

Murky etymologies

I. Introduction

In this paper, I will deal with the origins of a number of stems starting with *myr-* in Finnic, namely:

1. *myrkkyy* ‘poison’ and *myrkkää* ‘stench’;
2. *myrtyä* ‘become sour (milk), gain a strange taste’, with the additional meaning ‘become angry’ and a number of related stems, such as *myreä* ‘sour’, *myrähtää* ‘become sour, become angry’, etc.;
3. *myrä* ‘twilight’;
4. *myri*, *myry* ‘something protruding’, ‘framstående tillstånd’ (SRS), *olla myryl-länsä* ‘vara utstående’ (SRS).

The latter two are not mentioned in SSA and have a limited dialectal spread in Finnish. The justification for treating these stems together is as follows. Firstly, some of them have been connected etymologically: Saarikivi (2007: 338) regards both *myrkkyy* and *myrtyä* as stemming from the same Finno-Permic stem. Semantically, with the exception of *myri*, *myry* ‘something protruding’, they are related in that they exhibit affective, negative meanings such as ‘foul smell’, ‘dark’ and metaphorically ‘become angry’, ‘foul weather’ (*myräkkä*, SKES), etc. Some of the terms have been regarded as descriptive (such as *myrkkyy* in SSA), and while I will disagree in the following, the etyma may have been influenced at least in terms of semantics by the clearly descriptive *murista*, *myristä* ‘grumble’. Another etymon which must be considered particularly with *myrtyä* is that represented by Finnish *murea* ‘tender, crispy (of food)’, *muru* ‘crumb’ and *murtaa* ‘break’. This etymon itself is complex in terms of origins: a Uralic etymology competes with Germanic loanword etymologies in the case of *murea* and *muru*. An example of the way in which it may have partially blended with that of

myreä, *myrtyä* is that *myreä* in Lönnrot's dictionary has the meanings 'tender ("skör")' which suggests a variant of *murca* as well as 'sour' which may or may not represent the same etymon. As it is, various words may represent different original stems: *myräkkä* in Lönnrot's SRS with the meaning 'sour' but also 'loud noise' seems to be based on the same stem as *myrtyä*, possibly influenced by the descriptive term *myristä* 'growl', but the meaning of 'storm, foul weather' mentioned in SKES suggests a relationship to *myrä* 'dark'. We are thus dealing with a very complex group of words. In the following, I will attempt to bring some order to this group.

2. *Myrkky*

Finnish *myrkky* 'poison' has cognates elsewhere in Finnic, e.g. Karelian *myrkky* 'poison' (KKS), Estonian *mürk* 'poison, cowbane' (EEW). It has been borrowed into North Saami as *mirku* 'poison', Inari Saami *mirkka* id. The UEW (278; also Katz 2003: 275) tentatively connects it to Hungarian *méreg* 'anger, poison' and reconstructs Finno-Ugric **mirkkz*. The Hungarian etymon may, however, rather be an Iranian borrowing, cf. Ossetic *marg* 'poison' (NES; EWU). LÄGLOS rejects a suggested borrowing from a Germanic stem present in Old Norse *merkija* 'celery, water celery', pointing to both semantic and phonological problems. SSA compares *myräkkä* 'stench' and dialectal *myrkehtyä* 'choke because of stench', which opens up the possibility that the meaning 'poison' has resulted from 'foul smell'. Saarikivi (2007: 338) compares the word together with *myrtyä* 'turn sour' with a Permic etymon exemplified by Komi *mird* 'tight, strong, satiated' and reconstructs an underlying *mürä* 'strong (of food or colour)'. This suggestion seems semantically somewhat loose and calls for a new attempt.

My suggestion is that Proto-Finnic **mürkkä* 'stench' is a Germanic borrowing, namely from Proto-Germanic **murka* '(making) tender', 'mürbe (machend)' (Heidermanns 1993: 417), which is thinly represented in Old English as *murc* 'oppressive' and Middle High German *murc* 'rotten, wilted'. Related verbs are Old Norse *morkna* 'to wilt' (AEW) and Middle Low German *murken* 'crush'. The Proto-Germanic etymon is based on Indo-European **merǵ-* (IEW: 739–740) 'rot, decay, be wet', and the Proto-Germanic form would suggest an Indo-European zero grade **mrǵ*.

Phonologically, this hypothesis is entirely unproblematic. Proto-Germanic **-u-* has been substituted by Finnic **-ü-* quite often (Hofstra 1985: 30–31, 119–123) and Proto-Germanic **-rk-* has been regularly substituted by Finnic **-rkk-* (Hofstra 1985: 83). Semantically, the relationship is less clear. Heidermanns (1993: 417) argues for a semantic development from 'tender' to 'spoiled, rotten' and it is the latter meaning which would be a basis for Finnic **mürkkä* 'foul smell' as in 'smell of rotten food' as well as **mürkkü* 'poison' from 'rotten, inedible food'. Note that the semantic connection between the two Finnic terms is not completely obvious; poisonous weeds do not necessarily smell bad. The Germanic sememe 'rotten', however, connects the two. This would nonetheless entail a transition from a deverbal adjective (in Germanic,

Heidermanns 1993: 417) to a noun (in Finnic). However, the Dialect Archives of the Institute for the Languages of Finland (SMSA) have examples of *myrkkä* as an adjective, meaning e.g. ‘bitter’ (SMSA, Simo).

