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THE LOANWORD *mei(j)u* IN FINNIC LANGUAGES*

Abstract. The custom of bringing home young birches and green branches for spring/summer festivities has been practised by Proto-Finnic as well as by Germanic peoples ever since pre-Christian times. Later the ancient custom was transferred to Christian festivals. In some Estonian and Finnish dialects and in the Livonian language such young birches and branches are referred to by a noun with the stem *mei*, while a verb with the same stem occurs more rarely. Some Finnic dialects have borrowed the originally Low German word via Swedish or Latvian mediators. The areal distribution and phonetic variants occurring in Estonian dialects are suggestive of influences from various directions. The origin of the Low German source word is, in turn, associated with the Latin name of the month *maius*. Bible translations have contributed to spreading the word in the sense of holiday birches and bouquets.

Keywords: Estonian, Finnish, Livonian, midsummer birches, etymology.

The tradition of bringing home green birch branches

The Finnic people have a custom to bring home birch saplings and green branches for spring/summer festivities, especially for Midsummer Day. In Finland and Karelia Midsummer celebrations required that young birches (*juhannuskoivut*) be placed in the yard and on either side of the steps to the front door. In Northern Karelia and in some places in Finland birch boughs have been used to decorate the living room as well. In some homes fresh leaves were scattered over the floor and under the bed (SMSA; Vuorela 1979 : 270).

The Estonian tradition of bringing home birches mainly associates with Midsummer Day (St. John's Day) or Whitsun (Pentecost). Single reports also mention Ascension Day. The saplings were mostly placed in dwelling-rooms, especially at bedheads, less frequently in outbuildings, but the yard, eaves and the village green also got their share of the decorations. In some places people would even stick birch twigs in their cabbage bed or, as in Setumaa, in the grave mounds. Besides birches, bird cherry branches and spring flowers could be used or even junipers in the Isles of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa (EMSUKA; ERK III 210–211, 220–221, 330–331; <http://www.folklore.ee/Berta/>).

The custom of bringing home birch saplings dates back to pre-Christian times, and it was primarily found within the nations of Germanic Europe

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when celebrating the beginning of summer. The original semantic context of the rite is unknown, although it has been speculated that it had some importance in the Germanic paganism. Later, when many folk holidays were redefined as Christian ones, Midsummer Day was dedicated to St. John (Finnish *juhannus* etc., Estonian *jaanipäev*). As a result, the old customs were still practised, but their original meaning gradually fell into oblivion. The Whitsun custom of decorating homes and churches with green branches, called *meien* (pl.) etc. in Low German, is believed to have become general in Germany in the 11th century. Apart from that, in many places, Estonia included, young men would bring a birch sapling under a girl's window or behind her door as a sign of liking (Schiller, Lübben 1877 : 57; ERK III 221; IV 48–49).

Medieval Europe used to celebrate the beginning of summer either on May Day Eve, the first Sunday of May, Whitsun (Pentecost), or Midsummer Day round the may-tree (or maypole, Germ. *Maibaum*). A dictionary of modern German presents the entry *Maie* and the following explanation: "*junger Baum, bes. junge Birke oder Birkenzweige, die am ersten Mai, zu Frühlingsfesten oder Pfingsten als Festschmuck dienen*" (WbDG 2425).

The Finnic peoples usually did not make a maypole, but the Swedes living in Finland and Estonia are known to have erected decorated poles for Midsummer festivities, called *maj-stång*, *missåmmarstång* etc. in Finland-Swedish dialects, and *mitsōma-stak*, *mitsōmar-stong*, *mitsōmas-stong* in Estonian Swedish dialects, cf. Sw. *maj-*, *majastång*, *midsommar stång* (Danell 1951 : 272; Isberg 1970 : 205; OFSF IV 320, 385–386, 494, SAOB s.v. *midsommar(s)stång*).

