

Estonian Toponyms of the Balto-Finnic Background¹

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Abstract

Estonian is one of the Balto-Finnic languages and so has linguistic similarities with other languages of the family. Naturally, the Estonian toponyms have also similarities with the toponymics of other Balto-Finnic peoples. These similarities can be found in both lexicon and suffixes. Most of such toponyms have clear etymologies. Sometimes the etymology of Estonian toponyms can be explained with the help of other Balto-Finnic languages as the appellative in the toponym has not been preserved in Estonian. However, there are some toponyms that are met with more than one Balto-Finnic peoples, but their etymologies have not been sufficiently approved. These names must be very old because the counterparts of the names in Balto-Finnic area are often hydronyms or the names of old settlement centers. Sometimes these toponyms have parallels both in Estonian anthroponymy and/or in Balto-Finnic ones. The work in the project The Book of Estonian Place Names that would include all the existing village names in Estonia and some historically more interesting toponyms containing important hydronyms has increased the number of such toponyms. In my paper such Estonian toponyms that are difficult to etymologize but have their counterparts in the larger Balto-Finnic area will be analyzed. As the toponyms appear in the wide Balto-Finnic territory, they must be of the same stratum. Some of them may have a Finno-Ugric etymology, for example Lappish (the Sami) one, but it is possible, that one part of the non-etymologized toponyms belong to the pre-Finno-Ugric stratum, probably the Proto-European one.

Estonian is one of the Balto-Finnic languages and so has linguistic similarities with the other languages of the family. Naturally, the Estonian toponyms also have similarities with the toponymics of other Balto-Finnic peoples. These similarities can be found in both lexicon and suffixes. Most of such toponyms have clear etymologies. Naturally, all Balto-Finnic peoples have their own Holy Lake that has often given a secondary settlement name also, f. ex. Estonian *Pühajärve*, Finnish *Pyhäjärvi*, Vepsian *Pühärv*, Karelian *Pühäd'ärvi*.

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Estonian settlement names Luusika and Kaelase can both be compared to the Vepsian appellatives which have disappeared from Estonian by today. *lūžik* ~ *lunžik* means in Vepsian 'roebuck berry, *rubus saxatilis*'; *kaglaz* 'isthmus, a strip of land bordered on both sides by water' (see also Joalaid 2002)

In Saaremaa, Estonia, there is a settlement of *Salme*. In the northern coast of Estonia there is known the word *salm* 'strait, sound' (cf. Finnish *salmi* : *salmen*) that is usual in the northern group of Balto-Finnic languages, but our dialect collections do not show this word in Saaremaa (VMS 1989: 382). Nevertheless, we definitely have to do here with a former strait which by now has become the River Salme. As the archaeological excavations of the last couple of years have shown, even Pre-Viking Age ships sailed there.

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The settlement and a manor *Saha* in the Northern-Estonia have most likely not got their names after the plough (Estonian *sahk* : *saha*). Their connection with the toponyms *Saka*, *Sakala* and the corresponding appellative is not plausible for phonetical reasons (Reimaa 2007: 265–266). We rather can compare *Saha* to place-names in Finland: *Sahalahti*, *Sahakoski*, *Sahajärvi* etc. and *Saalahti*, *Saakoski* etc, from the older form *Sahalahti* etc. A part of the Finnish *Saha*-names are obviously connected to the appellative *saha* ‘sawmill’, but certainly not all of them. Some of these place names are older than sawmills, besides the word is absent from Estonian. Finnish toponyms have been connected to the word *sahi* ‘little waterfall etc.’ (SPK 2007: 393, 395).

While searching etymologies for some place names, even more distant cognate languages can help. For the Estonian place name *Pandivere* Paul Ariste has found an appellative in the Mordvin languages (Erzian *пандо*, Mokshian *панда* means ‘mountain, uplands’) (Ariste 1957: 132). But the word has also a Balto-Finnic background, because according to a late 19th century Russian source, the Vepsians have called the Ural mountains *Киви-панда* (*Kivi-panda*) ‘stone mountain’ (Майнов 1881: 494).

