

O. Bušs

**THE FINNO-UGRIC INFLUENCE ON THE LATVIAN
PLACE NAMES: THE HISTORY OF THE RESEARCH
AND CURRENT CHALLENGES***



This paper is devoted to the history of the research of the Latvian place names of the Finno-Ugric origin as well as to the explanation of some most actual challenges in this field of the research. The most prominent researchers of the Latvian place names of the Finno-Ugric origin have been August Bielenstein, Kazimieras Būga, Valentin Kiparsky, Jānis Endzelīns, Marta Rudzīte, Antons Breidaks. More profound etymological research of many Latvian place names probably derived from the Finno-Ugric common nouns is still needed.

Keywords: the Finno-Ugric influence, the Latvian, toponymics, place names, etymology.

It is obvious the Latvian place names are mostly names of the Baltic origin. However both geographical localization of Latvia as well as many particularities of the history of Latvia have already at the very beginning of the scientific research of Latvian place names aroused the suspicion there must be place names of Finno-Ugric descent, too, and probably even quite a lot of them. The Finnic-speakers of the Baltic Sea region, namely, the Livonians, Estonians, and even a group of the Vots (so called Kreewins) have dwelled alongside the speakers of the Baltic languages in the territory of the present-day Latvia for many hundred years, and created by them Finno-Ugrians place names still have preserved for us memory about the times when the Finnic languages were spoken by thousands of native inhabitants of Latvia.

To get a notion about the state of the research of the Finno-Ugric influence on the Latvian place names we have to make a short survey of the history of the research. The first really important linguistic study of the Latvian place names generally and of the names of the Finno-Ugric origin particularly was realized by the outstanding Baltic German linguist August Bielenstein (1826–1907). In the monograph “Die Grenzen des lettischen Volkstammes und der lettischen Sprache in der Gegenwart und im 13.

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Jahrhundert” [1]. Bielenstein collected the Latvian place names found in historical documents of the 13th century, and have analyzed these names from the point of view of geographical and linguistic identification. Bielenstein suggests a considerable number of the Finno-Ugric etymologies, mentioning nearly 400 (precisely – 384) Finno-Ugric (in his terminology “livo-finnische”) lexemes for purposes of comparison. Some of the Finno-Ugric etymologies proposed by Bielenstein, e. g., the etymology of the hydronym *Venta* (compared by Bielenstein with Livonian *went* ‘strecken, dehnen, spannen (to stretch)’, *vēna* ‘Sund, breite Flussmündung (straits, wide estuary)’ [1. P. 193], have been questioned by later researchers, e. g., by leading expert of the Baltic studies Jānis Endzelīns (1873–1961) [2. P. 356–357], although this questioning has not been always maximally correct. Some other Finno-Ugric etymologies proposed by Bielenstein are very intuitional, e. g., about the hydronym *Ilmade* and estate name *Ilmaje* Bielenstein writes: “...scheinen nicht lettischen sondern finnischen Lautcharakter an sich zu tragen (‘they don’t seem from the point of view of their phonetic structure (! – O.B.) to be Latvian, more likely they seem to be Finnish (= Finnic. – O.B.)’)” [1. P. 269]; not a single lexical comparison have been here given by Bielenstein, although the possibility to compare the above mentioned place names at least with Finnic *ilma* would be obvious [3. P. 108].

August Bielenstein was a high level expert in linguistics, especially in the Latvian studies, however probably he did not had very profound knowledge of the Estonian or Livonian. As to some extent contrary case connected to our item could be mentioned Jüri Truusmann (Russian Юрий or Георгий Трусман) (1856–1930), a native Estonian who 1897 published the dictionary «Этимология местных названий Витебской губернии» (Etymology of the place names of Vitebsk governorate) [4]; as we know Latgale (Eastern part of Latvia) belonged to the Vitebsk governorate, too. Truusmann have been a master of theology (orthodox) and probably a polyglot; however, his knowledge of linguistics as science did not have been profound enough. Many or even most of the etymologies proposed by him are sheer fantasy (e. g. the comparison of the name of the Lithuanian capital *Vilnius* – *Вильно* by Truusmann – with the Latvian *vilna* ‘wool’ and with some words having the same meaning from other languages [4. P. 52]), nevertheless, some comparisons made by Truusmann of one or another Latgalian place name – with Estonian words could be reasonable, e. g., the comparison of settlement name *Piziki* with Est. *pizike* (standard Est. *pisik*) ‘something small’ [4. P. 220]; to say more precisely the direct etymon of the settlement name would be most probably the Latvian surname *Piziks*, while the etymology of this surname in its turn is connected to the above mentioned Est. *pisik*. The existence of some reasonable etymological comparisons in the dictionary of Truusmann means this publication should still be checked by research of the origin of the Latgalian place names, and it should be mentioned in the cases Truusmann’s proposals have been linguistically correct, although not in every respect.

