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Families on the move?
The case of Proto-Finnic speakers

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Abstract

The speakers of Uralic languages arrived on the shores of the Baltic Sea by the beginning of the Iron Age (c 500 BCE). It has been suggested that the language was brought by a large number of people who arrived in at least two migratory waves. However, the current genetic evidence allows for both large and small numbers of incomers with a wide range of sex ratios. In this article, we combine archaeological, genetic, and linguistic research and discuss the different possibilities of how these newcomers formed and established families at the time of their arrival and in the next generations. It seems likely that the Finnic-speaking males established families with non-Finnic women, resulting in multilingual households. The complexity of family issues in prehistory is also being discussed. It is noted that the data allow interpretations supporting both patrilocal and matrilocal residence patterns. Since it is possible to interpret the data in multiple ways, the underlying biases deriving from modern concepts of a family should always be acknowledged.

Keywords: kinship, marriage, household, language, genetics, Estonia

20.1 Introduction

According to current knowledge, speakers of Uralic languages arrived on the shores of the Baltic Sea in what is now modern Estonia during the Late Bronze Age (by c 500 BCE; Kallio 2015a: 88; Lang 2020: 269). Possibly originating in the Volga-Oka region, the migration took place over several centuries and took advantage of waterways along the way. The migratory period was followed by a comparatively long and stable period of Middle Proto-Finnic (c 500 BCE–200 CE) before the Late Proto-Finnic divided into separate languages (for example, Finnish, Estonian, Livonian and Karelian; Lang 2020: 257–284). Human migrations and contacts between groups and individuals have left traces in the region's archaeological record, language(s) and gene pool.

In this article, we discuss the arrival of newcomers and the contacts they had in the Proto-Finnic homeland from the perspective of families. Who were the ones to arrive, and how large were the migrating groups so that the result is what we see today? Archaeological material alone cannot answer this question, but genes and languages may help enlighten the issue. Genes show signs of past population admixture in the region, which tells us about people of different ancestry having offspring together. Furthermore, Proto-Finnic has a large number of loanwords from Indo-European languages, including terms denoting close kin such as 'mother' and 'sister'. While terms denoting, for example, cultural items are prone to borrowing, terms denoting close kin are resistant to borrowing (Tadmor 2009: 64). The fact that these terms have nevertheless been borrowed to Proto-Finnic may indicate that family-related contacts have taken place in this area. What do these details tell us about the relationships between people in the Baltic region?

When discussing genes, languages, and families, we must remember that languages and genes do not determine ethnicities, and we cannot associate past groups of people speaking Finnic languages with present-day nationalities or countries. Equally, genes are not automatically tied to languages, and archaeological material does not tell us what languages people spoke or what

their genetic heritage was. It is also important to remember that at the turn of the Bronze Age and Iron Age, the definition of family may have been very different from the modern western idea of a nuclear family, which derives from Christian practices of the past few centuries (Kertzer 1991). Family systems are known to change and vary (Ensor 2013), and it is difficult to say, for example, whether the marriage systems in the Baltic region in the past were monogamous and who exactly was considered to belong to a family. The modern concept of kinship easily emphasises genetic relationships, but a genetic link is unnecessary for kinship ties to exist. In different cultures, kin could include, for example, adopted children, children from a spouse's previous marriage, spouses of siblings, anyone who shared a household, and even people who were socially bound to each other by sharing a profession or social class (e.g. Lukacs 2011). Most likely, this has been the situation also in the past.

There is no certainty of how the kinship system was organised and how kinship ties were created in the Baltic Sea region when Proto-Finnic was spoken. However, it has been suggested that family and kinship ties formed the main societal network, within which settlement, trade, and all forms of contact took place (e.g. Bolin 1996: 10; Asplund 2008: 355, 386; Bunnefeld 2022: 79). Later in the Viking Age and Early Modern period, both Scandinavian and Finnish kinship systems were likely bilateral (Lahtinen 2018; Sigurðsson 2020: 20), meaning that kinship was understood to be transmitted through both parents. The later historical patrilineal concept of kinship was possibly established only during the Early Modern period and reinforced by inheritance laws favouring the eldest son (Lahtinen 2018). These examples demonstrate how kinship systems can change over time.