The *mei*-stemmed names of holiday birches in Finnic dialects

Although the tradition of bringing home birches was common throughout in Finland and Estonia, a special *mei*-stemmed name for the holiday birch or bouquet of twigs was used in a small area only. In Finnish, *meiju* is used in the dialects spoken in southern and south-western Häme and also in some places of Kymenlaakso and Varsinaissuomi dialect areas, while *meiju* and/or *möiju* have been reported from Laihia dialect in southern Ostrobothnian and from some dialects of western Satakunta. The reported meaning is 'birch sapling or a leafy branch of birch (also of rowan, bird cherry or some other deciduous tree), or a bouquet of twigs or flowers brought home for Midsummer'. There are also compounds *juhannus-*, *juhan(n)i-*, *juhanin/meiju* (< *juhannus* 'St. John's Day') and *meijukoivu* (*koivu* 'birch') (SMS 5 : 295, 299; SMSA; SKES 339; SSA 2 : 156–157). Verbs such as *meijuttaa*, *möijyttää*, *möijätä* meaning 'decorate with birches or branches' and *meijustaa* 'fetch holiday birches or green branches' are much less frequently found in dialect usage than the nouns (SMSA). The dictionary of modern Finnish published in 1954 contains *meiju* with the label "dialectal", meaning 'leafy branch, Midsummer birch' (NS 3 : 425). The word cannot be found in newer dictionaries of standard Finnish (e.g. PS; SESS; SSRS).

The Finnish *meiju* made its first appearance in 1551, in the Bible translated by Micael Agricola: *Caunistacat site Juhla meijnlehdille* 'decorate this holiday with *meijn-*', where there is believed to be a spelling error of *meijn-* pro *meiju-* (Jussila 1998 : 157; SSA 2 : 156). In Lönnrot's Finnish–Swedish dictionary (1958 [1874] : 1050) we find *meiju* explained in Swedish as *ungt*

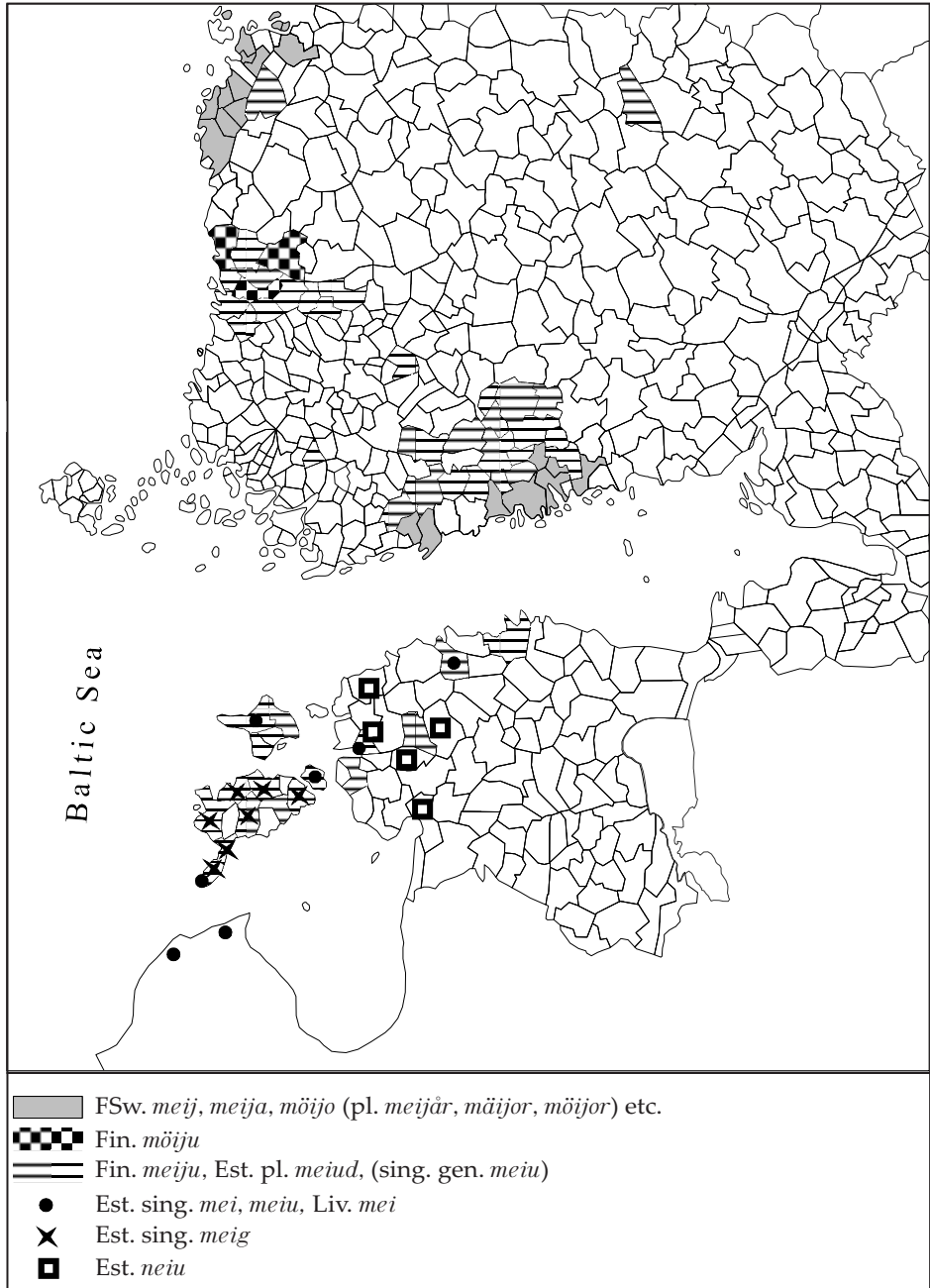
lõfträd helgdagslõf 'young deciduous tree as holiday decoration'. As part of Midsummer celebrations, the Finnish people occasionally built a temporary bower outside, which they called *meijumaja* or *lehtimaja* (< 'leaf' + 'house'). The last mentioned term is also used in the Finnish-language version of the Bible as equivalent to the German *Laubhütte*.

