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# Imperial History in an Estonian Folktale: Discussion in the Estonian Media in the 1890s

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**Abstract:** In the summer of 1890 several Estonian newspapers published articles about the possible national and historical background of a folktale called *Majaussi kasvandikud* ('The Boys Brought up by the House Snake'). The event started when schoolteacher Mihkel Kampmann published the narrative in the newspaper *Sakala* and insisted that the names of the protagonists (Rahurikkuja, Siniuss, Truuvaar) looked suspiciously similar to the ancient kings of Russia mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle* (discussants use the earlier name *Nestor's Chronicle*). The discussion that followed focused on the question of whether there is any possible connection between those two narratives, and, if there is, what kind of new knowledge can be gained from the Estonian folktale?

In analysing the discussion, I was not interested in the scientific truth (be it history or folkloristics) behind the possible connection of the two narratives or the origins of the folktale. I enquired as to why this folktale was felt to be so relevant and what the questions and problems were that the participants hoped to solve with the help of the narrative.

**Keywords:** mythology, media folklore, folklore, fictional folklore, Ado Grenzstein

> Once upon a time, there was a man who had three sons. He found a bluish snake in the woods and brought it home for the children to play with. The snake soon became a house snake; it played nicely with the children and ate from the same bowl. The eldest son was quarrelsome and would not leave the others alone. The snake liked the middle son most, as he was placid and deft. But the third son was faithful and loyal and was the best of the three. When the boys had come of age, the house snake said: "I will go back to my place now, but first I will give all of you names: the eldest brother's name is Rahurikkuja[1], the middle brother's name is Siniuss[2], and the youngest brother is Truuvaar[3]. Then the snake returned to the woods.
>
> When a war broke out, the three brothers went to fight, together with others, and they won. Due to their bravery, they were elected tribal elders. Afterwards they became kings in foreign countries. (Rein Ruute, 8 July 1890, Väike-Maarja Parish; published in Grenzstein 1890b)

History writing is never neutral: it tells us as much about the present as about the past. Although history writers often argue that they merely write down what has happened, many of them also create new interpretations, i.e., *rewrite* history. Jaan Undusk has noted that while writing history "fixes the beginning of history", "[r]ewriting establishes someone's right to history. Rewriting indicates that each history has an alternative … that each one of us can become a subject to history" (1997: 722–723). To prove the 'history suitability' of a small nation, it does not suffice to merely highlight their existence; different rhetorical devices need to be applied to emphasise the nation's importance from the point of

view of humanity (ibid.). Undusk states that Estonian history writing started with different *rewritings* of history. Because Estonian historiographers initially had no new sources, they had to connect bits and pieces from earlier histories in which Estonians were not the main characters, and to create a *rewritten* version that put Estonians at the forefront (ibid.).

Undusk's idea is well connected with Eda Kalmre's (2013) approach to "the great stories of a small nation", i.e. stories about the Estonian origin of well-known people, the role that Estonians played in important historical events, etc. Kalmre writes that these "stories reveal the Estonians' latent cultural desire for a higher descent and personal and national success" (Kalmre 2013: 26). Usually these stories emerge and spread at unstable times in the life of a nation. So, despite the ephemerality of the stories, in a more general context we could speak about an enduring tradition: "We may not take these fantastic stories quite so seriously, but these stories shaped as legends and rumours still articulate the individual and collective aspirations and needs in certain periods of time" (ibid. 38).

This article focuses on a media discussion in the 1890s, which, on the basis of a folktale, made an attempt to (re)interpret the position of Estonians in the Russian Empire. The starting point of the discussion was the folktale Majaussi kasvandikud ('The Boys Brought up by the House Snake'), published in the newspaper *Sakala* in the summer of 1890. Parish clerk and schoolteacher Mihkel Kampmann wrote a commentary to the story, in which he referred to its possible connections with the basic myth of the Russian Empire presented in the *Primary Chronicle* (also known as *The Tale of Past Years*) (see Cross & Olgerd 1953: 59–60). The discussion that followed raised the question of whether this connection could reveal some new information about possible relations between the Estonian and Russian nations in the past.

