

# The first workday or the Moon's day? Germanic and Slavic traditions in naming the days of the week in the Finnic languages

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The aim of this paper is to describe the naming traditions of the days of the week in the Finnic languages. It is well known that the Finnish names of the days originate from the Scandinavian and Germanic languages. It is also obvious that the Estonian system concerning the naming of the days is different, having its origins in the Baltic and the Slavic cultures and languages.

In the present paper, I attempt to categorize the Finnic languages from the point of view of the names of the days. Furthermore, I seek to answer the question whether the Finnish names of the days date back earlier than it has usually been assumed.

This paper has a highly practical motivation. Actually, it is a summary of a chapter from a study of the European names of the days by Sándor Maticsák. When translating the book – *Vándorló napok* – into Finnish I considered that it would be more useful to write an entirely new chapter about the names of the days in the Finnish and Finnic languages instead of about the Hungarian ones.

As a first step, I am comparing the names of the days in all seven Finnic languages. Further, the etymology of the names of the days is compared with historical as well as historico-cultural information.

## 1. The Scandinavian *-tai* days

The names of the days of standard Finnish can easily be connected with the present and old Scandinavian system:

| <b>Finnish</b>     | <b>Swedish</b> | <b>Old Swedish</b>  | <b>Old Norse etc.</b>   |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>maanantai</i>   | <i>måndag</i>  | <i>mānadagher</i>   | OHG <i>mānatag</i>      |
| <i>tiistai</i>     | <i>tisdag</i>  | <i>tīsdagher</i>    | <i>týsdagr</i>          |
| <i>keskiviikko</i> | <i>onsdag</i>  | <i>ōpinsdagher</i>  | <i>miðvikudagr</i>      |
| <i>torstai</i>     | <i>torsdag</i> | <i>þōrsdagher</i>   | <i>þórsdagr</i>         |
| <i>perjantai</i>   | <i>fredag</i>  | <i>frēadagher</i>   | <i>frjárdagr</i>        |
| <i>lauantai</i>    | <i>lördag</i>  | <i>lōghardagher</i> | <i>laugardagr</i>       |
| <i>sunnuntai</i>   | <i>söndag</i>  | <i>sunnodagher</i>  | OLG<br><i>sunnundag</i> |

(OHG = Old High German, OLG = Old Low German)

The only exception is Old Swedish Wednesday *ōpinsdagher*, which does not fit the pattern. Finnish *keskiviikko* means ‘the center of the week’, while the Swedish equivalent has the meaning ‘the day of the Odin (Wotan)’. However, the Old Norse (*miðvikudagr*) and the Old Middle German (*middeweke*) forms both had an equivalent naming for Wednesday with a similar meaning (‘the center of the week’).

These names of the days of Scandinavian-Germanic type predominate in Finnish only. Several dialect variants are even closer to the Old Swedish form having the suffix *-taki* (*maanantaki*, *tiistaki*, *torstaki* etc.).

The Old Swedish names had the following meanings:

| <b>Old Swedish</b>  | <b>meaning</b>  |
|---------------------|---|
| <i>mānadagher</i>   | the Moon’s day, as in Latin ( <i>dies Lunae</i> )                               |
| <i>tīsdagher</i>    | the Týr’s day (West Germanic <i>Tiw</i> , <i>Tiu</i> > English <i>Tuesday</i> ) |
| <i>ōpinsdagher</i>  | the Odin’s day (West Germanic <i>Wotan</i> > English <i>Wednesday</i> )         |
| <i>þōrsdagher</i>   | the Thor’s day  |
| <i>frēadagher</i>   | the Freya’s (Frigg’s) day   |
| <i>lōghardagher</i> | the bathing day   |
| <i>sunnodagher</i>  | the Sun’s day, as in Latin ( <i>dies Solis</i> )                                |

The idea of naming the days after gods and mythological figures comes from the ancient Romans and Greeks. Therefore, it is plausible to claim that the Germanic language(s) only transmitted the system to the other Northern peoples, the Finns and the Samis.

Ancient Finns understood the Germanic names as compound words, but their meanings were not very clear for them. This is why they were not translated – except the name of Wednesday, which was translated as ‘the center of the week’. The other six names were only phonologically adapted (*mānadagher* > \**mānantaki*, *þōrsdagher* > \**torstaki* etc.). The shortest names were thought as simple stems. This is why the element *-taki* was weakened following to the rules of Finnish consonant gradation: \**tīstaki* > \**tīstayi* > *tiistai*, \**torstaki* > \**torstayi* > *torstai*.

