

ESTONIAN  
NATIONAL  
SYMBOLS

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## - Republic of Estonia -

**Declared:** 24 February 1918

**Member of:** European Union, NATO

**Coordinates:** 58°35' N, 25°47' E

**Area:** 45 228 sq km

**Population:** 1 290 000

**Density:** 28.5 persons per sq km

**Ethnic groups:** Estonians 69%,  
Russians 25%

**Religions:** Orthodox 16%,  
Protestant 10%

**Capital:** Tallinn

**Larger cities:** Tartu, Narva, Pärnu,  
Kohtla-Järve

**Administrative divisions:** 15 counties

According to popular belief, the Estonian name for the country, **Eesti**, derives from *aesti*, the name of a nation situated on the southeastern coast of the Baltic Sea in Roman times. The word (Eesti < [a]est - ost - east), however, can be traced back to some antecedent form of the Germanic languages to the west, designating the Estonians as the 'people of the east'. The Finns and Latvians have appellations for Estonia based on historical border provinces in Estonia: the Finns' *Viro* comes from Virumaa on the northeastern coast, and *Igaunija* of the Latvians from Ugandi in the South-East.

Estonsko    エストニア  
 Észtország    Estteena  
 Эстония    འཕྲོ་ཁྱེད་ལྗོངས་    Ęstimō  
 אֶסְטוֹנְיָה    Εσθονία  
 Estonya    Estonja    Estonia  
 ... - ---- - ... -    ເອສໂຕເນີຍ  
 Eistland    Istuña    Estland  
 Эстонія    an Eastóin  
 एस्टोनिया    Estonie    Estija  
 Yn Estaan    爱沙尼亚  
 إستونيا    Estniska  
 Etonia    Эстм    གཤམ་རྒྱུ་ཁོང་ཁོང་ཁོང་



VISUAL  
ESTONIA





Throughout history the Estonians have called themselves *maarahvas* (lit. 'people of the land'). The reason for this can be discerned in the landscape of Estonia – scattered farms in a mosaic of fields, meadows and woodland. The taciturn nature of Estonians has probably much to do with this reclusive way of life.

Most Estonians hold an emotional attachment to certain images, which remind them of home, family values, the Estonian character and other such qualities. This perception of belonging can be evoked by the sea, the forest, a well-kept farm or simply one's own home with its apple orchard, an old tree in the front garden, a stone fence and the surrounding rural landscape.

The latter could be the fertile fields of central Estonia or the meagre juniper-filled grazing lands on the western islands – both conjure romantic and sentimental reactions in Estonians.

Other shared symbols include the Tallinn skyline viewed from the sea and the facade of the classicist main building of the University of Tartu.



The changing silhouette of the capital, Tallinn, with its bustling harbour in the foreground symbolises the importance marine trade has had for the Estonian economy through the ages.



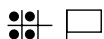
At more than two hundred years old, the main building of the University of Tartu has witnessed the activities of the Baltic German Estophiles, and the emergence in the early 19th century of the first indigenous Estonians to seek a higher education.



ESTONIAN  
FLAG





**- Estonian flag -**

The national flag of Estonia features three equal horizontal bands of blue (top), black, and white. The ratio of the width to the length of the flag is 7 to 11, the standard size 105 x 165 cm. The appropriate height of the flagpole depends on the size of the flag – the width of the hoisted flag must be one sixth of the height of the flagstaff.

The blue shade of the tricolour caused some argument during the reinstatement of the state symbols in the 1990s – should it render the blue of the cornflower or represent the cerulean of the skies? To resolve the matter an exact tone in the Pantone colour chart, No. 285C, was determined by the National Flag Act of 1993.



The Presidential flag features the great state coat of arms in the centre.



The small coat of arms embellishes the swallow-tailed naval ensign.

One of the most cherished national symbols of Estonia is the blue-black-white colour combination, along with its most significant expression in the national flag.

The birth of the tricolour is linked with the rise of national awareness in the 1860s – the flag is therefore the same age as the political history of its people. The process culminated in the blue-black-white flag being declared the official state symbol by the Estonian Provisional Government on 21 November 1918.

The Estonian flag is hoisted every morning at the top of Tall Hermann – the main tower of Toompea Castle in Tallinn. The banner is permanently flown on the offices of government institutions, municipal buildings and border checkpoints. In addition, the national tricolour flies over schools, universities and colleges on school days.

The flag is displayed on all residential and public buildings on 13 Flag Days annually, including Independence Day (24 February), Victory Day (23 June),

and the Restoration of Independence Day (20 August). Quite naturally, all Estonians have the right and privilege to raise the national flag on other days as well.

The flag is hoisted at sunrise, but not earlier than 7 am and taken down at sunset, but not later than 10 pm.

On Midsummer Night (23/24 June) the national flag is not lowered at all. In other cases, any continuously flown flag must be illuminated during the hours of darkness.

The Estonian flag was born in the national-romantic student circles of the University of Tartu during the final quarter of the 19th century. The blue, black and white tricolour was consecrated by the members of the Society of Estonian Students in Otepää on 4 June 1884.

Due to the enmity of both the local Baltic German nobility and Russian central government, opportunities for flying the tricolour openly were quite limited. However, the flag was soon adopted not merely by the Estonian students but by the whole nation.



To celebrate the 120th anniversary of its consecration, the original Estonian flag was again displayed in St Mary's Church in Otepää.

The political significance of the flag was further strengthened during the demonstrations of the 1905 Russian Revolution and confirmed during the February Revolution in 1917, when the Estonians managed to unify their ethnic territories in the neighbouring provinces of Estland and Livland into a single autonomous administrative unit – the Estonian Governorate.

The Declaration of Independence in 1918 was, quite naturally, announced under blue, black and white banners. There are several interpretations of the national colours. Accordant with the most popular, blue represents the reflection of the sky in the lakes and the sea, thus symbolising endurance: “until the skies last”; black stands for the colour of the traditional greatcoat of an Estonian man or for the earth that feeds its people; white denotes the desire for light and purity.

Throughout the occupations, from 1940 till the end of the 1980s, the Soviet authorities sought to ban the use of the blue, black and white colour set in any form.

Yet, the colours lived on in the free world. In late September 1944 many Estonians left their country in order to escape Bolshevik persecution and exile communities were founded in the USA, Sweden, Canada and Australia. The expatriates retained the flag and other national symbols and promoted their use at every opportunity.



A symbol of resistance: an Estonian flag hidden in the wall of the headmaster's office at Kildu Primary School during the Stalinist persecution in the 1940s, and found in 2004.