Below I would like to offer an insight into the textual field surrounding this article, both oral and written, public and private, those preceding and those succeeding Kampmann's article. For me, the most fascinating issue is the question of what made this narrative so meaningful and topical for these people at that time? But before contemplating the discussion itself, I would like to present some details about the historical context.

## 0.1 Estonia and Estonians in the 19th century

Before 24 February 1918, the territory we call Estonia belonged to the Russian Empire. Estonians did not have an administrative unit of their own; what is now northern Estonia was called the Governorate of Estonia, whereas southern Estonia was part of the Governorate of Livonia (together with northern Latvia). Local power was divided between the Baltic-German elite and Russians; the Estonian-speaking majority was mainly agrarian (in the case of social advancement they generally became Germanised).

Throughout the 19th century, the status of Estonians improved. The abolition of serfdom (in the Governorate of Estonia in 1816 and in the Governorate of Livonia in 1819) and the establishment of the right to own land (in the Governorate of Livonia in 1849 and in the Governorate of Estonia in 1856) gave rise to economic independence. The formation of the village school network (fully formed in the Governorate of Livonia by the 1850s and in the Governorate of Estonia by the 1870s) brought about a considerable increase in literacy: according to the census of 1881, 93.7% of adults were able to read and 35.2% could also write; according to the census of 1897, 91% of the population was able to read and 77% also to write.

Economic independence and higher literacy rates can be linked to the rise of national consciousness. The breakthrough of national

ideas among Estonians is usually assumed to have taken place in the 1860s and was manifested in the establishment of various societies and the concomitant formation of the Estonian public sphere (Jansen 2004: 82 f.). National awakening meant interest in the nation's past and a wish to write a history with Estonians in the leading role.

## 0.2 History and folklore

As mentioned, Estonian history writing started with *rewriting* history. In these rewritings the earlier published histories were supplemented with material derived from oral accounts. Tiiu Jaago has noted that "in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, history and folklore were closely intertwined fields, both in the European research area and in Estonia" (Jaago 2014: 419). In the case of Estonia, this closeness stemmed from the fact that there were very few written sources about the lives of ethnic Estonians. All written histories focused on the deeds of the upper classes (who had a different ethnic background). In this context, oral texts were treated as a possible way to fill in the blanks in those written histories (or as a means of *rewriting* history in order to ensure a more central position for Estonians). One of the most efficacious images summarising this approach is Jakob Hurt's metaphor of folklore as "the chronicle of the Estonian nation" (Hurt 1989: 9–25). This image was strongly supported by the so-called synecdoche principle, the belief that the lore accessible today is a fragment of an earlier whole, and by means of these fragments it is possible to restore the former whole (be it an epos or history), so to say, to fulfil the synecdoche (about the synecdoche principle, see Undusk 1995: 669–70, about fulfilling the synecdoche 1995: 679, 749).

The metaphor of 'folklore as the chronicle of the Estonian nation' was coined by Hurt in 1871 – almost twenty years before

the discussion. In the meantime, several histories of the Estonian nation written by Estonians were published (see, e.g., Hurt 1879; Jakobson 1882; Eisen 1877). Yet, there was still hope that something hidden could be found by delving into folklore (see, e.g., Truusmann 1887b) so that by the late 1880s, folklore collection had become an almost nation-wide enterprise. The campaigns organised by Jakob Hurt and Matthias Johann Eisen had more than 2,000 participants (Kikas 2024: 13–15; Jaago 2005; Kuutma 2005), and newspapers were quite willing to report the progress of the campaigns (Kikas 2024: 57–61). The organisers of the campaigns often referred to this earlier metaphor praising good collectors for having written "an extensive chapter for the ancestors' chronicle" (Hurt 1889). Although the discussion examined here was not directly connected with the campaigns, it could certainly credit the well-established undertaking with the creation of a suitable atmosphere. By the way, almost all the people who participated in the discussion had also participated in the collecting campaigns (Kikas 2016: 25–26).