20.2 Evidence of contacts and newcomers

The archaeological evidence points to various types of contacts between the Baltic Sea region and the Volga and Oka rivers during the Late Stone Age

and Bronze Age. Textile-impressed pottery spread from the east into modern Finland and Estonia. Later, the eastern types of bronze axes and their moulds reached the Finnish, Baltic and Scandinavian regions, indicating that not only the objects but also the new skill of bronze casting spread to new areas over the centuries. At the end of the Bronze Age, new burial types appeared in coastal Estonia: stone-cist graves thought to be of Scandinavian influence and tarand graves resembling eastern grave forms (Lang 2016). Although it is often difficult to distinguish whether new archaeological phenomena represent the actual movement of people or simply the movement of ideas and thoughts, the appearance of these grave forms is often associated with the arrival of new groups of people. The stone-cist graves have been associated with a Scandinavian population, and the tarand graves with a new population from the east. Although there is no direct archaeological evidence of Scandinavian settlers being buried in stone-cist graves (see Oras et al. 2016), western connections are supported by genetic evidence. The proportion of Scandinavian-like genetic ancestry is higher in individuals studied from stone-cist graves than in individuals from the Stone Age Corded Ware contexts (Saag et al. 2019).

The modern population also shows traces of past encounters. The three main languages spoken nowadays in the Baltic States belong to two different language families: Estonian to the Finnic branch of the Uralic family and Latvian and Lithuanian to the Baltic branch of the Indo-European family. Despite the linguistic difference, modern Estonians do not genetically differ notably from Latvians or Lithuanians, except that the Estonians have a slightly higher frequency of Siberian-like ancestry (Lamnidis et al. 2018; Tambets et al. 2018). According to ancient-DNA studies, this ancestry component first appears in Estonia in the Early Iron Age, while the earlier individuals do not show it (Saag et al. 2019). The component seems to appear in the region simultaneously with the eastern burial forms; thus, it has been interpreted as evidence of newcomers. In linguistics, these findings have been linked to the arrival of Finnic speakers from the east.

Obviously, the Finnic speakers did not arrive in an empty land. In the Bronze Age, the Baltic region was inhabited by speakers of Indo-European

languages, whose origin is often associated with the Corded Ware culture (3200–2300 BCE; Kallio 2015a: 79, 88). Of these groups, the speakers of Baltic languages inhabited a vast region stretching from the main speaker area in the Baltics to the Volga (Kallio 2015a: 78–79). It has been suggested that the Finnic speakers journeyed slowly through a Baltic-speaking area, and therefore, the Finnic language was already influenced by Baltic speakers in the process (Lang 2020: 261). During the Bronze Age, Scandinavian-like grave forms appeared in the coastal zones of Estonia. As mentioned, the builders of these structures (or the first generation) may well have come from the Scandinavian Bronze Age culture, and they may have spoken Early Germanic languages (Kallio 2015b: 31–32).

In short, this was the linguistic context in which the early Finnic speakers arrived and in which the Finnic language acquired its special features during the Middle Proto-Finnic phase (c 500 BCE–200 CE; Kallio 2012: 232–233). After this period, during the Late Proto-Finnic, the proto-language started to diverge into separate languages. Middle Proto-Finnic is characterised by a large number of loanwords of both Baltic (more than 200 words; Junttila 2015: 255) and Germanic origin (roughly 100 words; Kallio 2012: 228–229; 2015b). However, the situation changed by the time of Late Proto-Finnic: the flow of Baltic loanwords into Finnic decreased while the number of Germanic loanwords increased to several hundreds (Kallio 2012: 228). The difference in the number of loanwords has been explained by differences in social statuses between the speaker groups. With some possible exceptions, the Germanic speakers with a higher prestige would have been the main donors of loanwords to the Finnic. Meanwhile, the Baltic speakers had the lowest social status and they became assimilated into the Finnic-speaking groups when the Finnic speakers spread southward in the Baltic region in the first centuries CE (Kallio 2015a: 90). Overall, based on the large number of both Germanic and Baltic loanwords in Finnic, the existence of bilingual areas in the Baltic coasts has been proposed (e.g. Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001).

