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THE ROOTS 'GOD' AND 'HOLY' IN LATVIAN TOPONYMY

It is well known from the Bible that in the beginning was the WORD. We, onomasticians, can transform this sentence and say that in the beginning was the NAME. The name, or in this case the place-name, is also one of the possibilities for the identification of holy places.

As a toponymist working for over 30 years on the 'Dictionary of Latvian Place-Names', and mainly interested in Baltic hydronyms – names of the lakes, rivers, springs, ponds etc., I can attest that hydronyms or water-names constitute the most ancient stratum of toponyms, and can preserve the most ancient features and oldest memories.

Two years ago I touched on this aspect in a paper presented at the University of Poznań in Poland about the names of Baltic deities in Latvian place-names: *Dievs* 'God', *Velns* / *jods* / *jupis* / *nelabais* / *sātans* / *ļaunais* 'Devil', *Laima*, *Māra*, *Dēkla*, *Pērkons* 'Thunder', *lauma* 'fairy', *ragana* 'witch', *pūķis* 'dragon' etc. (Balode, 2008a; Balode, 2008b). This article is devoted mainly to two roots – Latv. *Dievs* 'God' and Latv. *svēts* 'sacred' – recorded in the toponymy of the territory of Latvia.

The first scientific study of Latvian place-names (also from the point of view of etymology) was the monograph by August Bielenstein *Die Grenzen des lettischen Volksstammes und der lettischen Sprache in der Gegenwart und im 13. Jahrhundert* (Bielenstein, 1892). His collections of Latvian toponyms have remained unpublished. The first extensive collections of the toponyms of Latvia (lists of the place-names without comments or study), which are nowadays included in the 'Dictionary of Latvian Place-Names', were compiled by Jānis Endzelīns (*The Place-Names of Latvia*) in 1922 and 1925 (E I; E II) and Juris Plāķis (*The Place-Names of Latvia and Latvian Surnames*) in 1936 and 1939 (U IV; U V).

Latvians can be proud of the 'Dictionary of Latvian Place-Names' started by J. Endzelīns in the middle of the 20th century (Lvv I; Lvv II), which has been

supplemented and continued by a group of onomasticians at the Latvian Language Institute. The next three volumes include toponyms starting with the letter P (Lvv III; Lvv IV; Lvv V). Compilation, preparation and publication of this dictionary is one the largest projects of the *Letonica* programme (involving four people working at the Latvian Language Institute). Apart from the published sources mentioned, a large place-name collection from 512 civil parishes (the administrative division before the Second World War), starting from the end of the 19th century, is used for this study. This consists of 1 250 000 place-name records in the toponymic card index of the Latvian Language Institute, as well as a card index prepared by Latvian geographers.

The name 'God' (Latv. *Dievs*) occurs quite infrequently in Latvian place-names: altogether, there are about 70 place-names mentioned in the 'Dictionary of Latvian Place-Names', including around 10 hydronyms recorded in the territory of Latvia: *Diēviņezers* – a lake in Dundaga, E II, 147 (and the homestead *Dieviņi* in the same civil parish, E II, 146); *Dieviņezers* – a lake in Lubezere, U IV, 200; *Diēmestezers* < *dieva mests ezers* 'Lake Thrown by God' – a lake in Griķi, U IV, 123; *Dieva mests ezers* – a lake in Abava, U V, 453 k, in Kabile, U IV, 191 k, in Virbi, U IV 188, in Lauciena, U IV, 209, in Zentene, U IV, 246; *Dievakājas ezeriņš* 'Lake of God's Foot' – a lake in Bērzpils, E II, 177; *Dieva atvariņš* – a whirlpool in Skaistkalne, U V, 265; and *Diēva diķis* – a pond in Nīca, p Lvv I, 221.

If we compare Latvian hydronyms with the water-names in the neighbouring country of Lithuania, we see that there are only four such hydronyms: Lith. *Diėvytis* – a lake and river in Laukuva (Šilalė District); *Diėvupis* – a river in Endriejavas (Klaipėda District); and *Diėrašas* < **Diėv-rašas* – a lake in Ukmergė (*Vanagas*, 1981, 86). There are some more examples in the card index of the Institute of Lithuanian language: *Dievógala* – a brook in Krapyškis; *Diėvo upėlis* – a brook in Panevėžys District; and *Dievókai* – lakes in Alytus District. Maybe the small number of hydronyms can be explained by a taboo in this Catholic country: 'You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain'. (See Fig. 1, indicating the distribution of hydronyms with the root *Diev-* in Latvia and Lithuania.)