However, there are some toponyms that are used by more than one Balto-Finnic people, but their etymologies have not been sufficiently approved. These names must be very old, because the counterparts of the names in the Balto-Finnic area are often hydronyms or the names of old settlement centres. Sometimes these toponyms have parallels both in Estonian anthroponymy and/or the Balto-Finnic ones.

Nearby Tallinn there is the settlement of *Kallavere* that directs thoughts to the Finnish name *Kallavesi*. There are two lakes with this name in Savo. The Finnish word *kalla* means first ‘a springtime accumulation of ice in the coastal water or on shore’, but more generally also ‘a reef, firm ground’. The word is a loan from Swedish dialects, it appears primarily in the Estonian Swedish and Finnish Swedish dialects, but also in Södermanland in Sweden. (SSA 1992: 287) In Finland there are a lot of place-names of *Kalla* and *Kallo* and the names are not all of the same origin, but at least in the area where the appellative *kalla* is spread, they are considered as containing the Swedish loan. (SPK 2007: 127) Lauri Kettunen (1938: 149) has compared the Finnish place names *Kallavesi*, *Kallajärvi* with the Livonian word *kōla*, *kāla* < **kalla* ‘an island; a sandbank, a dry place in water; a forest island’, but the Finnish etymologists regard the Livonian word to be a liable loan from the Swedish dialects spoken on the islands in the Gulf of Riga. (SSA 1992: 287) It has also been tried to find a Lappish (Sami) etymology for the place name *Kallavesi*: North Lappish *gállis* ‘old man’, genitive *gállá*. In this case the word might have referred to a mythic deity, otherwise it is difficult to explain its occurrence in the names of big lakes. As there is no information about such a mythic deity, all the etymology remains hypothetical. (SPK 2007: 127–128) Alpo Räisänen (2009: 43) explains the first component of *Kallavesi* as the word net *kalta-*, *kallas* ‘shore escarpment’. Besides, the first mentions of *Kallavere* are with the *-e* in the stem (1241 *Kallæuærø*, 1343 *Kalleuere*), later even *-i* (1424: *Calliver*) (Johansen 1933: 397, 482) and also the settlement name in Ingria *Kallivieri* can be compared with the Estonian name. Thus, the origin of Estonian *Kallavere* and the possible connection to the similar Finnish place names remains unclear.

However, it is not without interest to mention that *Kalla* is also found among Finnish surnames (83 persons). In Estonia the surname *Kalla* (36 persons) is represented too, but it may be the old orthography of the name *Kala* ‘fish’ and we cannot take it into account.

For centuries the Muraste manor in North-Estonia (Keila) had the name *Kurba* after the *Kurba* settlement. In the Vepsian territory there are some hydronyms like *Kurbjärv*, *Kurbjogi* and the *Kurba* village originating from the name of the river. In the early 19th century Estonia *Kurba* has also been surnamed four times: twice in the Island Hiiumaa (Dagö) in West-Estonia, twice in Virumaa, East-Estonia, both counties at quite a long distance from Muraste in Keila. The etymology of the place-names is not clear.

The main source of ancient prechristian personal names can be place names, in particular those with the suffix *-la*.

In East-Estonia, Virumaa there are two settlements and manors by the name *Rahkla*, German *Rachküll* and *Rachkell*. The first was actually in Estonian **Rahkküla* (the compound names with their last component *-küla* ‘village, settlement’ often include a personal name). The name type is widely spread in Balto-Finnic place and personal names: f. ex. the Ingrian settlement *Rahkola*, Vepsian *Rahkoil’*, former *Rahkola* in Finnish Karelia (allied in 1640 to *Kirkkojoki* (see Joalaid 2011). Alongside with the numerous Finnish farms by the name *Rahkola* there are also some settlements with this name. As a surname it is widely spread in Finland: *Rahko* (473 persons), *Rahkonen* (1301 persons), and there are other forms; as cognomen they are also old (Mikkonen-Paikkala 2000: 516–517). In the Central Vepsian territory Vepsians have a Russified surname *Rahkovitš*. The place name is widely spread also in the former Vepsian territory which has recently been inhabited by the Russian speaking population, sometimes in the phonetically changed form as f. ex. *Rakula* (Матвеев 2001: 343). Finnish reasearches have explained the etymology of Finnish *Rahkola* as follows: the appellative *rahka* means in Finnish ‘a kind of mossy bog’. It is a good etymology for the place name, but if the first part *Rahko(i)* of the place name is a personal name, the other possibilities can be taken in account. In Estonian the apellative *rahk* means ‘shingle; graver’.

