I would like to thank Rolf Bremmer, Robert Mailhammer, Karling Rottschäfer, and, especially, Patrick Stiles for giving me valuable comments on this article; however, they are in no way to be associated with the suggestions made in it.


Some investigators, however, have argued that palatalization and assibilation were independent changes in Old English and Old Frisian. They argue – Richard Hogg, Patrick Stiles and Hans Frede Nielsen – that English and Frisian do not share the same relative chronology of sound changes prior to palatalization, concluding that Frisian and English must have gone their separate ways before palatalization even initiated. These scholars do not

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I. INTRODUCTION

Opinions are divided on whether palatalization of *-*k(k)- and *-*g(g)- in Old English and Old Frisian resulted from a shared development or arose independently. Earlier scholarship asserted that there was a link. Theodor Siebs wrote that the beginnings of palatalization (but not assibilation) ‘liegen in der englisch-friesischen, das heißt der kontinentalen Periode’. Karl Luick thought that palatalization initiated ‘noch zur Zeit der anglofriesischen Gemeinschaft’. Alistair Campbell concluded that there was ‘nothing to show that the sensitivity of *$k$* and *$g$* to the nature of following vowels does not date back to a period when English and Frisian were in sufficient contact to develop some common characteristics, but it certainly continued long after the period’, and in his grammar he maintained that palatalization ‘doubtless began in the continental period, for it is a major link of Old English and Old Frisian’.

Some investigators, however, have argued that palatalization and assibilation were independent changes in Old English and Old Frisian. They argue – Richard Hogg, Patrick Stiles and Hans Frede Nielsen – that English and Frisian do not share the same relative chronology of sound changes prior to palatalization, concluding that Frisian and English must have gone their separate ways before palatalization even initiated. These scholars do not
seem to question that there was a general Old English palatalization though; but, unlike Siebs, Luick and Campbell, they are unspecific about whether it initiated before or after the settlement of Britain.

In response to arguments against a shared Old English and Old Frisian development, Robert Fulk, in the forerunner to this volume, presented an alternative chronology and interpretation of Anglo-Frisian sound changes which aimed to bring English and Frisian back to a common dialect at the time when velars were palatalized. Subsequently, Frederik Kortlandt responded to Fulk’s paper, criticizing many points of his chronology and offering several revisions while at the same time agreeing with the main thrust of it, namely that palatalization of velars initiated when Old English and Old Frisian formed a linguistic unity, Anglo-Frisian.\(^4\)

In this paper I argue that older scholarship was right to place the beginnings of palatalization in the continental period. I then take up the debate about relative chronology, and show that three out of four of the main arguments against a shared process of palatalization carry no weight while a fourth is inconclusive. However, ultimately it is questionable whether recourse to relative chronology is the ideal approach for assessing whether palatalization was a shared development or not, especially since the origins of palatalization are unknown. In particular, the genealogical (or Stamm-\(baum\)) method based on relative chronology cannot adequately deal with sound-change resulting from dialectal diffusion within language continua, and since Patrick Stiles\(^5\) has presented good arguments to show that we are dealing with a language continuum, the genealogical approach is bound to have its limitations.

2. PALATALIZATION IN OLD ENGLISH AND OLD FRISIAN

First it may be useful to outline the three environments in which palatalization occurred, they were: 1. Initially: here \(*k\) and \(*g\) were palatalized by all front vowels (except front vowels deriving from \(i\)-umlaut, a condition which holds for velar palatalizations in all positions) and the palatal approximant \(j\). 2. Medially: \(*-k(k)\)-, \(*-gg\)- were palatalized before \(*i\), \(*j\), while \(*-g\)- was palatalized between all front vowels. 3. Finally: \(*-k\) was palatalized by preceding front vowels in Old English only, while \(*-g\) was palatalized by preceding front vowels in both languages. Some examples are given in Fig. 1. Unlike Old Frisian, palatalized velars are not usually indicated in Old English orthography. In order to indicate them, the convention of a super-