Why is this so? There could be several explanations. Of course, we tend to talk much more commonly about negative phenomena. But the name of *Vēlns* 'Devil' is not mentioned very often either – especially in Latgale, the eastern part of Latvia. It is frequently changed to a euphemism – *Vella strauts* 'Devil's Brook' → *Mellais strauts* (< Latv. *melns*, dial. form *mells* 'black') 'Black Brook' etc.

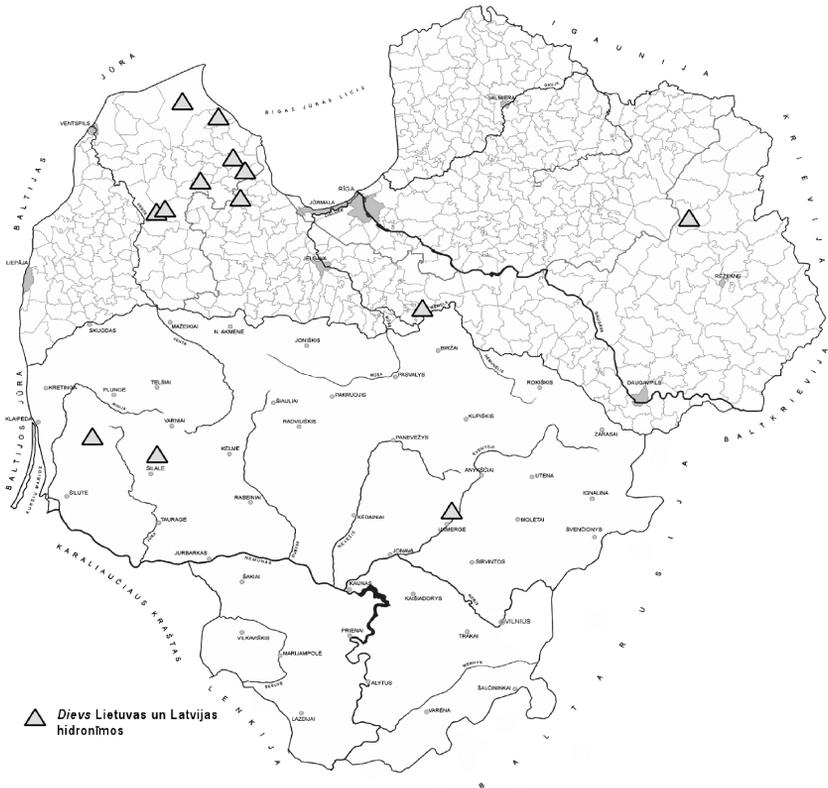


Fig. 1. The distribution of hydronyms with the root *Dievs* in Latvia and Lithuania.

Returning to the root of *Dievs* 'God', we may note that only a few such names of hills (oronyms) are known in Latvia: *Diēva*² *kalns* in Strutele, U V, 508; *Diēva*² *kalns* in Prauliena; *Dieva kalns* in Veclaicene; '*Dievu kalns*' in Mežotne E, II, 31; '*Dievārdukalns*' 'Hill of the Words of God' in Ranka; *Dieviņa*² *kalns* in Druviene. (A toponym in quotation marks means that this lexeme is taken from published sources and has not been verified by fieldwork.)