The return of the national colours in the late 1980s was spontaneous and steady. Starting in earnest in 1988, the civil movement that later became known as the Singing Revolution also restored the blue, black and white flag to the public domain.

The flag was once again hoisted at the top of the Tall Hermann tower of Toompea Castle on 24 February 1989.

In 1991, the then almost centenarian original of the Estonian national flag was brought out from its hiding place underneath a stove in a farm near Jõgeva, where it had been concealed since 1943. This banner is thus among the very few extant original national flags in the world.





The Estonians' use of national colours lacks neither zeal nor imagination.



In Asia, one of the most noted instances of the Estonian colours used to embellish the *kesho-mawashi*, the embroidered silk apron worn by Baruto - Kaido Höövelson, the first Estonian to reach the top division of Japanese sumo wrestling.



The three colours on the flag for the major Estonian sports association *Kalev*.



Some of the snappiest examples of the use of the national colours can be found in the armed forces. The blue, black and white triangular roundel was introduced as the Estonian aircraft marking in March 1919, during the War of Independence.

Besides the national tricolour, the restoration of independence in 1991 again introduced a large number of civic insignia that had been prohibited for nearly fifty years.

Many towns and rural municipalities reinstated their old banners, many more established entirely new ones. The Scandinavian-inspired ardour for local heraldic heritage, once ignited, resulted in the design of flags for all but the tiniest of Estonian localities.



Another set of blue, black and white on the flag for Paistu rural municipality.



ESTONIAN  
COAT OF ARMS





### - Great coat of arms -



The great state coat of arms for the Republic of Estonia has three blue lions, *passant gardant*, on a golden shield. The shield is framed by two golden oak branches that cross at the base and extend up both sides.

National sovereignty achieved in the Estonian War of Independence (fought from 1918 to 1920) did not interrupt the local heraldic tradition.

The central motif of the state coat of arms – three blue lions on a golden shield – is among the oldest symbols of Estonia. It stems from the coats of arms of the Knighthood of Harrien-Vironia (roughly corresponding to the modern counties of Harju and Viru) and Tallinn. These were granted by Valdemar II, King of Denmark, after

The story of the Tallinn coat of arms is connected with the birth of another ancient symbol. As the legend goes, the Danish flag called *Dannebrog* fell from the sky during a fight between the crusading Danes and Estonians at the foot of the present day Toompea Castle in 1219. While the validity of the case remains open, the royal Danish ancestry of the coats of arms for both Tallinn and Estonia is factual.

It is also argued that the present name of Tallinn comes from this event: garrisoned by the Danes, the fort overlooking the harbour and the adjacent trading post was known, in Latin, as *castrum Danorum*, the Danish castle, or *Taani linn* in Estonian – and from this comes the name Tallinn.

the founding of the Duchy of Estonia during the Northern Crusades.

The current design for the state coat of arms acquired official status in 1925.

Even while suppressed in Estonia, during the years under successive totalitarian occupations, the coat of arms was kept in use in the West by the government in exile and by the surviving diplomatic missions of the Republic of Estonia.

## ESTONIAN COAT OF ARMS



The small Tallinn coat of arms marks the purported birthplace of the *Dannebrog* – the Danish King's Garden in the Old Town of Tallinn.



The small coat of arms along with another heraldic feline – the *lion rampant argent* – has decorated the *azure* insignia of the Estonian Police since 1935.



The long and controversial history of the coat of arms, and the fact that its charge was employed by other nations (Denmark and England) and historical lands (Normandy), were some of the reasons it seemed unsuitable for the young Estonian Republic in the 1920s.

Although the 'three lions' were already used by the armed forces and on the currency, contests were organised in order to find an alternative design. The terms prescribed to the artists suggested showing the black eagle – *põhjakotkas* (lit. 'eagle of the north'), a mythological figure in the national epic *Kalevipoeg* – or a beacon or the characters EV from the name for the Republic, *Eesti Vabariik*. However, due to the lack of a broad consensus, none of the alternative designs was adopted and the three lions remained.



Young Eagles – boys' corps of the Estonian Defence League, with the Northern Eagle crest of the League in the background.



Aware of the power of images, the Soviets tried to sever any continuity in the use of Estonian symbols and erase an entire interwar period from the memory of the people. Foremost among the 'bourgeois' symbols proscribed was the emblem with three lions, which was replaced by that of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The repudiation of history, however, brought about some embarrassment to the Communists, as the elimination of all precarious symbols from their original setting often left a strikingly empty place which in turn symbolised something else...



The restoration of the Tallinn coat of arms on the Estonian Drama Theatre. Tallinn's oldest symbol had been plastered over due to its similarity to the coat of arms of the Republic of Estonia.

An endeavour to combine the symbols of the two historical provinces of Estonia – Estland and Livland.



Estonian heraldry goes back to the medieval period, when the Estonian ethnic territory was divided between the Livonian Order, the Kingdom of Denmark, and the Bishoprics of Dorpat and Ösel-Wiek. In addition, four Estonian towns belonged to the Hanseatic League. It is no surprise, therefore, that early local coats of arms relate closely to the heraldic traditions of Northern Europe.

Since the Middle Ages, many Estonian place names have had equivalents in German (for example Tallinn – *Reval*, Tartu – *Dorpat*, or Viljandi – *Fellin*) and, to a lesser extent, Swedish, Russian, Latvian and Finnish.

Quite a few of the foreign-language toponyms are rooted in once-used Estonian place names that have been dropped from modern usage. Every so often, they can even help decipher the heraldic symbols of a particular locality.

In the late 1930s, a number of coats of arms were designed for towns that sprang up during the rapid wave of urbanisation in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This bloom of local heraldry was cut short by the Soviets in 1940.

The majority of the coats of arms of smaller places, including rural and urban municipalities, date from the 1990s. Quite often, the new symbols rely upon important local landmarks.



The coat of arms for Narva, conferred by the King of Sweden in 1585, features the western sword, the oriental scimitar and the three round shots – all representing the war-ridden history of the town, with Muscovite Russia across the river.



Paide's coat of arms shows a silver tower associates with the Low German name of the town – *Wittenstein* (lit. 'White Stone'). The connection between Paide's Estonian name and the word for limestone ('paas', genitive 'pae') is far less obvious.



Kunda's coat of arms draws on artefacts found at Kunda Lammasmägi, a major archaeological site on the north coast of Estonia. The Mesolithic harpoon and fish spear points of antler have found their way to a coat of arms designed in the late 20th century.

Estonia's first state decoration, the Cross of Liberty, was founded on the first anniversary of the declaration of independence – 24 February 1919. The Cross was bestowed for services rendered during the Estonian War of Independence (1918-20). The award provided several privileges including free higher education – about 750 Estonian recipients of the Cross were either schoolboys (and one schoolgirl) or students.