The next researcher in chronological order is the founder of modern Lithuanian linguistics Kazimieras Būga (1879–1924). Several publications of him, primarily devoted to the history of the Baltic languages, and published in the beginning of the 20-ies of 20th century, included toponymic evidence regarding pre-historical contacts with the Finno-Ugrians as well as the Finno-Ugric etymologies of almost one hundred



Latvian place names from Vidzeme, thus from Northern and Central part of Latvia. Most of these etymologies although very short-spoken, based only on the comparison with one or few Finnish or Estonian place names, seem nevertheless to be correct, e. g. Latvian swamp name *Audas purvs* is compared to Finnish *Hauta-lampi*, *Hauta-vaara* [5. P. 643], and most probably the etymon of all three mentioned place names is a Finnic common noun (cf. Finnish *hauta* ‘a pit; a grave’, Estonian *haud* ‘a grave’, Livonian *ōda* ‘id.’ [6. P. 148] – thus the Estonian *haud* at the first sight seems to be the most believable direct etymon of Latvian *Audas purvs*; however, as the mentioned swamp is localized in Ādaži civil parish in the neighbourhood of Riga we should propose some old Gauja Livonian wordform been closer to the Estonian *haud* and been not so close to the respective modern Livonian word.

In 1939 a significant work of monographic size, namely, the research of Valentin Kiparsky (1904–1983) *Die Kurenfrage* have been published in Helsinki [7]. It is devoted to the old Curonian language; to solve enigma of the genealogical classification of this language – the Baltic or Finnic? If it is the Baltic, then to what extent is the language independent? – Kiparsky analyses old place names from Kurzeme or Curonia (Western part of Latvia) and comes to the conclusion, that although most of them are Baltic, a quite large layer of place names of the Finnic origin is (or have been) used in Curonia [7. P. 203–245].

The most significant publication of the Latvian place names appeared after WWII is the Dictionary of Latvian Place Names: two volumes compiled by Jānis Endzelīns (1956 [8], 1961 [9]; entitled *Latvijas PSR vietvārdi* ‘Place names of Latvian SSR’), and four volumes of *Latvijas vietvārdu vārdnīca* ‘Dictionary of Latvian Place Names’ 2003 [10], 2006 [11], 2010 [12], 2013 [13]). This dictionary contains all collected by linguists Latvian place names in alphabetical order from A- to R- as well as very short etymological comments. In the six volumes of this compilation one can find a large amount of references to the toponymy of the Finnic languages (especially to Estonian place names), e. g., a meadow name *Ruoksts* and some other place names with *Ruokst-* have been most probably derived from Livonian *rūogst* ‘reeds’ [13. P. 496]. However more detailed etymological analysis of many (probably most) Latvian place names of the Finnic origin is still needed.

The most quoted paper among the publications devoted exclusively to the Latvian place names of Finno-Ugric origin is probably the research of Marta Rudzīte (1924–1996) *Somugriskie hidronīmi Latvijas PSR teritorijā* (1968; ‘Finno-Ugric hydronyms in Latvia’ [14]); Rudzīte have compiled and commented on views held earlier about the hydronyms of Finno-Ugric origin in Latvia. In the list of river and lake names she included both less plausible (e. g., *Lipstupe* [14. P. 186]) and more convincing Finno-Ugrisms (e. g., *Lilastes ezers* < Livonian *līluD* ‘reeds’ [14. P. 186].