Microtoponyms with the root *Dievs* are slightly more common: *Dieva dārzs* 'Garden of God' – an uninhabited place and meadow in Birži, U V, 318 (p); a meadow in Prauliena; *Diēva dārzs* – a forest in Bārta, U IV, 70; a pasture in

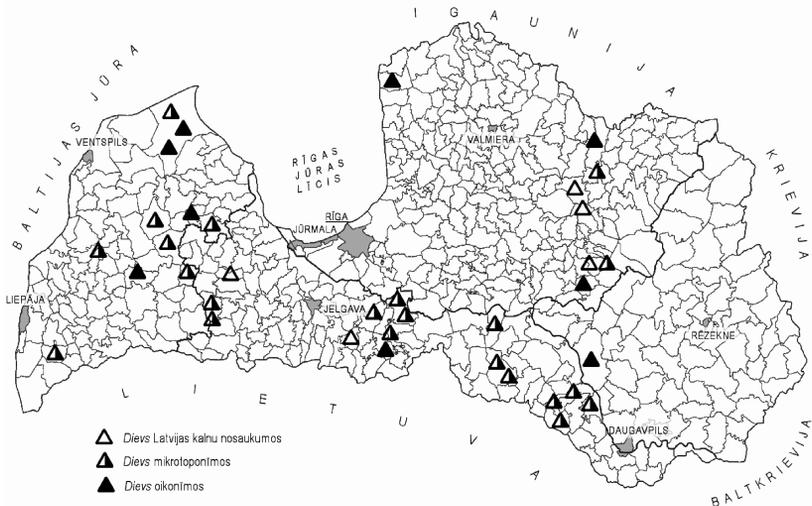


Fig. 2. The distribution of oronyms (empty triangles), microtoponyms (half-filled triangles) and oikonyms (filled triangles) with the root *Dievs* in Latvia.

Sauka, E II, 64; *Diēva dārziņš* – a forest in Kabile, U IV, 192; *Dieva dārziņš* – a field in Vecumnieki, U V, 271; a valley in Sauka, U V, 353; a bog in Rubeņi, U V, 303 (15 such place-names altogether); *Dievapluoks* ‘Pasture of God’ – a forest in Basi, E II, 9; *Dieva līkums* ‘Curve/Elbow of God’ – a meadow in Kandava, U IV, 197; *Diēviņkangers* – a forest in Dundaga, U IV, 257; *Diēva purvs* – a boggy place in Stūri, E II, 143; *Dieva purvs* in Blīdiene, U V, 132; *Dieva ruōza* – a forest in Sinole, E I, 83 k; *Dievinišķi* – a forest in Dviete, E II, 50; *Diēvene* – a meadow in Gaikī, U IV, 119 k; *Dieviņplava* – a meadow in Renda, U IV, 145 k.

As one can easily notice, some of these toponyms are metaphorical – based on a comparison. Predominantly, they relate to ancient legends and tales. Toponyms with the meaning ‘garden of God’ and ‘field of God’ are thought to be influenced by German poetical *Totenacker* or *Gottesacker* ‘cemetery, graveyard’. (See Fig. 2, showing the distribution of oronyms and microtoponyms with the root *Dievs* in Latvia.)

Mention should also be made of several oikonyms (names of inhabited places) with the root *Dievs* in Latvia. There are diminutive forms and *pluralia*

tantum forms in such examples as: *Dieviņi*² – a village in Krustpils, p, a homestead in Ļaudona, E I, 20; *Dieviņi* (now *Urdziņi*) – a homestead in Salaca, E I, 104; *Dieviņi* – a homestead in Dundaga, E II, 146; a homestead in Gaujiena, E I, 72; *Dieviņi* – a homestead in Virbi, E II, 111 (*Diēviņ*², U IV, 187); *Sila dieveņi*² 'Pine-Forest Gods' – a homestead in Līvāni, E II, 171; *Dievmalki*, E II, 97 // *Diēmalki*, U IV, 140 'Gulps of God' – a homestead in Raņķi; *Dievrīkstes* 'Rods of God' – a homestead in Dundaga, E II, 146. Also, in 1839 a unique homestead name *Deews-glahbe* 'God the Saviour' was recorded in Stelpe, U V, 262 (Lv I, 221).

Sometimes these place-names have an indirect, rather than a direct connection to the name of God, for instance the dialectal (Eastern Latvian or Latgalian) form of the toponym *Dīva kolns* – a hill in Nautrēni – has developed from an anthroponym, the nickname *Dīva Petris* (< *Dieva Pēteris*) 'Peter of God'.

In conclusion, there are about 70 toponyms altogether with the root *Diev-* mentioned in the 'Dictionary of Place-Names of Latvia' (Lv I, 221). Most of these are microtoponyms (about 26), hydronyms (10), oikononyms (10) or oronyms (6). Approximately the same number of toponyms with this root and the same semantics are recorded in Lithuania, with more oronyms (12), and fewer hydronyms (7) or oikononyms (8) (according to the card index of place-names of the Institute of Lithuanian Language).