The Cross of Liberty (2nd rank, II division) awarded to Captain Eduard Neps, CO of armoured train No 1, *Kapten Irv*. Captain Neps was one of the nine Estonians thrice decorated with the most highly regarded state award.

The Memorial Badge of the Estonian Red Cross, the first award to accredit services lent to the Estonian people in the humanitarian field and for saving a life, was established in 1920 by the Estonian Red Cross Society. It was re-established as an order and adopted as a state decoration in 1926.



Kristina Šmigun-Vähi, two-time Olympic gold medallist in cross-country skiing, presenting her Order of the Estonian Red Cross, 3rd Class.



The Order of the White Star is awarded to both Estonian and foreign nationals for eminent public service for the benefit of the Republic of Estonia.



The Order of the National Coat of Arms – a decoration of the highest class for services rendered to the republic that can only be bestowed on Estonian citizens.

## - The collar of the Order of the National Coat of Arms -



The collar of the Order of the National Coat of Arms was established as the badge of the office of the President of the Republic of Estonia on 24 February 1936. Following the Soviet annexation in 1940, however, the collar was looted and taken to Moscow as a trophy. Regrettably, the Russian Federation has so far refused to return it. In 2008 the president's badge of office was recreated on the basis of original drawings by the most prolific designer of Estonian state awards, Paul Luhtein.



In everyday life in Estonia, centuries-old symbolic images exist side by side with emblems that emerged during the era of the national awakening, as well as those from the first period of independence. Several symbols born during the half-century of Communist occupation are also still quite popular.

Promising new national symbols are being proposed by copy-writers and visual designers, brand and marketing experts, authors and visionaries.



**EST**, the prefix of the numbers of Estonian sailing boats, is the sole trigram abbreviation for Estonia. The two-letter country codes for Estonia include **ES** for civil aircraft, **EE** for Internet top level domain and **ET** for the Estonian language in the EU.

Although absent from official usage, several cross motifs are among the most beloved and widely recognised decorative elements in Estonian folk art. A particularly popular variant of the cross is the octagram, known in Estonian as *Muhu mänd* (lit. 'Muhu whorl') or *kaheksakand* (lit. 'eight-heeled star'). Another cross motif also combining heathen and Christian connotations, the wheel or Sun cross, is equally loved.



The *kaheksakand* woven sash pattern on a former water tower – now an art gallery in Lasva, southern Estonia.



Since the late 1980s, the wheel cross has graced the blazon of Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts (Estonian Heritage Society).



Impressive silver necklaces worn by the orthodox Setu women commonly consist of coins minted over several centuries and weigh over two kilograms.

It has been suggested that the word *raha* ('money') in Estonian originates from an ancient Gothic loan denoting fur. Another presumptive explanation connects the original stem of *raha* with the spoils of war.

The oldest coin hoard found in Estonia consists of Late Roman *sestertii* and *solidi*. The Viking Age introduced the Arabian *dirhams*, Russian *nogatas* and Western European *denars* and pence. The first local mints were probably set up in the 1220s.



Early modern farthings from 16th century Dorpat (Tartu) and Reval (Tallinn).

The diversity of currencies has made Estonian numismatics rather varied – marks, shillings, pence, *öre*, *groschen*, *ducats*, *crowns*, *grivnas*, *kopecks* and so on, have all been used on Estonian territory.

As in many a nascent nation, the legal tender of the Republic of Estonia has been used to signal the foreign policy preferences of the country. From 1919 to 1928, the name *mark* was used as in Germany and Finland; in the course of the monetary reform of 1928, it was replaced by *kroon*, a namesake of the currency of Sweden and Denmark.



A hybrid of the Viking longship and the Hanseatic cog on a one-*kroon* coin refers to the Estonian claim for a place among the ancient seafarers of the North.

The newly restored Estonian state reintroduced the Estonian *kroon* and *sent* in 1992. Adopting the national currency to supersede the despised Soviet rouble raised Estonian morale no end. Consequently, giving up their own money in favour of the European common currency 19 years later, in 2011, was a tough sacrifice for many Estonians.



The design of pre-war Estonian banknotes relied excessively on national imagery – hardworking country men and women and natural landmarks.



Several Estonian banknotes of the 1990s portrayed people of cultural merit, such as author A. H. Tammsaare and romantic poet Lydia Koidula.



The Estonian outline on the national side of Estonian Euro coins.

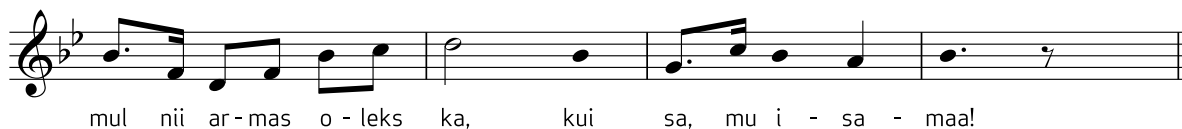
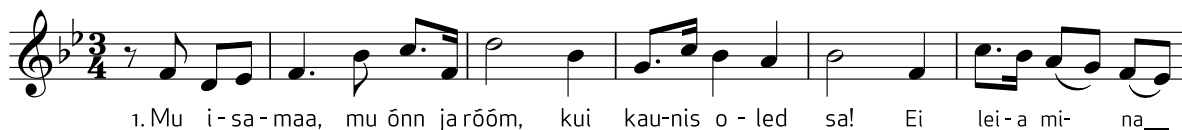


## Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm

My native land, my joy, delight

Johann Voldemar Jannsen

Fredrik Pacius



Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm  
kui kaunis oled sa!  
Ei leia mina iial teal  
see suure, laia ilma peal,  
mis mul nii armas oleks ka,  
kui sa, mu isamaa!

Sa oled mind ju sünnitan'd  
ja üles kasvatan'd;  
sind tänan mina alati  
ja jään sull' truuks surmani,  
mul kõige armsam oled sa,  
mu kallis isamaa!

Su üle Jumal valvaku  
mu armas isamaa!  
Ta olgu sinu kaitseja  
ja võtku rohkest õnnista,  
mis iial ette võtad sa,  
mu kallis isamaa!

My native land, my joy, delight  
How fair thou art and bright!  
And nowhere in the world all round  
Can ever such a place be found  
So well beloved as I love thee,  
My native country dear!

My little cradle stood on thy soil,  
Whose blessings ease my toil.  
With my last breath my thanks to thee  
For true to death I'll ever be.  
O worthy, most beloved and fine.  
Thou dearest country mine!