Põhula is a settlement and a manor (German *Poll*) in East-Estonia. The Estonian surname *Põlla* (10 persons) can be the the old orthography of *Põla*. Finnish researchers have related the Finnish surname *Piela* (121 persons) to the lake and parish name of *Pielavesi* in North-Savo. *Pielavesi* has been connected to the appellative *pieli* or *piela* (Mikkonen&Paikkala 2000: 464). The old meaning of it is ‘border, side’ and maybe the name-givers wanted to say that the lake is situated on the border, it is the furthestmost lake of the basin (SPK 2007: 333). There was also Lake *Pielaila* in Rautu and *Pielajärvi* in Kuhmo. In the Southern Vepsian area there is a parish center **Peloil’* situated on the shores of the lake *Pelajärv*.

In East-Estonia there is one more settlement and manor with the suffix *-la*: *Undla*, German *Undel*. Some more settlement names with the stem *Und-* are found in Estonia on the islands of the western coast: *Undama* in Hiiumaa, and *Undva* in Saaremaa. (Kallasmaa 1996: 462–463; 2010: 265) The exact counterpart of *Undva* is the Vote settlement name *Untovē*. The first records of *Undva*, spelled with *h* in the beginning, date from the years (1453–1798) . (Kallasmaa 1996: 462–463) and can be so of another origin. In Finland there was *Untila*, a settlement in Hämeenkyrö (1640). *Magnus Undilan* is mentioned in Hollola (1445). *Untisperä* is part of the settlement in Pihtipudas. In Kokemäki there has been a peasant *Wnnj Pederson* 1422. In Tallinn in Estonia *Thidericus de Unna* has been mentioned in 1325. (USN 1988: 884) Paul Ariste (1938: 25) has related the place names to the Finnish *Untamo* ‘a dreamer, a sluggish person’. The same position, that the names may have something to do with dream and sleepiness etc., is held by other name researchers: Detlef-Eckhard Stoebe (1964: 140), Lauri Kettunen (1955: 122–123).

There are a lot of surnames with the stem *Unt-* in Finland: *Untinen* (141 persons), *Untala* (9), *Untamala* (21), *Untamo* (29), *Unto* (11), and *Untola* (32). The Finnish male name *Unto* and much less frequent *Untamo* come from the period of romantic nationalism (USN 1988: 172).

It seems that the Finnish and Estonian toponyms contain surely the personal name **Unti* : **Unnen*, suffixed forms: *Unto*, *Untama* etc. which is unlikely to have originated from the Old Scandinavian personal name as has been suggested (Kiviniemi 1982: 40). The connection with the appellative *uni* ‘dream’ seems also not plausible.

But such an interpretation is still a case of folk etymology. In South-Estonia there is a settlement by the name *Uniküla*. The first record of it from the year 1431 is *Unnenkul*. In the same settlement there is a hill by the name *Undemägi* (Est. *mägi* ‘hill’). Not far from this place is *Unnemägi*, which, as has been told, got its name from the owner of the land by the surname *Unne*. (Rootsmäe&Rootsmäe 1990: 37–38) What is behind the other four Estonian settlements *Uniküla* and also *Unimäe*, *Univere* and *Unipiha* is not clear.

Still, what is the appellative the personal and place names have originated from? The same place names are also found in the Vepsian territory. *Undjärv* is one of the easternmost groups of Vepsian settlement and also a lake. In South-Vepsian area there is *Undoja* (Veps. *oja* ‘brook’), a little southward there flows the River *Undrega*, the present Russian name is certainly originating from the Vepsian **Undjogi* (Veps. *jogi* ‘river’).

But the place name is spread even more widely. Aleksandr Matvejev has given the area of its distribution: Karelia, the river basin of Svir, Arhangel'sk district, even the area between the Rivers Volga and Oka. The name is found even in microtoponymy. Matvejev has not found an etymology for the name, but supposes on the ground of its distribution that it is of Finno-Ugric origin and means something hydronymically essential (Matвеев 2004: 140).