As to the recently leafed young birch or branch brought home for holiday in Estonia it has been called *meig* in Saaremaa, *mei* in Muhu and Reigi, and *meiu* in some other patois (Jämaja, Reigi, Martna, Jüri). The genitive singular form from all the nouns is *meiu* and nominative plural *meiud*. A diminutive form with *kene*-suffix has been reported from Keila subdialect: *Meiukestest tehti luud, paar kolm tükki pändi ühte* 'A besom was made of the *meiu*-branches, bundling two or three twigs together'. The birches brought home for Midsummer Day have occasionally been called *jaanimeiud* (< Jaan cf. John). Pentecost has sometimes also been called *kasepühad* 'birch holidays' or *meiud* (ERK III 209). The verb *meiutama*, with a factitive suffix, meaning 'decorate with birches' has been used in Muhu patois, e.g. *Juaniba piab ää meiutama* 'St. John's should be decorated with birches'; *asemed meiu-tati ää* 'beds used to be decorated with birches'. In the Island dialect of Estonian the month of May is called *meiukuu* (< *kuu* 'month') (EMSUKA; ERK IV 48). The dictionaries of modern standard Estonian present the words *meig* (gen. *meiu*, part. *meigu*) and *meiukuu* (EKSS 3 : 386, 388; ÕS 533). The Estonian standard of the early 20th century uses the nouns *mei* and *meiu* 'tree with young leaves, especially birch, as symbol of health and fertility', *meiukuu* 'May, the month of leafing out', the verb *meiutama* 'decorate with *meiu*-s' and the deverbal noun *meiutus* (EÕS I 486). Records of the 17th-century Estonian contain *Meijkuu* (also *Meykuh*) together with the vernacular equivalents *nellipõha kuu* and *Suij kuu* (? < Est. *suistekuu* 'Whitsun month') denoting the month of May, and the German *Meye* (*Pfingstmeyen*) for Whitsun birches (Göseken 1660 : 79, 294 and "Erratis Gravioribus"). The Estonian–German dictionary by F. J. Wiedemann gives *mei* from the Island dialect with German explanation as *Maie*, *Maibirke*, *meiukuu* = *Maimonat*, and, in a separate entry, *maius g maiuse, maiusekü* from Pärnumaa (Wiedemann 1973 : 566, 593).

In Livonian the holiday birch etc. is called *mei*, pl. *meijõd* (Sjögren 1861 : 61; LW 219). The following example represents Ire (Mazirbe) subdialect: *i'l su'is-pivàd puškàntõb vääridi un túbidi meijõdõks* 'for Whitsun (Pentecost), the gates and rooms are decorated with *mei*-branches' (LW 368). Although Livonian has a borrowed term *mai* (*kū*) (< Latv. *maijs*, dial. *mai* < Germ.) for the month of May, in older usage we find vernacular compound nouns such as *sü'izži-pivât-kū* (Piza) 'literally Pentecost month' and *li'edõt kū* or *léd' kū* 'literally month of leaves' (Sjögren 1861 : 277; LW 192, 215, 368).

Loan relations

The Finnish *meiju* has been attested as a Swedish loanword: < Sw. *maj* 'leafy branch', FSw. dial. *mäijor*, *möijor* (pl. tant.). The Swedish noun as well as the verb *mäja*, *maje* 'erect maypoles, adorn with leafy branches' has been borrowed from (Middle) Low German < LGerm. *mei*, *meije*, verb *meijen* id. (Ojansuu 1918 : 53; Hellquist 1922 : 449; SKES 339; SSA 2 : 156–157). In Finland, the words are mainly used in the neighbourhood of Swedish-speaking areas.



