ON GOTHIC MAGAÞ ~ OLD FRISIAN MEGITH AND THE FORM OF SOME NORTH EUROPEAN SUBSTRATUM WORDS IN GERMANIC

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I. The Gothic feminine i-stem magaþs 'girl, maiden' has the following cognates in Old and Middle Germanic (all strong feminines):

OE mægþ2, megeþ 'virgin, girl, maiden, woman, wife' OS magad 'virgin'; OHG magad (plural magadi, magidi) 'virgin'; MHG mag(e)it, mait, meit (plur. megede) 'virgin, girl, unmarried man, servant' MLG māget, mait (plur. megede) 'virgin, girl, servant'; OFris. megith, megeth, (Old West Frisian:) magad 'virgin, girl'; MDu. (sometimes masculine when referring to men) maghet, maecht, (eastern dialects:) meghet, meecht, (northern dialects:) meit 'virgin, girl, unmarried man, servant'

We also find an *-īn-* derivation from the same stem, cf. the following forms: OE mægden 'maiden, virgin, girl, servant'; OHG magatīn 'virgin, girl'; MHG magedīn, -īn, megedīn, -īn, meidīn 'diminutive to maget, etc.'; OFris. meiden 'girl'; MDu. magedijn 'girl, virgin'.

The current reconstructions are *magap- (e.g. Franck-Van Wijk-Van Haeringen 1976, De Vries 1992, s.v. maagd) and *magapi- (e.g. Kluge-Seebold 1989, s.v. Magd). The word shows traces of the consonantal inflexion in Old English, cf. gen., dat. sing. mægeþ, nom., acc. plur. mæg(e)þ, and Old Saxon, cf. dat. sing. magad, nom. plur. magað. This is likely to reflect the original Proto-Germanic situation because this inflexional type was a declining rather than a productive category. Therefore, the former reconstruction appears to be preferable, while the i-stem forms represent a later development.

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1 This article is a revised version of a lecture Dirk Boutkan held in Kiel in January 1997. Sjoerd Siebinga found it in his papers and he and the board of the ABäG found it suitable for publishing in memory of this scholar who died far too young.

2. It is now generally held that a single reconstructed form of the second syllable, i.e. *-at-, suffices to account for all reflexes (e.g. explicitly Hollifield 1984: 34).

As early as 1879, Hermann/Paul (1879: 228-9) defended the reconstruction of a variant *magiþ- beside *magaþ-, but on the basis of spurious arguments. First, he took the OE root vowel æ and the steady spelling -e- of the second vowel as evidence for a form *magiþ- with primary i-mutation. However, fronted æ and medial -e- may have arisen in the dat. sing. form *magaþi or the nom.plur. *magapiz > *mægeþi(z) > *mægeþ- (i.e. the sequence *a-a-i regularly yielding æ-(-e)-, cf. Campbell 1959: 82 fn 1). Due to subsequent paradigmatic levelling this stem form was apparently generalized. As his second argument, Paul exhaustively discusses the OHG plural form magidi, the second -i- of which he considers original. He challenges the assumption of an assimilation of medial *-a- to -i- under influence of the -i in the ending, i.e. *magadi > magidi. Yet this rule seems well-established and is now generally accepted (Braune-Eggers 1987: 29,70; it is also found in OS, cf. Ramat 1969: 42). On the other hand, it is generally overlooked (by Paul as well) that the Frisian and Dutch evidence unambiguously require the reconstruction of a variant *magiþ- beside *magaþ-.

The form *magaþ- directly yielded Old West Frisian maged without i-mutation. The retention of the *a (no 'Anglo-Frisian fronting' to e) is regular in an open syllable before an -a- in the following syllable (e.g. Campbell 1939: 94-5). On the other hand, a by-form *magiþ- must be assumed in order to account for the i-mutated Old East Frisian forms, cf. megith- (acc. plur. megitha in the First Riustring Codex III,122) and megeth- (e.g. acc. plur. megetha in the Second Emsingo Codex 1, 11 and the fragment of the fiā-ēth A I, 22, both showing a weakened vowel /-θ-/), written <-e>-). Interestingly, the medial -g- in these forms cannot be original, because *-agi-, *-egi- yielded *-eji- > OFris. ei (> Riustring ê under as yet unclear conditions). Therefore its presence must be attributed to the influence of the stem form *magap- < *magiþ- > *megip- (i-mutation) > *mejiþ- > *meþiþ-, compare the following short lemma by Van Helten (1907: 229):

“megith (vgl. ahd. magid) mit nicht zu j gewordenem g (vgl. Gr. § 143 a) durch anlehnung an *magath (= wfris. maged, ahd. magad).”