## 2. The ordinal-based names

The naming principle of the days in the rest of the Finnic languages is mainly based on the ordinal numbers. The meaning of the names is literally ‘the first day’, ‘the second day’, etc.

|     | <b>Karelian</b>                           | <b>Izhor</b>                              | <b>Vepsian</b>     | <b>Votic</b>                              |
|-----|---|---|--------------------|---|
| Mon | <i>enzimäinarki</i> ,<br><i>ensiariki</i> | <i>enspäivä</i> ,<br><i>ensimmässarki</i> | <i>ezmäžnarg</i>   | <i>esimespäivä</i> ,<br><i>tuhkapäivä</i> |
| Tue | <i>toiniarki</i>                          | <i>toispäivä</i> , <i>toissarki</i>       | <i>tožnarg</i>     | <i>tõinõpäivä</i>                         |
| Wed | <i>kolmaspäivä</i>                        | <i>kolmaspäivä</i>                        | <i>koumanpäi</i>   | <i>kõlma(i)späivä</i>                     |
| Thu | <i>nell'äspäivä</i>                       | <i>neljäspäivä</i>                        | <i>nell'anžpäi</i> | <i>nellä(i)späivä</i>                     |
| Fri | <i>(piätinčä)</i>                         | <i>viijespäivä</i>                        | <i>(pätnič)</i>    | <i>viijespäivä</i>                        |

This naming principle is possibly adopted from the Slavic or Baltic languages, since both language groups have similar systems:

Russian: *вторник* ‘Tuesday’, literally: ‘the 2nd day’, *четверг* ‘Thursday’, literally: ‘the 4th day’, *пятница* ‘Friday’, literally: ‘the 5th day’.

Lithuanian: *pirmadienis* Mon, *antradienis* Tue, *trečiadienis* Wed, *ketvirtadienis* Thu, *penktadienis* Fri, *šeštadienis* Sat, *sekmadienis* Sun. Latvian has an identical model with one exception, namely, Sunday has a name with a religious motivation: *svētdiena* ‘Holy day’.

It can be noticed that the ordinal based names in Karelian, Vepsian and Izhor have two different endings: *arki* and *päivä*. Kustaa Vilkuna explains that originally all workdays were named *arki*. However, due to the Orthodox Christian influence, Wednesday could not be called merely ‘the third workday’, because it had a great religious importance as a fast day. So it had to be named more neutrally as

*kolmapäivä*, the ‘third day’. Afterwards, the ‘fourth’ and the ‘fifth workday’ analogically became *neljäspäivä* ‘the fourth day’ and *viiespäivä* ‘the fifth day’.

There are identical ordinal-based principles also in Estonian and Livonian, but the names of Friday, Saturday and Sunday are based on other principles. It is very possible that the ordinal based naming system was borrowed from the Baltic languages.

|            | <b>Estonian</b>  | <b>South Estonian</b>     | <b>Livonian</b>       |
|------------|------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Mon</b> | <i>esmaspäev</i> | <i>ÿispäiv</i>            | <i>e'žžõmpääva</i>    |
| <b>Tue</b> | <i>teisipäev</i> | <i>tõõsõpäiv</i>          | <i>tuuožnapääva</i>   |
| <b>Wed</b> | <i>kolmapäev</i> | <i>kolmapäiv</i>          | <i>kuolmõndpääva</i>  |
| <b>Thu</b> | <i>neljapäev</i> | <i>nelläpäiv</i>          | <i>nel'l'õndpääva</i> |
| <b>Fri</b> | <i>(reede)</i>   | <i>(`rjide)</i>           | <i>(breed'õg)</i>     |
| <b>Sat</b> | <i>laupäev</i>   | <i>(puul'päiv /-püha)</i> | <i>(puuolpääva)</i>   |

In many cases, Wednesday is named as ‘the center of the week’. This can be seen in the Germanic languages, like German (*Mittwoch*), Icelandic (*miðvikudagur*) and Old Norse (*miðvikudagr*). Slavic languages also have a similar naming principle: Russian *среда* (< Old Church Slavonic *srěda*) originally meant ‘the heart of the week’.

