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A history of East Baltic through language contact

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The background of the cover is a photograph of a forest. In the foreground, a long wooden bench made of weathered planks and logs sits on a bed of dry leaves and grass. The forest behind it is dense with tall, thin trees, some with white bark (birches) and others with darker bark (pines or spruces). A semi-transparent purple rectangular box is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing the title text in a light blue, serif font.

a History of East Baltic
through Language Contact

Anthony Jakob

The East Baltic languages, Lithuanian and Latvian, are well known for their conservative phonology with respect to Proto-Indo-European. This has led to a stereotype that these languages have developed in relative isolation without much contact with other languages. In this dissertation, I take a deep dive into the East Baltic lexicon, peeling away the layers of prehistoric borrowings in the process. As well as significant contact events with known languages, like the Russian dialect of Novgorod-Pskov, Gothic and the ancestors of modern Finnish, Sámi and Mordvin, the lexicon also reveals evidence of contact with unattested languages from which earlier populations must have shifted upon the arrival of the Balts in the Baltic region. The fragments obtained not only shed light on the linguistic features of these lost languages, but also provide a new perspective on the sociolinguistic scenario which led the earlier populations of the region to undergo language shift.