To add to this trouble, *myrkkä* ‘poison’ shows what could be a deverbal derivational *-y* (Hakulinen 1979: 222–224), though the suffix occurs denominally as well (Hakulinen 1979: 184–185). In Middle High German, *murc* is both an adjective and a noun – albeit with the meaning ‘swampy, crumbling ground’ which is distant from what I have to posit as a source for the Finnic etymon (Lexer 1872). If the Germanic original could be supposed to have meant ‘rotten thing’ as well as just ‘rotten’, my hypothesis would be on firmer ground. For all that, a development from ‘smelling badly’ to ‘bad smell’ on the Finnic side seems natural enough. The very good phonological match, and the possibility to connect both ‘bad smell’ and ‘poison’ to an original ‘rotten, spoiled food’, makes my suggestion deserving of consideration.

Other possibilities for an Indo-European borrowing seem more remote. An Indo-Iranian or Indo-European precursor to Ossetic *marg* ‘poison’ thought to have been the donor for Hungarian *méreg* would be PIE **melku-* ‘damage’, Proto-Iranian **marč*, **mark* ‘destroy, damage’ (Cheung, EDIV; IEW: 736). Katz (2003: 275) hypothesizes that Finnish *myrkkä* and Hungarian *méreg* are indeed related and ultimately borrowed from an early Indo-Iranian precursor of Ossetic *marg*, but he notes the semantic difficulty in that the meaning of the Ossetic term cannot be obviously reconstructed to an earlier level. Furthermore, this hypothesis would necessitate a change **-e > *-ü-* in Proto-Finnic which is not unknown but not exactly regular either (see below). Also, assuming dialectal Finnish **myrkkä* ‘stench’ preserves the original semantics (which is reasonable, as foul-smelling foodstuffs may be bad to eat, but poison as such does not necessarily smell at all), the semantics are more remote here.

3. *Myrtyä*

Lönnrot (SRS) mentions the following items belonging to this etymon: *myrtyä* ‘turn sour, gain an aftertaste; get angry’; *myrteytyä* ‘curdle (milk)’; *myräkkä (maito)* ‘curdling (milk)’; *myrähtää* ‘sour a little, become a little annoyed’; *myreä* ‘sour’. The etymon is present in other Finnic languages: Karelian *myrtyö* ‘become sour; get angry’ (KKS); Votic *mürtüä* ‘become sour’ (VKS); Estonian *mürastama, murastama* ‘anfangen zu verderben, sauer zu werden (Milch, Bier, Eingesalzenes); sauer ansehen’ (EEW); Livonian *murätsä, murästä* ‘etwas sauer werden (vom Fisch)’ (Kettunen 1938).

Underlying the Finnish etymon is a nominal stem **müre-*, which would have given rise to the derived **müreä* (> *myreä*) (Hakulinen 1979: 120–121) and with a consonantal stem **mür-* to the derived verb **mürtüä*. The parallel form in Estonian as well as the Livonian cognate would suggest a form **mure-* as well. The semantics of the Finnic etymon are very specific: they deal with soured foodstuffs and particularly soured, curdled milk, with meanings such as ‘become angry, annoyed’ an obvious

metaphoric extension. Proto-Finnic **müre*, **mure* can thus be argued to have been an adjective meaning ‘sour (particularly of milk)’.

There are strong reasons to first consider the origins of another Finnic etymon, namely that represented by *murea* ‘tender, crumbling’; *muru* ‘bit, crumb’; *mura* ‘gravel, sediment, small stone’; *murtaa* ‘break (off); bend’. The origins of this etymon, and the question of whether it actually represents a single etymon or a number of them, are complex. The verb *murtaa* has a cognate in North Saami *mordit* ‘knock or butt someone backwards or down on to the ground’ and possibly in Erzya Mordvin *murdam* ‘return’. The NES rejects this etymology on semantic grounds, but it seems acceptable: compare Dutch *keren* ‘to turn back’ from Proto-Germanic **kaizjan* represented in Old Norse as *keisa* ‘bend, fold together’ (De Vries, NEW). However, I will make another suggestion below.

