

Spelling Reform in Given Names in Estonian Parish Registers

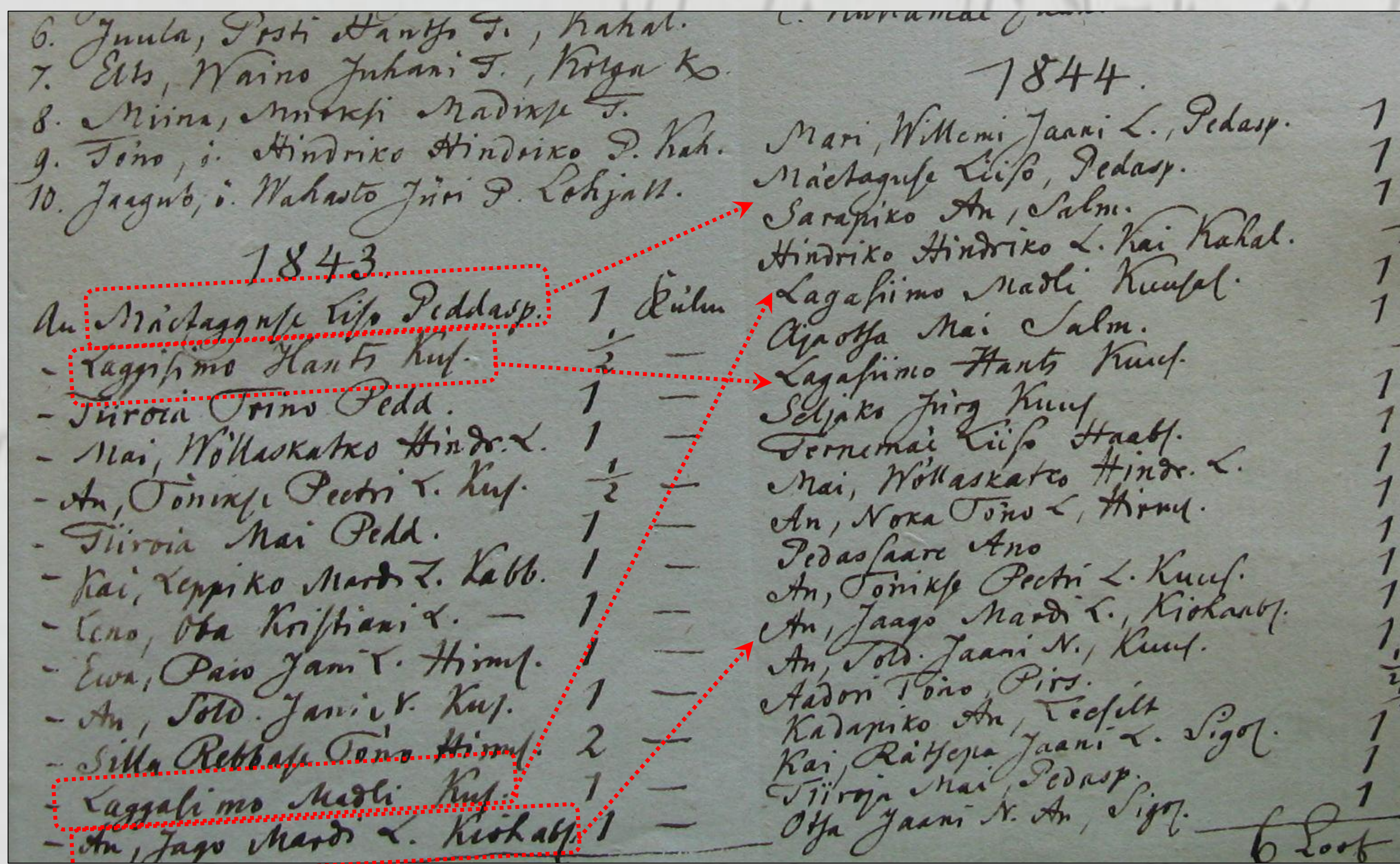
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- Until 1844 old spelling (based on German orthography) was used in written Estonian.
- In 1843 Eduard Ahrens, a Lutheran pastor from North Estonian coastal area, introduced new spelling based on Finnish orthography.
- Ahrens began to use new spelling in his parish registers also when writing Estonian personal and place names:



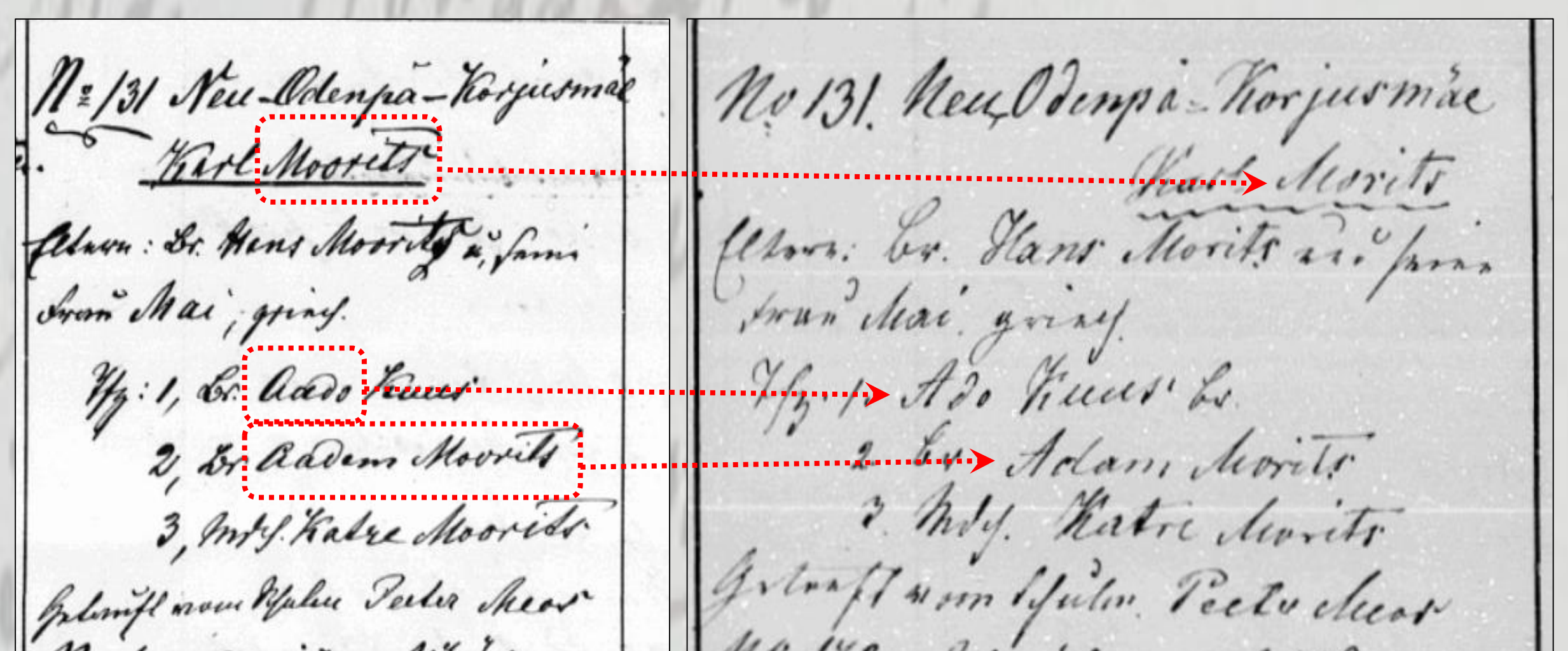
Eduard Ahrens (1803-1863)



