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OBSCURE PLACE NAME ELEMENTS *ura* AND *ora*
IN SOUTH ESTONIAN

Abstract. The article discusses South Estonian place name elements *ura* and *ora* 'stream, little river' which appear in the Estonian, Livonian and Latvian language and place names. The appearance and semantics of the word variants and the etymologies in the Finnic languages is analysed. Both South Estonian *ura* and *ora* are the variants of the word **urka*, because the spread of the *u*-initial variants is wider and there is no proof of the form **orka*. Although the researchers have suggested earlier that **orka* and **orko* are connected, doubts still remain because of the different stem vowels. However, we may associate **urka* with Finnish *urkama* 'cavity, pit, river bed' and with an old Uralic word **ura* 'road, path; watercourse, river bed'.

Keywords. place names, landscape related appellatives, South Estonian, lexicology, etymology.

In this article two semantically and etymologically obscured appellatives that have spread in southern and western parts of Estonia (i.e. in Võrumaa and Pärnumaa) and in Latvia (i.e. in Ludza (Est. *Lutsi*), in the area between Alüksne and Gaujiena (Est. *Leivu*), in Courland and also in the Latvian historical language areas) are introduced. Linguistically, this area includes the part of the western dialects of North Estonian in southeastern Pärnumaa, South Estonian (Võru), South Estonian linguistic enclaves (Leivu and Lutsi), and Livonian. These appellatives are **urka* (Võru and Leivu *urg* (Gen. *ura*, Part., Ill. *`urga*)), Võru *ura* (Gen. *ura*, Part., Ill. *`urga*), Livonian *ūrga* (Part., Ill. *urgō*), Salaca Livonian *ūrg*, and **orka* (Estonian and Võru *ora* (Gen. *ora*, Part., Ill. *`orga*) and the meaning is 'stream or little river', cf. Palmeos 1959 : 103; Pall 1997 : 30; Kettunen 1938: *ūrga*. The appellative *urga* occurs also in Latvian as a generic term¹ (Laumane 1996 : 260–261; Kagaine 2004 : 221). It is thought to be a Finnic loanword (Karulis 2001: *urga*) that has settled well in the Latvian language (Laimute Balode's verbal quote). The diminutive form *urdziņa* is also used and it appears in the place names as a generic term but less often. The verb *urdzēt* 'bubble, gurgle, sizzle, burble' has been derived from *urga* (Laimute Balode's e-mail 27.03.2009).

¹ *Generic term* (also *determinative part of a name*) (Fin. *perusosa*, Est. *liigisõna*) is the part of a place name, which refers to the class of a place, e.g. *stream, hill, ditch, lake, marsh*, etc.

In Leivu enclave, *-urg* appears as a generic term in the brook names like *Piitreurg*, *Laanurg* and *Musturg*. From Hargla the meadow name *Hobuurg* is known (Palmeos 1959 : 103; Pall 1997 : 30). The appellative *-urg* is also known in the areas of Estonian western dialects, e.g. in toponyms *Suururg* and *Laiurg* (Pär). There are also generic terms *-urk* and *-urgad* that appear in the small pool names *Napaurk* (Khn) and *Silmiurgad* (Khn). In Kihnu, the appellative *urk* is used to denote the meaning of a 'little lake' (Kallasmaa 2003 : 94). The appellative *urk* (Gen. *urgi*) refers to 'the line drawn on the field to divide harvest land' (Wiedemann 1973: *urk*). In Häädemeeste, the appellative *urgad* carries the meaning 'watery places on a beach pasture' (Karl Pajusalu's verbal quote). The word *urkama* stands for a 'cavity, pit, river bed', and *urk(k)onen* means 'cavern, cavity, den, hutch, smoot' in Finnish dialects (SSA 3: *urkama*, *urkkonen*).

In Rugarvi (Karelia) there is a river called *Orajoki* (*joki* 'river') that has a parallel name *Oralampi* (Fin. *lampi* 'little lake, pond'). In Uhtua (in Russian *Kalevala*) there is a stream named *Orgoja* (*oja* 'brook'). In the Karelian language, in the old Finnish literary language and in Finnish southwest and southeast dialects the appellative *orko* represents a low slowly foresting slope that might have a wet bottom. In Veps, *org* refers to a boggy land: *Orgniit* (*niit* 'meadow'), *Orgso* (*so* 'marsh'). There are at least three places called *Orko* that represent a little lake, slope or basin. One informant has suggested that *orko* has been derived from a Russian word *овпаз* 'abyss, precipice, gully', but that is probably an incorrect supposition. As it concerns the *Orko*-named low ground of Spankkova village, it has been noted that it is a "valley of a former river but there is no water in summer and winter" (Finnish Names Archive Nimiarkisto).

Do the appellatives share same origins?