## 0.3 History and Russification

The discussion that this article focuses on took place at the beginning of the 1890s, a rather complicated period from the point of view of the nation, i.e. the so-called era of Russification[4]. Starting in the mid-1880s, different reforms were carried out in tsarist Russia and its client states that aimed to unite the empire more strongly. The reforms were mainly administrative, and in the area of today's Estonia they mainly targeted the special privileges of the Baltic-German elite (Raun 2009: 123; about so-called administrative Russification see 131–138). This was accompanied by tightened censorship, restrictions on political activity, a distrusting attitude towards the national ambitions of non-Russian nations, and the

exclusion of local languages (Estonian and German) from official procedures; the court system and schools also became Russian-language (in 1885 and 1887 respectively) (ibid.: 139–151).

Russification was justified by a parallel approach to history that emphasised how the cultural differences between Estonians and Russians were so small that the Russification of Estonians would have been quite painless and natural. For instance, in his book *A Short History of the Baltic Krai* (1884) Evgraf Cheshikhin emphasises how the territory of Estonia "is nothing but a continuation of the territory of the Russian state next to the Baltic Sea that is not separated by any natural barriers" (Cheshikhin 1894: 1). Statements about close Estonian and Russian historical contact were based on references to the *Primary Chronicle* which depicts Estonians, Russians and other nations living in vicinity as acting together in different situations. Although the chronicle allows for different readings regarding the relations between these nations, Cheshikhin stresses one that sees Estonians (and the other nations) as subjected to the rule of Russians: "Paying tithes to Russian princes and accepting Orthodoxy prepared Latvians and Chuds for a final union with the Russian nation" (Cheshikhin 1894: 7).[5]

These kinds of statement are quite explicitly directed against the ideas expressed in the histories written by Estonians themselves. Contrary to the 'no differences between the nations' approach, Estonians stress the uniqueness of their nation. By the way, most of the history writing done by Estonians in the 19th century does not make any use of Old Russian chronicles, all the material is taken from West European sources. If there is a reference to the relationship between Estonians and Russians before the 13th century, the equality of the two nations is always emphasised (Kukk 2009: 194–197).

Early Estonian history writing has a sub-branch proceeding from Orthodox circles that was based on the *Primary Chronicle*; we can call it a non-Russification-minded reading of the chronicle.

There are two books published by the Orthodox Church in Riga: *Eesti rahva kalender* ('Calendar of the Estonian People') in 1855, with a longer overview under the heading *Teädus Lätlastest ja Eestirahvast, enne kui Saksad nende maale tullid* ('A Study of the Latvians and Estonians before the Germans Came) (ibid.: 33–50), and a history book *Venne rahvas ja Venne riik* ('Russian Nation and Russian State'), written by Jakob Lindenberg, a schoolteacher and Orthodox priest (1872). Both authors emphasise the equality of the two nations, for example all decisions were taken after democratic discussion (*Eesti rahva kalender* 1855: 44; Lindenberg 1872: 9).

Although from the point of view of Estonian history writing these two books are rather marginal curiosities, their existence relates well to Toivo Ülo Raun's recognition that in the pre-Russification era the Orthodox Church did not receive support from the state to operate in the Baltic governorates (Raun 2009: 147). Therefore, we could assume that these interpretations of history constituted a conscious attempt by the Orthodox Church to get closer to Estonians. On the one hand, these interpretations enabled the Church to emphasise the long-term good relations between Estonians and Russians, while on the other hand, the aim was to underscore the democratic attitude of Orthodoxy towards other nations (as compared to the rather German-dominated Lutheran Church). Yet, it is quite certain that after 1885 the Orthodox Church drew rather on Cheshikhin-style Russifying approaches to history.

As we will see, the discussion makes use of both readings of the Primary Cronicle – the Russification minded and non-Russification minded –, although the relationship between the two is rather ambivalent. In the next sections I will delve into the discussion. I start with the newspaper article by Mihkel Kampmann that introduced the topic and look at the different public reactions it got. After pursuing the public part of the discussion I end with events and actors that did not make it to the public space.