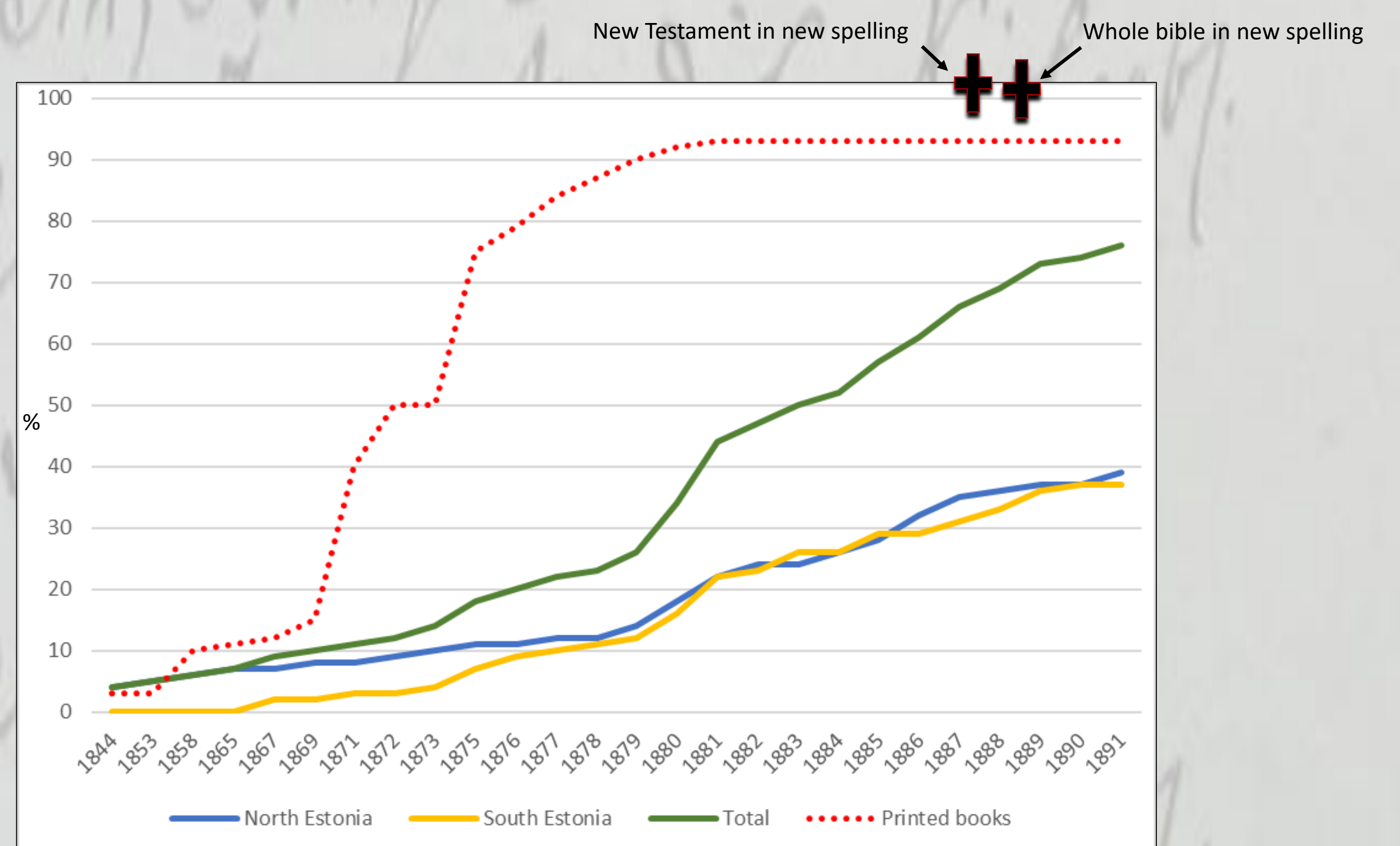
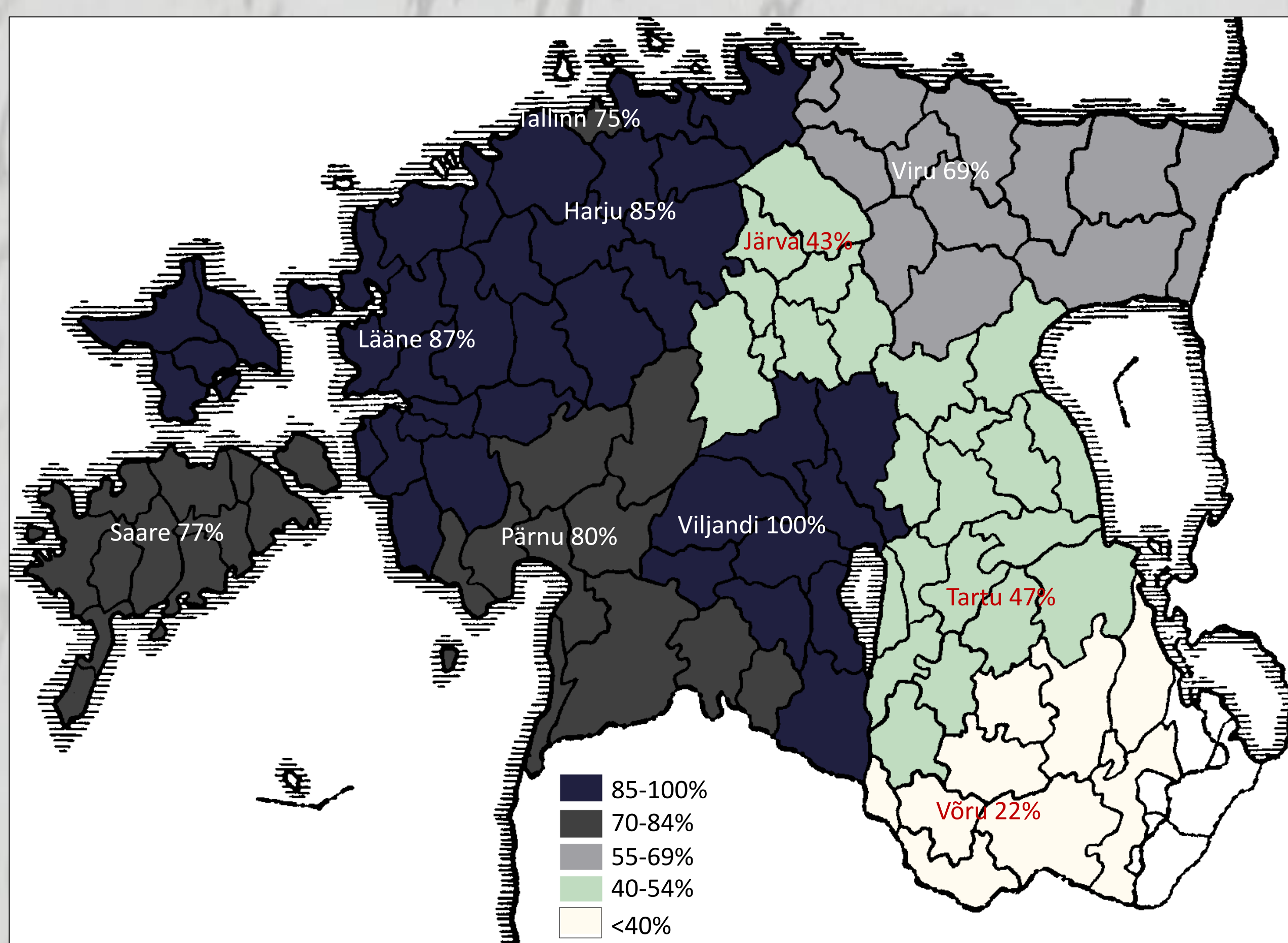
Tag der Taufe.	N. Taufname des Kindes.	N. Taufname des Kindes.	Tag der Taufe.	N. Taufname des Kindes.
1. Madis	Jaan Kõrb	Madis	Jaan Kõrb	
2. Alexander	Juhani Kõrb	Alexander	Juhani Kõrb	
3. Alexander	Juri Kõrb	Alexander	Juri Kõrb	
4. Mäli	Mäli Kõrb	Mäli	Mäli Kõrb	

Each year the congregation had to make archival copies of previous year's parish registers. Here the copy is written already in new spelling (Vaivara 1879).

- In 1844 three other North Estonian pastors accepted Ahrens's suggestions and started to use new spelling. Only eight other pastors followed over the next 25 years. Altogether there were 110 Lutheran congregations at that time. Books were published mainly in new spelling already in 1875.
- In South Estonia only in 1867 two first pastors started to use new spelling. There the Estonian national movement influenced the spread of spelling reform.
- By 1891 in total 69% of Lutheran congregations used the new spelling when writing given names (last names were more conservative), lowest rate was in areas of South Estonian dialect and Järva county (the latter probably had conservative pastors):



Sometimes the clerk reversed the names to old spelling when making the copy (Otepää, 1875)



New spelling in printed books was adopted much sooner than in parish registers kept by pastors of mostly Baltic German origin

Sources:

Parish registers of 110 Lutheran congregations (Estonian National Archives).
Kask, Arnold. Võitlus vana ja uue kirjaviisi vahel XIX sajandi eesti kirjakeeles. Tallinn, 1958.