As for *muru* ‘crumb’ and *mura* ‘gravel’, LÄGLOS relates them to the same Proto-Germanic etymon, namely Proto-Germanic **mura* represented in Swedish *mor*, *mår* ‘piece of waste’, Icelandic *mor* ‘dust’. LÄGLOS regards this etymology as certain in the case of *mura* but uncertain in the case of *muru*. SSA rejects either Germanic etymology, and the Finnic words have been connected with possible cognates in Saami, Ugric and Samoyedic from a Proto-Uralic noun-verb **mura* ‘piece; break off’ (UEW: 288). North Saami *moarre* ‘thin, non-bearing cover of snow’ from Proto-Saami **moarē* has been connected to the Finnic etymon (Collinder 1955: 36) but is regarded as a Finnic borrowing by UEW (287); the Proto-Saami vowel would be irregular for a cognate as it would suggest Finnic-Saami **mora* instead of **mura* (Sammallahti 1998: 43). Janhunen (SW: 87–88) reconstructs the Proto-Samoyed etymon as **mârš-* ‘brechen, zerbrechen’. The Proto-Samoyed form is compatible with an earlier Uralic **mura*, compare Proto-Samoyed *kârš-* ‘knife’ < PU **kura* (Sammallahti 1988: 537; SW: 54), but also Uralic **muri*, e.g. PU **sun̄i* ‘summer, thaw’ > Proto-Samoyed *t̄ŋ(š)* (Sammallahti 1988: 540, SW: 148). The Ugric cognates, mentioned in Älgu as North Mansi *mür-* ‘zerbrechen, platzen’, East Khanty *m̄ri-* and Hungarian *mar-* ‘bite, eat, gnaw’ present more difficulty. Uralic **mura* would develop into Proto-Ugric **mūra* (Sammallahti 1988: 500–501), but the vowel correspondences of the Mansi terms mentioned by UEW (288), namely Upper Konda *-u-*, Sosva *-o-*, are only compatible with Proto-Ugric **-ü-* if the second-syllable vowel was **-i*. The Khanty forms are even more problematic: the specific vowel correspondence with Vakh *-ɔ-*, Upper Demjanka *-o-* and Obdorsk *-a-* is held to be irregular by Karjalainen (1905: 98–99); the expected result is represented rather by PU **mura* ‘berry (Rubus)’ (Sammallahti 1988: 538; UEW: 287), namely Vakh *-o-*, Upper Demjanka *-u-* and Obdorsk *-o-*. As for Hungarian, forms with *-o-* such as *morzsa* ‘crumb’, *morzsol* ‘grind’ could have developed from PU **mura* (but not, in turn, **muri*) (Sammallahti 1988: 514), but this does not go for *mar* ‘bite’, which is seen as primary by UEW.

Thus, it is possible to reconstruct a Proto-Uralic **muri* underlying the Finnic, Mansi and Samoyedic etyma. The Khanty item doubtlessly belongs here in some fashion but the vowel correspondences are irregular. With Hungarian, there are both phonological and (in the case of *mar* at least) semantic problems. As for the proposed

Germanic etymologies, that of *mura* is quite unobjectionable, but *muru* ‘crumb’ is semantically more distant from the Germanic meaning of ‘sediment, gravel, dust’. Also, the Finnish term looks like a *-u/-y* nominal derivation of a verb (Hakulinen 1979: 222–224), which the supposed Germanic original is not, but the Uralic one may well have been. As a whole, I find the Uralic alternative more compelling, particularly as it possibly involves also *murtaa* ‘break’ and *murea* ‘crumbling, tender’ (more below), which are hard to explain on the basis of the Germanic alternative.

The adjective *murea* ‘crumbling, tender’ is of special interest here, particularly because it appears in Lönnrot’s SRS with a variation *myreä*, making it partially homonymous with the etymon we are primarily interested in. Such variation between velar and palatal vocalism is known in Germanic loanwords (Hofstra 1985: 30–31, 119–123), e.g. *pursto/pyrstö* ‘tail’ (LÄGLOS). It is also known in descriptive vocabulary (e.g. *murista, myristä* ‘grumble’), but I am hesitant to group *murea, myreä* ‘tender, crumbling’, let alone *myreä* ‘sour’, here, for the semantic rationale (which is obvious with sound-symbolic terms such as *murista*) escapes me. A Germanic etymology has been proposed for *murea* ‘tender, crumbling’ in the form of Proto-Germanic **murwija-z* (German *mürbe*, Dutch *murw*, Swedish *mör*, etc.) (LÄGLOS). Semantically, the comparison is unobjectionable, the meaning on either side is partially identical. Phonologically, however, the substitution of the Germanic sequence **-rwija(-z)* by Finnic **-reda* seems to me more problematic: one would expect Finnic ***murpeä* instead. LÄGLOS refers to the etymon *ankea* ‘dreary’ for support. Here however there are both Germanic forms with **-w-*, e.g. **ang(w)u-z* in Old Swedish *anger* ‘sad, sorrowful’ and without, e.g. Proto-Germanic **angez* in Old Norse *anгр* ‘sorrow’. LÄGLOS lists some two dozen other possible Finnic terms with **-eda* with Germanic etymologies, but only in one do we see postconsonantal **-w-* substituted by zero, namely Finnish *robkea* ‘brave’ from Proto-Germanic **wraskwaz* with identical meaning. Here, however, retention of postconsonantal **-w-* in some form would be phonotactically impossible in Finnic (e.g. forms such as ***robkpeä*). Given that, I would deem *murea* ‘crumbling, tender’ to be more likely related to the Uralic etymon represented also by *muru* ‘crumb’. This in turn means that the variant *myreä* mentioned by Lönnrot cannot be regarded as due to the otherwise well-attested double substitution of Germanic **-u-* but may rather be due to the influence of the etymon represented by *myrtyä* as well as, perhaps, *nyreä* ‘sad’.

