the following **nykoyte** 'you do not want'. Anyway, it would be rather inappropriate to reproach God with the writer's lack of money for indulging in a drinking bout, even in a jocular way.

As regards Bammesberger's identification of **thoneaw** as a vocative of the name Anthony (1997), I can only say that it is a theoretical possibility which seems rather far-fetched to me. His interpretation of **labonache** as a form meaning 'good night' would be fine if it could be fit into the context syntactically, which unfortunately is not the case. His proposals concerning the endings of **kayle**, **rekysē** and **thewelyse** are not supported by independent evidence and cannot therefore be substantiated. For these reasons I stick to my interpretation given elsewhere in this volume.

## References

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