

WHY NOT *EISTRA DOLGR* 'THE ESTONIAN ENEMY'
(„Ynglingatal“, 26)

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In „Ynglingatal“, in the 26 strophe, which narrates how the son of Yngvar, Braut Qnundr, avenged his father's death and defeated „the Estonian enemy“, as is well known, a peculiar form of the name *Eistr* (*Eistir*) occurs (Jónsson 1967:12–13):

oc ofvaeg
eistra dolgi
heipt hrlsungs
at hendi com.

Because of its uniqueness and obscurity, scholars and editors tend to amend this passage into *Eista dolgr* (Jónsson 1913–1916:103; Aðalbjarnarson 1941:65; Ólason 1946:37; Kock 1946:8; Pritsak 1981:259; Jackson 1993:70). In addition, the form *Eistrar* with the stem final *-r-* is found in the manuscripts „Fríssbók“ and „Jöfraskinna“ which unfortunately is in no way less obscure. On the other hand, on the basis of the *Eistra dolgr* the nominative plural form *Eistir* is sometimes reconstructed and considered equal to the forms *Eistr*, *Eistir* (Fritzner 1954:315; Noreen 1970:285). Well then, what do we confront here – a spelling error made by copyists or a fact of a language?

In order to know the answer to this puzzling question a larger historical comparative background is appropriate which, moreover, allows some insights into the origin and early history of the name *Eistr* (*Eistir*).

In Old Norse and Icelandic *Eistr* (*Eistir*) and *Eistland* refer to the present-day Estonians and their country, as is generally accepted. At the present time the Estonians call themselves *estlased* and they name their country and state *Eesti* or *Eestimaa* (*maa* means 'land'). But this is a recent name that spread among the Estonians during their national rebirth in the middle of the 19 cent. They took it over from Low German *Ehsten* 'Estonians' and *Ehstland* 'Estonia' at the same time replacing the German *-land* with the native *-maa* (Mägiste 1982:161–162). For a long time the Estonians had no proper name, as a matter of fact. In order to separate themselves from their neighbours they used to name themselves *maarahvas* 'the people of (our) land' and their language *maakeel* 'the speech of (our) land' (Moora und Viires 1964:27). It must be noted here that *Sýslukind* – structurally equivalent to *Sviakind* 'the Swedish people' (Vigfusson 1982:338,616) – in „Völuspá“, „Ynglingatal“ refers to natives of the lands to the east of the Baltic sea. It has been suggested (Ariste 1956) that *Sýslukind* is a loan-translation of the *maarahvas* (*maa* 'land' and *rahvas* 'people') into Old Scandinavian, cf. *sýsla* '...Gebiet' and *kind* 'Geschlecht; Lebewesen (gleicher Art)' (Baetke 1976:325,632). In view of this evidence it is most likely that the Estonians had named themselves „the people of (our) land“ (*maarahvas*) by the time of the 10 cent. (Ariste 1956, 1968).

Finnish *Häme*, a name of an ancient province of Finland, appears as *Yamь* with a collective meaning 'inhabitants of Häme province' in Old Russian (e.g., in the Laurentius Chronicle under 1042). Already a hundred years Finnish scholars have assumed that the name *Häme* and the first component *hämä-* of *hämäläiset* 'inhabitants of Häme province' is a Baltic word for land, soil (Prussian *same*, *semmē*, Lithuanian *žemė*, Latvian *zeme*) which is supposed

to have been borrowed apparently as *šämä(-) into Proto-Baltic-Finnic (Tunkelo 1899; Kalima 1936:26–27; Töivonen 1955:97; Jutikkala 1962:163; Koivulehto 1993). In Old Norse and Icelandic sagas and Scandinavian historical sources *Tavastland*, *Tafeistaland* (e.g., in „Hausbók“) and *Tavaster*, *Tafastr*, *Tafaistr* (e.g., on the rune stone of 11 cent. in the vicinity of Trödge Härad in Uppland) stand for the Finnish names of Häme and its population. (Jutikkala 1962:163; Suvanto 1974).

Tafeistaland and *Tafaistr* (Upplands Runinskrifter, 282) clearly show that *Tavast-*, *Tafeist-* are compounds containing Swedish *Ester*, Old Norse and Icelandic *Eistr* (*Eistir*) from an underlying form **AistiR* as their second component. What was the first component remains to be seen. According to „Nykysuomen sanakirja“ (I, Helsinki, 1951, 581), Finnish *hämäläiset* ‘inhabitants of Häme province’, originally ‘holders, owners of Häme, i.e. land’, has also a negative, pejorative meaning, namely ‘simpletons, nincompoops (tyhmyri, hölmöläinen)’. Semantics implicates that *Tav-*, *Taf-* are related to the Danish *taabe*, Swedish (dialectally) *tåp*, *tåpa*, Norse (dialectally) *taap*, *taape* all meaning ‘simpleton, nincompoop’ (Karsten 1936:479; Hellquist 1957:1175; Jóhannesson 1956:464). In such a case *Tavaster*, *Tafaistr*, consisting of two words (*Tav-*, *Taf-* ‘simpleton, nincompoop’ and *Eistr* < **AistiR*), seem to have been a Scandinavian loan-translation of the Finnish *hämäläiset* ‘inhabitants of Häme province; simpletons, nincompoops’ with an original meaning ‘simpletons, nincompoops – landholders, landowners, i.e. the people of the land, soil’.