20.3 Borrowed kinship terms

Compared to many other semantic groups, such as cultural terms, kin terms are not prone to borrowing (Tadmor 2009: 64). This is especially true when considering terms denoting closest relatives, as they are supposedly protected by 'proximity constraint' (Matras 2009: 171). This means that close kin terms are usually learnt in early childhood and used in high frequency, due to which they are considered part of the most stable vocabulary. Several kin terms denoting close relatives have been borrowed to Proto-Finnic from the Baltic and Germanic languages (Fig. 1; Table 1). The loans from Baltic include the terms for 'daughter', 'bride' or 'young wife', 'cousin' and 'sister'. Additionally, terms for 'tribe' and 'namesake', which are not kin terms but perhaps still relevant in the kin context, have been borrowed from Baltic (Junttila 2015: 88, 92). In the pool of Germanic loanwords in Finnic, there are two terms denoting familial relationships: a term for 'mother' and a term
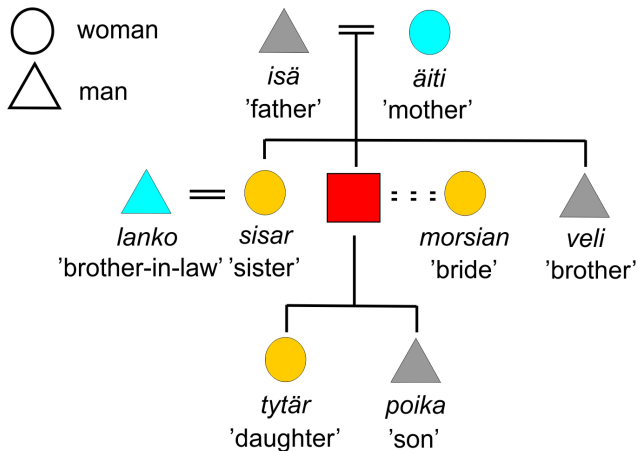
Figure 1. Borrowed kin terms in Finnish. Symbols in cyan indicate borrowings from Germanic and symbols in yellow from Baltic (cf. Table 1).

Kin category	From	To	Current distribution
Brother-in-law	Germanic	Proto-Finnic	Finnish
Daughter	Baltic	Middle Proto-Finnic	Finnish, Estonian, Veps, Livonian
Bride, (young) wife	Baltic	Middle Proto-Finnic	Finnish, Veps
Sister*	Baltic	Middle/Late Proto-Finnic	Finnish, Veps; Estonian, Livonian
Cousin	Baltic	Middle/Late Proto-Finnic	Estonian
Mother	Germanic	Late Proto-Finnic	Finnish

Table 1. Summary of kin categories which have a Baltic or a Germanic loanword in Proto-Finnic in the four languages included in Metsäranta et al. (in press). A more precise stage of the Proto-Finnic is given in cases when it is fairly certainly known. Asterisk (*) highlights the case where the same term has possibly been borrowed twice: separately into the proto-stage of Finnish and Veps on the one hand and the proto-stage of Estonian and Livonian on the other.

for 'brother-in-law' (for more linguistic details, see Metsäranta et al. in press and references therein).

20.4 Who were the ones to arrive?

Interesting questions regarding possible family relationships include whether the newcomers were women, men, or both, what age they were, and whether they were individuals or entire families. Individual newcomers would presumably have acquired spouses from the pre-existing population, while in the case of arriving family groups, the intermarriages with the pre-existing population would possibly occur in the following generations – unless the number of newcomers was so large that spouses could be acquired from the same group. Considering the long distance between the first point of origin and the destination, and the fact that the Middle Proto-Finnic stage lasted for centuries and thus many generations, it is likely that intermarriages with the locals took place at some point.

Stable isotope analyses (Sr and O) could provide direct evidence of mobility, but so far, only eight individuals have been analysed (Oras et al. 2016). Of these eight individuals, three have been identified as possibly non-locals. According to Oras et al. (2016), two individuals were likely of eastern origin. They were adult males buried in the early tarand graves at Kunda in the Early Iron Age. The stable isotope analyses have been carried out from premolars, which develop in early childhood. Therefore, the values measured from these men's teeth most likely reflect their childhood environment. Thus, the men can be assumed to have travelled from the east after childhood, but whether this travel occurred later in childhood or early adulthood cannot be determined. Intriguingly, these two males also had the highest proportion of Siberian-like genomic component among the six Iron Age individuals studied by Saag et al. (2019). Thus, we have concrete evidence of individual males arriving in the area at the time. The third possible non-local individual is a female buried at Muuksi. She likely originated from the nearby areas: western Estonia or the Baltic islands (Oras et al. 2016: 25).