There is another type of place name that can be very old: the names with the stem consonant: *s* : *ks*.

There are four settlements by the name *Tännassilma* (with sound variations) in Estonia. Nearby is a river or a brook by the same name. In the Vepsian territory there is a river by the name *T'änuz*, allative *T'änuksale*. Already Julius Mägiste (1952: 86–87) has compared the Estonian names to the Vepsian river name, but he leaves the etymology unclear.

Not clear is also the etymology of the Estonian place name *Tuulukse*, a settlement and a manor dairy farm, German *Tulus*. The big river in Olonets Karelia, is *Tuulos*, allative *Tuuloksele*. In Finland (Tavastia Proper) there is a parish by the name *Tuulos* (1431 *twlox*), which is probably a secondary name from the hydronym, and also *Tuulosjoki*. The etymology that *Tuulos* is coming from the verb *tuulastaa* ‘go fishing with the spear’ (SPK 2007: 468), seems not plausible.

There is another river name of that type: Vepsian *Ilmas* : allative *Ilmaksale*. The counterparts of the name in Estonia are Lake *Ilmjärv* and the settlement *Ilmjärve*, the settlements *Ilmandu*, a river and the settlement *Ilmatsalu*. In Finland there is *Ilmajoki*, a river and a parish; Novgorod in Russia is located by Lake Ilmen (Russian ИЛЬМЕНЬ), an earlier form of which was ИЛЬМЕРЬ < **Il'mär* It has been suggested that there is the appellative *ilm* ‘weather’ in these hydronyms and these were used to forecast the weather, but it is not sure whether it is

valid for all these names. Finnish and Ingrian settlements by the name *Ilmola* have originated from the ancient personal name *Ilma*, *Ilmari*, *Ilmo(i)* (Mikkonen-Paikkala 2000: 151). But Eino Koponen (2000: 104–106) has compared the Finnish appellatives *ilminen*, *ilmoi* and personal names *Ilmari*, *Ilmoi* with the Lappish appellatives *âlmăș ~ âlmai* ‘man, husband, friend, fellow’.

There is a substratum in the Balto-Finnic languages that the Estonian researcher Paul Ariste has related to the so-called Proto-Europeans. These Pre-Indo-European people spoke the languages about which we know very little. Ariste included among them probably the Basque language and some other extinct ones (Etruscan, Ligurian, Pelasgian, Cretan etc.). The representatives of the Proto-Europeans in Estonia he thought to have been the carriers of the Kunda archeological culture (Ariste 1981: 9–10). Ariste supposed that the name of the biggest lake of Estonia, *Peipsi* (Vote *Peipuz*, Izhorian *Peibuz*, Finnish *Peipus*), which is etymologically connected to the lake name in Ingria: Vote *Peipijä*, Izhorian *Peibijä*, is a name from the proto-European substratum. Another big Estonian lake *Võrtsjärv* may also belong there.

As the Proto-European settlements were situated along the River *Pärnu*, on the shores of which is now the town of *Pärnu*, Ariste also takes the name *Pärnu* from the Proto-European substratum. (Ariste 1981: 17) The stem *Pern-* occurs also in the settlement names of the Finnish toponyms: *Pernaja* – a parish in Eastern-Uusimaa; *Perniö* – a parish in Proper Finland, the settlement *Pernoo* in Kymenlaakso, two settlements *Pernu* – in Middle-Pohjanmaa and in the Lappi parish. In the Finnish place name dictionary different researchers give them different etymologies, but are not completely sure of them. There are two main etymologies: German(ic) male name *Bern* etc., cf. **bernu* ‘bear’ and appellative *pernä ~ pärnä* ‘lime tree’. The first one is related primarily to *Pernu*-names, which are considered to have been earlier farm names, but maybe also to Finnish *Perniö*, Swedish *Bjärnå*. The end of the Swedish name has been interpreted as the Swedish word *å* ‘river’. The Finnish name, too, is originally a river name with the same personal name in the beginning. From the name **Pernjoki* has come *Perniö*.