Swedish dialects have many phonetic variants from *maj*-, *mäi*-, *mej*- or *möj*-stem meaning 'leafy branches placed next to stairs, doors and windows by Midsummer Day'. The associated verbs are *mäja* and *möja* 'to place birches, erect maytrees' (OFSF IV 366, 494; SAOB, s.v. *maj*, *maja*; SSA 2 : 156–157). A comparison of the phonetic shapes and areal distribution of the Finnish and Finland-Swedish dialect words reveals that the Finnish dialect of Häme and the Finland-Swedish dialect of Nyland share the *-ei-* diphthong in the stem (Fin. *meiju*, Sw. dial. *meijo* pl. *meijår*). The Ostrobothnian dialect of Finland-Swedish uses *-öi-* like in *möij*, *möijo*, *möja*, etc., pl. *möijår*. This is

close to the Finnish dialect form *möiju* used in Laihia and Western Satakunta. The variant *meiju* may have spread in Satakunta either on the example of the Swedish *mäj-* stemmed word, in which *ä* is pronounced more like *e*, or on that of the Finnish *meiju*.

The Livonian *mei*, *mej*, *mejõz* 'holiday birch, leafy branch', must have been borrowed either directly from the Low-German word or as mediated by Latvian (Sjögren 1861 : 61; LW 219; Suhonen 1973 : 157). Latvians are also known to have brought home birches for Whitsunday and Midsummer Day. Both the noun and the verb have been used in Latvian: *meija* '(usually pl.) green birch bough or a bouquet of twigs used to decorate house and yard' < LGerm. *mei* 'ein grüner Birkenzweig, welcher im Frühling zur Ausschmückung der Häuser dient'; *meĵjât*, *meĵjêt*, *meĵjuôt* 'decorate with *meĵja*' < LGerm. *meijen* 'Maijen schneiden' (ME II 591; Sehwers 1918 : 124; 1953 : 78). The nouns such as *meĵja* 'holiday birch', the diminutive *meĵjina* and the verb *meĵjât* 'deliver and lodge holiday birches' have been recorded from the Ērgeme dialect of Latvian (ĒIV 2 : 290).

The current Estonian name *mai* of the month of May is not vernacular (see e.g. ERK III 150–151; Vahtre 1991 : 26; Viires 1993 : 79–80). It has been regarded either as a German < Germ. *Mai* (EEW 1484), Swedish < Sw. *maj* (Wiklund 1915 : 9, 15–16) or Low German loanword (Liin 1968 : 304; SKES 339). According to the Estonian etymological dictionary the Estonian word *meig*, *mei(u)* denoting a holiday birch has its source in the Low German word *mei*, *meige* 'May' (EES 279). It seems likely, though, that originally the source word used to stand for a holiday birch. According to the several earlier publications the Estonian *meig* has been borrowed from a Low German word meaning 'young birch; green bough brought home for a holiday' (see Hupel 1818 : 139; Ariste 1937 : 136; Liin 1968 : 304; SKES 339; EEW 1524). As the Estonian nominative form *mei* does not anticipate *meiu* as the genitive form Paul Ariste has suggested that the *-u* imparts a diminutive nuance.

Considering, on the one hand, the phonetic shape and areal distribution of the Estonian words in question and, on the other hand, the lexical usage of the neighbouring peoples as well as the traditional areas of linguistic influence, the Estonian terms could possibly have been borrowed from different sources. The great number of the phonetic shapes of the word recorded from Low German and Early High German suggests that the borrowing might occurred from different word shapes. The *meig* of Saaremaa is obviously a loan from a Low-German word meaning 'holiday birch'. According to Julius Mägiste the consonant *-g* could have been introduced in the strong-grade forms due to analogy, cf. e.g. Est *peig* gen. *peiu* (EEW 1524). It seems more likely, though, that the variant with *-g* was also borrowed from Low German dialect usage, cf. LGerm. *mei(ge)*, *meigh* (Grimm, Grimm 12 : 1474; Schiller, Lübben 1877 : 57). Notably, the Baltic Germans often used between front vowels the sound *j* instead of *g*. As immigrants arrived in the Baltics from several Low German areas, some of them probably used *g*, while some others used *j* (see e.g. Ariste 1972 : 94). The *meiu* of the Northern Estonian coast seems likely to originate from Finland-Swedish or Finnish dialects spoken in the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland. For the terms used in the Isle of Hiiumaa and in Läänemaa the immediate source of borrowing is difficult to ascertain, but here too a Swedish background would be expectable.