Could the complete etymon of *myrtyä, myreä*, etc., i.e. Proto-Finnic **müre*, **mure* ‘sour (particularly of milk)’ be a palatal variant of *murea* ‘crumbling, tender’? The likely Uralic etymology of the latter means this possibility is more remote than it would be if the suggested Germanic etymology could be supported. Furthermore, there are significant semantic differences between the two etyma: Finnish *murea* by no means carries connotations of ‘rotten’ or ‘inedible’, in fact, it describes properties desirable for food (such as a cake, or a piece of meat). But the etymon represented by *myrtyä* appears to have a very specific basic meaning of ‘sour’, specifically of milk.

As mentioned above, Saarikivi (2007: 338) provides a Finno-Ugric etymology for both *myrkky* ‘poison’ and *myrtyä*, but the reconstructed meaning of ‘strong (of

food or colour’) seems to me to be too vague. I would like to suggest an alternative etymology, which to be sure has problems of its own: the Indo-European donor item I will suggest is represented very sparsely on the Indo-European side, and the etymology requires a specific semantic shift on the Finnic part. This semantic shift, however, is interesting on its own terms, and therefore justifies the following suggestion:

Proto-Finnic **müre*, **mure* ‘sour (particularly of milk)’ < Indo-Iranian **m(u)rH-* from Indo-European **mrH-*, represented in Sanskrit *mūrch* ‘fest werden, gerinnen, sich verdichten’, (IE **mrH-ské-*), *mūr-tá-* ‘geronnen, fest geworden’ (IE **mrH-tó-*), and of particular interest here, *mūr-ná-* ‘coagulated’ (IE **mrH-e-*) (EWA II: 367–368). The stem is only extant in Indic and Greek in the shape of βρότος ‘clotted blood’, and to make matters worse, the connection between the two is valid only if the laryngeal can be postulated to have disappeared on the Greek side – a possibility which neither Mayrhofer (EWA II: 367–368) or Beekes (EDG) exclude, however. The stem may be on firmer Indo-European ground if, with Matasović (EDPC, **mar-o-*), it is connected with Proto-Celtic **mar-o-* ‘remain’ and Latin *mora* ‘delay’ from an Indo-European **merh₂* ‘delay’ (IEW: 970). The borrowing of Proto-Indo-Iranian **m(u)rH-* as a Pre-Finnic **muri* ‘sour (particularly of milk)’ would phonologically be unproblematic. We would, however, need to suppose a secondary palatalization in **müri* which is exemplified in *pursto/pyrstö* ‘tail’. The influence of the descriptive stem *murista/myristä* ‘grumble’ could account for this. In terms of semantics, milk that turns bad will both curdle and turn sour, and so we would thus have to suppose a semantic shift from ‘congeal, curdle’ > ‘curdle, turn sour (milk)’ > ‘turn sour, become angry’. The meaning ‘curdle’ is present on the Finnic side, e.g. *myrteytä* ‘curdle (milk)’ (SRS). It should be noted however that the Indic and Greek terms do not directly relate to milk (the Greek relates to blood), which means we would have to hypothesize such usage in the (Indo-)Iranian donor language or an independent development in (Pre-)Finnic. All of this is very hypothetical. Note however that if I am correct, Proto-Finnic **müre*, **mure* may fit into a group of (Indo-)Iranian loans having to do, originally at least, with dairy culture: the Indo-Iranian etymology of *piimä* ‘sour milk’ has been previously criticized (SSA) but it has gained recent acceptance (Aikio 2014: 9; Holopainen 2019: 178–180); *terni* ‘first milk’ of possible (Indo-)Iranian origin (SSA; Joki 1973: 328); *udar* ‘udder’ (SSA; Joki 1973: 332–333) and *vasa* ‘calf’ (SSA; Joki 1973: 338–339).

4. *Myrä*

The term *myrä* ‘twilight’ is mentioned in SRS (‘skymning, halfdunkel (ljusare l. mindre mörk än *hämärä*)’) and SKES, where it is connected to some Mari and Permic terms through an assumed metathesis from **rümä*. It is not mentioned in NykS and thus represents a rather obscure term, but it is possible that a number of meteorological terms with *myr-*, *myrV-* may be related to this or result from a blend between *myrä* ‘dark’ and descriptive terms such as *myristä* ‘grumble’. These would be, in Lönnrot’s SRS,

myry ‘(small) storm’ (‘blåst, yrväder (mindre än *myrsky*)’), *myrsky*, *myrskä* ‘storm’ (‘storm, stormvind; alarm’), *myräkkä* ‘loud noise’ (‘starkt sorl, buller, larm’) but ‘bad weather’ in SKES. The latter term also represents the previous etymon in the meaning ‘curdled’, attesting the degree of homonymy among the items treated here. The term *myräkkä* ‘storm’ is represented in Karelian as well (KKS), *myrsky* ‘storm’ has cognates in Karelian, Ingrian, Lude and Votic (*mürskü* ‘torm, raju’; VKS). SSA holds *myrsky* to be descriptive, but the presence of terms like *myry* and *myräkkä* suggest some derivational relationship. A denominal noun derivational element *-ska/-skä, -sko/-skö, -sku* is described by Hakulinen (1979: 177–178) and exemplified by terms such as *penska* ‘child (pejorative)’ from *pentikka*, *pentu* ‘whelp’, *lopuska* ‘waste’ from *loppu* ‘end’. Hakulinen (1979: 180) mentions that this derivational suffix appears to be fairly recent and mainly restricted to Finnish, with only some representatives in Livonian and Estonian. If *myrsky* belongs here as well, it would represent a rather old derivation, with its presence in Votic.