## 1. The beginning of the discussion: what does the similarity of names mean?

On 9 June 1890, the newspaper *Sakala* published Mihkel Kampmann's[6] article under the heading *Majaussi kasvandikud: Tähelepanemise väärt Eesti muinasjutt* ('The Boys Brought up by the House Snake: A Remarkable Estonian Fairy Tale'). For the most part, the article is a retelling of the folktale *Majaussi kasvandikud* (see the abstract), but the author also explains why he thinks that this tale needs the attention of researchers. In the author's opinion, the fairy tale could be interesting to a wider readership because the protagonists' names (Rahurikkuja, Siniuss, and Truuvaar) are very similar to "the names of the first Russian princes Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor" (ibid.) mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle*. And although he admits that historians have long considered "these three princes as fairy-tale", he still emphasises that the Estonian fairy tale may have historic value, as it "further complements the story about inviting the three famous princes to rule". With this remark, Kampmann refers to the episode in the *Primary Chronicle* in which the princes are asked to come and rule:

> 6368–6370 (860–862). The tributaries of the Varangians drove them back beyond the sea and, refusing them further tribute, set out to govern themselves. There was no law among them, but tribe rose against tribe. Discord thus ensued among them, and they began to war one against another. They said to themselves, "Let us seek a prince who may rule over us and judge us according to the Law." **Accordingly they went overseas to the Varangian Russes: these particular Varangians were known as Russes**, just as some are called Swedes, and others Normans, English, and Gotlanders, for they were thus named. The Chuds, the

> Slavs, the Krivichians, and the Ves' then said to the **people of Rus'**, "Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us." They thus selected three brothers, with their kinsfolk, who took with them all the Russes and migrated. The oldest, **Rurik**, located himself in Novgorod; the second, **Sineus**, at Beloozero; and the third, **Truvor**, in Izborsk. On account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of 60 in the Russian Primary Chronicle Rus'. The present inhabitants of Novgorod are descended from the Varangian race, but in olden times they were Slavs. (Cross, Olgerd 1953: 59–60, emphasis added)

I have marked in bold the details that will be at the centre of the discussion later (the people of Rus, the overseas element, the names of the princes). However, it is important to bear in mind that at the time there were probably very few Estonians who had read the *Primary Chronicle*. If people who read Kampmann's article happened to have any previous knowledge of the story, it came from some kind of retelling in a history book.

The most detailed retellings can be found in the early Orthodox publications I referred to earlier (*Eesti rahva kalender* 1855; Lindeberg 1872; Lindeberg's version is also repeated in C. R. Jakobson 1875), and there are also some overviews in books of general history (e.g. Körber 1860; P. Jakobson 1885). The two sets of publications convey the story somewhat differently: whereas the first set focuses on Estonian history, these publications also stress that the inviting was done by many different nations (including Estonians); the second set uses the Russification-minded reading of the chronicle and depicts only the Russians as the inviters of the princes[7]. As can be seen in this article, most of the people who participated in the discussion knew the Russification-minded

version of the story, only one was aware of the non-Russification-minded version.

## 2. Positive responses: finding connections between the folktale and the chronicle

There were two newspapers that reacted to Kampmann's article in a positive vein: a Russian-language article was published in the cultural supplement of the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* 1890 ('Estonian Governorate Gazette'), and two articles in one of the most widely-read newspapers *Olevik* ('The Present', Grenzstein 1890a, 1890b). Both of these articles stress that *Majaussi kasvandikud* is a really exceptional find, and maintain that as the Estonian-language versions of the names (Rahurikkuja, Siniuss, Truuvaar) have a meaning, they must be older than the Russian versions (Ruurik, Sineus, Truvor) which are (or seem to be) meaningless.

However, the discussants do not limit themselves to names only, they also try to find other connecting details between the chronicle and the folktale. For instance, they raise a question about who the Rus' were (the nation from which, according to the chronicle, the princes originate) and which sea they crossed.

