

BAGPIPE AND *PILLI* IN ESTONIA AND FINLAND. AN ETYMOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: The etymology of the Estonian-Finnish word *pilli* ‘pipe’ suggests that the 13th century Estonians borrowed their bagpipe from the Baltic Germans and the Finns adopted it from the Estonians (not from the Swedes) around 1300 AD.

Keywords: Bagpipe, Bladder Pipe, Etymology of *Pilli*, Estonia, Finland.

ДУДА I *PILLI* У ЭСТОНИИ I ФИНЛЯНДЫ. ЭТЫМАЛАГІЧНЫ ПАДЫХОД

Анатацыя: Этымалогія эстонска-фінскага слова *pilli* “дуда” сведчыць пра тое, што ў XIII стагоддзі эстонцы запазычылі дуду ў балцкіх немцаў, а фіны запазычылі яе ў эстонцаў (а не шведаў) каля 1300 года.

Ключавыя словы: дуда, дуда з пузыра, Фінляндыя, Эстонія, этымалогія слова *pilli*.

1. Introduction

The Finnish bagpipe was first documented in a 15th century drawing in the codex of the local wedding law (Fig. 1). The early data imply that it was respected in Southwest Finland. Its name is *pilli* (Finnish) and *pill* (Estonian) and its genitive form *pill-in* dates the word as medieval. It will be shown below that the history of this word defines the adoption process of the Baltic Finnic bagpipe.

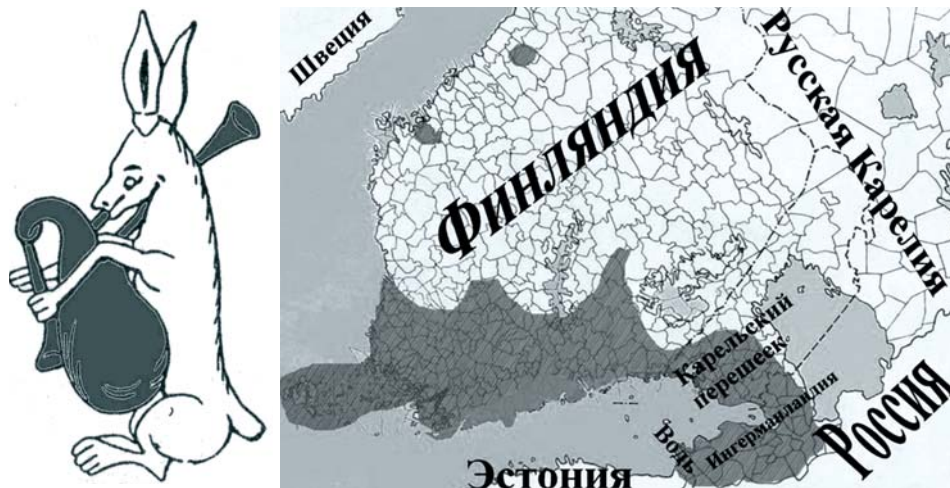


Figure 1. A rabbit blowing the bagpipe as drawn in the early 15th century *Codex Aboensis*, Finland. The distribution of data on Finnish bagpipes in southern Finland, Karelian Isthmus, Ingermanland and Vatra (Водь). See Fig. 4.

2. Four European bagpipe names

Finnish musicians never adopted bagpipe names widely used by other Europeans. A simple *plater-pfifā* 'bladder pipe' with a mouth tube and a melody pipe was played long before the 13th century in Europe and these early bagpipes were known by various names, such as by the following four.

1. *PĪPIŌ* (Latin)

The origin of Old High German *pfifā* = German *Pfeife* = Old Saxon *pīpa* = Dutch *pījp* = Swedish *pīpa* = English *pipe* 'tube; reed', French *pipe* > *fifre* and Portuguese *pifano* ultimately goes back to Latin *pīpiō* 'to peep'. In many cases the *pīpiō* element is connected to an instrument with an airbag, such as in *bagpipe* = *Sackpfeife* = *säckerpīpa*.

2. SUEGELBALCH (Middle High German)

The root of this name is the Proto German **swíglōn-* 'a blown one'. This word is mainly connected to flutes: Old High German *swegel*, German *Schwegel* 'flute', and its Finnish derivate *huilu* 'flute'. There is also the Middle High German *suegelbalch* 'blown bellow' referring to an archaic bagpipe. Its Old English equivalent is *swegl-leoðre* (Bühle, 1975), with its bellow made of *leoðre* 'leather'.

