

Trends in Estonian Name-giving from 1900 to 1945

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THE TRADITIONAL STOCK of Estonian baptismal names of the previous centuries had consisted predominantly of names common to the whole Christian world: they were, for the most part, saints' names. They were mostly in German form because they had been introduced by the Christian Church from Germany and because German cultural influence was strong in the area around the Baltic Sea. Also a number of German names other than saints' names were in use. Only a few names of other nations had been adopted (e.g., a czars' name, *Nikolai*, the Russian form of the saints' name *Nicolaus*, enjoyed some popularity in the late 19th century).

By the beginning of the present century a reaction against this monotony arose. A new taste in names developed, caused chiefly by internal circumstances, but partly influenced by an increasing love of novelty and by new trends in name-giving developed in other European countries (including Germany). The change in the choice of names was so fundamental that by the middle thirties the stock of Estonian names was completely changed.*

The first two decades of the present century were a transitional period in which the declining old tradition in name-giving existed side by side with the emerging new trends which characterize the next decades. A number of names which had been inherited from the previous century – such as *Aleksander*, *Arnold*, *August*, *Eduard*, *Hans*, *Johannes*, *Karl*, *Oskar*, *Rudolf*, *Voldemar*; *Adele*, *Alide*, *Alma*, *Anna*, *Elfriede*, *Helene*, *Hilda*, *Julie*, *Marie*, and *Marta* – were still current, but rapidly decreasing in frequency. A search for new and fresh names caused a temporary fashion of using different foreign

* Since the study of Estonian anthroponymy is still in its beginnings, this paper is based primarily on the author's own collections of Estonian names (from older documents, parish lists, lists of university students, birth and death notices in newspapers, etc.), personal observations, and several years' study.

names. However, the same period also shows the appearance of the first representatives of the types of names which became prevalent by the thirties.

At first the search for new names sometimes resulted in the use of unusual foreign names, such as masc. *Napoleon*, *Ovi(i)d*, *Rá*, *Sokrates*, *Modest-Adonis*, and fem. *Ariadne*, *Drusilla*, *Mimosa*, *Rhea*, *Zingarella*, *Olinde-Seraphine*, etc. Also feminine names derived from masculine names occurred, e.g., *Arvella* and *Arvilla* (from *Arved* and *Arvid* respectively), *Axella*, *Petronella*, *Felixeida*, and *Gustava*.

A remarkable number of English names became current in this period.¹ In Estonia their use was largely due to a general favorable attitude toward the English. After the First World War everything English came to be held in high favor among the Estonian people. Several English names, including English forms of saints' names, were then adopted. A small number of English names (e.g., *Arthur*, *Eduard* from *Edward*, *Nelly* or *Nelli*) had already been introduced in the 19th century: they came via Germany where they had become popular during the periods of English cultural influence. At that time, however, they had generally not been recognized as English by the Estonians. But in the present century, when knowledge of the English language and acquaintance with English civilization expanded rapidly in Estonia, parents often were already conscious of the fact that they were giving their children English names, especially in the case of such names as *Harry*, *Harriet*, *Mary*, or *Daisy*. The following English names and English forms of non-Germanic names were current in Estonia: masc. *Alfred* (pronounced with initial [a], since English names were usually pronounced according to the phonetic value of the letters in Estonian), *Art(h)ur* /art³ur/,² *Edgar* /et³kar/, *Eduard* (pronounced with long e, /e²/, as

¹ Cf. Hildegard Must, "English Christian Names in Estonian Anthroponymy," forthcoming in *Studies in Estonian Poetry and Language for Ants Oras*.