To get to the meaning of the name Rus', the author of the article in the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* of 1890 proposes three possible connections between this name and the Estonian language, two of which are explanations to the first one. Firstly, the name can refer to an ancient parish in eastern Estonia called Rusti (or Russi – the article uses them interchangeably). Secondly, it can refer to the Swedish origin of the inhabitants of the parish *rootsi* ('Swedish') > *russ*. And thirdly it can refer to the extraordinary strength of the inhabitants of this parish *rusikas* ('fist') > *russ*.

The question of the possible location of the sea is taken up by Grenzstein[8]. He suggests two solutions: the *sea* could be Lake Peipus, or it could just refer more generally to foreign origin: "Nobody knows which sea it was. It could have been Lake Peipus, which the Russians knew very well. Besides, it is not certain that the three brothers were invited from across the sea, as за море in Russian also means a foreign country (заморские товары – foreign goods)" (ibid.). Interestingly the first part of the hypothesis fits well with the idea that Rus´ is connected with the name of an ancient parish because this parish was located on the shores of Lake Peipus.

Although the argumentation in the two newspapers is rather similar, there is a difference in the tone. While the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* is quite moderate and neutral (it was a Russian-language weekly that mainly published official announcements), the discussion in the *Olevik* is rather heated and expresses explicitly what the story seems to be implying: "If it is really an Estonian fairy-tale, it complements an important Russian fairy-tale and is significant because it might mean that the first Russian princes Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor went to Russia from amongst Estonians" (Grenzstein 1890a). For Grenzstein it was not enough just to report and add something, he really wanted to investigate the matter and keep the discussion alive. So, in addition to retelling the previous articles, Grenzstein also introduces the story of the inviting of the princes in the *Primary Chronicle* to his readers. However, the version of the story he retells is the Russification-minded reading of the chronicle, which depicts the inviters as solely Russians (Grenzstein 1890a). In addition to this he organised a visit to the teller of story published by Kampmann (Grenzstein 1890b) and encouraged his readers to collect more variants[9].

## 3. Critical response: a midpoint between Scandinavia and Russia

The last to intervene in the discussion is linguist and censor Jüri Truusmann[10]. His article was first published in Russian in the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* ('Estonian Governorate Gazette') and later in translation in the newspapers *Eesti Postimees* ('Estonian Courier') and *Valgus* ('Light') (Truusmann 1890). Truusmann shares the opinion that the story is an important discovery for science: "by acknowledging the great power of poetry and the vividness of folk creations, the Estonian fairy-tale has also preserved historical truth" (ibid.). However, he is concerned about Grenzstein's conclusion that the existence of the folk tale could refer to the Estonian origin of the ancient princes: "Estonian newspapers and the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja* have published articles about this fairy-tale, obviously claiming that the founders of the Russian state, namely Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor, originated in Estonia; it is highly probable that such a subjective explanation remained incomprehensible to true Russians" (ibid.). Unlike other discussants, who encouraged readers to participate in the discussion, the pointedly scientific argumentation of Truusmann's writing is rather directed to the termination of further discussion.

Jüri Truusmann refuses to share other discussants' belief in the primacy of the names of the protagonists. Rather, he maintains that the names of the princes originate from Scandinavia, and he sees the Estonian versions (Rahurikkuja, Siniuss, and Truuvaar) as an intermediate stage between the Russian and Scandinavian versions. He exemplifies this with a reference to the modification Sineut (Scandinavian version of the name) > Sineus, arguing that, as the t > s change is characteristic of Finno-Ugric languages, Russians could have borrowed the name Sineus through the mediation of Finnic peoples, as proposed by linguist Arist Kunik[11].

Truusmann finds that the *Majaussi kasvandikud* folk tale is convincing proof of this version, so presents the modifications as Sineut > Siniuss > Sineus.

Truusmann also criticises other ideas that emerged in the discussion from the Scandinavian-centred point of view. He writes, for instance, that the sea the princes crossed was not Lake Peipus but the Baltic Sea, and that the name Rus' is derived from *rootsi* ('Sweden') (this interpretation was already published in the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Teataja*; however, Truusmann presents it as if it had not yet been stated).