The appellative *urg : ura* is not known in contemporary South Estonian Võru language area. Still, when the informants of Saru village in Hargla parish are asked which objects they associate with this appellative, they mostly refer to *Ura* (*oja*) (*oja* 'brook') and also to *Ura* farms (Ill. 'Urga'). Today, *-ura* appears as a generic term only in one name: *Villigä ura* (Har). The fact that the stream's name *Ura* is still used and users do not know its meaning confirms that the name only denotes the place.

There is a variation in couple of toponyms *-oja* (*-uja*) ~ *-ora*: *Saluora* ~ *Saluoja* (Rõu), *Ikuuja* ~ *Vinnora* (parallel names of one stream). If evolved in the natural language environment *Saluoja* could prove that for the users of the old name *Saluora* it was important that the name would characterise its object. *Saluora* and many other names containing *ora*-element are well preserved as settlement names but this can be explained by the established properties of Estonian toponyms – settlement names do not normally contain generic term anyway and they are not expected to characterise the place. Although, when the word appears in the settlement names, it is declined in the illative (*-`orga* or *-`urga*), i.e. exactly in the same way as a primary brook name could be declined. *-ura* appears often as a name element in western Võrumaa, just as *-ora* is used in eastern Võrumaa.

There occur variations of *ora* ~ *ura* in the earlier recordings of toponyms. Today's name of *Kooskora* stream has been written down on Mellin's map

as *Koskur* while at the same time there appear *Lindora* and *Werriora* (Mellin 1791–1798). In 1682, the name of Veriora village has been written down as *Weryura* (Roslavlev 1974 : 14); but earlier, in 1630, it has been referred to as *Weriora*, likewise it has been used later again. The name of *Riihora* village has been written down as *Rigura Pustus* in 1684 and *Richora* in 1688 (Roslavlev 1976 : 10). Nowadays, the lost name of *Panitora* or *Panitura* area in Vastseliina parish has been recorded like this: in 1561 *Panitora* (Панитора), *Panikoviçi* (Паниковичи), in 1585 *Ponitora*, in 1586 *Ponitura*, in 1627 *Pannitura*, *Panitura*, in 1630 *Panitura*, in 1638 *Pantza*, *Panytura*, *Pantura*, in 1688 *Pantoriska Gebiet* (Roslavlev 1976 : 17). The alternations in words *muro* ~ *moro* 'lawn', *turn* ~ *torn* 'scruff', etc., occur in parallel. The variability of both contemporary and written sources allows to believe that at least in South Estonia there is one appellative with different versions.

The objects which names have *-ora* ~ *-ura* as their components are quite similar (*-ura*: farmstead, marsh, meadow, stream, ditch; *-ora*: village, farmstead, lake, forest, stream, lea, everglade, meadow, hill, river — MF). One



Map 1. The spread of the elements *ura* and *ora* in Southeastern part of Estonia, Võrumaa.

could also replace names of streams or rivers with more 'ordinary' appellative *oja* 'stream, brook' and it would result in totally ordinary stream names (Pall 1977 : 728). But in the same article Valdek Pall points out that as the spread zones of both words do not match (*ura* is spread in Hargla and Rõuge in western Võrumaa, and in Leivu; *ora* is used in Vastseliina, Põlva and Rāpina in eastern Võrumaa) their origins might be different. In all, Pall's standpoint is that this is the case of the variations of one word that could be connected to the words Est. *org*, Fin. *orko* and Est. *urg* : *uru* 'burrow, lair'.

When to take into account that the *u*-initial form has spread in South Estonian, Livonian and southwestern part of northern Estonian while the *o*-initial form has mostly been found in the eastern part of South Estonian language area, one could hypothesise that the *u*-form is older. In this case the protoform of South Estonian *ura*- and *ora*-toponyms could be reconstructed as **urka*. The change from the word-initial *u* to *o* can be explained differently: a contamination with the word **orko*, an independent sound development or something else.

According to Marja Kallasmaa (2007 : 456–457), it is not possible to conclude from variable use of *-uja* ~ *-oja* and *-ora* in the place names of Võrumaa that it would have something to do with two versions of one word because "phonetically close elements of a name replace each other often in Estonian place names". Kallasmaa suggests a possibility that at least in the names of the bodies of water *ora* might have different origin. For instance, the first part of the name *Orajõgi* in Hädemeeste (Western Estonia) could be the appellative *orv* : *orva*,² because the name has been written down as *Orwaguge* in 1234. Kallasmaa believes that the origins of the *Orassoo* gulf in Saaremaa might be the same. Although the spread of the appellative and its meanings have not been recorded in Estonian dialects, it appears in the Polish revision in 1592 as a South Estonian cognomen: *Orva Marth* (Kallasmaa 2007 : 456–457). The cognomen has been also used in Northern Estonia, e.g. in 1726 there was a peasant called *Orva Jahn* who lived on the lands of Vaida manor (http://www.vaida.ee/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=9) (Google search 10.11.2009). Nowadays, *Orv* appears as a family name in a few cases (Google search 30.10.2009), but it is possible that contemporary family names, as well as the old cognomen, are based on the word Est. *orb* (Gen. *orvu*), Fin. *orpo* (Gen. *orvon*) 'orphan', that is an old Aryan loanword. Today, the original stem vowel *-a* has persisted in Finnish dialectal words as *orpana* 'cousin', *orvas* 'relative', and *orvastaa* 'to be a relative, take somebody for relative', which are connected with the word *orpo* (SSA 2: *orpana*, *orpo*).