² All foreign names are pronounced in accordance with the Estonian quantitative system. There are three distinctive degrees of length of the vowels and consonants in Estonian. They are insufficiently marked in the traditional orthography which is phonemic in regard of the quality of sounds. Each of the three degrees of duration has non-distinctive variants conditioned by quantitative environment. In this paper, a phonemic transcription is used in which the distinctive long degrees are marked with numbers: whereas the short or first degree is indicated by a letter (denoting the qualitative value) only, the second or long degree is marked by ² after the letter (e.g., *Enno* /en²o/, *Leena* /le²na/) and the third or overlong degree by ³ (e.g., *Ilmar*

in German; *u* comes from French via German (*u*) from Eng. *Edward*, *Harry* or *Harri* /har²i/, /ar²i/,³ *Oskar* /os³kar/, *Oswald* /os³valt/; fem. *Edith* /e²tit/ [e:dit.], *Daisy* (earlier pronounced /te²si/, later /teisi/⁴), *Ellen* /el³en/, *Ellinor* /el²inor/, *Fanny* /fan²i/ [ˈfaɲni], *Harriet* /harjet/, /arjet/, *Mary* or *Meeri* (both pronounced /me²ri/), *Nelly* or *Nelli* /nel²i/ [ˈnellɪ].⁵ *Edwin* [ˈedvin], *William* /vil³jam/, *Tom* /tom³/, *Ethel* /et³el/ and some others occurred occasionally.

Also a few names from other Western European nations were sometimes used in the same period, e.g., French *Aristide*, *Gaston*, and *Raoul*, Italian *Guido*, and Spanish *Ines*.

English names were succeeded by Scandinavian, especially Swedish names. The Estonians have always had a favorable attitude toward the Swedes, and friendly relations were intensified during the time of national independence between the two World Wars. Some names, such as *Gustav*, the name of King Gustav II Adolf, which had become popular in all Lutheran countries, and especially the old Scandinavian name *Karl*, had already been current earlier. In the second and third decades more Scandinavian names were adopted; e.g., masc. *Fred*, *Gunnar*, *Ingvar*, *Ivar* /ivar/ (or /i³var/), *Sven*, and particularly *Olav* /olav/ which was a special favorite; fem. *Astrid* and its short form *Asta*, *Helga*, *Ingrid*, and *Sigrid*, of which *Asta* and *Helga* were the most current.

But the fashion of using contemporary foreign names was counteracted and intersected by the powerful influence of patriotism. During the political independence of the Republic of Estonia (1918–1940) a general tendency to cultivate the national and dis-

/il³mar/). In some cases it has been found necessary to add the phonetic transcription. The transcription applied to denote the quality of sounds is that of the International Phonetic Association.

In Estonian the main stress is constantly on the first syllable; only in some foreign names (as well as foreign words) is it kept on a non-initial syllable. Therefore the stress is marked in the transcription only if it is on a non-initial syllable.

³ Initial *h* is normally not pronounced in Estonian (except in some small dialect areas); however, it is often retained by educated people in personal names.

⁴ There are no voiced plosives in Estonian; therefore, they are substituted by short unaspirated voiceless plosives. These are very short in intervocalic position.

⁵ Originally, *Ellen* is a pet-form of the saint's name *Helen(a)*, *Fanny* – of *Frances*, *Nelly* – of *Helen*, *Ellen* and *Eleanor*; *Harriet* is the English counterpart of *Henriette* (see E. G. Withycombe, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names* (New York and London, 1947), s. v.).

card the foreign affected every aspect of cultural life. Accordingly foreign names fell into disfavor. They were at first replaced by old shortened forms of internationalized saints' names, which centuries before had been completely adapted to the Estonian phonological and morphological system and thus were felt as genuine Estonian names. Foreign forms which did not agree with the structure of Estonian (those which were stressed on a non-initial syllable or contained sounds or letters non-existent in native Estonian words, e.g., *f*, *c*, */ʃ/*) were discarded at this time. The revival of the archaic and obsolete names had already started at the time of the First World War; however, this revival is most characteristic of the name-giving in the period of national independence.⁶ Since the thirties these have been the prevailing baptismal names.