And one more researcher should be mentioned – Antons Breidaks (1932–2002); he has systematically studied hydronyms of the Finno-Ugric origin in Latgale or Eastern Latvia, and from 1970 to 2000 has published many papers devoted to this item [s. 15].

The list of the researchers of Latvian place names of the Finno-Ugric origin includes many other surnames, too: Daina Zemzare (1911–1971), Valdis Juris Zeps (1932–1996), Tõnu Karma (1924–2014), Vallija Dambe (1912–1995), Kersti Boiko,



Dzintra Hirša, Benita Laumane, Laimute Balode, Ojārs Bušs [more detailed survey and literature s. 16. P. 28].

However there are still unexplored questions. Most ancient Latvian place names of the Finno-Ugric origin are to be found among hydronyms, and this is why just hydronyms have been researched most thoroughly in comparison with settlement names and microtoponyms. Nevertheless we still have many unanswered questions about the origin of Latvian hydronymy. Many etymologized Latvian hydronyms of probably Finno-Ugric origin still need more detailed and more profound analysis. Let us see as a challenge, not as a solved case some hydronyms with a root *Sav-*, among them the river name *Savīte* and lake name *Savītes ezers* in central part of Latvia (Bērzaune, Kalsnava) as well as *Saviēna* in northern part of Latvia (Zeltiņš). There are a lot of hydronyms with root *Sav-* all over Europe, among them the well-known river *Sava* in Balkans. These European hydronyms are, of course, researched and etymologized by many scholars, among them Hans Krahe [17. P. 50] as well as Vladimir Toporov and Oleg Trubatschov [18. P. 206], and a connection with Protoindoeuropean root **seu-* ‘wet, moist; to flow’, **soyos* ‘wetness; liquid’, proposed by Krahe and others, seems to be the most believable. From the point of view of the laringaltheorie the respective Protoindoeuropean root would be **sh2eu-* ‘to pour, to rain’ [22. P. 20–21]. However, Latvian *Savīte* and *Saviēna* are rivers localized in areas where at least some place names of Finnic origin are found (and Zeltiņš is a civil parish, where before hundred years many inhabitants had spoken the Leivu dialect of South Estonian). Finnic languages (both Finnish as well as Estonian) have the common noun *savi* ‘clay’, and the meaning of this noun is quite appropriate to motivate the creation of hydronyms. In Latvia there are few river names *Mālupe* (literary ‘clay river’) as well as *Māliņupīte* (with two diminutive suffixes: *-iņ-* and *-īte-*), *Mālgrāvis* (literary ‘clay ditch’), and even *Mālkalne* (derivation from **mālkalns* ‘clay hill’). And in Finland there are many *Savijoki* (‘clay river’) – both geographical features and persons, because *Savijoki* is a surname, too. In Estonia we have many other place names (settlement names, microtoponyms) derived from *savi* (*Savi*, *Saviaugu*, *Savikoja*, *Saviku*, *Savimetsa*, *Savimäe*, *Savioja* – all examples from the region of Tartu [19. P. 218]). The question still is: are Latvian *Savīte* and *Saviēna* Indoeuropean ‘flowing river’, ‘wet or most river’ or Finnic ‘clay river’? It seems we cannot give a fully definite answer. However we can formulate some arguments. The *Savīte* is a relatively small river, 25 kilometers long, *Saviēna* have been even much shorter and is now lost as the result of land-reclamation works. These two rivers might have preserved very old names, which do not have correspondence with common nouns in modern Latvian, though this is not very believable (although it is not out of the question). The toponymical context consisting of some place names of Finnic origin among the majority of Baltic names in this region shows the possibility of Finnic origin of Latvian hydronyms with a root *Sav-*, however a context cannot give any proofs. And here we are, still hesitating...

Among other actual challenges in the field of the research of the Latvian toponyms of Finnic origin only two more should be very shortly mentioned. The first one is the supplementing of the material for the research from the archives. There are maps from 17th century, and on the maps we can find some unknown place names



of Finnic origin, too, e.g., the *Mudsa* – a river name on the map of Bērzaune district (this map have been researched by Renāte Siliņa-Piņķe [20. P. 16]). As etymon of this river name can be probably identified some Finnic common noun related to the Estonian *mets* ‘forest’ (cases of spelling of respective noun with *-u-*, e. g., *muzza* can be found in Livonian [21. P. 248]).