About the relationships of the appellative *ora* and the names of *Orava*³

Although names function as names even when their meanings are not completely understood, the users still want to perceive understandable words as name elements. According to the user's comprehension, a meaning is given to the semantically obscured part of a name. The meaning is chosen

² The meaning of the word *orv* : *orva* in modern Estonian is 'niche, alcove', but it is difficult to connect this meaning with old cognomens and place names.

³ Est. *orav* (Gen. *orava*), Fin. *orava* (Gen. *oravan*) 'squirrel'.

from the patterns of already familiar toponymicon. These individual changes of names are called folk etymology (see also: Saar 2008; Kallasmaa 1995; Dalberg 1997).

In Võnnu Kastre the older brook name *Veriora* has been renamed as *Veriorava kraav* (*veri* 'blood', *orava* 'squirrel' (Gen), *kraav* 'ditch') (both names were heard and collected during a fieldwork in Võnnu in 1998); for the comparison the name *Oravaujamägi* (*uja* 'brook', *mägi* 'hill') in Vastseliina could be referred to as well.

The name of Võmmorski village probably contains of a stream name **Võmmora*. The present name of the stream that flows into the River Piusa in the village is *Pelska* in local language and *Белка* in Russian (Russ. *белка* 'squirrel'). Possible progression of name's development could be: Est. *Võmmorski* (village) < Est. **Võmmora* (stream) > Russ. *Белка* > South Est. *Pelska*. This line points to folk etymological interpretation *ora* > *orav* already during the creation of the Russian name.

It can be assumed that in the other Finnic language areas possible *ora*-names have been re-interpreted via folk etymology as *Orava*-names.

However, in Võrumaa there are the *Orava*-names which have originally been anthroponymes derived from animal names, e.g. *Oraff Lauer* (1624/1627) who gave his name to Orava village in Vastseliina parish (Roslavlev 1965 : 78).

In northern Finland near Sodankylä there is a village and a lake called *Orajärvi*. The village is also called *Orakylä*. From the lake, the *Orajoki* flows to the Kitis River. Samuli Aikio and Sirkka Paikkala consider the name *Orajärvi* originates from Sami but it is not clear which appellative is the exact basis of the name. They suggest that it might be Kemi Sami *orre* 'squirrel', and that *Orajärvi* in Pello and names starting with *Oranki*-might share the same origins. In this case, *Oranki* would be the older diminutive form of the same word (Suomalainen paikannimikirja 2007 : 305).

Etymologies

Etymology is not important when using the names. Name functions as a name even when we do not understand its meaning. This is the reason why words which have disappeared from the common language, or the ones about to disappear, or semantically obscured words, have been preserved in the specific parts of place names or more rarely as generic terms, e.g. *ora* and *ura*: *Orajõgi* and *Villigä ura* in Võrumaa. In the name *Orajõgi* the change in the name structure (epexegesis) has happened due to the fact that the name has been added a second(ary) generic term that also characterises the nature of the place and is synonymous with the previous one (Kiviniemi, Pitkänen, Zilliacus 1974 : 13). The meaning of *ora* ~ *ura* has obscured in South Estonian and name has been complemented with a more understandable synonymous word describing the nature of the place. In such cases the initial word describing the place moves into the specific part of the name. In the name *Orajõgi* the appellative *ora* has been complemented by a synonymous appellative *jõgi* ('river').

According to SKES, SSA and EEW, the Estonian words *urg* : *uru* 'burrow, lair', *urgas* : *urka* 'den, lair, hole', *urge* : *urke* 'sinus', *urk* : *urga* 'hole in

the ice', *urk* : *urgi* 'the line drawn on the field to divide harvest land', *urg* : *ura* 'stream', *org* : *oru* 'valley' and Finnish *urkama* 'cavity, pit, river bed', and *orko* 'hollow, dingle' are etymologically connected (SKES: *orko*, *ura*, *urakka*; SSA 2: *orko*; SSA 3: *urkama*; EEW: *org*, *urg*). It is also claimed that these words have clear connections with Finnish appellative *ura* 'road, path; watercourse, river bed'. The aforementioned words may be either the versions of Fin. *ura* and *orko* or direct contaminations of both. The Finnish *ura* is an old Uralic word which original form has been reconstructed as **ura* (SSA 3: *ura*; Häkkinen 2004 : *ura*). Finnish *Ura*-place names might derive from the meaning 'water bed' rather than 'road, path'.