Genetic data have often been interpreted to support the idea of male-biased migration, based mainly on two observed patterns, one seen in the present-day populations and the other in the ancient-DNA record. Firstly, most present-day Uralic-speaking populations (ranging from western Siberia to northeastern Europe and including Estonians and Finns) resemble each other in their paternally inherited variation; in particular, they share in high frequency a certain Y-chromosomal subtype which probably originates from Siberia (Ilumäe et al. 2016). Meanwhile, in the rest of the genome, they are closer to their non-Uralic-speaking neighbours than to each other (Tambets et al. 2018). Secondly, the Early Iron Age individuals buried in tarand graves studied by Saag et al. (2019) showed 0–8% of Siberian-like ancestry genome-wide but 50% in their Y-chromosomes (n=6). Such patterns, however, need not have involved male-biased migration *per se*: the combination of high Y-chromosomal and lower genome-wide proportion of Siberian-like genetic elements may have formed already earlier and been brought to Estonia by an evenly-sexed migration, as we do not know the genetic composition of

the migrants' source population (cf. below). Rather than a male bias in the migration, the present-day pattern may reflect a female bias in the admixture with the local population in the subsequent generations so that even if the immigrant generation would have primarily consisted of families, their sons and grandsons would have been inclined to choose local females as spouses. This would be consistent with the fact that the woman identified as non-local in the stable isotope analysis (Oras et al. 2016: 25) was likely from a nearby area.

It has been suggested that the arrival of Uralic speakers happened in at least two waves over the centuries (Lang 2020: 257–269), but who were the ones to migrate? According to Grünthal et al. (2022), the Uralic languages spread rapidly along water routes with new settlers, including trade managers and miners. However, it is unlikely that the ore seekers and miners would have moved to the Baltic region, where raw materials needed for bronze are unavailable. Instead, skilled specialists who knew how to acquire and process copper alloys could have been in demand even in new areas. Perhaps the first newcomers were skilled craftsmen and technological experts who were *invited* by the local elite, which in turn offered good benefits and conditions as a reward for joining their communities. Archaeological evidence points to a strong social stratification at the turn of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. The wealthy social elite dominated the landscape with visible grave structures and fortified hilltop settlements, which occasionally functioned as metal-working centres (Lang 2007: 74, 117, 267). An invitation would have allowed the newcomers an easy, peaceful assimilation into the local elite. They could have controlled the trade networks and been immediately integrated into the existing local upper-class networks. This could explain why the later incomers were easily established as the new elite with new grave forms, including visible structures and rich material culture (see Olli 2019: 60–61 and references), and why some equally wealthy communities practised different burial customs (Olli 2019: 20). This is, of course, a simple explanation and the reality could be much more complex (see e.g. Lang 2007; 2020).

20.5 How large were the incoming groups?

It is difficult to determine the size of the migrating groups solely based on archaeological or linguistic evidence. At first glance, the genetic data would suggest that the number of incoming people has been relatively small, as the proportion of Siberian-like ancestry in the Iron Age individuals is low. However, it is in the range of 6–8% (Saag et al. 2019) even in the two individuals who had non-local isotope values and who could therefore be first-generation migrants (Table 2). This suggests that the Siberian-like ancestry may have been low also in the migrants' source population. Thus, even a large number of migrants would not result in a considerable increase in the component. Therefore, the fact that the proportion of the genome-wide Siberian-like component in the present-day Estonian population is c 5% (Table 2) suggests that the number of Iron Age (and later) incomers may have been substantial. The Y-chromosomal data are in line with this: the modern Estonian population harbours c 30% of the Siberian-like Y-chromosomal subtype, while the Latvian and Lithuanian populations have c 40% (Ilumäe et al. 2016; Tambets et al. 2018).

	Y chromosome (%)	Whole genome (%)
Estonia, stone-cists (n=11)[1]	0	0
Estonia, tarand graves (n=6)[1]	50	0–8
of which non-local individuals (n=2)[1]	50	6–8
Iron Age Volga (Suzdal 200–400 CE, n=7)[2]	no data	18
Modern Estonia[3]	32	5
Modern Latvia[3]	42	<1
Modern Lithuania[3]	44	1

Table 2. Frequencies of Siberian-like ancestry in selected populations. NB. Frequencies from different publications may not be fully comparable as they are based on slightly differing analyses. References: 1 – Saag et al. 2019; 2 – Peltola et al. 2023; 3 – Tambets et al. 2018.

However, a smaller number of incomers could explain the present-day data if the immigrants' source population had a higher proportion of the Siberian-like component. Unluckily, no temporally relevant datasets exist for the presumed area of origin. Although anachronistic, one possible proxy could be the population data from the 200–400 CE Iron Age Suzdal region in the Volga-Oka interfluve (Peltola et al. 2023). In this data, the genome-wide proportion of the Siberian-like component is c 18% (in a comparable analysis, Iron Age Estonia had c 5%). Unfortunately, all the studied Suzdal individuals were females, so there is no data on the Y-chromosomal frequencies. Anyhow, suppose that the genome-wide proportion of 18% would be representative of the immigrants' source population. In that case, a back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests that an admixture of c 28% of the incomers and 72% of the local Bronze Age population (with an assumed 0% of the Siberian-like component) would yield the proportion of 5% of the Siberian-like component that is seen in modern Estonia. Naturally, there may have been fewer Iron Age incomers than 28% if they carried a higher proportion of the Siberian-like component or if more of the component has arrived in later times, after the Iron Age.