May God in Heaven thee defend,  
My best, my dearest land!  
May He be guard, may He be shield,  
Forever may He bless and wield  
O graciously add deeds of thine,  
Thou dearest country mine!



The Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia proclaiming the independence of Estonia in February 1918 ends with the last verse of Johann Voldemar Jannsen's lyrics.



Portraits of F. Pacius and J. V. Jannsen on an Estonian postal souvenir sheet issued to celebrate the 130th anniversary of the National Anthem.

The anthem probably occupies the most endangered position amongst the official national symbols of Estonia. Every now and then a discussion erupts concerning the need for a new national song. The main causes of dissatisfaction are the foreign author, lack of national spirit and the reluctance to share such a key symbol with a neighbour. A noticeable rival to the anthem emerged in the Soviet era – a choral song by Gustav Ernesaks, *My Homeland is My Love*, based on a lyric poem by Lydia Koidula. Ernesaks composed the song in 1944 while in forced evacuation in Russia, knowing that the old anthem would be banned. This song indeed became a kind of alternative anthem, which was sung during the years of Soviet occupation at the end of each song festival, with the public standing and singing as one.

Notwithstanding the ongoing debate about whether or not Estonia ought to be regarded as one of the Nordic countries, the Estonians undeniably have a strong, emotional affiliation at least with one Nordic nation, the linguistically related Finns.

The affinity is further strengthened by the fact that the two countries sing their national anthems to the same tune composed by the German-born denizen of Finland, Frederik Pacius.

Set initially to the Swedish lyrics of Johan Ludvig Runeberg, the national poet of Finland, and published for the student spring festivities in 1848, the song quickly gained popularity and was first sung in Finnish in 1867.

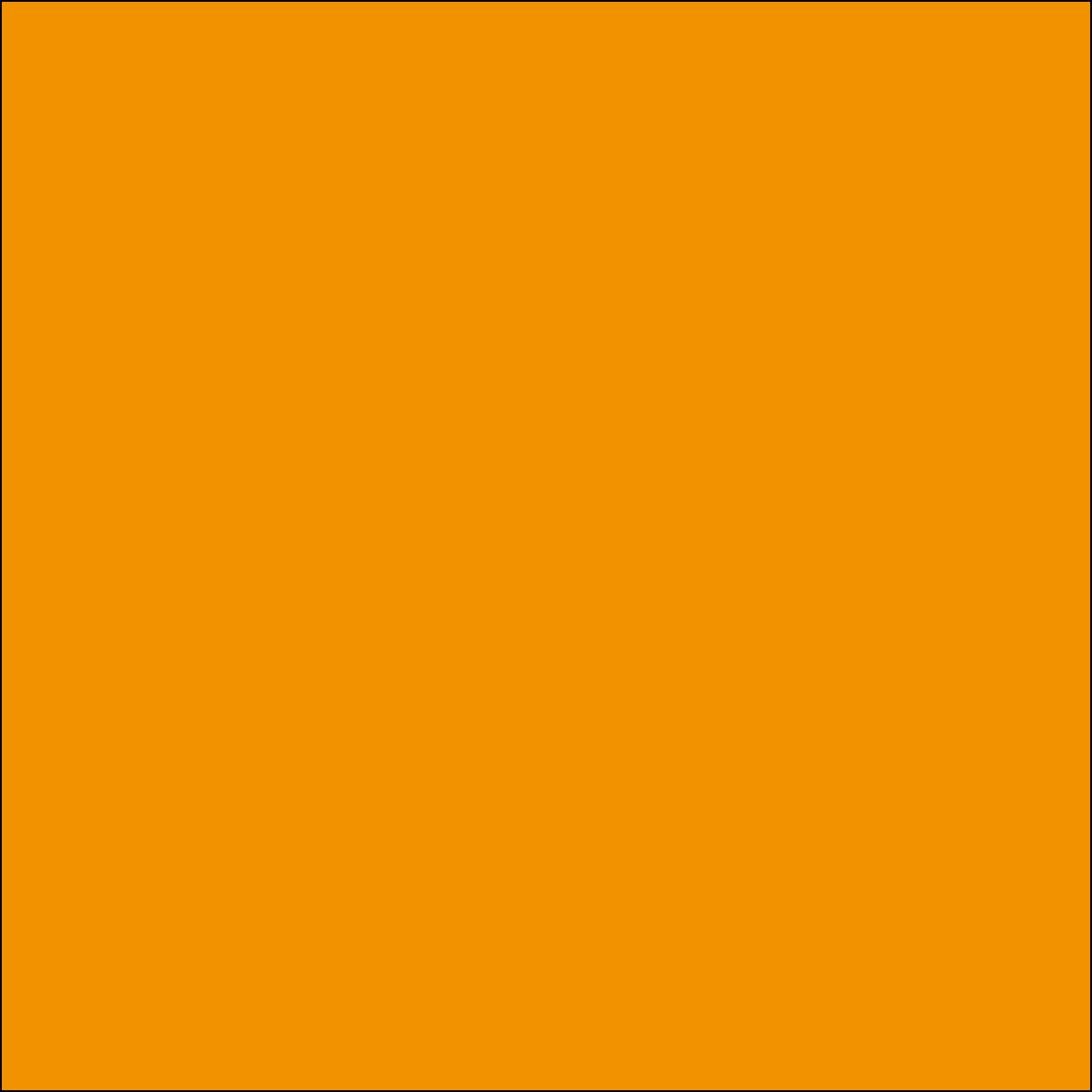
When Johann Voldemar Jannsen, a publicist and a founding father of the Estonian national movement, began compiling the programme for the first Estonian song festival, his Finnish friends sent him this song.

Jannsen provided Estonian words, and *My Native Land, My Joy, Delight* was performed by male choirs to about 15 000 spectators at the song festival in Tartu in 1869. The piece became increasingly popular in Estonia and in 1920 was proclaimed the national anthem.

In addition to the lyrics, the Estonian anthem differs from that of the Finns by the fact that the last four phrases are not repeated.









ESTONIAN  
POPULAR  
SYMBOLS

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ESTONIA  
NOW







The logotype of the awareness campaign *Eelista Eestimaist* ('Prefer Estonian').



Suur Munamägi (*lit.* 'Big Egg Mountain') is the highest point in Estonia. Although the moraine hill only rises to 318 m above sea level, every Estonian is familiar with its spruce covered form and the viewing tower at its summit.



Letipea Ehalkivi (*lit.* 'Letipea Bundling Stone'), the largest of the erratic boulders carried to Estonia by glaciers from Finland.