In accordance with the twentieth-century name-giving fashions in other countries, short names were preferred in Estonia and those with more than two syllables were rejected. Consequently, almost exclusively shortened forms – mono- or disyllabic pet-forms – of the saints' names were revived. The following hypocoristic and other shortened forms of saints' names which were revived and used as baptismal names were most popular: *Jaak* /ja³k³/ (from *Jakob* < *Jacobus*); *Juhan* /juhan/, *Jaan* /ja³n/, *Ants*, *Henn*, *Henno* /hen²o/, /en²o/, *Enn*, *Enno* /en²o/ (all from *Johannes*); *Jüri* /jyri/ (from *Georg* < *Georgios*); *Hillar* /hil³ar/, /il³ar/ (from *Hilarius* < -os); *Madis* and *Mati* /mat²i/ ['ma²ti] (from *Matthias*); *Mart* and *Märt* /mært³/ (from *Martin* < *Martinus*); *Peeter* /pe³t³er/, *Peet* /pe³t³/ and *Peedu* /pe²tu/ (from *Peter* < *Petrus* < *Petros*; *Peedu* is an Est. diminutive form in -u); *Toomas* /to²mas/ (from *Thomas*); *Tõnis* /tõnis/⁷ and (the diminutive form) *Tõnu* (from *Antonius*); fem. *Ann* /an³/, *Anne* /an²e/, *Anu* /anu/ (from *Anna*); *Eevi* /e²vi/ (from *Eva*); *Kadri*, *Kai*, *Kaia*, *Kaie* /kaie/, *Kati* /kat²i/ ['ka²ti], and *Riina* /ri²na/ (from *Katharina*); *Krista*, *Kristi*, *Kersti*, *Kirsti*, and *Tiina* /ti²na/ (from *Christina*); *Madli*, *Mall*, *Malle* /mal²e/, and *Leena* /le²na/ (from *Magdalena*); *Mare* /mare/, *Maret*, and *Reet* (from *Margareta*); *Mari*, *Marje* /marje/, *Marju*, *Mai*, *Maia*, and

⁶ At that time (especially in the thirties), even a puristic movement of so-called Estonianization of names took place and many adult Estonians exchanged the foreign forms of their baptismal as well as family names for new ones which agreed with the structure of Estonian.

⁷ õ denotes an unrounded mid back-central vowel.

Maie /maie/ (from *Maria*); *Tiia* /ti²a/ and *Tiiu* /ti²u/ (from *Dorothea*); *Viia* and *Viiu* (from *Sophia*).

As a result of a vigorous national and cultural revival in Estonia in the second half of the 19th century, some names of heroes and heroines of Estonian literary works had become favorite baptismal names by the turn of the century. Especially *Linda* and *Salme* /salme/ were very popular. To be sure, these were names of ultimate foreign origin – *Linda* is originally a Germanic name element occurring in fem. compounds such as *Theudelinda*, and *Salme* is an old German form of *Salome*;⁸ however, they were favored because they are the names of the principal heroines of the national epic, *Kalevipoeg*, and were felt to be Estonian names. Their popularity continued in the first decades of the 20th century, but then declined because they had become too common. *Kalev*, *Olev*, and *Sulev* – masculine names occurring in the national epic – were also used, especially *Olev* /olev/. Likewise some other names of heroes and heroines of nineteenth-century Estonian literature, particularly of historical novels, became current by the early twentieth century. Later a few names were taken from twentieth-century literature. For instance, *Tiina* /ti²na/ (the name of the principal heroine of a drama by A. Kitzberg, *Libahunt* ‘Werewolf’) was a special favorite in the twenties and thirties.

When acquaintance with the medieval chronicles dealing with periods of Estonian history spread among the population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, ancient names of Estonians occurring in them were revived. Hence such names as *Lembit* or *Lembitu* [‘lembittu], *Manivald(e)*, and *Vootele* (a misinterpretation of an ancient name recorded as *Wottele*) came into use. *Lembit* (recorded as *Lembitus*, *Lembitlo*, -u, etc.,⁹ in the chronicle by Henry of Livonia in the early 13th century), the name of a prominent and powerful Estonian chieftain in the beginning of the 13th century, became a special favorite. The name is usually interpreted as a form of an

⁸ See Ernst Förstemann, *Altdeutsches Namenbuch I: Personennamen* (2nd ed., Bonn, 1900), col. 1290; M. G. Freie, *Die Einverleibung der fremden Personennamen durch die mittelhochdeutsche Epik* (Amsterdam, 1933), p. 68; Hildegard Must, “Vom Ursprung der Personennamen im ‘Kalevipoeg,’” *Journal de la Société Finno-ougrienne*, 55 (1951), 14.