The terms for ‘bad weather’ and ‘storm’ mentioned above may at least partially result from descriptive terms referring to loud noise, e.g. *myristä* ‘grumble’ (‘brumma, ryta, morra, mumla’), *myri* ‘fisticuffs’ (SRS). But they also could be derived from an original **mürä* ‘dark’ if such a meaning can be argued to underlie that of ‘twilight’. This semantic development would seem natural enough, cf. English *dusk* ‘twilight’ from Proto-Germanic *duska-* ‘dark’ (Kroonen, EDPG). For a development from ‘dark’ to ‘bad weather’, cf. Finnish *samea* ‘troubled, opaque’, Karelian *šamakka* id. but also ‘cloudy (weather)’, borrowed into Skolt Saami as *šämvo’k* ‘troubled weather’ (KKuoS: 481).

Focusing only on *myrä* ‘twilight’ for now, SKES does not provide information on the dialectal spread of the term. The Dialect Archives of the Institute for the Languages of Finland (SMSA) have examples of *myrä*, *myriäinen* ‘twilight’, *myriä* ‘to get dark’ with a southeastern dialectal spread – from Valkeala and Vehkalahti on the eastern border of the Häme dialect area northeastwards to Ilomantsi, with most occurrences around Savitaipale, Lemi and Luumäki in Southeastern Finland. There are also attestations from the Savo dialect of Värmland, Sweden.

If a shift from ‘dark’ to ‘twilight’ at least can be allowed, a connection can be made to a Slavic stem of uncertain Indo-European provenance, namely Proto-Slavic **murь* ‘dark; with dark streaks or spots’ (EDS), represented in Russian *múryj* ‘reddish brown, reddish grey; having dark streaks or spots (of animal’s hair or coat)’; Ukrainian *múryj* ‘dark-grey with spots, dark-complexioned’ and Slovenian *múr* ‘black (of animal’s hair or coat)’. Derksen (EDS) draws a comparison to a homonymous **murь* with the meaning ‘mud, mould’, which is in turn compared to Lithuanian *mauraĩ* ‘duckweed, silt, mud’; Pokorny (IEW: 742) makes the same connection and provides more (semantically very heterogeneous) Indo-European cognates. This hypothesis does not support a connection between the Slavic and Finnic etyma, which are not semantically very close. Note that the Slavic terms refer to ‘dark’ in terms of complexion, animal coat, and so on; Finnish *myrä* to darkness in terms of twilight or poor weather.

Another possibility, however, is provided by Vasmer's comparison of Russian *múryj* with Greek ἀμαυρός, μαῦρος 'hardly seen, dim, faint' (REW, *múryj*). Beekes (EDG) takes no heed of this comparison and regards the Greek term as unetymologized, possibly a Scythian loan, but Pokorny (IEW: 701) relates the Greek and Russian items to a PIE **mau-ro* 'matt, schwach, lichtschwach, dunkel', adding (like Vasmer) also Old Norse *meyrr* 'tender'. De Vries (AEW s.v. *meyrr*) is skeptical about the inclusion of Old Norse *meyrr* here, and speculates instead it might result from a **mauria* as a metathesis variant of **marwia*, itself a variant of **murwia*, the Germanic term for 'tender' mentioned above. Puhvel (1957: 237) hypothesizes that Greek ἀμαυρός, μαῦρος 'hardly seen, dim, faint' is borrowed from Scythian **maurva-*, which would in turn be a North Iranian descendant of an earlier **morwo-* 'dark', which itself would be cognate to Greek μόρτος 'black, grey', Μόρυχος 'besmeared'. Puhvel (1957: 236) regards Hittite *aruna-* 'sea', possibly from an earlier **mru-no*, as a possible cognate as well. The Indo-European term in question, **mor-(u-)* 'schwärzen, dunkle Farbe, Schmutzfleck' (IEW: 734) is compared with a distinct set of terms in Balto-Slavic (e.g. Lithuanian *morai* 'mould', Russian *maráju* 'smear') and Puhvel's hypothesis thus excludes Proto-Slavic **murb* 'dark; with dark streaks or spots'.