Yet another peculiarity in Truusmann's approach is his greater attention to the original text of the *Primary Chronicle*. While Grensztein introduces the version of inviting the princes in which the inviters were only Russian (see 1890a), Truusmann highlights the presence of other nations as well. He finishes his article with the question of whether the Chuds mentioned in the chronicle might have been Estonians. By answering it in the affirmative, Truusmann also refers to the contradiction in the argumentation of the other discussants: if Estonians are Chuds, the idea of the princes being invited by Estonians would cast Estonians simultaneously in two roles, the inviters and the invitees, whereas the text of the chronicle clearly mentions that the princes were invited from *outside*.

This makes Truusmann's position highly ambivalent. On the one hand, hinting about the puzzlement of 'real Russians' at the beginning of his writing he positions himself as an official of the Empire. From this position he strictly disagrees with the interpretation that gives the Estonians a special position within the Russian Empire. However, on the other hand, he does not agree with the official Russification-minded readings of the *Primary Chronicle*, which stress the Chuds' subjugation to the Slavic tribes; rather he insists that the beginning of the empire involved cooperation

between several nations and languages, and that these nations had the right to preserve their particularity.

## 4. Back to the beginning: Whose idea was it in the first place?

In the article that initiated the discussion, Kampmann remains rather taciturn as to the origin of the folk-tale; he refers neither to the source nor to the place where the story was transcribed. He merely notes that "it was told by an old person who did not know any foreign languages or printed sources" (ibid.). In the course of the subsequent discussion, it appears that the story was told by Rein Ruute from Väike-Maarja Parish, and that the first to transcribe (i.e. 'discover') it was not Kampmann but Rein Ruute's grandson Voldemar Lurich, a 17-year-old who had just graduated from gymnasium (Kampmann 1890).

Both Kampmann and Lurich were Jakob Hurt's folklore correspondents. Kampmann joined Hurt's campaign at the beginning, in 1888, while Lurich's first delivery reached Hurt in February 1890, only a few months before the discussion was initiated. He had started collecting material for his first delivery at least a year before (*Majaussi kasvandikud* was written down over Easter 1889). As the young man lacked the courage to send his material to Hurt, he first showed them to Kampmann, the most prolific folklore collector in the area, and it seems that it was only feedback from Kaupmann that encouraged Lurich to post the collected material.

When he showed his material to Kampmann, Lurich also drew his attention to one tale, wondering about the similarity of the protagonists' names to those of the ancient Russian princes. Lurich, therefore, was not only the first to transcribe the tale, but also the first to notice the possible connection with the Russian chronicle. It is not too difficult to guess why Kampmann did not refer

to the youngster in his article. References to anonymous people and (as if) illiterate sources definitely sounded more authoritative than admitting that it was a connection established in the mind of a youngster trying his hand at folklore collecting. However, if we look from a wider perspective, Lurich's role is rather telling.

On the one hand, we must keep in mind that Lurich did something that folklore collectors often do – we find a lot of (pseudo) etymological explanations to the collected folktales on the manuscript pages. What is peculiar at the moment is that most of these ideas do not reach public space. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that Lurich had just graduated from a Russian-language gymnasium, where he had definitely studied the history of the empire (possibly including the Russification-minded version of the story of inviting the princes). It is most likely that graduating from the gymnasium made him stand out in his predominantly agrarian environment. And it could be that *Majaussi kasvandikud* offered him a possible connecting link between the things studied at school and those heard from his grandfather or other people.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of my article I asked what made this story so important and topical for people at that time. The simplest answer would be that history and its reinterpretation was in fashion. Quite a few histories written by Estonians had been published, yet there were still many loose ends, especially in the more distant parts of history. History was discussed in newspapers, at meetings of local societies, and also in works of fiction. So we can conclude that this discussion was part of the broader process of discussing history.