Relations between the Low German words for 'May' and 'May tree'

As can be concluded from the above the Finnic dialect names for holiday birch originate in Low German words denoting the concepts of 'May' and 'holiday birch (or other herbal decorations)'. The last mentioned category covers young trees (birch, beech, spruce), green boughs and saplings brought in for the festivities as well as bouquets or wreaths made of herbs or flowers. The spelling of the noun in Low German (and Middle Low German) texts varies: *meie*, *meije*, *meye*, *mey*, *meygh*, *meige*, *meyge*, *maig*, *maie*, *maye* (Grimm, Grimm 12 : 1473–1475; Weinhold 1869 : 50; Gutzeit 1887 : 228–229; Schiller, Lübben 1877 : 57). The terms for holiday birches etc. have been believed to originate in the name of the month of May, based on the argument that young leaves and other fresh plants are "*Erzeugnis des Mais*" 'product of May' (Grimm, Grimm 12 : 1475, <http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/maie>). Part of the equivalents given to the Low German words in etymological dictionaries are month names: Germ. *Mai*, Sw. and Dan. *maj*, Nor. *mai*, Eng. *may*, Fr. *mai* etc., while the other group consists of nouns for holiday-birches and green boughs for adornment': Germ. *Maie*, Dan. *maj*, Fr. *maie*, It. *majo* etc. The origin of both groups is associated with the Latin month name *Maius* (Hellquist 1922 : 449; Kluge 2002 : 454; NR III 6; SAOB, s.v. MAJ; Sehwers 1953 : 78). Besides the noun the Germanic languages as well as Latvian display a verb of the same stem: Germ. *maien*, Sw. *maja* (dial. *meja*, *möja*, *mäja*), Dan. and Nor. *maie* (Old Dan. *maje*), Latv. *meĵāt* (Hellquist 1922 : 449; ME II 591; SAOB, s.v. MAJA). The verb is also considered a Low German loanword. According to August Lübben the Low German verb *meien* means 'Eintritt des Sommers feiern; sich (im Freien) erlustigen' (Lübben 1993 [1888] : 223).

Although the month name and the terms for holiday-birches are phonetically close, their mutual relations are unclear. Earlier the Low German words have been used both with a masculine and a feminine article. In the 16th–18th centuries the masculine article became fixed to the month name: *ein maie*, whereas the feminine article became a feature of the noun for holiday birch etc.: *eine meye* (*meie*, *maie*, *maye*) (Kluge 2002 : 454–455). In Grimms' dictionary the sense 'holiday birch etc.' of the entry *maie* has been divided into four subsenses: (1) tree, usually birch, in places also beech, spruce etc., (2) (usually pl.) green (birch) branches as room decoration, (3) bouquet or wreath, (4) sapling (usually birch) (Grimm, Grimm 12 : 1475, <http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/>). As we can see, three of the subsenses refer to a tree or part of it, while only one refers to herbs (most of the examples come from southern Germany).

The phonetic equivalents of the month name *mai* are rare in medieval German sources, mainly occurring in poetic usage (Gutzeit 1887 : 229). According to Karl Weinhold's study "Die deutschen Monatnamen" the oldest German calendars date from the 16th–17th centuries, but the Low German month name *mei* first appears in a 15th-century Latin-German dictionary (Weinhold 1869 : 8–9). The earlier folk calendar of the Germanic peoples was based on natural conditions, while church dates were added a little later (Weinhold 1869 : 18–19). The term *mey* has also been used to refer to a longer period of time, covering the whole spring: *mey = Frūling: de beghynnet in sunte Peters daghe, de summer in sunte Urbans daghe* (today from February 22 to May 25). The month was specified with the compound

word *meiman* (*meimaen, meimane, meigman*) 'May + month'. Sometimes the name *may* has been used for two calendar months: *der erst may* 'May', *der ander may* (*ander meie, ander meige*) 'June' (Weinhold 1869 : 50). A. Lübben distinguishes between three senses of *mei, meig*: 1. 'der Monat Mai; Frühling; fig. Blüte, Flor.'; 2. 'Maifest'; 3. m.d. Pl. *meige, meigen* 'grüner Festzweig, Reis von Birken etc. zum Schmuck der Kirchen u. Häuser in den riden das Maifest feiern' (Lübben 1993 [1888] : 223).

