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A revision of Finnic chronology: Middle Proto-Finnic Livonian

The current understanding since Pekka Sammallahti (1977) is that South Estonian is the first language to have diverged from Proto-Finnic. This divergence would have taken place already during Middle Proto-Finnic times, whereas all other Finnic languages, including Livonian, are reconstructed to have diverged from the succeeding proto-language stage, Late Proto-Finnic (Kallio 2007, 2014).

Nevertheless, there are certain sound changes in Livonian that based on Finnic reconstruction are evidently Middle Proto-Finnic. One such example from the literature is the contrary chronology of sound changes in Livonian vis-à-vis Finnic, namely, the sporadic labialisation of **i* before **v* and the sound change **ti* > **ci*, e.g. Livonian *tõvā* (~ *tiva* ~ *tüva*) < **tīvā* vs. Finnish *syvä*, South Estonian *süvä* < **süvä* 'deep' (Kallio 2007: 238; O'Rourke 2022: 27). In the case of this difference in chronology, Kallio suggests Pre-Livonian, in addition to Pre-South Estonian, to have diverged early, but without referring to a particular language stage. In addition to already established examples from the literature, I argue that there is a further example of a Middle Proto-Finnic isogloss between Livonian and the rest of Finnic, namely, the representation of Proto-Finnic **nc*. The only *A*-stem word exhibiting this isogloss is Livonian *võntsa* 'forehead', cognate with Finnish *otsa* and Estonian *ots* id. The word is explained by Koivulehto as a borrowing from Germanic **anþja* into Middle Proto-Finnic **onťśa*, nowadays reconstructed as **oncca* (Koivulehto 1979: 290; Kallio 2015: 29). As can be seen in this case, Livonian has retained the pre-affricate nasal. Furthermore, there are four *E*-stem words in Courland Livonian, in which the nasal is preserved before the affricate: *kñťś* 'nail' < **künci*; *kñťś* 'lid' < **kanci*; *lñťś* 'southwest' < **lānci*; and *lñťś* 'forest meadow' < **lanci* (Viitso & Ernštreits 2012: 123, 133, 165, 173). The expected regular form for *kñťś* : *kñťś* 'sg : pl' is suggested to be ***kñťś* : *kāndōd* (Setälä 1899: 363; Posti 1942: 253–255; Kettunen 1947: 52–53; Kallio 2016: 41–42), but this explanation assumes the Proto-Livonian form to have been **kansi*. This reconstruction rests on the theory of two analogical developments: firstly, that the long initial-syllable vowel in Livonian developed because of the vocalisation of *n*, and secondly, that the nasal was restored throughout the nominal paradigm (Setälä 1899: 363). This unnecessarily heavy explanation also leaves the question of the affricate unexplained and can, therefore, be deemed in its entirety to be circular reasoning (cf. also Viitso 2008: 51–52). Since the Proto-Finnic form is now reconstructed as **kanci* < **kanti*

(cf. Kallio 2007: 235–236), I offer a more economical explanation in that the retention of the Livonian affricate shows that the deocclusion of **c* > **s* (ibid. 241–242) did not take place before a nasal in Livonian.

Based on sound changes such as those mentioned above, I argue in my presentation that the chronology of the divergence of Pre-Livonian would be at least on par with that of Pre-South Estonian, in line with what has been suggested already by Tiit-Rein Viitso (2008: 59–60, 84–85).

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