Aside from official symbols, nations are associated with and known by characteristic phenomena that can be described as 'vernacular' or 'popular' symbols. Usually, such symbols are shared with others, and in the world's eyes may even be linked more with one country despite having equal or deeper significance for the other. The sauna, sauerkraut and vodka are thus generally associated with Germany, Russia and Finland. For an Estonian, however, they are all quintessentially Estonian. It is more difficult to find phenomena that are unique to Estonia and perceived as such both at home and abroad. Several contenders that are appreciated at home, such as the outline of the country, are scarcely recognised by foreigners.

Many vernacular symbols of Estonia relate to the self-myth of the people's millennia-long past in the land they still inhabit – a sentiment shared by a number of scientists and politicians who maintain that the ancestors of Estonians have inhabited the current territory since the end of the last Ice Age, over 10 000 years ago. Such a tellurian concept of origin links many forms of nature with the national self-consciousness – raised bogs, erratic boulders and ice-shaped drumlins, all have their place in Estonian folklore and among popular symbols.

Also a symbol in its own right: the number of collected folktales per square kilometre in Estonia is among the largest in the world.

BARN  
SWALLOW





In 1960, in order to draw attention to the need to protect endangered birds, the International Council for Bird Preservation recommended its member associations designate most threatened avian species as national birds. The Estonian conservationists seized the chance, referring to the constitution of the Soviet Union that stated that the Estonian SSR was a sovereign nation, and thus technically eligible to participate.

Counter to the Council's guidance, the Estonian choice of the barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), announced in 1962, was based primarily upon patriotic rather than conservationist grounds. The barn swallow, which nests under the eaves of more or less every farm building in Estonia, was not exactly endangered. However, the measure was widely welcomed, as it provided a chance to stress Estonian national identity, as distinct from that of the USSR.

For the authorities in Moscow and at home, the selection was justified by pointing out that the swallow is often mentioned in Estonian oral tradition, and is even linked to class struggle – according to one folktale the swallow was born from a serf girl.

What started as a niche endeavour by ornithologists, gave rise to a widely recognised image, which can be seen today on a wide range of objects, from memorabilia to brand logos.



The barn swallow came to represent the 'genuine' smallholder approach to rural life – as opposed to the Soviet communal life on a collective farm.



The key graphic element of its logo, the stylised swallow, decorates the aircraft of Estonian Air, the national carrier since 1991.



The barn swallow, *suitsupääsuke*, represented as the 2011 Bird of the Year on the Estonian postal stationery.

CORNFLOWER







Symbolising summertime and vitality, the cornflower is among the most loved blossoms in floral garlands.



The 'going cornflower' by the staff of Raadio Tartu, the first independent local radio station in Estonia founded after the restoration of independence.

The campaign to designate a national flower – a competition initiated by a number of recently founded and very popular nature conservation societies – capitalised on the success of the national bird.

The televised opinion poll, conducted in 1967–68, favoured the cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*).

The observation that the cornflower is primarily a weed that grows among rye, the principal grain in Estonian bread (hence its name in Estonian, *rukkilill* – 'rye flower'), only added to its popularity.

Although less conspicuous than the barn swallow in Estonian folklore, the cornflower had many other strengths,

such as the 'designer-friendly' regular configuration of its blossom, and an association with the most beautiful time of the year – mid-summer – full of light and merrymaking.

The result of the popular vote might also have been due to the fact that the blue colour of the cornflower was associated with the blue of the forbidden national flag.

Soviet authorities, in a move that is today quite difficult to comprehend, responded with acts of fairly bizarre censorship. For instance, at the 100th anniversary of the Estonian Song Festival in 1969, all the cornflowers that were featured in the decorations were coloured red and presented as 'carnations'.



For Estonians, one of the essential symbols of home and homeland is rye bread, known as *must leib* (lit. 'black bread'). As the word *leib* has become a synonym for food in Estonian, adages such as *leivakõrvane* (lit. 'beside-the-bread') have emerged to indicate all other food eaten together with bread.

Black bread reached Estonia with the cultivation of winter rye, more than one thousand years, or approximately forty generations, ago. For Estonian peasants a large part of the annual farming cycle centred on rye, which, as a winter crop, requires more care than other grains.

Rites of both preventive and fertility magic were associated with the 'life' of the rye – from the ploughing of the field to the breaking of the bread. No surprise, then, that the sourdough-leavened black bread, the main fare made from rye, also became a cornerstone of Estonian identity.

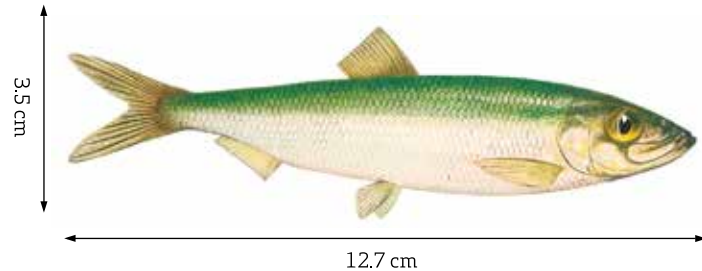
Tenant family at lunch on Muhu Island in 1913. With the husband of the house either at sea or at work on the mainland, it is the task of his father to cut the bread.



The ritual qualities of bread are evident in what is known as the Yule Boar. This hog-shaped loaf, baked for the winter solstice, could be linked to memories of heathen customs that involved the veneration of the pig's wild ancestor. The dough boar, kept until springtime and fed to the stock on the farm, was central to rituals that tried to secure food for the harsh winter until the new agricultural year arrived.



- Baltic herring (*Clupea harengus membras*) -



**Weight:** 14–43 g (giant form up to 1000 g)  
**Length:** 12–17 cm (giant form up to 30 cm)

While Estonians living abroad are said to miss black bread more than anything else from home, those at home have no reason to complain about the quality or the assortment of bread. The choice extends from the staple wholegrain sourdough bread through regional variations (such as the extra black and sweet, malty breads of the western islands) to a wide range of experiments with shape and content.

However, the decline in farming rye in modern Estonia, and the diminishing intake of black bread are constant worries for healthcare officials since rye bread is, in many ways, healthier than other bakery products.

To counterbalance this trend, some kindergartens and primary schools have taken the initiative and offer only rye bread at meals.



The latest addition to the family of national fauna, the Baltic herring has earned the title of Estonia's national fish, not so much because of its fine appearance as because this small fish was a primary addition to bread for Estonian peasants for centuries.

According to a German man of letters and Estophile Christian H. J. Schlegel, an Estonian and salted herring were so attached that the former could be

detected by the smell of the latter at the distance of one hundred paces.