As based on Tunkelo, some researchers (e.g. Lahti-Mononen 1968 : 481—482) have considered it to be possible that long-vocalic *uura* and *uuro* 'hollow, furrow' could also be versions of short-vocalic words *ura* and *uro* because the forms of the words where these landscape appellatives appear vary as well, e.g. *Uurasenselkä* and 1780 *Urasenselkä*. Could the long- and short-vocalic versions be related to each other and which words could be linked to them will be the subject for a further research.

Words Est. *org* and Fin. *orko* have been considered to be Finnic-Sami words and their meanings in the other Finnic languages (except Estonian and Votic) are 'shelf, wet slope, basin, foresting wet low place, hollow, dingle', etc. The equivalents from the further related languages have been dismissed due to the phonetical reasons. In Estonian and Votic, the meaning of the word is 'a valley between two high hills' (SSA 2: *orko*; EEW: *org*). This seems to be exceptional rather than common in the context of other Finnic languages.

The form **orka* (a possible nominative form of the appellative *ora*) never appeared in the analysed material, only SSA (2: *orko*) mentions that such form has been borrowed from Finnic languages to Russian dialects. The variant has not been registered in South Estonia either except in the illative form of toponyms.

An interesting tendency can be noticed in the research of landscape related appellatives: the etymology of even the most ordinary landscape appellatives normally stays totally unknown or unclear: they have no convincing Finno-Ugric parallels or proper loan originals. One possible reason is the potential origination from some unknown language that has been spoken in the Baltic Sea region (Saarikivi 2006). For example, the word Est. *org* ~ Fin. *orko* still has unclear etymology. The researchers have generally associated **urka* with it as well but at the same time the word **urka* might have developed from the word **ura* if the *k*-suffixial derivative is taken as a middle step (compare to *urkama*).

Conclusion

In the article two Finnic words **urka* and **orka* 'stream, little river' that appear in the Estonian, Livonian and Latvian language and place names were discussed. The appearance and the semantics of the word and the etymologies were analysed.

Using the old recordings, it has been shown that the contemporary appellatives *ura* and *ora* are two variants of one word. The original form can be reconstructed as **urka* because the *u*-forms are more widely spread

and also exist in Livonian. In the analysed material there has been no proof of the initial form **orka* and it does not become clear how **urka* ~ **orka* and **orko* can be more specifically related because the stem vowels of these words are different.

Some possible *ora*-names in Finnic languages might have changed to *Orava*-names via folk etymological analysis because such pattern has already existed in the language.

The major opinion is that *urg* : *uru* 'burrow, lair', *urgas* : *urka* 'den, lair, hole', *urge* : *urke* 'sinus', *urk* : *urga* 'hole in the ice', *urk* : *urgi* 'the line drawn on the field to divide harvest land', *urg* : *ura* 'stream', *org* 'valley' and Finnish *urkama* 'cavity, pit, river bed', and *orko* 'hollow, dingle' are etymologically connected. The words have connections also with an Uralic word **ura* 'road, path; watercourse, river bed'.

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Abbreviations

Est. — Estonian; **Fin.** — Finnish; **Gen.** — Genitive; **Ill.** — Illative; **Khn** — Kihnu parish; **Part.** — Partitive; **Pär** — Pärnu parish; **Russ.** — Russian; **Rõu** — Rõuge parish.

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МАРИКО ФАСТЕР (Выру)

**ЗАТЕМНЕННЫЕ ТОПОНИМИЧЕСКИЕ КОМПОНЕНТЫ *ura* И *ora*
В ЮЖНОЙ ЭСТОНИИ**

В статье рассматриваются топонимические компоненты **urka* и **orka* 'ручей, маленькая река', которые встречаются как в эстонском, так и в ливском и латышском языках и диалектах. Анализируются также варианты этих слов, их семантика и этимология в прибалтийско-финских языках. Южноэстонские **ura* и **ora* — это варианты слова **urka* 'нора', поскольку ареал распространения слов с начальным *u* шире, а каких-либо доказательств в пользу формы **orka* не обнаружено. Правда, когда-то исследователи этимологически объединяли **orka* и **orko*, но их более конкретная связь все же остается неясной, ведь корневые гласные разные. Более определенно **urka* можно объединить с фин. **urkama* 'полость, дупло, впадина; русло реки' и др. и с ур. **ura* 'дорога, тропа; водный путь, русло реки'.