The second challenge is connected with one specific kind of Latvian farmstead names of the Finnic (mostly Estonian) origin, e. g., *Ķeņģi*, *Raudsepi*, *Retsepi*, *Sāri* e. t. c., namely, with place names derived from surnames of Estonian origin. Sometimes the etymon is a really Estonian surname, especially in the parishes along the Estonian border. However sometimes they are the Latvian surnames (of Estonian origin, of course). Should the place names derived from the Latvian surnames of Estonian origin be treated as place names of Estonian origin? We cannot be sure, probably we can say these farmstead names are Estonian ones by origin – to some extent.

And of course there is still a long way to go to reach the state of the research, which would allow considering seriously the possibilities of compilation of a dictionary of Latvian place names of the Finno-Ugric origin.

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О. Бушс

Финно-угорское влияние на латвийскую топонимию: история изучения и актуальные проблемы

На территории современной Латвии в исторически обозримом прошлом наряду с латышским этносом и предшествовавшими ему балтийскими племенами всегда проживали носители и финно-угорских языков – видземские и курземские ливы. Поэтому неудивительно, что топонимы финно-угорского происхождения представлены в латвийской топонимии относительно многочисленным слоем и привлекали внимание исследователей, начиная с первых шагов научной топонимики. Первопроходцем латвийской научной топонимики можно считать известного прибалтийско-немецкого языковеда Августа Биленштейна, который в ходе этнолингвистического анализа латвийской топонимии XIII в. предложил и ряд этимологий топонимов финно-угорского происхождения. Эстонский православный теолог Юрий (Георгий) Трусман в 1897 г. опубликовал словарь «Этимология местных названий Витебской губернии», в котором среди большинства ненаучных толкований можно найти некоторые верные этимологии топонимов финно-угорского происхождения, локализованных в восточной Латвии. Классик литовского языкознания Казимерас Буга этимологизировал немалое количество финно-угорских по происхождению топонимов Латвии в ряде своих публикаций нач. 20-х гг. XX в. В 1939 г. Валентин Кипарски в Хельсинки опубликовал монографию *Die Kurenfrage*, посвященную детальному анализу эвентуального наследия куршского языка, в том числе и топонимов Курземе (западной Латвии), среди которых немало названий ливского происхождения. Крупнейшей публикацией латвийских топонимов явились 6 томов пока еще не завершеного словаря латвийских топонимов (1956–2013, A–R), в котором можно найти сведения, включая и этимологические, о большом количестве топонимов финно-угорского происхождения. Наиболее развернутые исследования латвийской гидронимии финно-угорского происхождения принадлежат Марте Рудзите и Антону Брейдаксу.



Несмотря на проделанную работу, еще немало латвийских топонимов предположительно финно-угорского происхождения (например гидронимы с корнем *Sav-*) нуждаются в углубленном анализе: они могут быть сопоставлены с древнеевропейской гидронимией (ср. *Sava* в Хорватии и Сербии), однако некоторые названия в северной Латвии (*Savīte*, *Saviēna*) этимологически восходят, скорее всего, к финно-угорскому (эстонскому?) апеллятиву *savi* ‘глина’. Корпус латвийских топонимов финно-угорского происхождения может и должен быть еще дополнен в результате исследования топонимического материала, извлеченного из хранящихся в архивах средневековых документов и географических карт. Специфическую проблему для исследования финноугризмов представляют собой деантропонимические названия хуторов, образованные от фамилий финно-угорского происхождения; для классификации таких названий определенную роль играет этническая принадлежность носителей соответствующей фамилии.

Ключевые слова: финно-угорское влияние, латышский язык, топонимия, географические названия, этимология.

Бушс Оярс,

хабилитированный доктор филологии,
ведущий исследователь, заместитель директора,
Институт латышского языка Латвийского университета
LV-1050, Латвия, Рига, пл. Академияс лаукумс, 1
E-mail: ojaars@lycos.com

Bušs Ojārs,

Dr. habil. philol.,
leading researcher, vice director,
Latvian Language Institute of Latvian University
LV-1050, Latvia, Rīga, Akadēmijas laukums 1
E-mail: ojaars@lycos.com