The Latvian root *svēts* 'holy' is mostly recorded in the names of hills in Latvia (about 30 oronyms – almost all supplemented with comments from the informants), for instance: *Svētais kalns* – a hill in Laucesa; *Svētais kalns* – a hill in Drabeši (*šeit senos laikos upurēja dieviem* / here offerings were made in ancient times); *Svētais kalns* – a hill in Jaunpiebalga (*te atrodas vecas kapa vietas* / an old burial site), 1970; *Svētais kalns* – a hill in Sabile (*hipotētiska sena kulta vieta* / a hypothetical ancient cult site); also a hill in Lubeja, 1959; *Svētkalns* – a hill in Nogale, 1962; *Svētulis* – a hill in Tērvete, U V, 412; etc. (The year given after the toponym indicates the time of the fieldwork when this place-name was recorded.)

There are also several spring-names (about 20), for springs whose water was thought to be curative (being very clean, pure and cold), for example: *Svētavots* – a spring in Cēsis (*lietots dziedniecībai* / used for healing), 1972; *Svētavots* – a spring in Kandava (*tek pret rītiem; mazgātas acis pret acu kaitēm* / flows eastwards; people washed their eyes against disease); *Svētavots* – a spring in Zentene (*ūdens dziedinošs, mācītāji braukuši pēc kristāmūdens* / curative water, the priests used it for baptism), 1962; *Svētavots* – a spring in Pastende (*te noslicis*

kāds mācītājs / a priest drowned here); *Svētais avuôts* – a spring in Sērmūksi (... *brīšmīgi skaidrs un auksts ūdens, senāk kungi nesa nuô tâ ...* / very clear and cold water, in ancient times the lords took water from it), 1950.

Also, several river-names (about 20) and lake-names (about 15) are known in Latvia with the primary meaning 'holy river' and 'holy lake'. There are analogical comments given by informants, for instance: *Svētupe* – a river in Taurkalne, U V, 374 (*šeit gāja pēc pūšļojamā ūdens* / water was taken from here for practicing sorcery), 1961; *Svētupe* – a river in Mārciena (*te visi nāca mazgāties* / everybody came to wash here), 1961.

Very often these 'holy rivers' are connected with 'holy lakes': for example, *Svētezers* – a lake in Mārciena, p; the lake *Svētezers* and the river *Svētupe* in Limbaži, p; *Svētezers* and *Svētupe* in Arona.

Rather popular are the names *Svētbirze* 'Holy Grove' (7) and *Svētkoks* 'Holy Tree' (about 30 or possibly much more, but not all recorded in the card index of the toponyms of Latvia), for example: *Svētbirze* – a grove in Vaidava, p; a grove in Valmiera, 1974; *Svētais mežs* – a forest in Lejasciems (*liela ozolu birze ar svētiem upuru ozoliem* / large grove of holy sacrificial oaks).

The largest number of phytonyms known in Latvia are names of oak trees, i.e. 'holy oaks': *Svētuožuols* 'Holy Oak' // *Dievuožuols* 'Oak of God' in Liezēre; *Strēļu svētožols* 'Holy Oak of Strēļi' in Renda; *Vadakstes Svētožols* 'Holy Oak of Vadakste' in Vadakste, with a girth of 7.80 m (*Eniņš*, 2008, 148); *Garozas Svētožols* // *Zemgales krīvs* 'Priest of Zemgale', a holy grove of which only one tree survives, having a girth of 6.76 m (*Eniņš*, 2008, 164); *Sīmanēnu svētožols* 'Holy Oak of Sīmanēni' in Valmiera (one of three oaks, *pie ozoliem nesuši ziedojumums, starp tiem bijis akmens krāvums – upuraltārs, ko padomju laikā iznīcinājuši* / offerings were brought to the oaks, among which there was a sacrificial altar, destroyed in Soviet times), with a girth of 8.20 m (*Eniņš*, 2008, 212).