We find an equivalent of the name **AistiR* (> *Eistr*) recorded also in Anglo-Saxon sources. In Wulfstan’s account about his voyage to the Vistula mouth and a town Truso (9 cent.) several place names (*Truso*, *Ilfing*, *Wiland*, *Ēstmere*) are mentioned (SRP I 732 et seq.) which clearly indicate that Wulfstan’s *Ēstas* (to *Ēstum*, mid *Ēstum*) referred to the Sambians, the biggest tribe of the Baltic Prussians. The name of Sambians and their country found in medieval Latin and German sources, viz. *Sembi*, *Sambi*, *Sembite*, *Sambia*, *Samland*, has been connected by origin with the Lithuanian verb *žėmbti* ‘to plough, till’, as well as its cognates in the Slavonic languages: Russian *ziabь*, Byelorussian *ziablia*, *ziabra* ‘field ploughed in autumn, tilled land’ from **zemb-* (Bammesberger, Karaliūnas 1996).

Earlier recordings of the name of Aistians (Einhardus, Jordanes, Cassiodorus, Tacitus) are fragmentary and ambiguous and therefore add little to our problem.

Thus the following juxtaposition provides the framework within which the origin of the name Aistians must be explained:

Eistr, *Eistir* (< **Aistes*) : Estonian *maarahvas* ‘the people of (our) land’ (cf. Old Scandinavian *Sýslukind*);

Tavaster, *Tafaistr* (< **Taf-aistr*) : Finnish *Häme*, *hämä* (lāiset), Old Russian *Yamь* (< Baltic Finnic **šämä-* < Baltic **žemē* ‘land, soil, field’), i.e. ‘the people of (our) land’;

Old English *Ēstas* (probably from **zstas* which because of *i*-umlaut from **āst-ja-* < **aist-ja-*, cf. Tacitus’s *Aestiorum gentes*) : Prussian *Sambi*, *Sembi* (< **zembis*, **zembai* respectively from Baltic **zemb-* ‘tilled land, field’), i.e. ‘the people of (our) land’.

An intrinsic coherence exists between the tribal names and the corresponding words for land, soil, field which can be interpreted only in such a manner that in ancient times in the East Baltic region apparently there was an ethno-linguistic model of deriving tribal names from words meaning ‘land, soil, field’ both in the Baltic (Indo-European) and Finno-Ugric speaking areas. It is quite likely that the name Aistians (*Eistr*, *Ehsten*, *Ēstas*, *Aestii*) was also

built on this model, since it looks like a translation of the words for land, soil, field. Originally, the name Aistians in all probability applied only to those tribes that called themselves 'the people of (our) land', but later on it might have come to denote all inhabitants of the East Baltic region from the Vistula in the south to the Botnian gulf in the north regardless of their racial character. As the name Aistians might have originally been used to denote only those tribes that named themselves 'the people of (our) land', it may be suggested that its primitive meaning was 'land, soil, field', too. In this respect a German document of 1429 is of importance, a passage of which reads as follows: *dorff genomt Ayster, von alters genomt Semm* „Village named Ayster [= Aistere], from ancient times called Semm [= Zeme]“, cf. Latvian *zeme* 'land, soil, field' (Kiparsky 1939:204; Feldmann, von Kymmel et al. 1990:12–13). This evidence proves that, first, a primitive meaning of Latvian *Aistere*, the name of estate in Durbe parish close by Liepāja (Libau), was 'land, soil, field', second, the name Aistians and Latvian *Aistere* are identical from the etymological point of view, third, the root **aist-* originally meant 'land, soil, field' (Bammesberger, Karaliūnas 1996).

As can be seen, the Latvian *Aistere* has *-r-* as its stem final consonant. In view of this fact the occurrence of *-r-* in the passage *Eistra dolgr* 'the Estonian enemy' in „Ynglingatal“ (26) can hardly be accidental, the more so that this sort of a form is found in „Historia Norvegiae“: *devenit in Eistriam, puer Olavus Eistriis in servum venundatur* (Metzenthin 1941:19–20). Consequently, along with the root noun *Eistr* from the nominative plural **AistiR* < Indo-European **Aist-es* (*Eistir* secondarily on the analogy of *-i-* stem words) (Noreen 1970:283; Krause 1948:69–70) **Aister* / **Aistr-*, an extended form in *-er- / -r-*, might also have existed. Besides *Aistere*, this form is still attested in the Latvian names *Aīsteres-purvs*, a marsh, *Aistīr*, a farmstead, in the eastern part of Latvia as well as in Lithuanian *Eistrai* (< **Aistrai*), ploughed field of 5 ha, in North West Lithuania, near at Latvian border.

Eistra in *Eistra dolgr* can readily be compared, for instance, with the Icelandic genitives plural *feðra*, *bræðra* of the consonantal *-r-* stem *faðir*, *bróðir* (cf. Latin *pater*, genitive *patris*, *frāter*, genitive *frātris*) which expose regular character of *Eistra* as genitive plural of *-r-* stem. It seems most likely that an archaic form of the name Aistians has been preserved in „Ynglingatal“ (26) as well as in „Historia Norvegiae“.

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