Russian *среда* is widely adopted in the Eastern Finnic languages: Izhor *serreeta*, Karelian *šeroda*, Votic *sereda*. It usually replaced the older name meaning ‘the 3rd day’.

Finnish *keskiviikko* appears to be an original Finnish or Finnic name, but probably it is a loan translation from Old Norse (*miðvikudagr*). In Old Swedish, the name of Wednesday was ‘the day of Odin’. However, as the *middeveke* of the Middle Low German indicates, old Scandinavians could also have such name for Wednesday, which was adopted by the Finns and later replaced by ‘the day of Odin’.

The form *kesknädala* or *keskviiko* ‘center of the week’ predominates also in North Estonian dialects, unlike in Standard Estonian, where *kolmapäev* ‘the 3rd day’ is used.

It is Friday that most usually has a name borrowed from Russian (Karelian *piätinčä*, Izhor *päätetsä*, Votic *päätittsa* < Russian *пятница*) and even if it has an indigenous name, it is not *arki* but *päivä*. However, it has been observed that the most remote Izhor and Votic dialects have ‘the fifth day’ rather than ‘the fifth

workday'. In northern Karelian *neljäspäivä* 'the fourth day' meaning Thursday has also been attested.

### 3. The weekend

|                 | <b>Friday</b>                                   | <b>Saturday</b>                    | <b>Sunday</b>          |
|-----------------|---|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Finnish</b>  | <i>perjantai</i>                                | <i>lauantai</i>                    | <i>sunnuntai, pyhä</i> |
| <b>Karelian</b> | <i>piätinč(č)ä</i>                              | <i>šuoventa,<br/>suovattu</i>      | <i>pühäpäivä</i>       |
| <b>Izhor</b>    | <i>päätetsä,<br/>päättentsä<br/>viijespäivä</i> | <i>soovatta</i>                    | <i>pühä</i>            |
| <b>Vepsian</b>  | <i>pätnič</i>                                   | <i>sobat</i>                       | <i>pühapäi</i>         |
| <b>Votic</b>    | <i>pääntitsa,<br/>viijespäivä</i>               | <i>lauk(o)päivä,<br/>subott(a)</i> | <i>pühä(päivä)</i>     |
| <b>Estonian</b> | <i>reede</i>                                    | <i>laupäev</i>                     | <i>pühapäev</i>        |
| <b>Livonian</b> | <i>breed'õg</i>                                 | <i>puuolpääva</i>                  | <i>pivaapääva</i>      |

Saturday in Finnish, Estonian and Votic is adopted from the Germanic peoples (< Old Norse *laugardagr*, Proto-Germanic \**Laugō dagaz*). Its meaning was 'bath day' (it is interesting that Saturday is still the most important day for sauna in Finland).

The rest of the Finnic languages have the Slavic-Russian *cyббoma*: *suovatta*, *šuoventa*, *suovattu*, *soavattu* in the Karelian dialects; *sobat* in Vepsian and *soovatta* in Izhor. Russian (and Slavic) *cyббoma* has its origins in the Hebrew *Shabbat*.

The most interesting variants are Southern Finnic 'half days': *puuolpääva* in Livonian and *puul'päiv* / *puul'püha* 'half day' / 'half holiday' in Southern Estonia. These names demonstrate the idea of Saturday being only a semi-workday before the great weekly holiday of Sunday.

Finally, the most important day of the week, the weekly holiday, Sunday. In Finnic languages there are two naming principles for it: *sunnuntai* in Finnish and *pyhä/püha/pühä* in the rest of the Finnic languages. The form *sunnuntai* is used only by Finns in Finland or in the historical Ingria (by Ingrian Finns in Ingria, in Finnish: *Inkeri*, in Russian: *Ingermanlandiya*).

The other name for Sunday, *pyhä* 'holy, sacred (day)' is also widely used in the Finnish dialects. In Finland, the difference between *sunnuntai* and *pyhä* depends on

the usage: usually Sunday was called *pyhä* in Finnish, but if there happened to be another holiday or feast-day directly before or after it, they were distinguished from each other by calling that Sunday *sunnuntai*. This means that every *sunnuntai* was *pyhä*, but not every *pyhä* was *sunnuntai*.

In the other Finnic languages, Sunday is exclusively *pühä/püha*. In spite of the strong Russian influence, the only Finnic language that has borrowed Russian Sunday *nedel'nik* is Votic, and even there, *nätilpäivä* is not as common as *pühä*.