It has been considered questionable just why a tree, esp. birch (in places rarely also some other trees) should have been called the "product of May". Spring, after all, is the time when all herbs sprout, most flowers bloom and all deciduous trees leaf out. Moreover, plants differ in the northern and southern regions of the German language area, depending on natural conditions (see e.g. Gutzeit 1887 : 228). Could it be that a *mei*-stemmed word was once used to refer to a tree, especially a young birch? In some North German dialects *maie* (LGerm. *meie*) really functioned as the general term for birch (*betula*), but its origin is associated with a word for holiday birch (ALE 1986 : 93, map 24). In Grimms' dictionary the Latin equivalent for the German compound word *birkenmeie* is *betula* 'birch' and the German *birkenmai* is translated as *ramus betulaceus* 'birch branch' (Grimm, Grimm 2 : 39). In northern Germany birch wood has been called *maienwald* (Grimm, Grimm 12 : 1480). It deserves mention that the dialect word *maie* as a common name for 'birch' has been recorded from the former East Low German area of Sachsen-Anhalt (LGerm.: *Sassen-Anhalt*). This is namely the same region where Martin Luther's two home towns (the so-called Lutherstädten) Eisleben and Wittemberg are situated. Hence it is possible that the noun *meie* meaning 'birch' has spread in the area as mediated by M. Luther's translation of the Bible. In the opposite case, i.e. if M. Luther had used a birch name known from his home dialect in his Low-German translation of the Bible, the association of the word with the month name would be somewhat surprising.

Semantic equivalents of *meiju* in Finnic dialects

Most Finnic dialects do not have a special term for the holiday birch, branches or bouquet. The entities are referred to by common names for tree and branch and words denoting birch (seldom some other tree). If specification is necessary, compounds are made up, using the term for Midsummer Day as the first component. The most common Finnish term for the holiday birch is *juhannus-*, *juhannes-*, *juhan(n)i-* or *juhan(n)inlkoivu*, in the dialects of Varsinaisuus and South Satakunta *juhannuskaski* (SMS 5 : 298). Often the branches of various other trees brought home for Midsummer have also been termed as *juhannuslkoivu* 'St. John's birch', but other words can also be found in the position of the second component of the compound, e.g. *juhannus-* or *johanneslkuusi* (*kuusi* 'fir tree'), *juhannuspuu* (*puu* 'tree'), in Häme we find *juhannuslimo* or just *limo*, *liimake* 'young deciduous tree; branch with young leaves' and *juhannuslehdet* (*lehdet* 'leaves'), *-lehdokset* or *-lehdot* (SMS 5 : 175, 299; SMSA). In south-eastern Finnish dialects there are a couple of examples of *mehe*-stemmed nouns referring to holiday birch: *mehheine*, *mehes* etc (SMSA). The same noun may occur as part of a compound, e.g. *juhannusmehet* (SMS 5 : 299). In south-eastern Finland and in Karelia a *mehe*-stemmed word was used in a wider sense, denoting 'moisture, moist; juice,

juicy' etc., and when applying to plants it could also mean 'green, fresh, vigorous' (KKS 3 : 286–287; NS 3 : 422–423; SMSA; SSA 2 : 156). The leaves and herbs scattered across the floor for St. John's Day were called *juhannusheinä* and *juhannusruoho* (*heinä*, *ruoho* 'grass') (SMS 5 : 297, 299).

Also in Estonian instead of the loanword *meiud* the name for 'birch' (usually pl.) is mainly used: in the North-Estonian area the noun is *kask*, pl. *kased*, sometimes also *jaanikased* 'St. John's birches' (EMSUKA). The South-Estonian equivalents for *meiud*: *kõiv*, *kõev*, *kõju*, pl. *kõivu*, *kõevo*, *kõo* etc. mean also 'birch' and 'birches' (EMS IV 222). Thus, the above nouns are common names denoting fresh birches or some other green trees or boughs, becoming a full synonym of *meiju/meiu* when supplemented with a first component meaning St. John's Day. The Finnish words *mehekset* (pl.), *limo*, *koivu*, *puu* etc. and the Estonian *kased* (pl.) etc. may mean the same only in the right context.