There are also quite a number of holy lime trees in all of Latvia, of which only a few examples will be given: *Ikšķiļu svētliepa* – a lime tree in Limbaži (*sena kulta vieta* / ancient cult site); and *Svētā liepa* // *Svētliepa* // *Usmas elku liepa* – a lime tree in Usma (*agrākos laikos rudenos nesuši upurus veļiem* / in ancient times offerings were left in autumn for the souls of the dead). Concerning the latter lime, there is a tale about a young girl who had an ulcer on her leg and went lame after she had broken a twig of the tree (*Eniņš*, 2008, 106–107). Another example is *Allažu svētliepa* – a lime tree in Ēdole (*no tās izgatavots Ēdoles baznīcas altāris un koka skulptūras* / the altar and wooden sculptures of Ēdole Church

were made from it). It is not quite clear whether this lime tree was worshipped before this, or whether the name was given by Christians because it had been used to make sacred relics for the church (*Eniņš*, 2008, 81). *Ances svētliepa* is a lime tree in Ance, the subject of about 50 stories and tales, which broke at the beginning of the 20th century (*Eniņš* 2008, 84).

There are two names of holy pine-trees in the card index of place-names of Latvia: *Svētā priede* in Palsmane (*pie priedes veci cilvēki nesuši ziedus* / elderly people used to bring flowers to this pine-tree); *Svētā priede* // *Dieva priede* in Smiltene (...*vecos laikos nesuši upurus dieviņam* / in ancient times people used to make offerings); there is only one holy spruce tree (*Svētegle*), one holy willow (*Svētais vītols* in Valmiera, near the spring *Veselības avots* – 'Health Spring', 1970) and one holy birch (*Svētais bērzs*), but these are much less connected with sacrifice.

There are very few examples where this root has been recorded in the derivation of microtoponyms: *Svētais grāvis* – a ditch in Vidsmuiža; *Svētais purvs* – a bog in Dzirciems, U IV, 182; *Svētais purvs* – a bog in Ļaudona; *Svētais dārziņš* – an uninhabited place in Bārta, 1960; etc.

The root *svēts* in the names of Latvian inhabited places (or oikonyms) is mostly connected with the former preaching-houses, for instance: *Svētiņi* – homestead in Gaiķi, 1953 (*tur bijusi draudzes baznīca* / a preaching-house used to be there); *Svētmājas* – homestead in Viļaka, 1962; *Svētā māja* homestead in Aloja, 1981 (*aģrāk bijis brāļu draudzes saiešanas nams* / there used to be a congregational house there); *Svētais zvirgzds* 'Holy Gravel' – homestead in Jumprava, p; *Svētciems* – estate (< river *Svētupe*), p; *Svētupes* – homestead (< river *Svētupe*) in Pāle, 1957.

Altogether, Latvian toponyms with the root *svēts* 'holy' constitute approximately 200 items in the card index. The majority of this material is relatively new – from the 20th century, but the most ancient records of place-names with the root 'God' or 'holy' are from the 18th century.

Summary

The article provides a short review of Latvian toponyms deriving from the root *Dievs* 'God' and *svēts* 'holy'. The name 'God' (Latv. *Dievs*) is quite infrequent among Latvian place-names: altogether there are about 70 place-names mentioned in the 'Dictionary of Latvian Place-Names', among them around 10 hydronyms. If we compare this with Latvian hydronyms derived from the

root *Velns* 'Devil', we see that *Veln-* toponyms are much more common – about 2000 Latvian place-names. Most instances of the root *Dievs* are recorded in microtoponyms (about 26), hydronyms (10), oikononyms (10) and oronyms (6). Approximately the same number of place-names with this root have been recorded in Lithuania.

Altogether, Latvian toponyms with the root *svēts* 'holy' constitute about 200 items in the card index, most being names of hills (about 30), springs (about 20), the water of which was thought to be curative, as well as several river-names (about 20), lake-names (about 15) and names of holy trees (about 30 altogether – the largest proportion being oak and lime trees).

Most of this material comes from the card index of the Latvian Language Institute and is relatively new: the most ancient records of place-names with the root 'God' and 'holy' are from the 18th century.

List of abbreviations

- dim. – diminutive form
 Latv. – Latvian
 Lith. – Lithuanian
 p – additional material

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