#### 4. Dating the names of the days

According to the ethnologist Kustaa Vilkuna (1959), the oldest name of the day in the Finnic languages is the *pyhä* ‘Sunday’. It was the sacred day, taboo day, with several social restrictions. It was the most important day of the week: therefore, it got a name before the other days. Originally, according to the lunar calendar, *pyhä* was the day without the Moon, and as the new moon appeared, the new week had begun (and this day was called ‘the Moon’s day’ or ‘the first day’ in several languages).

Most likely the old Finnic peoples had a name only for Sunday while the rest of the days were numbered, as it is still the case on the periphery of the Finnic languages.

Traditionally, the names of the days in Finnish are considered to be Old Swedish loanwords dating from between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, three of them – *lauantai*, *perjantai* and *sunnuntai* – were considered even older Germanic loanwords. Hakulinen (1946) found it strange that the rest of the names of the days would have been adopted later from Old Swedish (which developed from Old East Norse in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century).

In Old Swedish, Saturday was *lōghardagher*, as in Finnish it is *lauantai* (in Estonian: *laupäev*, in Votic: *laukopäivä*). The Old Norse diphthong *au* was monophthongized to *ō* in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and, therefore, *lauantai* had to be adopted before then.

The *-n-* in *maanantai*, *perjantai*, *lauantai* and *sunnuntai* is etymologically problematic. There was no *-n-* in the corresponding forms of Old Norse (*mánudagr*, *frijādagr*, *laugardagr*, *sunnudagr*), yet there was one in *\*sunnundag* in Old Low German and in *sunnúntag* in Old High German and apparently also in *\*mānundag* in Old Low German. Old Low German (and also Old Saxon) was spoken between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries on the southern coasts of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. This is why we can assume that the ancient Finns adopted the names of the days in the period of Old East Norse (between 800 and 1100) – or even before then.

Phonologically, the most problematic is *perjantai*. If it had been borrowed from Old (East) Norse (*frijadagr*) or Old Swedish (*frēadagher*), it would be phonologically adapted as "reejatai", "reijatai" (or something like that, as Estonian *reede*). It would be expected that the consonant cluster *fr* in the beginning of the word only lose the first element, as it happened with the rest of the Scandinavian clusters as they were borrowed into Finnish (*strand* > *ranta*, *slaktare* > *lahtari*, *stall* > *talli*).

According to Bentlin (2008), the problem of *perjantai* can be solved with the hypothesis of Old Low German *\*perindag* (in Old Bavarian there was also *pferintag*). The problematic *-n-* mentioned above originates probably from *perjantai* and *sunnuntai*, and the *-n-* in *maanantai* and *lauantai* could be an analogy (otherwise it would be expected that *maanantai* was *maanatai* and *lauantai* was "lauartai", cf. Old Norse *laugardagr* and Old Swedish *mānadagher*, *löghardagher*).

In the historico-(cultural) context, the adoption of the names of the days can be seen as part of the Scandinavian influence, which became intense at the same time as the Viking Age had begun. The Western Finnish tribes were subordinated by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but the Christian influences had arrived even earlier. It is known that there were Christians living in Swedish Birka in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

The ordinal based naming principle of the days predominates in the rest of the Finnic languages. This is also why it has been connected with the Baltic or Slavic influence. However, it is possible that it is a relic of the indigenous Finnic week system, as mentioned above.

By the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Proto-Finnic consisted of three main dialects, the Western (in present-day Southern Finland), the Southern (present-day Estonia), and the Eastern (on the west coast of Lake Ladoga). Eastern Proto-Finnic developed later into the Karelian and Izhor languages.

The proto-Karelians were highly mobile, even expansive people, and they populated present-day Karelia and the west coast of the White Sea by the 12<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, or even earlier, the first Slavic influences were identified in the archaeological digs. They arrived from Kievan Rus, Christianized in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, so the first Christian influence arrived in Karelia probably also in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Russian domination was established slowly by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The first border between Sweden and Novgorod was drawn in 1323 by the Treaty of Pähkinäsaari (Nöteborg, Oreschen). The Pähkinäsaari border separated the Finns and the Karelians both linguistically and culturally from each other.

The new border was not only political, it was also cultural, economical and religious between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches.

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