To connect these place names to the appellative *pernä ~ pärnä* has its weakness, because the word *pärn* is found in Estonian, but not everywhere in the Finnish language. As the place names with the first component *Pärnä-* occur all over the southern part of Finland, the spread of the word has obviously been larger. Saulo Kepsu has a theory, that the parish name *Pernaja* (in the 19th century the parallel names *Perna* and *Pernaa* existed) has originated from **Pärnäoja*, the Finnish name of the brook east of the church. The Swedish counterpart *Pernå* would so be a partial translation of the Finnish name (Swedish *å* ‘river’), which, in its turn, has influenced the first component of the Finnish name to be *Perna-*.

In the middle of the 17th century *Pernoo* was a duty-free estate, but in its territory there was a waterfall by the name *Pernokoski* mentioned in 1555. If we want to apply the theory of Saulo Kepsu for the name *Pernoo*, we would proceed from the river name **Pernäjoki* for the settlement is situated on the shore of a branch of the River *Kymi*. The phonetic form *Pernoo* can be compared with *Maksjoo* < *Maksjoki* and *Vanjoo* < *Vanjoki*. (SPK 2007: 327–328)

However, it seems that Estonian *Pärnu* and at least part of the Finnish toponyms are certainly too old to originate from a borrowed male name. Appellative *pernä ~ pärnä* ‘lime tree’ can be definitely found in the Finnish place names although it is not very widely spread in the language today. It attracts attention, that the Finnish settlement names mentioned above are

also situated by rivers and so can originate from the hydronym. Exceptions are the settlements by the name *Pernu* that are considered to originate from the names of farms.

Recently one more etymology has been given to the Estonian toponym *Pärnu*.

In his graduation thesis (2008) Timo Rantakaulio has connected *Pärnu* with the Vepsian appellative *pern* : *pernan* ‘steep shore of a river or a lake; a bluff’. The etymology deserves our notice. Maybe we should check all the above-mentioned rivers and find out how steep their shores are or were.

One possible substrate name can also be *Paala*, the old name of the river Põltsamaa. It has the counterparts in the Southern Vepsian territory: a lake *Palajärv* and *Palalaht*, a cove in the above mentioned lake *Релажärv*. Although there is an etymology for *pala*, it may mean ‘a piece’, also ‘a piece of land’ or it may be connected with the verb *palada* ‘põleda’, but the Vepsians themselves think that the meaning of *pala* in the place names is unclear. The hydronyms with the first part of *Pal-* ~ *Pol-* are widespread also in the Western Europe. As well the hydronyms with the first part of *Nar-* ~ *Ner-* are spread there. The Estonian counterpart of them could be a river name *Narva*, the settlement on the shores of it has been mentioned as *Narvia* in the 1241. In Finland there is a river *Narvanjoki* too, another variant *Naarvanjoki*, which has the settlement by the same name by the riverside.

Conclusions

As the toponyms with unclear etymologies appear on a larger Balto-Finnic territory, they must be of one layer. Some of them may have a Finno-Ugric etymology, for example a Lappish (Sami) one, but it is possible, that a part of the toponyms of unclear etymology belong to a Pre-Finno-Ugric layer, probably to the Proto-European one. As Balto-Finnic languages have got a lot of loanwords from Proto-European languages, including the landscape terminology, then why not treat as such also place names, sometimes even without the appellative. True, the weakness of the theory is that Ariste has located the loaning process rather in the Baltic Sea region, but the further to the east, the more we actually find place names with unclear etymologies.

If we have toponyms that have not clear etymologies, some the following tips may be of assistance:

- 1 to pay more attention to hydronyms;
- 2 to pay more attention to (ancient) family names;
- 3 to look the place-names in the larger Balto-Finnic (~ Finno-Ugric) context;
- 4 to take into consideration, that some of the place-names can have some more larger background.

If not said otherwise, the following data bases on the web are used:

<http://kansalaisen.karttapaikka.fi/kartanhaku/paikannimihaku.html> (Finnish toponyms)

http://verkkopalvelut.vrk.fi/Nimipalvelu/nimipalvelu_sukunimihaku (Finnish anthroponyms)

www.eki.ee/knab (Estonian toponyms)

www.keelevara.ee (Estonian anthroponyms)

Onomastika Net (Estonian surnames)

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