A dwarfed form of its Atlantic cousin, the Baltic herring was chosen as the national fish in an online opinion poll in 2007, just ahead of (or, according to some reports, clearly behind) the pike. The voting evoked quite a few jokes, which indicated that a well-organised search for national animal can be quite a jolly undertaking.





A barn dwelling, hub of activity for Estonian farms through the ages, shows the strong impact of bread crops on local rural architecture. Used for both dwelling and curing grain, this bulky edifice is unique to Estonians and their closest kindred nations, the Livonians of Latvia and the Votes and Ingrians of northwestern Russia.

The barn dwelling contains a central chimneyless kiln room where reaped grains can fully mature in heat and smoke, and next to this another room for threshing. The germination grade and storage life of cereals dried on poles under the roof of the kiln room were in fact so good that grain became



Life in a chimneyless house surely had an impact on how Estonian country people looked... and smelt.

the main export good in Estonia in the Middle Ages. It is known, for example, that Estonia provided the bulk of rye for the navies of the Low Countries.

The dusty and sweaty work of threshing, detaching the grains from the straw and chaff, has a significant place in Estonian folklore. As the curing of crops took place during the autumn period, when various seasonal jobs abounded, it often had to be done during the night, and was consequently covered in a shroud of mystery.

One more national stereotype has recently developed from a witty story by Andrus Kivirähk, *Rehepapp* ('The Old Barny'). The novel's title hero (*lit.* 'threshing bailiff') was a man charged with overseeing the threshing – one of the detested duties peasants performed for landowners. In folktales *rehepapp* served as a liaison between the people and the forces of the under-world. On dark autumn nights it was not unusual for this appointee to have dealings with the Old Devil himself.

What is more, the character in the novel acts as a go-between for the Estonian peasantry and the haughty lords of the Baltic German manor. In that office, *rehepapp* often exhibits rather 'flexible' ideas about keeping his master's property and his contractual relations. He has thus come to stand for shrewd, calculating and unscrupulous individuals, though sometimes he is also identified with the ingenious qualities of Estonians.



Kalevipoeg, set up by an eccentric Baltic German Baron Nikolai von Glehn in 1908, perfectly personifies the main attributes of the folk hero. For the assertive townspeople, who called the statue the Devil, von Glehn added a reminder: "Kalevipoeg is my name and merit, only morons call me the Devil."

Kalevipoeg, a cultural hero and trickster giant that sometimes goes berserk, is a key character in Estonian folklore. Inspired by tales about him and his arch enemy Vanapagan, and founded on the example of the Finnish *Kalevala*, the Estonian national epic was published in the mid-1800s by fellow associates of the Learned Estonian Society, physicians F. R. Faehlmann and F. R. Kreutzwald.

In Estonian mythology, the struggle between good and evil, as well as the definition of a hero, is by no means unambiguous matter. Instead of being clear cut and black-and-white, a set of motley creatures arises: one-time positive characters acquire unfriendly features and vice versa. Several pre-Christian deities have been converted into pagans, troll like giants who show both satirical and diabolical traits.

Reminiscent of heathen forest spirits, the archetypal Vanapagan (*lit.* 'Old Heathen') has many earthly qualities; his farm is always somewhere nearby and accessible, and a shrewd peasant finds it quite easy to deceive him. Yet, as a committed enemy of the imposed German-language Lutheran church, he has elements of a positive and even charming albeit dim-witted character.

Unlike many Europeans, Estonians are not very eager to make their history heroic and celebrate its factual or fictional paladins. This might be due to the fact that in spite of having endured numerous devastating wars, Estonians rarely have had much to do with the causes of the warfare – the chief adversaries in the country have been foreign armies battling for their own causes and between themselves.

One exception, and therefore the most important war for Estonians, was the War of Independence (1918–20). The soldiers killed in that war are honoured by over two hundred monuments, set



Until lately, Estonia lacked a main war memorial. The position was filled by a monument near the Tallinn Secondary Science School to volunteer schoolboys killed in the War of Independence. These were indeed schoolboys who seized the initiative in 1918 to save their country.

up as part of a public initiative in almost every Estonian parish in the 1920s and 1930s.

The majority of these memorials were routinely destroyed by the Soviets. People managed to hide details from a few that were kept safe for half a century and brought out again after the restoration of independence. The majority of the memorials had to be restored on the basis of old photos or drawings in the 1990s. Again, as part of a public initiative.



The Estonian national movement in the late 1800s certainly opposed local Baltic Germans politically, but not culturally. Among the most cherished German cultural phenomena to take root in Estonia, is choral singing.

The first countrywide celebration of choral music, the Estonian national song festival, took place in Tartu in 1869. 46 male choirs and five brass bands participated in the three-day event, altogether 900 performers in front of 15 000 spectators. The full repertory was presented in Estonian. Since then, Estonian song festivals have been organised regularly every five years.

In 1928, a special amphitheatre was erected at the Song Festival Grounds, at the foot of the Lasnamäe scarp in Tallinn. The complex was rebuilt for the 1960 festival, and can currently hold over 20 000 singers.

Allegedly more than 200 000 people, about every fifth Estonian, gathered at the Song Festival Grounds for one of the major events in the Singing Revolution, *Eestimaa laul* ('Song of Estonia') in September 1988.

In 2003, with similar events from Latvia and Lithuania, the Estonian Song and Dance Festival was added to the list of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.



Twenty thousand-strong united choirs performing at the XXV Song Festival in 2009.

The national song festival is but one expression of the movement of Estonian civic associations that first boomed in the 1860s. Societies of students, farmers, temperance and cyclists among others played a crucial role in Estonian nation-building – they substituted for political parties until the latter were legalised in the early 1900s.

Nature protection and later on heritage conservation societies also helped preserve Estonians' cultural awareness during the years of Soviet occupation.



Singers of the Kanepi Choral Association male choir in 1875.



Wearing and making national costumes is thriving. On Kihnu Island, off the south-western coast, many women still retain traditional dress as their daily apparel.

Estonians like to put on their national costume on a range of occasions, such as the summer solstice celebrations, song and dance festivals, weddings, school graduations, and so on.

Historically, with the movement of country people quite restricted until the second half of the 19th century, people from every parish had their own traditional clothes, shaped over the years by a variety of influences from Estonia's neighbouring nations and from further abroad – via manor and town, peddlers, sailors, soldiers and so on. More archaic forms lasted longer inland and further from urban centres, while coastal regions were more open to world 'fashions'.

During the time when the majority of the Estonian 'parochial standard sets' were being established, the late 19th century, the use of national costumes was already on the wane. However, especially in women's dress, separate items of costume and jewellery, their colour and how they were displayed, continued to indicate the wearer's age, origin, marital status and social position.