⁹ *Heinrici chronicon Livoniae*, ed. L. Arbusov (†) and A. Bauer (2nd ed., Hannover, 1955), p. 99, l. 17 et passim.

Estonian past participle meaning 'loved, beloved.'¹⁰ *Ülo*, a rendition of an ancient Livonian name which is recorded as *Ylo* (in the chronicle by Henry of Livonia¹¹), was popularized in nineteenth-century literature, but became a favorite as late as the 1930ies.

In the twenties and thirties of the present century several archival records, documents from the late Middle Ages, were published and found to contain a number of pre-Christian Estonian masc. names. These had still been in use up to the middle of the 15th century, after which time they rapidly vanished from the records and were replaced by saints' names.¹² Some of those obsolete names were then revived as baptismal names and were occasionally used by educated people (especially by professors and writers). For instance, the following men's names were used at this time: *Räni*, identical with Est. *räni* /ræni/ 'quartz,' after a name recorded as *Reni* in the 16th century;¹³ *Meelit* – recorded as *Melitu* in the 14th century and as *Melit* in the 16th century,¹⁴ cf. Est. *meel* 'mind'; *Toivo* – a modern Est. form derived from the fifteenth-century *Toyuo*,¹⁵ cf. Finn. *Toivo*, *toivo* 'hope, wish'; *Toivelemb* – recorded as *Thoyuelembe* and *Toyuelembi* in the 14th and 15th centuries,¹⁶ cf. ancient *Toyuo* and *Lempi* (modern Est. *lemb* 'love, affection'). A few names which are recorded as men's names in the medieval documents, e.g., *Meeli* and *Ülle* – recorded as *Meli* and *Ylle*¹⁷ – were now found more suitable for girls and came into use as feminine names. This group of revived ancient names was a late addition to the stock of names and occurred only sporadically in the period under investigation. However, *Toivo* – supported by the Finnish name *Toivo* – became current.

The cherishing of national culture was accompanied by a cultivation of closer friendly relations with the so-called sister nations. i.e.,

¹⁰ Also the other names were believed to be native names although they had not been sufficiently explained.

¹¹ See the Est. translation of the chronicle of Henry of Livonia by Julius Mägist, *Henriku Liivimaa kroonika* (Stockholm, 1962), p. 317.

¹² They were recently dealt with in an article on ancient Estonian personal names by E. Roos, "Eesti muistseist isikunimedest," *Keel ja Kirjandus*, IV (1961), 341–52 [Tallinn, Estonia, U.S.S.R.].

¹³ E. Roos, *Keel ja Kirjandus*, IV, 346 and 347.

¹⁴ E. Roos, op. cit., 343 and 345.

¹⁵ E. Roos, op. cit., 347 and 348.

¹⁶ E. Roos, op. cit., 344.

¹⁷ E. Roos, op. cit., 348.

those which speak languages of the same Finno-Ugric group to which Estonian belongs. First of all, this involved the Finns whose language is most closely related with Estonian, but to some extent also the Hungarians who speak another, though distantly related, Finno-Ugric language. As a result, a considerable number of Finnish Christian names (including Finnish shortened forms of Scandinavian and saints' names) became current, e.g., masc. *Ilmar* /il³mar/ (Finn. *Ilmari*); *Kullervo* and *Väino* (Finn. *Väinö*) – names of heroes of the Finnish national epic, *Kalevala*, which were used occasionally; *Aarne* /a³rne/ (from Swed. *Arne*), *Juho* (from *Johannes*), *Kalle* /kal²e/ (from *Karl*), *Matti* (from *Matthias*) – usually pronounced [ˈmat̪ti] as also Est. *Mati*, *Olavi* /olavi/ (from *Olaf*), *Paavo* /pa²vo/ (from *Pavel* < *Paulus*). Of Finnish feminine names, *Aino*, the name of a heroine in the *Kalevala*, came into vogue as early as the second decade of the present century; *Kerttu* (from *Gertrud*), and *Kyllikki* (Finn. spelling) or *Küllik(k)i* (Est. transliteration), another name from the *Kalevala*, were used mostly in the forties.

Of Hungarian names especially *Ilona* ['ilo.na], fem. (a form of *Helena*) was used, and *Arpad* and *Bela*, masc., occurred occasionally.