Independently of the original number of immigrants, the proportion of Siberian-like ancestry could also increase in the subsequent generations if the newcomers had a relative selective advantage. This could have happened through a higher societal status, which could have improved the chances of marriage and ensured access to better food sources and, thus, nutrition, which could have increased the number and vitality of the offspring.

All in all, the genetic inference of the number of immigrants is contingent on our assumption of the genetic composition of the source population: the number of immigrants may have been either large or small. Most importantly, the genetic data do not exclude the possibility that the newcomers could have consisted of families. A combination of families and single men is also possible. However, the genetic data certainly indicate that the incomers could not have been only females, as that would not explain the emergence of the new Y-chromosomal subtype. Furthermore, we do not know whether the

marital pattern of these people was monogamous, how many consecutive spouses people had (e.g. due to deaths), and what proportion of men/women even reproduced. In short, the situation may have been very complex, and it is impossible to cover all possible scenarios in this article.

20.6 What can we know about the familial relationships in the Baltic region?

The borrowed terms denoting close familial relations support the peaceful coexistence of speakers of different languages. The number of loanwords and their semantic domains has been seen as an indicator of bilingual communities and mixed marriages between groups of different linguistic backgrounds (Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001). Next, we will discuss what this would mean for the composition of a household.

The Late Bronze Age fortified settlements could include several households and up to 30–50 individuals (Lang 2007: 70, 113, 225). As mentioned, these settlements have been connected with elite families and functioned as metal-working centres. The Finnic-speaking immigrants could have arrived in these settlements, especially if they were trade and metal-working specialists. The settlements could have accommodated several families, and it would have been easy to form relationships and strengthen networks between families within them, for example, through marriages. It could even be speculated that the households within these settlements were mixed units in which speakers of both Finnic and local languages lived together (see also Vainik 2014: 149).

House sizes became smaller in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, and the settlement units consisted mainly of single households with c ten individuals. The development has been connected to changes in the size of families or co-residential groups occupying the house (Asplund 2008: 256, 271). According to Lang (2007: 225), households mainly consisted of nu-

clear families. He also states that the cohabitation of three generations was rare and short-term, based on the short average life expectancy. Lang does not determine the term 'nuclear family', but usually, it refers to parents and their children. However, given the likely high child mortality in prehistory, it is unlikely that the size of the nuclear family would have been large enough to fill a ten-person house. This gives us room to speculate whether the men had more than one wife at the same time, one of whom could have been of Finnic background and the other of more western/local origin. It has been suggested that concubinage and polygyny were common practices in the Late Iron Age (Karras 1990; Raffield et al. 2017), which is a chronologically closer proxy than the recent past. It might be presentist to automatically assume that the Late Bronze Age practices were the same as in later western culture in historical periods, and one must also consider the possibility of the past being different from what one would prefer. Different types of marriages, in which a man may have more than one wife, are also known from various cultures worldwide. One example is the so-called sororate marriage, in which the husband marries the wife's sister, for example, if the wife is infertile (e.g. Golomski 2016).

Providing archaeological evidence for marriages between different linguistic groups is very challenging. One cannot assume that language is reflected in the material culture: groups speaking different languages do not automatically use different kinds of objects (see also Saarikivi & Lavento 2012; Ensor 2013: 11). Inferring pre-historical marriages from linguistic material is also a speculative task, but the loanword evidence we see in Proto-Finnic can be associated with familial connections. This, together with the evidence of genetic admixture, suggests the existence of mixed marriages between speakers of different languages at some point in history.

Borrowing linguistic material is not necessarily straightforward or easily recognizable (see Saarikivi & Lavento 2012). Nevertheless, it requires several speakers, for example, in a household. The majority of Early Iron Age houses in Estonia would therefore have included primarily speakers of Finnic languages; hence the language became dominant. In this case, mothers living in

a Finnic-speaking environment but originating from other language groups could have passed some of the family words they used to their children. This scenario would suggest that the mothers were responsible for the care and upbringing of the children, influencing the core kin vocabulary of the child since early childhood, but this may not necessarily have been the case. Fathers were likely involved in the upbringing of their children, as the offspring mainly acquired their language. However, it is unknown whether raising children involved the parents, older siblings, grandparents, unrelated individuals, or all of them (see Derricourt 2018) and whether the kinship terms used at the time explicitly referred to biological relatives. All these aspects complicate the picture.