The important issue here, however, is that Pokorny (IEW: 701) and Vasmer (REW s.v. *смýpyй*) compare Slavic terms with *sm-* as well, such as Russian *smúryj* 'dunkelgrau, finster', *šmúra* 'dark cloud', with some cognates in other Slavic languages (e.g. Kashubian *smura* 'mist') and, notably, parallel forms such as *smur*, *smurá* and *smúro*. Semantically, in the shape of *smurá*, the term would provide a much closer match to Finnish *myrä* 'twilight'. Phonologically, the etymology is not quite unproblematic: Slavic **u*, **ū* as a reflex from earlier **-au-* (which is what we have to deal with in both Derksen's and Vasmer's etymology of Russian *múryj*, *smúryj*) is generally substituted by Finnic **u*, **ū* (Kalima 1952: 53–54). An exception is Finnish *tyrmä* 'prison' from Russian *tjur'má* id. (SSA), but according to Kalima (1952: 60), the shift in Finnish towards palatal vocalism was conditioned by the palatalized consonants in the Slavic original. That said, the substitution of donor language velar **-u-* by palatal **-ü-* is known, as was previously mentioned, in Germanic loanwords but also in Baltic loanwords, e.g. Finnish *syrjä* 'edge' from Proto-Baltic **sturja*, dialectal Lithuanian *stūris* 'edge' and Finnish *tyhjä* 'empty' from Proto-Baltic **tuštja-*, Lithuanian *tūščias* 'empty, poor' (Koivulehto 1999: 8). Koivulehto (2007: 241) furthermore adds an early Indo-European loanword, namely Finnish *kyrsä* 'unleavened, thin bread' < PIE **krusā*. In addition, variation between **-u-* and **-ü-* as well as doublets such as *tybmä* 'stupid', *tubma* 'nasty', the aforementioned *pyrstö/pursto* 'tail' and so on are attested in Finnic (Saarikivi 2007: 331–332, 2010: 253–254). According to Saarikivi, an important possible cause for the emergence of such doublets is descriptivization: the development of affective connotations in originally non-descriptive vocabulary (such as loanwords). In strictly descriptive vocabulary in Finnic, variation between velar and palatal vocalism is common. As Finnish *myrä* 'twilight' may be related to a number of derived terms carrying meanings of poor, noisy weather, e.g. *myrsky* 'storm', that is, vocabulary items

carrying affective meanings possibly influenced by preexisting descriptive terms such as *myristä* ‘grumble’, it is entirely possible that an original **mura* gained a palatal doublet **mürä* in some kind of descriptivization process. A weakness of this explanation is that no trace of **mura* exists. Its disappearance may have been stimulated by the existence of a homonymic *mura* ‘gravel’; furthermore, *myrä* ‘twilight’ is a somewhat rare and obscure term as it is.

Based on the existence of the substitution pattern **-u- > *-ü-* in Germanic and Baltic etymology (leaving aside *tyrmä* ‘prison’ < Russian *tjur'má*), as well as the existence of variation between **-u-* and **-ü-* in Finnic “descriptivized” vocabulary (and not only there), I think the etymology of Finnish *myrä* ‘twilight’ and its derived cognates from Russian *smurá* ‘dark’ or perhaps *smúra* ‘dark cloud’ is entirely acceptable. Note also that the dialectal spread of Finnish *myrä* falls within the zone where Russian loanwords are represented most strongly, i.e. the southeastern dialects and the southernmost and easternmost Savo dialects (Jarva 2003: 199).

5. *Myri, myry*

Lönnrot (SRS) mentions *myry* ‘protruding state’ (‘framstående tillstånd’) which occurs as well as *myri*, and he lists constructions such as *perse myrillänsä* ‘arse up’ (‘med stussen uppåt’), *olla myryllänsä* ‘protrude’ (‘vara utstående’). The term is not listed in NykS, SKES or SSA. The Dialect Archives of the Institute for the Languages of Finland (SMSA) have data for the adverbial *myrillään* and derived verbs such as *myryttää* but not for the presupposed underlying *myri* or *myry*, with the possible exception of the expression *päin myriä* (SMSA, Tyrvää), meaning ‘botched, messed up’. Forms encountered in SMSA are *myrillään* (or *myrillänsä*), *myryllään*, *myrrillään* and *myrryllään* as well as verbs such as *myrristää*, *myrittää*, *myritellä*, *myrrytellä*, and so on. The adverbs usually occur with the noun *perse* ‘arse’ and mean ‘arse up’, whereas the verbs typically signify ‘moon, expose one’s arse’. Whereas *myri* or *myry* are not encountered as such, there are some attestations for compound forms such as *myrryperse* ‘someone with his arse up’ (SMSA, Mynämäki), *myriperäinen* (SMSA, Kauvatsa) ‘when, if tying a knot, a second knot was tied in the same direction as the previous one’. Related as well may be *myrihattu*, ‘a covering (of crop) on a stook of crops such that the crown part lies on one side and the stem part lies on the other side of the stook’ (SMSA, Vampula). In terms of dialectal spread, the word is found in an area centered on Lower Satakunta, northward from Mynämäki and Kustavi until Pori, with the easternmost occurrences in Karkku, Tyrvää and Loimaa. There is a single outlying attestation from Ähtäri, situated on the border of the Ostrobothnian and Savo dialect areas.

The variation between single and geminate *-r-* is not easy to explain. It could reflect a tendency for liquid and nasal geminates to shorten in the Southwestern and Lower Satakunta dialect areas (Rapola 1966: 273–275), in which case the underlying original form would be *myrry/myrri*. The shortening tendency in question occurs

