THE 2.SG. PRET. INDIC. OF STRONG VERBS IN FRISIAN:
OLD AND NEW FACTS AND VIEWS
(WITH A DISCUSSION OF CODEX UNIA THEST)

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Abstract
Handbooks are unclear as to the form of the 2.sg. pret. indic. of strong verbs in Frisian, not least because of the sparsity of Old Frisian data. However, evidence from later stages of the language shows that the inherited West Germanic form, of the type *kuziz ‘thou chosest’, was recharacterized with the ending -st.

1. A West Germanic Innovation

The West Germanic languages share a significant innovation in their verbal morphology, having replaced the inherited strong verb second person singular preterit indicative form that is retained by Gothic (East Germanic) and North Germanic, for example in Go. gaft ‘thou gavest’ to PGmc. *geƀan ‘to give’, Olc. kaust ‘thou chosest’ to PGmc. *keusan ‘to choose’.¹ The Germanic strong preterit as a category essentially continues the Indo-European perfect; its preterit stem-forms ultimately reflect o-grade in the indicative singular and zero-grade elsewhere.

In West Germanic, the perfect-present modal verbs preserve the original forms, for example OE þearft, OHG darft ‘thou needest’.² In the preterit of normal strong verbs, the second person singular indicative form has the ending *-i and the stem-form of the non-singular indicative, e.g. OHG kuri, OE cure (reflecting WGmc. *kuziz).³

² OS dedos, the second singular preterit indicative form of “do”, would appear to be a further form that has escaped the change, surviving alongside innovated dādi and corresponding continental West Germanic forms. Old English has dydes(t), with a mysterious stem-form.
³ In High German and Saxon, the expected i-mutation does not become evident until their Middle stages; in Old English (and Old Frisian), i-mutation is lacking, cf. Bammesberger 1982: 417 fn 17.
Whereas older scholarship saw evidence of a suppletive zero-grade thematic aorist form here (cf. the Old Indic cognate verb 2.sg. ájuṣas ‘thou enjoyedest’, as if from PIE *(é-)ĝuses), the standard view now sees this development taking place wholly within the perfect. In fact, it would appear that the inherited indicative form has been replaced in toto by that of the equivalent optative (possibly because the sound-changes occasioned by the ending -t disturbed the integrity of the paradigm, cf. Heidermanns 2007: 58-59). This leads to paradigms such as the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old High German</th>
<th>Old Saxon</th>
<th>Old English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sg. pl.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kōs kurum</td>
<td>kōs cēas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 kuri kurut</td>
<td>kuri* } kurun</td>
<td>cure } curon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 kōs kurun</td>
<td>kōs cēas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The anomalous position of Frisian

Unlike the other West Germanic languages, however, Frisian unexpectedly shows the ending -st in this category. In Bremmer’s recently published *An Introduction to Old Frisian*, we read (2009: §151):

> The 2SG.PRET.IND. takes the vowel of the plural, though not many instances have been recorded. Unlike Old English, the 2SG.PRET.IND. takes the -(e)st ending, adopted from the PRES.IND.

There is quite a lot to take on trust here, as no forms are cited to support the contention. This is odd, perhaps, as Bremmer prints one of the rare examples in his Reader (see §4.2 below and footnote 9). The form *fōrest*’ given in his sample paradigm, 2009: §152, is a construct (although not marked as such) and, besides – being a class 6 verb – shows the same vowel in both preterit singular and plural anyway. Thus, although correct in itself, this form cannot provide information as to the canonical shape of the second person singular preterit

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4 Not least because the thematic aorist hardly existed as a category in Proto-Indo-European and would have to be posited as a parallel preterit formation for Germanic that left no trace beyond its suppletive role in West Germanic (cf. Polomé 1964: 878-80)