Many of the costumes were and still are crafted by hand, thus preserving the heritage. Today, the traditional garments are coming back into vogue, also among the younger generations. Even politicians turn up at celebratory occasions in national costume.



The President of Estonia wears the black greatcoat from the parish of his ancestors, Halliste in Mulgimaa.



A flat stitched floral design on a woman's midriff blouse from Jõelähtme parish.





The North Estonian Klint that skirts most of Estonia's north coast on the Gulf of Finland, was voted as the nation's most notable natural monument by the readership of the magazine *Loodus* ('Nature') in 1999. The limestone cliff was formed some ten million years ago by the erosive action of the huge Pra-Neva River, which emerged in the region of the modern White Sea and drained west of the Jutland peninsula. In several places, outcrops of klint have been further sculpted by the abrasive action of the sea.

Estonia's national stone since 1992, limestone is a sedimentary rock that formed 470–420 million years ago, at the time of the Ordovician and Silurian geologic periods. Then a part of the ancient continent Baltica, Estonia was situated at lower subtropical latitudes of the Southern Hemisphere and was mostly covered by shallow continental seas. It is from the skeletal remains of the inhabitants of these shelf seas that limestone is largely composed.



Extremely rare fossilised remains of red algae *Leveillites hartnageli* in limestone from Kalana quarry.

Dull and grey at first glance, limestone is actually quite diverse, ranging in colour from white or teal to chocolate brown or cherry-red, and containing a plethora of fossils, worm burrows and crawling tracks of mud-eaters. Various forms of life that have contributed to the formation of Estonia's national stone – bryozoans, corals, trilobites, sea lilies, etc. – have now been put forward, in jest, as a spare set of national animals for Estonia.



Tall Hermann, the keep of Toompea Castle in Tallinn, is one of the stoutest cases of late medieval limestone architecture in Estonia. Founded by the Crusaders in the 13th century, the castle has housed the Estonian parliament since 1918.

Nonetheless, the main importance of limestone lies in the cultural sphere, where it has brought its own specific qualities to both the urban and rural architecture of North Estonia. Farms, bridges, castles, churches and the dry-stone fences that line village streets: all traditionally built from limestone.

The heyday of limestone construction was in the Middle Ages. An excellent example of this is the Old Town of Tallinn, which, being arguably built on salt, the most profitable commodity for Hanseatic merchants, was almost entirely constructed of limestone.



In Kaali, on the Saaremaa island, a lump of cosmic iron collided with the earth in a huge explosion at the end of the Bronze Age, some 2500 years ago. The resulting crater lake is presumed to have become an ancient shrine of wide renown across Northern Europe.

Ribbon offerings on a sacred lime tree in Ilumäe, Virumaa.

The territory of Estonia was formally converted to Christianity in the 13th century, but many pre-Christian polytheistic customs, such as the worship of sacred groves (*hiis*, pl. *hiied* in Estonian), stones, springs and trees, survived long after. Arguably, it was but the arrival of Lutheran Pietism

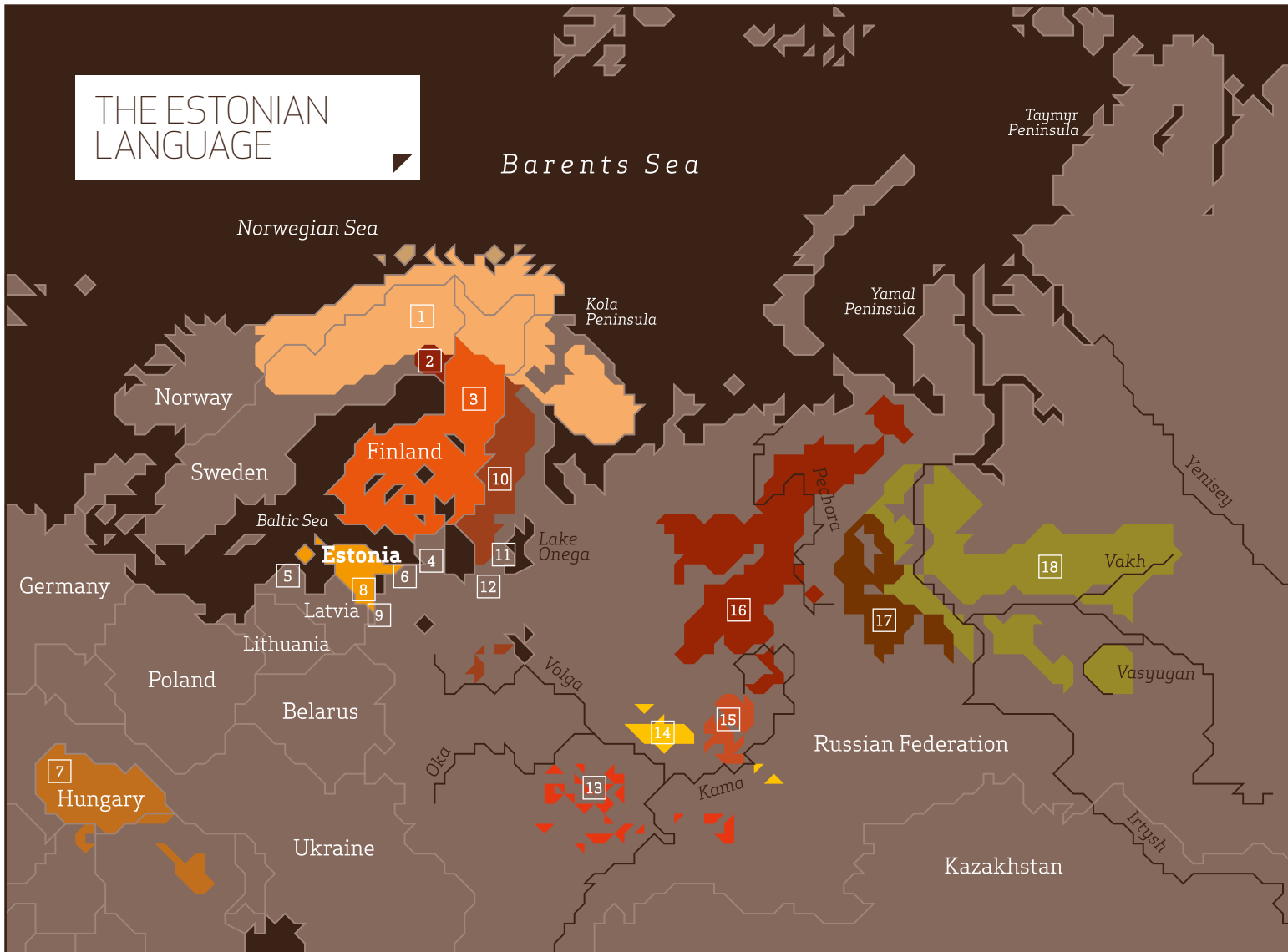
and the spread of the teachings of the Moravian Brethren that managed to convert the majority of Estonians to Christianity by the late 1800s.



