There is also an alternative scenario for borrowing kinship terms: arranged marriages. Skogstrand (2016: 88) has discussed marriage contracts in Early Iron Age Scandinavia and noted that the practice was possibly common. Social rules likely regulated marriages, which could have been used to form and strengthen alliances between families and groups (see Ensor 2013 for the complexity of marriage alliances). In this respect, marriage could be compared to a trading situation. Words related to women would have been at the centre of the arrangement, which would explain the borrowing of these words (see Table 1). Also in this case, the Baltic women would have been married off to Finnic men.

When thinking about past family systems, it is deceptively easy to start with the assumption of patrilocality: wives moving to the husband's household. Many genetic kinship studies have indeed inferred patrilocality in multiple places in Europe (e.g. Mittnik et al. 2019). However, there is no direct evidence of patrilocality in the eastern Baltic at the turn of the Bronze and the Iron Ages outside the assumption that men generally controlled the social and political organisation (e.g. Lang 2007: 125; 249–250, 260). Assuming that the local system was patrilocal and practised exogamy, we could easily see incoming Finnic men acquiring spouses from the local, pre-existing population. The sons of the Finnic-speaking men and local women would again have married mostly locals. In this case, it is relevant to ask what happened

to the daughters of Finnic men if their ancestry is less strongly reflected in the modern population. It could be speculated that these daughters married men with lower prestige and had fewer children. Also, suppose the men had concubines from a Baltic-speaking population. In that case, the children, especially daughters, from these unions could have had different social status than the ones from the Finnic-speaking mothers, which could have affected the marriage possibilities of these children. If the subsequent generations sought to marry off daughters to families of Finnic origin, this would have increased the number and power of Finnic speakers in the area.

So far, only one pair of biological relatives has been detected in ancient-DNA analyses from Estonia from the relevant era (cf. the Salme ship burial with four Pre-Viking Age brothers of Scandinavian ancestry reported by Margaryan et al. 2020). The relatives are two males from the Late Bronze Age, who were either maternal half-brothers or a nephew and his maternal uncle (Saag et al. 2019: 1705–1706). The men were buried in stone-cists at Väo and Rebala, within a distance of c 13 km. Each site is likely to represent a burial site connected to separate households/settlements. Given the small number of tested individuals, the detected kinship may indicate that the stone-cist graves were reserved for a small group of people who have been interpreted as the local elite (Saag et al. 2019). This pair of relatives is consistent with several possible scenarios that would fit in with either patrilocality, matrilocality, or bilocality (see Ensor 2013: 64–68), depending on the interpretation: For example, a case in which a brother (the uncle) and sister (the mother of the nephew) are raised in one house and one of them moves to another house (the sister in a patrilocal and the brother in a matrilocal scenario), and a case in which a woman has had two partners and offspring with both of them. In a patrilocal scenario, she could have moved to the new spouse's house while the son from the previous spouse would have lived in the late father's house. In a matrilocal scenario, one or both of the half-brothers could have moved from their birth home to their spouse's home. All these scenarios also fit with bilocal practices in which the couple chooses to live in or near either spouse's birth home.

20.7 Conclusions

This article is a brief attempt to both enlighten and speculate the past of early Finnic speakers from the perspective of families. Previously, it has been suggested that a large incoming population brought the Finnic language to the shores of the Baltic Sea, possibly in at least two migratory waves. In this article, we present that the current genetic evidence allows for both large and small numbers of incomers with a wide range of sex ratios. We also discuss the marital patterns and the possibility of men and women with different genetic and linguistic backgrounds living in the same households. It is possible that the Finnic males established families with non-Finnic women, which is in line with the genetic evidence and the borrowed kinship terms involving primarily female relatives. The current data allows interpretations that support both patrilocality and matrilocality.

The family perspective would be a valuable approach in studying settlement units or the impact of kinship ties on broader social phenomena. However, identifying families in prehistory is difficult due to the complexity of defining families, especially non-biological family relationships. The research should acknowledge possible underlying biases deriving from modern concepts of family that may influence the interpretations. Also, family relations can be affected, among other things, by gender roles, population size, social status, and inheritance systems and their changes. Simple answers may not always be available.

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