primarily after long vowels and unstressed vowels (Rapola 1966: 273) but sporadically after short stressed syllables as well (Rapola 1966: 274). A geminate *-rr-* is not frequent in Finnish and would suggest recent foreign origin (cf. *narri* ‘jester’), but the forms encountered would be compatible with *-rr-* as a weak-grade alternant of **-rt-* as well, e.g. **myrti*, **myrty*. This would explain forms such as *myrrillään* as well as verbs such as *myrrittää*, but the occurrence of compounds such as *myrriperse* or *myrrihattu* would then have to be explained as resulting from exaptation of a weak-grade alternant of **myrti*. Alternatively, the forms with single *-r-* may be original, and the geminate *-rr-* may be the result of contamination with forms belonging to the etymon *myrtyä* ‘turn sour’ mentioned above. A sign of this may be that both verbs such as *myrtyttää* and adverbs such as *myrtyllään* can have the meaning ‘be angry’ in addition to ‘show one’s arse’. Those additional meanings clearly originate with *myrtyä* ‘turn sour’ but also ‘become angry’. If the forms with single *-r-* are original, we would be dealing with **myri*, **myry*, but if compounds such as *myriperseinen* could be secondary exaptations, an original **myrki* or **myrkä* could be thinkable as well. As for the final vowel, the most likely possibility, on the basis of *myriperseinen* and the expression *päin myriä* is that we are dealing with an *-i* stem, and therefore a relatively recent formation. The expressions *myrillään*, *myrrillään* in themselves could also be compatible with an underlying **myre-* or **myrä-* provided that they are originally plural stems.

Looking at the semantics of the Finnish term, it is not that obvious that Lönnrot’s ‘protruding state’ is the most basic meaning. The expression *päin myriä* would suggest ‘topsy-turvy’ or a non-standard, undesirable physical position. This is also compatible with *myrihattu*, where the covering of the stool is positioned asymmetrically, and *myriperseinen* ‘when, if tying a knot, a second knot was tied in the same direction as the previous one’. Verbs such as *myrittää* and the adverb *myrillään* generally mean ‘arse-up’ or ‘show one’s arse’. The underlying **myri* (or **myrri*, etc.) may thus have meant something like ‘upside-down’ or ‘backward’. This opens up the possibility that it represents a Saami borrowing, from the etymon represented by North Saami *mur’det* ‘move (itr.) sideways or backwards’ (Nielsen 1932–1962), Tysfjord *mur’riet* ‘rücklings (mit dem Rücken voraus) hinausgehen’, *mur’ruot* ‘rückwärts, rücklings’ (Lagercrantz 1939 § 3987), Lule Saami *mur’tēt* ‘move backwards’, *mur’htōt* ‘in a crouched position’ (Grundström 1946). The Saami term is represented from Ume Saami eastwards to Ter Saami (Álgu), and is considered a borrowing from Finnish *murtaa* ‘break’ (SSA). In the more eastern Saami cognates, this meaning is preserved more closely, e.g. Skolt Saami *mur̄^dḥed* ‘break (in two)’ (Itkonen, KKuoS: 267–268). We should perhaps consider the possibility that North Saami *mur’det* and its cognates meaning ‘moving backwards’ are not related to the homonymic stem meaning ‘break’ at all, but rather represent a Finno-Permic **muri* meaning ‘move backwards’ represented by Mordvin *murdams* ‘return’.

Semantically, the meanings encountered in Lule and North Saami fit the Finnish one very well, provided a meaning shift from ‘move backwards’ or ‘crouched’ to ‘show one’s arse’ or ‘arse-up’. On the Finnish side, we would have to suppose an

original verb **myrtiä*, from which then *myrristää* and the like, ‘show one’s arse’. In terms of phonology, this idea is problematic in that Saami *-u-* is generally substituted with Finnish *-u-* in Saami loanwords, as attested by Aikio’s (2009) material. In the comprehensive word-list of Aikio (2009: 244–290), there is not a single Finnish item with first-syllable *-y-*. A shift to palatal vocalism on the Finnish side could have occurred to avoid confusion with the Finnish etymon *murtaa* ‘to break’ (from which the Saami word was borrowed in turn), but this explanation is ad hoc. The dialectal spread of the Finnish etymon is also unexpected for a Saami loanword: such loanwords are rarer in the southwestern dialects of Finnish than elsewhere (Aikio 2009: 216–217). The only certain loanword restricted to the southwest is *tiena* ‘salvage’, and it occurs, just like the etymon considered here, in the northern subpart of the southwest dialect area (Aikio 2009: 217–218). This does not mean that a Saami origin for *myrillään* and the like is impossible, but it is another oddity, in addition to the palatal vocalism. The semantic match is close enough, however, for this borrowing etymology to be at least deserving of consideration.