In a couple of Estonian subdialects *meiu* has a synonym *neiu*, which normally means 'maid; girl'. The plural form *neiud*, *neiuksed* (*neioksed*) has been used for holiday birches in some places of the Western dialect area and its neighbourhood (EMSUKA). Hence the name of *neiude pühad* 'literally girls' feast' used for Pentecost. The singular form occurs only in the compound word *neiukask* 'Midsummer birch' recorded from Vigala (EMSUKA). This is probably folk etymology. The loanword *meiud* was replaced by *neiud* as a phonetically similar familiar word, in turn producing such phrases as *neiude pühad* and *neiukask* and the diminutive derivative *neiuksed* (*neiu* + suffix *-ke(ne)*, pl. *-k(e)sed*). However, the name of the holiday may also have been associated with the ancient custom of bringing the girls the so-called love birches on Midsummer Eve (see Tedre 1973 : 15). Reportedly, in some subdialects the leafy spring/summer symbols have been called *neitsid* 'virgin; maid' (ERK III 220). There is, however, no such material in the Estonian dialect archive.

Conclusion

In some Finnish, Estonian and Livonian subdialects the birches brought home for Whitsunday and Midsummer (St John's) Day are referred to by a special term, a noun mostly occurring in plural: Fin. *meiju* (pl. *-t*), Est. *meiu* (pl. *-d*), Liv. *mei* (pl. *meijõd*) etc.

The uses of verbs of the same stem are relatively rare: Fin. dial. *meijutaa*, *möijyttää*, *möijätä*, Est. *meiutama* 'decorate with birches or branches' and Fin. *meijustaa* 'bring birches and branches for holiday'. The dialect words with a relevant stem occur along a narrow strip of land in the western part of the Finnic area and near the Gulf of Finland. Low German loanwords with a similar stem and meaning are used in the neighbouring Swedish and Latvian speaking areas.

Finnish has borrowed the originally Low German word from Swedish, with considerable help of the Swedish dialects spoken in Finland. Livonian material contains both a direct Low German loan and a word shape obviously mediated by Latvian. Opinions differ as to the etymology of the Estonian words in question. Considering, on the one hand, the phonetic shapes of the loanwords and their areal distribution in Estonian dialects, and on the other hand, the lexical usage of the dialects of neighbouring

languages as well as the traditional areas of linguistic influence, Estonian can have borrowed the words from two directions. Namely, the *meig* of Saaremaa is obviously a Low German loanword, cf. LGerm. *meige*, *meigh* 'holiday birch', whereas the *meiu* (pl. *-d*) used in the northern Estonian coast could easily have been borrowed from Swedish or Finnish dialects, cf. *meiju*. The variants used in the Isle of Hiiumaa and in Läänemaa in western Estonia, their immediate source could have been Swedish as well as Low German.

In most Finnic dialects there is no special term for the birches and branches procured for holiday decorations. Instead, common names for birch (rarely for some other tree) and green branches such as Fin. *koivu*, *puu*, *limo*, (pl.) *mehekset* etc. and Est. (pl.) *kased*, *kõevu*, *kõo* 'birches' etc. were used, and if necessary, specified with a first component marking Midsummer Day. In some places in the Estonian mainland holiday birches have been called *neiud* or *neiuk(e)sed*, possibly based on a folk-etymological interpretation of the loanword *meiud*.