3. CORNEMUSE (Old French)

According to Sachs (1920), the 14th century French *corner* 'to blow out' was added to *musa* 'leather-bag' leading to the word *cornemuse* 'blown leather-bag'. From this point of view, the Old English term *swegl-leoðre* consists of Germanic *swegl* 'to blow' and *leoðre* 'leather' and means the 'blown leather bag'. Moreover, Johannes Afflighemensis mentioned in ca 1100 the Old High German *musa*, which obviously referred to the *cornemuse*.

4. DUDÁ (Slavic)

The Slavic *dudá* 'tube' was adopted by the Lithuanians and the Latvians (*duda*) but it was also adopted to German (*Dudelsäck*) and Swedish (*dudelidej*) during the 17th and the 18th centuries.



Figure 2. Four European bagpipe names. None belongs to Estonian or Finnish. 1 = *pīpiõ*; 2 = *suegelbalch*; 3 = *cornemuse*; 4 = *dudá*. Nr. 5 refers to *pilli* (< *Spille*²).

3. *Spille*¹

There are Germanic words like Scandinavian *spel*, *spil* ‘play’, *spela* ‘to play’ or German *spielen* ‘to move around’ as in *spielende Augen*. Then there are words like German *Spiel* and Swedish *spel* referring to a revolving roller or axis (such as *ankarspel* for pulling up the anchor). The Germanic *spel*, *spil* was closely connected to playing music on a musical instrument. Thus, the Latin *mimus* was rendered in Middle High German as *spilman* already in the 8th century. An important trait is that the first vowel element of these forms is always long (-*ee-*, -*ii-*, -*ie-*). In the 8th century the meanings of the verb *spilōn* were ‘fight, move around, jump, dance’ (Koebler). Thus, *Spille*¹ goes back to *spiel(en)* ‘to move (vividly) around’. Note that its etymon differs from that of English *play* (< Old English *plegan* ‘move rapidly’ < Proto-Indo-European **dleg-* ‘to be active’).

4. *Spille*² > *Pilli*

The first vowel element of the other *Spille*, that is, *Spille*² is always short as in English *spill* ‘a small cylinder; a spool’, Danish *spille* ‘spool’, Low German *Spille* = Baltic German *Spille* ‘Garnspule’ = ‘spool (for spinning); reed pipe’. *Spille*² goes back to Proto-Indo-European **spi-* ‘spike’ (Figure 3).

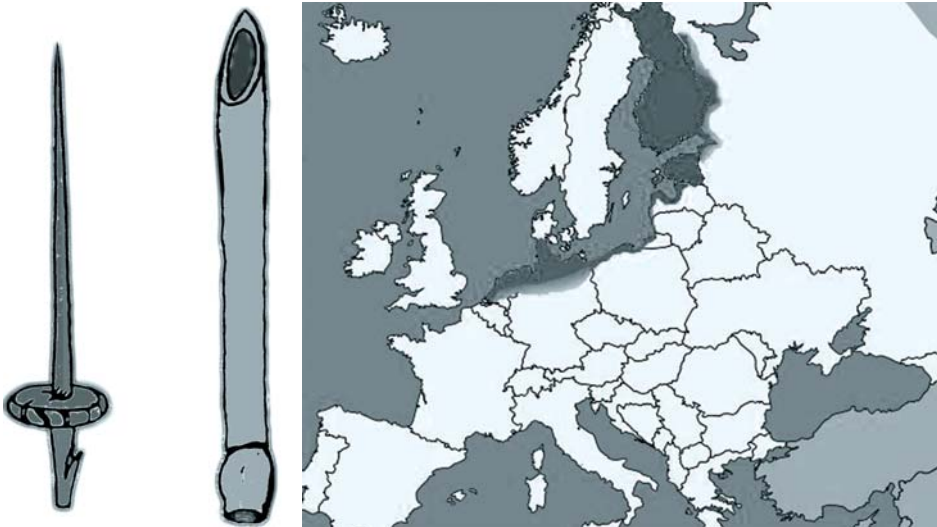


Figure 3. The Low German *Spille* ‘reed pipe’ is on the left accompanied with the *Spille* ‘spindle’. The map shows the region in which the North Germans and the Baltic Finns engaged in lively interaction during the Hanseatic League from the 13th century onwards and in which the words *Spille*² and *pilli* are known

Confusion emerged in the 12th century when the spellings and meanings of these two words overlapped. The medieval word *spīl* 'play; music making' overlapped in the Mecklenburg dialect with *spill* 'quill, reed pipe; spole'. People started to use words like *Platerspīl* 'bladder instrument' as synonyms of former *plater pfifā* and *bladder pipe*.