Supposing an original **myrtiä*, verbs such as *myrristää* and the like could be straightforward verbal derivations. The adverb *myrillään* could then be based on a derived action noun (Hakulinen 1979: 192) **myrti* ‘crouched position, back- or arse-up’ analogously to *makuullaan* ‘in a lying position’. Other expressions of position with *-lla* and a possessive suffix, such as *seisoallaan* ‘standing’, *istuallaan* ‘sitting’, appear to be based on infinitival forms (Hakulinen 1979: 255), whereas *myrillään* does not. It does seem to belong to the same group, however. The weak-grade occurrence of this underlying noun in compounds such as *myrihattu* and the expression *päin myriä* ‘messed up’ would, however, be based on exaptations from the adverb. Variation between geminate and single *-r-* would be explained by a general, if somewhat sporadic, variation between geminate and single nasals and liquids in the Southwestern and Lower Satakunta dialects. Forms with a labial second-syllable vowel, e.g. *myrryllään*, *myrryttää* and *myrryperse* are, however, problematic in this regard. Either a *-yl/-u* action noun suffix (Hakulinen 1979: 222–224) or a deverbal intransitive/reflexive *-yl/-u* (Hakulinen 1979: 269–271) would presuppose an underlying **myrteä*. This **myrteä* would have merged with **myrtiä* as **myrti*, *myrtiä* in the southern parts of the dialectal area where the etymon is found, but remain distinct in the northern part (Ketunen 1940: 192, 197). Perhaps this in combination with the possibility of contamination with *myrtyä* ‘turn sour’ mentioned before suffices to explain the co-occurrence of *myrillään* and *myrryllään*, *myrristää* and *myrryttää*. Note also that a similar relation in suffixes is attested in Finnish *ehtiä* ‘make it; be on time’ and *ehtyä* ‘run out, run dry’. Neither the variation between single and geminate *-r-* or that between second-syllable *-i* and *-y* can be satisfactorily explained. These variations are a matter of fact, however. They do not cast doubt on the coherence of the etymon represented by *myrillään* or that this etymon has a single origin.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that

1. Finnish *myrkky* ‘poison’, *myrkä* ‘stench’ is of Proto-Germanic origin, **murka* ‘(making) tender’, specifically in a meaning ‘rotten’ attested in Germanic daughter languages.
2. Finnish *myrtyä* ‘turn sour, get angry’ and related items, underlyingly **müre*, **mure* ‘sour (of milk)’ is an Indo-Iranian borrowing, Sanskrit *mūr-ná-* ‘coagulated’ from IE **mrH-e-*.
3. Finnish *myrä* ‘twilight’ is a Russian loanword, cf. *smúryj* ‘dunkelgrau, finster’, *šmúra* ‘dark cloud’.
4. Finnish *myrillään*, *myrryllään* ‘arse-up’, *myrristää* ‘show one’s arse’, *päin myriä* ‘messed up’, etc. represent a Saami borrowing from North Saami *mur’det* ‘move (itr.) sideways or backwards’, Lule Saami *mur’tēt* ‘move backwards’, *mur’btöt* ‘in a crouched position’.

Of these four proposals, I would consider 1 and 3 reasonably safe, with 2 and 4 being much more tentative. The Indo-Iranian etymology for *myrtyä* ‘turn sour, get angry’ is tentative primarily because of the very thin spread of the Indo-European etymon (Sanskrit and Greek); phonologically and semantically it is unobjectionable. An original meaning of ‘curdle’ can very well be reconstructed on the Finnish side, and a semantic development from ‘coagulate’ to ‘curdle’ seems unproblematic. The Saami etymology for Finnish *myrillään* and the like is complicated by a number of unexplained phonological variations on the Finnish side, and by the fact that the haphazard dialectal attestation of the Finnish item makes it very difficult to determine its original semantics. I would deem the etymology worthy of consideration because the presumed semantic development from ‘move backwards, crouched’ to ‘arse-up, show one’s arse’ does fit what we know about the semantics of the Finnish etymon. The proposed phonological substitution of Saami *-u-* by Finnish *-y-* is highly unusual, though the substitution pattern in and of itself is known from other loanword layers.

The words dealt with in this paper are intertwined in a number of ways. *Myrkky* and *myrtyä* have been connected etymologically by Saarikivi (2007), and while I do not follow his hypothesis, the meanings of the two are close. The etymon *myrtyä* is paralleled by *murtua* ‘to break’, *murea* ‘tender’ and so on to the extent that it should be considered whether the two are etymologically related (an idea which I reject above). Semantically, *myrtyä* and particularly forms which may or may not be related to *myrä* ‘twilight’ (e.g. *myrsky* ‘storm’) have been influenced by the descriptive stem *murista/myristä* ‘grumble’. In turn, *myrtyä* in its meaning of ‘become angry’ has blended in with the etymon represented by *myrillään* ‘arse up’. Despite this, I suggest four different loanword etymologies for each of the stems represented here.

All of the etymologies presented here show a somewhat irregular origin of first-syllable *-y-*. In the case of *myrkky*, the substitution of Germanic **-u-* with Finnic **-ü-* is widely attested. In the case of *myrtyä*, Finnic material actually shows traces of variation between **müre-* and **mure-*, and substitution of Indo-Iranian **-u-* with a double **-u-/*-ü-* may be acceptable as other early Indo-European loans (such as *kyrsä*) also show substitution of a velar by a palatal vowel. With *myrä* ‘twilight’, substitution of Russian *-u-* by Finnish *-y-* is poorly attested; the single supporting example (Finnish *tyrmä* ‘prison’) shows palatalized consonants on the Russian side which are absent in Russian *šmúra* ‘dark cloud’. Nonetheless, in terms of its semantic match and phonological match apart from the palatal vowel, as well as in terms of its dialectal spread, the loan etymology presented here for Finnish *myrä* should be considered. In the case of the etymon represented by *myrillään*, the substitution of the Saami velar *-u-* by a palatal *-y-* is the least of the problems, for the haphazard attestation and irregular phonological variation of the Finnish etymon impedes semantic and phonological reconstruction. The Saami etymology presented here is particularly promising in terms of semantics. The Finnish word, however, may be too marginal to be ever etymologized securely.

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