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Abbreviations

ALE — Atlas Linguarum Europae (ALE). Volume 1. Deuxième fascicule. Cartes et Commentaires, Assen—Maastricht 1986; **EES** — I. Metsmägi, M. Sedrik, S.-E. Soosaar, Eesti etümoloogiasõnaraamat, Tallinn 2012; **ĒIV 2** — E. Kaga in e, S. Raģe, Ērgemes izloksnes vārdnīca 2. J—P, Rīga 1978; **EKSS** — Eesti keele seletav sõnaraamat. "Eesti kirjakeele seletussõnaraamatu" 2., täiendatud ja parandatud trükk, Tallinn 2009; **EMS** — Eesti murrete sõnaraamat I—V, Tallinn 1994—1912; **EMSUKA** — Eesti murrete ja soome-ugri keelte arhiiv (Archive of Estonian dialects and Finno-Ugric languages (Institute of the Estonian Language, Tallinn)); **ERK** — M. Hiiemäe, Eesti rahvakalender III—IV, Tallinn 1984—1985; **EÕS** — Eesti õigekeelsuse-sõnaraamat I. A—M. „Eesti keele õigekirjutuse sõnaraamatu” II täiendatud ja parandatud trükk, Tartu 1925; **Grimm, Grimm** — Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, 16 Bde. [in 32 Teilbänden], Leipzig 1854—1960 auf CD-ROM und im Internet. <http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/>; **LW** — L. Kettunen, Livisches Wörterbuch mit grammatischer Einleitung, Helsinki 1938 (LSFU V); **ME** — K. Mülenbacha Latviešu valodas vārdnīca I—IV. Rediģējis, papildinājis, turpinājis J. Endzelins, Rīgā 1923—1932; **NR** — Norsk riksmålsordbok III. *M—studervoerelse*, Oslo 1983; **NS** — Nykysuomen sanakirja 3. *L—N*, 1954, Porvoo—Helsinki; **OFSF** — Ordbok över Finlands svenska folkhäl IV. *kyssa—och*, Helsingfors 2007; **PS** — Suomen kielen perussanakirja, Helsinki 1996 (Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja 55); **SAOB** — Svenska Akademiens Ordbok. <http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/>; **SESS** — Soome-eesti suursõnaraamat. Suomi-viro suursanakirja, Tallinn—Helsinki 2003; **SMS** — Suomen murteiden sanakirja 5, Helsinki 1997 (Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja 36.); **SMSA** — Suomen murteiden sanaarkisto (Lexical Archive of Finnish Dialects (Institute for the Languages of Finland, Helsinki)); **SSRS** — Suuri suomi-ruotsi sanakirja. Stora finsk-svenska ordboken, Porvoo—Helsinki—Juva 1997; **WbDG** — Wörterbuch der deutschen Gegenwartssprache 4, *M—Schinken*, Berlin 1974; **ÕS** — Eesti õigekeelsussõnaraamat ÕS 2013. Koostanud T. Erelt, T. Leemets, S. Mäearu, M. Raadik, Tallinn 2013.

Dan. — Danish; **Eng.** — English; **Est.** — Estonian; **Fin.** — Finnish; **Fsw.** — Finland-Swedish; **Fr** — French; **Germ.** — German; **It.** — Italian; **Latv.** — Latvian; **LGerm.** — Low-German; **Liv.** — Livonian; **Nor.** — Norwegian; **Sw.** — Swedish.

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ВИЛЬЯ ОЯ (Таллинн)

ЗАИМСТВОВАНИЕ *mei(j)u* В ПРИБАЛТИЙСКО-ФИНСКИХ ЯЗЫКАХ

В некоторых финских, эстонских и ливских диалектах для обозначения березы, которую принято приносить в дом на Троицу и Иванов день, используется существительное с корнем *mei-*, причем большей частью во множественном числе: фин. *meiju*, *möiju* (мн. ч. *-t*), эст. *mei*, *meig*, *meiu* (мн. ч. *meiud*), лив. *mei* (мн. ч. *meijõd*). Реже встречаются глаголы с тем же корнем: фин. диал. *meijuttaa*, *möijytätä*, *möijätä* 'украшать березами или ветками' и *meijustaa* 'приносить домой праздничную березу и ветки', эст. *meiutama* в значении 'принести и поставить праздничную березу'. Эти слова получили распространение на довольно ограниченной узкой территории на западе ареала прибалтийско-финских языков и вблизи Финского залива. Слова с подобным корнем и в таком же значении известны по соседству — в шведском и латышском языках. Все они зародились в нижненемецких диалектах. Происхождение нижненемецкого слова обычно связывается с названием месяца мая в латинском языке — *maius*. Распространению его способствовали, очевидно, библейские тексты.

В ливском языке встречаются как непосредственное заимствование из нижненемецкого, так и его форма, полученная через посредство латышского языка. В финский язык нижненемецкое слово попало через шведский, при этом большое влияние оказали финско-шведские диалекты. Относительно точной этимологии эстонского слова высказывались разные мнения. Учитывая, с одной стороны, фонетические формы и распространение эстонского слова, с другой, словоупотребление у соседей и традиционные сферы влияния языковых контактов, можно сделать вывод, что эстонские слова имели разные источники заимствования. Сааремааское *meig*, вероятно, заимствовано из нижненемецкого со значением 'праздничная береза'. Эстонское северо-прибрежное *meiu(d)* может быть заимствованием из финско-шведских или финских диалектов. Относительно хийумааских и ляэнемааских слов тоже наиболее вероятен фон шведского языка.

В большинстве прибалтийско-финских говоров специальные наименования для праздничных берез отсутствуют. Обычно используются диалектные названия березы и зеленых веток. Кое-где в материковой Эстонии о них говорят *neiud*, *neiuk(e)sed* 'девушки', но это скорее народно-этимологическая трактовка слова *meiud*.