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The etymology of Latvian *nākt* ‘to come’

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It is attractive to compare *nākt* with *kakt* ‘to come to an end’, *kacēt* ‘to try to reach’, *tapt* ‘to become’, *rast* ‘to find’, Lith. *kàkti*, *tàpti* (preterit *tāpė* beside *tāpo*), *ràsti*, which Stang (1966, 346f.) has identified as original perfects.

In the new Latvian etymological dictionary (Karulis 1992, 616) we read about *nākt* ‘to come’, Lith. *nókti* ‘to grow ripe’: “Vārda cilme ir neskaidra”. A similar judgment is found in Stang’s comparative grammar (1966, 335): “Die Etymologie des Wortes ist unsicher”. Endzelīns’ (1935) connection of the word with Gothic *nēhv(a)*, Old High German *nāh(o)* cannot be correct because the Baltic root vowel points unambiguously to **-eH₂-*, which is incompatible with the Germanic vocalism. We must evidently start from a meaning ‘to reach’, cf. *bērns jau nāca liels, viņš nāca it labi vēcs* (Mühlenbach 1925–27, 699), Lith. also ‘to pursue’, e.g. *Aš bėgau nuo tavęs, tu mane nokei ir ieškojai* (Žodynas 1970, 854).

From a morphological point of view, the verb *nākt* differs from the usual pattern of intransitive verbs because it has an *ē*-preterit *nāca*, which is also found in Lithuanian dialects. It follows that the preterit cannot be derived from a thematic aorist (cf. Stang 1966, 379). As Lithuanian has a derived present *nóksta*, *nókia*, it is improbable that root of the verb represents an original present stem. It is therefore attractive to compare *nākt* with *kakt* ‘to come to an end’, *kacēt* ‘to try to reach’, *tapt* ‘to become’, *rast* ‘to find’, Lith. *kàkti*, *tàpti* (preterit *tāpė* beside *tāpo*), *ràsti*, which Stang (1966, 346f.) has identified as original perfects.

The closest relative of the verb *nākt* now seems to be the Old Irish preterit *t-ánaic* ‘(he) came’, which represents a reduplicated perfect that can be identified with Vedic *ānāśa*, *āśur* ‘(he, they) reached’ from **H₂eH₂noke*, **H₂eH₂nkr* (cf. Beekes 1979, 18). The same verb may underlie the Old English perfect present *geneah*, *genugon* ‘suffice(s)’ (cf. Kortlandt 1992, 106). It must be separated from the Greek reduplicated aorist *ἐνεγκεῖν*, which represents **H₁neH₁nke/o-*, the root of which is reflected in Latvian *nest*, Lith. *nėšti* ‘to carry’. This leaves us with a number of questions.

First of all, it must be clarified why the final consonant of the root is reflected as *-k-*, not *-s-* (Lith. *-š-*). This does not seem to be a major problem. The original palatovelar was regularly depalatalized in Balto-Slavic before

the nasal present suffix which is attested in Vedic *aśnoti* 'obtains' (cf. Kortlandt 1978, 241). Since the root **H₂nek-* 'reach' was in danger of merging with the root **H₁nek-* 'carry' when the distinction between the initial laryngeals was lost, the generalization of the difference in the final consonant was an obvious analogical development.

A second question concerns the way initial *n-* was restored in a Proto-Baltic perfect sg. **ānak-*, pl. **ānk-*. I see three possibilities:

(1) The perfect stem could simply be replaced by **nāk-* on the basis of a full-grade alternant stem **nek-*, which is attested in Vedic, especially because sg. **-na-*, pl. **-n-* looked like a nasal present infix. Note that the analogical elimination of an apparent nasal infix is in fact attested in *segt* 'to cover', Lith. *sėgti* 'to fasten', cf. Polish *sięgać* 'to reach', Vedic *sajati* 'hangs', perfect *sasañja*, which has a non-initial nasal in the root.

(2) The initial nasal could be taken from a preceding prefix, as in *nemt* beside *jemt* 'to take'. Here Old English *genugon* '(they) suffice' from **gan-ung-* offers a parallel.

(3) The reconstruction of a paradigm **ānak-*, **ānk-* may be wrong. Since Gothic has full reduplication in *ga-staistald* '(he) possessed', *skaiskaidun* '(they) severed', we may have to start from **H₂neH₂nokē*, **H₂neH₂nk-*, which yielded Proto-Baltic **nānak-*, **nānk-*. If this is correct, the initial nasal was never restored, but the apparent nasal infix was eliminated.

In fact, the forms with an apparent nasal infix may not have been eliminated immediately. It is equally possible that the paradigm was reinterpreted as a present tense beside a preterit without a nasal infix. The nasal present was then eventually replaced by the simple thematic present in Latvian and by the *sta*-present in Lithuanian.

A final point to be noted is the fixed stress in *nākt* (cf. Būga 1924, 250f.). It is probable that the stress became fixed on the initial syllable when the alternating paradigm was eliminated. This accentuation is in accordance with the usual fixed stress in intransitive verbs.

The Lithuanian pair of derived presents *nóksta*, *nókia* has a perfect analogue in Latin *nancīscor*, *nanciō* '(I) obtain'. The medial nasal in these forms is usually explained from a nasal infix (e.g., Schrijver 1991, 491). The Baltic analogue now suggests that the present may have been built on a perfect stem **nānk-*. This stem relates to Old Irish *t-ánaic* '(he) came', which reflects **H₂eH₂nonke*, in the same way as Latvian *nākt* relates to Vedic *ānāśa* '(he) reached' from **H₂eH₂nokē*. Thus, we may have to reconstruct an Italo-Celtic perfect sg. **ānok-*, pl. **ānk-* which developed like Baltic in Latin and like Vedic in Celtic; note especially the analogical replacement of Vedic *ānāśa* by *ānamśa*, which is seemingly identical with the Old Irish form.

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