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OLD PRUSSIAN **nūsun tāwa*: A CORRECTION WITH THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In order to mark the 450th anniversary of the publication of the first Prussian Catechism (Königsberg, 1545) a volume entitled *Pirmoji prūsų knyga* containing a facsimile copy and philological analysis was published in Vilnius in 1995. The first of the two authors, Bonifacas Stundžia wrote the introduction and the philological comments and the second, Mikkelis Klosse (Kluisis), produced a reconstruction of the Old Prussian text with comments in English.

The Old Prussian original of the Lord's Prayer has *THawe nufon* (p. 45), but in the reconstruction (p. 81) we encounter: *Nūsun tāwa* with a reference to fn. 57 (p. 99) where we read: 'The Semitic word order [the suffixed 1 pers. pl. possess. Hebr. *-nū*, Aram. *-nā*(')] of the German text corrected'.

But in Koiné Greek (Matthew 6: 9) we encounter the word order *páter hēmōn* (πάτερ ἡμῶν) 'father our' (Nestle, 1981, 13). Now it is generally assumed that Aramaic was Jesus' native language (or at least one of Jesus' languages – he may have known Greek and Hebrew also) and attempts have been made to reconstruct the Lord's Prayer in the original (!!!???) Aramaic, where, e.g., Schwarz (1985, 209) has *abūnan...* 'father our...' But the postposed genitive was perfectly possible in Classical Greek as well, e.g., *Zeús patēr andrōn te theōn te* (Zeús πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε) 'Zeus, father of men and gods'. Modern Greek has an enclitic in the expression *o patéra mas* 'our father'. Semitic influence in the New Testament is well known, but whether the Koiné habit of placing the possessive after the noun is due to the influence of the Semitic languages or not remains an open question.

Following the Greek model, Latin has *pater noster* (Nestle, 1971, 13), and according to Prof. Haim Rosén of the University of Jerusalem (*per litteras*) this would be the normal order. Preposed *noster* would be very emphatic. For Classical Latin, Bennett (1945, 157) writes: 'When expressed merely for the sake of clearness, the possessive usually stands after its noun; but in order to indicate emphasis or contrast, it precedes'. Bennett gives the examples: *dē morte filiū meī flēbās* 'you wept for the death of my son' and, in contrast, *suā manū liberōs occīdit* 'with his own hand he slew his children'.

The Greco-Latin order is encountered, however, in other ancient languages, where it may or may not be justified, but in which we have more or less slavish translations of the Greek text, thus Georgian *mamao č'oveno* (Marr, 1931, 562), Armenian *hayr mer* (Jensen, 1964, 12), Gothic *atta unsar* (Streitberg, 1919, 7), Old Church Slavic

otbče našz [for *našb*] (Jagić's ed. of Codex Marianus, 15), 11th century English *Fæder ure* (Scragg, 1974, 13) etc. Even Mažvydas wrote *Teve musu kuris essi dangusu* (Ford, 1971, 34). Similarly Chyliński has *Tewe mufu...* (Kudzinowski and Otrębski, 1958, 14), although interestingly enough in his Bible translation Bretkūnas has *Musu Tewe...* (Range and Scholz, 1991, 30). My friend and colleague, Prof. Antanas Klimas, who was raised as a Roman Catholic, tells me that he finds the traditional *Tève mūsū* 'artificial, special, sacred, liturgical' used only in this one case (*per litteras*). The Latvian 1585 Catechism has *Thews mues* as opposed to the 1586 Catechism where we encounter *Muusse thews* (Vol'ter, 1915, 16; Vanags, 1996, 85).

For the Christian world the New Testament was first in Greek and in Europe later in Latin (through St. Jerome's translation). These sources furnish the basis for vernacular translations. In any case the proposed correction to the Old Prussian First Catechism is interesting and would put it in the forefront of religious reform, improving on Mažvydas and catching up thereby to Bretkūnas, Luther's Bible translation, where we read *Unser Vater in dem Himmel...*, and the 14th century *Lay Folks' Catechism* of Wycliffe and Thoresby, where we encounter under the rubric *Pater noster: Our fadyr þat art in heuyn...* (Simmons and Nolloth, 1901, 7–8). My Protestant parents taught me the King James English version of the prayer: *Our Father which art in heaven...* The purpose of this reversal of the slavish word order characteristic of earlier religious writings is, of course, to make the prayer more colloquial and hence more comprehensible to the average person. The author of the correction has rightly understood the sense of the Protestant reform.

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