What makes this discussion stand out is the diversity of participants, especially the role played by a 17-year-old Lurich. How could it be that his mind-play elicited the reaction it did from

the official censor? Of course, he did not participate on equal terms with others; his words and ideas were mediated by more educated participants, yet nobody doubted the connection he had noticed. In the case of Lurich, we can speak about searching for what Eda Kalmre (2013) calls "the great stories of a small nation". He does not focus on creating a complete new version of history, but rather enjoys the discovery of a connection. Grenzstein and Truusmann, on the other hand, focus on something more general and more complete, *rewriting* history in a way that would provide Estonians with a positive role in the empire.

This particular discussion was influenced by the changing political situation. The tsarist state was in the process of consolidation and although it was mainly aimed at weakening the positions of the Baltic Germans, it also had an effect on the cultural identity of Estonians. Taking this into account, we can look at the discussion as an identity-related work of a nation that tried to see these changes in a positive light. They were not pro-Russification, but they believed that even in this context it was possible to retain their national identity. The discussion is a kind of sign that Russification was not only straightforwardly oppressive, but that it also gave rise to new ideas that helped people to rethink Estonianness. It is paradoxical (or even ironic) that at the time when the Estonian language was practically ousted from official use, someone initiated a discussion in the press that focused on an interpretation of the Basic myth of the empire, based on the etymology in Estonian language. However, we can also say that it was specifically the peculiarities of the linguistic situation that made this discussion possible. The increase in the importance of Russian (including Russian-language education) also meant a rise in the number of Estonians who mastered Russian, increasing the number of people who were able to read in Russian. In turn, Estonians educated in Russian were interested in finding possible connections between these languages and their cultural traditions.

# Notes

[1] Troublemaker.

[2] Blue snake.

[3] Loyal man.

[4] Several historians have called for the term Russification to be abandoned as the name of the era, referring to the excessive vagueness and judgemental nature of the term (see, e.g., Miller 2009; Brüggeman 2010; Karjahärm 2012). Due to the lack of a better alternative, I stick to the term Russification; I hope that my approach will help to show that the influence of so-called Russification could be rather varied.

[5] Estonians are not mentioned in the excerpt. However, the ethnonym Chuds designated different Baltic-Finnic nations, including Estonians (Cheshikhin 1894: 2–3). In the 19th-century Estonian retellings of the story, the name 'Chuds' is usually translated as Estonians.

[6] Mihkel Kampmann (1867–1943) was a school teacher, cantor, newspaper editor, literary historian. Published several schoolbooks and works about history of Estonian literatuure.

[7] Another indication of the fact that the names and activity of the princes were not widely known in Estonian-language written sources was the lack of a unified tradition of presenting Russian names in the Latin alphabet. So, in the pre-discussion texts, the name Рю́рик is spelt Rürik (Lindenberg 1872) and Ruurik (C. R. Jakobson 1875; P. Jakobson 1885), the name Синеус is Sineus (Lindenberg 1872; C. R. Jakobson 1875) and Siineus (P. Jakobson 1885), and Трувор is Truvor (Lindenberg 1872) and Truuvor (C. R. Jakobson 1875; P. Jakobson 1885). It seems as if every user takes as the basis the Cyrillic name form, which they modify as they think best. In the following discussion, the names of the princes are also spelt differently. The Latinised variations of the name Трувор are especially interesting: Kampmann is the only one to use Truuvaar, yet it is considerably better at emphasising the similarity in the names than the variants used by the others.

[8] Ado Grenzstein (1849–1916) was an Estonian journalist, writer and teacher. His newspaper Olevik (1881–1915) was one of the most read newspapers of the time.

[9] He received three answers to this appeal (Koit 1890; Pihlakas 1890; Lurich 1890). Considering how many people actively collected folklore at that time, this was a rather meagre result. However, this might be yet another indication of how underrepresented the story of inviting the princes was in Estonian-language written sources.

[10] Jüri Truusmann (1856–1930) was a writer, linguist, ethnographer, and censor.

[11] Truusmann here refers to the Die Berufung Der Schwedischen Rodsen Durch Die Finnen Und Slawen: Eine Vorarbeit Zur Entstehungsgeschichte Des Russischen Staates, vol. 2 (1845).

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