However, many natural shrines have been preserved till today. Upholders of *maausk* (lit. 'faith of the land'), the

indigenous Estonian belief system and world view, work with scholars, as well as central and local authorities towards the recognition of indigenous sacred sites as an integral part of Estonia's natural and cultural legacy to be appreciated, protected and left undisturbed.



# THE ESTONIAN LANGUAGE



- |  |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|
|  1 Sami    |  4 Ingrian  |  7 Hungarian |  10 Karelian |  13 Erzya & Moksha |  16 Komi   |
|  2 Meä     |  5 Livonian |  8 Võro      |  11 Ludic    |  14 Mari           |  17 Mansi  |
|  3 Finnish |  6 Votic    |  9 Setu      |  12 Veps     |  15 Udmurt         |  18 Khanty |

Estonian kindred languages are spoken from the shores of the Norwegian Sea to the Central European steppe and Siberian taiga.



Kristjan Jaak Peterson (1801–1822), the linguist and poet, was perhaps the first Estonian who became neither German nor Russian as a result of his schooling.



An indication of recognition for regional languages – bilingual signs marking the boundary of the historical range of the Võro dialect.

Most languages spoken in Europe are Indo-European. Estonian, on the other hand, along with Finnish and Hungarian, and many smaller kindred languages in Latvia, Scandinavia and the Russian Federation, belongs to an altogether different Finno-Ugric language group.

Along with being a tool for everyday communication, the Estonian language has become an essential component of national identity for the Estonians, over the last 150 years.

The national emancipation of Estonia drew heavily on the written word and the high literacy rate in the country. The first periodical, a medical weekly offering simple practical instructions for taking care of people and stock,

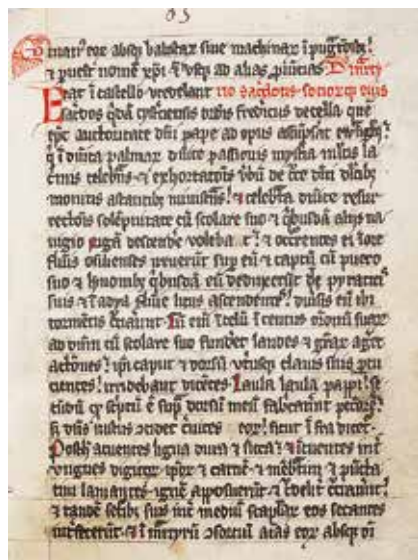
was published in 1766. By the end of the 19th century, the strive towards cultural emancipation was being led and encouraged by several Estonian-language dailies.

After Estonia gained independence in 1918, interest in widening the use of Estonian grew, and to that end, quite extravagant measures were taken. In the 1930s, for example, the linguist Johannes Aavik launched a drive to coin new words based on merging the 'intrinsic qualities' of Estonian sounds. Johannes Voldemar Veski supported another approach, equally significant from the standpoint of the evolution of the fledgling language, focusing on the development of standardised forms and terminology.

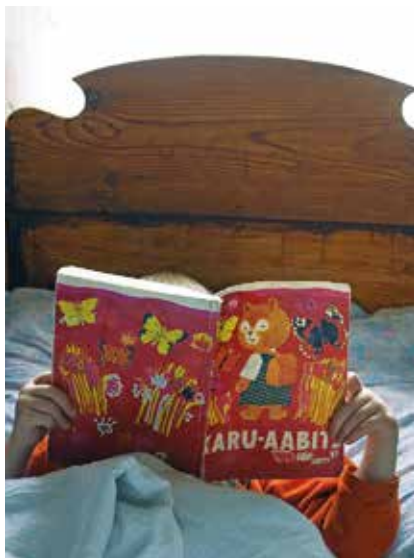
In view of its limited range, the Estonian language embraces a striking variety of vernacular forms. In addition to Northern Estonian, divided later into the island, western, central, eastern and north-east coastal dialects, another tribal parent language spoken in ancient Estonia, the linguistic predecessor of Mulgi, Tartu and Võro-Setu dialects, was Southern Estonian.

For hundreds of years, these two language continuums, Northern (Tallinn) Estonian and Southern (Tartu) Estonian, vied for the status of the standard language. The New Testament was put out in the Tartu language in 1686. Yet, as the complete Estonian Bible was first issued in 1739 in the Northern Estonian language, this vernacular form prevailed as the foundation for Standard Estonian.

Even so, up until the end of the 19th century, hardly any form of Estonian was considered above the 'kitchen lingo' of the 'people of the land', as the country-dwelling Estonian peasants and the labourers in towns were known collectively. As most of their countrymen still had to change to other languages in order to succeed, the nascent elites of Estonian birth had to show strong faith and resolve to stick to their native tongue despite the pressure from the two ruling cultures – German and Russian.



The earliest known coherent Estonian sentence in writing – “Laula, laula, pappi!” (lit. “Sing, sing, priest!”) – from the 13th century Chronicle of Henry of Livonia.



Karu-aabits (‘The Bear ABC’) is among the most popular primers in the long line of spelling books that have upheld Estonia’s literacy rate for centuries.



Estonian attained its political zenith in 2004 when it became an official language of the European Union. As of today, there are over 16.5 million speakers of Finno-Ugric languages in the EU.

Today, Estonian is the mother tongue for more than one million people, one tenth of whom live outside Estonia. Either at home or abroad, Estonians are characterised by a strong faith in the symbolic meaning their language has for its people. During the Soviet occupation, looking after and using Estonian became a form of resisting the alien oppression.

Language continues to be a topical issue: the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia declares that the state should preserve the Estonian culture

along with its language, and names Estonian as the sole official language. In addition, the Language Act was adopted in 1989, even before Estonia regained its independence.

Associating national identity with language might seem strange, even a little xenophobic, to nations whose self-awareness is based on something else, such as religion or a glorious imperial past. However, for a small nation this is an essential key for survival in a unifying world amidst the power-struggles of the mighty.

The Estonian language has proved itself amazingly resilient – arguably, it is the tiniest non-insular language in Europe, and probably in the world, that meets all the requirements set for an official language of a modern nation state. Estonian is used in all walks of life – from astrophysics to poetry, from the military to puppet theatre, from information science to legislature and so on.

Last but not least, and of particular importance to Estonians – the use of Estonian in the world is on the rise.



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ESTONIAN  
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