Since Finnish names often ended in *-o* and this diminutive suffix, corresponding to modern literary Estonian *-u*, appeared as *-o* also in old Estonian records as well as in some dialects, masculine names ending in *-o* became very popular. For this reason a number of archaic German short forms ending in *-o*, which were not easily recognized as German, also became current: *Aldo*, *Avo* and *Aavo*, *Arvo*, *Heino* (which became an especially popular name), *Helmo*, *Raimo*,¹⁸ etc. As a matter of fact, some of these names were apparently attractive because their stems were homonymous with those of some Estonian words, e.g., *Helmo* – cf. *helmes*, gen. *helme* 'bead, pearl.' There were also other shortened forms of foreign names which had become very popular earlier because of homonymy with Estonian words and because of a folk-etymological interpretation; e.g., the feminines *Helmi* (a hypocoristic of *Wilhelmine*) – cf. Est. *helmes*, gen. *helme* 'bead, pearl,' *Roosi* (a pet-form of *Rosalie*) – cf. *roos* (gen. *roosi*) 'rose,' *Lilli* (from *Elisabeth*) – cf. *lill*, gen. *lille* and earlier *lilli*, 'flower' (which suggested a further name form, *Lille*), *Laine* (probably from *Elaine*) – cf. *laine* 'wave,' *Hella* (from *Helena*) – cf. *hell*, gen. *hella* 'tender, affectionate.'

¹⁸ Cf. E. Förstemann, *Altdeutsches Namenbuch* I, cols. 2, 6, 56, 217, 718, and 1243.

Alongside the revived archaic and obsolete names, another group of names was especially characteristic of the period of national independence: namely, the newly invented Estonian names. These are Estonian words or their derivatives (mostly with diminutive suffixes) used as baptismal names. They were largely felt as a symbol of national culture and national independence. Native personal names, which the ancient Estonians had borne, had perished and been replaced by saints' names after Christianity had been imposed by force and the nation had been subjugated in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Now the principle of using native words as names was restored.

A few names invented by Estonian poets and prose writers were taken into general use from literature. An early stimulating example was the fem. name *Koidula* – the pseudonym of an outstanding personality of the nineteenth-century national literature, the revered poetess Lydia E. F. Jannsen, generally known as Lydia Koidula. The name *Koidula*, which was given to her by a contemporary writer, is a derivative of the Est. word *koit* (gen. *koidu*) 'dawn.' The name was adopted as a baptismal name. Also *Koidu* was later used as a fem. name. On the other hand, *Koit* as a masculine name (used in the 20th century) was taken over from a mythical story, *Koit ja Hämarik*, 'Dawn and Twilight,' by F. R. Faehlmann (an Est. writer of the first half of the 19th century), in which *Koit* is a personification, as a young man, of dawn. This, by its turn, suggested the use of *Eha* – identical with Est. *eha* /*eha*/ 'sunset glow' – as a favorite feminine name in the twenties and later.

A few more names of heroes and heroines of literary works inspired the use of Estonian words as baptismal names. However, the parents themselves showed much inventive imagination in coining more new names.¹⁹ Some inspiration and models were found among modern Finnish names (where a purification of names had also taken place). Such invented new names acquired a rather great vogue in the thirties. They were mostly girls' names; less imagination was

¹⁹ During the Estonianization of foreign names (in the thirties), when adults usually exchanged the foreign forms of their baptismal names for old forms which agreed with the structure of Estonian, some persons preferred native words as entirely new names. In a few cases it resulted in such imaginative combinations as that chosen by a girl (in Pärnumaa) – *Tuule Iil* 'gust of wind': *Tuule*, gen., 'of wind' as her first name, and *Iil* 'gust' as her last (family) name.

used for boys' names, which have always been somewhat more conservative.

The newly invented native names belong to various semantic groups. Since the name words were chiefly used as girls' names, they mostly imply appealing smallness on the part of the baby girl as well as affectionate feeling toward her.