For instance, the Mecklenburg word *Spille* (with a short *-i-*) referred to 'spool' and 'a spindle' but, simultaneously, in Scandinavian languages *spēlman* and *spilleman* became the synonyms (referring to 'musician') and, thus, also the synonyms of the 8th century *spīlman*. However, the words *spīl* and *spille* are separate words even if fused as a result of folk etymology.

The Baltic German *Spille*² corresponded to Estonian *pill(i)* referring to 'reed pipe' as did *Spille*². Figure 3 shows a cut reed pipe and a wooden *Spille*². Both were used as spindles. The same took place on the Slavic side: Proto Slavic **cěva*, **cěvь* 'quill, reed pipe; spole' was also used as a sounding reed pipe *cevnīca* 'pastoral pipe' in Russian. There are Old Russian *cěvьnica* 'pipe' and *cěvьnikъ* 'minstrel; Spielman'. The equivalents of Slavic **cěvь* are *Spille*² and *pilli*.

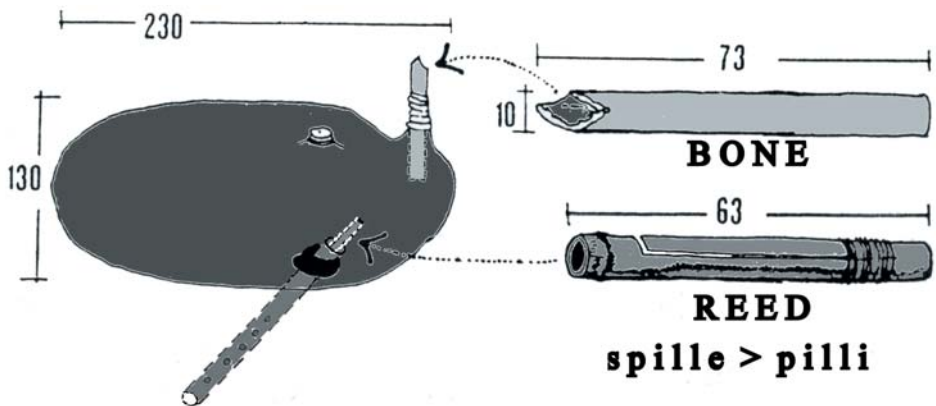


Figure 4. A Vatian *rakkopilli* 'bladder pipe'. The mouth pipe is of bone while the sounding element at the upper end of the melody pipe *inside* the bag is the actual *pilli* (< *Spille*² 'reed pipe'). The digits are millimetres (Leisiö, 1983). The small pipe with one cut reed (*Spille*² > *pilli*) gave the name to the whole instrument, and afterwards, to any small blown instrument in Finland and, finally in Estonia, to any musical instrument.

The 13th century North Germans introduced the archaic bladder pipe into Estonia, where people started to name this novelty according to its sound-giving reed pipe inside the bag for *pill(i)* from *Spille*². It was soon adopted by southern Finns. Later on, more modern bagpipes were also adopted from

Sweden (Figure 1) but the original *rakkopilli* in Finland came from Estonia. *Spille*² has been associated with a thin reed due to which there is a Dutch expression for a thin-legged person: *spille-been*. It has an exact equivalent in Finnish: *pilli-kinttu*. Likewise there is the Dutch expression *steken spillen in de zak* = Swedish *sticka pipan i säcken* = Finnish *panna pillit pussiin* 'to pack up and go'. In Medieval Finnish this expression had its original idea of inserting the idioglot reed pipe into the bag and only after that being ready to **march off to war by blowing the pilli**. This idea fits with the English meaning but differs from the Swedish and modern Finnish meaning of 'to give up'.

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