The most preferred group of name words were those denoting plants or their parts. *Õie* /õie/, the genitive form, with a diminutive value, of Est. *õis* 'blossom,' and *Õilme*, gen., another word for 'blossom,' were the earliest representatives. (They may have been suggested by *Lilli* < *Elisabeth* and *Roosi* < *Rosalie*, the homonyms of the genitive forms of *lill* 'flower' and *roos* 'rose.') *Õie* was a fairly popular name, especially in the first two decades of the present century. More names of the same semantic group followed in the twenties and thirties; for example: *Urve* – a derivative of *urb* (gen. *urva*) 'catkin (of birch, pussy willow), ament'; *Käbi* 'cone of evergreens'; *Lehti* and *Lehte* – derivatives of *leht* 'leaf'; *Taimi* – from *taim* 'plant.' *Virve* (/virve/), a favorite name, means 'sprout, twig' as well as 'quick, nimble, agile' and also suggests association with *virvendus* 'faint ripple (of water or light), flicker, glimmer.' Other terms denoting features of nature occurred too, e.g., *Pilvi*, an i-diminutive of *pilv* 'cloud,' *Tuuli* /tu²li/ and *Tuulike* (a double diminutive formation, -i plus -ke) – derivatives of *tuul* 'wind.'

Further new names suggesting tenderness or loveliness were, for example, *Helve* and *Helbe*, identical with nom. *helve* /elve/ and gen. *helbe* /el³pe/, 'flake' (used especially for snow flakes), and *Mesike* – an (irregular) diminutive formation from *mesi* 'honey.' *Lembi* and *Lemmi* /lem²i/ are derived from *lomb* and *lemme* 'love, affection.' *Säde* ['sæde.] 'spark' refers to the vivacity of the bearer of the name. More indirect allusions are felt in the case of *Luule* /lu²le/ 'poetry,' *Leelo* /le²lo/ 'folk song,' and *Aime* 'forefeeling, presentiment (esp. of good), anticipation, inkling.'²⁰

²⁰ The similarity of this name with French *Aimé*, *Aimée* is accidental. Est. *Aime*, pronounced ['aime], was taken into use as an Estonian name word. A girl born in 1908 was known to be the first of this name and thereafter others were named for her. According to her mother and relatives, an aunt of the girl found the word in a literary work (this form is a rare variant of the usual Est. *aimdus* or *aim* in the same sense) and thought that it would make an original and pretty Estonian name, and suggested it for her baby niece.

For this information I am indebted to Miss Aime Kangro.

Qualities referring especially to men were expressed in men's names such as *Indur* [in³tur] 'zealot, enthusiast' (from *ind* 'zeal').

Occasionally compound names were formed, e.g., *Tõeleid* 'discovery of truth' (*tõde*, gen. *tõe*, 'truth,' plus *leid* 'find, discovery') and *Õnneleid* 'discovery of happiness,' both masculine names. But compounds were very rare.

The new trends and fashions in the choice of names in Estonia, especially the revival of ancient names, were initiated by a few educated and informed individuals, and then, starting from bigger cities, spread gradually over the country. In the rapid succession of fashions a new trend would be introduced before the previous one had been completely adopted by the rural population. So the fashions overlapped and for a time they existed side by side – among different social groups. However, as a result of easier transportation and modern means of communication, in the thirties the taste in names became almost uniform all over the country.

By the Second World War and the occupation of Estonia by foreign powers, a new stock of baptismal names had developed. It consisted of four principal groups: revived short forms of old international saints' names, recently adopted Finnish names, newly invented Estonian names, and a few revived pre-Christian native names. They have continued in use. The group of newly coined names could be currently increased by new inventions and variations. However, the old forms of saints' names were, and still are, the most persistent and prevailing among the modern names.

The new taste in names developed to some extent in accordance with and partly under the influence of similar trends and fashions in the neighboring and other Western European countries. Particularly a revival of archaic names (caused by an admiration of the nation's pre-historical and early historical past) on the one hand, and a preference for short names – so characteristic of the fast tempo of the modern living in the 20th century – on the other hand, are noticeable. However, the development was essentially determined by political and cultural factors operative at home, particularly by the growing self-confidence of the prospering nation and a conscious cultivation of national traits. The fashions in name-giving formed a part of the general trends in the vivid and flourishing cultural life of the independent nation.